

"Thank God I never was sent to school  
To be flogged into following the style of a fool" William Blake

"My concept? You can't do anything with anybody's body to make it dirty to me - you can do only one thing  
to make it dirty: Kill it. Hiroshima was dirty." Lenny Bruce

"... for that which has been most stringently forbidden is, without exception, Truth"  
Nietzsche

During a conversation with my son he asked the question whether it is of more value to read a book or go out and experience life oneself. George Steiner asks regarding the study or teaching of Literature, whether knowledge of the best that has been taught and said does broaden and refine the resources of the spirit or do we become more absorbed in the literary sorrow than the actual circumstances. Years after leaving school, I am with a companion looking at a photograph of the author. In two words my companion sums up and defines the photograph as 'very Ruskinian'. I can enjoy and share the comment because I understand the symbolism in the photograph, but without knowledge of the authors and their work and without the knowledge needed to appreciate the symbolism my life would be far less rich.

Erasmus tells of how he bent down in a muddy lane ecstatically when his eye lit upon a scrap of paper so new was the miracle of the printed page. That is how I think of a child's mind when first attending school. The child, whilst being the observer and experimenter, collects data from the teacher. For the majority of students/stewdents the restrictive curriculum has to be adhered to faithfully, and by imposing this censorship education becomes the opposite of the miracle it should be, causing loss of respect and interest. The educational/eduoccasional system can make the student's awareness selective and limited, making them conform to a style of stereotyped education which allows only the 'correct' interpretation and answers whilst 'learning', and during exams. The frightening prospect of the 'all important' exam can be a harrowing experience for some young students, causing anguish during the final school years. I once had the opportunity of being able to sleep in a small room whose walls were completely covered by shelves of books. To lie down, my face inches away from those books, surrounded by them throughout the night gave me a feeling of peace, strength and beauty. Would I get the same result whilst forced to search frantically through reference libraries for books needed for research for exams? What happens to the joy of learning as we anxiously struggle towards that dreaded final exam? Thought and scholarship are a lonely, often self-consuming exercise of the spirit when it is at full painful stretch.

To teach is surely to guide, to develop with encouragement the full potential of the pupil so that he can examine the facts provided, extend and improve on what he has learnt and progress with enthusiastic new ideas. Patricia Hynes writes: "Intellectual passion is the mind on fire; a fire whose metaphysical energy furiously gathers and creates ideas; a fire whose vital flames light the eyes, a fire whose heat warms the mind and expands the self." Minds trained only in superficial thinking lead to acceptance of facts without deliberation, to misconception and distortion. Education should reveal what is intimate and ultimate, depth and transcendence, the original whole. As Kierkegaard said: "It is not worth remembering that past which cannot become a present." A child is aware of the beauty in nature, colours, the fun and joy in life. We must guard against stifling and smothering, undermining, violating or destroying their spontaneous questioning, guard against having their speech curtailed by manners and lethal custom into polite shallow verbiage and strive to create an atmosphere in which further creativity may flourish. E. Schachtel writes: "The more original the mind and personality of the perceiver is, the greater is the likelihood that what he perceives sometimes will transcend reality as known in the everyday currency of his culture." We should be acutely aware of what goes on around us and able to respond intensely to the events of our time. Stunted and apathetic education may lead to the same attitude to life instead of the adventure of discovery and of significant experience. When he was twenty, Kafka wrote in a letter: "If the book we are reading does not wake us, as with a fist hammering on our skull, why then do we read it? So that it makes us happy? Good God, we would also be happy if we had no books, and such books as make us happy we could, if need be, write ourselves. A book must be an ice-axe to break the sea frozen inside us."