The 21st Century Educator

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The following is a commentary on the nature and purpose of today's teachers and the challenges and goals facing them.

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Representing one of the most prominent American liberals during the time of the early republic, Thomas Jefferson once stated, “education in like manner, engrafts a new man on the native stock, and improves what in his nature was viscous and perverse into qualities of virtue and social worth.” While Jefferson is sometimes condemned as a racist and exploitive man in nature, his overtones and ideology radiate how equality, education, and virtue were and always will be the Pandora’s Box that we must pry open and wedge open for existence in all public schools in America. Education, within its own historical contexts, has often come under much debate over its ultimate aims, purposes, and goals that it sets off to accomplish, but one aspect that it always seems to drive towards is the notion of success. Whether it is success on the farm, success as a homemaker, success in the factory, success as a teacher, or even success in the business world, education has always had its purpose within its own historic context.

Following in the footsteps of modern liberalism, a bigger commitment is needed to individualism within the realm of education. Our very own Declaration of Independence states that when government violates human reason, virtue, and human rights, then a revolution is to be made from individuals who have the right and ability to do so. As educators we have the responsibility to come together to accomplish this feat.
Our educational system today represent the existence of an Artificial Aristocracy which caters to a person’s “birth and wealth” in accordance with their education. We need to exist in a Natural Aristocracy based on “virtue and talent.” Progress means moving forwards, not backwards.

The teacher today is no longer the nurturer and provider of virtue and social worth, but has be put in the role of paper pusher and willing disobedience. The current structures of the American school system cannot possibly foster any resemblance of success for its student learners and educators. Within the realm of the NCLB Act and increasing standards, educators and students are forced into a never-ending cycle of drill, test, pass, and fail. Our schools are disintegrating within the very realm of its own existence. The 21st Century educator is not put in any position of preparing our learners for success within their own virtue and social worth, but instead is perpetuating the very vain existence of inequality in our nation’s schools. Thomas Jefferson advocated a theory of “Natural Aristocracy,” which emphasized success based on virtue and talent. Today we are faced with an increasing sense of “Meritocracy,” which rewards schools based on success.

The educator today is faced with a terrible dilemma that forces the ‘have-nots’ even lower on the totem pole of success in education and drives the ‘haves’ to skyrocketing success in education and thereafter. This reality is stripping the underlining aspect of success from its very existence within the process of education in the public schools of America. The combination of all of the social ills within education is adding more weight, accountability, and repercussions for the 21st century educator.