

**‘Educated humanity is a blessing
for the world.’**

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The man — good looking, perhaps forty — was standing outside the department store, apparently uncertain which way to turn. That gave me the courage to speak to him. ‘I’m doing a little opinion poll about schools. Are you willing to answer some questions?’ He nodded and I asked, ‘If you can put it in one short sentence, what would you say is the basic task of primary schools?’ He thought, for quite a long time, and said, ‘The school should prepare young people for life.’ — ‘And that means?’ — ‘Enabling the students to take their place in society, the economy and the state.’

I thanked him, astonished. His answer was precise. I have heard variations of this answer since on a number of occasions. And really, no one can object to it.

But is that everything? Should we be satisfied if school-leavers are able, for example, to read the newspaper, operate electronic machines, fill out their tax returns, handle money, take out insurance policies and cope with many of the other similar demands of modern society? In that sense they would be prepared for life, for you can live very well, even if you never read a book, never go to a concert or a museum, hang absolute kitsch on your walls, fritter away your free time aimlessly, cannot tell a pine tree from a beech, have forgotten everything you learnt in history lessons, never pick up a pencil to do a drawing and never think about the meaning of life either. Despite all that, one can fulfil one’s duties as a citizen and earn sufficient money as a useful manual or office worker.

From Pestalozzi’s point of view, school should not simply enable a young person to function in society, it should help him to develop as

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an independent personality with all its human potential. By doing that it helps him to achieve a true *quality of life*. *The quality of education, therefore, can be measured by the quality of life that education opens up for the pupil.*

We need, therefore, to think about the *quality of life* if we are to be clear about the *quality of education*. Philosophically we are skating on thin ice, for who could deny that each person himself determines, on the basis of his individual situation, what quality of life is. But this relativism is no use to a teacher. He needs standards for his work, even if no one can prove that they are generally binding.

The question, then, is: what is quality in education, what teaching and learning goals can lead to quality of life?

My view is this: much of what we do is simply geared to *maintaining* ourselves or our species. What we do is purely for a *purpose*. We supply ourselves with calories; we move from point A to point B; we speak in order to impart information; we build houses to protect ourselves; we construct vehicles we can drive or fly so that we can travel in comfort; but mostly this is not enough for us, simply fulfilling *purposes* quickly loses its attraction. We want our activities to have *meaning*, to give us a sense of *excitement, pleasure and fulfilment*. And we can do that, for in the first place we can raise purely functional activities to a new, 'higher' level by allowing ourselves to be guided by *ethical values*. And in the second place we can do many things, which would not seem particularly necessary from a purely functional point of view, in a particularly satisfying way by allowing our activity to be guided by *aesthetic values*.

To rise above the purely functional to the ethical and aesthetic level is the essential characteristic of human *culture*. It is in this that man's spiritual nature expresses itself. It is the human spirit alone that makes this meaningful activity possible and it is only by going beyond the purely functional by turning it into a cultural activity that people can experience true quality of life.

Thus if schools want to make quality of life possible, they cannot restrict themselves to 'preparing pupils for life', that is to passing on usable knowledge and skills that can be applied directly in their future lives as adults. Rather, their task is to concern themselves with the healthy physical, mental and psychological development of the child as

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a whole. And this happens when *life in the school* is treated as *real life*, is not geared to the students' *future* alone but takes their *present* situation into account — and that in a way that their physical, mental and psychological capacities can be developed as broadly and as intensively as possible. Only when this is happening can one seriously talk of quality in education. Only in this way can schools make a constructive contribution to combating the cultural impoverishment that is a necessary consequence of a purely utilitarian approach. Otherwise they will suffer from the same cultural emptiness as do many people whose work is governed by utilitarian considerations alone.

I would like to use the example of language to illustrate what I am trying to put across. There is no doubt that we have achieved much, if our pupils can order information in their minds and formulate it appropriately through language. However, anyone who has that ability is at best *trained*, but not *educated* in the full meaning of the word. Genuine education demands the cultivation of speaking and language in the sense of raising it to the higher level of the aesthetic. It starts with articulation. Of course, in the first place the correct enunciation of sounds serves the purpose of better comprehensibility, but that is not the end of it. With correct and refined articulation we enter another dimension, namely that of music, and with that a new realm of experience — for both speakers and listeners — as an expression of the human spirit. Education is always a matter of seeking out and encouraging such elements, and teachers who are concerned about education and quality take every opportunity to do so.

Cultured speaking demands not simply correct articulation, but also breathing, intonation, modulation, pacing, pauses, accentuation, emphasis — all points that are of crucial significance in music as well. This is both a science and an art. People who speak professionally — actors for example — must have mastered it. But clear speech with pure sounds that is appropriate to the content must not be reserved for professionals. It is a goal that teachers who are concerned about quality always bear in mind, knowing that in so doing they will open up new areas of experience for their pupils.

Let us take the next step, which brings us to reading. A teacher who is conscious of the importance of the aesthetic dimension as a basis for

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quality of life will not be satisfied with the current definition of reading as the extraction of meaning. 'Reading' is more, it is *conveying* meaning, *structuring* the text by speaking it, bringing a work of art *to life* in one's own mind. Such a teacher will never be satisfied if a pupil has merely 'extracted the meaning' from a poem or piece of prose — understood it, that is. The main task — structuring the text by speech — is still to come. This task demands a much more intensive effort from the child himself than the simple understanding and absorbing of content transmitted by a text. It is only through this creative activity that he can assimilate the text — the poem, the story, the description — mentally and emotionally. And it is only this active assimilation of a piece of writing that deserves to be called 'education'.

In reading, this superior demand appears not only in the *way* texts are handled but more especially in the *choice* of texts. Current language teaching methods tend to give the pupils a range of all possible types of text production and text use, but that in no way guarantees that the beauty and deeper meaning of a poem will be a truly enriching and fulfilling experience for them. That only comes through occupying themselves intensively with really worthwhile reading material. In the long term, only a school system informed by a culture which ignores the mediocre and devotes its time, which is too short anyway, to worthwhile material, is the sure way to arouse *a love of art and literature* in young people and equip them to enjoy some quality of life. This brings us to a goal which we must at least set the students on the road to achieving, if education is to have genuine quality: namely to get them not simply to understand the texts and perhaps also read them in the way the teacher presents them in class, but to become involved, at whatever level, in literature in the widest sense.

What has been shown here in relation to speaking and reading is correspondingly valid for the promotion of good communication skills, as well as for subjects such as writing, drawing, music, gymnastics and in general when any material is to be presented in written or graphic form. The point is always to go beyond the purely functional and to guide the student into the realm of culture, to the aesthetic level. A creative teacher, for whom connections are important, will always find ways of bringing out the aesthetic or ethical element, even when pupils

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are learning a foreign language, dealing with mathematical problems or tackling various kinds of topic.

In this connection let us have a quick look at Pestalozzi's basic concern: whatever content pupils are dealing with, their activity should be so arranged as to develop the 'powers and faculties' that are in every human being. Put in more modern terms, that means that content-oriented 'material' education should serve 'formal' education. Presumably people will agree that teaching which looks to the higher capabilities of mankind and makes corresponding demands in quality will foster the children's faculties in a much more consistent manner than teaching which is satisfied with the purely functional. Thus a teacher who in his comments also pays attention to careful handwriting, a clear and attractive presentation and correct language can develop in the pupils a whole series of 'faculties' which will make a higher quality of life possible in many situations, for example a sense of beauty and balance, care in approaching a task, self-criticism, conscientiousness, stamina, imagination and creativity.

Naturally educational theory also deals with 'quality of education'. It has developed a series of systems to assure quality. But that is difficult, for with the usual methods of assessing learning success, the features we are presenting as the key educational element frequently slip through the net of any system. The reason is simple: the educational outcome is very difficult or impossible to measure. If with reading, for example, the goal is simply the extraction of meaning, astute questioning can establish when the meaning of a text has been understood. But how far a pupil has been enriched by a committed oral reproduction of the text or whether the urge to immerse himself in the world of literature has been developed, or further developed, can at best be determined through direct discussion with him, but not measured. In other words, true quality of education is always something more than can be assessed by learning checks and quality assurance systems. These always focus the teaching effort on the less essential aspects and in so doing tend to devalue what is truly decisive.

Therefore it can never be left to any kind of points system to determine what 'higher quality' means in education; that is always the business of teachers who are competent to do so. Yet that is not what people

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want to hear today, for the modern attitude demands objectivity and resists the idea that judgments which can be important in a child's life should depend on the subjective assessment of a teacher. Nevertheless, the decisive factor in achieving true quality of education is the teacher's awareness of quality and also his determination to aim for 'higher quality' in everything he does.

But the teacher is not there simply to *check* the pupils' actual attainment but also to *make sure* they reach it. That will find no favour with those who want to reduce the importance of the teacher and see him merely as an organiser of learning situations who provides material, creates suitable conditions for learning, accompanies, checks and assesses the learning process. That is correct to a limited extent, if one regards the school simply as a place of *training* where prescribed and assessable learning goals are to be achieved. But if one regards the school as a place of *education*, where every activity should be cultivated and thus raised to an aesthetic or even moral level, the teacher is, as ever, central to it: rooted in his endeavours to achieve true quality in his own life, he can set more far-reaching *goals*, choose the appropriate *methods and types of exercise* and be persistent in making the necessary *demands* on the students as a person they feel they can trust. Paper or the screen can at best be used to issue assignments, but children will only take demands that require real quality seriously *from a person* who means something to them.