



**Episode 777: Three Scams: Higher Education, “More Technology in the Classroom,”  
and Leftist Comedians**

**Guest: Brett Veinotte**

**WOODS:** As you know, as a matter of fact, you are a star of my recent eBook, *Education Without the State*. I took the transcript of our chat many hundreds of episodes ago, and I made it part of that book, and people are liking it so far. So remember, folks, that's at NoStateEducation.com. You can download that baby; if you like what you hear from Brett, you've got more where that came from in that book. Now, over at the School Sucks Project you have your podcast that has many episodes. How many are you at at this point?

**VEINOTTE:** Oh, I don't know. With all the bonus episodes we do, probably around 600 I would say.

**WOODS:** Okay, I have surpassed you.

**VEINOTTE:** Indeed, indeed, yeah.

**WOODS:** That's right, because back at the time we were neck and neck with you having a slight edge the last time we spoke. But you talk about so many topics, and the funny thing is just as we were about to go on, I was talking about a book, the subject of my Episode 776, *Unleash Your Inner Company*, and I was saying what's notable in its absence in this book is school. Here's a guy basically trying to teach you how to start a business, how to figure out what your purpose in life is professionally, and what's notably absent is school, because you wouldn't have learned this in school. Nobody teaches that stuff in school. And what you said to me was kind of funny. You said, Yeah, you know what's also absent from my podcast is school. We don't talk about school. Boring. Been there; done that. We talk about education, which is a different thing. So let's start there. What does that mean?

**VEINOTTE:** Well, yeah, could you image a podcast about public school policy? I mean, there might be one, but it would just be so unbearable. You know, I had this vision with School Sucks — We live in a time where like a political libertarianism, like the prospect of it — (laughing) It looks pretty bleak right now considering the candidates for president this year. But that wasn't the case when I started the show in 2009. It was right after the Ron Paul Revolution. There was a lot of energy, and there was a lot of optimism for the future.

I would say that in the years that followed I've become more realistic, and I've kind of narrowed my vision to the maximum amount of individual freedom in an unfree world for all those who seek it, and what we try to do is promote that individual freedom, that personal liberty, through greater self knowledge, the practice of self education, and subsequent self improvement that comes from those two things. So you know, most of the content that we produce to support that mission has to do with things like how to develop creativity, how to increase motivation, self reliance, some understanding of self image or self esteem, critical thinking, productivity. And we also delve into philosophy and psychology and historical topics as well. So "school" is in the name of the show, but what we really talk about is education, and the two are quite opposite.

**WOODS:** Well, of course I agree that having a podcast about public school policy and debating stuff like that would be something – I bet in hell they have that podcast. (laughing) I bet that podcast is just running constantly about public school policy, for heaven's sake.

**VEINOTTE:** Yep.

**WOODS:** But having said that, I guess I do want to ask you a bit about a public school policy or a school policy, because I'm sure it's not confined to the public schools. And it seems to me, the impression I get, is that computers and the Internet and technology, these are all great things. Believe me, I sing their praises all the time. I wouldn't be able to do what I do every day without these things. I'm not in any way knocking them. But what I am knocking is they're taking over education to the point of absurdity. It's absolutely everywhere, and it seems to me like it's doing it for the sake of doing it. It's technology for the sake of technology. Do we have evidence that because kids are getting their homework on the Internet and delivered to them through an app that this is making them retain more information or ask more critical questions or something? I suspect the question answers itself.

**VEINOTTE:** Well, I think that there are two stories that people like to tell about how technology can save the precious schools. And the first one is this Indian – he was the head of some kind of educational technology company; his name was Sugata Mitra, and he did this experiment where he put like a touchscreen computer in a hole in a wall in a rundown area in New Delhi, India, and the children came up and they taught themselves how to use the computer in, like, a day. And then of course there's the One Laptop per Child program that I think was done in Ethiopia, and they got great results as well, so they said if technology can change people's lives in these horrible conditions, certainly we can just fill our inner city schools with them and revolutionize the system.

The people promoting these stories are – This is just the latest version of "give us more money," right? Because you're talking about huge upfront costs, and then the implementation costs for these types of new technology, this is the latest track of that. So I think what people are finding is that if schools are high performing already, the technology can be a kind of enhancement, but if schools are struggling, the technology isn't really making that much of a difference. In fact, they're making the situations in some of those schools actually worse, because the cost of

implementation and maintenance is further straining already strained budgets, like in inner city schools.

So if people care about education, technology is a nice enhancement, but if it's in a community or a culture where education is not the focus, then it's utterly useless, if not damaging. So the idea that this is going to revolutionize the struggling school, that has not been the case in over a decade of research on that.

**WOODS:** The one thing that I would be really happy to see with technology but I don't think is being done in the schools would be, with the parents' permission, something like teaching kids how to start a Wordpress blog and learn how to get their opinions out there, or how to make a YouTube video and express themselves online, and these sorts of things that most people don't know how to do but probably would like to and I think could accomplish a lot if they knew how to do this. This is a practical thing, whereas it seems to me that if my student is taking — I could see calculus maybe having some benefits through the computer, but if my student is taking Algebra I, there's no real enhancement in doing that on a screen as versus on a piece of paper.

So the nice thing about the Ron Paul Curriculum is that it does focus on teaching people how to start a blog, how to do these things that, not only do they teach you ideas, but it teaches you how to express the ideas, how to be part of the marketplace of ideas, and frankly it's not surprising that an institution that is so I think hostile to independent ideas is not exactly going out of its way, tripping over itself to teach people how to get their fresh, independent ideas before the world.

**VEINOTTE:** Right. So what you're talking about is teaching young people the benefits of technology. Instead, what I see happening is that this technology is becoming a kind of slave to the failing pedagogy, right? It's just becoming another kind of enforcement tool. Now, one of the side effects of that is what kind of attitudes is that going to build in young people towards these technologies.

So the example that I would is in the 1960s, President Kennedy began a national fitness program in the schools. 50, 60 years later, what kind of attitudes nationally did that produce towards physical fitness? We live in the fattest country in the world, perhaps the unhealthiest country in the world, as far as self-inflicted lack of health is concerned, through diet and sedentary lifestyle. The same thing is true with reading. What are most people's attitudes towards reading? Reading was something that was imposed on people in school, and therefore they develop a very negative attitude that unfortunately lasts for most people the rest of their lives. And technology could also have a similar fate because of how it's being used on schools.

**WOODS:** You've been talking a lot on your podcast about education and school being different things, and so that's why I wanted to lead off with that.

**VEINOTTE:** Sure.

**WOODS:** And I know it's easy — I mean, it's easy for me and easy for you to say education and schooling aren't the same thing, and just because you're sitting in a brick and mortar institution that's called a school doesn't mean you're getting

an education, and just because you're not doesn't mean you're not. But what does that actually look like in practice? Let's take somebody who has, let's say, graduated from a public high school but really doesn't have a whole lot to show for it, isn't exactly quoting Shakespeare at the drop of a hat. But we wouldn't say, well, I guess your opportunity for education is over forever. Of course not. That would be a very impoverished way to look at it. But what does a person do at that point? I didn't really get the kind of so-called well rounded education I was supposed to get. What do they do? How do they get it, practically speaking?

**VEINOTTE:** Well, after 15,000 hours of the public school, how do they know they need it? Because what they've been given is a kind of counterfeit education. I mean, if you look at the narratives that are emerging out of higher education, students today and the know-it-all attitudes that they take on so many subjects, it's not like they're aware of the fact that they weren't educated. I mean, the people – One of the most important distinctions I try to make on my show is between schooling and education, because people have to know they're not synonyms. For so long people just assume they're the same things. I went to school; therefore I'm educated. You've heard so many times people called "educated," because they have a PhD or a master's degree. Does that mean they are actually competent as independent thinkers? I certainly don't see a lot of evidence of that in the media or even in academia. So there's an interesting question that I would insert before that, Tom: how would they even discover that they actually need to be educated, that their schooling was not education? I don't think everybody realizes that.

**WOODS:** Yeah, that is the real key, isn't it, especially because they feel like I completed the institutional expectations, I have the official piece of paper, so that's what an education is, unfortunately.

**VEINOTTE:** Yeah.

**WOODS:** Yeah, that's what an education is. All right, let's move on to higher education. You have a podcast and a project called School Sucks. And I understand the spirit behind that, and of course it's not that you're against education any more than Roger Waters was against education when he wrote that song. But it's the institutional structure; it's the setting in which it takes place. All right, fair enough. But once somebody has completed that, once somebody has turned 18 and has actually gone through the traditional public school route, how does your School Sucks approach then apply to higher education about the decision to go, and then if you do go what should happen next? Do you guys think about that on the show?

**VEINOTTE:** Yeah, absolutely, and I encourage people to – I mean, I worked for years as a teacher in secondary school, and then after that I ran a tutoring company. And one of the goals of this tutoring company – I was the vice president – was to move – I'm not going to say the name of the company, because it still exists and I'm not a part of it anymore. But the name of the company was suggestive of this idea that we're trying to move people into the top tiers of higher education, and what our thinking was at the time – this was back in 2009 – is that because the college degree is becoming so easy to obtain, soon it's not going to be worth much more than a high school degree. Turns out we were right. What our thinking was at the time is if you're going to go to college, you have to go to one of these top tier schools, a school that

has a large endowment, a school that can change very rapidly and education that students receive there is reflecting the changing industry outside of the school.

So the example that I always give on my show is I graduated from high school in 1995. I majored in mass communications, which was journalism and television. So while I'm in college from 1995 to 1999, outside of this small school with now endowment, the entire communications industry is being revolutionized by this digital age. Nobody told us, so in 2000 I went out into the work world knowing how to use Adobe PageMaker for Windows 95 and knowing how to use hot wax to layout a newspaper. But those skills weren't really useful in the communications world that I was interviewing for jobs in in the year 2000, in the year 2001. So I held this position for a long time, that if you're going to invest this huge amount of money, this ever expanding amount of money for college tuition, you need to make sure that you're going to a school that is actually going to create opportunities for you on the other side.

When I talked to Zach Slayback from Praxis, he actually said that having a degree from, say, an ivy league school, it could even be a kind of liability, because people don't want to hire you in entry level positions, because they know you're just going to be off to do something else in a year or two. Why would this person want to work here and do this? So I'm really at a difficult place right now as far as giving advice there, Tom, and I actually used to be a college consultant. I walked away from it, because I didn't like what I had to tell people to stay competitive in that field. Like, college was the 13th grade. You had to go there. The whole purpose of high school was going to college.

And what I think about now is how to get people, not when they're 18, because I think that creates additional challenges, but how to get people when they're 13, 14 interested in entrepreneurship or making their own job instead of just this following this path to getting a job where you're going to be taken care of. So I would start much earlier. I think by the time someone is 18, they're in a very, very difficult position having a lot of those realizations.

**WOODS:** Yeah, that's why when I'm talking to my kids and I've got some interesting project that I've launched or I'm trying something new, sometimes I succeed and sometimes I don't, but I tell them in both cases – First of all, I don't want them to view me as infallible and everything always goes right for Dad so if anything ever goes wrong for them they feel like their lives have no meaning, but I want them to learn from what I learn and learn from what I've learned through mistakes and successes, and just to get them thinking that it's possible to live their lives in a way other than – and this is the way I always put it – sitting by the phone waiting for somebody to call them with an opportunity.

**VEINOTTE:** Absolutely.

**WOODS:** That can't be the right way to live your life, where just everyone tells me I've got to do the following thing. Now look, I went to college, and then I got a PhD, so I'm going to come right out and say that. That's true. But if I had it to do over again, I'm not sure – certainly in 2016 that'd be a stupid thing to do. In history? You'd be crazy to go and get a PhD now.

**VEINOTTE:** Right.

**WOODS:** There's no job for you on the other end of that. I would definitely not be doing it. I did do it at the time. I'm not so sure how much I've used that. Well, that's not true. I guess I have used it. But in a lot of what I do now, I'm learning about how to be profitable. That's certainly nothing I learned in formal education. Nobody taught me how to be profitable. Nobody taught me how to run a going concern, how to so-called build a brand and all that. I never learned any of that stuff. So I want them to see that in me, so that they understand that life is not a cookie cutter where I'm expected to do the following three things, and so therefore I will conform to those expectations, and then on the other side I'm guaranteed that everything's going to turn out great. And by the way, that's one of the complaints that people make about people like you and me, that we can't guarantee that going the entrepreneurial route is going to turn out great. Yeah, but the college people can't guarantee that either. Nobody can guarantee anything. It's a question of likelihoods.

**VEINOTTE:** Yeah, and at least in the former you can be on a self-directed path. So I made this decision to major in communications – I talked about this on a recent episode of my show – based on something I decided I wanted to do when I was 12 years old. I loved baseball, and I thought it would be cool to be like the play-by-play guy on television. I said, That's a neat job; that's the job I want. So when it came time – I was so apathetic as a student because I hated school so much. When it came time to pick a major in college, I said, Ah, maybe I'll – I thought of an idea when I was 12, so I'll major in that.

And what I realize, like reflecting back now on almost 40 years of life, is that there was some kind of need or some kind of drive that was a part of who I am from a very young age to want to speak publicly, to be an entertainer, and also to recognize and help young people recognize the opportunity of this time. I found a way to do that, despite getting hung up in college and getting a useless degree, getting sidetracked like that for four years. This time allows me and the opportunities that exist in this time have allowed me to find a way to have the vocation, a vocation that's very, very connected to the core of my being. And that wouldn't have been possible 20 years ago.

So that's something that I hope young people will realize. Is it a guaranteed success? Absolutely not, but at least I get up every day and I'm excited. I certainly remember getting up in the morning and not being excited to go to work. When I was a teacher in a school, at the end of that it was absolutely dreadful. As soon as I wake up now, I'm out of bed, I'm making coffee, I can't wait to get into my office and start reading or start recording. I love when I have like a video project or an audio project to edit. It's just so exciting to me, and it's an opportunity of this time, and I think that people, as they just march down this path that's laid out before them – high school, then college, then career to take care of you – they never get to experience or enjoy any of that. Now, some people do obviously, but it's a minority, and I would like to see it become more people.

**WOODS:** And I don't want to disparage people who have traditional jobs, because a lot of them find these very meaningful –

**VEINOTTE:** Absolutely.

**WOODS:** – and they enjoy doing them. So it's not to say – You know, I had last week – this is another analogy. I had a guy who is the co-creator of a documentary called *The Minimalists*, and it boils down to a lot of people are just trying to get a lot of stuff, and they accumulate more stuff and more stuff and more stuff, and it's not meaningful to them, and it's like they're chasing their own tail basically. It's not meaningful in the long run. But at no time did he say, Therefore, I'm going to tell everybody that you shouldn't have the following items, or, You should live your life this way or that, because he realizes that different people have different values, and they're going to find different things meaningful.

**VEINOTTE:** Yeah.

**WOODS:** And the same thing holds here, so I don't, even though I go off on tangents like this a lot, I don't want people to think that I'm putting anybody down. But I am saying that I know a lot of you who are listening to me who are living that kind of lifestyle are craving Brett's lifestyle. And that's the thing that we're speaking to here.

**VEINOTTE:** Yeah, and I'm glad you pointed that out, because I do this a lot, and I catch myself doing this a lot. I superimpose a lot of my professional experiences onto other people that I don't even know. Like for me, in education I would just learn my way out of one job after another. I remember starting working as a residential counselor in this boarding school. It wasn't even educational. And I would give kids medication; I was certified to do that. And then I realized all of the problems with that. So I said, okay, I need to leave here and move laterally in this organization to being a teacher's assistant, and then moving up in this organization as a teacher. And every job, just after I sat in it for a year, like, all of these problems would start to emerge, and I'd say, I'm not helping people here.

Even when I got into tutoring and I'm just kind of shuffling kids into college through working with them on something like the SAT or doing college consulting and helping them write essays, I'm like, I'm part of the problem. I was an enforcer for the public schools by doing academic tutoring, going to a kid's house, saying, You're getting Cs; you need to get Bs. Something's wrong with you until you get Bs. That's what your parents basically told me to tell you. That's what the school basically tells me to tell you. None of that felt good.

So my career just kept changing based on these problems that would become apparent to me until there was nowhere left for me to go. SAT tutoring is not the worst thing, or standardized test tutoring. I actually think a lot of those tests have opportunities to develop critical thinking skills. But I just wasn't excited about going to work anymore, and eventually I think I was like 35 or 36 – this was just a few years ago. I said, Where can I go from here? If I want to educate people – that was one of the desires that I had when I started down this career path – I think I've come to a dead end. So I'm taking that experience that I had and maybe I'm applying it to other people recklessly, so I definitely get what you're saying.

**WOODS:** Let's shift gears completely and talk about one of your obsessions that you were telling me about. Talk about the comedian problem that we are facing.

**VEINOTTE:** Okay. In this election cycle, I have realized that these people, like Trevor Noah and Stephen Colbert and Bill Maher, absolutely have to be stopped. And I think that maybe we need to convene some kind of conference, where every single libertarian or even conservative media producer is assigned one of these people, and we have to devote five to ten hours a week to just absolutely taking them down, and I really want John Oliver. Do you know who John Oliver is?

**WOODS:** Yes.

**VEINOTTE:** Yeah, I have had it with that guy. And this was a very edgy, this kind of iconoclastic and irreverent form of comedy in the late '90s, but it's so worn out now, shows like *The Daily Show* and *Real Time with Bill Maher*, and they are just complete shills for the political left and for Hillary Clinton, and they're not even shy about it anymore. And I think this setup that they have is if you can laugh at somebody, you are better than they are. That seems to be the narrative that goes through every single one of these shows. We can always find a reason to laugh at Donald Trump. Or you know, I remember when it was Ron Paul or Mitt Romney. Whoever it is, you find a reason to laugh at them, and that means that we are better than them. We sit at the adults' table politically.

And I just feel like as I'm fighting against the public school system on my show, I realize that, oh, these are the people that young people are really learning about politics from or think they're learning about politics from. They're getting these easy answers. This is the sophisticated way of thinking. They're not getting any objective view of any of these situations, and I feel like there needs to be a more concerted effort to take these people down, or at least pointing out the tactics that they use. In 2012 we were doing a series on logical fallacies, and I did an entire episode on Bill Maher. I called it "Reality Time for Bill Maher."

After I watched a couple episodes of his show, and I realized that everything he was saying at the time — this was in the midst of the 2012 election, where it was Obama versus Romney — he was just using two logical fallacies over and over again in all of his arguments. One was composition, where you basically take the properties of a person, like some crazy Republican — I remember there was a guy who said something like "legitimate rape," and that was a big deal at the time. And then you say, okay, well, this guy did this thing, so all Republicans are this. And then the division fallacy was to make some kind of rule for like, All corporations are bad; Mitt Romney is part of a corporation; therefore, Mitt Romney is bad. So they're like opposite fallacies of each other, but he would just use them interchangeably to create hour-long shows. If it wasn't for these fallacies, he and his guest would just be sitting there in silence.

So I thought that there was a way to go after these people based on them breaking the rules of logic, but then I just realized that if that doesn't work, if you expose that, they just call you names. So it's something that is incredibly frustrating to me, because I feel like they're misinforming the people that I want to reach and inform, and I am serious. Like, in the background right now, I am developing plans to take them on on a weekly basis, hopefully with the help of other comedians who are kind of awake to the reality of the liberal media, other libertarian or conservative-leaning media producers. I want this to be a project. Even if it needs to be a whole separate show, this is something that I really want to get serious about doing.

**WOODS:** Yeah, well, "get serious," so to speak. That's a good idea.

**VEINOTTE:** Yeah.

**WOODS:** Now, bear in mind that your point about you should do it with comedians is really central, because there's nothing worse than somebody doing a funny routine, and then a libertarian comes along with a stern point-by-point rebuttal. People think, oh, this guy is thick as can be. He's missing the whole point; this is just comedy. But if you come back at it with comedy, that's all the better. And we have some talent in that area.

**VEINOTTE:** Yeah, absolutely, and I think that's really, really important. George Carlin said one time, as far as mixing politics with comedy, "At the point of laughter is the best place to insert new ideas." And it seems like these people, the Colberts and the Mahers and the John Stewarts and the Trevor Noahs and the John Olivers, they seem to know that, and this is a very, very powerful kind of political manipulation, pushing people into left-wing thinking, as if it is the only rational way to think. I mean, that's one of the narratives that exist in their programs. You can think like us, or you're an idiot. And they basically just come out and say that. So I think yes, it can't be like some kind of dry, like, oh, they're wrong and here's why, because –

**WOODS:** Hasn't he seen this chart from the St. Louis Federal Reserve?

**VEINOTTE:** Exactly. And they say, Come to Pleasure Island and have fun with us. Look at them, all serious with their charts. So I think – and I'd be happy to hear ideas from your audience or from my audience about how to best approach this, but I think it needs to be a show, and I think it needs, like, a sustained and concerted effort, because these guys are getting away with a lot. They want to be serious political commentators, but when somebody calls them out on what they're doing – John Stewart was famous for this. He'd say, Oh, well, the show on after me is puppets making prank phone calls. It's not like I'm a serious – I shouldn't be criticized; this is just comedy. But it isn't, especially as far as young people, high school and college age students. I mean, I started watching *The Daily Show* I think when I was maybe a junior or sophomore in college is when that show came on. I took it pretty seriously.

And the whole, like, "I get my comedy from Fox News and I get my news from Comedy Central" – that's a quote that I've heard. That's a big problem. Not that getting your news from Fox News is ideal, but the idea that that is news, that that is the truth, especially how deceptively those shows are edited and how people are brought on and made to look like fools entirely in the editing room. It happened to Gavin McInnes. I'm sure you're familiar with who he is, and he talked about it on his show. I think some exposing is needed there for sure.

**WOODS:** Okay, how do people get to the School Suck Project and podcast?

**VEINOTTE:** Absolutely. [SchoolSucksProject.com](http://SchoolSucksProject.com) is our website, and in the top navigation menu you can go through all our series. There's a dropdown called "Podclasses," so if you're interested in learning about critical thinking methods or better communication, psychology and wellness, history, philosophy, self sufficiency,

or even school issues, Tom – we do have a section on school issues where we talk about the origins of the public school system, teachers' unions, some really horrifying school news that's happened through the years. It's all there. My Twitter is @SchoolSucksShow, and I would also ask people to subscribe to our YouTube channel; the username is School Sucks Podcast.

**WOODS:** All right, I'm going to link to all of that stuff also at [TomWoods.com/777](http://TomWoods.com/777). I want people to check out what you're doing. It's all really important and fun, and you're not a hard guy to listen to, which is a good quality in a podcast host.

**VEINOTTE:** Thank you.

**WOODS:** All right, well, thanks for your time, Brett. Let's do it again soon.

**VEINOTTE:** Absolutely, Tom. Thank you so much for having me on.