Summary: Success Story

By Peter Allevato

The first Resolution for Stoa this 2015-16 year presents a very unique predicament: practical skills and liberal arts don’t really conflict with each other—they are simply different. Not opposed to each other, but different. Certain areas of study, like mathematics, can be features of both liberal arts and practical skills. By exploring the resolution through this particular lens, a strong case can be made for the value of Success on the Negative.

This case seeks to provide a simple, down-to-earth view of formal education, grounded in its principle purpose, preparing those who receive it for the future. When considering this angle, the value of Success is one that is difficult to defeat and accurately portrays the impacts of the resolution. Success itself is broad enough to include things like job opportunities, and promotions within the workplace. By providing a basic view of formal education and its purpose, it is easy to demonstrate why success should be the main concern of the round, and that practical skills best prepare students for success. Best of all, it is easily adaptable. This case provides a strong base template, which can be edited by novices and veterans alike to suit their particular needs, quirks, or preferences.

In refutation, the case has many areas where arguments can be leveled. Success as a value can be de-linked, thus eliminating impacts, or even turned, by provision of how liberal arts equips for success. The case is value-centric, and if the value is defeated, the rest of the case falls like wheat to scythe.

Success Story

Negative Case: Success

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“A man who has never gone to school may steal from a freight car; but if he has a university education, he may steal the whole railroad.”**[[1]](#footnote-1)** The point of this humorous quote from Theodore Roosevelt is not to say that education leads to crime, but rather that the effective purpose of formal education is to promote success in all endeavors of life. It is because I believe practical skills are a better path to this goal of success that I stand opposed to the resolution, and hold that in formal education liberal arts ought not to be valued above practical skills.

# Resolutional Analysis: Overlap

Before going too deep into the argumentation, we have to understand something that the resolution presents at face value. Liberal Arts and Practical Skills are *not* antonyms. Having one does not mean you won’t have the other. Many subjects like mathematics or some of the more general sciences are crucial to both liberal arts and practical skills centric education. So when we say we are supporting one side of the resolution or the other, there are certain core subjects that will always be covered in formal education.

# Value: Success

With that established, let's talk about why we have formal education. **Success** is the principle goal of Formal Education, and as such, we ought to weigh this round and this resolution by the impacts they have to Success. That is why Success, defined by Merriam Webster as **“the correct or desired result of an attempt”[[2]](#footnote-2)** is the value I will be championing today. The whole purpose of education is to best equip those who receive it for success. By looking at whether teaching liberal arts or practical skills better equips a student for success, we can see whether the resolution is true or false.

# Contention 1: Success is the Measure of Education

If we ask ourselves, “Why do we get an education?” The answer will always culminate with: in order to be successful. Success later in life is the ultimate goal of education; it’s what everyone looks to in order to determine whether or not an education was worthwhile. College students choose their majors based on what will give them the best success in their chosen field. Adults look at what they’ve done since graduation in order to see whether their education did them any good. Success is the perfect way to measure education, and as such, Success is the perfect value to weigh this round on.

# Contention 2: Practical Skills Lead to Success

There are many ways in which practical skills are superior to liberal arts in promoting success, and since that is the case, practical skills are what should be valued in formal education. We can see examples of this if we look to the job market:

When applying for jobs, there is a reason many companies leave open areas on their applications for ‘skills related to the position.’ Employers want employees who have skills that relate to the work that is going to be done. General education or liberal arts is not going to secure you jobs. Being a jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none will only make it more likely that you will lose a position to a person more directly qualified for a job, particularly on an entry level.

Once a job is secured, it’s still better to have practical skills in the workplace if you have an ambition to climb the proverbial ladder. Promotions are not handed out to those who exhibit general knowledge, but rather to those who show excellence in their given field. The employees who have practical skills at their disposal have a better chance of receiving benefits from upper management, and are better positioned to survive a cut when lay-offs roll around. Having useful skills better prepares you for success both in the search for work, and in work itself.

Every story of someone who had nothing, but gained everything, plays out through practical skills used by that person. If you want to be successful, you need to have skills that are useful enough to bring you success. That is why I hope you will join with me in negating the resolution.

Affirmative Brief: Success

‘Success Story’ defends well against many stances, but fares very poorly against others. As a general strategy, it is most likely unwise to attempt direct contradiction on most of the points. Rather, de-linking and turning arguments can sway the round in your favor.

The value of Success carries a lot of weight, but it is very broad, and a value that provides more clear-cut, specific benefits can serve to hit a harder impact than just general success. Success is also a very pragmatic value, and has little importance outside of a pragmatic viewpoint. If you can convince the judge that education should be rounding out an individual, rather than just equipping them for future opportunities, success can be swept aside like a dust-bunny.

The Contentions follow in a similar strain, dealing with very tangible benefits, but lacking intangibles. The second contention outlines how practical skills are good for the job market, but what happens when a student does not know what he or she wants from his or her education? A general education is certainly preferable in that instance. Another approach could minimize the impact of the applications, by pointing out that those with practical skills have only a narrow field in which they are qualified to work, and if there are no openings in that field, they’re done for.

Since the case itself deals with the very broad concept of Success, it lays out a good ground defense for just about any arguments, but fails to shore up its defense in any specific area. Because of this, pointed cross-examination questions and delving arguments based on details can be very damaging.

1. "Theodore Roosevelt Quote." *BrainyQuote*. Xplore, n.d. Web. 14 June 2015. <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/t/theodorero101963.html?src=t\_education>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. "Success." *Merriam-Webster*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 14 June 2015. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/success>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)