

Life itself is a continual learning process, or should be, and education encompasses much more than the schoolroom. Schools can often be too rigid and impersonal for children to learn what direction they should try to aim for in their lives. Many people have the idea that learning and education are the exclusive domains of the schools, that knowledge comes only from the teacher, that learning is confined to the years of school attendance and accept that education consists of courses and gaining certificates. This is not a healthy attitude to hold, as learning from books is certainly not all that education should be.

In our schools the majority of teachers have spent their entire lives within the education system. They generally go from school to university or college with no thought of doing anything else and then they return to the schools to teach. In my opinion it should be obligatory for all students to pursue something different for at least a couple of years before going on to further education after their school years. Surely someone who is to teach young, impressionable minds should have a good all round knowledge of life, not purely of academic subjects. Teachers also tend to share a common background in that they will have been successful at school and from a family background which is encouraging to them but which is also happy with the system of education and narrow in its view of life. Our best way of educating must be to give as wide a variety of subjects as possible and in a wide variety of ways, and to give appropriate credit for experiences outside of school; to do this it is important that teachers have a knowledge of more than the education system in which they are caught.

Our traditional method of teaching encourages memorising, answer-centredness, apparent learning and 'getting by' in place of real learning. The aim of the teacher should be to give the pupils the love of discovery and finding knowledge for themselves. The teacher should be honest and sincere in his desire to impart to children the joy of discovering for themselves and must try not to be an alien and superior being to them. Children are naturally motivated to learn and find out about the world around them. We often hear the older generation today saying that there is a lack of motivation inherent in young people but in fact it is more a loss of motivation and can be partly attributed to the structure of our schools and the expectation of children to learn exactly as the school expects them to. In young children there is a chance of adults destroying the intelligence and creative capacities because of making them do things they do not find of any interest or use to them. These capacities can be especially damaged by making children afraid of not pleasing, of not doing what teacher wants, of making mistakes. This can make them afraid to gamble and experiment. There is a danger of children feeling that what is worthwhile is what is taught and that if it is important to learn something it is necessary for someone to teach it to them. Often we can see a struggle going on in the classroom; children are expected to respect their teacher always and to accept mindlessly that he is right. Children are forced to take the views of their teachers and often not enough acknowledgement is given for their own personal discoveries and interests; the significance of incidental, casual and informal learning is often ignored.

There is also a danger within our school system of keeping all children at the same level. It is certainly more educative for them to discover for themselves at their own pace and to choose for themselves what to investigate than to be dictated to by anyone. The definition of a successful life is different in each individual child and he will learn specific skills and mental operations only when he is ready and cannot be hurried. Most teachers have a very rigid idea of what a child should achieve in a particular subject at a particular age. It is expected by our system that a group of thirty to forty children of the same age should have the same interests and developing skills at the same time, which is obviously going to cause some children to be repressed from learning and cause others to misunderstand and miss out on that particular piece of learning. It is, of course, very difficult for the teacher to successfully aid each child to achieve its full potential in the direction most suited to it in our classroom environment.

There is also a danger within our system of education to structure the curriculum totally towards getting a job when the student has to leave the educational establishment. Education should have little to do with the work people will do, "education is for living, not earning a living." People must be able to structure their leisure time in a way beneficial to their future well-being and happiness. The technological era we are in means society in general has more leisure time and it is obviously important that they fill it in a useful way. In order to do this it is important their interests and activities are as wide as possible and to facilitate this our education system should be structured differently and not be entirely work orientated.

Within our education system there is also a tendency to make people look at our government as the only possible way; it assists in making people conform. We are often led to believe that schooling and book learning are the only way to get on in life and the only worthwhile thing to do.

In conclusion, I think it is vitally important for our teachers to be facilitators of learning rather than instructors and should act as a resource for a student to turn to when in need of advice. If a teacher could pay careful attention to the individual child rather than to the group and respect his individuality and self-development this is bound to react well in later life. Education should be more concerned with forming people to lead worthwhile lives in whatever way they see fitting for them. It should form the general public to help alleviate the injustices and inequalities of our social system. Education is a life long experience and takes place everywhere. When dealing with children we should all remember this and assist them in development at every opportunity in every way and not leave education to the schools.