



## Front Matter

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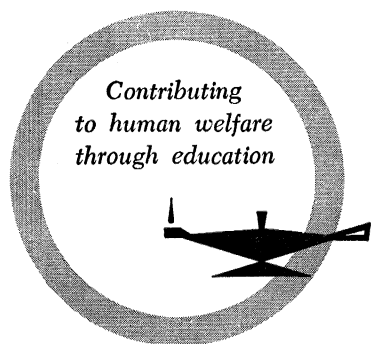
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# PEABODY Journal OF EDUCATION

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# Brigham Young- Educator

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Although he occupies a prominent place in American history as a modern-day Moses who led his persecuted followers to a refuge in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake, Brigham Young as an educator is virtually unknown. Nevertheless, his phenomenal success as a colonizer of the Intermountain West was partly due to his educational theory and the ability to gain support for it among his people.<sup>1</sup>

Some insight into this theory may be obtained by considering selected excerpts from Young's many discourses. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations cited in this paper are from the twenty-six volume work, *Journal of Discourses*, published at Salt Lake City, Utah, by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The numbers following each quotation refer to the volume and page wherein it is found.

"Education is a good thing," said Young, "and blessed is the man who has it, and can use it . . . without being puffed up with pride." 11:214  
As to its purpose, he declared:

Our education should be such as to improve our minds and fit us for increased usefulness; to make us of greater service to the human family; to enable us to stop our rude methods of living, speaking, and thinking. 14:83

Clearly, Young believed that proper education would improve the in-

dividual and society. He told his pioneer community, "The greatest difficulty we have to meet is what may be termed ignorance, or want of understanding in the people." 7:63  
He often emphasized the importance of educating the children and youth:

The education of our children is worthy of our attention . . . It is a subject that should be thoroughly impressed upon the minds of parents and the rising generation; and those who wish to preach from this text may do so. 13:262

On one occasion he said, "I wish this people to pay particular attention to the education of their children. If we can do no more, we should give them the facilities of a common education . . ." 10:224

Young expressed his esteem for good teachers by saying:

Let good schools be established throughout all the settlements of the Saints in Utah. Let good teachers . . . be employed to educate our children. A good schoolteacher is one of the most essential members in society . . . therefore, make the business of schoolteaching a permanent institution, and the remuneration should be in amount and in kind equal to the should also be promptly and willingly receipts of our best mechanics; it paid, and school commissioners and trustees should see to it that teachers are properly qualified and do earn their pay. 10:225

That Young was an advocate of schooling for both sexes is indicated by his counsel to:

Go to work and start some schools, go to school and study; have the girls go, and teach them chemistry, so that they can take any of these rocks and analyze them. The sciences can be learned without much difficulty. I want to have schools to entertain the minds of the people and draw them out to learn the arts and sciences. Send the old children to school, and the young ones also; there is nothing I would like better than to learn chemistry, botany, geology, and mineralogy, so that I could tell what I walk on, the properties of the air I breathe, what I drink, etc. 16:170

Believing one's enjoyment of life to be directly proportional to one's understanding appreciation of the world about him, Young proposed an extremely broad curriculum. "Learning a, b, c, d, does not hinder me learning e, f, g," he said. 16:27

It is our privilege and our duty to search all things upon the face of the earth, and learn what there is for man to enjoy, what God has ordained for the benefit and happiness of mankind, and then make use of it without sinning against him. 9:243

How gladly would we understand every principle pertaining to science and art, and become thoroughly acquainted with every intricate operation of nature, and with all the chemical changes that are constantly going on around us! How delightful this would be, and what a boundless field of truth and power is open for us to explore! 9:167

Vocational considerations were not overlooked in Young's educational theory. "Learn to be good for something," he admonished. 11:298 "Every Elder should have at least one trade, and if possible more than one." 10:77

Learn all you can. Learn how to raise calves, chickens, lambs, and all kinds of useful fowls and animals; learn

how to till the ground to the best advantage for raising all useful products of the soil; and learn how to manufacture molasses and sugar from the sugar cane. Raise flax, husbands, and let your wives learn to manufacture fine linen. 9:173

Young also stressed the importance of physical fitness:

Some think too much, and should labor more, others labor too much and should think more, and thus maintain an equilibrium between the mental and physical members of the individual; then you will enjoy health and vigor, will be active, and ready to discern truly, and judge quickly. 3:248

Having much interest in the study of human behavior, Young said, "All men should study to learn the nature of mankind, and to discern that divinity inherent in them." 7:1 With keen psychological insight he advised to "Understand men and women as they are, and not understand them as you are." 8:37 He was aware of individual differences and concerned lest the slow learner be forgotten or his opportunities be too severely limited:

One scholar in a school may far outstrip the rest; but give them sufficient time, and they can learn what the quick, bright scholar has learned so easily and quickly. If we are capacitated to learn one thing today, we can learn another tomorrow. It is the height of folly to say that a man can only learn so much and no more. 6:274

Young recognized that the acquisition of all desirable knowledge would be a never-ending task. "We shall never see," he declared, "the time when we shall not need to be taught, nor when there will not be an object to be gained." 10:221 He advised, therefore, that:

When a man is capable of correcting you, and of giving you light, and true doctrine, do not get up an altercation, but submit to be taught like little children, and strive with all your might to understand. 1:47

The source of all knowledge, according to Young, is God:

There is no ingenious mind that has ever invented anything beneficial to the human family but what he obtained it from the one Source, whether he knows or believes it or not. There is only one Source whence men obtain wisdom, and that is God, the Fountain of all wisdom; and though men may claim to make their discoveries by their own wisdom, by meditation and reflection, they are indebted to our Father in Heaven for all. 13:148 Not only does the religion of Jesus Christ make the people acquainted with the things of God, and develop within them moral excellence and purity, but it holds out every encouragement and inducement possible for them to increase in knowledge and intelligence, in every branch of mechanism, or in the arts and sciences, for all wisdom, and all the arts and sciences in the world are from God, and are designed for the good of his people. 13:147

Although all knowledge is from God, He does not dispense it automatically, but reveals it to men as they apply themselves to diligent study:

The religion embraced by the Latter-day Saints, if only slightly understood, prompts them to search diligently after knowledge. There is no other people in existence more eager to see, hear, learn, and understand truth. 8:6

The scholar can receive divine assistance in his search for truth and in his teaching if he is willing to humble himself and ask for it. Said Young:

Let our teachers ask the Father, in the name of Jesus, to bestow upon them and upon their scholars the

Spirit of wisdom and intelligence from heaven; ask for skill and control and ability to teach on the part of the teacher, and willingness to be controlled and adaptability to be taught on the part of the scholars. 9:369

When Young sent Dr. Karl G. Maeser, a noted German scholar who had been converted to the Mormon faith, to Provo, Utah, to establish an academy (later to become Brigham Young University), he gave him this charge, "I want you to remember that you ought not to teach even the alphabet or the multiplication tables without the Spirit of God. That is all. God bless you. Goodbye."<sup>2</sup>

It is certainly evident, even from this brief sketch, that Brigham Young, who had only three weeks of formal schooling, spent a great amount of time thinking about and discoursing upon the subject of education. It is fitting that one of America's largest church-related universities should bear his name. He was indeed an educator. What is probably the most succinct summary of his educational theory was given by himself as he defined education. "Education," he said, "is the power to think clearly, to act well in the world's work, and the power to appreciate life."<sup>3</sup>

#### REFERENCES

1. During the thirty remaining years of his life after arriving in the Salt Lake Valley, July 24, 1847, Brigham Young directed the immigration of some 100,000 people to Utah; established over 300 communities; built canals, railroads and temples; and founded numerous banks, stores, industries, and institutions.

2. Benjamin Alward, *A Look at Mormonism* (revised edition; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1962), p. 131.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 142.