

Why Schools Exist

<http://www.wholeschooling.net/WS/WSPncples/WS%200%20purpose%20schls.html>

The education a future educator receives is paramount to teaching success. Through appropriate coursework and field experiences, knowledge and confidence is gained that will help to ensure that the teacher will be successful. A large part of achieving this success relies on having a solid foothold on the historical and philosophical foundations of education while, at the same time, acquiring a personal philosophy that can be applied to the classroom once the teacher enters the profession. This can be attained by examining the purposes of education, the myriad of philosophies offered throughout history, current trends, and the reasons for wanting to become a teacher. As John Dewey (1897) once pointed out in his article *My Pedagogic Creed*, "I believe that every teacher should realize the dignity of his calling; that he is a social servant set apart for the maintenance of proper social order and the securing of the right social growth" (p. 8). Therefore, it is the teacher's responsibility to understand and practice an acceptable philosophy of education. To begin, a brief examination of the purpose of education and why schools exist will be presented from the viewpoint of several prominent historical figures and authors. There is an unlimited amount of information describing the purpose of education. Fortunately, while there are some variations in definition, almost all can agree that it consists of acquiring knowledge, learning skills, developing wisdom, and imparting culture through socialization. Maurice Holt (2004), an Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of Colorado, also believes that education is, "essentially about equipping our children with the ability to act responsibly in a complex society", and further states that it is an "institution" where students have time to discuss, argue, and reflect on knowledge and ideas, and therefore come to understand themselves and the culture "they will inherit" (Holt, p. 1). Along these same lines, Dewey (1897) would argue that education begins at birth, first unconsciously, to the point that the individual is a participant in society (p. 1). What seems to be most recurring in the various descriptions is the emphasis on socialization and acquired knowledge through experience. Another supporter of this view is Minister Louis Farrakhan. In his book *A Torchlight for America*, Farrakhan (1993) describes the purpose of education as a being a means for "self-cultivation" where "the gifts and talents of the individual" are cultivated through the acquisition of knowledge, followed by teaching how to give proper service to self,

family, community, nation, and then to the world (p. 47). It is this writer's opinion that the purpose of an education is to create productive and balanced members of society. Schools exist for a variety of reasons, some of which have already been inherently described above in the purposes of education. In an undergraduate course, it was described to this writer that schools are really a place for children to go because they are unable yet to contribute much to society. If one were to look at the patterns of education over the past couple hundred years it would become evident that the length of time spent in school has been steadily increasing. According to John Santrock (1995), author of the textbook *Life-Span Development*, the increases in enrollment in colleges and high school graduates are more of a result that there are no jobs for teenagers, whereas a hundred years ago, completing high school was not as important because employment was easy to find (p. 318). There are many more factors that contribute to this reasoning, but this is the general concept. Today, however, the existence of schools goes much further beyond the above mentioned reasoning. Most mission statements and visions offered by school districts sum the existence of schools in a couple of sentences. Perhaps the best example can be given by the Santa Fe Public School District's mission that states, "The Santa Fe Public Schools exist to ensure that every student graduates prepared to be a productive citizen of our local and global community (www.sfps.k12.nm.us)." They further describe their "vision" and philosophy of education as providing every student with a high quality education that promotes equality, diversity, and social justice through multiple learning opportunities (www.sfps.k12.nm.us).