On Education

Authors

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Introduction

If humanity has proved anything over the last fifty to sixty years, it's that we have potential. We have the potential to do amazing things. Our grasp and control over the mechanics of the world has only become more and more impressive over the years. Our technological pursuits alone have shown this, but there are arguments to be made saying we can do better. We can't reach our potential because we are giving our young an extraordinarily inefficient kick-start in life. We've managed this by way of an inefficient education system. Now the way we go about education now isn't all that bad. We've managed to get this far right? Fifty, maybe even up to thirty years ago this was the best we could do, but we've come a long way since then. Sure changes have been made, more kids generally are getting education than before, and that's good. We've also been accepting some technology into education. The problem here is the additions of technology have only been used to aid the education system as it is currently. Which has a disastrous side effect that we've let the system become stagnant for too long. The system has dug its heels in and I think it's due a flip on its head. And there are more issues that I'll come to later. I'll be keeping this piece short, for now I only focus on the fundamental problems with how we do things.

So what should we change and why?

What we teach

We need to change the focus on what we teach. Traditional subjects like maths, English, languages, history, art and the like have their advantages and disadvantages. The issue is that none of these on its own gives immediate benefit to the student. Schools should teach children from a young age things that will help them take control of their lives. Things like basic economics and money management, how to filter valuable information from useless information, how to think for yourself and how to teach yourself would have a more positive effect than any amount of teaching of a traditional subject at school level. As a base these promote a flexible mindset which can be applied to anything and is inherently more valuable than a mind taught traditionally because of how adapted to current society they are. In an information age like ours we need to be equipped to handle things like fake news around the world causing confusion and unrest. I am sure the reader can also think of other reasons why switching a teaching focus to this is more valuable than our current focus, especially at a young age.

Schooling needs to encourage creativity, imagination and innovation far more than it currently does. One larger issue being faced due to our exploitation of technology is the unemployment caused by automation. The main advantage we have over computers and machines is our ability of free thought, creativity, imagination and curiosity. It is not difficult to note we are coming to an age where to progress as a society these traits are becoming more and more valuable. They've always been an essential part of our progression, so it's sad we don't already target them more. Not only are those people with more of these skills generally more valuable to our progression, they also add more value to society as a whole because they can think of

However to promote these vital traits, schools will likely require an overhaul. It is not our schools fault that they currently subdue and discourage them, it is not on purpose. But we must realise that things must change, and we must get out of the rut caused by our lack of attention on the education system.

How we teach

Teaching in the traditional way is a waste of time and money. Now before the pitchforks are raised. Teachers are arguably the most valuable profession, it would be a mistake to ever think this. Some are

good and some are bad but they all end up shaping almost everyone's futures in some way, small or large. However teacher's shouldn't waste their time trying to teach 20-30 students per hour. We've had books for centuries which do a good job at targeting a larger audience. But books require time and effort and attention. Attention, a dwindling skill today, I will note is also undervalued and certainly under taught. The rise of video learning has been huge and will likely continue to rise and so it should. It is more engaging to today's visual audiences generally than books and with our current technology can easily reach a wide audience. Videos are also more versatile than in person lecturing and can far exceed current teaching effectiveness. Through editing and other techniques to visualise concepts, information can also be conveyed more densely. A side effect of producing resources like this is it becomes far easier to provide them to the poor. These video resources are cheap and easy to share, for those willing. And has the potential to provide opportunities for so many stuck in poverty with a willingness to learn.

Now this is not an argument that we should get rid of teachers. Students, are hard to encourage to learn. Which is why we thought we need teachers to put in front of them so they at least pay marginal attention to their studies. But with more video learning how do you approach it? One valid thought process here tends towards thinking about gamification of learning and skills gained. There is scope to make the education system a truly rewarding institution to be a part of. I have some ideas on how this could be done, I'm sure many people do, and it's time to consider doing it. This still doesn't cover teachers and why they are still useful. A vision of what teachers should be doing is acting as a guide to young students, helping direct their studies, giving advice, helping explain things or general moral and possibly emotional support. If teachers had the time to perform these duties they'd be making better use of their time, because until now, we've never valued their time close to it's actual value.

Most of what I've said so far seems to be largely geared towards primary and secondary education. However, I believe things are going wrong in our universities too. My observations over four years at university showed me how inefficient their teaching practices are. Most of the suggestions I've posed for the other forms of education still hold. However I believe, given the resources universities hold and the research they conduct, they are also wasting the student resource as well. Maybe there is a chance to get more research done, while also giving students a much better overall education and learning by practice rather than dwelling on too much theory. But I expect my suggestions on this can also wait for another day, and I'll leave this to provoke some thought for now.

The output of our teaching

Finally, a word in on exams. I've sat my fair share of them, I've even enjoyed them most of the time. But are they doing their job as well as possible? In a world where exam grades are forgotten as soon as you have 2 or so years of working experience. I'd argue things should be rethought, innovated if you will. Again I have an idea or two when it comes to this, they may not be perfect but getting the thoughts out there is a start at the least. Having an education system built from the ground up to show off and celebrate one's learning, which inherently shows their strengths and weakness, work ethic and maybe even hinting at their potential is an obvious ideal. And I don't think that is beyond us, as so little is.

Wrapping up

These are some words I wrote about the subject. It took me about half an hour, but my ideas have been kicking around for a while now. You'll note there are no citations or references in this post, this is purely a work of opinion from someone fresh from the system they deem broken. People will disagree as they may, but this is something I felt needs to be voiced. I could go on and write at length about exactly what we should do to these ends, and I probably will in time. For now I'll leave those opinions unvoiced to allow the reader to think about it without my ideas infecting your thought

process. And I also ask the question to you, maybe I am wrong, there may be a flaw in my logic, I've considered many counterpoints to my argument so far, and still believe in the general idea I've posed. I welcome more discussion as well, as this idea has merit and I alone cannot make this happen.