

When the word 'education' is used, it is generally accepted that most people are usually thinking of what boys and girls are taught in school. R.S. Peters remarks in his essay 'The justification of education':

"There is a general concept of 'education' which covers almost any process of learning, rearing or growing up. Nowadays, when we speak of education in this general way, we usually mean going to school, to an institution devoted to learning."

Often the terms technical and university education are referred to and an educated man is considered to be someone who has spent years of his youth in the classroom.

However, the word is being used in a narrow sense if it is supposed that education is a matter of one's early years only. Etymologists tell us that the word comes from the Latin verb educare, which means to bring up (children), but it is also related to educere, to draw out, and so we have the idea of continual drawing out of the powers with which we are naturally gifted. In this sense, education is a process which goes on, each day providing a learning situation. For most people their schooldays finish when they are in their teens, but their education is never really completed. All through life they are learning - from books, from the observation of the world around, from their varied experiences, and their contacts with their fellow men and women. All these influences affect the way in which we think and feel and act.

It was Gibbon, the great historian, who wrote that, "Every person has two educations, one which he receives from others and one, more important, which he gives himself." Although we "live and learn", the foundations of knowledge gained in later years are laid in the school. Often some obscure or apparently useless item of information or skill is proved to be of consequence in that the education we get later from life is all the richer and fuller for a sound education in our youth. School serves the purpose of providing the basic training to make education possible - essentially the learner must be motivated to feel that learning is something valuable.

Dewey asked that education should be for the "process of living" and in today's world there is little place for the man or woman who knows how to read but has no knowledge of what to read, who can listen without understanding and who has little idea of weighing the pros and cons of a situation. Consequently, schools have long been aware of the importance of enriching the curriculum beyond the classroom. Field trips to museums, art galleries, planetariums, industrial plants, local Government departments, etc. have always been considered of great value, to encourage pupils not only to pursue any special interest to its fullest extent, but to broaden experiences and interests generally.

In addition to encouraging creativity, there has been great emphasis to ensure that the basic skills have not been neglected, for it is realised that higher proficiency in these will be needed. Such vast changes have taken place in all technical aspects and advances over the last decade that teachers have become more and more aware of the need for educational change and opportunities to meet the needs of society today.

In a fast moving world of research, experimentation and discovery, greater emphasis must be placed on teaching the techniques of research, where to find material, how to outline, organise and summarise and evaluate that material. Not only is society changing rapidly but also the knowledge and volume of facts each day is accumulating. It would be facile of us to imagine that one could assimilate all this. Therefore it is important to know how and where to find information.

Teaching and learning in schools have always monitored and amplified the changes in society, but such a task is becoming increasingly difficult. In the light of such change, teachers have realised the process of change in schools must accelerate. Not only teachers, but pupils, politicians and employers have all voiced a need for a more practical and vocational bias in the curriculum. It is recognised that to fulfil these needs better facilities, specialist teachers and methods are required to benefit such practices already being tried today, in the form of careful grouping and special classes.

Evidence suggests that in the present system a substantial proportion of non-academic teenagers are unable to make the most of their full potential. Poor performers at school are not necessarily poor performers at work. The advent of the Warnock Report has highlighted the percentage of children with special needs and in the light of our present economic situation, it is questionable whether the present pattern of education is actually meeting the needs of society. What is the future?