

Education: By and For

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Education is arguably what keeps society functioning. Ushistory.org states that “Democracy depends on an educated citizenry.” Without those who are educated, society would have no way to perform at an efficient level. Education, whether it be informal or formal, always comes with a benefit. Some believe education is a civic responsibility. However, several questions need to be answered for education to be utilized and understood properly. For example, we need to give a name to who is responsible for educating others, who should provide educational opportunities, who should pay to be educated, and who should take advantage of educational opportunities once they arise.

However, before giving names to *who* should be educated and *how* one becomes educated, one must determine what it *means* to be educated. After all, what does it mean to educate oneself? Where, when, and how do we learn? In answer to these questions, education is offered virtually everywhere we go on a daily basis. Learning does not take place in classrooms alone. Families, parents, relatives, friends, peers, and even strangers teach lessons to others around them, whether that be knowingly or not. Sometimes the vital life lessons we learn—such as how to file taxes, how to balance a checkbook, how to fix a car—come from our very own, close-knit communities and families. When it comes down to it, these people are the ones who are responsible for educating the youth in society, or at the very least, urging them to become educated.

The learning that takes place inside the classroom is also vital. Ultimately, parents are the ones who need to urge their children to get a better education and to attend school. Parents feed

us, raise us, and in the process teach us many things. However, by sending their children to school, parents can be doing the world a favor by helping their children become well-rounded individuals, even if that means by just attending grade school and learning “the basics” public education has to offer. This is a parent’s civic duty to their child and to their community, and the child’s civic duty to themselves and to the world. After making it to high school, it should be the child’s choice whether or not to continue their education. In making this decision, parents or guardians should urge children to continue if possible, but it is up to the individual alone.

It is both the government’s and the parents’ responsibility to educate the children in a society, because these children will one day be the ones to make the very same decisions. In order for a government and democracy to be possible, educated citizens are necessary. Parents help to fund this creation of future leaders by paying taxes and simply by supporting their children in school. The government also has an important role in the survival of the “global democracy”: by providing and paying qualified teachers, building schools, and providing school supplies such as textbooks.

It is the job of both the government and communities, businesses, and other organizations to provide educational opportunities. Businesses and other organizations could definitely contribute to the cost of education for their employees at a huge discounted rate for further professional development. Companies want the best employees, and employees who are better educated may be better suited to get the job done. Providing some sort of training or aid in furthering education is definitely the job of organizations looking to better their companies. What company does not want to become better, increase revenue, and overall become more successful? After all, each organization and company is made up of many vitally important things: the people.

Once educational opportunities are available, citizens *should* feel obligated to take advantage of them. Whether it is available at a fee or for free, citizens should take advantage of educational opportunities when they can. Life itself can be a 100-year-long learning process that spans decades. In it, we will never cease to learn new things. Nevertheless, when given the opportunity to learn something we would otherwise *not* learn in our everyday lives, why not expand our horizons in order to become more critical thinkers, more creative thinkers, and better global citizens? For those not prepared to spend years at a university, there are many other venues for education. Local recreation departments usually offer classes at small fees, whether it be to learn CPR or how to swim. Community colleges also offer classes at a price lower than that at universities. Even stores like Michaels and Joann Fabrics offer craft classes for people looking to expand their creativity or find a new hobby. Truthfully, education is found everywhere.

This bountiful education, like many things, comes at a price. For public schools and children through high school, public schooling should be free. For people who seek to be further educated beyond grade 12, they should pay to receive a higher level of education. People who are serious about becoming educated, who have a desire and passion for knowledge, and who know the merit of education should pay for their learning if needed. Many college students would argue that going to a university accumulates too much future debt; this is the last thing new citizens going out into the work force for the first time need. However, universities should house students who are willing to repay such a debt for the sake of education. Ultimately, people need to make a choice by answering: is the time and money worth the fulfillment of the civic responsibility? Is it worth the experience? Yes. If you value education enough, and the enlightenment it brings, then yes. Today, many employers will look first to hire those who have a degree of some kind, over those who just have graduated high school. This is a perfectly valid

reason to attend school, but to those students seeking jobs, take this advice: studying something you enjoy, so that when it comes time to pay back the debts, will help you look back on your education and allow you to say “yes, my time and money were worth it.”

According to Howard Cohen, “One of the most important outcomes of a college education is learning how to learn.” He says that college graduates know how to change: “The capacity to adapt to a changing world is an important benefit to the individual college graduate, but it is also important for the well-being of our society.” Our world is in a state of constant flux, and, like this world, so too is the individual faced with many changes. A college education allows students to experience and accept change, but lower education also benefits the individual. Each level of learning is a step toward becoming well-rounded and becoming societally involved.

According to the International Consortium, universities are “strategic institutions for the development of global democracy [. . .] and the incubators of global citizens and leaders.” Students who choose to advance to the university level are taking initiative to help this “global democracy” by becoming leaders. According to Howard Cohen of *The New York Times*:

A healthy democracy requires civic engagement in both participation and leadership within government and civic organizations. We know from many research studies that college educated people tend to participate in civic life to a greater extent than those who have not had the opportunity of a college degree [. . . .] However, all of us benefit enormously from living in a society where skilled, knowledgeable, public-spirited individuals give their time and talent for the public good (Cohen).

In the end, college educations produce individuals who give their time for “the public good.”

Both the government and parents must take steps in assuring that society moves forward, therefore both are responsible for educating citizens in a democracy. Finally, those who seek to further their education by earning a college degree should pay for their desire to learn.

Ultimately, education needs to be provided by and for the people of today’s world.

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