THE EFFECT OF AGE, SOCIETAL STATUS AND SEXUALITY ON STUDENT’S ELEMENTARY SCHOOLING

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Abstract: Elementary education is a right guaranteed by the state for one very good reason – nation building. Every year of primary education increases a person’s productivity by 10-30% (UNICEF 2000). The need to maximize education is a national necessity. Age, societal status, and sexuality are common points of interests in education because these can affect the way students learn and may even dictate the quality of learning in schools. By grasping these factors, educators can have a definite rally point to improve primary education. But exactly how do age, societal status, and sexuality affect schooling? This is the line of inquiry this article would like to pursue. These factors will be explored independently with regards to their effects on elementary schooling. Different cultural perspectives of the effects of age, societal status, and sexuality to schooling are also discussed knowing this can change the dynamics of these factors. This paper is anchored on numerous case studies, theses, articles, and other related resources. Through the collective information gathered, it is hoped that a better picture will emerge of the effects of age, societal status, and sexuality on elementary schooling.

Keywords: children, age, sexuality, school, societal status

Introduction

Elementary education is a right, guaranteed by the constitutions of many nations, if not all. There is simply a high rate of return for education for it to be just a privilege for the few. It is
foundational and in many ways defines the general health of the society. The encompassing impact of primary education motivates a lot of researchers and educators all over the world to dig deeper into the factors that can have significant effects on elementary schooling. Age, societal status, and sexuality are the most common and widely debated. What is the best age for enrolling kids to school? How does poverty affect the academic performance of students? Can sexual activity affect grades? These are only some of the key questions that relate directly to the effects of age, social status, and sexuality to primary education. Answering these can change the way educators, parents, and students think. This paradigm shift has greater value in elementary level instruction where formal schooling starts and future learning are built upon.

Most studies in the past were limited to general access and completion rates in elementary education. But even if schools can admit as many students as they can, they might still prove to be inefficient in using available resources to educate kids. Sensitive factors such as sexuality and family context are taking the center stage in the world of academe. The quality of education is now more important than high enrollment figures. These changes in priorities are good news as it encourages continuous improvement of education.

Students after all are human beings. The way they learn are not only influenced by academic programs but also by biological factors, upbringing, and sexual preferences. All these three can steer students to the right (or wrong) direction in their lifelong pursuit for education. Understanding age, societal status, and sexuality can make all the difference in achieving, improving, and sustaining quality education.

The Effects of Age on Elementary Schooling

Jean Piaget, a notable developmental psychologist has influenced the way primary curriculum was developed in the 1960’s up to this very day. The “readiness” to learn is one of Piaget’s most important concepts adapted to the development of early and primary education (Atherton 2011). However the idea of “readiness” is not strictly age dependent, a new research found out. Evidence of this is the varied age of students that get started in school worldwide. In Finland, children do not get into schools until the age of 7. In the UK, the “right” age to start schooling is set at 5.

Determining the right timing for school solely by age is creating a different set of problems. One of which is eroding students’ self-determination and progress by getting them into school too early. Readiness to read or readiness to learn for that matter is dependent on a lot of things not just age. And yet schools worldwide are using age as the ultimate indicator of a child’s readiness to learn.

A research conducted by Cambridge Assessment suggests that admitting children at four instead of five may do more harm than good by distressing four-year olds. They are simply not ready yet for the environment and the barrage of social and emotional challenges at school. This
research further stresses the long term effects of premature enrollment which, says Kay Margetts, a professor in early childhood studies in Melbourne University, includes poor academic performance throughout schooling. Enrolling too soon can affect students by exposing them to negative experiences in the early years of schooling. Getting the timing wrong can easily make age a liability and affect the quality of education children get from elementary education and beyond.

Age affects every area of human performance (Ukueze 2007). This includes performance at school. Cognitive development is dependent on age so students in different age groups can display significant differences in how well they learn and grasp concepts. For students who started too early this can mean they are not yet ready or mature enough to understand what is being taught to them. This can trigger frustration and disappointment and reinforce negative attitude towards school.

Overage students on the other hand can also have a hard time fitting right in at school, with the cognitive strategies in the curriculum no longer relevant or applicable to older students (Lewin 2007). The negative effects of overage students in the classroom do not end there. There is also the possibility of social and behavioral tension caused by a wide age grouping in classrooms. The effects of the presence of overage kids in the classroom does not end on one specific student but goes on to affect the learning experience of the entire class.

The Effects of Societal Status on Elementary Schooling

Societal status is the honor attached to one’s position in the society. This often connotes wealth and can also be directly related to one’s financial status. Parents of different occupation classes often have different styles of child rearing, different ways of disciplining their children and different ways of reacting to their children (Rothstein 2004). All these can directly affect the way children learn in school. Parents who are financially stable are more able to support the financial, emotional, and learning needs of their children. They can have more time with them and they have the ability to encourage them academically because of high socio economic standing which can also suggests good education background. Significant predictor of intellectual performance at age 8 includes parental socio economic status (Smith 2002). This claim is elaborated more by Guerin asserting that socio economic status can bring about flexibility of a student to handle different class schedules at school (Guerin et al. 2001). All these simply means that social status can affect the preparedness of elementary school students to learn, enabling or disabling them to get the best out of it.

Having the financial means or the lack thereof can indirectly determine how many days a student is absent in school due to health problems. The social status of a student, a reflection of the parent’s socio economic status, can influence the health and wellness of a child. This line of thought is supported by the fact that in rural areas where nutrition status is quite low, academic
performance is significantly hindered (Adewale 2002). When a child gets proper nutrition, health care and stimulation during pre-school years, he or she can take optimal advantage of the resources of any formal learning environment (Eze 2002). Simply put a healthy child is secured of the ability to maximize learning. It all starts from the parent’s socio economic status.

Financial problems in families can have psychological and behavioral effects to kids and this can put them in a difficult situation in school. They can be sent to the principal’s office often, or get punished through suspensions more than the other kids. This can disrupt and frustrate the drive of students to do well academically. This is another perspective worth looking into. Children who belong to lower income homes have higher tendencies of deviant behavior compared to those who do not have pressing income issues (Oni 2007).

With these facts considered, it is safe to say that children who are economically challenged can be seriously marginalized at school. The quality of the education they get can be lower than what other well-off students can get from the same academic institution. It is also easier to understand that drop-out rates are higher in financially troubled kids compared to their well-off peers.

The Effects of Sexuality on Elementary Schooling

Sexuality is part of the human experience. It is simply defined as the capacity to have erotic experiences and responses. Sexuality can also refer to the sexual attraction a person has for another. When sexuality is considered to have effects in academic performance this is often a result of sex biases and stereotypes. How does this pan out in elementary schooling? Sexuality of 6-12 years olds is not as intense as those observed in secondary level students. But the formative nature of primary school age students may lead them to be susceptible to gender issues such as homosexuality.

There are primary school students who see themselves as gay. These students are singled out as outcasts. Bullying often follows next affecting gay students by hindering them in reaching their full academic potential, causing devastating effects to their self-esteem, depression and other mental health problems, and self-destructive tendencies. Bullying also forces ostracized students to leave school early. All these can subject gay students to extreme stress and can make school a very unattractive place for them to learn (Mayock et al. 2009). A study in Ireland revealed that the most common age when people realized they are gay is 12 years old. Sexual orientation is a part of the human experience. It is during the latter part of primary school years that majority of young people start the puberty stage marking the beginning of the physical and emotional maturation necessary for the transition to adulthood. In a perfectly heterosexual world, this transition should present no serious problems. But when homosexuality comes into the picture this can be a chronic source of academic related problems which can include higher absenteeism rate, low grades, and many more. Sexuality issues such as homosexuality can
change the way educators see the reality of how gender relates to students’ academic pursuit in primary school.

Dating frequency and academic motivation are seen to be negatively correlated (Quatman et al. 2001). This means that the higher the dating frequency the lower is the academic motivation. This can present a problem to young students that include those that are still in the latter part of elementary education. This also considers the fact that students who dated early will keep up with it as they enter secondary school, towards high school, and tertiary education. This can dictate lower grades as the student’s attention is not focused on their academics but in their social life.

In line with the early dating concerns is the research finding that asserts the fact that early initiation of sexual intercourse is related to poor academic performance (Schvaneveldt et al. 2001). This is included in the discussion because it follows the reality of precedence. Kids who start having sex in primary school can continue to do so in the latter part of their education, undermining their academic aspirations. This is consistent with the findings of the 2009 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey that revealed students who engage in sex before 13 years old got more D’s and F’s.

Sexuality can affect elementary schooling actively and passively, actively in the sense that their academic performance drops because of their direct action and passively in the sense that their academic pursuit suffers because of other student’s reaction to their person and preferences as in the case of homosexuality.

**Conclusion**

Age, societal status, and sexuality elicit serious effects to elementary schooling. These effects are brought about by the changing concepts of education and the continuous improvement in passing instruction and providing quality education to students. These effects are also highlighted by the changing realities of the society as in the case of increased awareness of gay rights in schools. This touches off sexuality of the students and how the school system, including the teachers, students, parents, and school administration react to this emerging social trend. Some of the effects were already there since civilization began – he who has the gold rules. This is exactly what is seen time and time again on the effects of affluence and wealth to the quality of education a student secures from academic institutions.

It is important to realize that the effects of age, societal status, and sexuality are universal. It does not matter where you are age will always be seen as a benchmark for readiness to go to school and the progression to the pre-determined grade levels. Location will have no effect on the influence of the parent’s socio economic status to the quality education that can be accessed by an elementary student. The discussion of gay rights and how homosexuality is seen in the
school context may differ in depth from one country to the next but its reality and prevalence in schools is unchanged. What is put out in public will depend on the cultural openness of a specific country or community but what is really happening in the classrooms and lobbies remains the same. And this is where the inquiry of this article finds its purpose.

The effects of age, societal status, and sexuality must be inspected, understood and brought out in the open. This is the only way these factors can be used to improve education. Failure to study and accept these factors and its effects can marginalize quality education in many ways. There is a need to change the determinants for starting school and balance out the negative effects of age as the sole basis for elementary school readiness. It is about time to better health and nutrition programs spearheaded by schools. This can effectively neutralize the limiting attributes of poverty in realizing quality education. Policies can also be developed to protect the rights of homosexual students while programs to improve sex and relationship education can be pursued at the same time. These measures can help students enjoy their sexuality without the excesses now commonly seen in schools when dealing with sexuality issues.

Age, societal status, and sexuality have myriad of effects to elementary schooling. These effects can all be turned into positive driving forces to enrich and improve elementary education. The first step is seeing how these factors are currently affecting education. The second step is acting on these things to make sure that these can bring in positive thrust to elevate education and nudge it closer to its goal.

References


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