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# STEVE JOBS VIEWS ON EDUCATION

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## **Abstract**

The famous co-founder of Apple Inc, Steve Jobs was a college dropout and a troublemaker in his own school days. He has expressed critical opinions about American public school system and called for reforms. He called teachers' union as the worst thing happened to education. For him technology could not be the substitute for teachers. He believed that only humans and not machines could kindle curiosity. Some of his ideas are also useful given America's shortage of manpower in the field of science, technology, engineering, and math. He also urged the then US president Barak Obama to grant visa to foreign student completing his engineering degree in America.

**Keywords:** Steve Jobs, Education, Education Reforms, Schools, Teachers.

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## His Own Education

Jobs was always more interested in electronics. He befriended many engineers in his neighborhood when he was 10 years old. Jobs was adopted by a caring couple from California, who raised him as “the “special chosen one”. Jobs was, indeed, gifted intellectually.

He learned to read from his mother. So that he could read before going to school. In school he encountered authority of a different kind than he had ever encountered before, and he did not like it. Jobs later recalled, “They came close to really beating any curiosity out of me.” When he started school, he didn't find anything particularly interesting to learn. He was frequently sent home for bothering teachers, and his parents found it difficult to deal with him. He became well-known for pulling off pranks.

His pranks, however, became quite dangerous when he was in third grade. As a result, he was sent home several times. But, as his father told the school, “If you can't keep him interested, then it's your fault”. Jobs stated that when he was in fourth grade, his teacher, Imogene Hill, assisted in turning him around. "I want you to finish this workbook, and if you do so, I will give you 5 bucks". This was something that sparked Jobs' interest in learning new things. According to him, she only cared about him in class because she saw something special in him. Jobs was identified as intellectually exceptional, and his school proposed skipping two grades after fourth to directly enter seventh grade. Jobs' parents chose to miss only one. That, however, meant changing Jobs' school. His new school had a reputation for fights, and he was bullied. Frustrated Jobs gave his parents an ultimatum: if they did not change the school, he would not attend. Despite the fact that finances were tight, Jobs' parents decided to relocate. He compelled his parents to bend to his will, and Jobs despised hearing 'no' to any of his demands since childhood. If he made a

decision, he made sure he got what he wanted. “I insisted they put me in a different school. When they resisted, I told them I would just quit going to school if I had to go back”, he remembered.

With the passage of time, he matured and enrolled in Reed College. He wished to major in Physics, Literature, and Poetry. Jobs became dissatisfied with the classes after 6 months.

He couldn't see the point of spending his parents' money on college. Jobs disliked taking the required classes, but he enjoyed his time at college. He had no idea what he wanted to do with his life, and he had no idea how college would help him figure out what he wanted to do with his life. As a result, he decided to drop out. But this was no fun ride. He slept on the floor of his friend's room because he didn't have a dorm room. He used to buy food by returning coke bottles for 5 cents. Not only that, but every Sunday night he used to walk 7 miles across town to get one good meal at the Hare Krishna Temple. Jobs was quoted in Stanford University as saying, “It was pretty scary at that time, but looking back at it, this was the best decision he ever made”. Dropping out meant he stopped taking required classes that didn't interest him and instead began dropping in on classes that did. As a result, he enrolled in a calligraphy class. He said “if he had never dropped in that calligraphy class, the personal computers might not have the typography that they do now”. Indeed, school education was a subject close to his heart. Mrs. Hills, his fourth grade Math teacher, was credited with getting him back into learning. He claimed that if it hadn't been for her and a few others, he would have ended up in jail.

## Kids Can't Wait

Apple's first significant success in educational computing occurred in 1978. The company joined the Minnesota Education Computing Consortium, which installed 5,000 computers with

groundbreaking software in schools across the state. The program resulted in a significant increase in Apple II sales. "One of the things that built Apple IIs was schools buying Apple IIs," said Jobs in a 1995 interview. Jobs saw a bigger picture. With only 10% of American schools having access to a computer, Jobs made it a public goal to install Apple computers in every elementary and high school in the country — a total of over 100,000 units. However, Apple had yet to come up with a financial solution that would allow it to make such a large donation. The existing tax law only provided tax breaks for computers donated to universities at the time. Then, at the age of 28, Jobs met US Congressman Pete Stark on a flight. By the time the plane touched down, Jobs had persuaded Stark to introduce legislation that would make it easier for Apple to obtain a federal tax break for donating school computers. Jobs was in charge of lobbying. Unfortunately, despite a House vote of 323-62 to pass the Computer Equipment Contribution Act, the bill never made it to the Senate due to the lame duck Reagan administration. Jobs, defeated but undeterred, shifted his focus to his home state. The California legislature passed a 25% tax credit for companies that donated computers to public and private schools on September 29, 1982.. Jobs dubbed Apple's latest initiative "Kids Can't Wait," declaring that the country couldn't afford to wait when it came to arming children with competitive programming knowledge. "We realized that a whole generation of kids was going to go through the school before they even got their first computer, so we thought: The kids can't wait. We wanted to donate a computer to every school in America," said Jobs. Jobs offered every elementary and high school in California with at least 100 students an Apple IIe computer with 64k bytes of memory, a monitor, a floppy disc drive, software coupons, and a manual for Apple Logo, a proprietary programming language aimed at students, in January 1983. With a

retail value of \$2,364 for each package and 9,250 eligible schools.

### **Equal Chances rather than Equal Outcomes**

In an interview while running NeXT, he elaborated on what education meant to him (YouTube file: The Steve Jobs 95 Interview unabridged). He stated that he believed in equal chances rather than equal outcomes. He defined equal opportunity as providing a great education to every child. Great teachers are required to provide a great education. However, because public school teachers were paid less, he questioned whether good teachers would choose to teach in public schools. Because children spend more time with teachers than with their parents, he insisted on having good teachers in charge of them.

He requested that teachers in public schools be paid on par with those in private businesses. Teachers' unions were another issue he identified with education. He referred to it as the "worst thing that ever happened to education." Despite the fact that he was the one who donated computers to schools, he refused to accept the fact that technology was replacing teachers. He flatly rejected the notion. Humans, not machines, were required to arouse curiosity and create interest. He said, "Computers can't get kids interested in. You do need a person. The way they are now computers are reactive. But they are not proactive. What children need is much more proactive and they need a guide. They don't need an assistant." He mentioned a voucher system in education. He claimed that the true customers of education were society and organizations that hired people. The ultimate customers, however, were parents. The issue was that the customers left, and they stopped paying attention to the schools. Mothers began working and no longer had time to devote to their children's education. Schools became more formalized.

He said, "What happens when a customer goes away and a monopoly gets controlled which is what happened in our country is that service level always goes down." He mentioned seeing a bumper sticker with words on it "We don't care, we don't have to" with a bell logo when AT&T was the sole provider of telephone services. Monopoly was about a callous attitude, as was IBM and the public school system, he claimed.

The next example he gave of education economics is even more fascinating to learn about. He gave the example of a car, which he thought was the most expensive thing people bought after a house. He envisioned an average car costing \$16,000 to \$20,000 with an 8-year commitment; \$2000 per year for a consumer. He provided figures for the state of California, which spent \$4400 per pupil per year in a public school, which was more than double the cost of a car. People who bought cars were well informed and had a plethora of options to choose from. He stated that car companies such as General Motors, Ford, Chrysler, and Toyota produced cars efficiently while taking some of the money from consumers for advertising. As a result, consumers had access to comprehensive information about automobiles, and automobiles continued to improve. He then contrasted the scenario with the public education system. "But in schools since people don't feel like they are spending their own money, they feel like it's free, no one does any comparison shopping. In fact you want to put your kid in a private school, you can't take \$4400 out of the public school and use it. You have to come up \$5000 or \$6000 of your own money." Instead, he imagined a scenario in which parents were given a voucher, a check for \$4400, to spend at any accredited school. He elaborated on several advantages of it. , "Number one, schools would start marketing themselves like crazy, to parents to get students. Secondly lot of new schools would start. Third thing the quality of schools just like in competitive market start to rise." He stated

that many public schools may close, which may be painful in the early years. The complaint could be that all schools would pick up good students while leaving out all bad students. He used cars as an example to demonstrate that not all car manufacturers produced expensive vehicles. He emphasized that the most competitive market was for \$10,000 cars, and that all car manufacturers were tailoring their models to meet the demand. According to the market competition model, where there was a need, there were many providers.

"I used to think when I was in my 20s that technology is the solution to most of problems and unfortunately it isn't so," he said. He used the analogy of bad and poor programming, which led many to believe that it was a network conspiracy to feed bad stuff because it was cheap to produce. But the truth is that network provided what people desired. He described it as "extremely disappointing." He likened the situation to a school system. It was encouraging to believe that technology could solve problems. However, the issues were more human, organizational, and political in nature. He identified people as the source of the problem. A competitive environment would attract people, but it would also drive out those old teachers who had lost their teaching spirit a long time ago. He explained that the situation was much more complicated than giving one computer to one child.

### **Views on American Education System**

Laurene Powell, Jobs' wife, had arranged for him to meet with President Obama. When he met Obama, he warned him, true to his nature of being candid about his opinions, "You are headed for a one-term presidency." To avoid this, he said, the administration needed to be much more business-friendly. He stated that building factories in America is much more difficult due to regulations and unnecessary costs. He stated that, in comparison to the United States, building factories in China

was much easier. He also criticized the American education system, claiming that it was out of date and suffered as a result of union labor rules. He warned that there was no hope for education reform unless the teacher union system was abolished. He advocated for treating teachers as professionals rather than assembly-line workers in the industry, as well as giving principals the authority to hire and fire teachers based on how good or bad their work was.

He stated that schools should be open until at least 6 p.m. and in session for at least eleven months of the year.

He was irritated that teachers were still using chalkboards and textbooks to teach. He advocated for the use of digital technology in all books, learning materials, and assessments to make them more interactive and personalized for students' needs, as well as to provide real-time feedback.

He also offered to put together a group of six or seven CEOs to explain America's innovation challenges. The offer was accepted by the president. Jobs compiled a list of attendees for the Washington meeting, but when he discovered that more names had been added by presidential aides, he declined to join the group. However, in February 2011, Jobs had dinner with Obama and assured him, "Regardless of our political persuasions, I want you to know that we're here to do whatever you ask to help out country." He stated that America needed more trained engineers and proposed that any foreign student completing his engineering degree in America be granted a visa. Republicans, according to Obama, are opposed to such a move. Jobs was irritated by such policy paralysis. He said, "The president is very smart, but he kept explaining to us reasons why things can't get done. It infuriates me." "Apple employed 30,000 engineers to support 7,00,000 factory workers in China." Such

a large number could not be found in America.

These engineers did not need to be tech nerds; instead, they only needed basic manufacturing engineering skills. They could be trained at technical schools, trade schools, or community colleges. Companies could relocate more manufacturing plants to America if that were possible, he said. The argument had a significant impact on President Obama. He kept telling his aides, "We have to find ways to train those 30,000 manufacturing engineers that Jobs told us about." However, Jobs was dissatisfied with Obama because he perceived Obama to be hesitant to offend people. Later he said, "Yes, that's not a problem I ever had."

### **Textbook Industry**

Jobs met Murdoch over dinner on his 56th birthday. They were talking about education. Murdoch had established a digital education division. He remembered Jobs being skeptical that technology could transform education. However, both agreed that digital learning materials would destroy the paper textbook business. In fact, Jobs' next goal was to revolutionize the textbook industry. He recognized that with an annual revenue of \$8 billion, there was enormous potential for digital transformation.

Jobs saw it as the next big opportunity for another reason. Schools do not have lockers for security reasons, and students must carry heavy backpacks. Jobs said, "The iPad would solve that." Steve wanted to hire great textbook writers to create digital versions that would be available on the iPad. He met with major publishers such as Pearson Education about collaborating with Apple. He described the process of state certification as corrupt. But he said, "If we can make the textbooks free, and they come with the iPad, then they don't have to be certified. The crappy economy at the state level will last for a decade, and we can give



them an opportunity to circumvent that whole process and save money.” Jobs was chastised for not making charitable contributions like other wealthy businessmen. According to Jay Elliot, Jobs did not believe in simply donating money to worthy but bureaucratic organizations that would distribute the funds with no direct involvement from the donor. Instead, he was moved by the way Apple donated to and supported schools.

Apple has donated billions of dollars in computers and software to school systems over the years.

Although some may not consider it charity, Elliot writes that many thousands of teachers and school administrators would strongly disagree.

### **Apple University**

In 2008, Jobs launched the "Apple University" program. His vision for 'Apple University' was to train employees to be future business leaders. He believed that teaching Apple executives to manage like him was critical to the company's future. The reason for this was that his management style was diametrically opposed to what is typically taught in traditional management courses.

He identified key elements critical to Apple's innovative leadership, including accountability, attention to detail, perfectionism, simplicity, and secrecy. A former Apple executive said, “Steve was looking for his legacy. The idea was to take what is unique about Apple and create a forum that can impart that DNA to future generations of Apple employees. No other company has a university charged with probing so deeply into the roots of what makes the company so successful.” Steve kept Apple University, like most of his other projects, under wraps. Joel Podolny, Dean of Yale School of Management, had been personally recruited by Jobs. Yale only stated that Podolny was leaving to “lead educational initiative at Apple.”

Apple was completely silent on the subject. Apple offered him the position of vice president of human resources. His task included investigating the decision-making processes that had led the company in unexpected directions, such as the Apple Stores and the iPhone. The lessons learned from the company's successful forays away from its core business were to be taught to groups of aspiring Apple executives. Podolny enlisted the assistance of other business school professors in developing case studies, which included searching through Apple archives, speaking with current and former employees and executives, and determining answers to questions that define the decision-making process.

Meanwhile, Jobs' son, who was studying at Stanford, began working in an oncology lab during the summers. Jobs foretold to his biographer, “I think the biggest innovations of the twenty first century will be the intersection of biology and technology. A new era is beginning, just like the digital one was when I was his age.”

### **Conclusion**

Steve Jobs believed in making beautifully designed products of quality which ordinary people could easily use. He was a college dropout and had strong opinions about reforming the prevalent education system. Even though Jobs have expressed his opinions on American education system, the opinions are equally applicable to all the countries. Another important lesson one can take from Steve Jobs is the importance of nurturing one's curiosity where schools and teachers have a great role to play. In his famous Stanford University Commencement Address, Jobs stated the importance of following heart and falling in love with what one does in life. For him, a person must be passionate about the career he wants to pursue in order to put his heart into it and achieve success.

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