

As this exhibition is entitled 'Education', I probably appear under false pretences as my last attempt at formal education was to drop out of a full-time 'A'-level course - when I was twenty-nine. Having since decided that I suffer from exam phobia (it seems kinder to myself than to admit that I might have failed!), I can view the system from the perspective of being married to someone who had all the advantages a high powered grammar school had to offer, and two children who have surmounted the obstacles and are through to university; however, it is an unfair system for most children.

The comprehensive ideal was based on equality of opportunity and parity of esteem, which can never be achieved until the private sector is absorbed into the system. The private sector has a pupil/teacher ratio of 1 to 7 compared to 1 to 30 in the public sector. Is it right that in a so-called democratic society, that the freedom to buy privilege and increased life chances should be at the expense of the right of all our children to benefit from the kind of education that would create a less divisive and a more sensitive, creative and compassionate society?

My reservations about the present system are that my children very rarely come home from school having enjoyed being there. Certainly that was no fault of the teachers, but of the competitive, exam orientated system required by an industrial nation which implements a series of obstacles in the form of examinations. (Japanese children are committing suicide by the score because they are afraid of failing.) As we contemplate a future where fifth generation computers will be capable of controlling production of all the material goods we could possibly need, we will have to re-assess our attitude towards education in general.

We need a more fluid, flexible system where each child is valued as an individual, not compelled to wear a uniform, where free expression and non-conformity is encouraged, and essential instruction presented in such a way that it would be interesting, stimulating and fun. Peace studies would be a fundamental element, as would be the knowledge that we inhabit a planet which is being desecrated by human beings in the name of profit. The demands of freedom and discipline could be reconciled by teachers who are not pressurized to produce 'results' as such - the natural academics would automatically flourish and if necessary be monitored by continual assessment. Literature, music and art ought to be presented in an imaginative, colourful framework where ideas and concepts can be explored to their limits. The metaphysical and ethical aspects of politics ought to be discussed along with the various major religions and their consequences on humanity. Personally, I believe that one phrase encompasses all that human beings should adhere to - "Love thy neighbour as thyself", but in order to do that we have to love and value ourselves.

We have inculcated in us from a very early age that worth equals wealth - that we are valued more as an individual if we own a larger metal box on wheels than the next person. We are also subjected to a Manichean view of the world which is distorted and dangerous, and I would quote Gunter Grass, who is withering on the governing intellectual 'educated' elite of the Eighties:

"Whether they are concerned with nuclear science, electronics, bio-chemistry or genetic research, or involved in the security system of first-strike nuclear weapons, they live far removed from the actual problems of our planet. It is not hunger and drought, but the presumed or actual advantage of the enemy during an ever shorter warning period which concerns them. They are not expected to meet the challenge of the growing misery of mankind, its social and nutritional problems, but to deal with the problem of controlling those suffering masses. Their intellectual attention is not claimed by the denuded and dying forests, not by the polluted seas and rivers, but by immense cable projects, genetic engineering, by territorial conquest and the question whether a nuclear war in spite of the calculated losses might not be winnable after all."

Future generations must be taught to be more aware of our symbiotic existence, to make choices as to priorities and to participate in life rather than becoming a spectator.