

EPE 773: Prompts for Assignment 1

Please note that the prompts below are intended to provoke your thinking and writing. You do not need to respond to all of the questions within each prompt. Try to keep your piece focused on making one overall argument.

1. An important consideration that educators confront is the idea of “imposition” on the part of schools. George Counts, you may recall, argues that schools should impose (or impart) a transformative vision of how society *should* function so as to motivate students to become socially active as community members, citizens, etc. Others argue that schools have no business imposing any vision of how society should function (i.e. ‘Amoralism’). Instead, they argue that the family and other voluntary organizations (e.g. a religious organization) should have the primary responsibility for the moral development and social justice orientation of children and adolescents.

Given what we have read and discussed, and given other material or evidence you have encountered, how far do you think schools *should* go in cultivating a vision of a just society? That is, to what extent should schools attempt to provide students with a model (or models) of how society should function?

Another approach would be to focus on what schools *can* impart to students rather than focusing on what schools *should* impart. This approach would focus much more on the constraints of schooling in society. For example, you may argue that it is simply not feasible for schools to impart a transformative vision of society since schools serve a variety of competing cultural, political, and economic interests. Alternatively, you might argue that schools already do this work by providing every student with an understanding of how science, arts and literature, and social relationships shape society. Note: These are just examples.

2. You may also focus on one (or more) of the goals outlined by Labaree. For example, Labaree discusses the social efficiency goal and how it conceptualizes education as a public good with “use” value (as opposed to “exchange” value). Social efficiency, according to Labaree, states that our economic well-being (and therefore our well-being as a whole) depends on our ability to prepare the young to carry out useful economic roles with competence.

Which of these goals do you find most compelling? Which of the goals aligns most closely with how you expect to approach your work as an educator? Comparatively speaking, how do the goals differentially shape students’ life chances? Do some goals favor certain groups in society more than others? What are the implications of these competing goals with respect to education and/or the health of our social institutions (e.g., economy, politics)?

Here are some general guidelines to consider as you construct your position:

Initial Thesis (~800 words)

1. Develop a coherent thesis argument (can consist of multiple parts)
 - Introduce the topic and clearly state your position on the matter
 - Work through the details/components of your position
 - Can be done analytically by breaking down the position into constituent pieces and putting it all back together
 - Or you can focus on the interrelationships between the components – in this case the whole does not equal the sum of the parts – it is something entirely different
2. Engage your argument with existing thought (e.g., course material)
3. Aim to be persuasive, not misleading
 - To do so requires that you consider your opposition in a thoughtful way
 - Try to anticipate what the best possible argument would be against your stance

Antithesis Response (~500 – 800 words)

1. Begin by acknowledging the insights of your interlocutor
 - Be curious. What is the good sense in their argument?
 - Illustrate that you understand their position.
2. Note limitations with respect
 - You can be direct, but avoid condescension at all costs.
 - What is another way to think about the topic that contrasts with the original position?
3. Anticipate and acknowledge your own limitations

Synthesis (~500 – 800 words)

1. Acknowledge the insights of the thesis and antithesis
2. Note limitations in the antithesis
3. Try to identify possible areas of common ground
4. Advance a new thesis that reconciles the tension in the thesis/antithesis
5. Try to anticipate limitations of your new thesis