

Philosophy at the End of Education

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Part 2

In recent times, as I have witnessed/experienced many elements of the brutalising aspects of (secondary) schooling and the formal educational project, I have been minded to ask myself the teleological question, “What is education for?” that is, “What is the purpose of education?”

I have begun my philosophical investigation by observing students, teachers, parents, and administrators’ behaviours in schools, in reporting by the press, and in conversations, as I sought to answer the question of how do these groups view the purpose of school. The picture that is emerging is that for many, the purpose of schooling is (primarily) credentialing and certification in an increasingly competitive and capitalist culture with entrenched patterns of injustice. “Learning” has in many instances taken a back seat to success by any means and at any cost. This observation has led to the following chain of reasoning. IF the purpose of school, as an institution, is taken to be credentialing and certification, THEN what justification do schools have for their existence when this purpose is attainable faster, better, and more economically, perhaps with a guarantee, by private tuition companies, or for free, as is beginning, and will increasingly be the case?

One of the conclusions I have come to is that, no matter how much they convince themselves otherwise, schools are NOT primarily credentialing and certifying institutions. They do not (at present) have that authority. This rests with the examination body, in our case the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC). Because students (unwittingly) sit these examinations as representatives of their institutions, and not as agents acting on their own behalf, schools are able to co-opt their performances as a measure of their teaching quality, ignoring or downplaying the contributions made by cultural capital, selective sieving beginning at SEA level, and extra-lessons, as well as the human costs to bodies and minds. Media reports following the release of examination results do much to reinforce this invalid measure of the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Certainly, in my mind, while certification and credentialing are necessary for survival in the world we live in, they are not sufficient to justify the existence of schools, nor are they, nor ought they to be, the main ends of education.

Around the time of my birth, Everett Reimer declared that, “School is Dead.” This is even more true today than it was then. We seem to have a necrophilic fetish where school and some traditions are concerned. The question that I have begun to pose, and one that serious educational institutions everywhere will have to begin to explore and articulate their own answers to is: “*What is the purpose, what is to be accomplished in inviting physical bodies to inhabit/dwell within the same physical space with others, at the same time?*” The answer is to be found in those types of organisations where people come together to accomplish certain ends that are not accomplishable alone. We already have models of this that range in scale from marriage to mas camps. In all of these instances, individual association is a matter of choice directed and oriented by interest and desire to learn, do, and become different, better, in some particular way. This is not often the case in school where students’ interests rarely coalesce around regimented and increasingly narrowing, due to over-testing, curriculum experiences. When Reimer wrote his treatise, the means to organise education in this way, to match individual interests and desires

with experienced practitioners was a next to impossible task. In a small Republic of 1.4 million people with the current information and technological resources and personnel at hand, it is not.

I have not as yet answered the question as to an end for education, though I have argued for a revisiting of the justification for schooling as currently practised and a re-imagining of other possibilities for such a social organisation. I need some more concepts. Our educational system is iatrogenic, that is, it makes people, culture, society, and social institutions sick and disrupts their agentive capacities for recuperative intervention by denying them access, power, and opportunities for creative transformation of their own lives. Indeed, the legacy of education locally is overwhelmingly that of massive failure and systemic suffering on an incomprehensible scale. Fractally amplified across economic, political, cultural, technological, environmental, and personal landscapes, stories of poverty, inequity, failure, suffering, greed, corruption, violence, and disaster speak of pervasive and pernicious pathologies in which we educators, facilitators among discourses of power, exclusion and oppression, are conspicuously implicated. It is imperative that we find anew ends for education.

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