

# The problems of our education system and push for a paradigm shift



The education system in the United States is failing. It is not meeting the needs of today's children and young adults. Its model, outdated and obsolete, is not congruent with the emerging values of today's society, nor capable of sustaining the economy. Designed for privileged men of western society, it was later turned around for the labor needs of the Industrial Revolution. It has been structured on the bases of mass production. It has been over standardized much to the detriment of the society and the individuals placed in it. Our education system is more about passing tests for a degree, and training to be worker bees than it is about learning. Yet at the same time, the system is not building a sturdy foundation for future workers and the economy.

The standards movement is concerned with raising academic standards and increasing competition. Real life is not just about academic knowledge and other aspects of life and knowledge are being neglected. The competition being pushed is based on the assumption that it will drive up standards; however, that has not proven to be the case. On the contrary, standardized education crushes creativity and innovation, the very merits on which today's economies are contingent upon. The income gap is increasing at alarming rates and while not the only cause, standardized education is hastening it. People born into poverty are not being given the proper tools and motivation to get out of it with the way the system is currently set up. Instead of focusing on employability and the education needed for someone to actually work, all the emphasis is being placed on raising standards in academics. (Creative Schools 15)

The effects of standardization are deadening and creating segregation among students. The learning environment is sterile, and teaching is done in a whole classroom style rather than having students work together. Students not only are not encouraged to work together but forced into competition against one another. Individualism, creativity, imagination, personal expression are all being stifled. Even in very young children, when imagination and play are most critical, the standards of academia are being shoved on them. The nature of learning is fragmented as discrete subjects are the basis of the curricula. The interconnectedness of life that makes up our reality is ignored. Life skills and soft subjects are not of importance to the bureaucrats that design this system but for young adults who quickly realize how little they truly know about life, they are critical.

Children who do not fit the mold of this system are labeled as having ADHD and medicated. Attention deficit hyperactive disorder is not a true illness of an individual but a reflection of the sickness of society. Children are being overstimulated by life and bombarded by technology. They're overwhelmed by the media and the sickening degree to which capitalistic consumerism is being forced into their lives. Then expected to sit still in a classroom and have information that in many ways is outdated and inaccurate, forced into their heads, all to pass a test at the end of the week. It is an atrocity and the poor children who cannot abide by this soul-crushing model or one who has the awareness and intrinsic motivation not to follow, is labeled as sick or troubled. Children are highly energetic beings; powerhouses of energy and that energy needs to be focused not subdued and vanquished like some evil

entity. School should be designed to harness this energy to its full potential, not restrain and suppress it.

Some people believe that we all come here for a specific purpose but that we end up forgetting who we are and why we are here. Perhaps it is this oppressive learning environment and fragmented system that helps us forget. Perhaps it is designed to do precisely that. What is clear is the current model of education dulls a person's ability to think creatively and develop multiple solutions to a problem, to think divergently. The longer a child is educated in the current system, the more they lose this innate intelligence. (K. Robinson TED Talks 2010) For some who retain this intrinsic genius, end up going on to doing extraordinary things in the world. Still, for some, a life of struggle is eminent as they never find their place in society having all their lives being labeled as strange or troubled.

Unfortunately, this standardized, bureaucratic model of education is a global issue. The competition is not just in the classrooms but between countries, and the U. S. has fallen behind other developed nations further damaging the economy and the children of this country. Leading the world in Education is Finland and Singapore. The U. S. falls around 31st out of 65 countries that compete in PISA testing. PISA or Programme for International Student Assessment tests 15-year-old students from all over the world in reading, mathematics, and science, every three years. The U. S. places next to last in measures of child well-being. The U. S. is not investing in education and teachers' salaries the way Finland and Singapore do. " Finns believe that teaching is as difficult as medicine or law, and it is therefore just as hard to enter. Singaporeans say teaching is as challenging as engineering, so they <https://assignbuster.com/the-problems-of-our-education-system-and-push-for-a-paradigm-shift/>

pay teachers a starting salary comparable to that of engineers.” (C. M. Rubin 2012) The United States needs to place more value on education and compensate teachers to reflect that. Teachers here are not valued and paid nearly as much as they are in top education countries that place great stock in education. Yet, students in the U. S. have the highest debt. Perhaps people should stop worrying about all this competition and wake up to what is really going on here.

The education system is a bureaucracy ran like any other greedy corporation. It has been completely corporatized and is one of the biggest money-making industries. Youth are being led by the illusion that getting a college education will secure them a good job. Yet the reality is having a degree is no longer a promise of work in your field of focus, or even at all. For others, it becomes an “ expensive irrelevance”, (Creative Schools 15) with graduates settling on jobs that never required their obtained degree. Students have been misled and even exploited by this corrupt system that leaves them burdened by massive student loan debts and in many cases, without a career capable of repaying it, or at least, absent of substantial discomfort, even hardship to themselves and families.

In the widely accepted model of education, children are subjected to academic “ tracking” and this tracking can have adverse effects on many students lives. Students get separated by academic ability and placed into specific groups or programs. The problem is, being good at something is not the same thing as that something being good for you. Just because you’re good at something does not mean it is something you enjoy and want to pursue for your life. Unfortunately, many children have their fates decided by <https://assignbuster.com/the-problems-of-our-education-system-and-push-for-a-paradigm-shift/>

this practice. " As the story goes, the smart kids go to college. The others may leave school early and look for a job or apply for a vocational course to learn a trade of some sort. Either way, they have taken a step down the status ladder in education." (Creative Schools 17) Instead of working with children and young adults to discover where their interests and passions truly lie, a tracking system simply places them in assigned classes according to overall achievement. Much as it is difficult to move up in a social class, so too is it in this educational class system.

As a result of this tracking, many students drop out or go onto higher education and into careers that do not fit who they are. For many who do enter into college, a sense of self has not yet been discovered, and their plan and purpose still so unclear. Also, important occupations that require technical training instead of college degrees are often viewed as less desirable in the land of academia. Occupations such mechanics, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, chefs, bakers, caretakers, and so forth, are all absolutely vital to society and without them, many of the elaborate and glamorous careers obtained with a doctorate or MBA could not exist.

The education system is vital to society for several reasons. One importance it has is cultural. It as a way to pass on the community's values and traditions. It has vast importance to the economy, facilitating its growth and prosperity. " Its social importance to provide all students, regardless of their circumstances and upbringings with opportunities to prosper and succeed and to become active and engaged citizens. It is needed to foster attitudes and behaviors, essential to maintaining social stability and promote change where it is needed." (Creative Schools 8) Finally, there is a personal stake in <https://assignbuster.com/the-problems-of-our-education-system-and-push-for-a-paradigm-shift/>

education. Every person has the right to come to realize their potential and to discover their passion and sense of purpose, and to have the opportunity to live a fulfilled life. Changes need to be made to ensure people have this opportunity. “ We need a radical change in how we think about and do school—a shift from the old industrial model to one based on entirely different principles and practices. People do not come in standard sizes or shapes, nor do their abilities and personalities. Understanding this basic truth is the key to seeing how the system is failing—and also how it can be transformed.” (Creative Schools 25) It is imperative that this is achieved.

We need a more holistic approach to education that advocates for and inspires children’s and adult’s creativity and individualism. Ron Miller founder of the Holistic Education Review, defines holistic education as a “ philosophy of education based on the premise that each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to humanitarian values such as compassion and peace” Instead of approaching subjects as discrete, a better system would focus on the interconnectedness of all things as a way to a more progressed society and a better life. “ Holistic education is concerned with the growth of each student by allowing one to reach his or her intellectual, creative, emotional, and physical potential. It encourages the transfer of learning across various disciplines in which learners have the opportunity to openly and collectively discuss cultural, political, social, and moral contexts of their lives.” (Lauricella 57 & MacAskill) Children need to be raised to think for themselves, to use their imaginations. Intrinsic motivation should be discovered and encouraged, self-esteem should be nurtured.

Students should be guided to develop qualities they can contribute to forming an improved society and a better world. Through greater awareness, activism, attitude and values changes, consideration of the needs of the environment and future; as well as more spirituality, a more positive future can be realized. What is needed is an integrative education system based on moral responsibility, and individuality, not on standardization. Some notable proponents of holistic education are Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau, Carl Jung, Maria Montessori, and Rudolf Steiner. The latter have schools based off of their ideas and principles.

Steiner education also known as, Waldorf education, is based on the educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner. Its pedagogy aims to develop students not only a student's intellectual skills but also their artistic, and practical skills in an integrative, multidimensional, holistic way. Its modus focuses on the fostering of the student's imagination and creativity.

Montessori schools are very similar to Steiner schools. Unlike our standardized system that groups students by their date of birth much like a product manufacturing date, they mix ages in the classroom. Not all students learn at the same rate. Some are advanced, and some may be behind what the current model demands. Students in Montessori schools have a choice of activity and are taught with a more hands-on approach versus instruction absent of application. Teachers are trained to recognize a child's abilities and characteristics both good and bad and construct learning around that. Finally, classrooms are small, and the environment is more natural and comfortable with areas organized by subject.



The standardized system used in mainstream America has a model that is focused on being rational instead of intuitive, quantitative versus qualitative, and strict emphasis is placed on assessment and evaluation over quality instruction and learning. Students are placed against each other and cooperative learning is disregarded. "As knowledge is co-created as each individual constructs their own meaning and ways of knowing." (Ron Miller) Merely covering content and testing how well a student processed that is not learning.

In the current system, teachers are more authoritative figures who lead a classroom by an exercise of power. The power dynamic between teacher and student usually favors the teacher who dictates the arrangement of the class space, and utilization of class time to proactively control student behavior and promote, or in many cases, discourage learning. Some teachers arrange rooms in a way that discourages students from moving, while others give students choices and believe learning is enhanced when a student is comfortable and has some control over their environment. "In holistic education settings, teachers become less of an authoritative figure who directs and controls, and more of a friend, mentor, and facilitator. The idea of delivering education from a top-down system does not exist in the holistic model, as students and teachers are meant to learn both with and from one another" (Lauricella & MacAskill 58) The role of the holistic teacher is to nurture and support the child's whole developmental needs of mind, body, and spirit. (Luvmour, J. 2001) In an educational environment such as this, the absence of homogeneity, strict standards, incessant testing, and authoritarian control, students can flourish as learners and individuals.

One such school that actively employs this holistic way of teaching, is The Integrated Arts Academy in Burlington Vermont. It uses the four main art forms: movement, drama, music, and visual arts, to teach children kindergarten through fifth-grade core subjects. Another, Lyford Cay International School, bases their teaching on the International Baccalaureate Program. They provide a challenging and transformative education. They encourage creative, individual thinking, and focus on a student's growth not just academically and physically, but more importantly, emotionally and ethically. Cultural differences are focused on and celebrated. Students are guided to not only think and learn but to reflect on the nature of knowledge and how we actually come to know what it is we claim to know. This school provides a balanced education and empowers students to be successful not just in academics but in life. These two schools take a different approach, but each offers unique developmental opportunities that are not found in schools of standardized education. They both spark motivation intrinsic to all children to develop cultural, social, and moral talents necessary to positive advances of society. Those are just two examples, in Vermont and the Bahamas, but whether in California, Germany or New Zealand, these schools exist and hopefully, the world will eventually adopt this model of education over standardized.

In a study conducted to provide insight into if and why college students believe that exposure to holistic teaching system would have benefited them, the large majority agreed that it would have. Of the five areas of holistic education, personal identity, meaning/purpose, connections to the community, connections to the natural world, and humanitarian values that

were accessed, 70 % believed would have been beneficial to them. Nearly 90% of the qualitative comments suggested an overwhelming need for students to learned more about who they are, what they believe, and their opinions about political, religious, or philosophical issues. As one respondent reported, “ standardized education [is] soul-crushing and a more personalized learning method would have opened a lot more doors.”

(Lauricella & MacAskill 65)

The overwhelming majority—on average about 70%—of participants agreed that had they more exposure to holistic principles while in the K-12 system, they would have been more successful in university. Students supporting experience with holistic principles reported that a holistic education would have helped them to better choose their course of study at university, to more fully understand their career opportunities after graduation, and to be more informed about the community, natural world, and citizens with whom they interact Although our study sample was small it is likely given the high 70: 30 ratio for holistic education, that students (especially females) want both the opportunity and ability to know themselves and their communities better and recognize the benefits of increased exposure to holistic principles in understanding their future potential as students and citizens.

There is a familiar saying that you cannot love someone else until you love yourself, equally you cannot meaningfully learn about the world until you learn about yourself and possess a solid understanding of who you are and what you believe. The widely accepted model of education still used today is simply antiquated. It is not doing our children and young adults any good, and therefore not doing justice to our society and our world as a whole. By <https://assignbuster.com/the-problems-of-our-education-system-and-push-for-a-paradigm-shift/>

adopting and incorporating the design of holistic education into our society many of the problems we see in society can be remedied. By fostering creativity and imagination, and providing an atmosphere that promotes awareness, free-thinking, and individualism, students will discover their passion and sense of purpose. With an integrative education system based on greater moral responsibility, and individuality, not on standardization, the ideals for a healthier, happier life and a better world can be realized.

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