

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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I have been invited to talk to you about Education and Training, and as I stand before you I feel embarrassed because I suddenly realise that this is a case where youth should be speaking and others - educationists, planners, economists, administrators, parents - should be listening to find out what is wanted for the present so that the future can be safeguarded. Doubtless you will have plenty to say in the discussions later on and so I dare to speak on, perhaps to pin-point certain problems or lines or development - certainly to ask questions, because I am not very sure that we know what we want - so that youth can tell us what it wants. Of course there are the usual answers - happiness, peace, love, a steady, interesting job, material possessions, spiritual and aesthetic satisfaction, knowledge and a measure of control of what is around us. Of course all these mean different things to different people. "Happiness is a girl in every port," says the sailor. "Happiness is when the children are at last in bed," says the mother.

With the world changing so quickly around us, with the clash between technology and conservation, with the frightening outburst of new knowledge, with the unsettling movements of people and division of families and communities, one needs a solid platform, a raft to survive in rather troubled waters.

What is it that youth wants from education and training? Is it the same thing as what youth should want? What should educational systems be doing to satisfy these needs and perhaps create new ones? Is youth being short-changed by educational systems?

We have moved a long way from the idea that children in schools are a captive audience detained, not very comfortably, in a place where oracular knowledge is thrown at them. Schools are becoming workshops where children participate in new experiences and are faced with programmed learning situations. Children and youth are, and should be, full participants, helped to find something new in themselves or in the world around them. The movement is from formal to informal, from a statement by the teacher to a discussion between teachers and students; from a

formal system of education to a wider, informal system which embraces parents, mass media, employers and the community. It is becoming more and more accepted that education is not only training to pass an examination and so qualify for a job, but a training in the act of living. Hence the keener awareness that education is a life-long process and that systems must be worked out to facilitate life-long education.

Mainly for administrative reasons, school systems have been organised into three main levels: the primary or elementary stage, which often includes the pre-primary or the kindergarten stage; the secondary stage; and the tertiary stage. In most advanced countries the first two levels are compulsory. I must repeat that these levels are rather arbitrary if viewed from the point of view of the development of the person. Nobody suddenly stops being a child and becomes a youth, nor does a youth suddenly stop being a youth and become a man. Now that I am over forty I keep on reminding myself and others that life begins at forty.

It is logical to expect that despite the mainly administrative distinction that will be a wide overlap between the aims of primary and secondary schools. Again there will be overlaps at the secondary and tertiary levels, though here there are also some divergent aims.

You are past or almost past the primary and secondary levels but it might be worthwhile to see what is aimed at during these stages because it has a great bearing on our theme "Youth and Development".

Pre-school education - either in the home, or more formally as part of the educational system seeks to awaken in the child a number of abilities and interests: the ability to express himself and communicate with others; the ability to observe the world around him; the ability to create something with his hands, alone and with others, and to appreciate beautiful things; ability to master his own body and to use it to the best advantage. The child is being educated to face the community rather than his immediate family, but within the wide meaning of education there is also the more limited meaning of training. I must enlarge on this because I shall come back to it later. By training I mean that organised activity which seeks to give a learner specific skills for use in the attainment of certain objectives. This training is a part of every level of education - a child of three must be trained to do up a button if he is to be able to dress himself. A primary school pupil must be trained to read if he is to be educated to seek

knowledge for himself. A secondary school pupil must be trained in the use of logarithm tables as part of the wider education in logical thinking, appreciation of symmetry, balance and discipline which is mathematics. A university student doing research must be trained to use complicated scientific equipment, and also trained in the right research procedures. But to come back to the pre-primary stage: the general aim is to awaken a number of abilities and interests. It is also the time when certain space-time patterns take shape, when the first foundations of logical argument are laid and notions fundamental to reading and writing are acquired.

During the primary stage there are three main objectives:

- (i) the discovery (rather than study) of the natural and social environment by means of activities centred on themes very close to the child and his immediate environment;
- (ii) intellectual activities to enable child to grasp those subjects which are indispensable to knowledge - the mother tongue, in some cases a foreign language, mathematics - the three R's of the traditional primary curriculum;
- (iii) the development of artistic and bodily activities art, music, sports, pottery, etc.

The secondary level continues and widens the work covered in the primary school. It continues to instil in pupils an interest in learning by deepening their knowledge of tool subjects (mother tongue, Mathematics and General Science) and to open to them new aspects of learning by offering new activities which help to develop their inclinations and abilities - history, geography, home economics, a foreign language. It gives opportunities for creative work and instil a deeper sense of appreciation - art, music, drama, craft, literature. These should also help them later on in better utilisation of their leisure time. It continues character formation and helps to instil the right moral attitudes in the children though religion, civics, sports.

In most systems, there is a shift in bias after the first two or three years of secondary education, but the course should still seek to give all young people a common frame of reference. All need a good general knowledge and improved ability to

communicate as well as an adequate background for entry into the working life. School leavers need an understanding and appreciation of themselves, economics, leisure, politics and their environment generally. They must be prepared for citizenship. They are going to be consumers, so they need consumer training, mass-media consumer training. They need civic and social training and preparation for family life. For optimum learning, such topics must be introduced through direct practical activities, social projects, community service, and not in formal or academic fashion. How they are taught is important as what they are taught. Can they observe, perceive, analyse? Above all are they trained to continue educating and training themselves? Towards the end of this stage a youth begins to prepare himself for a job or to go into the tertiary level of education for specialised courses which are also mainly job oriented. What the system has given him so far is a general, basic education which makes it easy for him to be trained for specific skills and adaptable to learn new skills. In most advanced countries, secondary education does not give technical training, job-orientated training. This takes place in institutions of further education such as technical institutes, polytechnics, universities, training colleges or through apprenticeship schemes and on-the-job-training. Technology demands specialised skills, but secondary education generally does not give these. It does not mean that it should take no heed of technology and manual skills. There is a tendency for society to feel contempt for manual work - to value academic subjects in school more than practical or technical subjects. To counteract this, experimentation with materials and tools is a very important part of secondary education. For most students a vocational element in the latter part of secondary education creates motivation and gives relevance, and sampling the work of various trades gives an understanding of what people do and of the range of careers available.

I shall not enlarge on the third level of education because I would like to see it within the context of life-long education, a cycle through which people can go again and again to obtain specific skills to fit the exigencies of their employment or even just to follow their interests or leisure time activities. In advanced countries the principle of life-long education is beginning to be implemented and youths are encouraged to leave school, find a job and then return to continue and expand their education: there are evening classes, day release courses, Universities using correspondence courses, schemes for a return full-time to educational institutions, in-service training. Special attempts are being made to create programmes aimed at drop-outs, those who have not finished the secondary course.

The majority of young people finish their formal, general education at the end of the secondary cycle and seek jobs or training for jobs. The third level of education, with few exceptions is job orientated. Even the Universities have as one of their main function the training of highly skilled personnel.

How does Malta fit in all this? Is youth being served? Is youth helping itself and is it an active participant in this process we call education?

With pre-school children being able to socialise and play safely in the streets, and with unemployed grandmas, mothers and aunts to encourage them, kindergartens are not of very high priority. We have about 108 primary schools which are becoming liberalised since the rat race for selection into a few secondary schools has been removed. Eighteen months ago we introduced secondary education for all up to the age of fourteen and for the next five years the point of stress and difficulty will be in the secondary level of education. We are re-organizing secondary education so as to remove selection into different types of secondary schools and so that all secondary schools will offer a two year common course to all children with options and some specialisation after the second year, when every child has had at least eight years of basic education. We are re-drafting the curriculum of secondary schools to make it as flexible as possible to allow teachers to adopt courses to fit the varying needs of children. We are trying to obtain the right mix of academic and practical subjects which have a bearing on what the pupils need and will need. We are trying to put more stress on day to day assessment rather than academic periodic examinations which often are a test of memory than an assessment of what has been learned. We hope that in the three years' time we shall be fully equipped to offer every child a full five year secondary course. At present we have 40 secondary schools. By next September some of the smaller ones will be amalgamated or incorporated into bigger schools to offer better facilities and more economical use of staff and equipment. In the near future we shall be raising the school leaving age to fifteen and then to sixteen as soon as this is possible.

This spurt of secondary education will be the foundation for the skills which Malta needs to vary its economy and base it on a firm footing. With a broad based, solid education, young people can receive vocational training which will make them able to carry out responsible tasks in the technical and commercial sectors and also to be adaptable to the changing world around them. Technical training will assume even greater importance.

At present boys can enter the Technical Institutes (2 in Malta and 1 in Gozo), by means of a competitive examination after they have reached the age of fourteen or through a day release scheme once they have become apprentices. The Institutes cover a fairly wide variety of courses at the craftsman and technician level. A total of 1150 boys can be accommodated full-time at the Technical Institutes in Malta and this number can be raised to 1350 when the Institute at Naxxar becomes fully operational.

With the introduction of secondary education for all and with the raising of the school leaving age, it is envisaged that boys will go to the Technical Institutes after they have received their secondary education. This will up-grade the level of work at the Technical Institutes and it will enable courses to be accelerated.

The Trade Schools are a new project meant to offer technical training for boys in various trades at the skilled labourer level. The first of these schools is due to open in the near future.

For the time being entry into Trade Schools will be by selection from the less academically motivated children in Secondary Schools and it is hoped that the transfer of these boys to a Trade School will give them the necessary motivation to continue their education and to give it more relevance. Once secondary education to cater for all types of children is well established, young people will remain in secondary schools for as long as possible to receive a full, basic education before moving to a Trade School or a Technical Institute to continue their education and training. Similar facilities for vocational training for girls are practically nil and this is a vacuum which must be filled as soon as possible. Lack of information on manpower needs is hindering planning for technical education and training.

The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology is now well established and is now testing its strength and seeking areas for consolidation and expansion. The Royal University of Malta also is expanding into new areas. It is also becoming aware that in the not so distant future it will have to develop from an institution for the elite into an institution for the majority with the consequent problems of maintenance of standards.

I am afraid I have spoken too long, sometimes like an old-fashioned teacher, all talk and chalk, though you must admit I did not use the blackboard. I now leave the topic to you.