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**THE PURPOSES OF EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES: ORIGINS,
CONFLICTS, AND COMMON GROUND**

A Thesis in

Educational Theory and Policy

by

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ABSTRACT

Over the course of American history there has been endless discussion about the purposes of public education. From Thomas Jefferson to John Dewey, many key figures have written opinions on what should be the central aim of schools. Looking across history, from 1776 to 2012, I discern four broad purposes: academic, economic, democratic, and societal. This thesis attempts to answer three research questions: What are the different purposes of education, and where did they come from? How do we explain how some took prominence over others throughout American history? How do we make sense of the competing tensions between the purposes, and why do different people disagree so strongly? I argue that the first three purposes – academic, democratic, and economic – have been a part of education since the beginning of America. The fourth purpose, the societal purpose, was not implemented until the Common School Era. My analysis shows that the purposes overlap with one another. Since the 1980s, there has been a debate over excellence versus equality. I find that when education focuses on excellence, the two most prominent purposes are the academic and the economic. When focusing on equality, the two most prominent purposes are the democratic and societal. However, in either case, the two less prominent purposes do not disappear; they become smaller in importance until a policy shift swings them back into focus.

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INTRODUCTION

What is the purpose of education in America? Ask a group of ten different people, and most likely you will get ten different answers. From preparing students for college or for the workforce, to teaching children right and wrong, to teaching them how to be Americans, to getting a good education, to breaking the cycle poverty... the list goes on. Everyone has a different opinion.

Despite the sheer number of opinions, through my analysis I demonstrate that these differing ideas can be best understood as four general categories. Looking across history, I discern a democratic, an academic, an economic, and a societal purpose. Each of these purposes have waxed and waned in popularity over the course of American history. More importantly, none of these purposes emerged overnight, and I will explore the origins of each.

This thesis will attempt to answer three research questions: What are the different purposes of education, and where did they come from? How do we explain why some took prominence over others throughout American history? How do we make sense of the competing tensions between the purposes, and why do different people disagree so strongly? The units of analysis under examination include the different major education reform movements and key reformers. The approach I have taken to answer these research questions is a historical one, and it is national in scope. I have looked at who historians have identified as the major players - among them Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin, Horace Mann, and John Dewey - and examined these key figures' interpretations of the purposes of education. The evidence I draw on includes national reports, addresses, speeches, annual reports, and statements given by these major reformers. I build upon past scholars' accounts of different reform movements and how the movements themselves reflect certain purposes. I have looked at the works of historians such as

Ravitch, Kliebard, Kantor, and Cremin, among others. This thesis is a meta-analysis of past scholarly writings on the history of the purposes of education.

Each chapter will delve into a specific purpose. The first three I examine – academic, economic, and democratic – have been a part of American education since the formation of the Republic. The final purpose, a societal purpose of education, was not a perceived responsibility of education until the Common School Era. Its evolution is the most recent and modern of the four purposes.

I acknowledge that I have deliberately chosen to not include an educational purpose of self-improvement through spirituality. Some philosophers, such as Gandhi, contend that all education is about self-improvement on a spiritual level. While education should be part of finding meaning in life, perhaps this is more of an overarching goal of humanity. Because education was founded on the principle of separation between church and state, I do not believe this is a central purpose of American public education. I believe that all education leads to self-improvement of some kind though, and this is an aspect included in all the purposes I have identified.

While these chapters trace the history of American education starting with the birth of the nation, there will be a significant amount of emphasis placed on the Progressive Era, between 1890 and 1938, because it is during the Progressive Era where we find the most discussion and debate about educational purposes. The first four chapters examine each purpose separately; in the final chapter I examine how the purposes have overlapped and influenced one another. Since the 1980s, there has been a shift from equality to excellence, and I examine how that can be understood in terms of the purposes of education.

Before proceeding farther, we must understand why the Progressive Era was so important

in changing education. During this era there were enormous demographic shifts that forever changed our society, and in turn, impacted education.

It must be stressed that, “until quite recently, in no society did more than a tiny minority of children spend more than a small part of their youth in formal education institutions” (Bowles & Gintis, 1975, p. 103). Before the Common School Era, education in America was for the rich, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant elite who could afford to send their children to school instead of to work. With the common school movement, mass public education began to gain traction in America, but it was not until the 1852-1910 compulsory school attendance laws that mass education truly became a reality.

Simultaneously, there were monumental demographic shifts in the U.S. that naturally affected the school population. Before the late 1800s, the majority of immigrants to America came from Northern and Western Europe. Then, as progressive reformer E.P. Cubberley explains, “About 1882, the character of our immigration changed in a very remarkable manner” (1909, p. 14). Immigrants suddenly flooded into America from Southern and Eastern Europe. Cubberley sums up the fears and xenophobic thoughts generally held at the time: “These Southern and Eastern Europeans are of a very different type from the Northern Europeans who preceded them. Illiterate, docile, lacking in self-reliance and initiative, and not possessing the Anglo-Teutonic conceptions of law, order and government, their coming has served to dilute tremendously our national stock, and to corrupt our civic life” (1909, p. 15). This population explosion of new immigrants also brought with them children, and between 1880 and 1918 the nation’s student population increased over 700 percent from 200,000 students to about 1.5 million. Between those years, there was an average of over one new high school built every day (Oakes, 1985). As Cubberley makes clear, many reformers were wary of teaching these

“illiterate” and “docile” immigrant children. The majority of these immigrant children lived in cities, and with the compulsory education laws in effect, urban districts were suddenly inundated with students.

The period between 1865 and 1890 also marked an era of significant economic changes in America that impacted reforms in schools (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). The rise of industrialization and urbanization led to new innovations in industry, and new thoughts on the factory system would shape education in many ways. Additionally, the gap between the rich and the poor was more visible and apparent than ever before. Reformers began to look to the schools to address these issues and provide solutions and order for the new society.

As these four purposes of education became more defined over time, so too did the idea of the American Dream. The American Dream is the driving force behind education, why we push so hard to educate every child. It is the idea that if a person works hard enough, regardless of what economic class they are from, they will be able to succeed in this country. It is the Horatio Alger Puritan success story of hard work, which allows them to climb the social and economic class ladder. This idea is based on the concept of meritocracy, which is deeply grounded in our public education system. It dates back to Horace Mann’s claim that schools are the “great equalizer” (Urban & Wagoner, 2009).

It is my view, along with many scholars before me, that the American Dream is a myth. Since the Progressive Era, public schools have implemented the policy of different academic tracks for students (Ravitch, 2000). In many schools there is a college-preparatory track and a vocational track. The division of students along these different curriculums based on their academic performance is known as tracking. The idea behind these tracks is meritocratic. The students that work hard and perform well will be placed in the college-preparatory track, while

the students who do not perform well in school will be prepared for a career after high school in the vocational track. Class origins should not play a factor. However, class and socio-economic status matters immensely. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to be placed in the lower tracks than their middle- to upper-income peers. Additionally, these students placed in the lower tracks are also more likely to be minority students.

I have drawn on the works of historians and sociologists such as Katz, and Bowles and Gintis who have been critical of the underlying goals of education. I am aware of how their interpretations of history may have colored my own. Specifically, I would like to address potential biases I may bring against vocational education, which is an aspect of the economic purpose. Scholars today interpret the rise of vocational education in one of two ways. First, they may see vocational education as an expansion of the possibility of the American Dream. As Historian Harvey A. Kantor explains, these scholars and reformers maintain that, “Vocational education sought to liberate the school from outmoded practices and to expand occupational opportunities for immigrant and working class youth” (Kantor, 1988, p. x). On the other side of the debate are those that Kantor labels as “revisionist scholars.” In their view, education is a form of social control. Vocational education serves the needs of businessmen and the capitalist elite in creating a workforce of lower-class citizens and maintaining the unequal class structure. In researching this thesis, I was influenced by the revisionist scholar standpoint, and while I do not agree with all of their arguments, I believe my writings may reflect a more revisionist and critical bent.

While these sociological theories have informed my understanding of the purposes, the focus of this thesis is a historical overview rather than a critical theorist lens. As E.H. Carr once wrote, history “...is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an

unending dialogue between the present and the past” (1961, p. 35). After much interaction, this is my addition to the conversation on the purposes of American education.

Chapter 1: ACADEMIC PURPOSE

In America, there has never been a purely academic purpose to education. Learning always leads to something tangible. Teachers may push a love of learning onto their students, but Americans do not really believe in learning for learning's sake. Even those who advocated for an academic purpose of schools were no different. Though they never went into specifics, they spoke of learning and education improving society in general.

There are two camps that advocate for an academic purpose to education. All advocates of academics purport that the most important aspect of education is that learning develops the mind. That is the primary function of schools: developing intellect to be able to think and reason. Where the two sides branch off is here: some academic supporters have taken it further and have claimed that there is specific knowledge that every student must know in order to develop the mind. This academic branch has evolved over time and is now the common thought today. But I will begin the discussion of the academic purpose of schooling around the Progressive Era.

The first section will focus on the prominent advocates of liberal education during the Progressive Era: Lester Frank Ward, W.T. Harris, Charles Eliot and the Committee of Ten, as well as Robert Maynard Hutchins. The next section will briefly cover the different periods during the later half of the century where the academic purpose waxed and waned. These include the life-adjustment movement of the 1950s, The National Defense of Education Act, the free schools movement, *A Nation At Risk*, and E.D. Hirsch's views on cultural literacy.

Academics in the Progressive Era

One of the earlier proponents of the academic purpose of education was philosopher and scientist Lester Frank Ward. Ward was part of the second group of academic advocates.

Historian Diane Ravitch notes that Ward believed,

...the main job of formal education, was to ensure that ‘the heritage of the past shall be transmitted to all its members alike...all children should have the right to the accumulated knowledge of the past: the information, intelligence, and power that come from studying humankind’s inheritance of arts and sciences (2000, p. 29).

In America, those who were privileged to go to school, all learned the same traditional curriculum, typically Latin, Greek, and mathematics, as well as other traditional studies. Ward, although one of those not privileged enough to go to college, fortunately happened to be a genius. Born in 1842, after attending public school for a few years, he was able to teach himself: “Latin, Greek, German, mathematics, French, botany, geology, and paleontology” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 27). He served in the Civil War and then worked for the U.S. government. As Ravitch describes it, “*In his spare time*, he earned degrees in law in medicine” (2000, p. 27, emphasis added). Ward was also one of the founding fathers of sociology.

Ward was a believer in the transformative power of knowledge. He believed that “the most important source of inequality was the unequal distribution of knowledge” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 28). According to him, the primary purpose of education was to equalize society through knowledge and what he called “directive intelligence” (Ravitch, 2000). The way to transmit that knowledge to everyone was through a solid academic curriculum. As Ravitch notes, “He considered education ‘the great panacea’ and insisted access to knowledge was the key to social progress” (2000, p. 29). Ward was a defender of “intellectual egalitarianism,” believing that “the lower classes of society are the intellectual equals of the upper classes” (Ward, 1883).

A contemporary of Ward, William Torrey Harris was known as one of the leading advocates of liberal education during the Progressive Era. Together with the other leading supporter of academics, Charles Eliot, “they insisted that schools in a democratic society should

aim to develop the intelligence of all children fully, regardless of their parents' social status or their probable occupation" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 30). "Unlike Eliot, who endorsed mental discipline (the training of the mind) as an end in itself, Harris believed that certain academic subjects were the indispensable foundation of a liberal education" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 32). According to Harris, "the great power of education... derived from the ability to think, reason, and generalize" (Harris, 1889).

Charles Eliot, president of Harvard, was more focused on the importance of training the mind generally than specifically that every student took the same course. Eliot was at his core, a supporter of mental discipline and mental power. While he advocated for a more modern curriculum, he was not so concerned that all children learn the exact same subjects. What mattered to Eliot was the development of the mind. "In the 1890s Eliot was a spokesman for liberal education" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 32). Eliot was insistent of the intellectual capacity of all children and very much against a differentiated curriculum, stating, "we Americans habitually underestimate the capacity of pupils at almost every stage of education" (Eliot, 1892). Eliot was a critic of the "narrow classical curriculum of ancient languages and mathematics...[calling] for the addition of modern studies such as science, modern foreign languages, and English literature" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 30). Together, Eliot and Harris have been crowned by Ravitch as "The Apostles of Liberal Education."

In 1892, the National Education Association created a national committee, the Committee of Ten, to make recommendations to the nation about college admission requirements. Eliot was chairman. Among its many recommendations, the committee determined that all students should be given an academic education. The report was written during the Progressive Era, when many reformers were rejecting the classic academic curriculum as not fitting with the needs of

the student. Instead, many were supporting manual and vocational training instead of rote memorization of subjects. Needless to say, the committee's report did not find a foothold among the progressives on this matter. The report also was condemned by the classicists, scholars who supported studies of the classics like Latin and Greek. The classicists were outraged that the recommended academic curriculum did not include either of those ancient languages, and instead included science, a subject of which they were very skeptical (Ravitch, 2000).

One point that distinguished the committee from later supporters of an academic curriculum was that the committee, like vocational advocates, did not believe that all students would, or should, go to college. At the time, they were aware that only a small percent of high school students go to college, and the committee was accepting of that. Their recommendation of an academic curriculum was not to suddenly mold everyone into a college scholar. In fact, they insisted that high schools "...do no exist for preparing boys and girls for colleges'" (National Education Association, 1892). The main purpose was to prepare Americans for "the duties of life" (National Education Association, 1892). The academic curriculum served to cultivate well-trained and disciplined minds, and those minds would be adequately prepared for any future.

Eliot, along with the committee, was very strongly opposed to vocational education, stating, "In a democratic society like ours, these early determinations of the career should be avoided as long as possible, particularly in public schools" (Eliot, 1905). Additionally, Eliot writes, "The classification of pupils according to their so-called probable destinations should be postponed to the latest possible time in life" (Eliot, 1905). The Committee of Ten's report was significant and influential in many ways in terms of higher education reform, however, at the secondary level the progressive movement towards social efficiency moved forward with academics in jeopardy of falling to the wayside.

Courses were judged by how relevant they were. The president of the San Francisco Normal School, Frederic Burk, summed up the feelings of the time despite the committee's recommendations: "What is the product of four years of Latin? What is the output of algebra? What is the value of the narrow and prescribed course in literature?" (Burk, 1903, p. 34-35). If a subject was not directly linked to a particular skill or occupation, it was not worth learning.

Towards the end of the Progressive Era reform movement, one other advocate of the liberal education emerged. Robert Maynard Hutchins became president of the University of Chicago in 1929 and became a critic of the American education system during the 1930s. He believed that the classics, or what he termed the "Great Books," were the "heart and soul of liberal education" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 299). Only through having an understanding of the great classics in literature could one enter "the great conversation," and so, he believed that all students should have to read them (Hutchins, 1936). Along with his predecessors, Hutchins believed that general liberal education trains the mind and was useful for everyone regardless of whether they later attended college. In his view, education should "draw out the elements of our common nature. These elements are the same in any time or place. The notion of educating a man to live in any particular time or place, to adjust him to any particular environment, is therefore foreign to a true conception of education...Education implies teaching. Teaching implies knowledge. Knowledge is truth. The truth is everywhere the same. Hence education should be everywhere the same" (Hutchins, 1936). Hutchins' opinion is a loaded statement that makes a lot of assumptions about a dominant culture versus diversity, however, that is beyond of the scope of the discussion at the moment. For the purposes of the discussion here, it is important to take away Hutchins' belief that there are certain things that every child should know.

Hutchins not only criticized child-centered progressives, but also Eliot's elective system

he created at Harvard as president. Hutchins called the notion of allowing elective courses “a denial that there was content to education. Since there was no content to education, we might as well let students follow their own bent...This overlooks the fact that the aim of education is to connect man with man, to connect present with the past, and to advance the thinking of the race. If this is the aim of education, it cannot be left to the sporadic, spontaneous interests of children or even of undergraduates” (Hutchins, 1936). In his view, there was one set path of education, and no one was allowed to stray. Hutchins’ argument was immediately rebutted by John Dewey, which will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Post-Progressive Academics

The push for a strong academic curriculum has waxed and waned over the years. One of the periods in which academics was not a focus was the early half of the 1950s. Historian Arthur Bestor has described education in the 1950s as an “intellectual and cultural vacuum” (1953, p. 11). During the 50s, a life-adjustment movement swept through the schools, where courses included topics such as dating and hygiene, on how to be sociable as oppose to how to solve differential equations. Bestor was extremely critical of this movement and published a book in 1953 entitled *Educational Wastelands*. In it, he condemned the life-adjustment movement and attacked schools for losing their sense of purpose, which in his view, should be an academic one. Bestor writes that educators have “...undermined public confidence in the schools by setting forth purposes for education so trivial as to forfeit the respect of thoughtful men, and by deliberately divorcing the schools from the disciplines of science and scholarship, which citizens value and trust” (1953, p. 9-10). Bestor asserts that the school’s main purpose is to “provide intellectual training” to every student (Bestor, 1953, p. 16). He also argues that all students

should receive this training, whether they will attend college or not. In his writings, we hear the echo of the Committee of Ten and Charles Eliot from over half a century before:

Our civilization requires of *every* man and woman a variety of complex skills which rest upon the ability to read, write, and calculate, and upon sound knowledge of science, history, economics, philosophy, and other fundamental disciplines. These forms of knowledge are not a mere preparation for more advanced study. They are invaluable in their own right. The student bound for college must have them, of course. But so must the high school student who not does not intend to enter college. Indeed, his is the graver loss if the high school fails to give adequate training in these fundamental ways of thinking, for he can scarcely hope to acquire thereafter the intellectual skills of which he had been defrauded” (Bestor, 1953, p. 13).

Diane Ravitch will essentially make the same statement years later in her book *Left Back* when she argues that schools have lost their central mission to provide intellectual training to all students. Additionally Bestor asserts that schools cannot be all things: “The school exists to serve the needs of men. But, like the hospital or the post office, it is not designed to provide all kinds of services indiscriminately. There are many needs of mankind which are exceedingly important in themselves, but which education has little to do with” (1953, p. 16-17).

The launch of *Sputnik*, led to a resurgence and focus on math and sciences and led to the National Defense of Education Act in 1958. Then in the 1960s and 70s, the free schools movement caused some critics to reassert the purpose of education. Max Rafferty, former California State Superintendent of Public Instruction, argued that schools have once again forgotten their primary function: “A school is not a health resort, nor a recreation center, nor a psychiatric clinic. It’s a place where the massed wisdom of the ages is passed from one generation to the next” (Rafferty, 1970, p. 16). He asserts that, “the aim of education is to give young people the intellectual tools which the race over the centuries has found indispensable in the pursuit of truth” (Rafferty, 1970, p. 13). The 60s and 70s were marked by a focus on equity

with less attention on academics. The academic focus would not return until the 1980s.

In 1983, *A Nation At Risk* was released. This report maintained that our schools were failing us. America needed to return to a core academic curriculum. The report noted,

But the problem does not stop there, nor do all observers see it the same way. Some worry that schools may emphasize such rudiments as reading and computation at the expense of other essential skills such as comprehension, analysis, solving problems, and drawing conclusions. Still others are concerned that an over-emphasis on technical and occupational skills will leave little time for studying the arts and humanities that so enrich daily life, help maintain civility, and develop a sense of community. Knowledge of the humanities, they maintain, must be harnessed to science and technology if the latter are to remain creative and humane, just as the humanities need to be informed by science and technology if they are to remain relevant to the human condition (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

The commission spoke of creating a “Learning Society,” and recommended more rigorous coursework and a return to the “New Basics” (1983). *A Nation at Risk* was the first modern instance of overlapping the economic purpose with the academic one. The report shifted the focus of education from equality to excellence by overlapping academic with economic success.

Not all advocates of the academic purpose abandoned ideas of equality, however. E.D. Hirsh published his book, *Cultural Literacy* in 1987. *Cultural Literacy* was published out of the desire to even the playing field between students of different races and classes. Hirsch touches on issues of cultural capital, reconceptualizing this term as cultural literacy. Hirsch explains it as: “To be culturally literate is to possess the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world” (Hirsch, 1987 p. xiii). There is certain background knowledge that students must possess in order to successfully interpret writers and speakers. After Dewey and other progressives condemned rote memorization, many reformers moved away from this method, however, schools are resistant to change, and rote memorization did persist. Still people lamented rote learning as a terrible way to teach children. Hirsh counters with, “Our current distaste for memorization is

more pious than realistic” (1987, p. 30). He argues that children at a young age love memorizing catalogues of information. “To thrive, a child needs to learn the traditions of the particular human society and culture it is born into” (1987, p. 31).

Hirsch created the Core Knowledge Foundation, which promotes a common core knowledge curriculum for all states. Current President Barack Obama has also supported a core knowledge curriculum in America, with the idea that there are certain basic concepts and facts that all students must know. Many Americans have evolved away from the Committee of Ten’s idea that not all students should go to college, and current policymakers have adopted a “college for all” approach (Kirst & Venezia, 2004). It has only been in the last few years, that some have begun questioning this notion.

The academic purpose is the one that historians have most often labeled as the central purpose of American education. However, I do not believe intellectual training is the main mission of American schools. Instead, I see academics as one part of multiple purposes that exist in tandem to one another. In fact, I argue that there has never been a purely academic purpose to education in America. Like the other purposes, there have been resurgences in academics over the years, but it has never superseded the others. Academics will never be the only purpose. Education is too inextricably linked to our government, our economy, and to our society.

Chapter 2: ECONOMIC PURPOSE

The Association for Career and Technical Education is currently the nation's largest supporter of vocational education. Created in 1926, ACTE promotes the "advancement of education that prepares youth and adults for successful careers" (ACTE, 2011). Its membership numbers around 27,000 and is a strong voice for vocational education in today's K-12 public schools.

Where did this notion come from that education should prepare students for specific careers? When did Americans decide that vocational education and a differentiated curriculum were going to be part of the educational landscape? And at what point was it determined that education should have an economic purpose?

The economic purpose of education maintains that schools fulfill a vital function in preparing students for the workforce. Preparing students for jobs that will then contribute to the economy has consistently been seen as an essential purpose of public education. Today, students take math, science, and computer classes, all of which give them useful skills for obtaining a job. Many students go on to college to obtain the benefits a college degree brings to the job market. But I have chosen to focus, not on the increase in college preparation's link to the economy throughout the years, but instead on the history of vocational education because it is the most explicit manifestation of an economic purpose in schools. Vocational education seeks to train students to prepare them directly for entrance into the economy. Today, as Hochschild and Scovronick found, "Americans rank 'preparing people to become responsible citizens and helping people to become economically self-sufficient' highest among various possible purposes of public schooling" (2003, p. 11).

The most significant time period in the history of vocational education was the

Progressive Era. Many scholars, including Diane Ravitch, mark the beginning of a vocational push in American public schools to the Progressive Era. In their view, before this period, schools focused on a pure academic curriculum. However, vocational education in K-12 schools has been a part of the American curriculum dating back to the Revolutionary War.

The first section focuses on early precursors to vocational education, from Ben Franklin's Philadelphia Academy to the manual training movement. The bulk of the analysis, however, will cover the Progressive Era, when vocational education truly became embedded into the American education system. The main actors during this era were the National Association of Manufacturers, the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education, Charles Prosser, David Snedden, and John Dewey. I examine how much of Dewey's ideas have been misinterpreted and what role his writings had on vocational education in the third section.

Early Vocational Education

In some sense, the United States educational system has always been vocational. The first primary schools and colleges of the colonies were for the small, elite population of white males who would go either into law, medicine, politics, or the church (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). These are specific vocations. However, the overall subjects they learned were traditional and "liberal" in content. It was Benjamin Franklin who first criticized this liberal curriculum.

Benjamin Franklin once said, "art is long, and time is short" (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 62). This succinctly sums up the argument for vocational education in America. Art and academics are all well and good, but with a limited amount of time, Franklin believed that students should "learn those things that are most likely to be most useful and most ornamental" (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 62). In 1749, Franklin outlined the plan for a "Philadelphia

Academy” in *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania* (Urban & Wagoner, 2009).

The focus of this grammar school was practical studies. The school was not intended to produce scholars, but men who would become artisans and tradesmen. The curriculum did not teach Latin or Greek, because these men would not need an understanding of these languages. Franklin felt that vocational and practical studies were the mark of forward progress, yet academics in America had an “unaccountable prejudice in favor of ancient customs and habitudes” even “after the circumstances which formally made them useful, cease to exist” (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 63). To Franklin, these ancient customs were Greek, Latin, and other purely scholastic subjects that did not serve much purpose to everyday citizens. However, this was one of the few schools that offered vocational education. The Philadelphia Academy was short-lived though. Shortly after his death, the Philadelphia Academy was closed. Without Franklin’s support, vocational education disappeared and would not reemerge in formal education until the 1880s. For most Americans, the family continued to be the major institution of vocational training well into the 1800s. If not the family, adolescents commonly learned a trade through apprenticeships; however, the erosion of the apprenticeship system caused many tradesmen to look to the schools to fill the gap.

The push for vocational education did not happen without warning. There were small steps towards a vocational system of education throughout the 1800s. These included the Yale Report of 1828, the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862, and the facts that schools generally preached a Puritan work ethic (Kliebard, 2004). Most importantly, however, was the Manual Training Movement of the 1880s.

To meet the needs of the new industrial society, some educators believed that students

needed training in industrial technology. In 1876, the President of M.I.T., John D. Runkle, was impressed by Russian instructional tools and started the School of Mechanical Arts at M.I.T.. He was an advocate of industrial education in general high school curriculums as well. Calvin Woodward was another proponent of manual training. Woodward established the Manual Training School at Washington University, a secondary school for boys ages 14-18. The curriculum was not seen as vocational training though; it was preparation for an industrial society. The idea behind manual training was “to train the mind by training the hand” (Grubb, 1995). In high schools, the goal was the development of mental capacities rather than learning specific job skills. Grubb asserts that it “was novel in insisting that the curriculum include more occupationally oriented content” (1995, p. 12). However, most educators initially opposed manual training. Many of the basic skills learned did not necessarily align with the new industries (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). While the manual training movement never gained much traction, it set the stage for vocational education.

Economics in the Progressive Era

The Progressive Era is impossible to concisely define; even determining the exact time period is difficult. Historian Lawrence Cremin marks 1876 as the beginning, and then continues all the way up to 1957 (Cremin, 1961). For the purposes of vocational education, I will focus on the years between 1890 and 1930. The progressive education movement sprung out a need to drastically improve conditions in public schools. Before the Progressive Era, many urban schools were dreary and terrible places to learn. There were two main types of educational progressives: the administrative progressives who wanted to reform the structure of schools, and the pedagogical progressives who wanted to reform the curriculum. It was a time of many

educational reforms, and among them, vocational education emerged as the most successful curricular innovation of the era (Kliebard, 2004).

New thoughts about education and new influences impacted the ascension of vocational education where manual training failed. The most important ideas to emerge that impacted vocational education were the notions of social efficiency and social control. The rise of industrialism created a whole new business-mindset that influenced many reformers. One of the leaders of the social efficiency educators was John Franklin Bobbitt, who believed that schools should adapt their curriculum to each “class of individuals” (Kliebard, 2004, p. 84). The premise behind social efficiency, as it applies to vocational education, is that teaching students what they will never need in their future occupations would be a waste. The answer lay in a separate vocational curriculum where students not destined for college would be taught specific trade training.

Many progressives spoke of adapting school to the needs of the child. Kliebard notes though, “Within the framework of the new theory, ‘education according to need’ was simply another way of saying ‘education according to predicted social and vocational role’” (2004, p. 84). This was not to say, that all progressives were attempting to funnel the lower classes into vocational tracks and then into the factories. Many were truly humanitarians concerned about the desires and happiness of children (Cremin, 1961). However, regardless of intent, the result was that poor students were assigned to vocational courses, while the elite were prepared for college. Additionally, new ideas about the connection between intelligence and genetics gave rise to the theory that the new immigrants to America were inherently less intelligent and capable than White, Anglo-Saxon Protestants. With science showing that some children were not capable of learning, this lent support to the social efficiency educators’ movement.

Why was vocational education so successful? Kliebard provides the answer: vocational education had “money, powerful lobbying groups, energetic leadership in high places, and a sympathetic public” (2004, p. 123). One of the first supporters of vocational education was the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) in 1896 (Kliebard, 2004). This association was concerned about industrial competition from Germany, the decline of apprenticeships in America, and the failure of the manual training movement. The solution was to create trade schools modeled after the German education system. The National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education was created shortly after and became the primary lobby group for vocational education. National lobbying won over Congress, and in 1917, Congress passed the Smith-Hughes Act, mandating federal aid for vocational education.

The two most influential individual advocates of vocational education were David Snedden and Charles Prosser. Snedden was a professor at Columbia Teachers College, where Prosser was his pupil. Both advocates of the social efficiency doctrine, Snedden and Prosser supported a dual system of separate schools for vocational and academic studies (Gordon, 2008).

In addition to the leaders of the movement, the American public was generally in support of vocational education. For some, it was out of fear of immigrant children and a need for social control. Many truly believed that some students could not learn the traditional curriculum. More surprisingly, many Americans from working and lower class families were also in support of a vocational curriculum. They saw vocational education as “recognition of the dignity and honor of their own way of life” (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 238).

The dissenters of narrow vocational education, aside from their common interest against this curriculum, would never be grouped together otherwise. They lacked enough cohesion to create a real counter-reform. Those against the movement included the American Federation of

Labor union, liberal education humanists, and progressive reformers Jane Addams of Hull House and John Dewey. Of this odd grouping of people, John Dewey was perhaps the most influential.

John Dewey's Thoughts on Vocational Education

Dewey was a prolific author throughout his career, writing several hundred articles and forty books (Rebore, 2001). In those writings, he laid out his philosophy on vocational education. Dewey was adamantly opposed to the traditional academic curriculum of rote memorization and teacher centered-instruction that was in place since the Common School Era. He believed in learning through experience rather than just memorizing abstract concepts (Ravitch, 2000). Dewey supported vocational education for all children in addition to the regular curriculum (Rebore, 2001). Dewey's definition of vocational education was different from many of his contemporaries like Snedden and Prosser however. From the beginning, Dewey was opposed to vocational education becoming narrow trade-specific training because it would overemphasize technical efficiency (Gordon, 2008).

Dewey advocated for a broad vocational curriculum that would teach vocational principles and lead to reestablishing meaning in factory work (Kantor, 1988). Dewey saw the potential of vocational education as transformative to society. Historian Harvey Kantor notes, "By uniting practical and general education, he hoped that vocational education would help workers see the full dimensions of their work, thereby restoring meaning to the fragmented labor of the factory" (1988, p. 17). As Dewey stated, "It would give those who engage in industrial callings desire and ability to share in social control, and ability to become masters of their industrial fate" (1916, p. 316). Dewey had faith in the education system as a means to transform the economy because he had a utopian view of American society (Kantor, 1988).

Dewey's definition of vocational education is more similar to the short-lived manual training movement of the 1880s rather than vocational education as we understand it today. He believed that all students should be given vocational courses where they would come to learn through experience and action the science of tools and processes, develop an appreciation for the historical evolution of industry, learn how to work collaboratively in groups, and develop strategies for problem solving (Gordon, 2008). Dewey's vision of vocational education was part of his larger belief in child-centered instruction and learning through educative experiences.

Dewey was also adamantly opposed to a dual system of education where there would be schools to train academically minded students and separate vocational schools for the rest. Dewey believed that a dual system would narrow vocational education into "a handmaiden of industry" (Kantor, 1988, p. 36). Rather, he argued, it would be better to eliminate vocational education entirely than "to separate industrial education from general education, and thereby use it to mark off in the interest of employers a separate class of laborers'" (Dewey, 1913).

How much Dewey believed in a truly radical reformation of society and classes through schools is somewhat unclear. His writings indicate that he believed in such a transformation, but it was not obvious what that society would look like. As Kantor wrote,

Dewey's reliance on education to reform the workplace was not only a reflection of his belief in the potential of American society. It also betrayed some fundamental concerns. What troubled Dewey, was not so much the existence of classes, but the growing distance between them and the conflicts that they created (1988, p. 31).

This distinction is an important one. According to Kantor it would seem that Dewey was content with separate classes, and that the purpose of schools as to eliminate the conflict between classes by reestablishing meaning in the work of the lower classes. Bowles and Gintis lend support to this notion. They label Dewey as an "essential mediator" between the capitalist class and

subordinate social classes, and that he existed within the constraints of capitalist structure (Bowles & Gintis, 1975, p. 118). Bowles and Gintis note, “Indeed, Dewey seems to have been aware of these constraints and, true to his pragmatism, to have operated consciously within them” (1975, p. 121).

However, in some of Dewey’s writings he discusses transformation of society, and according to Dr. Howard Gordon, Dewey believed it was the role of education to “combat social predestination, not contribute to it” (2008, p. 32). Dewey warned that if vocational education became narrowed to trade education, “education would then become an instrument of perpetuating unchanged the existing industrial order of society, instead of operating as a means of its transformation” (1916, p. 316). Everyone seems to have a different interpretation of Dewey. With this in mind, it is understandable how so many of his contemporaries misinterpreted his ideas.

Considered by many to be the father of progressive education, John Dewey’s philosophy was also one of the most misunderstood. Many cite Dewey as one of the progressives who supported vocational education; however, Dewey did not believe in vocational education, as we understand it today. Despite this, many of the supporters of the vocational education movement of the Progressive Era used his writings as justification for the cause.

In analyzing Dewey’s influence on vocational education, I first want to examine Historian Diane Ravitch’s interpretation. I posit that she overestimates Dewey’s potential influence on the movement. Critics of Dewey such as Ravitch explain how his philosophy was used to support the stratifying vocational education movement and how Dewey failed to correct this misinterpretation. Ravitch succinctly sums up her views in the following paragraph from her book *Left Behind*:

Dewey's writings encouraged those who thought that education could be made into a science; those who wanted to create child-centered schools based on the interests of children rather than subject matter; those who believed that learning by doing was more valuable than learning from books; those who expected vocational and industrial education to train poor minority children for their future jobs; and those who wanted the schools to serve as instruments to improve society. These disparate, sometimes discordant, ideas had been discussed for years, but Dewey's intellectual eminence certified them as dominant doctrines in the new professional schools of pedagogy" (2000, p. 59).

In Ravitch's view, Dewey's words were the driving inspiration for many progressive reformers; however, just as many were disloyal to his original intentions and ideas. Dewey had many disciples, but how accurate they were to Dewey's philosophy is questionable. Dewey's works were interpreted and implemented differently depending on the type of school. In private progressive schools, rich children reaped the benefits of a child-centered education, where the curriculum was centered around their interests. In large public schools, Dewey's ideas were interpreted to mean vocational education to "train the children of the masses for works on farms, shops, factories, and homes" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 59). Ravitch claims that ultimately, whether intending to or not, Dewey's philosophical writings undermined the premise that all children should study a solid academic curriculum" (2000).

Ravitch paints an unforgiving picture of John Dewey as a man who was naïve about the repercussions of this philosophy. There are a few passages from her book that nicely capture her disdain of the naïveté of Dewey. First, she writes:

In one of his famous lectures he chided those who favored a course in zoology over laundry work; he said that either could be narrow and confining, and either might 'be so utilized as to give understanding and illumination – one of natural life, the other of social facts and relationships.' This was true in theory, but in practice the children who were studying zoology were probably learning the principles of science, while the children in laundry work course were purely training for unskilled work" (2000, p. 59).

And then, a few pages later:

Dewey lauded schools that introduced manual training, shop work, sewing, and cooking, because such activities made school real and vital to children, rather than a place set apart for ‘lessons having an abstract and remote reference to some possible living done in the future.’ Dewey wanted the schools not to make students into cooks, seamstresses, or carpenters but to use the occupations to provide insight into how society evolved and how it functioned. In the public schools however, many of those who promulgated the ‘new education’ simply wanted the schools to train better cooks, seamstresses, and carpenters (Ravitch, 2000, p. 61).

It is not a pretty picture she paints, essentially making Dewey out to be a fool.

One of the major turning points in Dewey’s career involved University of Chicago President, Robert Maynard Hutchins’, attack of progressive education and his promotion of the “Great Books.” Hutchins asserted that the progressives were taking education in the wrong direction and that education should center on intellectual development, claiming there are certain “great books” that every child should read as a part of an essential core curriculum. Dewey vehemently attacked Hutchins’ proposal and claimed that Hutchins was promoting different types of education for different types of students. The irony of this assertion should not be lost. At the same time that Dewey was condemning Hutchins for a differentiated curriculum he was turning a blind eye to the reality that many of his progressive contemporaries were sorting students into academic tracks and vocational tracks based on social class. Ravitch does not mince words when she notes, “Dewey preferred to believe in his nonexistent ideal of a liberalized vocational education, rather than confront the reality of narrow training for existing jobs” (2000, p. 306).

The result of Hutchins’ criticisms, though, was that it did force Dewey to take a closer look at some of the problems and lack of consistency within the progressive movement. In 1938, Dewey published *Experience and Education* to clarify the central theories of the progressive

movement. Dewey criticized those who idealized and romanticized the learning-through experience philosophy, explaining that educators must be there to guide children, and that experiences, if not properly directed, could be “miseducative” and harmful as well (Dewey, 1938). However, nowhere in *Experience and Education* does Dewey mention vocational education. In Ravitch’s view, his failure to offer any critique of vocational education through differentiated curriculums would have a lasting impact on American education.

What Ravitch fails to point out, or decides to overlook, is the fact that Dewey did address the proponents of narrow vocational education. He was actually one of the most outspoken critics. I believe that Ravitch also incorrectly assumes that with one word, Dewey could have changed the course of vocational education. Kliebard explains that in 1914 in *New Republic*, Dewey “denounced in uncharacteristically harsh language the nature of the proposals that had been emanating from the supporters of the [Smith-Hughes] legislation” (2004, p. 123). Despite his criticisms, it did not impact the outcome of the Smith-Hughes Act. Dewey clearly did not have as much power as Ravitch gives him. She rewrites history to give Dewey power, and then recasts him as a villain. I do agree that Dewey should have addressed the issue of vocational education in *Experience and Education*, however, how much of a difference it would have made is questionable.

Resulting Impact

Despite Dewey’s and other’s protestations, vocational education marched forward. It faltered significantly when the Cooley Bill was defeated, and Snedden’s proposed dual system of education was, for the most part, halted. Instead, vocational education remained in the same schools with the college-preparatory curriculums.

Social efficiency educators won the day, but not without a compromise. If they had had their way, traditional liberal education would have been completely eliminated from public schools. But their reforms were too broad. Ultimately, they struck a compromise with humanists. The humanists conceded that if they could not win a liberal education for all students, they would at least protect it for the students who would be able to go on to higher education. This compromise led to the current system of the comprehensive high school and its ability grouping and tracking.

However, vocational education also transformed the entire education system, and liberal education was not left as pure and removed as the humanists would have liked. College preparation is now linked to job preparation. And many, like researcher Mike Kirst, see it as the high school's role to prepare for college in order to get that job (Kirst & Venezia, 2004). High school courses are now "infused with criteria drawn from vocational education" (Kliebard, 2004, p. 110). Courses in business math and business English are taught, and there has been an overall movement in practicality into the traditional curriculum.

That is how we get to today and the Association for Career and Technical Education. An organization created during the progressive era, its position and endorsement of an economic purpose to education has clearly emerged out of the ideas endorsed by Snedden, Prosser, the National Association for Manufacturers, and others. On the other side of the curriculum debates were those educators who supported an academic focus in schools.

Chapter 3: DEMOCRATIC PURPOSE

Goodlad, Soder, and McDaniel note that, “the only institution in our nation specifically charged with enculturating the young into a social and political democracy” is the public school (2008, p. 51). Salomone reiterates this point by stating, “Schooling by its very nature is a prime vehicle for indoctrinating the young in a common core of values and political principles” (2010, p. 5). The connection between education and our political system is tightly bound. The core of democracy is the notion of universal participation, and citizens can best be taught how to participate through schools. Thirteen state constitutions include the promotion of democracy and good citizenship as essential goals of their public educational system (Salomone, 2010). As an advocate of democratic education, Goodlad, Soder, and McDaniel summarize best the argument for why public schools should focus on a democratic purpose:

A democratic public is an educated public. Consequently, our system of public education constitutes the front line for the development of democratic character in our people and democratic functioning of our government and institutions. Democracy embraces how we are with one another, and how we are with one another entwines with how we conduct all of our affairs. The necessary learning begins with the very young and should become habitual in our preschools, nursery schools, and kindergartens and increasingly rigorous in later years” (2008, p. 2).

What stands out is “the development of democratic character in our people” and “democratic functioning of our government and institutions.” These seem to be two separate aspects of a democratic education.

Through reading different historical accounts, I have tried to make sense of those two parts of a democratic education. Bull, Fruehling, & Chattergy conceptualized it best. They separated the democratic purpose of education into two distinct branches: a political education and a societal education (1992). The central purpose of political education is to teach how the political system works. It is about fostering an understanding of democracy, civics, and learning

how to participate in democratic decision-making. Concepts of student voice and service learning would fall under this branch.

The other branch of the democratic purpose is societal democracy, or societal education. This is where issues of socialization, Americanization, social control, morals, and values fall under. As Bull, Fruehling and Chattergy note, “Democratic societies are also obliged to enable their citizens to participate in the social arrangements... the specific economic, cultural, and interpersonal institutions and activities authorized by the majority’s vision of the good for the society” (1992, p. 58-59). Over time, the societal branch of the democratic purpose has evolved to include issues of multiculturalism. Diversity and socialization are paradoxical, and this is where we have tension today.

And so, this chapter will explore the origins of the democratic purpose of education. The key actors I have drawn on for evidence include Thomas Jefferson, E.P. Cubberley, John Dewey and the National Education Association among others. The writings and addresses of these actors provide insights into how the democratic purpose was understood during these periods in history. The early years of the nation laid the foundation of the importance of a democratic purpose to education, but it was the Progressive Era that truly shaped it into what we are familiar with today. Pledges to the flag, English instruction, and lessons on good citizenship all originate from this period in history. First though, I begin with Thomas Jefferson’s thoughts on the democratic purpose, and then briefly summarize the history of the democratic purpose through to the Common School Era. The second part of this chapter examines what the democratic purpose meant during the Progressive Era.

Early Views of Democratic Education

Of all the founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson wrote the most extensively on the importance of education. Jefferson believed that an educated citizenry was essential in order for democracy to survive. Thomas Jefferson believed that education was not for material gain and private wealth, but it was for public trust and the good of the republic (Urban & Wagoner, 2009).

As Bull, Fruelling, and Chattergy note,

Early on, Thomas Jefferson had a vision of mandatory public schools that could promote common beliefs, attitudes, and abilities that were, in his view, needed to make the American experiment in democracy succeed. Without an informed electorate, Jefferson argued, democracy would degenerate into a rancorous and ultimately fatal struggle among narrow and parochial interests (1992, p. 2).

With the fear of the destruction of the nation weighing heavily on their minds, "...many leaders in the early Republic, charged with a deep sense of destiny, masked a dark vein of anxiety by assertive nationalism" (Tyack, 1966). Education had the potential for national salvation.

However, Jefferson only meant mandatory education for a select group of students, specifically, white, landowning males.

Education was not widespread until the Common School Era, when public schooling was made available to everyone, and even then it took another few decades and compulsory school attendance laws before the majority of the nation's children were going to school. Before the Common School Era, it was left up to separate religious institutions to educate children. It was the responsibility of the churches to teach children how to read their Bible and to instill moral values. The public schools of the Common School Era were predominantly run by Protestants and were openly anti-Catholic in their lessons. They chose to teach Protestant values and morals. Virtues became democratic, and moral education was enfolded into democratic education. When the public school became the most popular form of schooling, parochial schools declined in

popularity, and it was left up to the public schools to instill these values.

An increase in immigration and compulsory education meant that more children, from all different backgrounds, were in school than ever before in the history of America. The upper classes started to fear that immigrants were putting the American way of life in jeopardy. This is when the socialization aspect of the democratic purpose came to the forefront. The Progressive Era significantly defined what the democratic purpose of education would be.

Democratic Education in the Progressive Era

As historian David Gamson writes, “Despite the tendency to associate the concepts of democracy and education with John Dewey, Progressive Era city school district administrators were the people who arguably left the most significant imprint...” (Gamson, 2007, p. 180). One of the administrative progressives, E.P. Cubberley, professor from Stanford, held an openly xenophobic and nativist – but accepted - view toward immigrants. He believed the fatal flaw of immigrants, aside from low intelligence, was their lack of understanding of democracy.

Immigration was at an all time high, and the new cultures flooding into America made many people afraid of losing what it meant to “be American” in the deluge. By the late 1880s, with the increase in immigration, cultural diversity came to be seen as a social problem (Bowles & Gintis, 1975). Social control was also of utmost concern. Compulsory school attendance law of 1890 was as much for the benefit of children as it was for upper class citizens who were fearful of wild poor immigrant children roaming the streets (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). These uncultured children needed to be socialized into American society. What better place to do it than the school? As Edward Ross, another administrative progressive noted, “Education is one of the most effective weapons in society’s arsenal” (Kliebard, 2004, p. 79).

By 1909, in thirty-seven of the largest American cities, 58% of students had immigrant parents. In Boston, it was 64%; in Chicago, it was 67%; in New York, it was 72% (Salomone, 2010, p. 23). These students represented 60 separate ethnic groups, each with their own distinct culture and language. An overwhelming amount of educational reformers were highly concerned with these different ethnicities moving into America. Leaders from the National Education Association denounced the “foreign colonies” that were moving into urban areas with “a purpose of preserving foreign languages and traditions and... destroying distinctive Americanism” (Dougherty, 1891). In 1891, the NEA declared the “right of the child to an elementary education in the language of the nation, and the duty of the State to secure him that right” (Salomone, 2010, p. 24). In 1905, Julia Richman, a NYC district superintendant, presented to NEA, stating that immigrants “must be made to realize that in forsaking the land of their birth, they were also forsaking the customs and traditions of that land; and they must be made to realize an obligation, in adopting a new country, to adopt the language and customs of that country” (Richman, 1905).

The truth was, though, it was not until this point that America became synonymous with the English language. Even up until the mid 1800s, school reports in many states, and even school lessons, were in German (Salomone, 2010). But suddenly, people needed to define what it meant to be American, and one thing to unite everyone was a national language. As Salomone beautifully phrases it, national identity and language has always been a “web of paradoxes” in the United States (2010, p. 233). There was a wave of “cultural evangelism of the school” in the Progressive Era (Salomone, 2010, p. 27). Children were socialized through patriotic rituals of “flag ceremonies, loyalty pledges, singing, pageants, and parades” (Ziegler-McPherson, 2009, p. 132).

Socialization in schools was very much intertwined with the increasing factory and

industrial life at the turn of the century. Indeed, many scholars point out how schools would socialize children for later factory life. According to Urban and Wagoner, “Devotion to organization, regularity, punctuality, and discipline meant that the schools in a very real way prepared their students to work in the new factories that were developing in the nation’s cities” (2009, p. 203). Socialization for future economic life had been a part of schooling since the mid-1800s. Students were taught “punctuality, regularity, and order,” all things they would need to know to become successful workers in an industrial society (Kantor, 1988, p. 3). Bull, Fruehling, & Chattergy also point out how the democratic purpose of education overlaps with an economic one: “In part, societal education in a democracy is specifically vocational, a way of preparing individuals to fill particular roles within the society” (1992, p. 59). Many reformers advocated socializing children for both American society and industry.

However, not all progressives sought to eradicate the past cultures of immigrant students. Some touted the benefits of having a diverse society. In the 1890s, groups of young social reformers, many who were women, advocated recognizing the cultural contributions immigrants could bring to the United States. Jane Addams, of Hull House, was one of the leaders of this movement. She “imagined a national identity that could continually renew and transform itself as the immigrants engaged in a vibrant interchange with American culture,” but educators still needed to “inculcated mainstream Protestant republican virtues, which they believed were essential to a unified society” (Salomon, 2010, p. 29).

In addition to some progressive reformers, middle-class leaders among the different ethnic communities supported ethnic diversity, helping the idea of multiculturalism survive. They believed in “partial acculturation without assimilation” (Salomone, 2010, p. 29). In 1908, the metaphor of America as a melting-pot came into existence. First used as the title of Israel

Zangwill's play *The Melting Pot*, the metaphor soon gained traction and was taught in schools everywhere. Today, some are critical of this metaphor. As Salomone writes, we have "...a nation reluctant to move beyond the melting pot metaphor or face up to the unspoken failings of past Americanization efforts" (2010, p. 234).

One of the more successful reforms directly influenced by the democratic purpose was the transformation of history into "Social Studies." As Kliebard notes, "With concern about an undesirable class of immigrants on the rise, it was to the schools generally and to the social studies in particular that American leaders turned as the most efficacious way of introducing American institutions and inculcating American norms and values" (Kliebard, 2004, p. 107). In 1916, in a report conducted by a subcommittee on social studies, the National Education Association wrote, "Good citizenship should be the aim of social studies in the high school...facts, conditions, theories, and activities that do not contribute rather directly to the appreciation of methods of human betterment have no claim" (National Education Association, 1916). Concern about Americanization was of the utmost importance during this era.

The Democratic purpose is difficult to define because there are contradicting goals within the purpose itself. There is the goal of socialization or Americanization, teaching children about American values so that they will be socialized into the American way of life. At the same time, there evolved a goal of embracing multiculturalism and celebrating diversity. The tension between the two has yet to be resolved.

Despite Gamson's assertion that Dewey had a limited impact on democratic education, Dewey's writings and ideas on democracy cannot be ignored. Dewey believed that the primary purpose of education was to "foster the growth of democratically minded citizens" (Gordon, 2008, p. 30). Schools were the primary way of teaching the democratic way of life, and an

understanding of democracy was essential for social reform (Urban & Wagoner, 2009).

Dewey had many thoughts on how political institutions influenced education. His main argument was that it is natural that educational systems reflect and reinforce the main institutions of the larger society. As he writes in *Democracy and Education*, “Education proceeds ultimately from the patterns furnished by institutions, customs, and laws. Only in a just state will these be such as to give the right education; and only those who have rightly trained minds will be able to recognize the end, and ordering principle of things” (Dewey, 1916, p. 103). Schools unapologetically taught an American way of life. Dewey conceded this, and conceded that this was the *American* ideal, not necessarily the ideal of other countries: “Since education is a social process, and there are many kinds of societies, a criterion for educational criticism and construction implies a *particular* social ideal” (Dewey, 1916, p. 115).

As Goodlad, Soder, and McDaniel note, “For most of the 20th century, education in the United States has been linked with democratic citizenship” (2008, p. 42). However, the importance of democratic citizenship in education can be traced all the way back to the beginning of the Republic. It is true that the democratic purpose of education has been prominent during the 20th century. The different pushes for a democratic purpose throughout the century have coincided with periods of increased immigration and shifting demographics.

During the 1960s and 1970s, immigrants started arriving primarily from Latin America and Asia. With the influx of immigrants from new backgrounds and new languages, there were simultaneous efforts to implement English-only education, on the one end of the spectrum, and bilingual education on the other end. Both of these reforms efforts can be interpreted as outputs of a democratic purpose; one of Americanization and one of diversity.

The democratic purpose of education was born in tandem with the birth of America.

Today, democratic education brings to mind inalienable rights, civic virtues, and founding fathers preserving democracy. In truth, the democratic purpose of education was created out of fear and necessity during a time where the grand experiment in democracy could have failed before it began. In order to preserve such a fragile state, early Americans clung to nationalism as a democratic way of life. With each new wave of immigration over the years, nationalism reared up again. However, as explained, the democratic purpose is not without contradictions, and while one aspect is nationalistic Americanization, we see other iterations today in the way of civics classes, service learning, and lessons in diversity. The democratic purpose has evolved over the years, but the core idea remains the same: to teach democratic values to ensure the continuation of our society and system of government. One of the democratic values is that “all men are created equal.” The next purpose is very much connected to this idea of equality.

Chapter 4: SOCIETAL PURPOSE

According to Jennifer Hochschild and Nathan Scovronick, as of 2003, “Public education uses more resources and involves more people than any other government program for social welfare” (2003, p. 10). This statement reveals more than facts about monetary levels of spending. The language choice of “social welfare” highlights how Americans view public education. We trust in schools to act as “the great equalizer” of society, and this is why we invest so much in education.

Because at the core of this purpose is the idea that schools should improve society, I have decided to term this the societal purpose. I chose not to call it a social purpose because there are already many definitions of a social purpose, but none quite fit my definition. I also want to distinguish this purpose from socialization, which is not a part of the societal purpose. At the core of the societal purpose is the belief that schools have a responsibility to improve societal problems and improve equality, and that there is a moral duty that goes above and beyond just instruction. Racism, sexism, poverty, class issues, etc., they all fall under the domain of education under this purpose.

I see two manifestations of the societal purpose: attempts at curricular equality and attempts at non-academic equality. Examples of curricular equality may include trying to lower the achievement gap between races, provide additional curricular resources like bilingual education, or special education. Non-academic attempts at equality may include providing children with free or reduced lunch, providing health resources, or providing resources to parents and community members. Where did this notion that public schools have a duty to improve societal equality come from? That is the central question I will be attempting to answer in this chapter.

The first section will focus on the Common School Era and the creation of the societal purpose. Because Horace Mann was one of the most articulate voices arguing that schools could serve as the “balance wheel” of society, I examine his writings on the topic as an illustration of this societal impulse. Next, I will move into a section on the Progressive Era, where the writings on John Dewey and the pedagogical progressives will be the main focus. The final section will examine the period between 1954 and 1970. Supreme Court opinions, the Coleman Report, and writings by other scholars will be used as evidence. Before we get there though, we must see where the ideas for the societal purpose originated.

Attempts at curricular equality can be traced back to Thomas Jefferson and The Bill for More General Diffusion of Knowledge. Jefferson drafted the federal bill in 1778, and submitted it to Congress in 1779. If the bill had been passed, Jefferson believed that “our work would have been complete” (Jefferson, 1813). The bill proposed creating a system of public education for “all free children, male and female” (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 82). Slaves were excluded from the system, but the notion of mass education was radical in nature at the time.

The system would have been based on meritocracy. Jefferson did not envision every student succeeding; he had clear doubts about the intelligence of most citizens. However, he believed that the system would have provided equal opportunity for all children to learn if they were able, regardless of social class. As he viewed it, education would create a “natural aristocracy” of the most intelligent to run the new nation, and schools would enable the “best geniuses raked from the rubbish” (Jefferson, 1779). Jefferson strongly believed in education, and stated that this bill was “by far the most important bill in our code” (Jefferson, 1779). However, the bill was defeated and a “more general diffusion of knowledge,” along with a societal purpose, would not become a reality in American Schools until the 1830s with the Common School Era.

From the Common School to the Progressives

Curricular equality through a system of mass public education was once again proposed in the 1830s with the common school. Urban and Wagoner provide the most concise definition of the common school:

The common school was free; that is, no tuition was charged for attendance, and poorer citizens did not have to sign a pauper's oath in order for their children to attend. Common schooling was also 'universal,' that is, open to all children regardless of station or status. This 'universal' standard did not necessarily include either black children or white children with 'strange' religious beliefs, such as Irish Catholics, however (2009, p. 112-113).

While the common school provided unprecedented curricular equality, and confirmed the notion of a societal purpose, there were still clearly students who were denied equality.

Additionally, many wealthy landowners did not want to pay taxes to send other children than their own to school. Horace Mann, of Massachusetts was the most famous advocate of the common school, and he played the most influential role in convincing America to create this free public school system. Mann believed that it was the moral obligation of the wealthy to pay taxes to support the new system of education. His appeals to the upper class are impassioned. In his "Tenth Annual Report" he addresses those who do not want to pay taxes for a system of public schools. Mann makes the connection between infanticide and depriving children of education. Massachusetts had recently passed laws prohibiting infanticide, and so he argued, depriving a child of education would be tantamount to depriving a child of life. If citizens supported the preservation of a child's life, they must support education (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 122).

The language of the conclusion of his "Tenth Annual Report" is just as strong. Mann ends with an emotional appeal to every generation to maintain the societal purpose by supporting public education:

The successive generations of men, taken collectively, constitute one great Commonwealth. The property of this Commonwealth is pledged for the education of all its youth, up to such a point as will save them from poverty and vice, and prepare them for the adequate performance of their social and civil duties. The successive holders of this property are trustees, bound to the faithful execution of their trust by the most sacred obligations; because embezzlement and pillage from children and descendents are as criminal as the same offenses when perpetrated against contemporaries” (Mann, 1846).

While Urban and Wagoner use different terminology than myself, they discuss how Mann’s conclusion expressed the societal purpose of education. As they write, “This was a radical statement for its day, or for any day. Mann impressed on his readers the collective or social purpose of the common school. That institution, Mann and other reformers insisted, exists for the benefit of all society, not just for those who presently attended” (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 123). However, not all working class were ready to send their children to this new system of schooling. Mann also attempted to convince the working class that school was more beneficial to their children than labor. In appealing to these parents, Mann stated his most famous words, “Education, then beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men- the balance wheel of the social machinery” (Mann, 1848). This metaphor of education as the great equalizer epitomizes the essence of the societal purpose.

However, there are historians critical of the Common School Era. There is contention about how much these public schools were truly about educational opportunity. Michael Katz is the most notable critical historian, labeled by many as a radical revisionist. Katz argues that the common school was a form of social control rather than a liberal reform attempt at educational equality. As Urban and Wagoner state, Katz’s argument makes for a “powerful hypothesis,” and I believe there is a lot of merit to it. The common schools used a Protestant Bible, taught Protestant values, and were openly anti-Catholic. In addition, slaves were excluded from education altogether.

Katz is not without critics of his own though, and many have pointed out flaws in his analysis. If we choose to believe schools were not solely a form of social control over the lower class, and that there was an element of a greater societal purpose in the common schools, the statement by Urban and Wagoner expresses the era nicely:

While Katz saw the public school as an institution imposed by the establishment on the lower classes, his critics tended to see the common school, and public schools in the twentieth century, as imperfect institutions that nevertheless attempted to overcome, or mitigate, social decisions in American society and to help the members of the lower orders of that society to better themselves (2009, p. 131).

There are certainly some problems with Katz's analysis. For instance, he omits the "Tenth Annual Report" from his critique, when it clearly has some explicit socialist overtones that would weaken his argument. At the same time, there is a lot to be said of his analysis of discrimination in schools. Regardless of whether we agree with Katz or not, the fact is that the common school led to a public education system in America, which was open freely to all classes of citizens. One is hard-pressed to find a more explicit exhibition of curricular equality. The Common School Era built up the foundation of the curricular equality aspect of the societal purpose. However, as I stated previously, there are two conceptions of the societal purpose, and non-academic equality was not a concern of education at this time. It will take a drastic change in the demographics of America and an era of progressive reform before schools take on that role.

Thomas Jefferson once said, "The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body" (Jefferson, 1787). Despite Jefferson's beliefs, cities did grow. America had to decide whether the cities would be a "sore" or a strength to the economy of the nation.

During the period between 1846-1856, 3.1 million immigrants flocked to the cities (Bowles & Gintis, 1975). Economic changes of urbanization and industrialization lead to the

emergence of a growing middle class, while at the same time, created city slums filled with the poor and destitute (Mitchell & Salsbury, 2002). With the concentration of citizens of all social classes in the city, it was the first time the extremes of wealth and poverty were truly visible next to one another (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). At the same time, there was a drastic reduction in overall upward mobility into the upper class (Bowles & Gintis, 1975). With the increasing visibility of the gap between the rich and poor, there emerged a movement to create social reform. Educators and politicians began to believe that schools had the ability to solve the nation's societal problems (Urban & Wagoner, 2009).

With the Progressive Era reemerged a push in curricular equality and a new focus on non-academic equality for all students. Reformers leading the way were the pedagogical progressives who believed in providing for the needs of the whole-child. There was an increase in social pressure for schools to do more than just teach (Cremin, 1961). When the compulsory school attendance laws were enforced, suddenly there was an influx of poor students with poor hygiene and tattered clothing. Cremin writes, "Manners, cleanliness, dress, the simple business of getting along together in the schoolroom- these things had to be taught" (1961, p. 20). This was the first evidence of a non-academic responsibility of schools emerging. In progressive schools, like in Gary, Indiana, there was a swimming pool that children swam in everyday that served as the only bath many of the students would receive (Cremin, 1961). Bathing, meals, health and hygiene, these all became new responsibilities of the school, increasing the focus on the societal purpose.

Further Steps Toward Equality

There is an air of hypocrisy that hangs over the history of the societal purpose. Until the end of slavery, "education for all," meant education for all but African-Americans; until *Brown*

v. Board of Education in 1954, “education for all,” meant quality education for whites and segregated education of unequal value for African-Americans. While American touted educational opportunity, an unequal system of education was forming in the shadows, parallel to the white schools. As historians Mitchell and Salsbury note,

By the turn of the century, the two-track system of education for the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ was becoming a reality in spite of the ‘separate but equal’ concept which was constitutionally verified in 1896. Thus it can be said that by the early 1900s the United States generally had subscribed to the notion that a second-class education for children of color was morally okay. Moreover, the education of poor European American children did not fare much better, although they were not segregated by race” (2002, p. 14).

Segregation was not addressed until the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, when the United States Supreme Court famously declared, “Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” (*Brown v. Board*, 1954). This marked the beginning of a new era toward steps at increasing the societal purpose.

In the 1960s, President Lyndon B. Johnson launched the “War on Poverty,” enacting a series of reforms that were meant to eradicate poverty in America. As a former schoolteacher, Johnson specifically focused on the public education system as a way to improve society. Johnson proclaimed, “the answer to all our national problems comes down to a single word: education” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 2). As Mitchell and Salsbury write, with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1964, “It was one of the first times in U.S. history that an American President became seriously concerned about the growing poverty and its effects on the nation’s schools” (2002, p. 18). Policymakers, and educators both, were optimistic about the potential of ESEA, truly believing that poverty could be eradicated through education and that with assistance, the poor could become middle class (Borman, Stringfield, & Slavin, 2001).

Policymakers especially had faith in potential of Title I of ESEA, which would “...provide financial assistance to school districts serving concentrations of poor children for programs meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children” (Borman, Stringfield, & Slavin, 2001, p. 5). Education was thought of as a panacea, and numerous programs were implemented in order to achieve educational equality among students of different backgrounds such as individualized reading, bilingual education, team teaching, “schools without walls,” and learning centers (Mitchell & Salsbury, 2002).

Diane Ravitch writes, “By 1966, racial issues had become a central element in debates about educational policy” (1983, p. 268). In 1966, the U.S. government published The Coleman Report, named for the primary sociologist leading the study, James Coleman. Originally titled “Equality of Educational Opportunity,” the report showed that family background played a significant factor in educational outcomes. Along with ESEA, the federal government began subsidizing free or reduced lunch for children who could not afford one. Providing lunch for children built upon the Progressive Era idea that schools have a non-academic responsibility as well.

The Supreme Court once again added to the discussion of the societal responsibility of schools, determining in *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) that, “there is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum, for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education” (Hoschchild & Scovronick, 2003, p. 151). The Supreme Court’s decision supported The Bilingual Education Act under question, which had been passed in 1968. In this instance we see how bilingual education can be interpreted as an outcome of a societal purpose (in addition to the previously discussed democratic purpose), as an attempt to better the life of students.

Additionally, the federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed in 1975, mandating that the public school doors be opened to handicapped and disabled students for the first time.

Diane Ravitch is extremely critical of the increasing societal purpose during this era, and of anything that took away from the academic purpose. She writes, “As though the schools did not have enough to cope with just trying to keep track of new directives from courts, legislatures, and other governmental agencies, citizen groups complained vigorously about the cost, quality, and nature of public education” (Ravitch, 1983, p. 316). According to Ravitch, it was during the 60s and 70s that there was a “...growing uncertainty about the purpose of education” (1983, p. 316). As she writes, with great imagery,

“...educators forgot how to say ‘no,’ even to the loopier notions of what schools were for. Every perceived need, interest, concern, problem, or issue, found a place in the curriculum or provided a rationale for adding new specialists to the school’s staff. Once the hierarchy of educational values were shattered, once schools lost their compass, hawkers of new wares could market their stock to the schools. Every purveyor of social reform could find a willing customer in schools because all needs were presumed equal in importance, and there was no longer any general consensus on the central purpose of schooling” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 17).

I must wholeheartedly disagree with this assessment. By “central purpose,” Ravitch means academics. She is implying that schools should focus on intellectual training, however the academic purpose has never been the central purpose of American schools. As I have demonstrated, public education in the U.S. is composed of four interwoven purposes that have waxed and waned over time. Schools never lost any one of those purposes; they just focused on others. During the 60s and 70s, it was the societal purpose, which for a brief moment, took center stage. After the 70s, there was a swing back towards excellence and away from equality. Under President Ronald Reagan, resources towards education were reduced. School choice and vouchers were meant to provide equal educational opportunity, but they were, and still are, more

hollow efforts than the programs of the 60s and 70s.

In the late 1980s, there was a small, but significant reform movement that addressed more of the non-academic equality aspect of the societal purpose. Health and social support converged with education to create full-service schools. The Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services and Department of Education best defined a full-service school in 1991: “A full service school integrates education, medical, social, and/or human services that are beneficial to meeting the needs of children and youth and their families on school grounds or in locations that are easily accessible” (Dryfoos, 1995, p. 148).

Full-service schools epitomized the part of the societal purpose that focused on non-academic equality, the part that believed schools played a much larger role than improving academics. During this small, but significant movement, some school buildings incorporated school-based health clinics, family resource centers, community schools, and youth service centers (Dryfoos, 1995). The idea that schools have a responsibility not just to provide services for the students, but for their families as well, is an essential aspect of this purpose. Today, an incarnation of full-service schools exist under the banner of the Harlem Children’s Zone. The idea of Geoffrey Canada’s model is providing services for children and their families from “cradle to college.” This is the societal purpose in action.

The societal purpose has come a long way. Like all of the four purposes, it has transformed and evolved over time. It was just a possibility during the early years of the Republic, and was not made a reality until the Common School Era, the societal purpose only existed in the form of curricular equality. With the Progressive Era came a new focus on non-academic equality of resources. The heyday of the societal purpose though, was the 60s and 70s, where it flourished with ESEA and multiple Supreme Court rulings. The purpose waned in the

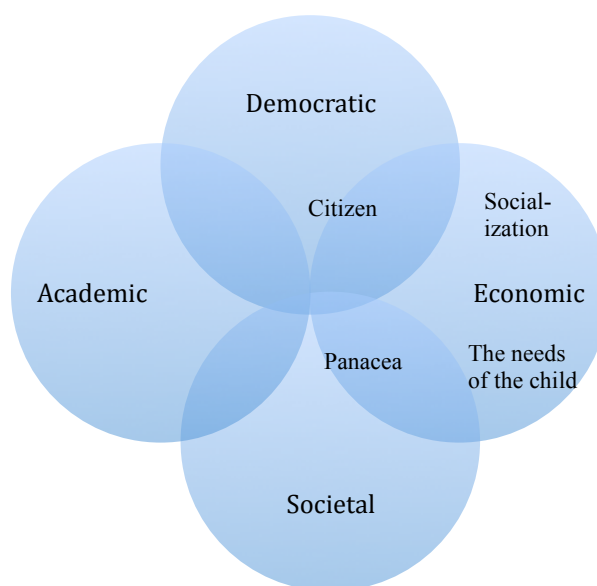
80s though, only to reemerge in full-service schools, a small but significant movement of the 90s. We see its lasting legacy today most explicitly in schools like the Harlem Children's Zone, but an underlying societal purpose exists, however small, in every public school across the nation.

CONCLUSION

Up until now, I have focused on the purposes as separate entities. While I have mentioned briefly where the purposes find common ground, I will now examine these connections in more detail. The purposes of American education have blurred around the edges, becoming closely intertwined in many unexpected ways. On more than one occasion I found myself unsure of whether a particular piece of evidence reinforced one purpose or another. While we like to be able to make clear distinctions and demarcations, it is impossible to do so with educational purposes. There are many instances when these purposes overlap on certain issues. Ignoring how the separate purposes connect would be choosing to ignore the reality of education in America. And so, in this chapter, I will examine the overlapping themes of the purposes. Additionally, I will try to make sense of how the purposes connected and changed together throughout history.

Because of the imagery in the term “overlapping,” I decided that a Venn diagram would best visually represent the four purposes. I believe Figure 1 best captures how the purposes overlap with one another:

Figure 1. Purposes



As seen, there are common concepts that linked the purposes together.

At the core of both the academic purpose and the democratic purpose is the notion of creating “educated citizens.” The democratic purpose includes academics to a certain extent, but only to the extent of academics about American politics, civics, and values. The academic purpose pushes it farther. To be a good citizen, one needs to be able to think and reason, having a strong academic core will ensure this.

The academic purpose does not push socialization as a specific goal. This is where academics break from the democratic purpose, which advocates for socialization and Americanization. I saw this similar overlapping trend of socialization though in the economic purpose. The economic purpose supports socializing students for the future occupations and has many connections to the idea of social control.

However, the economic purpose is not inherently bad, and those who advocate for an economic purpose in school are not automatically terrible people. The truth is that education is irrevocably tied to income in our modern economic system. And there are some people who are genuinely concerned about the “forgotten half” of students who do not go to college and are left without options (Rosenbaum, 2001). In the progressive era, this was the case too. While Ravitch paints the picture of progressives as evil, mal-intentioned capitalists, many actually were humanitarians concerned about children. They advocated for a vocational program because they saw vocational training as a way of helping students succeed who would otherwise drop out. “The needs of the child” were important to these progressives. This is where I see an overlap between the economic purpose and the societal purpose. Concern about the needs of the child is a theme found in both of these purposes.

Ravitch has argued time and time again that schools have lost their mission by focusing

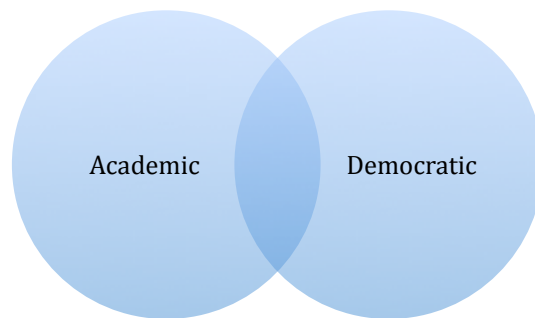
on social problems and issues that are not a school's concern, instead of focusing on academics. She sees these two purposes as unconnected to one another; however, I find them to be intertwined. The societal and academic purpose both find common ground in the belief that schools can solve society's problem. The thought behind both are one in the same: if everyone had a solid education, poverty would be eliminated. If schools provided resources to address poverty, it would break the cycle. This idea of education as a panacea is found an intrinsic belief of both purposes.

The Purposes Together Throughout the Years

It is not enough to just trace the history of each purpose of education. I want to understand how the purposes fit together throughout the years. They exist together, sometimes working in tandem, other times in opposition to one another. When one purpose is focused on, others diminish, but once created, a purpose is almost impossible to eliminate. I wanted to represent this tension and pull between the purposes over the years, so once again, I have chosen a Venn diagram format to trace the history of the purposes in relation to one another. I will begin with the post-Revolutionary War period.

Diane Ravitch argues that the economic purpose was not part of education until the Progressive Era. She argues that there was a "moral purpose" focus until it switched to an economic one. By moral purpose, she means a focus on academics and the right to all citizens to an academic education, which I have interpreted as both the democratic and academic purpose. In her view, the period beginning with the colonial era up until the Common school era, the purposes may have looked like this:

Figure 2. Pre-Common School Era



However, as evidenced, education has always had a connection to the economy. While the economic purpose was small in formal education, it was still visible. The original purposes focused on excellence. Education was geared towards the elite few who attended formal schooling past grammar school. This is how I believe the purposes more accurately looked during this period:

Figure 3. Purposes of the Pre-Common School Era

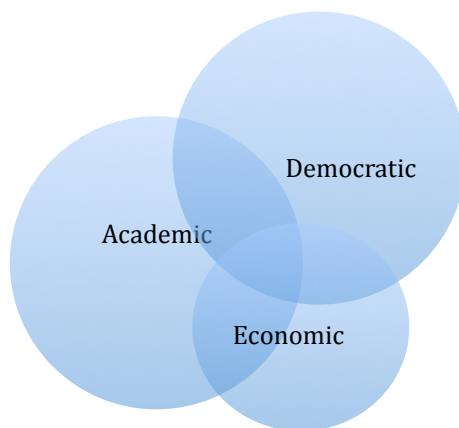
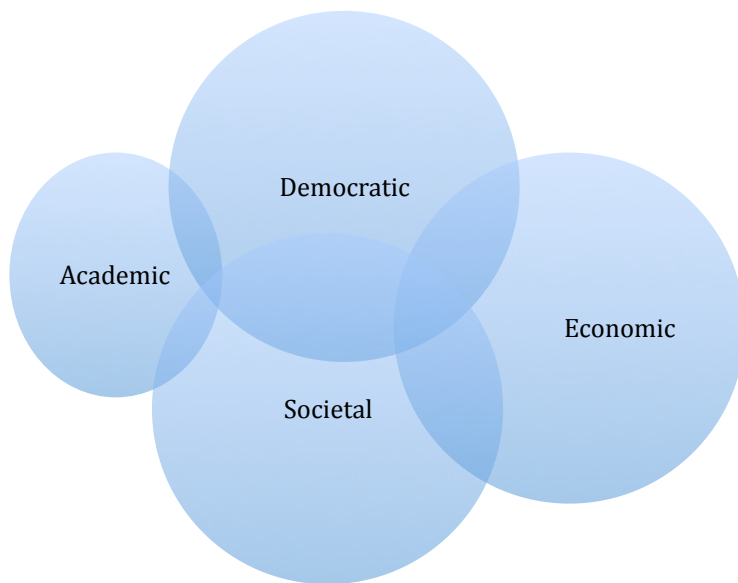


Figure 5. Purposes of the Progressive Era

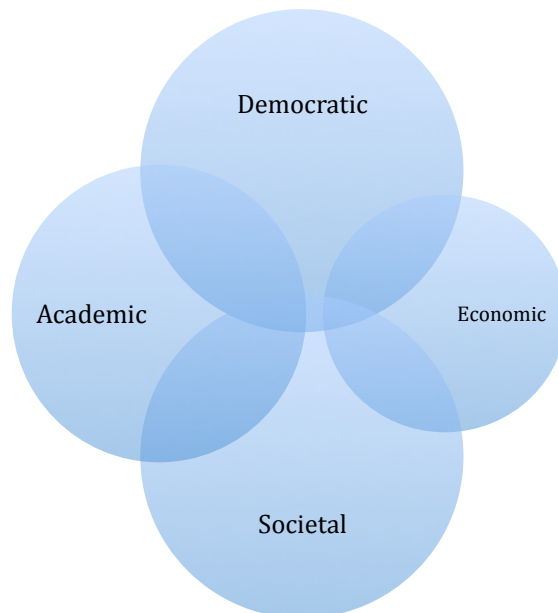


This model did not last though, and there was a backlash against “anti-intellectualism” of the Progressive Era. Even though American education is considered by many to have always been “anti-intellectual,” progressivism came to be considered a taboo word in education. During the 1950s Americans decided to refocus on academics with NDEA in 1958.

Throughout the later half of the 20th century, the competing purposes have waxed and waned in popularity with the civil rights movement and the “War on Poverty” in the 50s and 60s, then refocusing on economic and academic goals after *A Nation at Risk* in the 1980s, shifting back and forth up to the present era.

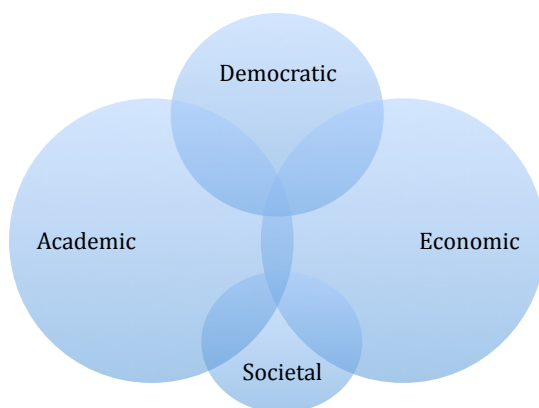
Today, the debate is over choosing between equality and excellence, two competing notions in education. This is where a pattern emerges. When as a nation, schools focus on equality, the two most dominant purposes have been democratic and societal. During these periods, the economic purpose significantly diminishes, and to a lesser extent, so to does the academic.

Figure 6. Equality



Conversely, when schools focus on excellence, it is because the economic and academic purpose have become much more important, while societal, and to a lesser extent democratic (at least the political education part), are less of a priority.

Figure 7. Excellence



In order to have excellence with equality the purposes must be in balance. We have yet to figure out a way to do so. Through my analysis, I have demonstrated that none of the purposes are disappearing. While certain historians have decried the loss of a mission in public schools, I beg to differ. The four purposes – democratic, economic, academic, and societal – exist today in public schools throughout America, seated at desks all in a row, hands raised, waiting to see who will be called on next.

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