

Those who are left behind

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Education: Economics and Public Policy

16th Oct. 2020

The creation of human capital is a crucial concern in both public policy and moral thought. Ensuring that our youth gain the necessary intellectual tools to be able to reason, to understand and comprehend ideas even when they disagree with them is an essential part of building a strong and vibrant society. The capture of public education by unionized teacher groups, bureaucracies and groups with political agendas is creating a system that leads to centralized control at the expense of the development of the individual.

I. Introduction

The centralized control of the education system is being used to promote political concepts and values at the expense of our children and is limiting their educational opportunities and the creation of human capital. The primary goal of education should be to convey the knowledge necessary to cultivate the human capital in each individual that will enable them to have the best opportunities given their talents. Yet, the intervention in the education process by the government has created obstacles to the education of our children and leads to a misalignment of desired outcomes. Each of us is an individual, and it is not possible to centrally plan the outcomes of how individuals will develop. However, this has never stopped the progressivist reformer from acting on their desire to create a utopia. More importantly, no matter how many times these attempted utopias become hellish dystopias, the progressivist reformer will try again with the same failed ideas. The simple but often neglected alternative is to allow the market to work even in education¹.

The US education system and for that matter, many western educational systems, are failing their students². There are many causes for the slide to lower standards. In part, parents are at fault for allowing this to occur; but more importantly, government policy has created a public education system that targets quick fixes and political rhetoric. The difficulties stem in part from the highly distributed and decentralized nature of the US education system that is coupled with multiple sources of political manipulation and politicians who seek to make promises they know they cannot keep. Former President Obama implemented a policy that he termed, a race to the top. Unfortunately, this policy merely took the previous approach of President Bush and made it worse³. The reliance on high-stakes exams and a focused narrow curriculum have led to a parochial school system that creates students who can learn a test but who fail to understand the subject matter.

¹ Friedman, Milton. "The Market Can Transform Our Schools" By Milton Friedman New York Times, 2 July 2002." *New York Times* (2002).

² Riley, Jason L. *Please stop helping us: how liberals make it harder for blacks to succeed*. Encounter Books, 2016.

³ Green, Steven K. *The Third Disestablishment: Church, State, and American Culture, 1940-1975*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

Progressivist ideas have abounded from before the twentieth century. Whether we are discussing educational theorists such as Piaget, Dewey or Spencer⁴, or those behind contemporary issues such as the proponents of the *no child left behind* bill, egalitarian progressivists have glorified the “blank slate” concept that all individuals begin with no knowledge and with equal opportunities. This set of discredited unscientific and false beliefs have been the basis of ill-informed government strategies in many guises. To Marx, Lenin and Stalin, the Lamarckian⁵ mythology of trait inheritance would be used to indoctrinate individuals into Communist thought. It was believed that their offspring would inherit the exhibited traits of individuals based on how they acted. These inheritances are not through genetic heritage but rather merely the state of the parents at conception. In Lamarckian thought, if a parent studied harder or were re-educated in concentration camps to believe the altruistic thoughts of the Communist Party blindly, their children and grandchildren would become naturally ingrained with the same concepts and educational ideals.

Progressivist strategies such as universal indoctrination require central government control and enforced curricula. The reason for this is simple; the only way to ensure that dissent is quashed is by using force. In this, progressivist educators seek to experiment with our children and attempt to mold them into something they would not otherwise become. It is not a strategy of education but indoctrination. And in this, we see individuals who are actively hostile to all forms of religion⁶. In this, many of the advocates of progressive policies that align with early blank slate theorists such as John Dewey sought to actively utilize the educational process to align people precisely against religion and towards a belief in a secular faith of scientism⁷.

Many socialists profess good intentions, but they ignore economic realities. In doing this, we see the path of where good intentions alone can lead. In seeking to create a unified system that delivers an

⁴ Egan, Kieran. *Getting it wrong from the beginning: Our progressivist inheritance from Herbert Spencer, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget*. Yale University Press, 2002.

⁵ Lamarck, 1809: 124 in Ernst Mayr, "Lamarck Revisited," *Journal of the History of Biology* 5 (1972): 79–80.

⁶ Green, Steven K. *The Third Disestablishment: Church, State, and American Culture, 1940-1975*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

⁷ Martin, Jane Roland. *Education reconfigured: Culture, encounter, and change*. Taylor & Francis, 2011.

education system that generates secularized left-leaning students without an adequate capacity to survive, let alone flourish in society, the system has created a pathway to churn out a generation of resentful people. Merely lowering the standards that once existed, or pushing more people into university education in fields that fail to lead to the development of the skills demanded by employers leads to the creation of a generation who believe that they deserve not merely an opportunity but the right to succeed and prosper without understanding the prerequisite to possess marketable skills. It is the creation of human capital that lifts people from poverty and allows for social mobility.

It is the success of programs such as charter schools⁸ that creates the same hostility that exists against them. In an in-depth reaching analysis of both charter schools and traditional public schools, Thomas Sowell presents a series of statistics that question the entire progressivists concept of education and demonstrates a thesis that charter schools provide superior educational opportunities than the existing US public school system⁹.

II. Defining education

From the time of Aristotle, it has been recognized that education is a central component of leading a fulfilled life¹⁰. Critically, we must never forget that “*the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it*”¹¹. Yet many of these same precepts have been twisted into a concept of redesigning people to fit into the desired outcomes of others seeking to recreate the world and their image, disregarding that *wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: Wisdom preserves those who have it*¹². In this, they mirror the concepts of Plato far closer than those of Aristotle. It could be argued that these intellectuals see themselves as the philosopher kings in a hierarchically designated society; a state that

⁸ Sowell, T. *Charter schools and their enemies*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2020.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 7.

¹⁰ Chambliss, J. J. (1987). *Educational theory as theory of conduct: From Aristotle to Dewey*. SUNY Press.; Curren, R. R. (2000). *Aristotle on the necessity of public education*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

¹¹ Ecclesiastes 7:12

¹² Lobkowitz, N. (1970). *Theory and practice: History of a concept from Aristotle to Marx*.

Sowell¹³ has confronted at many times as he undermines the untenable position of the self-anointed intellectual.

A primary concern when we look at the creation of human capital is the dichotomy between education and training. Education is a process that should create strong, capable individuals who can learn for themselves and to survive in a variety of different environments. It should make a civic-minded youth who understand the need for both free-speech and patriotism. In that, it should create individuals who are strong enough to stand up for what is right and yet who understand the value of the system they are a part of. As Proverbs 22:6 reminds us “*Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old, he will not depart from it.*” When we fail to bring up and educate our children to be a part of our society, can we complain when they rebel against that society and reject its values?

The terms education and training have merged over time to become synonymous and often interchanged. Yet, the two terms have different origins. Education was the process where individuals would learn to rationally and logically learn how to interact with others in society and to develop the potential for reasoning and ethical character. Training differs in that it provides a vocational activity¹⁴. One is educated in moral thought that one is trained in a vocation. In this, there may be overlaps. An individual who is trained to be a philosopher must necessarily be educated. A theologian and ethical theorist must by nature not only be trained in the necessities of their art but also educated to the extent that they can conduct an occupation that is primarily concerned with the output of one’s mind. Herein, a lawyer or technician may be merely trained vocationally, yet without the ability to weigh ideas rationally, their potential will always be limited.

A sound education is necessary to provide the necessary skill set that allows individuals and consequently, through those individuals, society to achieve its full potential. No individual starts as a blank slate. Each of us is different and unique, and for that reason, each of us has different talents and

¹³ Sowell, Thomas. *The vision of the anointed: Self-congratulation as a basis for social policy*. Hachette UK, 2019.

¹⁴ Grube, Laura, and Devin Anderson. "School Choice and Charter Schools in Review: What Have We Learned?" *Journal of Private Enterprise* 33, no. 4 (2018).

skills. As Aristotle asserted, it is only an educated mind that can come to understand the ideas of others without having to accept them. In this, a Democratic Republic can genuinely exist. For, it is primarily through active and engaged debate that democracies manage to survive without degrading into demagoguery¹⁵. Therefore, we see that it is necessary to ensure that educational standards are maintained to create a sound foundation upon which we can build a good society.

Although popular opinion is divided, with many believing that charter schools are either a striking success or, in the converse, to be seen as a failed and dangerous experiment¹⁶, the truth comes from the analysis, not of individual cases but the overall changes that have occurred through the introduction of charter school programs. In seeking perfection, it is possible to destroy the good¹⁷. Many charter schools can be demonstrated not to achieve the best results but to deliver far superior results to what they have replaced. And this is the real test. It is not a test of whether a charter school can provide a child from an impoverished district with an educational experience that equals or exceeds the best preparatory schools or even the top-ranking US public schools, it matters that they have delivered superior results to the failed schools these replaced.

A. What is equality?

The concepts of equality of outcome and equality of opportunity are diametrically contested. However, this does not stop those who seek progressive change and the introduction of egalitarian regimes. Systems such as these are seen to deliver a platform that the intellectual and literati will be able to command. Few of these individuals even understand the reality of the outcome that necessarily results when their ideals are carried forth and executed. As an example, literature teachers earn under half the wages of road workers in Cuba¹⁸. Yet, economic rationale places little concept in the minds of the progressivists who strive for the creation of a utopia on earth.

¹⁵ Farkas, Johan, and Jannick Schou. *Post-truth, fake news and democracy: Mapping the politics of falsehood*. Routledge, 2019.

¹⁶ Sowell, T. *Charter schools and their enemies*. p. 1.

¹⁷ Kingsbury, Ian, Robert Maranto, and Nik Karns. "Charter school regulation as a disproportionate barrier to entry." *Urban Education* (2020): 0042085920923011.

¹⁸ Rosendahl, Mona. *Inside the revolution: everyday life in socialist Cuba*. Cornell University Press, 1997.

Repeating the same action and expecting a different outcome has been defined as being not only a rational but a form of insanity¹⁹. It is precisely this repetition of expectation that is being repeated in the endless desire to introduce a forced system that promotes equality of outcome. Yet such a system is anything but free. Such a system cannot deliver equality of opportunity for some students will necessarily need to be held back. Though, unfortunately, many do not have the opportunities available to others due in part at least to a combination of poverty and social pressure, holding back others to furnish equality is perverse. Different individuals will exhibit different capabilities, and consequently, some will demonstrate far more merit than others. At times, even children from a background of poverty and neglect may rise beyond that of the most privileged child. However, this opportunity may never appear if the only opportunity involves equality of outcome.

One of the key fundamental aspects of economic actualities is the concept of incentives. Where these are removed, people do not work as hard. In a world of equality of outcome, the natural incentives to achieve have been removed. All that remains is a central government that will force people to act. Yet, it is easy to hide the product of one's mind. The resilient individual can be seen to exhibit strength. But the most intellectual and brightest person cannot be forced to work intelligently without incentives. In a world where equality is defined not through the nature of the individual in law but rather through economic outcomes, there are no incentives for the best to achieve. In this, society degrades to the lowest common denominator. It is for this reason that funded education is necessary.

Education provides many benefits to society and acts in an economic form as a positive externality. In this, a dollar spent towards the education of productive individuals will return more than a dollar to society. Hence, it is in the interest of rational people and government to ensure that education is provided in a form which permits the individuals in that society to grow. The difficulty is between long and short term investments. Education is, by nature, a very long-term investment. The government and parents will spend money over an extended period of decades that may take a further two or three decades to

¹⁹ Glasby, Jon. "Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." *Evidence, Policy and Practice: Critical Perspectives in Health and Social Care* (2011): 119.

repay. Yet, over time the investment is warranted. But this investment is only valued in a society that seeks to grow and develop. Where we attack the concept of meritocracy and seek to displace those who have achieved through our own personal and, it becomes possible to limit education and hence the opportunities it can provide.

The need for accountability takes us back to the research on charter schools. Charter schools enable the introduction of controls around teacher accountability²⁰. Accountability is further enhanced through the reduction in the ability to discipline or remove ineffective teachers. The power associated with teachers' unions and the difficulty of disciplining or removing ineffective teachers from public schools comes at the cost of a child's education. It should be no challenge to understand that the best teachers will deliver superior educational outcomes than those who merely coast or actively neglect their duties. In this, the nature of how the testing system has been developed must take some of the blame. Systems that are easily gamed have been created to simplify universal testing regimes. These may deliver short-term political results but rarely deliver increases in educational opportunities.

Where teachers are capable of teaching to the test or even focusing the results on rote memorization in place of understanding, we find the result of a school system that produces high school graduates that cannot manage to understand the first year of university content. The result is individuals who feel resentful. When people believe and have been told that they deserve more and yet have no capability of achieving it because the educational system has failed them, they end up resenting not the educational system but society.

The other problem with progressivist oppositions to alternative school systems stems from a desire to inject external political agendas into the school curricula. Not only does this aid in the retention of power from bureaucratic systems that maintain financial control even when their role is no longer necessary, but it enables political groups to create unthinking pawns that are indoctrinated in a false

²⁰ Archbald, Doug, Andrew Hurwitz, and Felicia Hurwitz. "Charter schools, parent choice, and segregation: A longitudinal study of the growth of charters and changing enrollment patterns in five school districts over 26 years." *education policy analysis archives* 26 (2018): 22.

agenda and who do not have the necessary intellectual tools to be able to think through these concepts for themselves.

III. Conclusion

In seeking to create a progressive, egalitarian system, educational reformers from the time of John Dewey on have treated the individual as grist for the mill that can be molded into the superlative peon in their idealized system. In this, they seek to replace religion with a secularized concept of science that is practically worshipped in a metaphysical form that exceeds any rational understanding. The progressivist desire to interfere with the education of our youth stems from a mistaken belief that the individual begins as a blank slate that can be written on and erased, as required. Through this belief, they see any advancement or merit is a privilege. The individual who achieves more does not do so because they have more talent or because they have worked harder but because they are seen to have access to unwarranted opportunities. The outcome is the formation of a structure founded on envy, jealousy and a false desire for some unachievable utopia, which damages the opportunities necessary to develop fully within society leading merely to resentment. In limiting the ability to create and disseminate the necessary skills in intellectual thought and rational discourse, people are easily misled.

For this reason, we must provide genuine educational opportunities. As Sowell demonstrates²¹, it is essential to provide competition within education. In this, when measuring the output and quality of schools, it is only viable to measure the output of an individual school against its results. The differences between groups within schools limit the ability to compare like with like in a comparison of the best public schools with the worst charter schools. With regards to any accurate analysis of charter schools²², it is vital to compare the results achieved in any specific school against those solutions produced in its region or even in its former operation as a public entity. Where we see the progressivist seeking to

²¹ Sowell, Thomas. *Charter schools and their enemies*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2020.

²² McAdoo, Daryl. "The black elephant in the room: A case study analysis of the role of race in charter school board member experience." PhD diss., UCLA, 2018.

indoctrinate children, we face the necessary economic boundaries of time and financial restraints that must necessarily redirect funds from other more necessary investments.

Further, indoctrination limits the ability of citizens to reason. For every educational alternative that replaces a skill necessary for the development of rational thought in our youth with some progressivist experiment, we replace a necessary development skill with something designed to deliver propaganda. In this regard, we must remember that investments in human capital deliver not only benefits across society but increase the welfare of the individual.

IV. References

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