

EDUCATION FOR FREEDOM: LEARNING AS A LIFESTYLE

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INTRODUCTION

In my fervor for education and commitment to independent research, I hold a strong belief that education transcends mere schooling. It is essential to recognize that schooling and learning represent distinct, if not entirely different, concepts and practices.

Schooling is a contemporary educational process aimed at mastery through skill acquisition. It encompasses a structured training regimen that occurs over a specified timeframe, with a significant focus on obtaining certificates and certifications. The prevailing paradigm of our educational system treats schools as transactional entities—akin to stores of knowledge—where educators function as custodians and disseminators. Under this model, when students seek knowledge in specific disciplines—such as Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Psychology, Philosophy, Religion, or Theology—they attend school, pay their fees, and receive this knowledge in return.

This transactional view creates an impression that schools are merely physical locations, reinforcing a dominant narrative around education that equates it with what happens within school walls. Consequently, when discussions arise about education and educational experiences, they often center on the activities conducted in schools and our engagement with them.

The structure of the school system predominantly revolves around programs of study that are designed and influenced by governmental and employer interests, frequently disregarding the needs and aspirations of students. Students are not encouraged to participate in the decision-making process or curriculum design; instead, they are expected to conform blindly to pre-established programs shaped by a select few. As a result, students are often treated as means to an end—restructured or reprogrammed to fit societal norms, thus securing their place within the system. Their relevance is closely linked to their roles, which they fulfill often without conscious awareness, conditioned to perceive this as the ideal life trajectory. The space for independent thought and decision-making is all but stifled, leaving them unaware of the complexities of making choices.

Education, in this context, risks being reduced to a system of manipulation, exploitation, and servitude, becoming merely a tool for survival rather than a vehicle for genuine growth.

In contrast, learning embodies an entirely different experience—one that fosters change and personal development. Learning is not merely about acquiring skills or mastering survival techniques; it is fundamentally oriented toward self-discovery and self-improvement. It represents an education aimed at freedom rather than merely employability or social conformity. Learning champions the freedom of being, thought, and expression, positioning itself as a lifestyle that transcends the confines of time and space, applicable to individuals of all ages.

Education for Freedom: Learning as a Lifestyle is an article written to probe the essence of education, critically evaluate the prevailing systems and practices, and articulate a concrete educational philosophy. Its foundational premise asserts that education, regardless of its objectives or structure, ultimately exists for the purpose of freedom, and that learning is inherently a way of life.

The Contemporary Nature and Character of Education

Education has always represented the aspiration of individuals and societies alike. The fate of every nation—its success or failure, progress or regression—hinges on its perspective and implementation of education. This reflects the society's passion, commitment, and dedication to educating its populace. Education is the fundamental driving force behind human civilization and scientific advancement. It is the essential pathway to personal self-discovery, independence, freedom, transformation, and growth.

A person who has turned away from education—who consciously opts not to seek knowledge, change, or personal development—can be viewed as straying from their true potential. Education is not an end in itself; rather, it is a means to achieve growth. The journey from being an ordinary individual to becoming a fully realized person is shaped by education.

At its core, education focuses on individuals or groups, transcending mere policies and structures. Its intrinsic goal is freedom—specifically, freedom of thought and expression—achieved through self-discovery. True freedom cannot exist without a profound understanding of oneself. A person who has discovered their true self is a liberated being, and in turn, that liberated individual is the embodiment of a well-educated citizen.

Regrettably, modern society has faltered significantly in this regard. Many people mistakenly equate education solely with schooling, reducing it to just academic experiences and skill development. In this distorted view, education is seen as

merely a stepping stone to acquiring specific skills, rather than as a means to discover one's authentic self and live life fully.

Unfortunately, much of what is branded as modern education often acts as a destructive force, stripping away the essence of life and its joys. It can manipulate, exploit, and reduce individuals to mere cogs in socio-economic and political machinery, confining them to predefined roles and repetitive routines. This version of education fails to facilitate self-discovery, relying instead on alluring propaganda and generalizations without substantial grounding.

In contemporary society, the notion of relevance is tied to employment, and an individual's worth is assessed based on their job and competence within that role. When individuals lose their jobs or retire, they often find themselves marginalized, deemed a liability rather than valued members of society. As a result, the elderly, once reservoirs of wisdom and experience, may be viewed as unnecessary burdens.

Education today is predominantly targeted toward the young, designed to prepare them for future roles in a workforce that judges success solely on actionable achievements. Health, individual freedom, and personal growth are undervalued, too often equated with laziness or rebellion. As individuals age and their strength diminishes, their perceived worth in society wanes, leaving them feeling insignificant.

Current educational systems train individuals to be role players and conform to societal expectations, devoid of spaces for rest, reflection, and genuine communication. This competitive framework prioritizes high grades and certifications—the culturally accepted markers of success—as the ultimate objectives, reinforcing the control of government policymakers and employers over educational institutions.

Within this structure, education is frequently viewed through the lens of social control and national development, rather than as a mechanism for self-discovery and personal fulfillment. Individuals are often indoctrinated to believe that the education provided by government and employers represents the only viable path to success.

Moreover, the focus on educational levels as criteria for professional advancement serves as a psychological manipulation, leading individuals to adapt to these limitations rather than questioning their validity. Learning—an essential element of education—has been overshadowed by training that prioritizes skills suited for conformity.

Consequently, individuals are not educated to recognize and value their own worth; instead, they are valued solely for their skills. In this skewed perspective, a person without skills or opportunities to develop them is rendered irrelevant within society. This misleading educational paradigm prioritizes skills above the individual, reducing

schools—once centers of learning—to mere training grounds for subservience and exploitation.

In many cases, the educational journey begins with formal schooling and ends upon exiting the educational system, thus perpetuating a cycle of mechanical training rather than fostering true intellectual and personal growth.

The Divide Between Education and Practice

The distinction between education and practice, as well as between academia and the public sphere, is increasingly apparent. Education is typically acquired within the formal structure of schools, which function as centers for disseminating knowledge. In this dynamic, schools are perceived as commercial entities in an academic marketplace, where students act as buyers and teachers as sellers in this transactional relationship.

When individuals seek education, they often do so because they feel a lack of knowledge and are compelled to conform to the instructions of their educators. The prevailing view is that teachers, as the custodians of knowledge, provide truths that students are expected to accept without question. This creates an environment where critical thinking is discouraged; students are often not allowed to challenge or analyze the perspectives presented by their teachers. The accepted narrative becomes the ultimate truth, and efforts to deviate from this path can lead to labeling—those who challenge the status quo may be viewed as deviants, delinquents, or free-thinkers, and are often marginalized or silenced.

In this climate, the fundamental values of freedom—particularly the freedom of thought and expression—are at risk. The genuine spirit of human compassion is compromised, and love for learning is undermined. What is often misconstrued as goodness may, in reality, reflect blind conformity, where individuals are conditioned to adhere to an idea of intelligence that is quantified through standardized measures like IQ tests. This system, arguably manipulative, raises critical questions about its true purpose and implications.

Have we, as a society, become aware of this concerning trend? If not, why? What are individuals truly seeking—knowledge or mere titles? The relationship between educational credentials and knowledge is complex; titles often serve more as instruments of manipulation than as indicators of genuine understanding. This begs the question: Can knowledge truly be purchased? Does any institution have ownership over knowledge itself?

These queries lead us deeper into the essence of education. What constitutes education, and how does it relate to the character and nature of knowledge? These questions will be explored in the next chapter.

What is Education?

The question of what constitutes education has often elicited skepticism among some educators. W. O. Lest Smith, for instance, describes the endeavor to define education as akin to “a parlour game—an innocent but futile way to pass the time.” Smith argues that the fluid nature of education makes it inherently difficult to pin down with a single definition. After all, education evolves over time and varies across different cultures. Consequently, any definition must be context-dependent, tailored to a nation's unique understanding and philosophy regarding education. As Smith cites from Dr. J. B. Conant's *Education and Liberty*, educational practices are not readily transferrable between countries.

Indeed, Smith's assertion is compelling: the essence and execution of education shift with societal changes and cultural contexts. However, does this evolution imply a stark disconnection between past and present conceptions of education? When we refer to education in contemporary terms, do we risk losing linkages to its historical and etymological roots? Are educational methodologies truly so relative that they vary solely based on a country's resources, goals, and cultural values?

While I acknowledge and appreciate Smith's perspective on the dynamic nature of education, I question whether we can definitively conclude that education eludes definition altogether. Numerous eminent educators—including Robert W. Pazmino, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Lois E. LeBar, Cornelius Van Til, and Arthur F. Holmes—have navigated this challenge by framing education through religious lenses, intertwining their understanding and practice with their faith. For these educators, the notion emerges that education cannot fully exist without a religious foundation.

This reliance on a faith-based framework presents a challenge: the inclination to dismiss perspectives that do not align with their beliefs, even if those perspectives contain fundamental truths. For example, such educators may critique the concept of education aimed at fostering personal freedom as humanistic, asserting instead that

true freedom is a redemptive experience intimately connected to divine figures such as Jesus or Muhammad. Consequently, definitions, explanations, or descriptions of education are either assumed to be common knowledge or avoided to circumvent complications.

The School Concept of Education

I contend that the absence of a clear, overarching definition of education—one that could provide a coherent theoretical and conceptual framework—has given rise to what I term the "school concept" of education. This paradigm shapes public perception, equating education primarily with the physical institutions known as schools and the activities that transpire within them. It posits that education is fundamentally an achievement attained through formal schooling—a journey that begins when one enters school and culminates upon graduation.

Within this framework, individuals identified as "schoolmen" are deemed educated and relevant members of society, while those who lack such schooling are often classified as illiterate, uneducated, and socially insignificant. However, the essential distinction between the educated and the uneducated should not solely rest upon academic qualifications, such as attending college or obtaining certifications. According to the school concept, learning and growth occurring outside formal educational institutions are often dismissed; pursuits of knowledge undertaken independently—despite their depth and commitment—are frequently regarded as valueless unless they lead to formal certification.

In this view, education is reduced to a narrow definition that focuses on a specific course of study conducted within a prescribed timeframe, leading to a conflation between education and a program of studies. This results in an environment of controlled learning, where assessment of intelligence is predicated largely on compliance with predefined criteria. Consequently, those perceived as "intelligent" are often subject to subjective judgments, stripped of self-perception, aligning instead with the expectations imposed by others. This awareness points to a programmed notion of intelligence—a reality shaped by external assessment rather than intrinsic understanding.

In summary, while the complexities surrounding the definition and nature of education are apparent, it is crucial to navigate these discussions with careful consideration of both historical context and current frameworks. Understanding education requires us to transcend simplistic notions and engage with its multifaceted and evolving identity.

Redefining Education: A Critical Perspective

The conventional school concept of education posits that there is a clear distinction between learning within an academic setting and the everyday realities of public life.

In this framework, school and public life are viewed as separate domains. Education is often perceived as an abstract mechanism, primarily a means to qualify individuals for specific roles in the workforce. Unfortunately, many do not see it as an opportunity for personal growth and transformation; rather, it becomes a pathway to employment, social recognition, and respect within their communities.

I have encountered numerous individuals who candidly express that their purpose for being in school is not to delve into subjects such as theology, but rather to obtain a certificate that will facilitate their ordination and elevate their status within their respective denominations. This perspective highlights a troubling consequence of the prevailing educational model: education is relegated to a mere necessity for securing licenses or credentials, rather than being viewed as a vital opportunity for learning and self-discovery. For many, education serves as both a tool and a means to achieve cultural success. Consequently, school becomes a compulsory step towards acquiring the certificate—the ultimate key to success in today's society.

The disconnect between academic life and public existence fosters a perception that experiences outside the classroom are far more significant than those within it. This rift leads many students to eagerly anticipate the completion of their programs so they can return to the public sphere, where they believe true engagement and action occur. The academic experience is often regarded as uninteresting and disconnected from real life, which inhibits students from fully engaging with their studies. Education, in this context, appears isolated from the world.

While there may be some validity to this perspective, it can also be misleading. Properly understood, education should not be viewed as separate from life; rather, these two spheres are intrinsically linked. The school concept of education often reflects the administrative designs of government, employers, and policymakers, mirroring a nation's political and social ideologies. Countries with imperial ambitions tend to shape their educational systems to reflect these aspirations. For instance, if a nation deems warfare as a necessary strategy for dominance, disciplines such as security studies may be prioritized above others.

Individuals are often educated with the intent of cultivating compliant citizens who uphold the values of loyalty and patriotism. In this regard, educational institutions frequently receive financial support from governmental and corporate entities, as they serve as vehicles for ideological manipulation. As such, the focus tends to be placed on standardized achievements rather than the holistic well-being of students.

The school concept of education represents a distortion of what education should truly encompass. Etymologically, the term "education" is derived from the Latin word *educare*, meaning "to lead out." This definition emphasizes a process of drawing forth the innate potential within students, rather than merely imposing knowledge from the teacher's perspective. The essence of learning is not about acquisition but

transformation; students do not simply collect information but grow and evolve through the learning process.

True education hinges on the belief that learning emanates from within the individual, rather than being externally imposed by authority figures. Educators are meant to guide students in self-discovery, acting as leaders rather than dictators. Ultimately, all learning is a development and growth of the self, rooted in having students explore their inherent capabilities.

Real education seeks to maximize the boundless potential within each individual, cultivating their wealth of ideas and ideals. Its purpose is to foster opportunities for growth and development without leading to manipulation or exploitation. By redefining education in this manner, we can create a more integrated and meaningful approach that benefits both the individual and society at large.

The Essence of Education

Education represents a journey of self-discovery, self-actualization, and freedom—freedom of thought, personal growth, and the pursuit of joy in learning. It fundamentally revolves around the individual. Contrary to popular belief, education is not confined to formal programs administered in an institution wrongly termed a ‘school.’ Rather, it embodies a reflective lifestyle characterized by continuous learning, adaptation, and development, regardless of one’s setting.

Moreover, education transcends the mere acquisition of skills. Learning is not restricted to formal educational institutions; rather, studying—whether through structured courses or self-directed efforts—should be viewed as a natural progression and essential element of the educational journey. It is profoundly misguided to overlook genuinely educated individuals in favor of those who have merely secured institutional credentials and employment. Such neglect represents a significant disgrace for governments and employers alike.

This same critique applies to universities that reject candidates based on low intelligence scores, erroneously equating GPA calculations with a definitive measure of a person’s capabilities. There is a dangerous misconception that prioritizes intelligent students over those who are intellectual. What remains unrecognized is that the notion of intelligence and the methodologies employed to assess it are fundamentally flawed. Intelligence bears no direct relationship with intellectual capacity; the latter is a gradual evolution that unfolds with age and disciplined learning.

Many historical figures such as Wellington, Napoleon, Sir Isaac Newton, Jonathan Swift, Lord Clive, Sir Walter Scott, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan were underestimated during their formative years. However, as they matured, they made

indelible contributions to human history. It is inhumane to fabricate evaluations of individuals based on superficial assessments employing psychometric measures.

Furthermore, the history of intelligence measurement is riddled with errors and ethical transgressions. A superficial understanding of the scientific evolution since the Renaissance reveals the atrocities committed by Europeans who deemed themselves the pinnacle of civilization and science. In their quest to separate themselves from non-European cultures, they falsely believed in their inherent superiority, thus marginalizing other races.

As scientific inquiry progressed, comparisons of human abilities shifted from biological assessments—such as skull measurements—to psychological evaluations via IQ tests. This evolution in methodology, however, perpetuated the original narrative of supposed superiority. Ultimately, it constituted a mechanism of academic and cultural manipulation.

The inquiry initiated by the French Minister of Education, Alfred Binet, to identify students requiring specialized educational support was misaligned with the intention of genuinely measuring intelligence. The entire IQ framework is a misnomer; it is an illusion that no critical thinker should endorse.

It is imperative to recognize that true education extends far beyond formal qualifications. It is a holistic process that fosters creativity, growth, and understanding, leaving an enduring impact on individuals and society alike. Embracing a more nuanced view of intelligence will allow us to nurture potential in all individuals, paving the way for a more equitable and enlightened society.

Purpose of Education

Education fundamentally revolves around people, with its primary aim being to assist individuals in discovering their identity, embracing their true selves, and achieving self-actualization. However, the contemporary understanding and practice of education have gradually shifted focus from self-discovery and personal development to an emphasis on standards, social and democratic citizenship, achievement, and a bureaucratic approach to education—all of which contribute to the competitive pursuit of institutional prestige rather than individual growth. This shift has sparked a worrying trend towards prioritizing educational standards over the needs of individuals.

The Shift in Focus

The drive toward educational standards stems from the demands of governments and employers, who prioritize socio-economic and socio-political goals aimed at enhancing national or international employability and fostering democratic citizenship within a welfare state framework. Employers seek highly skilled graduates, while the government often favors graduates who conform to societal norms, leading to a

situation where educational institutions are compelled to align their goals with these external pressures.

In this environment, parents and students frequently make choices based solely on the perceived prestige of an institution, considering its ranking and the success of its graduates in securing employment with top companies, government bodies, or non-governmental organizations. Attendance at a particular college confers not only educational experience but also social capital, with certificates acting as the key to cultural success, social mobility, and escape from poverty.

Critique of the Current Educational Paradigm

Bernard Trafford has articulated a well-founded critique of contemporary educational purposes, contending that the core objective should be human development and personal fulfillment rather than mere employability or social conformity. Trafford emphasizes the intense pressure schools face to achieve higher measurable standards annually, driven by local and national government mandates. He raises an essential question: if schools feel the weight of this pressure, how much more intense is the pressure felt by students preparing for high-stakes assessments?

In response, it is clear that this damaging strain can only be endured by a few. The pressure instills a pervasive fear of failure—of not meeting exam expectations—and fosters intense competition among students, often leading to disunity, ethical dilemmas, and academic malpractices. I concur with Trafford's assertion that the current educational landscape represents a mechanistic approach, reducing the richness of education to mere numerical achievements. This narrow view is both demeaning and limiting, as it confines assessments of intelligence and success to quantitative measures that fail to capture the complex nature of human intellect.

A Broader Perspective on Education

Trafford is not alone in his critique; numerous educators, such as Oakeshott, Jellema, and Nicholas Wolterstorff, share similar reservations about contemporary educational goals. Oakeshott posits that the true purpose of education lies in freedom and the understanding of oneself and the world. From a Christian perspective, Wolterstorff views education as a pathway to *shalom*, a concept that encompasses justice but also embodies right relationships—whether with God, fellow human beings, nature, or oneself. He argues that the community defined by shalom

transcends mere justice, embodying responsibility and adherence to divine principles for a flourishing existence.

While Wolterstorff's insights come from a particular theological framework, they resonate with broader truths about education's ultimate purpose: cultivating meaningful relationships rooted in love. Such relationships form the foundation for

freedom and growth, underpinned by the understanding that arises from self-discovery. In essence, education should be an endeavor that fosters delight, enriching both individual lives and the collective human experience.

The Character and Nature of Education

Education for Freedom

What defines the character and essence of true education—education aimed at fostering freedom? This chapter seeks to explore this pivotal question.

Learning as a Lifestyle

Firstly, education for freedom embodies learning as a way of life rather than a mere curriculum that begins upon entering school and ends upon graduation. It transcends the confines of the traditional classroom, functioning instead as a holistic engagement that occurs anywhere, anytime, and in any context—be it at home, in the marketplace, or within professional settings; whether alone or in groups; across diverse cultures and regions like the West and Africa. Learning as a lifestyle is similar to worship in that it should be pursued earnestly and authentically, as encapsulated in the biblical reference of John 4:23.

The ultimate aim of this education is not simply to secure employability or bolster democratic citizenship; instead, it focuses on fostering an intrinsic desire for knowledge, understanding, and self-discovery. Such an education resists manipulation and exploitation as it aims to liberate individuals from various forms of bondage—be it religious, social, political, economic, psychological, or scientific. Education for freedom is therefore deemed a ‘divine’ calling to engage in a reflective lifestyle that promotes change, growth, self-awareness, and self-actualization; it nurtures both personal and national development. To put it succinctly: one must learn to thrive; choosing to learn is essential for growth and progress.

The Importance of Dialogue

Secondly, education for freedom recognizes the necessity of dialogue and communication. It is not solely an individual pursuit but rather a communal endeavor grounded in love, aimed at fostering self-understanding and collective growth.

Dialogue is essential for self-discovery, mutual comprehension, peaceful coexistence, social acceptance, and intellectual development.

Through dialogue, we honor the equality of human worth and the practice of intrinsic freedom. No single perspective is wholly perfect; instead, it is the culmination of diverse ideas that enriches understanding. Engaging in dialogue allows us to share our thoughts openly, respect differing opinions, and appreciate the variety of cultural perspectives.

Education devoid of dialogue is tantamount to a tool for manipulation and oppression. Freedom is an integral component of education—education that truly promotes freedom must empower both teachers and students to think, express, and share ideas freely, without fear of judgment or discrimination for differing viewpoints. Denying anyone the opportunity for self-expression is fundamentally unjust, as communication is crucial for personal expression. Prof. J. B. Bury astutely noted that it is unsatisfactory for thinkers to be barred from sharing their thoughts, rendering their insights without value to society.

The Imperative of Research

Thirdly, the character of education for freedom highlights the essential role of research. Education without research devolves into mere propaganda, perpetuating outdated and irrelevant ideas among students. Rigorous academic research is essential for generating innovative concepts and replacing obsolete notions.

There can be no genuine education without research, as effective research is often revolutionary in nature. Research serves as a cornerstone for both academic advancement and national progress; without it, there is little hope for development. A school or nation that neglects research is devoid of potential. In my view, institutions that operate for years without an active research agenda should be evaluated for viability. Schools must evolve into research hubs, prioritizing new discoveries over the mere reiteration of old ideas.

Writing as a Vital Component

Finally, an integral aspect of education for freedom is the necessity of writing and publishing research findings. Engaging in research without the subsequent articulation and dissemination of those findings is akin to not conducting research at all. Discoveries must be documented and shared with the broader community; impactful ideas cannot be hoarded—they must be communicated.

In essence, schools should serve as centers for learning, dialogue, research, and the publication of innovative ideas capable of fostering transformation and progress in society. By embracing these principles, education for freedom can significantly contribute to a better world.

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