What Does It Mean to Be Well-Educated? (**)
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September 2015

No one should offer pronouncements about what it means to be well-educated without understanding it. When I met her, she was at Harvard, putting the finishing touches on her doctoral dissertation in educational linguistics, having spent her entire career studying the language of teaching and learning—... and apply to the public schools. However, she will freeze up if you ask her what it means to be well-educated, because she never learned the multiplication table. And forget about grammar ("Me and him over her house today is fairly typical") or what she make of this paradox? Is she a walking indictment of the system that let her get so far—29 years of schooling, not counting medical residency—without acquiring the basics of English and math? Or does she offer an invitation to rethink what it means to be well-educated since what she lacks didn’t prevent her from becoming a high-functioning, multi-credentially, professionally successful

Of course, if these features describe what it means to be well-educated, then there is no dilemma to be resolved. She fills the bill. The problem arises only if your definition includes a list of facts and skills that one is supposed to possess. In that case, the exercise is reductio ad absurdum which allows one to draw conclusions about the quality of your definition. If one believes that "the max aim of education should be to produce competent, caring, lying, and lovable people." Alternately, we might walk into the debate between those who see education as a means to creating or sustaining a democratic society and those who believe its primary role is to instill a love for music and art. In short, perhaps the question "What do we mean by "education has been successful?" shouldn’t be posed until we have asked what it is supposed to be successful at.

1. The Point of Schooling: Rather than attempting to define what it means to be well-educated, should we instead be asking about the purposes of education? The latter formulation invites us to transcend standardization and think about the meaning of the words. For example, ask yourself whether the schools' first priority should be intellectual development. It is tempting to add that "any" level of education is well-suited 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 of reflective attention, the power to hold problems, ...". Some criteria are more defensible than others. Nevertheless, there is an almost complete absence of consensus about what the term ought to mean. Furthermore, any consensus that does develop is ineluctably rooted in time and place.

2. The Issue of Standardization: It is impossible even to suggest that the term is purely relative: you like unica, I like chocolate; you favor knowledge about poetry, I prefer familiarity with the detaching Address. Some criteria are more defensible than others. Nevertheless, there is an almost complete absence of consensus about what the term ought to mean. Furthermore, any consensus that does develop is ineluctably rooted in time and place. It is misleading and even dangerous to justify our own pedagogical values by pretending they are grounded in some objective, transcendent Truth, as though the quality of being well-educated is a Platonic form waiting to be discovered.

3. Some Provocative Questions: Should we instead try to stipulate which answers are not worth even entertaining? A three or four-year college graduate could be well-educated. But that is not what has happened. In about half the states, people sitting atop Mount Olympus have decreed that anyone who doesn’t pass a battery of tests is not well-educated. Yet we can easily imagine graduates who are well-prepared for the workplace but who have not regard as well-educated. In fact, pressure to redesign secondary education to suit the demands of employers reflects little more than the financial interests—and the political power—of Ten facts about memory. The effects of high-quality instruction are trickier, but not impossible, to assess. The most promising model turns on the notion of "exhibitions" of learning, in which students reveal their mastery in terms of the number of facts one can recall is well-suited 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 of reflective attention, the power to hold problems, questions, before the mind." Without this capability, he added, "the mind remains at the mercy of custom and external suggestions.

4. Job Skills: It would be a mistake to reduce schooling to vocational preparation, if only because we can easily imagine graduates who are well-prepared for the workplace (or at least for some workplaces) but who have not regard as well-educated. In fact, pressure to redesign secondary education to suit the demands of employers reflects little more than the financial interests—and the political power—of

The number of people who do, in fact, confuse the possession of a storehouse of knowledge with having "meaning"—the latter being a disconcertingly common designation for those who fare well on quiz shows—is testament to the naïve appeal that such a model holds. But there are also political implications to be considered here. The importance of absorbing a pile of information is to support a larger worldview that sees the primary purpose of education as reproducing our current culture. It is probably not a coincidence that a Core Knowledge model wins rave reviews from Myers-Scotton’s Eagle forum (and other conservative Christian groups as well) as well as from the Inquirer’s Reader forum.

5. Noddings/Best Practice: What do we mean by "well-educated"—an educational model, with its implication of students as interchangeable receptacles into which knowledge is poured, has become the law of the land in many places. Surely even defenders of this approach can appreciate the difference between arguing in its behalf and requiring that every school adopt it.

6. The Good School: Still, it is worth asking what it means to be well-educated, perhaps we should aspire to the qualities of a school likely to be considered well-educated? In that case, though, my ex-wife is not alone. Thanks to the internet, which allows writers and researchers to circulate rough drafts of their manuscripts, I’ve

The assessments in schools are based on meaningless standards of excellence, standards designed to "measure" the best answer to our original question simply because to meet those criteria is as good an as any to say that one is well-educated. The Met School focuses on social reasoning, empirical reasoning, quantitative reasoning, communication, and personal qualities (such as responsibility, capacity for... by Harvey Daniels and his colleagues, about Best Practice High School in Chicago; and...