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Instructional Leadership:  
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### The Purpose of Schools

Education is ever-changing. Laws come and go, standards are updated and added to, new curriculum is introduced. One thing in education that does not change, however, is the importance of the child. Preparing the student for life after school remains at the top of the list for educators. The problem educators and schools face, however, is how to provide the best education for the students. Two main theories have been introduced: *gesellschaftlich* and *gemeinschaft*. In this paper, we will examine these two perspectives and determine, in my opinion, the best course of action for schools.

In the *gesellschaftlich* perspective, “schools are seen primarily as a means to serve national economic interests by preparing students for the workplace” (Sanders, 2006, p. 2). This approach to education seems to have a no-nonsense point of view. The student is there to learn and be educated. Although this perspective has some positives, it is “associated with, if not deemed responsible for, inflexibility and the impersonal treatments of students and parents, inefficiencies in school operations and unresponsiveness to community concerns and educational innovations” (Leithwood & Hallinger, 2002, p. 289-290).

The *gemeinschaft* perspective, on the other hand, places emphasis on “relationships, interpersonal connections, and providing students with a sense of purpose and belonging in society” (Sanders, 2006, p. 2). *Gemeinschaft* is loosely translated as “community.” In this view, schools “nurture the well-being of children and youth” (Sanders, 2006, p. 3). They use community involvement to assist in installing values into the students.

Some would argue the *gesellschaftlich* perspective is the best way in which to educate students, while others would say the *gemeinschaft* perspective is better. I, however, agree with Thomas

Sergiovanni, as paraphrased in an article by Joel Westheimer (2016), “Sergiovanni demonstrates that neither extreme adequately serves as a model for school community. Rather, the real challenge is to build *Gemeinschaft* within *Gesellschaft*. Sergiovanni's suggested model for community demonstrates strong insights into the practical and theoretical tributaries that those interested in building community in schools must cross.”

I strongly value education and believe getting our students to a place in which they are ready to enter the workforce, and will be successful doing so, is vital. This, however, does not simply require head knowledge. If a student is not trained in how to interact with peers, co-workers, or people in authority, it is unlikely they will be successful in their job. Having a sense of how to appropriately treat people will assist our students in finding, acquiring, and keeping a career.

In his article, Westheimer (2016) talks about a sign he saw while on a bus. It read, “FEDERAL LAW 49.CF 37-167 REQUIRES THAT THESE SEATS MUST BE VACATED FOR SENIORS AND DISABLED PERSONS” (Westheimer, 2016). When describing his reaction to this sign, he stated that he was initially happy that a federal law protected seniors and disabled persons. He then realized, with sadness, why such a law was needed. While some might find giving up their seat to someone who needs it more is common sense, our society has lost some of the genuine care for people.

While intellectual education is important, I believe schools must not give up on helping the students learn and maintain other key life skills. While one would argue these practices are learned in the home, more and more students are growing up in families and homes in which parents rely on schools to educate their child(ren) in these areas. These skills can include how to interact with people. Allowing the school and community to work together is a great way in which students can learn the appropriate way to handle situations (such as giving your seat to a woman who is elderly).

Another life skill students should learn is how to carry on a conversation. Communication is a key element of life. Too many students only communicate over social media, text messages, e-mails, and so on. Their inability to carry on a conversation face-to-face could become an obstacle in life.

Students should also be taught how to learn from their mistakes. The ability to fail and grow from that experience has become a rarity. Along with those listed, there are so many other life skills students should learn, but many are missing out on. When the school combines the practices of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaftlich*, they can assist the student in not only the fundamentals of learning but also other important skills needed in life.

Along with the community (*gemeinschaft*) and society (*gesellschaftlich*) practices in education, other topics surrounding the issue of education are: the cost of tuition in higher education, the purpose of college education and whether or not everyone should attend college, and trade schools vs. community colleges.

According to an article by Furchtgott-Roth and Meyer (2015), nearly 40 million people have debt from student loans, the student loan debt has increased by 325 percent since 2004, and “the number of borrowers owing between \$50,000 and \$75,000 has doubled, and the number of borrowers owing more than \$200,000 has tripled.” On top of those shocking statistics, “Over 8 percent of graduates younger than 25 are unemployed” (Furchtgott-Roth & Meyer, 2015). These numbers have increased because “College tuition has increased by [a staggering!] 1,180 percent since records began in 1978” (Furchtgott-Roth & Meyer, 2015).

The above numbers are shocking to see. As a society, I believe employers value a college education. As an individual, however, one has to wonder if it is worth it. Along with the above statistics, the article also mentioned “over 115,000 janitors and a quarter of retail salespersons have college degrees” (Furchtgott-Roth & Meyer, 2015).

With the cost of higher education sky rocketing, one poses the question, “What is the purpose of a college education?” In the past, students viewed college as a place where they could “explore courses and majors before settling on a job and career” (Selingo, 2015). That view, however, has shifted. “...college students have increasingly seen a bachelor's degree as a means to an end: a job” (Selingo, 2015).

Along with the shifting beliefs on the purpose of college, universities are changing their programs to better meet the needs of the students. Degrees such as “Liberal Arts” are becoming a thing of the past as majors such as “Social Media” are coming to the forefront. One might argue these new degrees could rival trade schools. These degrees are teaching skills specific to a career path rather than a general knowledge of many things. Trade schools and the importance of learning a specific craft are becoming more and more popular as the cost of 4 year colleges and universities increases.

In conclusion, as schools work to meet the needs of their students, they must not only focus on the fundamental goals of education, but must also consider the students and their transition into society after school. Students need social skills along with head knowledge. Schools can partner with community entities to help instill these values and skills on the students. As these students graduate from high school and consider further education, they must decide whether or not a 4 year degree and the costs are worth it. If the student cannot afford the degree, attending a trade school and learning a specific craft is a good alternative that will provide a steady source of income after graduating. Preparing students for their integration into society is an important aspect of what the school must do for students. They need to be well prepared to make wise choices for themselves and for their families.

## References

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