

What is Education?

Education is the Ticket...

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Education Synthesis Assignment

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Discovering there's a Ticket

Raised in a small gossip town, I most often dreamt of leaving. I yearned to travel the world, and do great things! As a young child, I was introduced to the famous quote of Eleanor Roosevelt: "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." This was astoundingly encouraging to me as a relentlessly optimistic dreamer. If I confidently believed in my dreams, and took passionate ownership of my future, then I knew that I could achieve my dreams. So, I learned very early that if I worked super hard through my grade-school education, I could earn my ticket out of town.

Education had been presented to me by my family as a means to an end. I would go to school, be educated, go to work, and in turn come to model Plato's "functionalist ideals of a utopian republic (Noddings, p8)," meaning: become a contributing citizen to our country. Education as the means to the end: a miserable tax paying employee of some company that is a mere cog in the giant wheel of an industrial economy. Not that my patriotism was lacking, but this just didn't seem a sufficient goal for me. Nonetheless, I played along. Once in university, I was again diligent in my studies, striving to earn another ticket, but this time to a destination I'd choose, not to what was chosen for me.

Svinicki and Dixon's study of The Kolb Model provided them the conclusion that there are fundamental differences in the nature of a discipline being taught. "Kolb has suggested that the disciplines of humanities and social science are based in concrete experience and reflective observation, the natural sciences and mathematics in reflective observation and abstract conceptualization, the science-based professions in abstract conceptualization and active experimentation, and the social professions in active experimentation and concrete experience." I came to learn that the "education" that was earning me new tickets was more than just classroom lectures and framed diplomas. Aligning with Dewey's interactionist philosophy, there were both internal and external aspects of my learning experiences that existed within the framework of my life, not merely within the walls of the school (Noddings, p32, 38). The educative process involves the interaction of formal education, life experiences, and personal maturity, which to me signifies another ticket on the journey towards my dreams.

Earning the Ticket

Several years ago, I traveled from Lubbock, Texas, to Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Seven connections on four different airlines and two days later, I arrived. I booked the first three connections as a single flight to Europe, and each of the other legs was purchased separately. As I planned the trip, I knew where I was going but found no easy way to get there. I had to have all of these tickets to get to my destination. Similar to life, we have goals and dreams set before us, and rarely is there a direct flight. We have to determine our route and secure the right tickets! Sometimes formal education, experience, and

personal growth can each *alone* provide you with a ticket, but most often these three components mutually coalesce to provide a more direct route to the desired destination.

Formal Education

Any intentional pursuit of knowledge is what I consider, for this argument, formal education, what most young people understand to be their ticket. Whether this includes pre-school, grade school, university, trade school, workshop, or any effort to study on one's own to educate themselves on a given subject or skill, these are all efforts to formally, or intentionally, gain knowledge. Some subjects are discrete, while others are open-ended. Some skills are specific, others are tacit. The instruction of all of these types of education can take many forms, utilizing many different pedagogies and styles. Education, no matter the setting or form of delivery, is best received with an "open-mind" (Culver 225). Cultivating an open mind is a valuable outcome of critical thinking and reasoning.

In Culver's discussion of Perry's Model of Intellectual Development, he states that "many students appear to leave college in a position characterized by a) a tendency to treat all opinions as equally good; b) little evaluation of alternative views of an issue; c) a tendency to hold one's opinions largely on the basis of whim and unsubstantiated belief; and d) hesitation to take a stand or commitment bases on evidence and reason (Culver, p222)." None of these characteristics are those of the critical thinkers that educational institutions hope to create. No matter the pedagogical form of instruction, reaching the complete intellectual development within a four year degree is not-likely, as much of the development continues into graduate school or the workplace.

As intellectual development continues in education, experience and self-awareness can become catalysts that provide for greater cognitive growth.

Experiences

Aristotle believed that circumstances affect us (Noddings, p13). That is what happens around us becomes our experience and will, in some way – either big or small, affect us in the end. Hogsett writes:

"Life experiences have formed attitudes in even the youngest children that determine not only their degree of receptiveness or readiness to receive the knowledge we want to impart, but that will reformulate that knowledge within the mind of the student, either in usable directions or against a cul-de-sac, with no way out (Hogsett, p29)."

Hogsett is describing how students will gain knowledge based on how their life experiences have prepared them to receive it. A good example would be a bright young college grad who chooses to go directly on to business school instead of out into the "real" world. This young grad may do extremely well, making high marks, and graduate quickly. Now compare with an associate who has been working in business for seven years and decides to go back to school to earn the same M.B.A. as the young grad.

The associate has years of business experience that will allow her a completely different perspective in the courses. This will allow her to have more significant cognitive growth because of her previous experiential knowledge. The associate will have a better idea of where to apply the theories and ideas, because her degree of receptiveness or readiness to receive the knowledge was higher than that of the young grad.

Some of life's experiences can be from observation. Schön describes: "...knowing-in-action makes up the great bulk of what we know how to do in everyday and in professional life... If we want to discover what someone knows-in-action, we must put ourselves in a position to *observe* her in action. (Schön, p30, *emphasis added*).” If I want to know how to be a great teacher or manager someday, I am going to not only read books on the topic, but I will observe people in those roles. I can easily make a list of the traits I don't like in a manager or teacher, but to really know what makes a great example, I have to make astute observations during my experiences. Like Dewey's discussion on childhood imitation (Noddings, p29), I may choose to adopt certain modes of behavior for my own purposes through imitation.

One can have all sorts of experiences, but it is merely the circumstances and situations that one lives through. Experience to Dewey is both social and cultural (Noddings, p31), and he insisted that experience is educative only if it produces growth (Noddings, p26).

Personal Growth

Personal growth is a maturation of self based on the increase of knowledge and experience. Noddings wrote that “Socrates insisted that self-knowledge is basic to all knowledge. It accompanies and informs our critical examination of the larger society (Noddings, p7).” As self-knowledge, or self-awareness, develops, we become more grounded. For example, someone who is not self-aware is like an un-anchored dingy floating aimlessly in the ocean. It is subject to all of the wind, rain, and elements, and is easily influenced by any circumstance. As self-awareness develops, it's as if you have an anchor that can provide you stability in the storms. To stretch the analogy: one could say the more knowledge you gain, the bigger your boat becomes, and the more experience you have, you know the right places anchor out!

As we learn from formal education or experiences, a natural by-product is some form of growth. As Aristotle believed, circumstances affect us, so the circumstance of learning, no matter the source, affects us and yields growth. Noddings describes Dewey's growth metaphor for education:

“Dewey often spoke of education as synonymous with growth, and growth was one of his most important biological metaphors. Because so many people think of education as an enterprise that has a specific aim – an ideal person or way of life as its outcome- Dewey's positing of growth as education's aim did not satisfy most inquirers. Many asked, Growth toward what? Dewey

insisted that growth is its own end; that is to ask “growth toward what?” is inconsistent with the concept of growth. *Growth tends toward more growth*, he said, and we must not make the concept rigid by specifying its direction (Noddings, p26, *emphasis added*).

I could easily argue along with some of Dewey’s critics that education is an enterprise with specific aims, but isn’t the foundation of education, goals and aims aside, to grow, just as Dewey posits? So if I become educated, as in my early method of thought, as a means to an end, then growth would not be my goal. But if I seek education, formally, experientially, or personally, with the goal of earning the tickets I need to get where I want to go, then growth is the goal and the destination is a reward.

A great portion of personal growth is due to reflection. Schön writes: “Reflection-in-action occurs in the medium of words. It makes explicit the action strategies, assumptions, models of the world, or problem-settings that were implicit in reflection-in-action... Yet we also have the ability to reflect *on* such a process, reflecting on reflection-in-action (Schön, p30).” This reflecting poses questions on one’s experiences such as: How did I do that? Why didn’t that work? What should I try next time? The greater one’s self-awareness, the more rich the answers to these questions should be. Personally, I find that the value in reflection-on-action is that if you can articulate where you came from, it helps you align with where you actually are, and, in turn, better plan for where you are going.

Cashing in the Ticket

Formal education, experience, and personal growth all join become the educative process, and can be your ticket. So, where do you want to go?

Here I stand on the edge of a broad horizon gazing longingly as far as the eye can see. The brilliant sun slips away to rest closing yet another chapter of its rhythmic existence.

The gentle ripple of the tide is ever flowing, ever moving, and ever changing. Refusing to succumb to mediocrity, it boldly denies any standard pattern.

A lone bird dances with the remnants of the day, choosing its unique destiny, eluding the trap of meager expectations, and never settling for melancholy ideals.

The exhilaration of a freedom defined only by space is irresistible. It’s just me and the horizon – bound by nothing but my dreams. (Horizon, Meagan Pollock 2004)

I wrote this bit of prose during my senior year of university. I was visualizing finishing school, and earning my ticket. “The aim of education, according to Dewey, is more education. Education thus functions as both end and means (Noddings, p27).” My aim, dream, or objective, at that time, was to complete the institutional requirements to earn a diploma – my almost literal ticket overseas to where my next education waited. It took an evolution of learning to realize that my education wasn’t the end,

it was the means by which I could continue on toward more learning. “Growth tends toward more growth (Noddings, p26).”

Dewey argued that students should be involved in setting objectives for their own learning (Noddings of Dewey, p28), a process of discovering the next leg on the journey towards your dreams, and preparing to earn your next ticket. As Palmer describes one of the paradoxical tensions in the teaching and learning space (the space should be bounded and open), he elaborates: “If boundaries remind us that our journey has a destination, openness reminds us that there are many ways to reach that end. Deeper still, the openness of a learning space reminds us that the destination we plotted at the outset of the journey may not be the one we will reach, that we must stay alert for clues to our true destination as we travel together.” (Palmer, p74-75)

Special Note: Education Airlines has a Frequent Flyer & Ambassador’s Club Program. Work hard to collect miles, and sometimes you get rewarded with a bonus ticket!

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