

World:
Education – I

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1 Introduction

In this entry, I shall give a brief overview of my view on the education system, at least in the UK. I will split this entry into these sections:

- The Current State of the Education System
- The Purpose of an Education
- Where the Current Education System Might Fall Short

2 The Current State of the Education System

Here, I will try and give a fairly adequate overview of the education system, as it is in the UK. Firstly, just so it is known, I have gone through the education system in the UK, so based on this experience, I will draw out my outlooks. The first stage is Nursery (ages 3-4), and then Primary (ages 5-10), Secondary (11-15), Advanced (A) Levels (ages 16-17), and finally an optional Higher/Tertiary Education (ages 18+). Within Primary are SATs, within Secondary are GCSEs, and within Advanced education are A levels, and of course, within Higher education lie degree qualifications.

Every single one of the pre-university qualifications are based on written exams. Furthermore, in order to attain an education at 'good' sixth forms (schools for A levels), or 'good' secondary schools (for GCSEs), one must pass the previous stage of qualifications, to a high enough degree.

At this very moment, I have finished the first year at Imperial College London for a degree in Civil Engineering. Now, it seems to me, the higher stages of education have a larger basis on practice and application of principles, especially in university. Even though I have said "larger", I mean only that, as I think it is still primarily, at least so far in my degree, based on written examination and assessment, simply because it is easy to manage.

3 The Purpose of an Education

Having outlined the education system in the UK briefly, I shall now try and solidify and extract the purpose of an education, for the individual, and society, in order to measure the current education system later on.

In order to find the purpose of education, I will take a quick sweep through the notable history of western education. In ancient Greece, there existed private schools, where any parent who could afford the fee, could send their children to learn literacy, the arts, gymnastics, or learn rhetoric or mathematics in a higher stage of education. Of course, many after some short education, seemed to learn a trade on the job. Ancient Rome shows a similar situation with the development of private schools, where there existed stages of education, and if one could afford it, further higher education. A full, and formal education was completed more for a status symbol rather than practicality, and so many still learnt on the job when it came to trades.

Then, as the medieval period began in the western world, so did the expansion of Christianity, whereby monasteries were founded all over Europe. These also served as centres of education, teaching Latin, writing, the arts, medicine and theology. From these establishments grew many of the modern infrastructures of universities.

Of course, in the Islamic world, and the Eastern world, there existed many schools and methods of formal education, that I have not gone over. Although, I would argue, the picture is similar, that is, educational establishments built upon religious or cultural institution, until the modern day where education has been greatly standardised, and made available for all, at least where the infrastructure exists. With regards to the history, all that I have said is based on my understanding from several sources, so it may help for you to dig deeper into the history yourself, as my description may contain inaccuracies, but I would hope, only very few, at the most.

So, we now have an idea of the development of formal education. Now, let us look at the purposes of such a thing, with relation to the context in history. We can see that the importance, and implementation of education in societies, grows as time goes on. Education in the ancient world would have most likely been seen as an optional, although fruitful, addition to life, since survival was still a very large part of daily life, and so a trade as well as learning on the job was more important. As time went on, we could say that education enriched the abilities of one in a trade, or craft.

Now, in modern terms, 'education' would include the learning of a subject, mostly in universities, but it would be worthy to remember that a formal education probably is not merged with any one trade, but provides ways of thinking that could help in any trade. Such things as literacy, writing and being well versed in speech, would be considered an education, historically speaking. However today, those things are considered more as prerequisites for a higher or full education in a subject, such as Engineering. Even in today's world, there is a clear distinction between education, and the real world trades.

And so, we can see quite clearly, that an education, in the past, was an optional addition to a trade, whether that trade be politics, agriculture, philosophy, or to attend to religious work or to be a scribe. Although, it must be noted, that a formal education was optional, at least for those who were not expected to be in a high skilled trade. And so, in this modern day and age, where information, science, technology and medicine more or less rule all manner of different trades, an education is vital to attain entry into any trade in this world. For people without a higher education, many of these trades, no matter how essential, will not be available. Of course, one can attain an apprenticeship in order to enter that trade, however, and so almost bypass formal higher education, yet still attain entrance into that trade, if that trade offers apprenticeships.

And so, given all this, what would be the purpose of a modern day education? Is it an optional addition and enrichment of a trade, or even of life? Is it an essential, compulsory element of a trade? I would be driven to think it is all of these things. Education was founded on optional enrichment, in arts and literature, and in philosophy, and in the medieval period, founded greatly on religious theology. These things were in there entirety, optional to real world trades. Yet, the more learned people got, the more discoveries and knowledge they gained, up until a point where knowledge became the sole power of all humanity, in the modern age. At that very point, it became an absolute necessity, to continue formal education in society, and is to this day, a crucial pillar of a developed world, and all the trades that exist within it.

As for the individual, education in the past was a means to attain high class positions in high class circles, or to become apt in a particular art or trade that requires literacy or written skill, that wasn't essential for survival. But, on the whole, for the commoner, farming, fighting, or building were skills, far more vital and lucrative, and required learning on the job. It was the essential trades and occupations that offered new recruits the position of an

apprentice, from which they began to learn of their newly found trade, in that trade, with that trade, and for that trade. In the present day, the whole of modern society in a developed world requires all within it to have knowledge of science, technology, medicine, and even the arts, of course whereby many do not fulfil that requirement. Thus, no more is education optional. No more is a non educated individual fully welcomed, or fully effective in this modern society. In the past, education was an option, but now in modern society, education is a necessity, and may not be fully recognised as such to the degree it should be.

So, the purposes of education in the modern day and age are twofold:

- Allow one to be able to work in a modern trade, be it technical, philosophical, scientific or artistic (individual)
- Allow one to become a fully functioning member of society, in order to sustain it (societal)

Education is the pillar of a developed society, and the pillar for an individual to be part of society. And so, I find, it is education's purpose to sustain a developed society, and to give the individual the power to be part of that society in order to sustain, and develop it further.

Education ultimately should serve as the method by which people are entered into, and prepared for completely, the trades of the modern world, not externally to the trades, but within them in a fully integrated manner.

4 Where the Current Education System Might Fall Short

Now, as it has hopefully been clearly stated in the previous section, in the past, education was very much a separate circle from society and its trades. However, in a modern society, education has been realised to be a pillar for modern trades, not separate, but integral to society as information, mathematics and science become more and more important in every single line of work. Yet, we still use the same educational infrastructure as was used in the past, infrastructure that implied that education was a separate enrichment of society and life. This is what, I think, is fundamentally wrong with modern, higher education systems.

In the past, the purpose of education for the individual, that is “To be able to work in a modern trade, be it technical, philosophical, scientific or artistic”, has been less important, since it was not integral to have a formal education in order to become a farmer or carpenter, for example. But in a modern society such as ours, almost everyone in every trade, would benefit from, if not be required to have, a formal higher education. Also, from a societal perspective, the modern age requires all people to be educated, in order sustain and develop all of the trades in society, as well as society itself.

Thus, from an individual perspective, education must allow that person to be able to work in the trade they wish to enter. And from a societal perspective, education must be given to everyone, and furthermore, lead to an enrichment in innovation in all trades.

And so, I believe that the modern education system achieves the societal goal of education for the most part, but fails to effectively fulfil, I think, the individual goal of education, and I will explain why.

If education is to give the individual the ‘ticket’ which they can use to work in a trade of their choice, the education must be completely and wholly integrated with that trade. Now, in the current education system, universities try to tie together trades and education, but nonetheless, they remain quite separate. Now, I do think that if higher education were to be entwined with the specific trades, then there would also have to be absolute, solid, and strong unity within the trades themselves in order to offer an education. So, if the education system were to truly fulfil the purposes of education, as I see them, then it would also mean a shift of companies, within specific trades,

into unified bodies. For example, in order for an optimum education in civil engineering, the real world companies of that trade (of civil engineering), would have to be unified in order to supply that integrated education in the first place.

In the current education system, there is still a strong barrier between getting a degree in a subject, and working within a trade. I watched a TED talk recently on YouTube, and in that talk, the speaker explained the fact that what is learned in a degree is still a tenth or so of all the applicable knowledge you would need to work in that trade (in that video, the speaker was talking about engineering specifically). And so it makes me wonder, if I could get an apprenticeship in engineering, then that would actually be more effective in order for me to gain the skills to work with in my trade, compared to a degree. Now, a degree is valuable, and I know that I will treasure my degree when I am to hopefully receive it, but I would argue that the value of a degree, with a schism between education and working in the trades, is severely lowered. Now, if that schism were to be bridged, joining the respective trades to the respective degrees, then the trades would have a say in the curriculum of the degree, and the degree would provide experience within the trade itself, with direct cooperation from the companies. In this way, the line between a degree, and apprenticeship is blurred, and I think, quite honestly, the more blurred the line, the more effective the learning, since there begins a closing of the gap between education and the trades.

I think the current education system still leaves too large a gap between education and the trades. But I would say, at least in the case for the UK, this is also because the government manages education, and the companies manage the trades. If we are to join together education and the trades, then that would mean necessary and absolute cooperation between the government and companies, or where companies take over the management of higher education in their respective trades, or if the government administration took over management, on paper, of the companies. The result would be a meaningful, and smooth transition allowing the student to become apt within a final, complete trade, not just become apt in a subject, leaving a large gap in trade knowledge.

The higher education system infrastructure that I think would be more effective, would be for companies within a trade, say civil engineering, to join up to form a single civil engineering trade learning body, that offers what would be apprenticeships, much like they are today, but with the same transferability as a degree, irrespective of company. And so what you have is a

qualification in a subject, offered and managed by trade bodies (companies) themselves, giving not just the theory and practice of the subject, but experience in the trade, and learning of trade skills, which a degree cannot provide.

As for the societal purpose of education, I would say that the UK seems to fulfil that purpose in its education system to a large degree. It provides an education for all children, no question. But, there is a rift between higher education and A levels. Higher education can be said to be the connection between education and the trades, and A levels to be the connection between higher education and lower fundamental education (fundamental education being my term for education up to A level, lower fundamental education being up to GCSE level). The problem arises when we start to view higher education as an imperfect link between the trades and education, as I do think it is. If one is to do badly in A levels, and so not pass onto higher education, can you say that they are not prepared to enter the trade that higher education would have provided the link for? I would say, most certainly, not. As I have explained before, I think a degree, as it is now, is an imperfect link between education and the trades, so if that is the case, then A levels are an even poorer indication of one's aptitude to work in a given trade. Thus, the fact that one needs to pass A levels in order to gain a degree, which in turn is needed to enter a trade, is flawed, since a degree, let alone A levels, is an imperfect link to the final end goal trades themselves. Now, what I think really would fulfil the societal purpose of education, would be for the joining of current education system and the trades into one body of learning, whereby one enters after attending a fundamental education, and leaves the process, fully able, with all the skills and knowledge necessary, to work within a trade, as well as having as absolute promise of position within their trade of choice. This is similar to solution to fulfil the individual purpose of education that I sated earlier, but has an extra implication that no one should be exempt from higher education on the basis that they did not pass fundamental education with distinction. Fundamental education (literacy, mathematics, reasoning, world history, et cetera), and higher education, I believe, should not primarily measure one's aptitude for a certain trade, for that is secondary. I think it is primarily, and of utmost importance, that education prepares people for the trade they wish to enter. The bottom line is simply that an education system is a means for teaching people, and a means through which those people can learn. The difference between measurement of aptitude and teaching of aptitude is subtle, and both are probably required, but the results, if only one is focused on, are major. For example, one student is John, and the other Arthur. John and Arthur are just about to do their A level exams.

Now, if education was primarily a measure of aptitude, then the system is justified in splitting stages of education into age groups for a start, but also in basing qualification on time deadlines, not ability. And so, if John is apt enough, he may pass with distinction, and if Arthur was not apt enough at his age, he may fail his A levels. The result here, is that, no matter of one's actual ability, one must take specific tests, at the specific ages and times, and so Arthur, having failed his A levels, has been measured, not prepared, despite maybe being slightly less learned in what he was expected to know. And when it comes to university, Arthur may not even be able to attend one. Arthur may even have gotten bad GCSE results, and so might have received a lower standard of A level teaching compared to John, at a different school. So in the beginning, John and Arthur may have had only a very small difference in aptitude, but because the current education system seems to, in my eyes, primarily measure aptitude, the education system has made the difference in aptitude greater and greater as the stages of education continue. If, however, the education system was not primarily a measurement of aptitude, but a means of preparation for skills in a specific trade, then that means qualifications would not be delivered based on age or a constricted time limit/deadline, but delivered when a student is believed to be ready, and maybe that implies the lack of need for exams at all, since judgement of their readiness is simply decided beforehand. The real cause of John and Arthur's difference in aptitude in the beginning, say in GCSEs, may simply have been that Arthur learns better from practice, and John learns better from theory, or that Arthur simply needs more time to learn than John. Thus, the result could have been, in this new system, although John and Arthur's aptitude early on may have been different in the beginning, that John attains a qualification of distinction, and so does Arthur, but Arthur has simply attained that qualification a year or two later than John. That way, there would not be a growth in difference of measured aptitude. In this new system, both get to attend university, and even work in the trades of their choice, but simply with a time difference in their qualifications. Such a result where both student receive a degree of equal standing may have been far less likely in the current education system. The reason for this being, that the new system has prioritised the improvement of aptitude (learning) above measurement of aptitude (qualification). In practice, the education system must serve the whole variety of children from different backgrounds and with different characteristics, and so they will all have different ways of learning, and different speeds of learning, and I strongly believe, at the very least, the current education system holds those inherent differences against students. Thus, to finish off this paragraph, the result is that the whole of society is not educated to the same standards or level. In a world where learning, and

an education, was not key to working in the end trades, that is perfectly acceptable. But in this modern world, where learning is key, and needed for a flourishing, innovative, and strong society, this is most definitely unacceptable. Some may argue that many areas in fundamental education, such as science and world history, are not necessary for working in the trades. That, I would say, was true of the past, but not today. Yet, it is these very areas within learning and education, that the current education system allows people to walk out of due to 'lack of aptitude'. I most definitely cannot see this as a valid reason, nor as something that leads to anything good within a society. If a student is not yet apt in a specific area, it is the teacher that must be patient. It is the teacher that must teach, with absolute persistence, until the student learns. Only then will the student become apt. I think it is this, because of excessive standardisation, that the current education system fails to allow for effectively, at the very least.

5 Final Remarks

I hope that I have outlined areas where the current education system needs to improve, with adequate clarity. I do understand that the solutions to those areas, that I have tried to provide in this entry, are rather vague, and so I aim to refine them in later entries in this series and revisit the problems themselves. At the very least, I would like to think I have conveyed the reasoning behind the problems I see in the current education system.

I would like to finish this entry, by means of gratitude. Although I have pointed out problems with this country's education system, that I have been put through myself, I acknowledge absolutely, that it is by no means, on a global scale, a bad education system to have been put through. The education I have received, has ultimately allowed me to be in the position I am in, at this very moment, and allowed me to write this very entry. Of that, I can only be grateful. But, it would be of a backwards nature, to stagnate in the improvement of any education system. And so, it is to that end, of improving education, which I hope I have contributed towards, in writing this.

Thank you for reading.

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