

Adam Byrn Tritt on the Florida Today Site: Public Schools Aren't for Just Children or Parents, But Society as a Whole.

Tritt makes the case that the crucial role/goal of the common school is for the collective, the body politic, the social order. High quality education delivered in a collective venue renders, of course, a private benefit, but more so a collective benefit, a common good, a democratic state of affairs.

Tritt's column should be required reading for all federal, state, and local public officials, school board members included.

OPINION

Public schools aren't for just children or parents, but for society as a whole | Opinion

Adam Byrn Tritt, Guest columnist

Tenth grade honors English class. Students were working on a short writing exercise. The stimulus? A quote by Alfred Adler, the famed psychologist and personality theorist who postulated humans are driven by the will to power. The desire to affect their world. "Meanings are not determined by situations, but we determine ourselves by the meanings we give to situations." We have already read similarly in Shakespeare and in "Man's Search for Meaning" by Holocaust survivor, psychiatrist and developer of Logotherapy, Viktor Frankl.

Then, one student raised his hand and asked the purpose of public schools. We all make different connections with material, so questions that seem unconnected really aren't. I asked them for their ideas.

"So we can get jobs."

No.

"So we can have better lives."

Nope.

"So our parents can go to work."

I can't disagree, but let's look at original purposes. Exigence.

"So we can be happy."

Nah.

"To make the world better."

Nope.

I asked, why is it that folks without kids still pay for schools for you guys? Why did Jefferson want free education?

Silence.

Why is it that curriculum isn't up to parents? Why are school boards not elected by just parents? Because schools aren't for their benefit. They aren't for your benefit, either. They are for the collective benefit. Collective. The benefit of our society as a whole, not the individual. The purpose of public education is to ensure the citizens, the voters, have the ability to look critically at facts, and tell fact from fiction, fact from opinion. So voters can make smart decisions based on facts and then become smart officials, and officeholders who make decisions based on what's best for the country and its people. So we can continue to have a real representative democracy.

And pulled out this, from Thomas Jefferson:

"That democracy cannot long exist without enlightenment; That it cannot function without wise and honest officials; That talent and virtue, needed in a free society, should be educated regardless of wealth, birth or other accidental condition; That other children of the poor must thus be educated at common expense."

The sole purpose of our public schools, as described by Jefferson himself, a proponent of free education, is to create an educated electorate able to discern the factual from the fallacious, to think critically regarding the world and information at hand, to synthesize that information and be able to communicate that clearly in their writings, decisions, and, most importantly, at the ballot box.

Eva Brann, writing for the journal "The Imaginative Conservative," went so far as to point out that Jefferson was Hegelian in his thought, looking for citizens to be able to take a thesis and a diathesis and be able to synthesize them into useful information and, then, into practical decisions. To make choices and take actions not simply for the individual good, what is best for the one, but what is best for our country and our democracy.

This philosophic, logical attitude should not be surprising. Jefferson was a natural philosopher and inventor. The Founding Fathers were highly educated and concentrated in the seven liberal arts: grammar, logic, and rhetoric (called the trivium), as well as arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music (the quadrivium). They were well-versed in philosophy and logic, and we know, certainly, this is true of Jefferson. It is this logic, and the purpose of that logic, at the foundation of public education.

Recall Benjamin Franklin and his feelings on our democracy. After the Constitutional Convention in 1787, he was asked, by Ms. Elizabeth Powell, "Doctor, what have we got? A republic or a monarchy?" Franklin answered, "A republic, if you can keep it."

This is the often-used portion of the interaction, but Franklin is often not often quoted in full, as his outlook tended towards the ominous. Powell asked, immediately, "And why not keep it?" Franklin responded: "Because the people, on tasting the dish, are always disposed to eat more of it than does

them good.” Power. Franklin knew once tasting power, those in charge, appointed, elected, in government of business, would want more.

The only bulwark we have against such growing power, such rampant avarice, against the good of our cherished democracy, to keep it in the hands of the people, is the ballot box.

A thriving, healthy democracy requires an electorate which can look critically at information, see the world and problems we face logically, and decide which actions are best for the good of our nation, not for individual comfort or personal pocketbooks. Jefferson believed in the power of that education and, that a citizenry educated so, would make decisions in the best interest of our nation and the common good. This is the spirit in which curriculum should be created and lessons planned. The desired outcome is nothing less than a healthy democracy.

Thus, our public schools are not for the children. They are not for the parents. They are for the country and our democracy. A curriculum, based on literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, and rhetorical skill is necessary for the protection of our republic. If such a curriculum is not to the liking of a parent, there are private schools. If a parent does not like the secular nature of public education, there are religious schools. If there is a book a parent wishes a child not read, they may forbid their child to read it. But they must understand the public school is not made for the good of the individual student, and the parent is not the “customer.”

The customer is our nation. Our democratic republic. If we can keep it.

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[Public schools aren't just for children and parents: Here's why | Opinion \(floridatoday.com\)](https://www.floridatoday.com/story/opinion/2019/08/27/public-schools-arent-just-for-children-and-parents-heres-why/1000000001)