

Editorial: Education and Life: failings in the education system

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The precept that education gives training for life, for most of us is somewhat wide of the mark. What school teaches pupils is how to select a life partner, sort out income tax, choose a car or anything else that seems to be important in adult life.

Education (primary and secondary) helps to develop the expanding brain and is important to help individuals understand cultural norms leading to a sense of identity, but what happens after that? The strength of education is that it has the potential to teach pupils some well-trying and tested skills, which are easy to teach and easy to assess. Life skills are every bit as valid as subject skills but are more esoteric, much harder to assess and nearly impossible to examine. Such life skills include: emotional development; cognitive skills; the ability to comfort or put people at ease or to get an idea across; the ability to read two dimensional plans and make them into a three-dimensional space, and the ability to read a map, find the way home and know which direction North is without any aids. The list is nearly endless.

What happens at the end of the formal education is that students are tested and, depending on the assessment of one tenth of their skills and knowledge, are categorised and encouraged to embark on careers that may be totally unsuitable because of other life skills, which are typically realised much later in life.

The purpose of education for me is the awakening of the ability to think, to assess and to make decisions based upon rational judgements. The purpose is also to teach others how to co-operate in a practical way with peers to achieve goals greater than those an individual could achieve alone.

There is still a place for the classical formal education subjects such as English, Maths, Sciences, and Languages, but I would like to see other skills being encouraged in pupils: in particular, problem-solving, co-operative behaviour, leadership, emotional stability, the ability to improvise, to entertain, to comfort and to inspire others. This might be considered exotic for the standard comprehensive school, but it can be done and could be fun for both the teachers and pupils alike, in helping to explore less conventional educational assets.

In my view, education has a much larger and wider curriculum than has ever been posted on a notice board. Some of these skills are developed in the school theatre, on the playing field, in the art studio and on the playground. I think that there is an endless curriculum called 'life', which, when

the pupils have learned to think and develop life skills, will help to make society an infinitely better place and stimulate citizens to make better life judgements with fewer tragic consequences.

I appreciate it is easy to write about these matters and much harder to do something about them. There is a huge unharnessed attribute to help us in this task: namely, the digital world. I am encouraged to see youngsters solving problems and developing their minds and capabilities for social interaction through digital devices. What needs to be done is to harness young learners' enthusiasm and make education the greatest adventure imaginable.