We all know today that our current education system is being talked about over and over again. We have failing schools, or drop-out factories as some reformers have come to call them. We are falling behind other countries in mathematics and science. We keep throwing money at the problem, signing acts, and increased standardized testing. But is there a better perspective that is well suited to tackle this problem with a new approach. The aim of this literature review is to discover theories and arguments which suggest that education must be reformed and guided away from its current direction.

My first source is a book by Paulo Freire “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” suggests in chapter one that we live in a world divided among the oppressors and the oppressed. The greatest virtue for the oppressed is to liberate themselves and the oppressors, since the whole hierarchal system oppresses both parties. He suggests that the only way for us to change would to both be mutual subjects, to teach with rather than teach to, to learn with rather than to learn from. He suggests that it is imperative for the oppressed, generally illiterate to form a critical conscience as to address the situation in which they find themselves. This would also present us with a way for the oppressed to engage in committed involvement rather than the false sense of involvement which is prevalent in America today. However this is a rather radical view, and requires a complete reform of the entire social system of which we are currently based, and Freire holds a rather leftist Marxist view, which obviously in a capitalist society would not be in favor.
However Freire was highly successful at educating illiterates in Brazil, and gained a great reputation as a new leading figure of education reform.

Another source, Jonathan Kozol’s “Illiterate America” presents us with empirical evidence with high illiteracy in America, and the dangers that this can create. I think this ties in nicely with Freire’s key concept of conscientization, the pedagogy of developing a critical conscience, to understand that one can change and transform reality. Kozol will present us with the devastation that illiteracy can have on our democratic system. As well as other social impacts it can create. When people cannot read they can be easily taken advantage of, they potentially may sign a contract they do not understand. This ties in nicely with the oppressed and oppressor standpoint that Freire gives us in his work. A way to break out of this cycle must be addressed in education, and Kozol a huge advocate for education reform is a great mind to draw ideas from. However this book is a little dated, so the exact numbers of illiteracy may not be accurate for today, but the ideas still remain, uneducated persons in a democratic system is a danger to our society.

Marc Edmundson in his article “Uses on a Liberal Education” has a very nice quote that complements Kozol’s argument. “A democracy needs to constantly develop and to do so it requires the most powerful visionary minds to interpret the present and to propose possible shapes of the future” (Edmundson 290). Edmundson focuses on education in the University sector rather than education as a whole, but presents a very important factor that ties in very well with Kozol and Freire. From his observations he suggests that consumerism in the university is bringing a negative factor to the way we operate academics, complaining that the focus is not on education, but as treating students as clientele that wish to purchase knowledge. This ties in again with oppressor and oppressed. We as college students should have a more critical
conscious about everything that is marketed to us when choosing a school. When we can learn to read, and not just read, but to read what things are trying to convey to us, we can potentially break out of the consumer driven culture which is now plaguing American universities. While we may not be technically illiterate, perhaps we are unaware of our current circumstance.

An article written by Oskar Gruenwald called “The University as Quest for Truth” published in the *Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies* gives a way to re-imagine our contemporary universities that Edmundson has observed, as not quite doing their supposed job. Gruenwald thesis is very clear. “…rethink the idea of the university as a quest for truth, discovery, interdisciplinary intellectual engagement, and vocation understood as character development and preparation for life, career and participatory citizenship in democracy” (Gruenwald 1). This ties in beautifully with all of the prior authors because he presents us with how early universities taught ways to think critically, and way to be well educated in life, and not just a specialized career. He elaborates on the loss of current values that universities used to teach, and that contemporary universities are forgetting to do today. This goes well with Freire and Edmundson in the sense that the aim of education is to enlighten minds, to kindle fire and not merely fill a vessel.

Another article by Irene C. L. Ng “Education as Service: The Understanding of University Experience through the Service Logic” published in the *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* brings a unique argument to the table. Rather than just blaming consumerism on the marketization of universities, it suggests that “…a marketing orientation can assist a university in developing its offerings while elucidating the uniqueness of education as a service” and makes a second claim that states “…true student-orientated marketing puts the university ideology at the center of marketing efforts and that marketing may well be an effective tool to
communicate such ideologies” (Ng 39-40). This presents us with a way that schools can still be marketing and not losing their value of the education and may in fact be a way to improve education. This is a counter argument to Edmundson, but also this article draws in a different solution to the same problem. It is no defending consumerism in universities and warns against the dangers of it. This ties in with all of these other articles especially Gruenwald, because it suggests marketing to students can help to bring about pursuit of truth and other virtues in the university.

Another source “About Consumerist Education” by Paul Gottfried is a break-down of his opinion about consumerist education. His opinion is closely related to Mark Edmundson’s, however, he is lacking in certain areas that Edmundson was really doing a good job. This source has some good ideas, and explains the consumerist education and other forms such as schools in socialist countries. He brings up some good pathos arguments, seems he is angry when writing it and some quirky remarks to say, that are pretty sharp and get his point across well. It ties in with the works of Paulo Freire in a way because it presents how these universities are acting as an oppressor to students, and how students are oppressing themselves at the same time because they don’t truly care about academics, because of the consumerism that is infecting the schools, but are being pushed along through the curriculum anyways.

Another source was interesting “Consumerism, Activism, Intrinsic Motivation, and Balance: An Interview with Tim Kasser” The Generalist’s Corner by Jared Keeley. Tim Kasser is a doctor in psychology and often teaches classes on alternatives to consumerism. His main focus on it was the effects of consumerism on the psychological well-being. However, this article will tie in nicely because while most of the other sources have presented us with a problem there is not a definite solution here. Tim Kasser has been working on a strategy to reduce
consumerism. And this will tie in well with Paulo Freire also because it is trying to free us from something that seems to be keeping students down, and is tearing down the university with it. The article attempts to address why some of these issues are happening, and through understanding that it allows a reader to attempt to think about solutions.

With the sources discussed above, it can be determined that education is currently something that must be addressed and a lot of people seem adamantly concerned with where it is heading. While some blamed consumerism, other presented ways in which a market based school could better education. Others argue that consumerism is eroding away university values, and eroding education along with it. Some of the classic works from educators such as Paulo Freire who spent much of his life educating illiterate and his belief in the powers of education, combined with the observations of Edmundson, Kozol, Ng, and Kasser some conclusions may be drawn about our current educational systems, ways to address these problems, whether or not reformation is necessary, and ways to get schools back on track with its true mission.

Works Cited


http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=5&hid=13&sid=713b45f8-efba-4b87-af44-e70471baf36-%40sessionmgr13&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZS%2ZzY29wZT1zaXRI#db=a9h&AN=43428739