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Education affects us all at some time. We all enjoy, or to some minds, suffer the process of being educated or being taught. This immediately makes me ask, is learning the same as education? We can be taught facts, we can learn how to carry out various tasks; to be educated, however, implies perhaps displaying culture, taste and a wide knowledge, being cultured, a complete person.

Is this what we are trying to do in our schools today? To produce adults who can take their place in society, and more importantly, contribute to it in a worthwhile way. I sometimes doubt it. The majority of children leave school, as young adults, with some knowledge of basic facts. They satisfy examiners that, at that moment, they can answer various questions to a pre-set standard; whether this is a test of knowledge or of memory is a debatable subject. Of course, educational authorities must do their best to ensure that young people become literate, to have a working knowledge of mathematics, to have an understanding of moral standards and the world's religious beliefs, and these days, to explore scientific facts. But do we really teach them how to think for themselves, to be self-reliant and not to depend entirely on other people to solve their problems?

Going to school should be a happy experience. Learning should be a pleasure. The majority of young children are curious. If you have spent time with a lively youngster, you will know they keep asking questions, they want to know about everything - in fact it can become tedious, as they exhaust your own knowledge. What happens then when they go to school? Why does learning itself become tedious and many children lose all interest? Look back to your own school days and you will know the answer.

There are many teachers, of course, who hold children's interest all the time, make learning and thinking an exciting process. They inspire children to want to become educated. This I believe is today, where there is a vast improvement in our schools. Learning is not the dull task it was, of learning facts by rote, but there must still be a long way to go, otherwise why is it then, even today, there are sixteen-year-olds leaving school, who are barely able to read or write? This is not a common problem in a County such as Devon, but is a very serious one in some inner cities, leading perhaps to the feeling of despair and inadequacy among teenagers of all races and creeds, leading, in turn, to mindless vandalism and violence.

Where does our educational system go wrong? - does it start with the selection of young people who want to enter the teaching profession? Now that we have falling school numbers, and fewer teachers are required, there are as I understand, as many as ever applicants for this profession; therefore, should there be a more comprehensive selection system? A great deal is known about assessing young people to find out if they are suitable for a particular career. Training a teacher, as training for any highly-skilled job, is expensive and it seems sensible that applicants should undergo a thorough selection process to discover, at least, if they have the right temperament to teach. It is quite obvious that not everyone is suited to giving interesting lessons, to arouse the inherent quest of knowledge that most children have, and more importantly, have they the strength of character to put up with the tensions of dealing with children each and every day? This last requirement is, I believe, one of the most important. Like many arts, the technique of teaching can be learnt to some degree, but experience plays a big part in producing an outstanding teacher - however, without the right temperament, other talents are wasted.

I have outlined some of my concerns; I have no easy answers. Much research is at this moment going into improving the curriculum, examinations conditions, and examining the types of schools which give best results overall. Unfortunately we do not have an average child, the kind of education that suits one does not suit another. But what I do believe is, that everyone of us has some talent of some kind. It may be academic, it may be physical, if only this talent can be found when a child is young, and can be developed, it helps in so many ways. Most of us have seen this happen, a child who is perhaps a slow learner, who matures or develops at a later stage, suddenly discovers he or she has a particular talent, in sport, music, art, or in any subject you can think of, when this is brought to the fore, the child gains self confidence, and there is an all-round improvement. This is where parents and schools can play such a big part, and where at the moment, unless the child meets an interested and dedicated person, he or she just remains part of the machine, the present education machine that tries to turn out children to fit the average mould.

I believe it is important to imbue children with the idea at an early age, of aiming high in all they do. Not to be content with second best. This means to aim as high as they can with their particular talents, rate of learning and rate of maturity. We all understand that everyone is different, but everyone can try to give of their best. This requires a great deal of attention and dedication for all concerned with children, parents and teachers. This is one of the great problems of today, insufficient time to deal with individual children who perhaps need more special

handling. The answer to this is more money to be spent on Education. But already Education takes such a large proportion of our financial resources, it is in competition with demands for other equally important services, that I cannot see any hope of extra cash until this country as a whole becomes more prosperous. It is another spiral, we need better education so the young can produce more wealth for the country to produce better education. But in spite of this I view the future of education with optimism. With the dedicated experts that are working on this problem, the situation can only improve.