

**Some Reflections on Education
in Britain**

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British Education has seen many significant developments over recent years, with much critical assessment of curriculum provision within schools, particularly with regard to the monitoring and maintenance of standards and the need to offer cost effective education. While it cannot be denied that the Central Government Policy of financial constraints on Local Authorities has required a closer analysis and review of educational priorities and consequently a more effective use of resources, it is essential to recognise that it is the quality of the educational provision within our schools and colleges that is of paramount importance and where emphasis must be placed.

Educationalists have indicated that education at all levels must be broad based with specialisation being built on a meaningful general education which is geared to the production of a balanced member of society, who is able to cope with contributing and participating in the increasing and changeable pattern of community life. This requires a greater appreciation of the distinctiveness of each individual as a significant and creative being who needs nurturing and training in skills, enabling the progressive growth of the personality of each individual, resulting in an enrichment to society. Education has concentrated almost exclusively on the pupils at risk, requiring strong support in the form of remedial or compensatory education, so often for social and political reasons, rather than ensuring that the educational opportunities must be available for all pupils if the fulfilment of potential ability and enrichment of life is to be achieved. Each individual is of equal worth and therefore has the same right for their personal interests and needs to be developed within the education system. While a broad based curriculum is to be encouraged at all levels of schooling, this should not be to the detriment of individual skills, interests and talents. The curriculum should widen educational horizons and not be seen as a constraining factor on the personal wish to develop an individual capacity, as is so often the case. Educationalists should not be allowed to continue determining and restricting personal development in the context of an egalitarian campaign which attempts, however unsuccessfully, to ensure that each child reaches only a basic level of development.

Education in the classroom situation is in need of radical and fundamental change, with a more realistic appraisal and understanding of students. More emphasis should be placed on producing an exciting, stimulating and variety of environment. The time has long since passed when children should be herded into groups of thirty or so as a closed captive audience. Clearly the provision of pleasant classroom surroundings with adequate up to date facilities is an important aspect of the educational programme, but there is need to extend these to include the whole spectrum of community facilities. All schools must be seen as the core resource for a programme of ongoing adult and continuous education, in other words, education for life. School activities should be less school based and closer links with the broader society and community fostered, together with more learning in practical situations with greater emphasis on field work. The time-table should not be allowed to contain and prevent the development of interest seeking group work and individual research projects. Homework assignments should be geared to a more creative and purposeful extension of personal interest with a variety of options offered.

A more stimulating and challenging range of activities should be made available, integrating areas of the curriculum in a more meaningful way, with the practical life processes and experiences not being presented as examples of theoretical models, but as the core approach of teaching method with models and theory being explained from practical analyses. Stress should be placed on the real world situations and linkages between traditional subject areas being presented in a conceptual context so that the child is geared to an understanding of the local community, society at large, worldwide cultures and the meaning of life.

All children should be required to make a contribution to their community and hopefully an ongoing one, in a voluntary capacity. There is need of a change in emphasis in education so that more time is spent directly relating the system of training to the needs of the "world of work and leisure" of the individual, with appropriately selected industrial and commercial personnel being brought into schools and colleges on a part-time teaching basis and providing direct inputs both in schools and also in short term placements in industry.

The Manpower Services Commission has been established by Central Government due primarily, to the very slow progress made within the traditional and existing educational system, particularly schools, in adjusting to the needs of education within the present period of technological revolution. It is not, I believe, a failure of the Education Authority to respond to changing needs, but largely that of the grass roots practitioner in the form of the classroom teacher so often being bound by examination structures and syllabus requirements, and, at times, a disturbing lack of vision.

Whilst greater emphasis on a quality education and individual worth would be an encouraging development and it cannot be denied that one of the disappointing features of education in recent years has been the frequent evidence of student under-achievement and limited expectation of many students and teachers, efforts should be made to pursue a policy which should ensure the development of the whole child with the so called 'hidden curriculum' becoming accepted as a central issue in the school learning situation.

The personal, social and moral education of the child within the school and community is of the greatest significance and has only too often been overlooked or promoted by zealot social engineers who have destroyed, not enlarged, the educational opportunities of young people in their care. Great stress must be placed on the development of personal attitudes; the exercise of personal initiative, creativity and trust; the cultivating of tolerance and the ability to appreciate equally strongly held and often conflicting views of others; the nurturing of freedom of speech, together with the acceptance of fairness and justice, as these are all essential requisites within society.

Associated with the development of personal attitudes, beliefs and values, is the need for the consideration of the religious perspective in life. The education of the whole child must of itself ensure that the tripartite person is recognised and developed. There is much emphasis placed on the physical person through positive developments in the curriculum, with the broadening of Physical Educational opportunities, the progressive expansion of recreation and leisure pursuits, Outward Bound Courses, and the establishment of Sports Halls and community facilities generally. In the physical areas it is for those suffering from disability that action to increase opportunities is urgently necessary. Similarly the stress placed on the broadening of the mind and intellect of man has prospered and been nurtured, as it has been appreciated that the analysis of life situations in the real world and the importance of philosophy and ideas in the extending of the feelings and sensitivities of a whole person are important. What has rarely been understood and in some quarters not even recognised, is that the greatest need of all in the education of the whole person is the development of the 'spiritual man'. This is far more than the provision of an ethical and moral code of life as it is centred on the spiritual needs of every person, irrespective of physical or mental capacity. The spiritual qualities are present, if latent, in every being and their failure to develop, results in impoverishment, stress, unrest, and so often a vacuum and feeling of hopelessness, inadequacy and inability to cope, as against those who have developed a spiritual faith, belief and hope within themselves, thus accomplishing a fulfilment and a meaningfulness in life. In this area, education within the school system has lost its focus, and far too much emphasis is placed on the material and transient, leaving young people ignorant of the basis and meaning of life. Religious Education, required by the 1944 Education Act, but not fully offered by most schools, has been simplified and debased, leaving young people without a sense of peace, happiness, or purpose in life. The failures of society and of young people to cope with the requirements of life, are less the result of the schools' limitations in the education of the body and mind, than to the inability to provide for a real or personal commitment embracing the spiritual dimension.

In summary, Education needs to firm up on its objectives so that its goals are clear and purposeful, seeking always to enhance and enrich individual attainment and enjoyment and promote creativity and expertise, within a framework of a broad based education, offering a range of skills. Education needs to ensure a greater awareness of the needs of the community, society and the 'world of work and leisure'. The 'hidden curriculum' must be considered extremely important, as it concentrates on the development of personal, social, moral education and seeks to promote the education of the whole person. The physical and mind-extending processes within the field of education are being actively pursued, but there are profound limitations in developing the more crucial 'spiritual' capacity within young people proceeding through the system, with consequential disturbing effect on the child, the community and society at large.