What Does It Mean to Be Well-Educated? (**)

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In this article, I will argue that education has been far too focused on the acquisition of knowledge — for which there is no substitute. The education system has been built around the instruction and testing of knowledge. But there is no substitute for learning how to think for yourself, how to think for others, and how to think for the world. In other words, knowledge has been taken as an end in itself, and not as a means to an end. Knowledge has been taken as a substitute for thinking, and not as a means to thinking.

The issue is sufficiently complex that it means to be well-educated, should we instead be asking about the process of education or the product of education? In other words, do we want to know if we have mastered enough facts, or if we have mastered the way to learn and to think about facts? These are not the same question, and they have different answers.

1. The Point of Schooling: Rather than attempting to define what it means to be well-educated, should we instead be asking about the process of education or the product of education? In other words, do we want to know if we have mastered enough facts, or if we have mastered the way to learn and to think about facts? These are not the same question, and they have different answers.

2. An Absence of Consensus: It is even possible to suggest that the term is purely relative: you like opera, I like Shakespeare; you favor knowledge about poetry, I prefer familiarity with the getty-by-address. Some criteria are more defensible than others. Nevertheless, the idea of making diplomas contingent on passing an exam answers by default the question of what it means to be well- (or sufficiently) educated: Rather than grappling with the messy issues of reflective attention, the power to hold problems, questions, before the mind. Without this capability, he added, "one is not thinking at all, is not free, is not a man." The term "well-educated" is thus defined as that which is sufficient to the task of preserving the status quo.

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4. Some Personal Definitions: Should we instead try to stipulate what attributes students who are well-off should have? Perhaps we should consider the following: A year later, having spent her entire life in school, she decided to do the only logical thing . . . and apply to medical school. She subsequently became a successful practicing physician.

The term "well-educated" is thus defined as that which is sufficient to the task of preserving the status quo. By contrast, consider Dewey's suggestion that an educated person is one who has "gained the power to think and think well." A person who is well-educated is one who is well-informed, that is, well-aware of the world's facts and ideas.

5. Modern Educational Reform: It is possible to suggest that the term is purely relative: you like opera, I like Shakespeare; you favor knowledge about poetry, I prefer familiarity with the getty-by-address. Some criteria are more defensible than others. Nevertheless, the idea of making diplomas contingent on passing an exam answers by default the question of what it means to be well- (or sufficiently) educated: Rather than grappling with the messy issues of reflective attention, the power to hold problems, questions, before the mind. Without this capability, he added, "one is not thinking at all, is not free, is not a man." The term "well-educated" is thus defined as that which is sufficient to the task of preserving the status quo.

6. The Good School: Finally, instead of asking what it means to be well-educated, perhaps we should inquire into the qualities of a school likely to be well-educated? In other words, who gets to decide what it means to be well-educated, and how do we know if we have mastered enough facts, or if we have mastered the way to learn and to think about facts? These are not the same question, and they have different answers.

7. The Power of Their Education: (Eliot par excellence.

The assessment of schools is based on meaningful standards of excellence, standards that are not absolute, but that are better than ours. The best answer to our original question simply because to meet these criteria is as good as any way to say that we are well-educated. The Met School focuses on social reasoning, empirical reasoning, quantitative reasoning, communication, and personal qualities (such as responsibility, capacity for critical thinking, and ability to solve problems). It also has high expectations for all students, including students with disabilities, attending vocational training, and those who speak English as a second language.

Less obviously, the fact of making deposits contingent on passing as exam answers by default the question of what it means to be well-educated. (Or, if you prefer, well-educated.) Rather than grappling with the messy issues of reflective attention, the power to hold problems, questions, before the mind. Without this capability, he added, "one is not thinking at all, is not free, is not a man." The term "well-educated" is thus defined as that which is sufficient to the task of preserving the status quo.

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