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Education is a lifelong activity. It begins at birth and ends with death, it embraces all things and we are never able to claim to be its master.

Education has many subjects apart from the academic content. Babies are educated from birth, to talk, walk, recognise, memorise, feed themselves and become potty clean. The average youngster learns at an amazing rate, probably more rapidly during the first five years than at any other time.

Unfortunately for many the word 'education' confuses many memories of school, some happy, most not so happy. In fact, education is directly associated with school days and subsequently people seem to consider upon leaving school that education ceases. Yet the acquisition of knowledge should be the most important ambition. Why then do we have illiteracy? is it an illness or due to some deficiency in a person, or is it that we have failed to communicate, failed to ignite the thirst for knowledge in that person who for some reason is not receptive to the established methods. Or do we install into some individuals at an early age the idea of being a failure? Why is it children do not want to go to school, why do some rebel against school life and why is it that most people consider their education to be completed upon leaving school?

Educationalists never consider the existing methods to be perfect, some are reluctant to change, others feel it best to resort to past methods and some are constantly moving forward to more exciting avenues of learning. Education must be informative, enlightening, interesting and exciting, but mostly it must be fun. Children must want to learn and if that is to be the case then the whole structure of teaching has to be constantly reviewed.

Not enough is being achieved in the field of nursery schools. If it is accepted that the first five years is the most receptive, then let's make it possible to teach children by making available the necessary equipment and personnel.

Primary Schools are much more creative now than ever before. Some of the marvellous work being produced by the children is remarkable and I am convinced that modern methods are responsible for the tremendous improvements, however we still have a long way to go with classes of up to 40 children per teacher and outdated books, individual attainment is bound to be affected.

Secondary Education is generally an emphasis of the establishment view and it is here that many people are lost. Pressures are great on young people today and one is more likely to experience the fear of failure.

Unfortunately streamlining tends to produce what the establishment requires. Young academics are programmed to be professional people, other youngsters to the trades. After leaving school it becomes difficult to alter course unless there is considerable resolve, and a place in a higher educational establishment is remote, without firm qualifying examination results.

Modern technology increases the pressure on the young, as the employment they are groomed to adapt to, shrinks, leaving many of them feeling surplus to requirements and useless in society. With the advances in modern technology we shall hopefully proceed to a method of work sharing, which will result in an increase of leisure time. Now, more than ever before, leisure use must form part of the curriculum content.

The Comprehensive system of Secondary Education offers a balanced, varied, creative and wide ranging programme which incorporates subjects other than pure academics. However, it is still very establishment orientated and is in need of constant review to ensure that there are changes to satisfy modern needs. There is a strong argument here for greater parent and lay involvement within the management structure of school, to ensure also that these changes are reviewed and policies implemented in the best interest of the pupils and community.

Higher and Further Education

There should be no age limit to the accessibility to higher or further educational establishments, and to enhance the quality of life and to cater for the inevitable demand for retraining, either for updating highly technological professions, or for new and alternative employment, as old methods become redundant, it will be necessary to increase provisions. It is also reasonable to assume that people will have more leisure time and will subsequently wish to make use of the Colleges to learn trades other than their usual professional interests. There is a danger that this freedom may be discouraged because of financial considerations, and alternative methods introduced, funded by industrial organisations, which would narrow the curriculum and result in a funnelled approach to any subject. To widen the educational horizons and improve the quality of life, educating people should be firmly retained in the hands of the professional educationalists, and adequate funds and equipment must be made available to ensure constant updating of methods and machinery.

Community Education

Probably one of the most important yet terribly underfunded spheres of the educational programme.

It incorporates all age groups, youth work, unemployed people, adult literacy, senior citizens, and also offers numerous courses on a great number of subjects of an academic nature as well as the opportunity to learn skills and crafts.

Community education caters for a great deal of social work, its aim is to prevent social problems rather than to cure them although it has performed that service on many occasions.

The education of officers in the community field is tremendous, and the surprising numbers of dedicated voluntary people never ceases to amaze and fill me with admiration. If there is a cause which justifies increased expenditure then community work is it.