

You are unique. There are people who are similar to you, but none who are exactly the same. You may crave to be like someone else, maybe a film or music personality, but no-one can be better at being you than you yourself. Isn't it sad, then, to state that probably you do not fully understand who you are or how to realise your maximum potential? The drawing out of what is in a person rather than to impose upon him a preselected view from outside should be both the aim and practice of a process called Education.

What is the real situation? The word 'education' conjures up memories of formal institutes of instruction where a general (headmaster) led his troops (teachers) in an unrelenting campaign to fill empty vessels (students) with fragments of knowledge, each piece precisely categorised under its select subject-heading for administrative convenience. The System rules, but all is not O.K. Did you ever attempt to mix 'Arts' subjects with those classified as 'Science'? Systems deal with absolutes, each item being definitely one thing or definitely another. Conversely, people are varied and variable, and seem to defy attempts to pigeon-hole them within fixed boundaries. Your well-developed skills and natural talents are complemented by your dreadful performance in other activities. Even these abilities or inabilities are subject to change and, indeed, on some days they seem to swop! We are all alike in these respects, and yet each one of us is a unique individual.

It is the failure of managers and operators of systems to recognise fundamental human needs and the essence of individuality which is the root cause of much social unrest. Traditionally, these overlords have dictated laws of behaviour acceptable to them, forcing reluctant square pegs to exist in round holes. 'Know thyself' and 'to thine own self be true' are still two of the best pieces of advice ever expressed. Your personality is as multi-faceted as a ballroom mirror-ball and is continuously growing and subtly changing. That growth needs guidance and encouragement.

Did you leave school with a clear perception of reality; did you know who you were and how you fitted into Space and Time? To put it another way, were you fully aware of all the good, indifferent and bad characteristics of your mind and body; at what point in global history were you living and in what location on the planet? It is probable that you were a mass of confusion. Neither your self nor the world made sense. How had the education system equipped you to deal with your search for identity and a concept of your relationship to the rest of the world? Your mind was filled with lists of Kings and Queens of England, dates of battles, and Parliamentary bickerings of former years. You were able to form the Imperfect tense of foreign verbs or work out a stream of figures using Logarithm Tables. But what did you know about your mind, your body, your personality and how the real day-to-day world of shop, office or factory would react to you?

You had completed academic courses and considered that you knew those subjects. But each of your courses had definite boundaries and preselected texts, which would not have existed if you had either studied on your own or been part of a research organisation, freely selecting your information sources from all those available. Information which is taught tends not to grow. Misconceptions can occur if we fail to realise that information changes, since conclusions may be drawn on inaccurate or obsolete bases. Britain, instigator of the Industrial Revolution, has lost its lead in several manufacturing fields, including heavy engineering and textiles, due in part to not recognising the changes in both demand and competitors' intentions, and implementing procedures to cope with them. Dinosaurs could not adapt and became extinct. There has always been information, and the world's history is that of a dynamic, near-kaleidoscopic, mix of people and places in time. But the rate of change has increased dramatically in recent years, producing a potential tidal wave of information. If we are to avoid drowning we must be able to handle information wisely; we must learn how to learn.

Research work by educational psychologists and others has provided mankind with techniques which can enable people to study more efficiently so as to derive the maximum benefit per unit of time and energy put into it, and to enjoy the whole process of learning. These techniques do not apply only to formal study situations but to many areas of life. Problem-solving and creative thinking are aided by effective study methods in which efficient reading produces a greater quantity of memorised new information since it is integrated with previously known facts and their relationship is understood. But these methods are not taught in our schools.

Modern man has available to him the collective knowledge, techniques, and experience of previous generations from which to learn. The present day application of universal truths (emanating from the minds of observers of differing races, creeds and centuries) would greatly assist us in avoiding the re-occurrence of the majority of errors which lead to frustration, conflicts, and waste of resources. Why are the writings of Emerson, Holmes, Kipling, Maugham, Shaw, Thoreau and the I Ching shunned by the educators? Are the proponents of peaceful living in harmony with the natural order of the Universe considered to be threatening to

a human system which perpetuates the myth of 'Man, the conqueror of Nature'?

Man can be creative and demonstrate great ingenuity: tremendous achievements can result from people working in unison towards a known objective. Yet a nation capable of engineering return trips to the moon engages in all sorts of military conflict in countries all over the world, is a leading producer of second rate films and television series, and exports vast quantities of a fizzy drink developed from a small town patent medicine. The untapped potential available to individuals and collections of individuals is immense, but their accomplishments are comparatively few.

All systems devised by human beings include significant proportions of waste. The education system is of paramount importance since it shapes the future managers and operators of every one of these systems. It has the opportunity to draw out and encourage human potential and to channel this into constructive endeavour. It dictates merely a set of subjects and methods of competing against other people.

How can this situation be changed? A fundamental re-assessment of attitudes is called for. Our presently accepted 'absolutes' should be challenged. Teaching staff are no longer the high priests of Total Knowledge, dispensing morsels of information to assembled masses of ignorant peasants. They should act as respected messengers and guides to their students, assisting in the development of the individual's problem-solving skills, critical faculties and communications abilities.

The major inhibitors of individual, social, national and international progress (in its truest sense) could be drastically reduced. People make inefficient use of resources available to them. They need advice on how best to use their minds, bodies, time and money. A large proportion of human nervous energy is squandered on worries and anxieties. Confidence needs to be built and strengthened. Powers of observation are inadequate. Inarticulate people feel inferior to those better able to express themselves, their frustration turning to either despair, smouldering resentment or violence. Communications break down, and disagreements transmute through arguments, skirmishes and confrontations to full-scale wars.

What does our education system do to avert or minimise this ridiculous waste of human potential? Why does a system which purports to deal in the dissemination of knowledge force its consumers into making crucially important decisions during two of the most traumatic times of any life, namely, puberty and adolescence? Why should the direction of a human life be determined by the judgement of an official on the frantic scribbles of an anxious youth in a severely restricted time-span? Should a large number of rapidly-writing parrots be required, then change nothing! But if we seek to nurture the growth and development of people who possess self-esteem, self-confidence, genuine concern for others and the ability to get along well with most of them, then changes will have to be made in the methods, attitudes and emphases in our formal system of education.

What is your opinion of yourself? How do you assess your value? If you live with approval, you can learn to like yourself. However, approval is not very forthcoming, or is reserved for a select few, those regarded as winners. Institutes of education at every level, encourage competition between individuals or groups of individuals. We realise that careful participation in sporting activities can bring benefits to the human body. But the healthy aspects of sports have been distorted, the free spirit of games imprisoned, and participants forced into rivalry with one another. Mental abilities, too, are assessed using competitive criteria. Who is best or worst or clinging to some percentage point in between? How is a 'pass' mark chosen? You leave the formal education system with the weight of other people's opinions of, and attitudes towards you, pushing aside your ability to assess yourself. What is success, anyway? Who defines it? Have you ever decided, in your own terms, what you would regard as success?

Schools and homes tend to be factories of unhappiness. If you've been the victim of relentless criticism, you will find it easy to condemn. You will incline towards shyness if you have been consistently ridiculed. An environment dominated by hostility is the breeding ground for those who, eventually, seek to resolve every situation of disagreement by a fight. The education system, the news media, and the managers of many businesses have one characteristic in common: they highlight people's frailties and failures ('Not Good Enough'; 'Miners Lose Fight'; 'Poor Sales Figures'). Philosophers, theologians and thinkers down the ages have emphasised the power of both faith and positive thought. But twentieth-century man has been deceived into believing that he is the highest form of life, that God is an obsolete concept, and that happiness is attainable through the acquisition of material things. We are encouraged, by poorly designed social infrastructure and commercial vested interests, to dodge our responsibilities and avoid any form of effort or work. All of these deceptions lead to recurring disappointments, a general feeling of unhappiness and fundamental insecurity.

Regardless of their outward appearance, human beings are beset by fears and apprehensions. Fear causes worry, which, in turn, makes people tense and nervous, affecting the stomach's nerves and juices, frequently leading to the formation of stomach ulcers in adults. Prevention, of course, is always better than cure. Unfortunately, little attention seems to be paid to the prevention of anxiety states in people. Fears create barriers to a person's development and erode the ability to learn. Initially, a baby probes and evaluates the surrounding world without fear. But the extraordinary capacity for learning and intellectual growth demonstrated by the vast majority of infants in their first three years is either damaged or destroyed by adults who make them afraid. By making children afraid of not doing what other people want, of not pleasing, of making mistakes, of failing, or being wrong, we also force them to fear risk-taking, experimentation, and attempting the difficult and unknown. The degree of ingenuity shown by someone meeting a new situation or problem is an indication of their real intelligence. An intelligent person has a positive attitude which pervades the thought processes over which he has control. The bodily senses provide information which is disseminated and forms the basis of the various reaction options. Decisions are then made, resulting in a course of action. Self-confidence is built by experiencing a series of minor successes, and learning from each failure. But fears can curtail the achievement of self-confidence by crushing an individual's natural curiosity and any desires to

pioneer new ground. Educators should attempt to reduce all such deterrents to the fulfilment of human potential.

Even though fears may be removed from the potential learner, it is inevitable that some subjects will be more appealing than others. Motivation is the most effective key to education. Educators should seek the true interests of each individual student and make subjects relevant, useful and interesting. The nature of the human mind is such that we remember facts only for as long as we need to. Students who are forced to memorise items for a specific examination will be unable to recall a large proportion of them within a relatively short period of time following their sitting. Thus, much of the mass of details taught in schools is made redundant, and, furthermore, the underlying general concepts may have been obscured by the intricacies. Adults decide what children ought to know, but in a school free of the aforementioned fears and other restrictions, each child can learn what he or she most needs to know. This type of learning results in permanent memorization and a willingness to apply the new body of knowledge. We should encourage curiosity and guide it towards understanding rather than promote the mere retrieval of unconnected facts. We should nurture the ability to think for oneself rather than tell people what to think.

A person's problem-solving ability is considerably assisted by clear thinking, allied to a keen sense of awareness. Since our environment consists of everything that surrounds us other than ourselves, we are only truly aware of our environmental circumstances when each of our senses is heightened, and the brain taught how to extract meaningful information from the many signals it receives.

In the choice of audio-visual aids we must acknowledge that no one communications medium is an educational panacea with the ability to put across with absolute efficiency any message on any subject to any learner. Especially, we must realise that neither video-tape nor the varieties of computer program sources can achieve this ideal. But we should seek to match the learner to subjects and techniques of greatest value to him, as an individual human being, via the most appropriate medium or combination of media. The ever-accelerating rate of flow of incoming information creates problems for a teaching system which involves subject curricula based on obsolete textbooks. Frequently, textbooks are found to present their information in a dull, lifeless style, whereas an enthusiastic teacher will infuse his subject with a dynamic, stimulating quality. He will be a salesman of interesting facts and concepts. A commonly-used sales sequence is to gain the potential client's attention, hold their interest, then persuade them to make a decision and act on it. Salesmen, advertisers, and teachers are in the persuasion business. The truly effective ones realise that stimulation, not coercion, is the key to a locked mind.

What official incentive is there to release children (and adults) from their mental bonds? In the United Kingdom, at the time of writing, apparently very little. Successive governments seem to have been aware that if the population received real education it would soon be quite clear to them that their administrators had been either grossly ignorant or highly negligent (or both). Every government administration is short-sighted. Each one, regardless of political party, staggers from one term of office to another, making eloquent excuses for not implementing election pledges. Meanwhile, our greatest resource continues to be wasted. Our vast national reservoir of human potential has been repressed, distorted and condemned to feebly trickle out as subservient mediocrity.

Feminist Footnote: The words 'man', 'mankind', 'he' as used in this context apply equally to the male and female genders of the human race.