

Education as a function of society essay

[Economics](#), [Trade](#)



We learn early on that our voice is what makes us distinct. By it we express our consciousness; we participate in discussions and exchange of ideas; we fight for our rights. It is essential that one finds his own voice, for it is the medium by which he expresses himself, and with that expression he knows that he has an identity, and that as an identity he has control over his actions. It is not surprising then, that as we learn more about the world, the more we develop our own voices. After all, there is an internal integration of what has been learnt and where we would like to position ourselves in an ongoing discourse.

The discourse could be as grand as taking a stand between communism and capitalism, or as vital as gaining respect. It is then education's purpose to aid us in not only finding our voices, but as well as refining and tuning it.

However, the quality of education and of learning and literacy is influenced by social, historical and political factors. In his paper, Rose discussed why students go back to school even after thirty years. These students approach education with trepidation, regarding it highly and they keep on coming back to get the high school diploma and all it represents.

The high school diploma does not only mean that they have achieved some amount of considerable literacy, but also that they have gained respect, as Rose wrote: literacy here is intimately connected with respect, with a sense that they are not beaten, the mastery of print revealing the deepest impulse to survive. These are people who are struggling with poverty everyday but who see education as a key to a better life. Their compositions are riddled with grammatical errors and misspelled words, but still they continue to refine the poverty-stricken voice into one who has a say in society. Rose

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shows how poverty greatly affects the kind and quality of education one acquires.

As we saw in Rose, students who barely had enough struggled with going to school – they did not have enough to spend on the basic necessities such as clothing and shelter, and in most cases have nothing to eat. Poverty forces students to drop out of school and work instead just to survive. Instead of learning in school, the streets become their classroom. Experience becomes their teacher, and because of necessity and perseverance, they acquire enough skills so they could work. A young man might drop out of school and be forced to work as a mechanic, and eventually he learns the trade. But his acquisition of such knowledge is not credited because he has no diploma. His earning power remains significantly lower than a mechanical engineering graduate even if he is the best mechanic around.

On the other hand, Lu shared her experiences of growing up and studying two different languages during a time when China was at war externally and internally. This war made itself known in Lu's reading and writing. She developed two voices – one for English which represented bourgeoisie mentality and another for Standard Chinese which represented her formal education and citizenship. Studying both languages made her see what each language represented, what ideology it was fighting for. If before she used to turn on and off her English or Chinese depending on what she needed, she realized that she has been mimicking the voices that taught her the language. She became silent, afraid to mix up the teachings of the two languages because she has been taught these oppose each other.

Yet, she realized that the war is being fought, and she has to make a stand. Not necessarily with either side, but listening to the two voices, she can find her own stand in a heated discourse. In Lu's case, economic ability was not a problem. They had the means to get quality education, employing private tutors so they would learn English while attending the Chinese standard school as well. However, it was political and social factors that greatly influenced the quality of Lu's education. Although it could be argued that Lu received the best education money could buy, it cannot be considered best qualitatively speaking because the student was not able to find her own voice, to know herself and make arguments for herself. Instead, the politics of that time shaped the kind of education that was taught. Each centered on an ideology, and that determined the way students behaved and thought.

Education should be redeeming, guiding the student towards self-discovery. Education does not seek to make clones, but rather of critical, creative, and sensible individuals. In both cases, social and political factors have influenced the kind of education that the subjects received.

In Rose, the people defined as “poor” were seen as somehow lacking in the ability to learn, and they carried that stigma throughout their lives instead of redefining education to suit them. It was not that they were less competent, but that their education was often fragmented because they did not have enough resources to continue their schooling or to feed themselves. In such cases, they learn outside the school – not from textbooks. When they go back to school, it is more difficult for them to pick up where they left off, not just because of the years that passed by, but more so because they have

learned to see themselves as how society perceives them: poverty-stricken, not only financially, but also intellectually. As Rose posited, it seems that we have forgotten how difficult it is to keep before our eyes the negative power of the unfamiliar, forgetting that information poverty constrains performance, neglecting the effect of despair on learning.

In this case, social forces reinforce poverty's vicious cycle. Thus, these people acquire a low-quality education – at least from the school system. The quality of education they receive from the streets is largely unaccounted for. Our standardized tests only accounts for what is considered education taught in school, but neglects the street skills often needed to survive in the real world. In Lu, the social and political environment constrained her to maximize her full potential, limited her ability to express herself even when she knew two of the world's most spoken languages and greatly influenced the kind of education that she received. It was tainted with ideological undertones, which pushed her to not think for herself, but rather to give correct answers expected from her. Especially with reading assignments, it seems that there is always a correct answer that the teacher is waiting to hear: her interpretation of the selection.

To be fair, it is not only her interpretation, but of the academe. Students perceive this kind of tension, and pick up on what the school system requires of them. Instead of teaching them to think critically and analyze, they give generic answers to get good grades. This is no longer a question of ideology, but still, the classroom politics affects student learning and the content and quality of education.

Education does not exist in a vacuum. We learn the things we know living within society characterized by social and political dynamics. The quality of education that an individual receives, both formal and informal, is influenced by the environment and its elements by which it is acquired. Poor education results from imposing limits on the learning process – the limitation can take the form of financial incapability, imposition of conformity in thought and work, even social prejudices. In an environment where the student is regarded as lacking and incapable, it reinforces a culture of poverty in spirit. In an environment where orthodoxy is prized and critical thinking unpopular, the student learns superficially: able to read and write, but not able to reason for himself adequately. He ends up delivering what is expected, not producing anything of his own, not motivated to excel or to use his maximum potential.

However, as we saw in the two articles, individuals can triumph over their situations. Rose showed students who held on to learning despite their economic and social status. Their determination to learn shows that despite the impact of external forces to the quality of education, the individual has the ability to overcome. Meanwhile, Lu showed that what most would consider as high-quality education can impede on self-expression and – realization.

It is clear that the materials and subjects taught in school are not the only factors that determine what makes an education good or bad. The conflicting ideologies posed on her by the politics of her time greatly influenced the kind of learning that she got from her education. Education is a function of all the

elements in a society: social interactions, norms and culture, politics. It is important to understand that no one thing fully determines the quality of education; instead, it is the dynamics of all these elements that in fact influence it. Works Cited: Rose, Mike, “ Crossing Boundaries”, in Reading Culture: Contexts for Critical Reading and Writing. Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, 1999. Lu, Min-Zhan, “ From Silence to Words: Writing as a Struggle”, in Reading Culture: Contexts for Critical Reading and Writing. Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, 1999.