

Rethinking Education (3)
Posted On:December 31, 1969

When I was a child, I could hardly wait until I was able to go to school. I loved school from Kindergarten to Graduate School. My children, however, did not love school as much as I did. They were enthusiastic only when they had a really dedicated teacher. My daughter had two of them, both men. The first was in fifth grade and he had a passion for Van Gogh and Shakespeare. She caught that enthusiasm. Later, she had a teacher who was a Holocaust survivor who taught the history of World War II. Other than those two teachers, school was a drag for her.

My son had two years of prep school in Iran, and he too had a wonderful teacher. When she died in a plane crash, he lost all interest in school. Returning to the US, we enrolled him in a "new school" in which all he learned was to smoke pot.

Now in the process of rethinking education, I go back to the first system: a gifted teacher attracting paying students. Socrates, in ancient Athens, was such a teacher. He taught critical thinking. His instruction was questioning why a student thought the way he did, and in the process, freeing students of blind acceptance. One of the institutions he questioned was Greek Polytheism, and for that "irreligious" teaching, he was sentenced to death.

I have a friend who started her own school when her two daughters were little. She is a professional woman who realized that she could do a much better job than a hired nanny with little education. Her institute grew as her daughters grew up, and her system was smashingly good! She made use of our community that had neighbors and friends with teachable abilities and whenever her girls wanted to know something, she found willing tutors for them. I was one of those tutors. Her children bloomed, had no problem gaining entrance into any ivy-league universities they chose, and are now happy, successful citizen adults. My friend was so gifted as a teacher herself that her children enjoyed social teaching as well: dancing, skiing, public speaking, and contributions to their society. One daughter and her fellow classmates invented an ice cream maker powered by solar cells, and took their invention on the road.

Unfortunately, this system is expensive and cannot be a model for reforming the entire US system of education. But some elements can be adopted. Community is probably the key.

We do not have a national education system, a choice made early. Education is local: town, city, county, and state systems are our mode. The flaw is financing. Rich communities can afford a good school system while poor ones cannot. What is the role of a national education system then? What should our country do?

Money. Financing education should equalize the local zip-code dilemma. Those with less resources should be augmented by grants carefully regulated to avoid abuse.

Teachers. Professional teachers get degrees from colleges that largely agree on methodology. But one size does not fit all. There are great teachers and mediocre ones. Communities do know the difference. A country with wonderful outcomes, Finland, has the answer: make teaching a respected, competitive profession with payment to match. We could do that.

Resources. Art galleries, museums, traveling orchestras and theater groups, and Internet could greatly enhance critical thinking. The local community's pool of elders and retired specialists could enhance all sorts of disciplines, including those using apprenticeships that provide hands-on experience.

Community. Small town newspapers have played a huge role in educating Americans. Journalism's code of investigative processes and efforts at factual reporting can undo our current dilemma of "alternate facts," made-up conspiracies and deliberate lies. Money spent to revive local papers would be well spent.

Philosophy. The country as a whole should determine the philosophy for American education. Our past leads the way. We want to produce honorable, diligent citizens. "Honorable" would cover the teaching of ethics, honesty, and empathy, qualities that would benefit work, family, and community. "Diligence" would cover America's already good work ethic and respect for our underpaid "essential workers."

Children need values!

686 words

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April 16, 2021

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Inspiration.

Education took a nosedive back in the 1950s when dad brought home the bacon, mom didn't have a career but managed the family, and children didn't help on the farm or the family business but simply had to go to school. Kids no longer had a purpose;

they simply had to sit through classes all day and do homework every night.

So what happened next? The 1960s! Teens started rebelling and rock 'n roll emerged. Without a real purpose in life, they started smoking, doing drugs, and fighting the authorities. Today, students don't have chores (imagine that!) because it's their job to get good grades in school.

To improve our educational system today, we need to give students a purpose. We certainly have plenty of problems to solve (climate change, discrimination, socioeconomic equality, etc). By doing a project, students can work individually or in small groups to be part of a solution. They'll be more motivated to engage in academics if they see how these skills are necessary for them to accomplish their goals. Having a purpose also builds self esteem and students with confidence usually don't become burdens on society.

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