

And College Education for All

The educational system in the United States is a mess. Pretty much everyone knows it, but what to do about it is a huge problem.

It's easy to point to various symptoms and declare them the problem. High dropout rates, as high as 50% for some cities or 1/3 for some states, are often pointed out as the problem, but really they're more symptomatic of the issue.

The problem in many ways is that the schools aren't addressing the needs of the students. There is a huge emphasis on sending kids to college, no matter their aptitudes or interests.

A college education is a wonderful thing for many people. It makes great jobs available to them and on average increases their income. But it is not the road to every job, and not every child wishes for a job that requires a college education.

Don't get me wrong. Every child should have the opportunity to choose to go to college. But if their interests and aptitudes are elsewhere, shouldn't that be encouraged?

This can be tough. The trades and vocational skills lack the status of a college education. I doubt there are many people who expect that to change. This is true even though these are vital skills and those who have them can have good careers and be experts in their field.

The educational system has more problems than just how to best teach children. Many of the problems in the schools relate to students' home life. Uninvolved parents are an issue as well, but not one that the schools themselves can easily address.

Perhaps the greatest challenge comes from figuring out how to route children appropriately in school. At what age do children know what they want from school, much less their lives? How can the system be flexible enough to cope with uncertain and changing interests.

Sound impossible?

Absolutely it's impossible as the schools are now, and changing them won't be easy. It will take a long time to figure out how to implement a workable solution. Figuring this out doesn't mean changing everything at once. Better would be to try changing things carefully.

The focus on making college education available to all has driven us to focus almost to exclusion on getting children to the point where they can go to college. But this ignores the needs of many students who are not well served by such a focus. To improve our schools we need to work on serving the needs of all of the children, not just the ones heading to college.

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About the Author

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