

Response to *The Aims of Education*

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In his essay, *The Aims of Education*, Alfred North Whitehead argues that education should be used to produce young men and women with not only a deep knowledge in a certain area but also culture. This second point is important because as Whitehead points out, "A merely well-informed man is the most useless bore on God's earth." To help students from becoming the bores Whitehead talks about, inert ideas should be avoided in education. Inert ideas are those which do not build upon, or have other ideas built upon them. These disconnected ideas can be avoided by teaching multiple topics together, therefore interrelating them.

I agree with many of the points in this essay. In some points I feel like he may be attacking liberal arts schools because of their diverse range of classes breaking one of Whitehead's commandments, "Do not teach too many subjects".

While I do not believe St. Martin's teaches too many subjects, we may be required to take too many because of our general education program. If this requirement was changed to require the same number of classes but allow the student to choose two or three subjects,

fewer different subjects would be taught to each student. This would fulfill his other commandment, "What you teach, teach thoroughly."

Later in his essay Whitehead discusses proofs. In doing so he redefines proofs to proving the worth of a subject. One subject that I have never completely understood why I am required to learn is college English such as

English 101. When I was in running start I took both English 101 and technical writing. I found technical writing to be a very useful class and still pick up my textbook now and again for reference. I understand the use of English 101 while in school but I do not see the classes' worth after I, or anyone else for that matter, graduates. Then again if essays are only used in college should they be required format of written documents for any class. Furthermore the absence of any technical writing classes

at St. Martin's worries me. For many students their job will be the first time they will deal with technical writing other than lab reports.

In the recent past there has only been one class that I have not done well in. That was

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Alfred North Whitehead

my chemistry class last year. The main reason I did not do well in that class was I was not interested in the subject and I do not see myself using it in the future. If my professor would have proved to me that chemistry would be useful in an engineering career I would have worked harder to understand and learn the material.

The essay also talks a lot about teaching methods. Personally I like derivations. Derivations allow me to see how material builds on itself which is one of Whitehead's points. In the past I have had classes both with and without derivations and I am often confused when I don't have them because I do not understand how the material interrelates. I do not necessarily need a proof but I do like a derivation, or as Whitehead says, "We do not attempt, in the strict sense, to prove or to

disprove anything, unless its importance makes it worthy of that honor."

Overall I actually enjoyed this essay. In most cases I agreed with the author. Often times I have been disappointed by my inability to specialize my education. I have already taken a course on Pacific Northwest geography and am interested in taking a class on Pacific Northwest history but I am unable to use it to fulfill one of my History Gen-Ed requirements, "But I am certain that in education wherever you exclude specialism you destroy life." There were also many tidbits that I found both insightful and funny. My favorite is, "Of course it will be difficult to teach from it. If it were easy, the book ought to be burned; for it cannot be educational." This essay really helped me reflect on my education and about how I would like to change it.