

of primary school

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with a chief examiner of Cambridge University. In my naivete, I had expressed some reservations about their marking methodology, saying that it was too slack. He had replied that they focus on a pupil's strengths whereas, he felt, that we focus on his weaknesses; their system was designed to award marks, ours to deduct them. His remarks struck me as being particularly pertinent since the 'empty half' of the glass always seems to hold more appeal for us.

I firmly believe that intrinsically all humans are good and there is a latent genius within every child. The process of education should discover that genius and polish it so that each child can grow up to play a productive and positive role in the society. Each child is unique and his individuality must be catered to. Humans are diverse not only in their appearance and culture but also in the way they assimilate knowledge. Different pupils respond to different ways of teaching.

Sadly, teachers want their pupils to be tailor-made to their liking and those who do not measure up to their standards and meet their expectations are, at best, ignored. It is extremely easy to be a judge and rather difficult to be a lawyer. There is a wide discrepancy between the theory we learn and its practice.

There is something intrinsically wrong with our education system. The curriculum, even at the primary level, shows disregard of moral, social and intellectual values and a lack of imagination and understanding on the part of those who formulate it. A seven year old child has a heavy load of books to carry to school every day, while the teachers have to contend with an overly ambitious syllabus and are required

to 'finish' it in the designated time. Both are so overburdened with their respective obligations that they lose interest, and teaching and learning, at best, become perfunctory. Consequently, what is regarded as learning actually becomes memorizing without understanding. The child adapts himself to his circumstances and manages to memorize long answers and reproduce them in the examination, thus meriting a good result and the praise of his family and teachers!

One little problem, though. He has not learned any thing. The child fails to develop an analytical mind and whatever natural and creative ability he has becomes totally dormant. From the very beginning the system makes a child dependent. He does not think because he does not have to. The result-oriented system of examinations has led to corrupt practices and schools and colleges concentrate on producing good results often without actually imparting quality education. Ideally, a school should aim to provide an environment that facilitates learning rather than teaching. 1

Education at primary level is of the highest importance and ironically the most neglected in our country. Unfortunately, in our society teaching is not considered a specialized vocation. Half the time it is a stepping stone to better opportunities and if one of those doesn't come along, well it's better than nothing, isn't it? It is an undeniable fact that the a lot rests on the shoulders of our primary school teachers. So it is even more regrettable because many institutions do not realize this simple fact and employ untrained and unqualified teachers who, instead of encouraging and inspiring their impressionable proteges, often do the opposite.

To have any hope of reforming our primary education system, we need to have in place teacher training programmes and professional development institutes which keep track of and incorporate changing trends in pedagogy. Students must also realize that a teacher's role is that of a facilitator and the spirit of inquiry and self growth should always remain with them; even after they formally finish their studies. ■

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with unequivocal authority that he is a fool, a dunce of the highest order and deserves all the ridicule the teacher can muster. The pupil justifiably starts thinking of himself as a fool and a dunce and eventually loses any self-respect or self-confidence he had. School and all things associated become an anathema. So much talent and promise can go down the drain because of the improvidence of one teacher. If you think about it, we are a nation of critics, criticizing sometimes just for the sake of criticism and sometimes to prove our non-existent superiority. The aim is always to find fault. This attitude is, to a certain extent, a ramification of what we learn at school where any mistakes in work are always highlighted but strengths or virtues are conveniently ignored. I remember a discussion I once had