

Problems in Education

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Summary: This paper focuses on the problems in education, not only at schools, but in “life-long” studying.

Recently in Estonia there were four suicide-attempts by children ages eleven to thirteen. We are a country with less than 1.5 million people. The reason was said to be bullying, harassment or violence at school. These are not the only examples of the dark side of education all over the world, as there are often cases of shootings at school. Many children leave school before graduation, due to these many stresses.

Ordinarily a little child looks forward to the first school day. During the first school years he takes care of his school things, but problems soon occur which lead to so many abandoning school. There are too many young people who do not have even an elementary education.

What do these events at our schools show? Can we continue to tolerate these kind of results from our educational system? I don't think so. Cases of violence and of suicide attempts among the pupils are signs of deep crisis in the world educational system.

The importance of education is immense for every area of life depends on a proper developmental level for a thinking person to make wise choices in elections, science, economy, educational and health systems, and to fulfill the demand more educated workers.

School should be the place to create a developing environment for the children who build our future society, who will become the parents. Is it possible to keep at school the qualities we see in the little girls and boys: expansiveness, reliability, outgoingness, kindness, and shining eyes? Is it possible that our children at school can acquire knowledge AND a form of behavior based upon the realities of right relationship? What kind of conditions should be in schools?

Every child should feel that he is loved, that he is important to his parents, and that teachers care about him. It is not easy, for children come from different homes and some may be timid and shy, or hyperactive and even aggressive; they may be from different nations, races, and religions. But all are equally potential builders of the future and at school everyone must be treated without prejudices, and with compassionate tenderness that is sensitive to the child's normally affectionate response and upon the knowledge that love always draws forth what is best in child and man. Love is also an understanding; a child needs to know that his activity and motives are comprehended.

Every child needs time and attention at home and school. Alas we live in the world of rush and hurrying. Children see their parents always hurrying and often there is no time for special relations between the child and his mother or father. Children see the same absurd tempo at school, where the teacher has no time to commune with him separately, as the classes are big

and the teacher is only one. Children always want to attract attention of the adults, but as the adults seem to be always in a hurry they may feel lonely and seek relations on streets and shopping centers.

A child needs guidance and help arranging his time – it is good if he has tasks to do, if he participates in some activities or additional trainings. All this helps in developing his sense of responsibility. However, often our children are growing under the condition of prohibitions and commandments: “don’t do this or that”. These directions are part of their everyday life, first at home and later at school: obey and follow the rules at home and at school. But this situation may lead to rebellion. Certainly a child needs some rules and control, but it can’t be in the smallest details. In the home relations we should develop in our children is their understanding of the differences between good and bad, right and wrong.

Today our official education is concentrated to the acquiring of knowledge and mostly from the perspective of national, racial or even religion limitations. Factual material is over-emphasized at schools and many pupils and their parents are not content with it. The school programs are sometimes changed, but not the principle. Of course there is a need to gather more and new information and use it in practical life.

There are many examples of new discoveries – about 40 years ago children learned to use a slide rule, today computers and the other IT tools area are especially necessary: most children have their own computers or have use of them. IT is today so common that even the ordinary paper school-diary has been changed to the electronic one. Through it parents can see their children’s grades, and children can open the school page and see their homework. IT is a method and a source – there are discussions in our society to replace customary paper-schoolbooks and exercise-books to the study based on internet sources AND even that to start studying based absolutely on i-Pads (i-Pods, i-Phones). This discussion is only in a beginning stage and the ideas are being evaluated. It is said that studying through the internet requires absolutely new school programs and new approaches (and it all requires time), but all agree that our children will live in an information environment which is new and strange to the adults.

Our school is a part of our society and enmeshed in glamour of materiality which occurs as an over-emphasizing of the material part of life. In man it emerges as selfishness and as competitiveness. What our children really need from teachers (and parents too) is the help on grasping of these facts, on understanding what lies behind the outer facts, on how to synthesize separated facts, and see the whole behind the details. Children need help with arranging their activities and discovering and training their inner talents, on developing right group relations where they may see their place as a part of some kind of greater whole. This would create a basis of selflessness, contrary to our wide-spread attitude of selfishness.

Today we see these kind of examples with exchange studies, where students may study in another country for a time. They see the school-life then from the other point. They may see the practice of the other countries and participate in projects which mostly are in service of good intentions and ideals.

Rather good example, I think, is the “back to school” enterprise. Here some popular politicians go to schools to give some lessons. For example – our president went to a school for social studies, and our Parliament chairman spoke about astronomy (as she had been an astronomer). The movement “back to school” invites not only popular politicians; everyday professionals may go to the school they graduated from and speak about his or her

profession, hobby, or something else interesting. It is a way to make school-life more interesting and to intensify the relations between the school and society, to give to the children some more interpretations of life.

Our children should see the life from the point of cause and effect - it could teach a wider way of seeing and sense of responsibility, which is a basis of commonsense. Children need help in discovering who they really are – that there is more than only the physical body, that part of him is immortal and that he is a thinking, feeling and acting being; that a soul is the source of goodness and beauty. Sure, religions have taught this during long ages, but they have failed as most of humanity does not believe there is a soul. People are not interested in dogma; they want to see proofs, especially scientific. Unfortunately our school-programs still exclude the teaching of karma, although the word “karma” is already well-known in the society.

We are now in a state of economic recession. We have enormous unemployment today, but at the same time the companies have problems on finding new laborers – skilled laborers, well-educated laborers. At least - despite that it is the recession time - financing for education in Estonia doesn't decrease, but is increasing for the next years.

So today, the education of grown-ups is an important topic in our society – there is even a term which means something like studying through all the life. Schools and universities encourage people to keep studying – to follow up his professional knowledge or to study something fully new. Of course there is a part of material calculations for all this is not for free, but the principle of keeping your mental side active is not bad.

Beside the universities and higher education schools, there are lots of the other training centers and courses for new pupils: teaching and training has become a new business branch. We may see all kind of training companies – from the popular language courses to the narrow specialized professional trainings.

One more educational possibility is for the aspirants (or physically young or old). Classical groups are the schools at churches and monasteries. If the teaching of such kind of groups shows the world as one great whole and does not agitate ill feelings against the other religions, and people and develop understanding and compassion, then it could be a good possibility. An example may be the Buddhist monastery schools, characteristic in Buddhist countries. We see various trainings and courses of all kind of movements -

- In our country the teachings of Buddhist monks are very popular; these courses are arranged by some group of followers on weekends or in summer camps;
- The yoga movement is very popular – many young people are devoted to studying yoga secrets and they share their skills with others;
- Groups of different kind of healers arrange courses and seminars;
- Many officially unorganized groups of those interested in spiritual values who regularly gather for collective discussions;
- Organizations like Anthroposophy and Theosophy, etc. organize lectures and seminars and group work to apprehend the secrets of the world. For more advanced aspirants they open up new possibilities according to their capabilities and exertions.

These were only some examples of the trends in the societies today. Why do we speak about these possibilities in relation to education? These freewill groups may discover and carry on the spiritual values; in these groups people study to see the world more widely than it is taught

at schools, they read and analyze together books and share this knowledge with each other. And they are mostly the parents, the partners to the schools.

There is an eternal problem – school and home – if both of them teach, then who is responsible? It is clear that a child gets his “starting capital” from home and the role of his parents is big. Homes are different and parents have different attitudes, so the role of the school should be to homogenize, but at the same time, develop.

Finally – there are no sudden jumps to the new heights. It is as always – strategy or long-term plans, and tactics or nearer-term plans. Training our teachers in a new way, preparing the new textbooks (and training materials for internet-based study), teaching and shaping parents who form the home environment, and necessary for success, preparing all for right social relations. This takes time and effort by the thinking men of goodwill.

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