

Travis Tran

Mrs. Small

Humanities – W Section

9 October 2022

### Why go to School?

Nowadays, information is everywhere. The cumulative knowledge of the entire human race is at the fingertips of billions around the world. Since the Age of Technology, companies such as Google have been able to provide the answers to nearly every question in countless domains. This rise in accessible information has posed an important question: “What is the purpose of school in the twenty-first century?” Many argue that the need for organized schooling has been erased by Google even though it has been effective in educating billions of students around the globe for millennia. This notion of expunging organized schooling, however, is false. Although Google may be able to provide information on demand, traditional organized schooling provides something to students that Google never can: the ability to think. The purpose of school in the twenty-first century is to teach students how to think critically and expand human knowledge while developing character and strong morals by simulating a real-world environment.

Without school for the impoverished, both character and critical thinking cannot be developed. This is why public schooling is a central need for everyone. In his journal, *The Common School Journal*, author Horace Mann, known as the father of modern American public education, argues that “In the great march of society, it is rather our duty to bring up the rear than to push forward the van,” meaning that society should have everyone caught up intellectually than a few to be far ahead (Mann). I agree with Mann on this topic. If the gap between the

educated and the uneducated grows, knowledge will eventually be lost, as it was in the dark ages. Therefore, the educated must teach the uneducated in schools and institutions. Also, from a humanitarian standpoint, it is unethical to leave the rest of the world uneducated while the few become enlightened. Mann also comments on this component of public education when he writes “Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity” (Mann). Here, Mann further strengthens his belief that the educated man must teach the uneducated and win a victory for humanity. The great Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. also stands by this philosophy when, in his speech at Morehouse College in 1948, he preaches that “The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. But education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society. The most dangerous criminal may be the man gifted with reason but no morals. ... We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.” Just the facts (i.e., Google) is “the greatest menace to society” because it stops with efficiency and does not go through the struggle of intense and critical thinking for the student. Having access to knowledge and learning knowledge are two different things.

It is not enough for students to survive in school, they must thrive: to do this, both the student and the teacher must be engaged and passionate. Being unengaged and apathetic is the same as having access to knowledge but not learning it. If school makes a student cram and forget, the student should very well quit school and Google everything. In *Horace's School: Redesigning the American High School*, author TheodoreSizer, one of the leading figures in the American school reform movement of the 80s and 90s, comments on this concept, saying “A teacher cannot stimulate a child to learn without knowing that child's mind any more than a physician can guide an ill patient to health without knowing that patient's physical condition”

(Sizer). This is the extent to which the teacher must be passionate about the student. Without this, the classroom falls apart and student performance drops off a cliff. Passion is an essential component of the classroom and provides students with the ability to learn how to critically think and develop good character. In his book, Sizer writes a mix of a personal experience teaching and a hypothetical school board meeting, calling it “nonfiction fiction.” He describes the desolate environment of a Northeastern American classroom, composed of mainly black and brown 14-year-olds. He then passionately injects the classroom with a hypothetical historical question, bringing it back to life: “The kids jumped in, at first tentatively, then vociferously” (Sizer). This is a prime example of what a classroom should look like with students thinking critically. With the right teaching methods and a passionate teacher, all students can effectively engage in learning. In the board meeting, Sizer argues to the board that a challenging curriculum and environment are good for students.

School, at times, can be challenging for the student, but however unintuitive it might seem, it is actually good for the student, for it simulates the real world. The friend groups made in high school simulate what kind of person one will be later in life. A great example of this can be seen in *The Geeks Shall Inherit the Earth*, a book written by Alexandra Robbins. Set in the early 2000s, Robbins follows and profiles the lives of several high school students for the school year. One of those students, Whitney from upstate New York, is a popular girl who does not enjoy being in the popular clique. Whitney, attending a predominately white school, has always been one of the pretty and popular girls. Now, she realizes that she does not like it because “the prep description [does not] fit the ‘real’ Whitney” (Robbins). If Whitney does not act the way she does, she argues that she will have no friends. This is an important lesson for Whitney to learn, as this is what the real world is. If she spends her life with people that she does not like

just because of social norms, she will be miserable for her entire life. Although it is hard not to conform, it is important to stand up for yourself in the real world. This is a part of what school teaches, albeit somewhat unintentionally. The challenge in this sense is learning how to fit in the workplace and finding the right group. It is a fact that there will be irritating or malicious people in life, and school is a preview of that.

Although many argue that past historical figures were successful without the adversity of organized modern schooling and some do not fit into the schooling environment, this number is only a fraction of the figures who have benefitted from good schooling. This is one of the main claims that three-time New York teacher of the year John Taylor Gatto makes in his book, *Against School*. Gatto counters and criticizes the idea of organized schooling in America in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, reasoning that “a considerable number of well-known Americans never went through the twelve-year wringer that [students] go through” (Gatto). Examples of these people are George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln. On top of this, Gatto observes that students in most classrooms are constantly bored, repeating the same worksheet again and again. Although his argument may seem convincing, Gatto’s logic is flawed because modern school is different from what it was in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Students’ needs and the world’s needs are different. To rebut the observation that students are getting bored, it is important to also observe why they are getting bored. Perhaps it is how they are getting taught or the curriculum they are forced to be taught. Just because a student is bored with school does not mean that it is not necessary for their development both morally and intellectually. Some may also argue that the school environment is not meant for everyone. One of those people is Faith Erin Hicks, who authored the graphic novel *Friends with Boys* in the mid-2000s. In her novel, Hicks depicts a young girl going to school for the first time after being

homeschooled up through eighth grade. From the beginning, the girl is obviously shaken by the great number of students that attend the school and behaves awkwardly in social settings, finding spots to hide and mapping out the school. Here, it is understandable how it could be deduced that school is not meant for everyone. Now, think for a moment about how this girl will survive in the real world. Without social skills, it will be tremendously harder for her. Therefore, school is important because people, in the workforce and the real world, need to know how to communicate and collaborate. Homeschooling drastically reduces this experience in a learning environment, while traditional schooling teaches it.

Organized schooling has been around for multiple millennia and is an integral part of life. From North America to Asia, education is prevalent in all aspects of life, but since the rise of the internet and Google, its function in society has been questioned. Through analyzing modern organized schooling, it is prevalent that the purpose of it is to teach people how to think critically and expand the facts to reveal new horizons for the rest of the world. For this to happen, school must be widely available so that everyone can grow both their knowledge of the world and their character. Additionally, students need to thrive in a school environment through the lessons and lectures of passionate teachers. Without that, schooling is just as effective as Googling everything; the common denominator: nothing is learned. Students must also be challenged in school to prepare them for the real world. Life is not all roses and sunshine. School is the perfect environment to teach that. Although some argue that school is unnecessary to be successful and not meant for all, the times have changed and only a fraction of all students have been successful as dropouts. This is because school provides the adversity needed to be successful in the real world. So, while Google may provide the facts, it doesn't teach how to apply them to expand on humanity's knowledge. It will show what and where the dots are but will not teach the ability to

connect them. With organized schooling adopted globally with passionate teachers and students, humanity will be able to dig deeper into the vast space of undiscovered information.

Works Cited

- Gatto, John Taylor. "Against School." *Harper's Magazine*, September 2003, pp. 33-38.
- Hicks, Faith Erin. *Friends with Boys*. POPCOM, 2016.
- Mann, Horace. *The Common School Journal*. Marsh, Capen, Lyon, and Webb, 1852.
- Robbins, Alexandra. *The Geeks Shall Inherit the Earth: Popularity, Quirk Theory, and Why Outsiders Thrive After High School*. Hachette Books, 2012.
- Sizer, Theodore R. *Horace's School: Redesigning the American High School*. Houghton Mifflin Co, 1993.