

Student's Explanation on How He Aced the ACT Shows What Education is Missing

The average ACT score has [sloped downwards](#) in recent years as more students have been encouraged to take the test.

In spite of this decline, there are still a handful of students who manage to nail a perfect score. One of the most recent is Louisiana teen Joshua Owens.

When asked to explain the secret of his success, Owens unhesitatingly attributes it to homeschooling.

“‘Home schooling gave me an advantage because the instruction is tailored for the individual. It’s not just about getting ahead,’” Owens told The Times-Picayune.

According to Owens, homeschooling trained him to become a critical thinker:

“‘It is one thing to know the subject material, but it takes critical thinking and ability to apply the knowledge. Learning is a goal, not a means to an end,’ Owens said.

Owens is indeed a critical thinker. He scored as well as he did using his critical thinking skills, not crediting traditional ACT prep classes. He does not suggest or recommend the prep classes.”

Owens’ comments are interesting, particularly in the light of current education practices. For years, traditional education has employed a factory-style methodology in teaching students. Under this system, students are expected to learn the same material, at the same pace, in the same way. This cookie-cutter method is also applied to testing practices, which

encourage students to plug and play the pat answers they have learned from their teachers.

By contrast, Owens' "tailored" schooling appears to have taught him to actively interact with knowledge instead of simply being a passive listener.

Ironically, these two types of schooling were once contrasted by John Locke in his famous work, [Some Thoughts Concerning Education](#). According to Locke, the type of education practiced in today's schools is exactly the type of learning which stifles a student. In regards to the interaction between pupil and teacher, Locke wrote the following:

"All their time together should not be spent in reading of lectures, and magisterially dictating to him what he is to observe and follow..."

Instead, Locke found that the best education enables students to engage and discourse with the teacher, a practice much more easily followed in the homeschool setting than in a classroom of 25+ students:

"[H]earing [the student] in his turn, and using him to reason about what is proposed, will make the rules go down the easier, and sink the deeper, and will give him a liking to study and instruction: and he will then begin to value knowledge, when he sees that it enables him to discourse; and he finds the pleasure and credit of bearing a part in the conversation, and of having his reasons sometimes approved and hearkened to. ... [T]his opens the understanding better than maxims, how well soever explained; and settles the rules better in the memory for practice. This way lets things into the mind, which stick there, and retain their evidence with them; whereas words at best are faint representations, being not so much as the true shadows of things, and are much sooner forgotten."

Locke's words should give us pause. Is it possible that the normal, factory-like approach to schooling is killing genuine learning and knowledge instead of fostering it? If we truly want to change the education system, is it time to figure out a way in which students can discourse, engage, and interact with a knowledgeable teacher instead of simply being a warm body doing time in a desk for 13 years?