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The Inadequate Fulfillment of Educational Purpose by School Systems

Schools are an institution heavily debated on numerous fronts; children either enjoy or dread this learning environment, adolescents and adults contemplate whether it teaches useful information, and many more question the relevance of its current form in modern society. For a significant period of human history, the scarcity of educational resources restricted in-depth tutelage to the economic elite. Over time, the attainability of educational resources—and, consequently, the population of educated individuals—rose significantly through the installation of public and private schools. Now, the prevalence of the internet provides educational resources markedly more diverse than the curriculum taught in schools. As a result, many critics believe that these modern assets render the education system obsolete. Despite the rise in accessible, internet-based educational media resources, schools remain a necessity for the education of adolescents, as they seek to provide a well-rounded education to prepare pupils for the professional world, enable students to build communication skills, and boost childrens' critical thinking skills; however, the modern public education system fails to adequately execute these objectives, creating an unproductive environment potentially limiting the capabilities of students.

The non-ubiquity of a quality educational experience and the lack of diversity in the educational material delivered to students falls short of providing children with the resources to universally succeed in their adulthood. Some argue that, as evidenced by the accomplishments of individuals who did not participate in public education, the system does not serve a purpose. In his essay, "Against Schools," prominent public school critic John Gatto references that throughout most of history, American "kids generally didn't go to high school, yet the unschooled rose to be admirals, like Farragut; inventors, like

Edison; captains of industry, like Carnegie and Rockefeller; writers, like Melville and Twain and Conrad; and even scholars, like Margaret Mead” (209). Gatto argues that the lack of typical education experienced by these individuals signals that all children contain the potential for success without the education granted by schools. Gatto, however, fails to include that many of the mentioned individuals still received a form of education, albeit through non-standard means: information taught through a parent, incomplete education, apprenticeship, etc. Without schools, many today would lack access to these foundational elements or experiences. Intrinsicly intermixed within the bitstream plasma with biased or impractical information, the breadth of knowledge presented on the internet does not present a concentrated and comprehensive curriculum equivalent to those offered by schools. Universal access to public education should enable all students to receive the information and experience necessary to succeed in their adulthood. However, schools fail to deliver on this objective. The quality of education varies greatly between schools. Even within public schools, academics differ greatly between establishments. As a result, some individuals may be placed at a disadvantage regarding the caliber of their educational material, thus impacting their potential to succeed in the modern world; location and general luck should not determine an adolescent’s ability to succeed beyond high school and college. While funding for public education increased, standardized testing scores remain consistently low, demonstrating that, in the current state of public schools, increased funding may not improve learning. Schools need to identify and address the root of this issue to ensure equal access to quality education, thus building a universal foundation for success.

Additionally, the individuals mentioned by Gatto were anomalies in their respective generations; until recently, much of the population served as blue-collar laborers or farmers. As technology becomes ever more integrated with society, many occupations now require specialized education. Elementary and middle schools should enable students to access a broader range of information and learning so they can determine their field or future occupation; the critical facilitation of a wide variety of information during

primary education indicative of the current job market aids students in determining their interests and aptitudes. Secondary education should allow for a more intensive exploration of a chosen field of interest to enable a student to understand if the subject matter should be explored further and prepare for college and beyond to a greater extent. However, the current design of information facilitation in the American public education system hinders childrens' ability to comfortably determine a focus area for their future, resulting in uncertainty and distress when reaching the point in their life when this decision becomes critical. Primary school-taught subjects provide the barest of information to prepare students for the business world. Incapable of suitably understanding their passions, many adolescents feel lost while choosing a collegiate major; due to the primarily unessential and limited information that encompasses many of the subjects taught, schools allot less time towards well-roundedness. Additionally, during high school—a time in which students must explore their interests to a greater extent— significant core requirements for subjects that do not pertain to their interest areas prohibit more intensive exploration and limit opportunities to build skills more likely used in the students' future. Limiting broad curriculum requirements enables students to still receive—while less in-depth—information on a variety of subjects, grants them the ability to construct their schedule, and places greater priority on the field they wish to pursue. In addition to academics, public education seeks and fails to strengthen students' communication skills.

While the environment created by schools enables students to gain social skills required for success in the modern world, unmoderated settings and social pressure resulting from the formation of rigid clique structures place some students at a disadvantage and threaten their mental health. Schools offer a unique opportunity for a diverse population of students to congregate. The distinctiveness of the environment offered by schools should allow students to forge bonds, formulate opinions, and teach children communication skills; schools provide a unique setting to offer this experience and likely serve as the sole opportunity to gain these experiences for many children. The graphic novel, *Friends with Boys*

by Faith Erin Hicks illustrates the benefits of the school social environment. In the novel, the main character, Maggie, transfers into a typical high school after being homeschooled for the span of their education. Maggie initially views school as an intimidating social setting, stating: “There is no way I can do this. I can’t! [...] It’s scary. [...] I liked being at home” (Hicks 192). The vast difference in the environment offered by schools as opposed to homeschooling intimidates some students, like Maggie. Nevertheless, the environment enables many students to broaden their horizons and grow. During lunch, Maggie forms a friendship with one of her peers, and, following this event, the school appears to become considerably more manageable and less intimidating to her. This plot conveys some truths about school social settings: while intimidating at times, it forces students to communicate with others to facilitate co-dependency and general happiness for both parties.

However, this school social setting—while one of its greatest strengths—also serves as a major drawback; unstructured environments can be equally unproductive as productive for students. For example, the formation of social hierarchy and cliques serves as a negative influence on the communicational learning of students. The book, *Geeks Shall Inherit the Earth* by Alexandra Robbins, illustrates this through the perspective of the fictional student Whitney, who, during her post-summer arrival at school, contemplates that “if [the] freshman girls didn’t already have something going for them when they got to Riverland [...] they were out of luck” (Robbins 179). The innate nature of the human psyche influences individuals to form groups based on common interests. This behavior often leads to the exclusion of others from cliques. As a result, a diverse student population segments into groups and friendships between children demarcated by strict lines; if one fails to conform to the group’s shared qualities, one risks ostracism. Consequently, some children serve as outcasts or ‘floaters’ unable to experience the opportunities offered by the school environment. Conversely, students may also feel pressured to alter their personal qualities, whether being their personality, interests, physical traits, and so on. This social pressure on students makes them dedicate their time to forming an untruthful image of

themselves to fit in. The inability for one to act as themselves and the exclusion of others leads to the inability of students to experience social settings in which to build skills required to form interpersonal connections and seek opportunities during adulthood. Found throughout other aspects of school, this pressure of conformity limits student creativity and continues to set schools up for failure.

Many public schools fail to build the critical thinking skills of their students and discourage individual opinions, hindering innovation and perpetuating the cycle of inadequate modern education. A productive learning environment challenges students to broaden their horizons and think outside of the box. *Horace's School* illustrates this dynamic setting; the author and prominent educational reformist, Theodore Sizer, conducted research whilst teaching a humanities class at a school he visited. As he shifted the discussion topic, he noticed that the students' "patterns of response were different; now different stereotypes emerged. The quick portraits I had twice formed disappeared again" (218). Sizer's role as a teacher offers a unique perspective illustrating the effects of a dynamic learning environment on students and their thought processes. This ideal setting stimulates the development of critical thinking skills, as it requires students to think outside of the box and establish beliefs concerning questions with ambiguous or no 'correct' answers. Schools must strive to implement this line of thought into curriculums and learning environments, as it fosters innovation, to enable adolescents to take risks in a sheltered environment; students grow the most through challenges. Teachers, like Sizer, must strive towards maximizing student free thought and, as a result, minimally contribute to discussions, only "serving as a human encyclopedia, a fact giver; [they must express] no opinion" (Sizer 219). By offering a 'hands-off' approach to teaching, teachers ensure the growth of the student body.

However, many teachers indoctrinate students into their opinions. Schools often limit students' learning by teaching there is only one way to solve a problem or interpret knowledge: the way as expressed by the teacher. This dangerous decision promotes conformity toward a single idea and snuffs out the creativity that many students relish before entering the school system; what happens to the

creativity that children demonstrate when they are younger? What suppresses that? Was it growing up, or was it schools, which intentionally or unintentionally suppressed creativity of thought? This problem stems back to the teachers, who create an over-controlling environment. However, John Gatto argues that fault should not be placed on teachers, who “are themselves products of the same twelve-year compulsory school program that so thoroughly bores students (207). Taught by the same institution that extinguishes the inventiveness of the children it fosters, they grow up devoid of individuality, become teachers, and perpetuate the cyclical nature of the failure of schools. Inevitably, these teachers limit their pupils who, no longer as successful or creative as possible during their adulthood, consequently find themselves unable to inspire innovation and meaningfully contribute towards societal progress.

While still serving a purpose despite the rise in alternative educational resources, schools do not effectively fulfill their objectives and create a potentially damaging environment for students. The ranging quality in public schools inconsistently establishes an underpinning for success, and the narrow educational material limits awareness for students regarding their future field. The unique social environments provided by schools fail to equitably provide a constructive setting for adolescents to develop communication skills. Additionally, the in-class environment and material hinder the development of critical thinking skills and deter creativity in students. As a result, many schools fail to build the necessary foundation in the student body for productive adulthood. These institutions must identify and resolve these issues to ensure the benefits to students and evolve to remain necessary in the modern world.

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