What Does it Mean to Be 'Educated' in the 21st Century?

By **Starr Sackstein** on June 2, 2016 5:00 AM

If what it means to be 'educated' has changed, why isn't the system for becoming educated changing with it?
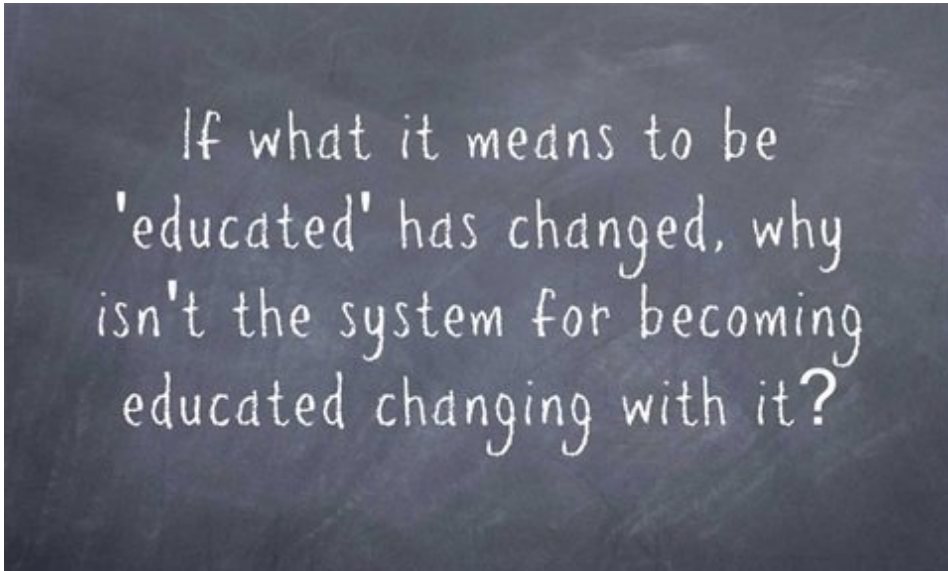
12 years of cursory primary and secondary education that covers a breadth of knowledge spanning history, literature, assorted maths, language, physical education, assorted physical and living sciences and other electives.

Upon successful completion of high school, being "educated" meant a student went to a college of his/her choosing to major in a subject area that would yield a respectable job and potentially go on to higher education to ensure relevancy in his/her career path.

Students in my generation and earlier generations did this dutifully, if being "educated" was a value they or their families' held.

Peter Greene toils with the question "Are things that every educated person should know?" in his post called *An Educated Person,* where he discusses what people should know or what has value and even asserts that what has value is different for different people.

After having gamed several systems to become "educated" with a Masters degree in Secondary Education in English and also continuing my professional education to become permanently state certified as well as Nationally Board Certified, I've discovered that on-going exploration of the world is more essential. That this is what it means to be truly educated; a continuing curiosity to learn more and use what we know to innovate and grow both individually and as a people.

It's not necessary for a body of information to be memorized, but rather a skill-set mastered to

make infinite learning possible.

After having a conversation with Peter Huerta, a senior at WJPS, it is clear that the system does students a disservice. He is a highly intelligent student who refused to play the game and although his transcript may not be impressive, he is. Something he said that I found particularly apt was that school forces all students to be a certain way and this idea was echoed by another student, Abhishek Singh in this **vox.**

There simply isn't one way to do anything or there shouldn't be.

Lara Cwass, a senior at WJPS said, "Although the 21st century has an extreme focus on technology, I think that the most essential part of one's education doesn't always involve a special background technology directly. An educated person in this century should surround him/herself with cultures that are not limited to his/her own, should have "strong logic" (apply this skill in whatever form is relevant to his/her own life), and should attempt to achieve a "balance" throughout his/her own life and be as well rounded in the number of areas that he/she chooses. An educated person should have strong conversational skills, learn how to be approachable, have a basic understanding of math, science and language, know how to care for others and care for his/her environment, have a well rounded understanding of the arts, and know how to be thankful for whatever he/she has. Although technology shouldn't be the central focus because it can hinder the most important qualities of an education, it should and inevitably will be used as a tool for learning in many, if not all of these parts of life."

Kay Kim, a junior at WJPS suggests, "Being educated can be defined in several different ways. The first definition of being educated is to be enlightened. However, being educated under the NYC DOE may mean adjusting to changes to the learning curriculums and adapting to what is seen as the more "college-ready preparation". Being educated may also be very facile. Teachers in school can only teach so much. I am not criticizing them in any way. I am saying that students need to fulfill their duties as students by going further than what is taught in the classroom. They need to try to apply those learning in everyday life. As students accomplish their roles, they then can become "Renaissance people", as it is encouraged in today's society."

Many of my PLN have defined what it means to be educated when I put out the call on Twitterand here are some of their thoughts:

@Aricfoster2 :"Proficient in ways to make sense of new experiences: literate, numerate, problem solving, seeing patterns, support a claim, etc."

@JennBinis: **"**The issue of being "educated" related to "classic" course of study" - In terms of a pod-cast from her **Ed History 101**

@pambradley "Knowing what questions to ask and how to find the answers."

@misswerner "being a righteous digital citizen and being a productive agent of change."

@amyriley418 "educated" in the 21st century means being a thinker&problem solver, as well as digital&literal learner."

@ScienceNerdNiki "You're an independent, critical thinker who can solve problems & collaborate to create w/ innovative media."

Perhaps more important that what it means to be educated is the conversation about **how we educate**, the control we have to change the way learning happens and the ever-evolving spaces that we live in and what it takes to be "successful" in them. (Of course, "success" is another loaded word like "educated" but that's for another time."

As many reforms move through and the 21st century matures, more technology and information become readily available and our need to command varying skill-sets shift. Educational systems must be aware of the world they turn graduated students into and must adjust accordingly. We must consider changing the way the school day looks to better suit the needs of our learners instead of forcing all of our learners to fit into the landscape that was created over 100 years ago.

Perhaps a few things to consider are:

- the structure of the school day
- the way we group students inside of classes
- the amount of time we require students to be in school
- the course **requirements for graduation**
- the way we **record learning and communicate it**
- the **content taught** in each class
- the manner in which we deliver information
- the technology we use or don't use
- the use of social media and other online curation tools
- how involved students are in making all of these decisions

How can we start to change systemic elements of education to better provide opportunities for

deeper appropriate learning in our current landscape? Please share