

National Insight: Toward A Clearer Understanding of Preparing High School Students for Passing State Examinations for Graduation in the State of Texas

Yolanda E. Smith
Student
PhD Program in Educational
Leadership
Prairie View A&M University

William Allan Kritsonis, PhD
Professor
PhD Program in Educational
Leadership
Prairie View A&M University

ABSTRACT

To graduate from High School in the state of Texas students must pass the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test. Many states are beginning to administer state exams as requirements for graduation. Schools continue to fall short of the basic philosophy of Existentialism that emphasizes, “starting where the student is”. Education will continue to lose its focus until all students are afforded equality in preparation for the TAKS test.

The original purpose of education was to teach students to read well enough to be able to understand their Bibles (Kritsonis, 2002). We can only wonder how many of our High School students can understand their Bibles. What is today’s philosophy for education? What philosophy does the state of Texas use to ensure that all students are being educated equally? Has the true purpose of education changed or is it a way of discriminating?

The purpose of this article is to discuss an educational philosophy and how it could change education as we see it today. Our basic philosophy of education is as follows: *Education is meant to produce well-rounded citizens. In order for a student to be well-rounded he/she must obtain knowledge, character, and ethics. All students are capable of learning and should be free to do so. The success of a student is dependent on the*

student, the school, and the parent and or guardian. The success of our nation is determined by the success of a child's education.

The basic core of education is providing students with knowledge and character. In defining knowledge we tend to lean towards the Existentialist and Pragmatist philosophies. Epistemologically students should obtain and demonstrate knowledge acquisition. Students should be taught how to make decisions based on analyzing data and through their personal experiences. Students master the ability to analyze through understanding mathematics. A central purpose of mathematics is to teach students how to make decisions. Texas schools and students would benefit more if they would staff math experts in all middle schools. The metaphysics of education is too often in middle schools where mathematics is deemphasized. Students struggle in high school because of their lack of knowledge in mathematics. It is through mathematics that students can learn how to read, reason, think logically, analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and make assessments.

The United States must move closer to offering what most of the world considers demanding mathematics for their middle school students (Schmidt, 2004). In order for all states to ensure that all students come to the testing table equally, all states must have the same curriculum for each grade level. If the No Child Left Behind Act is to be realized then the United States must take a closer look at how other countries have the same common standards for all students in 1st grade through at least 8th grade (Schmidt, McKnight, Cogan, Jakwerth, and Houang, 1999). Curriculum taught throughout the 8th grade is the foundation of basic knowledge. Like a house, if the foundation is not set correctly then it will be impossible to build on it. Students struggle in high school because their foundation in arithmetic was not firmly grounded. Instead of high school teachers building on the foundation of arithmetic by introducing mathematics, they spend a lot of time either re-teaching the foundations of arithmetic or the students get left behind. High school objectives for mathematics and other subjects are not satisfied.

In order for educators to meet the children where they are, we must allow them the freedom to learn in an environment that is conducive to their learning style preference. Many practitioners had reported significantly higher achievement among previously at-risk and underachieving students after their learning-style preferences had been accommodated by style-responsive instructional strategies. The gains were reported for (1) elementary students (Andrews, 1990; Klavas, 1993; Lemmon, 1985; Stone, 1992; Turner, 1993), (2) secondary students (Brunner and Majewski, 1990; Elliot, 1991; Gadwa and Griggs, 1985; Harp and Orsak, 1990; Orsak, 1990a, 1990b) and (3) college students (Clark-Thayer, 1987; Mickler and Zippert, 1987; Nelson, Dunn, Griggs, Primavera, Fitzpatrick, Bacilous, and Miller, 1993; Lenehan, Dunn, Ingham, Signer, and Murray, 1994). School administrators and state officials need to use research findings and recommendations in developing guidelines for developing their curriculum to ensure all students' academic needs are being successfully met.

In discussing character, what does it mean to educate the whole child? Educating the whole child means teaching them more than reading and mathematics. For the axiology of education we could look at the history of education and find Thomas Jefferson's 1818 Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia, in the "objects of primary education". Jefferson listed such qualities as morals, understanding of duties to neighbors and country, knowledge of rights, and intelligence and faithfulness in social relations

(Noddings, 2005). We are not staying that educators are solely responsible for the development of the whole child. In schools, educators and administrators have to develop new ways to get communities and parents more actively involved.

Schools are the heartbeat of every community. It is the job of the administration to solicit the support of its community. The student will benefit more if the community provided volunteers, advocates, business support and resources. In doing so the community will help in meeting the child where he/she is as a person.

In conclusion, "the principle goal of education in the schools should be creating men and women who are capable of doing new things, not simply repeating what other generations have done". (Jean Piaget) It is imperative that we spend more money and attention creating a whole child that is knowledgeable and has ethical character. Investing wisely in today's education will yield major dividends for all of us in the United States of America.

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