

What's wrong with the education system?

By Gabriella Farah

Nowadays, far too many children don't enjoy school. I came to this conclusion because I sent out a questionnaire to students all over the country asking them whether or not they enjoyed school, and a staggering 80% of them said that they didn't. Parents typically blame this dislike of school on laziness on the students' part and an unwillingness to learn, but in reality, school is no longer an enjoyable process. Most children enjoy learning; they enjoy discovering new concepts as well as being challenged; it's in their nature. However the system they're forced to abide by no longer makes education interesting. Instead it pressures them to the point where they only work because they're scared of what will happen if they don't. Education now completely relies on instilling fear; kids are practically bullied into studying. They're told that if they don't work, they'll fail their exams, and if they fail their exams, they'll fail at life. Children are taught this from a young age, an age where they shouldn't even need to be thinking of their career nor their future. The reason students work isn't because they enjoy it, it's because they're scared of failure.

School should be about teaching children to be creative, to be curious and inquisitive. Instead, the large majority of schools essentially squash out childrens' remaining creativity. Sir Ken Robinson, a famous author and educationalist, said in his Ted talk about education killing creativity: "My contention is that creativity now is as important in education as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status". Unfortunately though, instead of helping children pursue their natural talents and interests, we force them to sit in a classroom and learn by rote, as if it's the most important thing in the world. And ten years later, once those children have left school, all that's been made out of them is yet another grey-faced citizen, similar to the thousands others manufactured by the education system.

A complaint often heard about school, especially from the students themselves, is that what they're being taught is useless and won't help them in the long run. It's an understandable concern, as it may seem to them that learning mathematical equations and historical dates is pointless, but in reality they're learning a lot more than what they think they are. School teaches you how to learn a skill, how to practice it, and how to apply it, and that will help the students in the future just as much as the general

education they'll receive. Although admittedly, they may still have a point when they say that a lot of what they're learning won't ever help them later on in life. However the actual problem with today's education system isn't what they're being taught, it's how they're being taught.

In every school, students are grouped together based on age rather than ability. They work alongside pupils who may be at a much superior or much inferior level to them. They must work at a predetermined rate, regardless of whether or not they've even understood the topic being covered. The result of this is that either students are not being challenged enough (as they're already at a higher level than their classmates), or that the rest of the class struggles to keep up with work and to understand what they're being taught. In every class, there is a clear separation between those pupils. This distresses the students, and often creates additional anxieties, both emotionally and academically, especially for the ones who have trouble keeping up.

What's more, schools today unknowingly discourage children from reaching their full potential. They're manufacturing a generation of identical future employees, and this, in my opinion, is partly the fault of a hierarchy in the subjects. Why is it that maths, sciences, economics and English are taught with more importance than music, drama or art? The reason is that the most 'important' jobs, the ones that will earn you and your country the most money and the careers you 'should be' aiming to follow are all centered around business studies, economics, and other similar subjects. Subjects like drama and music don't even exist in some schools, and in many they're considered to be of little importance. Students are steered away from the subjects they actually enjoy and are passionate about, purely because their school and their parents tell them 'you'll never actually be a musician' or 'you'll never actually be an artist'. In my opinion, all subjects should be taught with the same level of importance, and the student should be allowed to choose which ones they are interested in. This is where the students who claim that 'maths is stupid' might have a point. Unless they actually want a job that requires you to have a knowledge of maths, why are we making them sit through countless maths lessons when they could be studying something they actually enjoy and want to do in the future?

One of the main reasons why everything's gone wrong is because of a single factor: exams. Exams are the most important thing you'll come across in your time at school. They are what will determine your entire future; what university you'll go to, what career you'll follow, essentially, how successful you'll be. There are many questions that could be asked about exams; is it right for someone's entire future to rely on how well they've

performed in an exam when they're only teenagers? Are they truly an accurate assessment of intelligence? Or do they simply assess your ability to memorise facts? I put this question to Dr. Anthony Seldon, headmaster of Wellington College and widely recognised as one of the best headmasters in the country. He said that 'Exams matter. They really matter, as they test key skills of memory, recall, analysis, argument and command of oneself, etc. But these are only some of the skills young people need for life. I wouldn't abolish exams: I would improve them.'

Improving the exams is exactly what's going to need to happen in order to prevent the education system from falling apart. At the moment, students aren't being taught to think for themselves. They don't come up with their own ideas; they're told to memorise something and they do it without questioning it. Ask them for an answer that requires them to think, analyse and extrapolate, and they'll panic. It's not their fault, it's the system they've been in their whole lives. Teachers feed their students facts that they'll have to learn off by heart and spit out in an exam in order to get top marks. All they're taught is exactly what they need to know in order to pass the exam; nothing more, and that's the problem. And what's more, the levels of stress students experience during their exams are probably too high to be considered safe. In my questionnaire, 70% of the students who answered said that one of the reasons why they didn't enjoy school was because of the amount of pressure put on them to perform. You could argue that amongst other things, all the academic stress put on them is partly what's pushing teenagers towards things like drugs, alcohol, and self harm.

Dr. Seldon continued: 'the core problem is that schools have chosen to become little more than 'exam factories'! They see themselves as primarily or exclusively to produce top exam results. This leaves little space for wider enrichment.' This is exactly what's wrong with schools today; a school is known for how well it's students have done in their exams, as published in newspaper league tables, and never for their musical, artistic or sporting achievements. No one seems to understand that people should not be defined by grades. There's so much more to a person than their academic results, you can't judge someone based off an A*, an A, a B or a C after their name, which is why it is surprising that universities look at grades before even interviewing the applicant. Some of the most boring and uninteresting people could be the ones with the most A*s, and some of the most creative, intriguing people might be the ones with the Bs and Cs. Take Einstein as an example, he dropped out of school at 15 and turned out to be one of the most brilliant people who ever lived. Richard Branson dropped out at 16 and later founded Virgin, a company now taking people all the way to the moon.

Nowadays, such importance is placed on exams and academics that students concentrate on nothing else, and by the time they've left school and gone to university or found a job, they are completely unprepared for what faces them. They're so used to being spoon-fed information and so unable to think for themselves that they can't do any work without being told exactly what to do. Unless we can fix the way students are taught, the exam system, as well as the schools' attitude towards results, the new generation of graduates won't be as educated and capable as they'll need to be in order to survive in life, create business, and run the country. The consequences of a badly educated generation are going to be huge, and preventive consideration needs to be given to this sooner rather than later.