

SCHOOLING AS REFORM

Consolidation and Commodification

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Schooling is a subsidiary of reform, which is an institution. Reform commodifies people, making them resources to social ends. As an institution, reform's dual and interrelated mission is self-perpetuation and consolidation of the status quo. A corollary is that damages of reform are greater on marginalized populations than on privileged ones. As part of the institution of reform, school is not designed to educate. Education is individualizing and self-actualizing, thus not of interest for schooling. Schooling for education is a means to escape reform. The argument is made so we will see why and how to change our situation.

Schooling is increasingly dominated by an amalgamated ideology of educational neoesentialism, economic neoliberalism, fiscal conservatism, nationalism, and big data. This has driven an array of detrimental policies and practices under the auspices of the standards and accountability regime. While most educators are, at the very least, uncomfortable with facets of it, we have been complicit. This is due in part to our tendency to be reformers, believing in social justice goals that the current wave of reform alleges to pursue. However, reform is not the force for change that we are encouraged to think that it is. While it promotes improvements, it is also averse to transforming society.

A common response is that the current wave of reforms were enforced by proponents

of one ideological approach, and that reforms advocated for by most educators are different. My argument is that the differences are insubstantial. Public schooling (referred to subsequently as schooling) is a project of reform, which is an institution that commodifies people. In offering change without transformation, it assures its own regeneration. Moreover, its goals are inevitably arranged to consolidate the unjust status quo.

The approach that I take to make this argument is conceptual analysis. As configured by Barrow (2010), in a tradition descended from Richard Peters, conceptual analysis starts with the axiom that concepts, while represented by words, are not the words in and of themselves. It acknowledges that there is no way to define words in such a manner as to describe a concept

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The SoJo Journal: Educational Foundations and Social Justice Education, Vol. 5(1), 2018, pp. 29–42 ISSN 2381-5183
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perfectly, permanently, or for every context. At the same time, sharing understanding and development of concepts is the very purpose of language. People use concepts to function in the world, so it becomes vital to clarify what concepts mean by sharing our constructions of them and engaging in dialogue about those constructions. While we never come to perfect agreement or account for all cases, “we can always make some sort of progress in presenting an account of a concept that is (a) clear, (b) complete, (c) coherent, and (d) compatible” (pp. 12–14). Barrow calls these the four Cs for defining in conceptual analysis. Defining carefully in this way is an important form of resistance to what Marcuse (1964) called desublimation, the undermining of the meaning of rich concepts that comes from operationalizing them. Such desublimation is destructive to knowledge and service professions. Professionals in a field must engage in thorough contemplation of the terms central to their profession in order to determine what is most ethical and just for them to do. To understand how we are ensconced in a system that commodifies students and teachers, it is important to explore the constructions of concepts central to our work.

COMMODIFICATION

Soshana Zuboff (Chakrabarti, 2019), during an interview on National Public Radio, provided a summary of free will. She explained that it resides essentially in someone(s) imagining a future condition and working to achieve it. She acknowledges that the imagining and the work to reach the goal are highly subject to outside influences, but freedom of individual agency resides in the moment of imagination of the future condition and in the work toward it.

Objectification, and usually commodification, enter into the situation the moment that will does. This is because, in peoples’ exertion of will, anything that is relevant to the goal is either an obstacle or a means to it. For instance, someone who wants to sell two-by-

fours looks at a tree and does not see a breathing being that lives for its own purposes. What they see is a means to the goal, particularly a resource: lumber in raw form. The tree’s very living is merely an obstacle to their ends, and realizing their will is a matter of getting through the obstacles and using the resource.

Someone exerting will is a subject, and to attain the goal, everything else, obstacle or means, is an object. Later, I will give examples of how goals can serve to resubjectify those objects, so will is certainly not foreclosed from accomplishing ethical or just things. Nevertheless, objectification is an automatic function of will, and more particularly, the objectified people or things are usually configured as commodities.

A commodity is a subset of object: a commodity is a resource. It was originally used to describe oppression of people by Marx (Marx & Engels, 1975) in the context of industrial workers: “We have shown that the worker sinks to the level of a commodity and indeed becomes the most wretched of commodities” (pp. 270–282). For hooks (1992), commodification is configured more broadly as “Eating the Other,” turning people into objects for our own edification. This is something that we do no matter what we intend. Imperializing, dominating subtexts are omnipresent in our decisions such that we will always “eat the other” (p. 61). In considering this breadth of usage, and the measures of clarity, completeness, coherence, and compatibility, I offer this definition: Commodification is the particular form of objectification in which the object is a product or is an obstacle or resource to obtaining a product.

In his article in this issue, Hayden lays out the distinction between objects employed as commodities and objectification that does not commodify. I would not pretend that I could improve upon his relation of the distinction. His configuration reaffirms that the action of will almost always commodifies. For instance, if you are a teacher, and your goal is that the students’ test scores go up in order to show student growth, you are exchanging their labor (and

your own) for a product. As we look at a cow and envision only hamburger, so we look at the student and render her as either burger flipper (obstacle to the goal) or as global worker (resource to the goal). Instead of seeing a pig as an intelligent and curious being, we see bacon. Instead of seeing a teacher, we see a catalyst of test-score production and college applications.

However, nested in the automatic objectification consequent upon will, there is an opportunity to resubjectify objects, and thus be acting in noncommodifying ways. Going back to the example in which you are a teacher, you may have been convinced that the increased test scores really represent something wonderful for the future of your students. The new teachers described by Nagrotzky in this issue have been indoctrinated to accept this premise. Though it is untrue, your conviction that the approach really is for the students' benefit problematizes the relation between will and commodification. If the goal is to benefit the object, then that object is resubjectified. In the case of being a teacher whose goal is that each student benefits in their life, the objects of your goal are also the *subject* of endeavor, and the commodification of them disappears. With this twist, exertion of will is performed in ways that are ethical and socially just. What, or more precisely who, teachers determine as our goals is therefore vital in discerning between objectifying or subjectifying, dehumanizing or humanizing.

The goal setting done by reform introduces a distortion to the goals we might otherwise envision. Commodification of our students has been promoted by generating an operationalized, quantitative conflation of schooling with education that rests outside of the individual human being, and that serves to keep reform as the forum of any changes we attempt to make.

REFORM

The next term to explicate is reform. The definition that I propose is: The central societal institution around which perceived beneficent

change is contemplated and carried out. The completeness and compatibility of this definition rely upon understanding that, as an institution, it is self-perpetuating and conservative in its assumption that the societal status quo, rather than individuals, comprise the frame of beneficent ends.

Reform was originally derived from reformation, and as Joanna Innes (2003) recounts, reform only started appearing regularly in social and political discourse at the end of the eighteenth century. By the late 1800s, it had become a common term to refer to alterations in institutions that would amend or improve things.

This means that reform has will. Reform is a focal point for the envisioning of goals, and the path toward those goals. As such, it commodifies everything as obstacles and means to its goals. For example, if the larger goal of a program of school reform is to make society more economically equal, then the target might be to lower "the achievement gap" between poor children and rich children. As soon as this is configured, all of the teachers, students, and infrastructure of school systems are rendered as obstacles or resources to that end. The individual student disappears (sometimes is even discarded on purpose), in order to get to the goal. The student allegedly benefits from no longer being on the wrong end of "the achievement gap," but that student stopped being an individual person the moment that the goal was configured. Moreover, unlike an individual teacher, a reform cannot resubjectify its objects because it operates at scale. It is done for an abstraction or a grouping, not for people known in the individual sense.

This is not a novel interpretation. As Weber's (1930) view of rationalization suggests, and as Foucault (1977/1995) argues more directly, reform of any kind relies upon objectifying people. Even Haskell's (1985) historic-sociological explanation of reform does not change this bottom line because the intention of individual agents becomes subsumed by the group pursuit of group goals.

Individuals are objects in service to its larger agendas.

For completeness and compatibility, the proposed definition of reform has to be considered in terms of solving problems, since this is part of the offered definition. Reforms are limited in solving problems because they stem from and operate within the constraints of existing paradigms, and thus their interpretation of the greatest possible benefit always refers back to the status quo.

Critics of reform, starting with Luxemburg (1900/2006), highlight this shortcoming of reform. Her essays discern between the limits of reform and the transformational change that defines revolution. They indict reforms as tools employed to forestall transformation rather than to effect it.

Freire (1970/2005) elaborated on a similar concept of categorically different forms of change, which he described as antidiological and dialogical. Luxemburg was a Marxist, and Freire a neo-Marxist, so their views on the matter were formed in an assumption of an inevitable, dialectical operation of history leading to class revolution.

However, criticism that change is minor and transient when premised within existing paradigms does not require a Marxist frame. Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch (1974), in a personal psychology text, centered their effort on the categorical difference between what they labeled first-order and second-order change: “There are two different types of change: one that occurs within a given system which itself remains unchanged [first order change], and one whose occurrence changes the system itself [second order change]” (p. 10). While they referenced Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), which used a carefully reconstructed definition of Hegel’s concept of paradigm to explain how paradigms persist and shift, it was left to Marzano, Zaffron, Zraik, Robbins, and Youn in 1995 to make the firm connection between second-order changes and paradigm shifts, and also to apply the idea that first-order changes are

insufficient to effect the needed transformations of schooling.

Scholars on the opposite end from the leftists also concur. It would likely distress Luxemburg or Freire, who initially discerned revolution from reform, to know that some rightists had adopted their argument to make the case for extreme free-market school choice (Chub & Moe, 1990; Bast & Walberg, 2003).

All of these scholars have observed the same phenomenon: The reformer, or first-order change agent, seeks to reengineer existing situations assuming that a substantive part of the purpose is to reinforce existing structures and paradigms, which they interpret as essentially good. The reengineering is undertaken in ways that are conservative and sustaining of the status quo. The revolutionary, or second-order change agent, understands that the real problems are the assumed paradigms.

It is asserted in these traditions that reform can never actually solve the most profound social problems because it targets symptoms of social pathologies rather than fundamental causes and because it sees consolidation of the status quo as the ultimate objective.

The school reforms of our generation serve as an example. Neoliberalism is the controlling ideology today, and its reflection in schooling is neoessentialism. In parallel with conservatism’s devolution into neoliberalism, educational essentialism decayed from its focus on academic subjects and associated perennial works. Because, as DiLissovoy (2013) writes, neoliberalism assumes that “value has to be demonstrated on the basis of quantitative and standardized measures” (p. 423), goals of school reform were operationalized down from subjects to skills, parsed into trackable, supposedly objective, components (see Spring, 2013, pp. 426–448; Urban & Wagoner, 2009, pp. 401–413). The result in neoessentialism is a regimented, mechanized reform designed to realize the neoliberal vision of human beings as consumers and laborers. Big data has blessed neoessentialism with both the means to enact this reform and faith in its efficacy and beneficence.

In today's schooling, problems can only be rendered within the parameters of "objective" measurement. For instance, when one of the problems may be that we have an a-literate society, in which the a-literacy and then illiteracy are directly correlated to socioeconomic status, it can only be configured as an 'achievement gap' in reading measures' scores of students in schools. Some of the symptoms of the real problem are rendered as the total problem.

It all makes perfect sense in a society reformed such that people understand themselves in economic and technological terms. As DiLissovoy points out, people in today's neoliberal order are

trained to view themselves as fundamentally isolated and forever in competition ... sales-people for their own human capital in a world in which there are always winners and losers, and in which the losers have no one but themselves to blame for their "inefficiencies." (DiLissovoy, 2013, p. 423)

The neoessentialist reform is coherent, natural, and rational from such a perspective. The daily enactments inform the assumptions, which inform the values, which guide subsequent actions in a spiral of consolidation of the dominant paradigm.

Describing this specific reform's path suggests that reform in general is antagonistic to positive change, but good versus bad is not the point. Even Luxemburg (2006) acknowledged that reforms, in and of themselves, were meant to effect positive change. It is a distorting reduction to argue that, because reform is not revolution, it is useless for altruistic or beneficent purposes. Some reforms help people, and some can even operate to expand peoples' experiences in ways that satisfy Freire's criteria for revolutionary praxis (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 79). An excellent example of this are the reforms that took our society away from "separate but equal" between the 1950s and the 1970s. Simply the experience of living and working together without artificial social barriers allows people personal, communal interac-

tion which challenges racist ideology (see Thurgood Marshall's dissent in *Milliken v Bradley*, 1974).

Despite this important acknowledgment, it remains true that reform is self-limiting and antitransformational. The changes it promotes are limited by the tolerances of the status quo. In the example of the reforms from the Civil Rights Movement, it is unsurprising that inequalities and institutional racism persist, because the reforms, while doing a great deal of good, were not designed to transform society to the point where power dynamics would be transformed.

There is more to reform than a set of programs for first-order change, or even a mentality. Reform is an institution, and as such, is an agent of oppressive paradigms since those are the paradigms of the status quo.

The definition of institution remains contested in sociology, political science and economics. However, it is widely agreed that institutions consist of groups of people in association, operating according to norms. They are the agents of specific functions within society. Their concerns always include self-perpetuation, perceived within the institutions as both cause and effect of serving their functions. The functionalist tradition, descending from Spencer and Durkheim, further clarifies institutions as essentially servants of the existing order, since they depend upon that order to exist and prosper. They are organizationally biased toward the status quo (Miller, 2011).

Reform is, in this sense, an institution. It consists of groups of people with norms. It reproduces itself and serves as an agent to perpetuate and consolidate the existing social order. The first element of this requires no explication. Every reform effort involves people with certain assumptions, agendas, and accepted modes of action. The other two parts, self-perpetuation and serving the status quo, require explication.

Reform persists and is recapitulated in new versions in each generation. This works through both success and failure of reforms. Successes achieved are initially lauded to indi-

cate that reform works to bring about needed change. Yet, over time, the successes become invisible and the outcomes meld into the assumed environment. People living in the society altered by reform take the outcomes for granted, ceasing to remember how they were the result of intentional action.

At the same time, no reform effort ever delivers solutions to all the elements people perceive as wrong or unjust, since, as the revolutionary authors point out, that would require changing the paradigms. For instance, reform's response to failures in meeting the goal of narrowing opportunity gaps is always that the programs have not been configured or executed well enough *yet*. The neoessentialist approach gets reconfigured, repackaged, and applied to schools as new reforms. The benefits will continue to be limited by the same constraints, but so long as we accept the same assumptions, reform is safe to repackage the same approaches and apply them again.

This is illustrated by the reflection of scholars on how we seem to keep repeating reforms. In describing Chicago Schools since *No Child Left Behind*, Payne (2008) quotes Muncie and McQuillen, who point out that "educational practitioners and researchers have generated significant bodies of knowledge, but communities of practice and the body politic have not learned.... [M]istakes are repeated and research on educational reform often rediscovers the wheel" (p. 182). In a concrete manifestation of this, when *No Child Left Behind* failed (even according to its own metrics—see Guisbond, Neill, & Schaeffer [2012], Davidson, Reback, and Rockoff [2015], Wong, Wing, & Martin [2015], and Harman, Boden, Karpenski, & Muchowicz [2016]), society merely allowed the imposition of more stringent and more widely shared versions of exactly the same approach, the Common Core (also see Tienken, 2019).

Between forgetting successes and dissatisfaction with the continuing status quo, more reform ensues. Meanwhile, the underlying causes of the situation never get questioned because we can always create a reform pro-

gram to deal with what appears to be the problematic situation. What is made to appear an incremental approach to change is actually circular, shuffling among symptoms that are perceived to be problems. Changing cultural perceptions alter the scope and direction of efforts, but there are inevitably more efforts.

Reform also serves to consolidate the existing order. This seems opposed to its mandate to change situations for the better, but this seeming paradox is resolved by the revolutionary critics: Reform is a societal sleight of hand, a means of offering and delivering change without ever promoting transformation. Reform's actual mission as institution is to *govern* change in a distinct and limiting way: (1) promote changes that consolidate the existing socioeconomic structure, or that offer no threat to it, and (2) by offering that change, continuously diminish the seeming necessity for meaningful transformations that would undermine existing socioeconomic arrangements.

One result is that, while reform commodifies everyone, it commodifies the poor more than the rich. In the case of school as reform, inequitable schooling by social class is endlessly perpetuated. School reform idealizes the middle and upper classes as the target for the language and values that all people should have, meeting people who are in that class where they already are. Students in privileged areas meet reform's targets automatically, and their teachers therefore have plenty of space and time to offer them noncommodifying education. In an anecdotal example, an English teacher from one of the wealthiest suburbs of the Chicago area said to me, without irony, "Standards? Oh, sure, they're there, I guess. They don't bother us." He and his colleagues can afford not to think about standards, since most of their students come to his classes already breezing through the high-stakes tests.

Meanwhile, the reform targets purport to alter students in underprivileged communities out of any context that they have. Teachers in underprivileged areas, whether rural or urban, live in constant fear for their jobs or even their

schools' existence, which inclines them to further commodify their students on demand. This is because the reformers' targets have been determined by and for a culture alien to the students' own, so the majority of students find the targets obscure and therefore out of reach. Since the larger cultural goals assumed by the reformers are alien and even undesirable from the perspective of the students, their families, and their communities, the entire curriculum gets steered merely to achieve scores on tests. Some schools in the most vulnerable neighborhoods of our cities have become so commodifying as to seem farcical. There are now charter schools in Chicago with scripted classrooms right down to the kindergarten level. In these classes, the teacher has to stay on the programmed algorithm no matter what the students, the widgets to be manufactured, may offer or how they might respond.

There are no such schools in the suburbs to the north or west of the city, where privilege lives. Parents in wealthy communities have the social and political capital to guarantee that their children will not be so obviously demeaned. The commodification of students by school reform is for everyone, but the extent to which it applies in practice is directly proportional to the students' starting distance from reform goals.

A few students in areas of poverty do manage to meet reform's targets sufficiently to be permitted access to the next arbitrary gateway to material surety. The reformers use those few who manage this to trumpet the success of their approach. However, many of these students falter in that next step when they get to college, and find it asks for nothing like what their highly artificial K–12 schools were asking.

The predictable failure of school as reform to "lift" everyone from poverty or end "poverty culture" guarantees that more reform will ensue, and that society remains essentially unchanged in its social class distributions. In this way, reform's *institutional* dual mandate to persist and to consolidate the status quo is served.

SCHOOL

The next step to take is to define school. This requires understanding that school is not merely one forum in which there are reforms, but that it is, in its current and historical manifestation in our society, a subsidiary of the institution of reform, a central technology (using the Postman definition) to its ends. School's connection to reform goes deeper than being a convenient venue for its purposes. We tend to think of schooling as the larger category and reform as something that happens within it, but the opposite is true. This becomes evident when we see schooling's particular manifestations of self-perpetuation and governance of change.

Schooling perpetuates reform in precisely the manner described above in both its successes and in its failures. To the extent that school succeeds, the outcomes become invisible, and also because they inevitably fail in the larger sense of social justice, we are driven to further reform. We never have been satisfied with results from any program of school reform, and we are unlikely ever to be so. As Ravitch (2000) points out, "it is impossible to find a period in the twentieth century in which education reformers, parents, and the citizenry were satisfied with the schools" (p. 13). It is in this environment of "not good enough yet" that teachers are encouraged to become active in reform, putting their efforts behind competing programs rather than questioning the entire project. We promote reform, competing with other reformers and imagining that our own favored program provides needed solutions.

Schooling at all times serves reform's agenda to consolidate the status quo by continuously offering change while never transforming paradigms. School is a technology of reform that inculcates society's norms and forms. It is legislated, funded, and regulated in ways that assure that paradigmatic change hostile to the status quo will never be seriously contemplated. School always has reforms at work upon it, but in the big picture, all American public schooling, (and most available

alternative schooling) is part of the institution of reform.

This has been the case at least since its origins in the Common School Movement. The existence of American public schools is the result of Whig reform enthusiasm in the 1830s and 1840s, carried forth by evangelizing reformers, chief among them Horace Mann. Mann (1840) proselytized how state-regulated and funded common schools would solve just about every social ill. To get support for common schools, Mann and his ilk promised each social class rewards and benefits. They guaranteed change while consolidating, rather than transforming, the paradigms. The suggestion to the rich was that the population would be led to admire material success and become diligent, compliant workers in common schools. The suggestion to the small, but growing, middle class was that the common schools would make everyone share their approaches, their values, and their language. The suggestion to the poor was that the common schools were the ticket to material success (see Mann, 1840, pp. 9–10, 60; Mann, 1846, pp. 8–10; Spring, 2013, pp. 87–88). The incompatibility of these promises was downplayed, and the frame of the class hierarchy remained unquestioned. Common schooling was being sold as magic: benefit for all without cost, change without change: reform.

Reform has been the constant in public schools since that time, sometimes serving to address problems, and at other times problematizing matters further, but always within the limits of what contemporary paradigms allowed. Reform of schools was central in the Reconstruction South, the Progressive School Movement of the early 20th century (including tracking, testing, system expansion, and curriculum changes), and the slow integration and greater inclusion of students between *Brown v. Board of Education* and *No Child Left Behind* (see Ravitch, 2000, pp. 51–400; Spring, 2014, pp. 387–390, 440–445; Urban & Wagoner, 2009, pp. 185–440).

Much of this history reflects the limited potential of reform to make things better for

people. We can name reforms for which there have been genuinely positive outcomes. The introduction of kindergarten and, later, preschool opportunities such as Head Start have facilitated opportunities for children who would otherwise not have them. Moreover, many of Mann's particular promises have been kept: The dominant culture today employs the language and norms of a middle class, the majority of people do admire and aspire to wealth, and schooling undeniably has served as a means of upward mobility. Of course, each of these facets also represents the success of reform in consolidating the status quo.

Since reform always operates within the paradigms of its place and time, it is also capable of producing great harm. One of the most distressing, but highly revealing, examples of publicly funded and delivered schooling as reform is the Native American boarding school system initiated in the late 1800s. As Adams (1995) has documented, these schools were promoted by reformers with a wide range of motives. The boarding schools were promoted and funded as a beneficent reform effort for the society, at the cost of obvious suffering of individual children. According to today's values, these schools were torture for the children and intended as cultural genocide. This illustrates the centrality of schooling to reform and how reform promotes, rather than transforms, values of a time and place.

School is a keystone technology of the societal institution, reform, the function of which is to pursue change in order to foreclose transformation. This is central to the definition of school.

Therefore, a definition of schooling that properly describes it as a technology of reform is called for. A suitable definition for school that I believe meets the "four Cs" criteria can be found in Dornbusch, Sanford, Glasgow, and Lin (1996): A designed situation for the intentional instruction of students in information the society deems of greatest value to its ends (pp. 405–407).

School is not designed or conducted for the benefit of individual students, except inas-

much as the society believes that its interests are best served by benefiting individuals. The actions within school that we can call the constituents of schooling tend to take the form of instruction, training, socialization, and/or indoctrination. These terms all fit readily with the societal mission of school, and they are not the same as education.

EDUCATION

Ivan Illich (1971), whose book, *Deschooling Society* announces its intent directly in its title, noted: “most people acquire most of their knowledge outside school, and in school only insofar as school, in a few rich countries, has become their place of confinement during an increasing part of their lives” (pp. 11–12). School can be viewed more in terms of its prevention of education than as the necessary forum for getting it. However, in common parlance, school is the place where people are educated and education is what one acquires in school. The two are ubiquitously conflated. Defining them this way creates a tautology. If school is the place where students are educated, what is education? If we answer in even an indirect way that it is what we get in school, we have failed to be clear about the meaning of school in the first place. While it may enhance the definitions’ coherence, this is done at the expense of completeness. It fails to render an account of constituent elements. It also fails the compatibility test: Was everything you did in school educative? Was everything you count as your education in life gained in school? I use the rhetorical form because I am certain of most people’s answers.

There have been so many theorists whose ideas either explicitly define education, or require tacit understanding of it, that it would be impossible to examine them all to arrive at a consensus. We are inevitably frustrated in attempting to achieve a complete definition. Though we cannot hope for completeness, we can turn to some of the most famous thinkers on the subject to develop a sense of education

that provides the minimum acceptable point for completeness, and is also clear, coherent, and compatible.

Locke (1824), reflecting an Aristotelean approach, viewed education as the obtaining of virtue: “’Tis *virtue* then, direct *virtue*, which is the hard and valuable part to be aim’d at in education” (§74). He connected virtue to the person’s ability to choose reason over desire: “the principle of all virtue and excellency lies in a power of denying ourselves the satisfaction of our own desires, where reason does not authorize them” (§38). Acquisition of knowledge is tacit in this formulation, and its purpose is synthetic and holistic. The knowledge is acquired in order to enhance qualities of the person’s being in the world, particularly giving reason reign over whim and impulse, in order to live in as virtuous a manner as possible. Education is not knowledge and skills for direct application, but the use of knowledge for self-possession.

Rousseau (1762) configured education as the mind’s processing of a person’s comprehensive experiences long before John Dewey did. He resolved the limited general use of the term by rendering it plural:

Education comes to us from nature itself, or from other men, or from circumstances. The internal development of our faculties and of our organs is the education nature gives us; the use we are taught to make of this development is the education we get from other men; and what we learn, by our own experience, about things that interest us, is the education of circumstances. (p. 12)

He clarified that “the agreement of the three educations is necessary to their perfection” (p. 13). In elaborating his ideal model of education, Rousseau describes the educated person having “less memory than judgment. He [*sic*] may speak only one language, but understands what he says: and if he does not say it as well as another, he can do things far better than they can” (p. 116). Rousseau describes a holistic and integrative vision of education.

Dewey (1916/1921) was direct in stating that education is “that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (p. 89). Dewey’s approach was to argue for the process of learning, knowing, and education as continuous and nondiscrete. In this approach, everything experienced is learned and everything learned is being processed in terms of other things known, which suggests that it is education. However, it is optimistic to believe that every occurrence in our lives counts as experience, and that every experience is processed to the extent that we could reasonably include it in a definition of education. It is more precise to locate education on the continuum of our mental processing of concepts.

While Dewey was stressing the continuity of the organic process, he suggests such a continuum:

The increment of meaning corresponds to the increased perception of the connections and continuities of the activities in which we are engaged.... What is really learned at any and every stage of experience constitutes the value of that experience. (p. 89)

He uses “value” to indicate how learning happens in proportion to the quantity and quality of the process of thinking we apply. We know that this starts with perception and attention.

Current knowledge from neurology and memory scholarship tells us that we do not walk through our day experiencing everything that occurs around us. This would be impossible. In fact, the inability to select from the total set of stimuli and ignore the rest is one of the basic challenges for people who are nonnormative on the autism spectrum. There are many ways in which we are limited in our perceptions and in our selections of the matters deserving our attention. Perceiving and attending comprise the process that renders occurrence into experience, and it is the processing

of experience farther with intention that qualifies it as learning.

So far, this provides part of a definition of learning, not education. What discerns education from all things learned is simply how much farther along the thinking continuum we carry our processing. Concepts that are not used and reused, crossed over into other contexts, processed in new ways, are static and dissipate. They are not part of our education. This likely accounts for much of what we learn in our lives, particularly in classrooms.

Education as Dewey meant it is not this static, lost majority, but instead that portion of what is learned that is kept, used, and informs us across different life contexts.

This clarifies the relationship between instruction/training and education. If we value and use the instruction or training, it becomes part of our education. We may, however, be instructed and trained extensively and never value or use it, in which case, it is not part of our education. Conversely, there may be experiences we count as part of our education in which we were never explicitly instructed or trained.

Piaget (1964), widely considered the founder of constructivism in the field of education, described the mechanisms of experientialism as a matter of active construction of schema. At the root of his schema theory was the assertion that

knowledge is not a copy of reality. To know an object, to know an event, is not simply to look at it and make a mental copy or image of it. To know an object is to act upon it. To know is to modify, to transform, the object, and to understand the process of this transformation, and as a consequence to understand how the object is constructed. (p. 176)

In this approach, education is the construction and continual reconstruction of our schema, mental action taken upon the elements of experience.

Vygotsky (1934/1986) and his team furthered the theory of schema development, identifying language, a necessarily social,

shared phenomenon, as the vital element in human thought. Vygotsky concluded:

Thought does not express itself in words, but rather realizes itself in them.... Thought must first pass through meanings and only then through words.... The connection between thought and word, however, is neither preformed nor constant. It emerges in the course of development, and itself evolves.... Thought and speech turn out to be the key to the nature of human consciousness. (pp. 251–256)

The reason that this insight is important in constructing our definition of education is that even the autodidact requires other people in order to have it. Education is impossible without the paradoxical combination of the unique, personal construction of experience and the necessarily shared versions of concepts' meanings in language. We must have each other to have human learning, and therefore education.

Maslow (1962) defined philosophy of education as “the theory of how to help [people] become what they can and deeply need to become” (p. 34). He stated this in an essay devoted to outlining growth and self-actualization. Thus, education as a pursuit is a holistic enterprise of “let[ting people] grow and help[ing] them grow in a Taoistic rather than an authoritarian way” (p. 39). This fits with his construct of self-actualization, a vital component of the life well lived which we are compelled to attempt. The educator, in this view, is there to facilitate each person's journey toward self-actualization, and education is this pursuit overall, not merely the schooled or intellectual component.

From these luminary's views, a definition emerges. Learning is the meaning that we construct out of shared language and personal experience, and education is the subset of learning in our lives that informs our subsequent actions and judgments.

While not complete, any definition that falls short of this is certainly far too short of completeness. It is clear, it is coherent, and it is certainly scientifically, philosophically, and

theoretically compatible. It should also be compatible with most people's actual experience of the phenomenon. People describe key experiences in their lives as part of their education in life. They are not wrong. The only mistake is to think of this as metaphoric, rather than as merely a correct application of the term.

A correlate of this definition of education is that, because education is synthetic and constructed, it is individualizing. Each person's experiences are unique, and therefore, each piece of prior knowledge and each new experience perceived that is added to it is rendered in that person's unique interpretation. The more complex and sophisticated the durable, interacting schema become in which a person's knowledge is ensconced, the more a person is themselves rather than generic or alike to anyone else. This correlate demarcates indoctrination from education, as indoctrination seeks to unify people around a single view, while education, though it may cause a person to participate in any number of shared views or ideologies, is necessarily comprised of the growth of a distinct, self-deciding individual.

This correlate should not be mistaken for a claim of liberation from social influence or mutual exclusivity from indoctrination. There could be no accurate accounting of our knowing that precludes socialization or even indoctrination. The entire collection of constructivist, social constructivist, and critical theory show us that our learning is inevitably intertwined with our surroundings, nested within societal assumptions, paradigms, and agendas, such that the self that each of us builds from our knowing is full of both tacit and explicit socialization and indoctrination. However, since each person's experiences are unique, and are processed from personal perspective and networked into schema uniquely, their rendering of knowledge in terms of meaning, even for indoctrinated concepts and contexts, is a unique manifestation.

If we accept this definition of education or one close to it, it is clear that it is not at all the same as the intention or result of schooling.

Because education is individualizing, it is generally not in line with the imperatives or mission of school. School is not necessarily connected to education, and indeed, they end up frequently at odds with one another. School's inevitable targets are societal, while education lives within individuals no matter its sources or its benefit to society. We certainly should not claim to be educators if we serve school's mission, means, and ends when they are at odds with serving individual human beings in furthering their education. A school instructor or trainer can proceed to commodify students within the reform institution. To be an educator, for which I tend to reserve the term teacher, a person must decommodify, seeing students as full human individuals to help in reaching their own best ends.

EDUCATION INSTEAD OF REFORM

If we truly wish to be educators, we are obligated to reject reform because it prevents schooling from being primarily educative. The current wave of neoessentialist reform offers a particularly despicable version in which resubjectification of commodified teachers and students is foreclosed, and which seeks to alienate people from the best parts of our shared humanity. While there are other reform directions which would reflect less villainous extremes, they would inevitably operate to frustrate rather than realize the necessary humanizing transformations.

We remain afraid to cast off reform. While we often propose how much we value education, we tend to lack faith that individuals who meet their educational potential will create a better society without reliance upon imposed agendas. Liberals will argue that, without a reform agenda to narrow opportunity gaps, school will forever "confirm" rather than "confer status," to borrow terms used by Joel Spring (2014, p. 20). For conservatives, schooling without reform would neglect the direct concern with our status in international economic competition.

Meanwhile, libertarians leverage the sort of argument made in this essay to propose that the only way out is to stop having public schooling. This is the message that Illich promoted 50 years ago. His conviction was that education was made less, rather than more, available because of indoctrination inherent to mass schooling.

Though there are echoes of Illich in the reasoning here, I believe there is hope for schools which educate. It will require a revolutionary, rather than a reform approach if we are to accomplish this. However, that does not mean the kind of scorched-earth interpretation that Freire (2005) and Illich (1971) promoted, but more the versions envisioned by Kuhn (1962) and Marzano et. al. (1995). Conceptual revolutions dependent upon praxis can be slow and can transform peacefully, as long as agents within the system commit to them and seek to realize them a little more every day. School can be saved from reform and its commitment to an unjust status quo if we understand the situation for what it is and act using both concerted and individual resistance.

We can do so if we center our efforts as teachers, principals, and professors on providing education to each student as a dignified, whole, and individual human being. We can focus upon this despite the structure and agendas imposed from above, and reform's propaganda that its mandates are beneficent. We can exert the agency we have to shift control of schooling from vast, impersonal levels to the people most likely to comprehend and work for students' actualization: teachers, parents, and communities closest to them. In these ways, we can move the revolution forward and facilitate actual education of, by, and for people.

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