

Is Education Fun?

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Everyday, increasing numbers of children and adolescents are engaged in “education,” but how many of them are really enjoying it? How many are compelled by the constraints imposed upon them by adults and how many are accepting it, if at all, for no other reason than sheer resignation and the belief that this is the only way of decreasing the hardships of their future adult life? What effect is education producing on the young generation in this environment of constraint and tension?

The desire for knowledge acquisition is natural to young developing minds, but very often it is destroyed by the fact that they are given more than they desire or can assimilate. Often when they are required or challenged to think, they do not think spontaneously in the way in which they would think about running or jumping; they think with a view to pleasing some adult, that is, with an attempt at correctness rather than from natural curiosity. Children who are taught painting or music beyond their level of interest—or with a view to social correctness rather than self-expression—become progressively less interested in the aesthetic side of life.

Because many children’s desire for knowledge construction is propelled by intrinsic curiosity, it is likely that if you teach a child the principles of the operation of a common pump in lesson time, he may not necessarily acquire the knowledge you are trying to impart, whereas if you have a pump in your backyard he will spend his leisure time touching it, exploring its operations, and “learning” about it.

Many educators agree that by making the learning experience fun, exciting, and relevant, the “conflict” between teacher expectations and student expectations in the classroom will be reduced. Despite the number of theoretical postulates that sum up this idea with the term “student-centred learning,” teachers across all levels of the system are severely challenged in their quest to attain this ideal. How can learning be made fun, a kind of game to be enjoyed, where the initiative of the learner is given priority? Can learning be transformed into a “spontaneous” process? And if so, how could this freedom be reconciled with the necessary self-discipline that seems to be inevitable for almost all learning?

In order to answer these and other similar questions it is important to first assess the current state of affairs. What are we giving to our students in today’s classroom? Careful consideration might lead one to suggest that our present education system overburdens students with factual concepts, inert ideas, and redundancy. The focus is on success at subject-specific terminal examinations at all costs. Students are implicitly encouraged to

develop a knowledge base that stresses breadth rather than depth; one that compromises quality for quantity.

With this focus, it is glaringly obvious that there is no place for fun and excitement in the classroom. Why should an entire lesson be devoted to the composition of a song or a poem about a content concept, when several different concepts could be “taught” to students in the same time frame? When will I complete the syllabus if I spend all this time on drama and role-play? It is obvious that teachers see activities like these as “extra” and “by-the-way,” and not as strategies that can be included in the classroom to support and enhance the teaching/learning process.

Despite efforts made by teacher training programmes to equip teachers with understandings of students’ mixed abilities, multiple intelligences, and diverse needs and experiences, teachers’ classroom practices are still influenced by traditional beliefs that the teacher is the provider of knowledge—via whatever method suits the teacher—and that the students’ job is to passively accept this knowledge, whatever their learning style.

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