

Final Draft

English Composition 101

26 September 2018

Summary and Response to “The Working Classroom” by Malcolm Harris

“The Working Classroom” by Malcolm Harris offers an in-depth look into the emphasis on education and learning and the challenges children have to go through during their training. The author highlights the demand and pressure on children to succeed and compares this to the concept of waged working. In his exposition, Harris notes that more weight has been placed on educational outcomes depicted through grades and landmarks such as college admissions which all accumulate to form human capital. Hence, all the effort, time and attention have been focused on developing and advancing human capital. However, the author argues that more human capital does not necessarily substantiate to a higher standard of living and economic well-being. Instead of banking on uninformed human capital, more effort should be on understanding what the expectations of the changing world as well as the problems that it should solve. It would be beneficial to understand, control, and regulate the changes to children’s efforts and thereby create a competent, well equipped and engaged student rather than a worker.

“The Working Classroom” challenges conventional approaches to education and underlines the overlooked similarities between waged labor and the current education system. One of the overlooked similarities is the fact that kids spend the whole day in school but still have to do more work once they get home. Harris terms this as “intensive training” that most adults can’t keep up with on a daily basis (4). The author points out that the hard work and huge workloads have been designed to ensure that children get college admissions. However, college admission should be a step towards one’s different track, not a validation for hard work.

While trying to secure the future of kids, parents and teachers drill children to invest all their time, effort, and attention in accumulating human capital. The author defines the end product of this quest to be “overworked, under-engaged, gold-starred, and tired children, wondering where their time went” (Harris 3). While the emphasis has shifted to the work that the child does, Harris notes that the duration and intensity have “grown out of control.” (3). He posits that the workload takes up most of the time needed for play, sleep or rest. Further, he argues that parents, teachers, and policymakers often bypass the effects of these changes on the well-being of a growing child.

Instead, more parents, teachers, and policymakers are focused on making the child future-ready as they forecast an ever-changing world. They channel all the efforts and time to ensure that a child is at the best level to compete for “twenty-first-century employment.” (Harris 4). The general understanding is that the parent must raise a successful American and that the choices and actions of children have an effect on their prospects. As a result, all the efforts of the parents are invested in ensuring the child accumulates as much human capital and eligible for the job market thereby safeguarding his prospects. Harris posits that these efforts have succeeded in creating an educated generation, but have not automatically led to better living standards. Instead, the millennial generation is worse off as compared to other generations. The author argues that the ability to produce high levels of value does not necessarily substantiate to a better life in the twenty-first century. This makes one wonder what assures a fulfilling life in this century.

The author also notes that college admissions and higher education has become the principal goal (Harris 4). To a greater extent, this exemplifies the role of accumulated human capital and unregulated work imposed on young learners. Hence, as common belief stands, the

purpose of seeking higher education is to add value and extra credit in the job market. Harris identifies the key issues applicants consider for job opportunities to be achievements and presentation of these qualifications in the most attractive ways (Harris 4). This rating is based on the information kids have prepared and accumulated over the past eighteen years and offers a justification of a huge work load on a middle school child.

It is clear that Harris offers valid arguments on the current education system and the efforts channeled by all stakeholders to ensure that children attain their best. I agree that changes need to be made to ensure the future taskforce meets the demands of its time, but emphasize that all these changes should be well defined. Evidently, the world is changing; however, we need to understand what this means to the future generation. Understanding these needs is the only way to make them ready. Once changes have been well recognized, the efforts of teachers and policymakers should be regulated, controlled and well structured.

Also, I concur with his analogy that these efforts are out of control. Instead of changes being on the consumption of more education input, they should aim at making education useful and engaging while still allowing the prosperity of children. Children should not be overloaded by school work, but rather schools and colleges should concentrate on shaping unique skills and talents. This process would help children do what they want in their best levels thus reducing the pressure of creating many job opportunities. Hence, education should focus on improving the creativity and innovation of kids as the twenty-first work environment places more value on these qualities.

In addition fostering innovative and creative kids, making kids technologically competent could make them well equipped for the 21st century while also providing time for the playfield. The writer talks about technology and its effects on employee tasks. He uses the experience of

Danny, a young boy who attempts to find an easier way to do assignment through technology so as to reduce the time taken with the assignment and hence increase the time for play. Through Danny one understands that technology reduces the time taken to complete a job, but does it intensify the amount of work done? I agree with the writer that technology increases the amount of work done despite speeding it. Danny does not understand why he should not be allowed to use the computer to complete his homework when employees all over the world are using them. Danny's mother in response to this act increases his workload to reduce the time spent playing baseball. This act shows that when technology is involved, then someone can be able to complete many tasks or a significant workload in the same time as the one that would be taken to complete a single task manually.

Harris discusses a sensitive topic that has not been well understood by most people. The reading offers a better comprehension of the challenges that children face with education. Our education system is exposing children to a lot of work so that they can gain enough knowledge and skills and be productive to the country's economy. Parents, schools, and authorities set rules and make decisions for the children to follow and be valuable to themselves and the society. Children have no time for sports, plays, and other extra-curricular activities since most of their time, effort and money is dedicated to school work. In spite of the quality education being offered, children are still less valuable to the economy than their predecessors. This indicates that the work input and excellent education output is not a guarantee for success and more effort should be invested in developing the unique skills and capabilities of a child. To achieve this, parents, teachers, and policymakers should find a balance between class material and creative and innovative engagement of the child. This will ensure that all aspects of a child's growth and development are used to create a competent and innovative individual fit for the 21st century.

Works Cited

Harris, Malcolm. "The Working Classroom, Harper's Magazine". *Harper's Magazine*, 2018,
<https://harpers.org/archive/2017/11/the-working-classroom/>. Accessed 12 Sept 2018.