

4-20-2022

Creating a Generalized Michigan School Constitution

Kurstin K. Frank
Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/honorsprojects>



Part of the [Education Commons](#), and the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

ScholarWorks Citation

Frank, Kurstin K., "Creating a Generalized Michigan School Constitution" (2022). *Honors Projects*. 870.
<https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/honorsprojects/870>

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Research and Creative Practice at ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Creating a Generalized Michigan School Constitution

Kurstin K. Frank

Department of Education, Grand Valley State University

HNR499: Senior Project

Professor Kevin Holohan

April 20, 2022

Creating a Generalized Michigan School Constitution

Over the past couple centuries, multiple scholars, philosophers, and officials of all kinds have researched the basis, purpose, and structure of schools. Through all the changes and developments that education has gone through in the past, Noddings (2016) explains that there remains four central questions that philosophers and theorists of education ponder: what should be the purpose of education, who should be educated, should education tailor to individuals, and what role should the state play within education. As of recently, the second question seems to be unanimously answered by a declaration that every person should be educated. Spring (2020) argued that this is due in part to collective agreement that everyone in society deserves an education but is also indicated in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which declares that “all students/persons/children have the right to education” (p. 129). The other three questions still loom over the educational environment. While many people today hold different ideas, opinions, and beliefs about education, ultimately, there can be no steadfast, concrete answer to these philosophical questions. These questions have remained relevant and prominent in education for a long time and will continue to be answered in different ways depending on the changing circumstances of our society and knowledge. Although these questions cannot be answered indefinitely, there have been multiple theories created by educational officials, philosophers, and theorists that attempt to provide structures, policies, and answers to how education and schools should function.

Through the centuries since education’s birth, educational theorists have created and devised multiple forms of education and declared their benefits and downfalls. These theories each provide a different lens with which to ponder education, such as Educational Progressivism, Essentialism, Perennialism, and many others. The theories and movements within education

reflect the differing ideals of the purpose and structure of education and schools, concerning what adults, officials, and scholars believe to be best for students and for preparing students to become democratic citizens and acceptable adults after their educational career. For the purpose of this project, the educational theories that follow are some of the most common and impactful ideas about how to structure education and what the purpose of school should be. After all, as “thoughtful educators,” we must “wonder how many budding Einsteins experience failure in today’s schools because the prevailing methods do not meet their needs” (Noddings, 2016, p. 18).

One of the most popular educational theories is known as Progressive Education. Not only is Progressive Education particularly prominent in the world of education, but so is the philosopher behind the theory. Hopkins (2017) describes that John Dewey is coined with being the “father of progressive education” (p. 60). Dewey has also been “hailed as the savior of American education by those who welcome greater involvement of students in their own educational planning and activity” (Noddings, 2016, p. 24). However, interest in Dewey’s work has “waxed and waned” over the years as educational theorists and philosophers fluctuate “between ignoring and adoring him” (Noddings, 2016, p. 24). Dewey’s theories were treated in such a way over time due in part to his ideas about growth in education. Often Dewey spoke of education as “synonymous with growth,” to which many people argued was not a concrete aim for education (Noddings, 2016, p. 26). These philosophers and educational theorists questioned what the concept of growth in Dewey’s ideas were working towards, because most people think of education as “an enterprise that has a specific aim,” such as to attain life skills or the knowledge to obtain an esteemed job (Noddings, 2016, p. 26). However, in Dewey’s perspective, “growth tends toward more growth” and “we must not make the concept rigid by specifying its

direction” (Noddings, 2016, p. 26). In other words, Dewey argued that we must not lay a rigid end goal for education, because every person acquires knowledge specific for their own individual progress and path in life.

Progressive Education emerged as a reaction to the traditional style of teaching. The conventional style of teaching in the early years of education was lecture-based, teacher-oriented, and focused heavily on memorization. While society faced multiple social uproars and new ideas surrounding educational foundations and purposes, Progressive Education sought to complement the changing times. Kennedy (2019) describes Progressive Education as a philosophy of teaching “children how to think rather than relying on rote memorization” (para. 2). Progressive Education focuses on learning by doing, critical thinking, having the teacher as a facilitator, and on school activities being connected to the life experiences of students (Kennedy, 2019). With the teacher as a facilitator, or guide, students can question the world around them, hold discussions with other students and the teacher to gain perspectives and ideas, as well as work individually or in groups. Progressive Education also stressed the importance of involving students in many hands-on projects and activities, as they would involve the student in the learning process more effectively than lecturing. In short, Progressive Education rejected the traditional structures of schooling and instead prescribed an involved, interactive, inclusive, and meaningful educational setting for supporting students in preparing themselves for their own individual lives.

Another prevalent theory of education, that is closely associated to and influenced by art movements and artistic expression, is Perennialism. Perennialism in education plays a serious rival role with Progressive Education, as philosophers and other professionals viewed Progressive Education as a “cultural regression” (Mosier, 1951, p. 80). Perennialism is rooted in

the idea that certain universal truths about life can be found by looking at different cultures and prominent notions throughout history (*What is Perennialism?*, 2018). An education based upon Perennialism and its beliefs centers around classic or traditional pedagogies, works, philosophers, theorists, authors, inventors, and so on for their ability to “transcend time” and never become outdated (*What is Perennialism?*, 2018, para. 1). The classic works of Plato, Einstein, and Thomas Edison, for example, would be the foundations of education and schooling under this theory. The goal of Perennialism is to “teach students to think rationally” and critically (*What is Perennialism?*, 2018, para. 2). In the educational setting of Perennialism, classrooms are teacher-oriented, lecture-based, organized, well-disciplined, and promote lifelong learning. Skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening are emphasized in a Perennial Education classroom to prepare students for studying literature, history, and philosophy (*What is Perennialism?*, 2018). Overall, the educational theory of Perennialism aims to teach students the basic skills needed to reflect upon the past as we embark on the future, because after all, in the eyes of Perennialists, “the more things change, the more they stay the same” (*What is Perennialism?*, 2018, para. 3).

While some theorists attempt to hold onto the ideas of the past, other theorists attempt to hold onto the structures of long-ago because of their assuredness and traditional effectiveness. In the educational theory backed by Essentialism, school structures are based on those processes, subject areas, and methods of traditional schooling and focus on the generality of education. Essentialism ideals are founded upon just what the name signifies, the “essentials”. Truly, Essentialism is a “state of mind which recognizes the role of definite subject matter at the core of the educational program” (Brickman, 1959, p. 430). Theorists of Essentialism claim that the core subjects in today’s schools—math, language arts, science, and social studies—are crucial in

guiding new generations to attain the basic skills they will need to function within a society.

Classrooms that embrace the theory of Essentialism are teacher-centered, lecture-based, and aim to teach students about those core subjects to transmit basic skills. This educational structure is founded upon the thought that the purpose of education is merely to train individuals to become part of society, fulfilling needed jobs in the economy and effectively participating in citizenship responsibilities. In summary, education in the perspective of the Essentialism theory maintains the importance of core subjects, discipline, and attaining the mere basic skills needed to function in real life.

While essentialism focuses on conveying the basic skills individuals need in their lives, the theory of Democratic Education emphasizes the ways in which education transmits democratic ideals and skills needed to participate in society and assume the responsibilities of a citizen. However, this educational theory also considers the ideals of democracy by bringing students into equal standpoints as their teachers and facilitators. The four essentials of democratic education are freedom, discussion, involvement, and equality. However, this structure of education also fosters the importance of cultural diversity, as well as the importance of teaching children “to be active, engaged, critically aware, self-assured, self-directed, and self-disciplined citizens of a democracy” (Thayer-Bacon, 2012, p. 4). In this structure of education, students and teachers have an equal vote in the decisions about their learning and social lives. Democratic education classrooms are student-centered, focused on problem-solving and critical thinking, and empower students in their learning careers. A Democratic Education is one that involves students in decision-making and prepares them to be assertive, active, and informed citizens ready to be involved in their political society after their educational career.

As theories of education cater toward different goals and skills of the individual's life, the theory of education known as Unschooling throws nearly all the traditional ideas about education out the window. Through the years, many theorists and other adults pondered the effects and benefits of schooling, but "not all agreed that formal learning was the answer" (Draxler, 2014, p. 39). From this perspective is part of where the theory or structure of Unschooling emerged. Theorists that support Unschooling believe that children are hard-wired to learn due to their inherent curiosity, passion, and interest in everything around them (*Unschooling*, n.d., para. 2). In supporters of Unschooling's perspective, learning is a side-effect of playing, pursuing interests, and developing passions (*Unschooling*, n.d., para. 4). Unschooling is often only seen within home-schooling and other non-traditional educational settings and determine that learning does not occur through teaching but instead through the mind of the child. Unschooling, while not a conventional form or structure of education, is catered towards providing individual children with support and encouragement in learning through their own interests, curiosities, and passions in their lives.

While education theories are plenty and cover many different thoughts about how education should be structured, all these theories and discussions have one thing in common. That is, something that they commonly lack. What most of these theorists do not consider is the desired structure of schools, purpose of education, and school environments from a student's viewpoint (Joseph, 2006). By including students in the discussions and creation of theories around education, teachers and officials would be able to find margins of error and be better equipped with an understanding of students' needs. Students would also have more agency in their educational careers, which could empower students and encourage them to strive for a successful education. After all, students know how they best learn individually, and the

structures, policies, and purpose of school and education should align with what helps all individual students thrive.

Central Focus

While learning about the various educational theories, I noticed the lack of student opinion present within them. I wondered why no one has thought to ask students what they need before and was quite frankly outraged at the fact that adults have consistently assumed they knew what was best for children. After all, when designing any organization or institution the creators must survey the needs of the targeted audience in order to develop those structures to be sound, purposeful, and adapted for benefitting that intended audience. I also know that while I was a student in high school or even earlier, I knew how I best learned within the classroom and could tell the teacher what I needed for further support in my educational endeavors. I would have thrived within my education if I had a say in the way things were structured, and I know other students would benefit from a more involved environment in their schools. Students know what they need and want within their education, and they also know what tools and structures best support them in their own endeavors. Because of this lack in listening to students on the part of theorists, officials, and adults, I pondered how we could bring student opinions and ideas into the conversation surrounding school purpose, structure, and policy. Then it came to me: when people wanted their voice to be heard in the past, they declared their needs, wants, and opinions within documents of purpose, such as the declaration of independence. By gaining student opinions and arranging their statements into declarations, I decided to create a makeshift constitution for public schools in Michigan from the students' viewpoint.

Methodology

The purpose of this project is to create a Generalized Michigan School Constitution from students' viewpoints that declares what a sample of students want to see within their schools and school structure in Michigan. The project was designed to occur between September of 2021 through April of 2022, beginning with preliminary research and moving into interviews, and afterwards analyzing the data and supporting it with further research. While the preliminary research went well, the interview portion of this project proved difficult. Through multiple amendments and quick fixes, I was finally able to reach out to a multitude of students from various public high schools within Michigan. Initially, the goal was to interview roughly 25 students to gain familiarity of student needs and perspectives and represent a varied sample of the experiences of high school students across Michigan. Over the course of this project, however, I was only able to interview 17 students for roughly 15-30 minutes from schools across Michigan. These students represented a total of nine different public high schools in Michigan and were almost evenly spread between grades 9-12. The interviews took place over Zoom to avoid any pandemic-related excursions or obstacles, and a consent/assent form was filled out by a parent/guardian and the student before the interviews took place.

During these interviews, I asked specific questions of each student concerning their opinion on certain structures and policies, what their favorite part of school is, and whether they need or want specific accommodations within school. After and while interviewing students, I wrote notes on the students' answers and paraphrased individual viewpoints of what the students want and need within their schools. After the interviews, I compiled all data to form a general list of school attributes that would accommodate students across Michigan. This data compilation occurred over the course of a couple weeks. I first wrote out generalized statements of what I had

taken notes on. For example, 15 out of 17 students declared that teachers should teach lessons in multiple ways because not every student learns the same way. As this was a view that most of the students interviewed had affirmed, I carefully wrote out a statement that summarized the student viewpoint and added it to the constitution in progress. I did this with all the notes I took while interviewing students, and then organized them into categories. Once I had solidified categories for the constitution, I researched the format of the constitution and of other legal documents resembling the constitution to decide how I would format the Generalized Michigan School Constitution. I used a font that looked like the constitution's writing and inserted a generalized statement explaining the conditions and source of the constitution for the beginning and ending sections. Then, I placed my declarations with their designated categories into the document and positioned it after my preliminary research.

Once the constitution was polished, I began to delve into pondering which theory or theories would best fit the opinions of the students I interviewed, and from there addressed how the theories would accommodate the students' declarations. After that I elaborated on the other assertions that students had brought up within the interviews and addressed the problems they brought up with supporting evidence from other sources and experiences. Once I addressed all that the students had to say, I concluded the project with a discussion of how our schools can accommodate and empower their students to ensure that they are supported, confident, and successful within their educational careers. What follows are the constitution and analysis portions of this project.

A Generalized Michigan School Constitution
For Michigan Public Schools

We the students of various Michigan public schools agree that the current school structures, policies, and purpose are not sufficient to meet our individual and collective needs. In order to accommodate and support us as students within your schools, we declare the following structures, policies, and purpose of education are to be implemented within our schools.

In Terms of Student Voice:

- Students need to have more agency in their educational careers.
- Teachers, facilitators, and other educational officials need to stop assuming what students want or need.
- Teachers, officials, and students should work together to discuss what the policies, structures, and purpose of school should be and look like.

In Terms of Structure:

- Schools need to look less like jails or prisons and more like buildings of opportunity, innovation, and acceptance.
- Classrooms need to be comfortable and not rigid, boring spaces.
- Classrooms need to have a positive atmosphere that shows students they are accepted, protected, supported, and encouraged.
- The teacher should act as a guide for the students, not a dictator.
- Courses should be more hands-on, interactive, and inclusive so all children can be involved in the learning process.
- Students should be encouraged to pursue what they are interested in or passionate about.
- Students should be allowed to work in groups more often to learn from each other and share ideas and perspectives.

- There should be designated, comfortable and somewhat private spaces for students to go if they need a mental break during the school day.
- There needs to be better communication and relationships between students and the staff at school.
- Teachers need to be more on top of their emails and in helping students outside of class.
- There needs to be a mental health program or club for students to be able to go to when they need help and not have the fear of being judged.
- Schools need to offer more clubs and after-school programs for students to be involved in.
- There needs to be better monitoring of bullying within school buildings, and tangible consequences for those who bully others.
- Having conferences with teachers, faculty, and students would allow for better communication and could help to accommodate students in their needs.
- Teachers should work together to make lessons and units that are consistent in grading policies, pace, format, and expectations to make it clear and consistent for struggling students juggling multiple classes at once.
- Teachers need to have and show confidence in all their students.
- Teachers should have office hours within high school during the school day for students to be able to ask questions outside of class but not inhibit their after-school activities.
- Schools need to have more resources for students that otherwise would not be able to have access to them.

In Terms of Curriculum:

- Schools need to provide more courses that focus on real-life applications and skills, such as how to file your taxes, buy a house, invest in the stock market, and handling money.

- School and its curriculum should be tailored to students and their individual needs, interests, and passions.
- There should be less of an emphasis on core subjects; specifically, not requiring students to learn information that will not be readily applicable to their lives as adults.
- Students should be able to work together alongside their teachers and facilitators to create a curriculum and educational plan that is specifically catered to each individual student.
- Lessons should be taught by teachers in a variety of ways, with multiple representations and explanations of the material in order to accommodate each individual student's preferred and most susceptible way of learning.
- There needs to be either less homework or more time for students to begin working on homework in class in case they need help or do not understand the material. This accommodates those students who are involved in other after-school activities, those who have disruptive home lives, or do not have reliable help from others while they are home.
- Schools should have more hands-on, interactive, and inclusive learning experiences so students can readily apply what they are learning to practical situations.
- Students should not have to take tests or quizzes on material that was not covered in class.
- Standardized tests are not an effective way to measure student accomplishments and often harm students that do not do well under extreme pressure. Standardized tests need to either be altered or ceased, and teachers should not sort students based on these tests.
- There needs to be more interactive projects for students to apply their knowledge in real-life situations.
- There should be less big quizzes and tests during a term; with an excessive amount of them, students feel more pressured to only perform the material for the test and not to fully understand and apply the knowledge elsewhere.

- Teachers need to provide ample practice problems, practice tests/quizzes, and warm-up questions before administering a test or quiz so that students know what to expect and are mentally prepared to take them.
- Teachers should not give students pop-quizzes or surprise tests that are heavily weighted because they do not measure a student's best work and some students do not operate well under the immense stress of a surprise assessment.
- Teachers need to emphasize the material's application to their individual lives rather than emphasize a grade.
- Students should be given more time during school hours to collaborate with and learn from others.

In Terms of Grades:

- Homework should either not be included in the grade or be based on effort or attempt to finish it.
- Grading policies should be structured so that students cannot dig themselves into a hole that they cannot climb out of.
- There needs to be a consistency in grading across all teachers of at least a grade or school so that students are not trying to juggle multiple different expectations and measurements of their learning from all their teachers.
- Teachers need to better prepare and accommodate their students for exams if they administer them and make them a major part of their grade.
- Teachers need to be more approachable and willing to help students who appear to struggle with their grades or the material in class.

- Students should be given an opportunity to learn from their mistakes on assignments and earn back at least a portion of the points they missed if they demonstrate that they learned from those mistakes.
- More consistent assignments that are returned on time in order for students to be able to track their learning, keep their grades up, and be able to assess where they need more practice.
- Teachers need to be consistent with the feedback they give their students so that they can learn from their mistakes.

In Terms of Policies:

- Attendance policies need to be more accommodating of students needs and the other events and situations occurring in their private life.
- There should not be policies on how often or whether a student can use the restroom unless it becomes a problem for their learning. Students are human, and using the restroom is a basic human necessity that should not have to be regulated unless the liberty is clearly being taken advantage of by the student.
- School needs to be a place of opportunity and choices; not of limitations of what you can and cannot delve into.
- Schools need to be accommodating of students' sleep and rest by having school start later in the morning. This allows for students to be well-rested and accommodates those students who are involved in many other activities after school.
- Disruptive behavior and the consequences for them need to be consistent, explanatory, and fair across all severities.

In Terms of the Purpose of Education:

- The purpose of education should be to guide all students to opportunities for their individual future adult lives.
- Education should give students the tools and knowledge they need to live easier and more efficient lives, in every aspect of real-life.
- Education should provide paths for students to choose from that are tailored to what they want to do for a career as an adult.
- Education should provide the student opportunities to discover, inquire, and discuss topics of interest and topics they are not aware of.
- School should also be about making memories, friends, relationships, and to grow as a social human being.
- Education should be purposed to make individuals a better person and to help them build their own future.
- The purpose of education should not be just to 'pass'.

We, the students of various Michigan schools declare that these statements are sound and logical, and reflect what we would like to see within our school structures, policies, and educational purpose.

Analysis of Data

The educational theory or structure that is closest to accommodating all these needs and desires of students in Michigan would be a combination of progressive education and democratic education. With the role of teachers being facilitators or guides within both progressive education and democratic education, students would feel more encouraged to pursue their interests, passions, and feel more comfortable asking questions. In both theories, the classrooms are structured to be student-centered, comfortable, and supportive to help foster autonomy and collaboration. These theories also emphasize critical thinking, problem-solving, inquiry, and experiential, hands-on learning and activities which would help students to be more involved, excited, and interested in their courses. The inclusion of students in the decision-making process within democratic education also gives students more agency in their own educational careers, allowing them to be able to pursue a curriculum that adheres to their interests, passions, and curiosities. Overall, combining these two educational theories and implementing them within schools across Michigan would aid students in various ways, and fulfill many, if not all, their educational needs, and desires.

While combining these two theories of education, our teachers, facilitators, and educational officials also need to rethink other areas of school. Numerous students commented on the lack of mental health and supportive programs within their schools, which is a dangerous feat for our vulnerable, developing students. Today, more than ever before, our younger generations are dealing with tragedies, hardships, bullying, and other ails that can detrimentally affect our students' well-being and mental health. This detail needs to be understood in today's educational world, and schools need to provide more resources, programs, and other organizations that will help and support them. Because education "is essential to the

development of cultures,” the environment and culture within school needs to be one that is accepting, encouraging, and supporting of students—otherwise we will continue to create a culture of judgement and discouragement (Mufune, 2017, p. 25). Programs such as mental health club, quiet areas for students to talk to a professional, and one-on-one counselling could prove to be useful in our public schools. After all, if students can not feel safe and supported within their schools, they simply will not be able to learn with their full potential.

Another big issue that students have noted upon in the data is grading policies. In terms of grades, we can learn a thing or two from Feldman (2019) when he stated that “grading remains a central feature of nearly every student’s (and teacher’s, and parent’s) school experience” (p. 17). The traditional grading practices, those that emerged alongside the beginning of education over one hundred years ago, also continue to be a central feature of grading policies in public schools (Feldman, 2019). Traditional grading, specifically the 0-100 grading scale, stifles risk-taking, supports the commodity of grades, hides information, invites biases, provides misleading information, and demotivates and disempowers the student (Feldman, 2019). With this grading scale and the typical policies behind it, “students don’t feel trust in their teachers, only the pressure to conceal weaknesses and avoid errors” (Feldman, 2019, p. 30). What is worse, “the measure of learning,” which is “contrary to the curiosity and joy that students enter school with” just ends up becoming “a race to earn the most points” and not to learn and apply the skills and information taught (Feldman, 2019, p. 34). Schools need to reconsider their grading scales and policies to reflect an understanding, support, and accurate measure of their growth as students and in learning the material at hand. Otherwise, we will simply continue to discourage students and blatantly tell them they are stupid because of some grading areas that they supposedly lack in. What could be considered even more cruel, however,

are the standardized tests that students are forced to participate in frequently in their educational careers.

Introduced into education at the turn of the century, standardized tests have become a huge part of public education. Think about the following: “4.0, 36, 2400—these numbers define the education of the American student” (Friend, 2012, p. 222). What is worse, these numbers do not even need to be explained. Any student, teacher, and parent will know what these numbers mean simply because these numbers have been used in recent years to describe the accomplishment and intelligence of the American student. This “score-crazy world in which we’ve grown up holds that one test is a sufficient way to gauge intelligence,” and students, parents, and even sometimes teachers alike find this to be particularly problematic (Friend, 2012, p. 222). Often, these tests are characterized as measuring students’ college-preparedness and skills within the core subjects. However, “if you were to review the actual items in a typical standardized achievement test, you’d find many items whose correct answer depends heavily on the socioeconomic status of a child’s family” (Spring, 2020, p. 244). There are also many items that measure the “verbal, quantitative, or special aptitudes that children inherit at birth” (Spring, 2020, p. 244). Such things are better suited for intelligence tests and genetics tests, not a measure of their capabilities and development within school. As well as having unfair questions, these tests are often hours long and require students to sit completely still and silent for ridiculous time frames. Students need to move, naturally. Also, not every person performs well under an immense amount of stress. Standardized tests, whether they are sure to mean well or not, often only place a pressure and ultimatum to students when it comes to their growth and supposed “college-readiness”.

Probably the biggest issue that students see within their schools today is the lack of opportunities for them to engage in courses that they are truly interested in. While students recognize the importance of core subjects such as English, Science, Social Studies, and Math, they also desire a broad variety of other classes to be offered for their various interests. Granted, this liberty of having a wide range of courses to choose from are often only abilities of larger schools with larger staff crews. However, providing students with a range of extra-curricular activities, diverse elective options, and courses on managing adult responsibilities such as finances and home owning are a consistent trend of desire across all students of the various Michigan schools interviewed. By incorporating different courses such as home economics, woodshop, and those that focus on teaching students about finances and economic skills, schools will better equip students to become adults themselves and assume the responsibilities of a member in the society they live. Until schools begin to implement more opportunities such as these within their curricula, students will continue to feel cheated and unprepared to become the adults they aspire to be after their educational careers.

The most salient problem that students uncovered in this data, however, was by far the lack of effectiveness and misguidance that the purpose of school conveys. In her article, Miller (2014) describes that public education is not a “neutral process of imparting practical knowledge and technical skills,” but rather a “primary institutional means of reproducing community and national identity for succeeding generations of Americans” (p. 131). While most educational facilities declare that their purpose in educating students is to equip them with the basic skills that they need to function within society. However, many people and even students see the correlation between education and “social control/transformation” and that the school is a “prime institutional means through which to effect cultural identity on a national scale” (Miller, 2014, p.

124). By utilizing public education as a tool for social control and creating efficient and “trained” citizens, schools are only treating students as if they were mere objects to form instead of vastly different individuals. This situation is in part due to the transition in American thought from the “concept of ‘protected’ childhood to ‘prepared’ childhood— ‘protected’ childhood focuses on the happiness and well-being of the child. The ‘prepared’ childhood is when attention is given the child’s future as an adult rather than concern about the child’s immediate happiness” (Spring, 2020, p. 8). Rather than ensuring happiness and enjoyment of life in their childhood, schools, adults, and officials today are merely crafting little adults as soon as they possibly can. This mindset is in part due to the societal obsession and agenda of creating and molding our children into well-trained citizens to uphold our society’s institutions. After all, the “goals of American schools are politically determined” (Spring, 2020, p. 4). Unless we begin to think about children deserving the “protected” childhood described, children are only going to become robotic, blinded citizens that do not know how to express themselves and make their own ideas and conclusions about things. Schools will continue to fail their students as well if we continue purposing education to create perfect, conformist citizens. What we need are unique, talented, and intelligent individuals, not robots.

There are many ways for schools to begin involving students in the decision-making and discussions on educational structures, policies, and purpose. Whether some believe students know what they need or not, students should be included in their institution’s endeavors and decisions. After all, the political principle states that “when you are going to be affected, directly or indirectly, by a decision, you should stand in some relationship to the decision-making process” (Joseph, 2006, p. 35). Students should be included in the decision-making processes and discussions within their schools, because leaving them out could “only reduce the chances of

achieving a successful change effort,” and, “if excluded, students may resist and challenge the effort” (Joseph, 2006, p. 35). Some examples of activities and positions that students could hold are student-run focus or leadership groups, designated educational systems designers, researchers, and even having students complete writing exercises or forums reflecting on their educational experiences and their feelings about them (Joseph, 2006). By implementing positions for students to exercise their voice and agency within their schools, students will be more motivated, engaged, and empowered in their educational careers and schools will have fully supportive, successful, and thriving environments and outcomes.

Through implementing student-voice activities and inclusion, schools today can better understand their students and meet their needs, desires, and curiosities. As for the structures, policies, and purpose of education, schools need to listen to students and possibly adopt values and schemas described within both progressive and democratic education so that our students can truly thrive. If we don't listen to the students, education has already failed those students. Because after all, students are the only individuals who know exactly what they need and want within their school to be supported in their own learning. The purpose of education is not merely to train individuals into cookie-cutter citizens, or at least it should not be. What education's purpose should be is to aid children and adults alike with attaining the skills and knowledge they will need to live efficient and comfortable lives.

References

- Draxler, A. (2014). International Investment in Education for Development: Public Good or Economic Tool? In G. Carbonnier, M. Carton, & K. King (Eds.), *Education, Learning, Training: Critical Issues for Development* (pp. 37–56). Brill.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w76wjj.11>
- Brickman, W. W. (1959). The Essentialist Spirit in Education. *The Clearing House*, 33(7), 430–430. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30190940>
- Feldman, J. (2019). *Grading for equity: What it is, why it matters, and how it can transform schools and classrooms*. Corwin.
- Friend, N. (2012). Reflecting on My Progressive Education. *Schools: Studies in Education*, 9(2), 217–226. <https://doi.org/10.1086/667918>
- Hopkins, E. A. (2017). John Dewey and Progressive Education. *The Journal of Educational Thought (JET) / Revue de La Pensée Éducative*, 50(1), 59–68.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26372390>
- Joseph, R. (2006). The Excluded Stakeholder: In Search of Student Voice in the Systemic Change Process. *Educational Technology*, 46(2), 34–38.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44429286>
- Kennedy, R. (2019, May 30). *Progressive education: How children learn*. ThoughtCo. Retrieved September 27, 2021, from <https://www.thoughtco.com/progressive-education-how-children-learn-today-2774713>
- Miller, A. (2014). Unsited to Age Group: The Scandals of Children’s Literature. *College Literature: A Journal of Critical Literary Studies*, 41(2), 120–40. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.gvsu.edu/10.1353/lit.2014.0025>.

- Mosier, R. D. (1951). Perennialism in Education. *History of Education Journal*, 2(3), 80–85.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3659188>
- Mufune, P. (2017). Education and democracy: some general conceptual issues. In E. M. Amukugo (Ed.), *Democracy and Education in Namibia and Beyond: A Critical Appraisal* (pp. 24–39). University of Namibia Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvh8r3gn.8>
- Noddings, N. (2016). *Philosophy of Education*. Fourth ed., Westview Press.
- Spring, Joel. (2020). *American Education*. 19th ed., Routledge.
- Thayer-Bacon, B. (2012). Maria Montessori, John Dewey, and William H. Kilpatrick. *Education and Culture*, 28(1), 3–20. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5703/educationculture.28.1.3>
- Unschooling*. Unschoolersorg. (n.d.). Retrieved April 2, 2022, from <https://unschoolers.org/what-is-unschooling/>
- What is Perennialism?* Edupedia. (2018, June 13). Retrieved September 26, 2021, from <https://www.theedadvocate.org/edupedia/content/what-is-perennialism/>