

# Advocating for childhood education

[Family](#), [Children](#)



In today's evolving world, having a good education is paramount for self-development, maximizing career opportunities and for the advancement of society. Thus, developing good education habits during childhood and adolescents will greatly enhance their potential in adulthood. In order to have a well-rounded concept of education today, it is imperative to understand how the education system was set up in the past. This will help put into perspective how the United States has advocated for children and adolescents' educational rights in the past to make them what they are today. Finally, it is crucial to be aware of factors that still negatively affect childhood education. The US should advocate for children and adolescents regarding educational matters.

Unfortunately, child labor was rampant in the United States, and because of this, education suffered to a large degree. For most families, education was a luxury that most simply could not afford. The economy was much different, and a bigger segment of society was part of the lower socioeconomic range. During the eighteenth century, the arrival of a newborn child signaled a new future laborer for the family. Beginning at the young age of five, children were expected to lend a helping hand with agricultural work and other important household chores. The farm-hand lifestyle was very common in the lower socioeconomic segments of United States and it required a large amount of tedious work. From planting crops and feeding livestock to fixing equipment, children and adolescents were forced to conduct physically-taxing labor. Larger families who had less work would commonly send their kids to other households to work as servants. The sad reality during these

times was that most families could not afford the costs of raising a child without some form of child labor.

During the upsurge of the industrial revolution, child labor shifted from farm and agricultural work to machine and factory labor. Children and adolescents commonly worked full time in hazardous conditions and some youth even began working as young as age four. Common work included selling the newspaper, working with machinery in factories and working in coal mines. Consider the following:

“ The Industrial Revolution was a time of few government regulations on working conditions and hours. Children often had to work under very dangerous conditions. They lost limbs or fingers working on high powered machinery with little training. They worked in mines with bad ventilation and developed lung diseases. Sometimes they worked around dangerous chemicals where they became sick from the fumes” (Nelson).

The sad reality is that children are easily manipulated and abused. They are more malleable because they are not as physically, mentally or emotionally developed as their adult counterparts. Thus, children are more willing to work for less wages and longer hours. It was also common for child laborers to not receive any wages at all, and instead worked for their room and board. When they actually earned money, they commonly earned about ten to twenty percent of what their adult counter-parts made.

In more recent history, the United States has made several leaps and strides in advocating for children’s rights through the use of community programs

and legislation. The most important piece of federal legislation that limited the employment of children and adolescents and protected their academic prospects was the Fair Labor Standards Act. The FLSA was successful in reducing the number of hours that children under sixteen could work, and also defined occupations that were deemed too dangerous or hazardous for them to perform.

Another entity that advocated for better legislation was The National Child Labor Committee (NCLC). Established at the beginning of the twentieth century, this body of highly motivated advocates was dedicated to the ending of all child labor. They effectively gained popular support by publishing information on the lives and working conditions of child workers. They managed to drive legislation for youth that complimented current educational laws that were designed to keep children and adolescents in school.

Since the 1980's, educators have made a shift from the traditional academic system to one that requires deeper learning. Because so many facets of life have moved to the digital realm, certain skill sets have been identified as necessary for twenty-first century society.

Today, the United Nations has declared the right to education as a fundamental human right. Human rights are rights that have been deemed by the UN to be unalienable rights that apply to every person alive, regardless of any form of discrimination. It is also important to note that the UN states that sexual and gender education falls under this category as well.

“ UNESCO Education Sector Education is UNESCO’s top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation on which to build peace and drive sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations’ specialized agency for education and the Education Sector provides global and regional leadership in education, strengthens national education systems and responds to contemporary global challenges through education with a special focus on gender equality and Africa” (UNESCO 2018).

Thinking of the children by more than just labor potential has helped change the role of youth in the working-class culture. In conjunction with a greater awareness of the exploitive practices of some employers, this led to reform efforts that effectively ended widespread child labor in the USA.

Unfortunately, reformers faced a hard battle against the legal system. The Constitution and its limited scope of powers proved to be the main obstacle to reform. The issue turned out to be a matter for the states to deal with.

It is crucial to be aware of factors that can negatively affect education. Things like poverty, difficult home lives, stress and exploitation can lead to a disrupted educational experience. Poverty can drastically undermine educational development in children and adolescents due to the lack of resources available. Since so much of our childhood experiences carry over into adulthood, difficulties with education can have lifelong effects.

“ Early childhood poverty is a prevalent social issue, both in the United States and in the wider international community. It has been well established that factors associated with poverty, including familial income and parental education level, can negatively affect children’s language and cognitive

development, which can result in academic achievement deficits that compound across the lifespan. Additional environmental factors, specifically maternal and children's own social-emotional development, have also been shown to impact these sensitive early childhood developmental processes" (Sharkins).

Other negative impacts on education from poverty include the community in which they live and crime rates. Often times, children that grow up in poverty are faced with unsafe environments. For example, the simple act of walking to school in an unsafe, impoverished neighborhood can be belief-threatening in extreme circumstances. Thus, the added stress of living in dangerous can negatively affect educational pursuits.

The role of the parents or guardians in childhood education is arguably the most fundamental factor in how educational development will take place. It is the role of the parents to set the right example for their kids and show them right from wrong. Taking an active role in the child's life allows them to learn concepts such as self-esteem, discipline and emotional security.

Consider the following situation: A child with parents that argue a lot, who live in poverty and do not take active roles in their child's lives. These children are statistically more likely to fail and have lower cognitive skills when compared to children that are raised in a healthy home life. A difficult home life can lead to other problems that effect education such substance abuse and unhealthy sexual activities.

Substance abuse is another factor that can be detrimental toward education, especially in children and adolescents. These are usually tied-in with poverty

and difficult home lives. Often times, youth turn to drugs to fill a void they may feel in their life. Perhaps they hurt a lot and drugs take that pain away. Regardless, there is a correlation between drug use and poor academics. There also exist extreme conditions where one or both parents may be drug users, and this means that their children are exposed to that kind of role model.

Stress, anxiety and depression can be detrimental to a student's educational pursuits. Excess stress (distress) is harmful physically, mentally and emotionally. Thus, if a student is in a state of chronic stress, then he or she will be unable to perform to their full academic potential. Physically speaking, the hormone cortisol plays a central role in reactions involving stress. When an individual is in a state of chronic distress then their bloodstream will contain more cortisol than average. This extra cortisol in the bloodstream is also associated with increased incidence of hypertension and coronary heart disease because it channels excessive cholesterol into the blood and leads to plaque buildup along the walls of arteries. It is also important to note that chronic stress and anxiety can lead to mental health issues and, in extreme conditions, even psychosis. This occurs because excess cortisol can cause damage to the cerebrum of the brain.

“ I think there are a couple of ways. most important, and in some ways the simplest one, is to really be aware of the situation, to understand children are arriving in school with very different experiences and one of the ways that those experiences shapes them is through stress. If kids show up to school with lots of stress, that's going to change them, usually” (Goral).

Unfortunately, exploitation of children is still something that occurs today. Often times, the entertainment industry pushes for ideologies that seem contradictory to educational success. Because of this, children and adolescents may be more concerned with parties and social events rather than academics. Children were exploited during the industrial era as well, but they were exploited in a way that was meant to get popular support for political movements. For example, muckrakers used the shock appeal to reach to a large and diverse audience at the turn of the twentieth century. Their aims were political, as they captured images of the horrible living conditions faced by the working class in ghettos.

“ The arrival of Sunday color comics featuring the “ Yellow Kid” gave such publications the name of yellow journalism, a derogatory name for mass-market newspapers...Theodore Roosevelt dismissed such writers as muckrakers who focused too much on the negative side American life. The term stuck, but muckrakers’ influence was profound. They inspired thousands of readers to get involved in reform movements and tackle the problems caused by industrialization.” (Henretta 548)

Consider the motorcycle diaries: As Che and Alberto traveled away from home, they were exposed to the difficult lifestyle faced by many South Americans. Thus, Che’s ideals begin to change. When “ The Mighty One” broke down, they were forced to continue the journey on foot, allowing them to have a deeper and more meaningful connection with the people. Also consider how Che traveled with the communist couple to the Anaconda Mining Company in Mina de Chuquicamata, Chile. He was disgusted by the



treatment of the volunteer workers, and he yelled at the person in charge to get them some water. He even went as far as throwing a rock at the truck when it pulled away. Che's birthday speech at the leper colony confirmed that he has indeed gone through an existential change. If parents and educators gave children the same attention that Che gave his people, then they may have much more potential in adulthood. Having that intimate connection that Che had is a very good thing.

Thus far, we have discussed the importance of understanding how education was in the past, how the US has advocated for children and adolescents' educational rights, and factors that negatively affect education today. All of these things can help people advocate for children's education well-being. Advocating for childhood education rights is important for the betterment of the individual as well as the advancement of society. Thus, it is especially crucial for educators and parents to be able to identify factors in children's lives that negatively. For example, if parents see that their child's grades are slipping, it is their responsibility to identify the cause. The same can be said for educators; they must be able to identify children who live in difficult situations such as poverty or a difficult home life. Looking for signs of stress of depression, anxiety and abuse in children is very important, and taking the appropriate action to better the child can prove to be difficult, but it must be done.