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The function of my school is to provide universities and polytechnics with well qualified, polite, well-dressed, punctual young gentlemen and ladies, with a variety of interesting hobbies. It serves its purpose very well. It has a good reputation throughout the southwest and is inexpensive.

From my first day there until the last day in the 5th year I was forced to pay rapt attention to at least 6 subjects in which I had nothing but passing interest. I was forced into working by means such as threat of the cane, detentions and lines, 'O' level results, thus job chances and end of term reports. I was forced to involve myself in sports, and school clubs (with U.C.C.A. in mind).

Within a few weeks of my first term at school I came to hate it cordially. I regarded education as something that was forced upon me by unfortunate circumstances, and thus that I did not want. Everyone took this view; it was actively encouraged by teachers who frequently gave us the "none of us are here by choice, but as we are we may as well make the most of it" speech. Even pupils who had a definite career in mind, or who had to endure massive family arguments when they got a bad report, did as little work as possible.

As what we learnt at school seemed to have such small relevance in real life, that even if I was taught a useful skill at school, such as how to read well and write well, we did not use these skills in everyday reading or writing.

Good teaching within this restrictive system was difficult simply because I can think of one good teacher that I had for French in the 4th year. His lessons were divided into two roughly equal halves - the first half he would speak, and we would speak nothing but French. He would correct us on our pronunciation, but without the barrage of scathing remarks that most teachers use. During the second half we would discuss our problems with the language (in English) and tap his knowledge at our own rates. He encouraged an interest in the subject and gave us a grounding in practical, spoken French. After a year with him our exam results went up and up. Everyone respected him, but other teachers were a matter of personal preference.

Due to the nature of the school, although exam results were unimpressive, pupils who went on to further education were often left behind by the fierce competition from willing workers all over the country. So although the school fulfils its function, it does not prepare pupils for the next stage in their education. In fact, it does not prepare its pupils for real life at all. When one spends the first 12 years of their life being told what to do - even what to wear - and has to have their hair cut, making decisions for the first time comes as a shock.

We are taught for the first five years, exclusively for exams, and in the 6th form, some attempts were made to compensate for this by the so-called "block lessons," in which a teacher gave us some background information on some interesting topic, such as abortion, nuclear arms, or alcoholism, and this should be followed by a lively, mature discussion. In fact, it is followed by rowdy, immature arguing. This is because the subjects are not new and arouse no interest in us, and because the teacher is not capable, generally, of treating us as adults, just as we cannot regard them as equals. We have had the teacher vs. pupil ideal bred into us. Few pupils take "block" lessons seriously because "took no interest" and "messed around" translate as "argued with maturity and eccentricity."

Out of class, conversation is usually, to say the least, dull, as the school does not encourage the same attitudes regards families, school, women, sex, etc. and are thus limited to what they did/are going to do this/next weekend, how they hate Mr So and So and fancy Miss So and So.

No-one likes a "different" person amongst the school ranks, and I was called "hippy," "slovenly lout," "queer," etc. just for growing my hair beyond collar length. This of course is typical public school behaviour.

In my view education should be regarded as a process done for oneself by oneself. Theoretical work should be studied at the pupil's leisure at his own rate - not rammed into his head at a rate which bores the most intelligent of us and leaves the least intelligent behind. Independent research by the pupil should be encouraged so he can link the subjects together and so that he can specialise when he is ready to. Teachers should be consultants who direct and help the pupil. If skills need to be practiced they should be practiced under the direction of the teacher, not at home where mistakes can be learned and repeated. If pupils wish to involve themselves in sport they should be allowed to, not forced to.

Pupils should be examined by continuous assessment. Exam results depend largely on mood, standard of teaching, whether they ask the right questions, and ability to remember a mass of information which is seldom useful outside the classroom in their heads. They do not depend on intelligence, keenness, ability to work hard, or interest in the subject.

But I cannot see the system ever changing. Schools provide workers, not people. If they did not function as they do they would not exist.

P.S. I hate school.