“What does it mean to be educated?”

Education is not simply attending a school or university, it is a journey within oneself, a path to a greater understanding of the world around us. Although education is defined as “the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits,” it begs the question, what does it truly mean to be educated?

According to John Dewey, philosopher and pragmatist, “Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.” This school of thought is consistent with Westover’s didactic experiences and childhood journey. To be educated is to learn from experiences in life, to struggle, develop, and evolve as a person. Learning does not just happen in the classroom or at home, it occurs through problem-solving, real-life experiences, and new challenges. Often the best lessons learned are those experienced for yourself. Through failure, individuals learn from their mistakes and improve themselves as valued members of society. Education is a constant effort to better oneself and take each day as a new challenge with the opportunity to become a more well-rounded individual.

Each and every interaction with another human being is a potential learning opportunity. Whether it is a parent, teacher, or peer, any individual can provide a life-changing educational experience. Learning can be greatly influenced by the environment, particularly by those around us.

In Westover’s case, growing up with a stern, enigmatic father and abusive brother greatly influenced the way she developed as an individual, which ultimately motivated her to expand her pursuit for knowledge and understanding. For students, a particular teacher or role model can provide a transcending experience that ultimately alters the way they view the world and spend the rest of their lives. A broader perspective, or simply even learning something new, can greatly impact one’s development as a person. Understanding and embracing new values as well as developing positive habits can change a person’s perspective by leading them to a new endeavor that potentially creates opportunity and prosperity.

The beauty of education lies within the expansion of knowledge. An individual may dedicate his or her entire life to sharing knowledge and experiences for the greater good. For others, it may be a life-changing opportunity to escape poverty or at least improve their sense of purpose and meaning. In a community setting, education is the foundation for improving society and solving social issues. Most conflict breeds in ignorance and hate, and the simple solution is to use education to create a positive and safe environment that advocates the pursuit of knowledge and self-betterment. Through educational discipline, society can collectively focus on solving
problems in an interdisciplinary way. Students should apply their knowledge to real-life scenarios through experimental inquiry and analysis. This ultimately prepares learners for citizenship, day-to-day life, and future vocations.

However, people often make the mistake of equating education with a school building. College provides students the opportunity and platform to expand their knowledge, whilst challenging preconceived concepts and philosophies. For Westover, college was a transcending experience that allowed her to seek not just knowledge, facts, and figures, but the truth. By reading memoirs such as “Educated,” we are able to gain new perspectives that grant us a greater understanding of the human spirit. Learning from other people’s experiences opens a new path to self-introspection and explores the meaning of what happens in the world around us.

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