

THE ROLE AND NECESSITY OF EQUAL EDUCATION AND COMPETITIVE DEBATE IN POST CAPITALIST/INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

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Section I

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Modern capitalism has changed dramatically over the years. It has moved from people trading in common market areas to selling mass-produced goods. In more recent times capitalism has become a more knowledge-based system. In order to achieve success in the so-called Post Capitalist (or Post-Industrial) era, education has become the essential prerequisite for achievement in the market. Those with a diversity of knowledge and who are able to synthesize that knowledge (i.e. those with training in critical thinking skills) are the ones who seem to have the best ability to attain success. As a result, in Post Capitalist society, to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor (the educated and uneducated), American society must offer curricular and extracurricular programs which encourage students to become critical thinkers.

In order to advance this argument, Section I will examine the necessity for equal and critically minded education in Post Capitalist/Industrial society. Moreover, Section I will explore the harms associated with unequal education in the current system and in the future. Section II will offer some solutions to help rectify the harms associated with unequal and lacking critical thinking training in many American schools both in curricular and extra-curricular activities. Section III will conclude my argument and help resolve the impacts of this matter.

A good education has been key to maximizing the benefits of Post Capitalist society. As the world has progressed, so has capitalism. In this evolution of the market system, most advanced nations have moved away from possessing a comparative advantage in the amount of goods that they are able to produce. Their new comparative advantage is in human resources. Nations like Japan have been leaders in furthering this transition from industrial capitalism. Although Japan is experiencing economic turmoil, most economic analysts argue that Japan's capacity to end their economic problems is enhanced by their educated work force. Because the 1970's and 1980's were a time for economic boom in Japan, many nations witnessed that developing human capital through education was a more efficient method of gaining economic success.

Today, workers in most industrialized nations are able to read, write, and perform high level tasks. In this knowledge-based world, the premium is on the worker with the most relevant amount of education. While education alone is not enough for a person to secure a job, it is now necessary to possess a higher level of education in order to succeed in this new, competitive world economy. Because job security is no longer guaranteed and careers span tenure at several jobs, companies are looking for workers who are critical thinkers and are able to be trained, instead of possessing a few skills. The new worker in Post-Industrial society is someone whose specialties are critical assessment and problem solving. A superior education provides this for many Americans. The United States, consequently, has been able to maintain a stable economy and a high quality of living for most Americans, despite severe economic trouble in other regions of the world. Unfortunately, not all Americans are receiving the benefits of the United States' increased economic prowess.

A lack of high level education is precluding many from the benefits of Post Capitalist America. "Many public schools are inferior. The Supreme Court in Brown v.

Topeka Board of Education ruled that education must be equal for all students, and not separated along racial lines. Over forty years after the Brown decision, United States public schools do not reflect this constitutional requirement..." (*Wade 60*). Students in many public schools are put at a disadvantage in the Post-Industrial United States, as a result. They are simply not able to compete with their counterparts in better public schools or wealthy private institutions foreign and domestic.

This injustice is the personification of the complexity of intersecting oppression. Students who are poor, Black, and Hispanic are living in a country that claims to have egalitarian goals. In reality, they are going to schools that do not offer the tremendous amount of support these students need academically, financially, and personally. There is no valid reason for why these students are forced to live in an unequal world. If education is good, society has an obligation to provide it for all of its citizens, despite their race, class, gender, or any other arbitrary characteristic they cannot control (or combination thereof) (*Kozol*).

The result of this educational inequality is enormous. "Thus the state, by requiring attendance but refusing to require equality, effectively requires inequality. Compulsory inequity, perpetuated by state law, too frequently condemns our children to unequal lives" (*Kozol 56*). Educational inequality cannot be ignored because this inequality is systemic. If Post Capitalist American society is going to ever reach its full productive capabilities, all Americans ought to have the opportunity to see success. But, the harms to an unequal education in Post-Industrial America are not just in terms of overall quality.

Disparities in information retrieval make it difficult for students of poor schools to adjust to Post Capitalist society. Schools across the country are training students for industrial work even though the United States is in a Post-Industrial era. "Bells currently ring in schools at all levels to signal the end of fifty minute classes, and to prepare students for factory shifts characterizing an industrial age which no longer ex-

ists” (Wade 61).

In addition to being psychologically ill prepared for work in the Post-Capitalist age, many students lack current modes of information retrieval and technology. “The most powerful force driving the division between the rich and poor is the computer. It separates working Americans into two camps: those with a good education, for whom the computer revolution has brought great benefits; and those lesser skilled Americans who perform good and honorable work ... now being replaced by technology” (“*Tearing.....*” A10). Post-Industrial workers are becoming specialists in critical thinking only with practice. If every student does not have equitable access to information, it is impossible for all students to have the diversity of knowledge that is key to understanding a broad, diverse world.

This systemic inequality only causes harm. It hurts society as a whole because those with diverse and unique perspectives are voiceless in an era that places a premium on communication and discourse. The so-called “Marketplace of Ideas” does not function at its greatest capacity and society begins to stagnate ideologically. Beyond that, individuals who are politically, socially, or economically enfranchised are the recipients of a disservice. They are not able to practice critical thinking (gathering information, synthesizing, and problem solving) because they are not able to garner information in the first place. The United States has the potential to economically, politically, and socially empower or suppress its citizens in a changing job market. In order to increase the viability of as many American workers as possible, all people in the United States must recognize the magnitude of the harms associated with unequal education.

Section II

There are many things that can and should be done in order to reduce the barriers within the current system of education. These solutions are the best way by which the Post-Industrial United States will be able to realize a greater sense of justice, equality, and fairness.

Critical and experiential learning for all students is crucial to students feeling that they are ready and able to succeed in Post Capitalist economies. “The task of applying knowledge is critical to meaningful educational reform. Each student deserves and needs the opportunity for experiential education; for intellectual self-discovery; for a pedagogy that motivates authentic inquiry; for a pedagogy which allows students to ‘own’ their learning” (Wade 62). If students are able to feel some ownership in their educational experience, the time they spend will be more meaningful. They will embrace the lessons they have learned and truly be able to compete in the 21st century marketplace

A reform of pedagogy is the best way to affect this change across the board. This reform should stress actual intellectual understanding and application of concepts being delivered to students as opposed to students being able to regurgitate facts on an examination. Schools can do this by emphasizing research projects and discussion within its classrooms about how the issues they are studying influence and affect their everyday lives.

The ability to tap into the “Information Age” with computers and other forms of accessing information is vital for all students. All schools should do their best to afford their students the curricular ability to find information. “Students attending schools with inadequate or non-existent computer resources are already being disenfranchised from the information age. Incentives need to be built into educational reform to encourage the skills necessary to apply computer-based information” (Wade 62). The Post-Capitalist United States is evolving. In the process of this evolution, it is imperative that all students have the opportunity to embrace critical types of education. Students could not choose where they were born and largely are not able to choose their schools.

If the United States is to uphold its mandate in Brown, it is necessary that it provide information to its students. Efforts such as the 1996 Telecommunications Act are good first steps towards this goal. The \$1.66 billion the federal government has budgeted will increase the ability for schools and libraries in urban and rural parts of the United States to access the Internet (Lowe). This program is not a panacea, however. The Telecommunications Act should be complimented by other federal, state, local, and private sector efforts to enhance the funding rural and urban schools receive in bringing their schools up to par, not only in the areas of computing capability and information retrieval, but how that technology is utilized in the classroom.

As an extracurricular activity, debate is an excellent forum that gives students the

training and practice to be critical thinkers.

Debate competition is a rich source of opportunity for providing educational reform; for leveling the playing field of unequal education; for lowering the institutional barriers of exclusion; for motivating interest in information.

How does one redress the inequality inherent in public education? Competition in debate teaches the communication skills vital to educational reforms which are critical to the success of living in a global society. If one knows how to advocate on one’s own behalf in a way that will be acknowledged by the listener, one does not have to resort to violence to get the attention of decision-makers. (Wade 62-3).

While debate opportunities are not equal for all students in all situations of education, it is important to allow all students the opportunity to compete in a forum that allows them to express themselves verbally. This way, Post Capitalist America will have the right workforce to compete successfully in the global market. Today, many employers complain that job applicants do not possess requisite oral and written communication skills. If the United States is able to train a work force where competent communicative abilities is the norm, Americans will be extremely successful in an ever-increasing global marketplace. Competitive debate can provide this service for the United States, as the nature of debate is to give competitors an outlet to express their ideas verbally. Those ideas must be originally researched and tested in competition.

Debate also provides students training and practice in expressing their frustrations which can lead to substantive changes in the systems in which they live. The ability to analyze and solve problems is a tool all employers in Post-Industrial society are value in employees. More importantly, however, social, political, and economic institutions can be infused with fresh ideas and can make changes for the better with a minimum of conflict. Instead of using violence to express pent-up anger, persons once silenced by oppression are able to express their concerns and gain an ability to advocate ideas in their interest.

Beyond these benefits, promotion of competitive debate as an extracurricular opportunity for all American students is crucial toward promoting information diffusion.

While greater communication skills generate appropriate advocacy for educational needs, debate competition offers potential for computer usage. The Internet is a rich source of evidence for both policy and value contests.... Free access to information removes competitive barriers to those from inner-city and rural areas who might not have access to excellent library materials. (Wade 63).

To provide a realistic chance for students to achieve excellence and understand how to use their critical thinking skills in a competitive atmosphere (like Post-Industrial society), debate as a competitive activity should be provided on an extracurricular level to all American students. It is simply unfair to justify a system that allows some students to receive the benefits of debate, while others have very little intellectual extra-curricular activity selection at all, let alone competitive debate. The capacity for students to maximize their potential ought not to be based on luck. Students, as future citizens, should be well trained to be an active participant of their society and be a part of its solutions, not its problems.

Some would argue that debate in a competitive forum would alienate some students and would preclude students not suited to competition from enjoying the benefits of debate and other types of activities which promote critical thinking. However, this is not a reason to discourage these activities for two reasons. **First**, all students should become accustomed to the competitive atmosphere of Post Capitalist America and the competitive world marketplace. Competitive forums are a perfect opportunity for them to experience competition. As history has progressed, the clash of ideas has shaped the way people and institutions behave. The benefit to being apart of the vital questions of the day and the aptitude to relate ones own interest strongly outweighs the minimal cost of student shyness and discomfort in competition.

Second, competition allows students to hone their skills and provide motivation for students to seek out information.

Competition is that which motivates students to more fully explore the information necessary to achieve the levels of academic merit to which they aspire. If a debate loss motivates one to the library or the Internet, one is accessing the information age. Interscholastic debate offers a creative structure for increasing access to knowledge. (Wade 63).

Although it is unfortunate that some people may be alienated by competition, it is extremely important to realize that com-

petition is not an end unto itself. Competition in debate and other critical thinking extra-curricular activities is a means to achieving beneficial long-term goals.

• **First Main Goal**

Strengthen the educational experience for all students. On top of reform pedagogy in curricular settings, students need reinforcement outside of the classroom to illustrate how their learning can be applied and how it can be fun. Debate competitions, after all, are also social events in which students from different parts of the state, region, nation, and world interact and share ideas.

• **Second Main Goal**

Make a system that is just for all citizens. If there are flaws in the way that institutions work, the only way that those institutions will ever change without bloodshed is through critical reflection and discussion. Elite persons have had the ability to persuasively maintain their resources because they possess the communication skills to uphold structures that benefit themselves. In order to balance the power and level the playing field, persons not expressing the dominant paradigm should have their voices heard. Debate functions as a perfect opportunity for students to receive the skills necessary for the expression of their silenced voices.

Indeed, as the United States and other industrialized powers move into the 21st century, it is of growing importance that the United States provide all of its students with the tools necessary to succeed. Because the premium has moved away from brute strength to the ability to garner information, synthesize it, and use it solve problems, the United States must rethink its current method of educating its population.

The United States has an obligation to all of its citizens to provide access to equal education, the "Information Age," and extracurricular opportunities such as competitive debate. Industrialization allowed the United States to bridge the rich/poor gap by providing jobs for all sectors of American society. Today, the United States is in a unique position to avoid permanent socio-economic injustice and stratification. By providing opportunities to all sectors of American public education, the United States fulfills its obligation to "establish justice" and protect fairness and give all people a substantive ability to exercise their rights. Truly, as Americans, we ought to strive toward a more just society by giv-

ing all of our citizens the equal ability to experience and enjoy all of the benefits of living in this society.

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