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Any personal view of education must obviously be influenced by an individual's own experience of education, so I would like to begin by describing my own. I grew up in what was then, in the fifties and early sixties, a mining valley in South Wales which had a strong tradition of, and belief in education, particularly as a means of self advancement and as a route out of the mines and into a better job. This was a narrow and utilitarian view of education but it was certainly the view held by most of the people that I knew. From quite an early age I can remember my father urging me to "stick in at school and get yourself a better job" and this stayed with me for a long time and provided much initial motivation.

I was fortunate enough, in those optimistic post-war years, to pass the 11-plus and go to a grammar school which had some good teachers. In those days and especially amongst people with my background, teachers were respected for their academic achievements. They had "been to college" and had an authority conferred upon them by their formal education which was unquestioned by most people. Thanks to some of my teachers I began to realise that education was far more than a simple process of learning a trade or passing a few exams but was a kind of voyage of discovery, perhaps even of self discovery. I remember also that the influence of individual teachers had almost as much to do with their personality as with the subject which they taught.

I happened to be good at Mathematics but my interest in the subject was stimulated by my teacher in the sixth form who clearly enjoyed the subject himself, and was always delighted to see others share his enthusiasm. He also treated us like individuals, talked to us rather than at us, and was the opposite of the pedantic, autocratic teacher. His informal, friendly approach to learning made a profound and lasting impression on me.

I remember also, with great affection, my English teacher who seemed to me to be the epitome of wisdom with common sense. Coming from a home in which there were virtually no books, literature consisted of a few comics and the Daily Mirror. Anything more than that - poetry, music, Shakespeare - was thought useless and even "sissy". A man was interested in sport and "manly" things so it was with a sense of amazement that I heard my English teacher say, one day, "If you like football, then that's fine, but if you like football and Shakespeare, then that is even better". This was an unthinkable connection in the culture that I knew and grew up with. The two were worlds apart, and yet here was this teacher, with all the force of her authority, joining the two together. It was a very powerful statement to make to someone of my background and I have never forgotten it.

She changed my attitude to many things, made me realise how important it was for me to read and discover things for myself. She showed me that education is important as an end in itself, that it is an enrichment and an exciting experience and that life lived without these discoveries is dull and empty. I find this particularly true in mathematics. It has never ceased to fascinate me and when I read some new mathematics I am always filled with a sense of wonder. This, above all else, is my lasting gain from education.

For me then, education is a continuing journey of discovery and the best that educators can do is to use their own experiences and interest to help guide those who wish to learn. Unfortunately there seem to be some students that I meet that do not wish to learn or are at least reluctant to do so. Some even give the impression that they have been drafted into higher education. I do not blame these people, they are the product of the world as it is today. Many of them are hoping desperately that at the end of 3 years they will more easily get a job or improve their prospects, some are in higher education because they cannot find a job and some because it is the next step after school. These reasons are rarely sufficient to produce the enthusiasm which I, as an educator, would like to foster and it is sad to see so many young people who feel compelled to study a subject for which they have so little love.

The philistine, utilitarian attitude to education which preaches that only that is good which provides technicians for the economy is a view which has been vigorously promoted in recent years. It has distorted the views of education and has shifted the focus to "practical", "technical", "scientific", "vocational" training and away from the broadening, enriching experience which it should be. There is nothing more ridiculous than the spectacle of government ministers most of whom are arts graduates, preaching the virtues of science, nothing more absurd than the scientifically illiterate administering science policy.

It has also been unnerving to see the reaction of some members of the educational establishment to this raucous onslaught. Instead of a spirited defence of liberal, humanitarian values there has been muted agreement of the failure of education, failure in this case being equated with the erosion and decline of Britain's industrial base. There have even been some that have profited and advanced their careers by selling out to these

ideals. I cannot understand, nor can I even respect, any teacher or academic who does not believe in the primacy of academic ideals, the pursuit of knowledge, all the things I learned to respect as an adolescent. To be brought up to respect education, and especially the educated, is a burden when one eventually discovers that many of them are no better and no worse than the most ordinary of ordinary people.