**Challenging the Modern Technocrat: Choosing an Existential Education**

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Modern education suffers from a catering problem; rarely, if ever, do educators or administrators take pre-curricular action that questions the paradigms and objectives behind educational projects. The most fundamental educational questions that exist take the form of “What is the purpose of education?” and “For whom is this geared for?” and yet these are the questions that are never asked. This applies in particular to the reform discussion that dominates modern dialogue about education; scholars and intellectuals posit "fixing" our educational system as external to intrapersonal relationships, which fails to interrogate our individual relationships with shaping educational processes that are supposedly external to us. The most important aspect of modern education ought to be its inherently existential nature; vacating these discussions of personal empowerment for increased debate about the value of standardized testing and other curriculum based reform guarantees the inevitable replication of the technocratic and supposedly objective forms of education which produce material violence.

One of the biggest problems inherent within national curriculums of education is that they overlook the most common part of every student’s existence- the condition of individual praxis. Policies like No Child Left Behind (and the universalized standards enforced by national regulations) leave behind the most important part of every child’s existence, namely the unique lived experiences of every individual (which ought to alter and shape the way that education affects them).

Existential questions about what education entails should produce a common answer: education ought to serve as a training site that provides the tools that students need to challenge the problems around them- yet this idealized vision of why we engage the structures of education rarely happens or take place. Instead, educators, policy makers, and administrators default to the norm; educational leaders adopt a “market and workplace skills” perspective on the function of education, and all the tests and assessments and SATs mandated by the regulations that govern student bodies serve as superficial processes in a technical framework oriented around producing self-serving, competitive, and technocratic individuals.⁠1 The failure of education can be summed up in one sentiment: classrooms are filled with unique individuals, not blank information processing slates.

The proliferation of technocratic and coldly rational modes of education has both material and symbolic impacts on the lives of students. Schooling that fails to nurture and develop the search for individual identity and meaning in favor of technically oriented practices produces individual subjects who lack meaning and produce material violence as a result. The individuals produced by our education systems fail to possess worldly care or any concerns beyond individual vantage points and thus practice forms of disingenuous politics that naturalize external harms as banal and everyday events.⁠2 The production of alienated individuals who feel an inability to effectuate structural changes (and therefore internalize deterministic political stances as an inevitability of existence) is a direct result of educational systems that fail to teach students how to utilize their identity and lived experiences as productive supplements to their educational curriculum. We are at the very real risk of producing a society in which all meaningful struggles for change are depoliticized by the rhetoric of inevitability.⁠3 Challenging the sites of material violence begins by drastically overhauling the education system.

Every meaningful educational reform must thus incorporate the factor of *individual existence* into the teaching regimes currently in place at schools across the country. This is a tenuous process; we are at risk of once again degrading the value of individual experiences if we push for holistic reform measures that fail to understand the unique contributions every student can make in shaping their own educational processes. Educators should start encouraging and developing curriculum discourses of reflectivity and inquiry for their individual students, in the process creating safe spaces for students to engage in critical self-interrogation about the value of their lived experiences. An existential education would create the conditions for individual students to learn about the significance of their histories and experiences and assure them that what they experience does matter.

Education can become emancipatory when developed around specific student experiences and nurtured to grant students the confidence and tools they need to challenge specific conditions around them. One of the core theses of existentialism is that every individual/subject matters, and that we all have the power to shape our own lives; when this idea becomes applied to educational spaces, students have the opportunity to learn the tools that grant them the belief in their individual ability to effectuate change. Through engaged systems of education, we can challenge the creation of disingenuous, technocratic individuals in favor of self-aware, empowered students who can overcome the material barriers around them.

1 Stanley, Rasheed. “An Existentialist Curriculum of Action.” (Maryland: University Press of America, 2007), 4.

2 Greene, Maxine. “Landscapes of Learning.” (New York: Teachers College Press, 1978), 152.

3 Spanos, William. “Global American: The Devastation of Language Under the Dictatorship of the Public Realm.” Symploke Volume 16, Numbers 1-2, (2008)