

A critique of american education

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What is the goal of education? Many Americans believe that the goal of education is to teach America's youth a variety of critical thinking skills that will ideally enable them to achieve success and become contributing members of society. To evaluate what students gather from their learning experience, America's educational system employs the use of a multiplicity of assessments, ranging from standardized tests to essays, projects, and other examinations created by individual teachers across the country.

America's educational system places high value on testing precisely because it is believed to be an indicator of retention; teachers use tests to determine how much students have learned in class. American society at large equates high test scores with high intelligence and vice versa. I feel testing is important primarily because it challenges students to demonstrate their understanding of what they have been taught. Having said that, I believe American education is test-driven.

Consequently, many Americans, especially students, overprize test scores. This overemphasis on testing and earning high test scores prevents us from realizing the benefits of deeper education. In line 38a of Apology, Plato says that "the unexamined life is one not worth living." Plato avers that deep education must accent critical thinking, creativity, self-discovery, and self-cultivation: intellectual growth and moral development. According to the Plato, paideia (Greek word for deep education) challenges us to reexamine our lives, our character, and our place in the universe. Predicated upon life-long introspection and calling into question one's preconceptions so as to achieve self-cultivation, paideia is about mustering the courage to think critically for yourself.

Though Plato's words of wisdom were written over two thousand years ago, I still find them to be of great value. If Plato were alive today, I think he would encourage America to revise its somewhat narrow-minded qualification of legitimate education. I think that tests, though an important aspect of education, are subjective in that academic curriculums and pedagogical methodology differ from school to school. I think that America's preoccupation with subjective testing marginalizes the cultivation of authentic creativity. In combination with being tested, I feel students should be given more opportunities to develop passions, build on their talents, explore new ideas, and engage in discourse with their peers and teachers in a fashion conducive for self-development. More meaningful in life than testing as a means of determining short term retention of a particular set of information and cursorily estimating intelligence, is the cultivation of self-knowledge.

If America's educational system were more focused on helping students achieve purposeful self-cultivation through interactive, thought-provoking, and explorative forms of learning: fieldtrips, debates, discussions, research on topics of interest, and creative writing rather than reinforcing curriculums that inculcate the pedagogical approach of teaching to a test, society would produce more efficacious citizens. To realize our unlimited potential, American education has to place higher value on creativity because true education engenders self-discovery. America's schools should serve as channels through which students travel to find themselves and become what they explore.