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British law requires a minimum of eleven years to be spent in education. Initially to me it appears as a kind of 'sentence' especially when the words 'compulsory education' are added. Then I asked myself, how do I interpret education; academic; practical or a knowledge of the life I live and the satellites around it. Some people say, 'too much knowledge is a dangerous thing', yet too much is sometimes never enough. I find the present education system does not fulfil many of my expectations or questions, and in doing so can appear irrelevant which can destroy incentive and confidence in my appliance to learning.

I feel that public examinations should be 'nationalised', i.e. everyone studying the same syllabus in each subject and grades being divided into pass with credit, pass and then fail. Education should also try to be made appealing to everyone. Many of my ex-school mates would label learning as stupid, snobbish or useless for a variety of reasons - some due to laziness, boredom, inability to comprehend, outside 'pressures', etc. Initially I found that teachers 'forcing' Shakespeare and the like a cause for resentment and the word 'classics' became a metaphor for 'Boring! I am not interested'. It is embarrassing to admit that as later I found the same material fascinating, especially when I explored it of my own free will and could form my own opinions. I feel that sadly, for the majority the best things of past generations that remain relevant and uneroded by time are just not being communicated in a clear, interesting or relevant manner.

The school environment is said to create a sense of belonging to a facet of society, a preparation ground for later life and an environment in which a personal identity can be formed. Personally, it did none of these for me. In fact I feel my thirteen years of school were in some ways totally unproductive and useless. Since leaving school I have tried to 'compensate' for lost time and have found that college is helping me in this. How does a school instigate a sense of belonging if one has to be a uniformed, 'carbon copy' pupil, if you work and achieve too much one's peers label you 'creep', if you do the opposite you are a rebel: to me the adulation received in being a rebel is false - ultimately you are stranded in a trap of your own making. Subconsciously whether one admits it or not, the friends you associate with exert the greatest influence. The family also influences, but are not, in my experience, as involved with education as some believe. I am not certain as to school 'preparing for life' as often I have felt teachers wishing to typecast me or conveniently assign me to a familiar expectation pattern. Also, having spent three years at an 'all-girls' school, I experienced the 'Look, it's wearing trousers!' syndrome where us girls had obsessions with anything male. This seems as sexist as 'boys don't do needlework and girls don't do metalwork' and I feel that this 'segregation' of the sexes can result in conflicts. (In retrospect single sex schools may hold less distraction - I am unsure as to expressing a definite view on either.)

I found that full potential is hard to attain if opinions are repressed and not open to discussion. I also think that I look back on my school years as that of being placed in an institution preaching conformity and trying to produce conventional people for a conformist lifestyle.

In the case of authority I believe the college to have reached a 'happy medium', whereas in my experience of school I was conditioned into accepting a reiterated set of others' morals, etc. I remember being harassed for my appearance which seemed trivial; okay, I was meant to be a pupil in school society, but wasn't my work more important? I also found authority too restricting or totally non-existent. Anarchy in the classroom led me to become totally disillusioned and start 'missing' school. Ironically I was told if I carried on with my erratic attendance I would be suspended - exactly what I wanted! I feel as though I am presenting a very anti-education stance but I would like to stress that I now crave to expand my knowledge, especially as I feel I have evolved out of the flippant attitudes I once possessed.

I also find trying to progress frustrating; before I left school one teacher told me I had potential, another that I was designated for the Y.T.S. scrap heap or early retirement at sixteen! If "I think therefore I am" how many of my thoughts are truly my own and how long before I can establish my own beliefs - if ever!

Maybe due to my erratic schooling I digress! Education seems to cover so many things and my experience is not yet sufficient to articulate in the style I would like to. What really maddens me is the indoctrination of it all. Many aspects seem to be forced upon one from four to sixteen years. Religion is often heavily accentuated; how does a Moslem or a Buddhist react to Christianity being the accepted doctrine? Surely in this multi-racial society if religion is to be taught, a child must be aware of the variety of denominations around him/her? Another source of irritation is the "do well, get a career, earn money". I feel that fulfilment and satisfaction are somewhat overlooked.

State education has the advantage of being free - all very well - but I feel that a decline in standards is becoming evident. Certainly a lack of interest in the pupils - for example the controversial teaching strikes. Yes, teachers deserve a wage and recognition but I feel in the case of some students the priorities were

misjudged. There is something appealing in the public schools' methods - personal conduct is often stressed yet I wonder as to how much bigotry these systems produce; this is accentuated when one encounters that "I am holier than thou" attitude (that is a personal prejudice!).

Personally, I also think that the functions of education are portrayed as something that is useful in later life for jobs, coping with domestic finances and understanding one's role in society, whereas I also view education as a medium for increasing self awareness and exploring further into the world around you. The majority of my teachers at school dismissed this as fairly unimportant and more inclined towards further education, whereas I feel that education should be presented to pupils in its widest context.

Generally, although I have doubts concerning the communication of education I feel that everyone has the right to the opportunity of learning as much as they are able to and want. At present the education system seems to me to be chaotic, unfair in some cases and lacking in the resources to do as well as possible. If we are to nurture any knowledge, thought and development in our pupils surely we should start by giving them a love or thirst for knowledge. For some pupils this is a natural instinct whereas for others their fear, resentment or apathy can dull their potential.

As I see it, public schools, grammar, comprehensive, and secondary schools should weigh up their own advantages and disadvantages and discuss methods so that a stronger approach to education could be developed.