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WHEN EARNING INTERFERES WITH LEARNING

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Abstract

Millions of the world's children have to work to earn, and so minimalise their time at school, as well as their taste for school-type learning. This problem is relatively more acute for children with the potential to develop their abilities to a gifted or talented level. But for most of them there is no alternative, because they are often contributing to essential life support.

Additionally, the environments of poor children are often unhealthy places to grow up in, both physically and psychologically, so that their loss is not only of their health and education, but of normal psychological development, inhibiting their maturation into autonomous adults. Schools can provide the motivation to learn, especially working with the families. This can be done with concern for the children's out-of-school lives, using appropriate techniques of teaching, notably applied psychology. It is possible to help some gifted children who work, though it may be extremely difficult.

When children are obliged to earn money, it interferes both with the time they can spend at school and also with their inclination to acquire school-type knowledge. Though this is clearly true for all children, it has special implications for those with the potential to develop their abilities to an exceptionally high degree. Although poor school-learning is always detrimental to the life-chances of any child, it is relatively much more so for the potentially gifted and talented.

There is as great a need in poor countries as in rich ones for well educated and able leaders, but this implies appropriate concern and provision for the children who will grow up to take that role. Yet even in rich countries, there is government reluctance to provide special education for the more able. In the Developing World, where resources are stretched to the limit, concern for the highly able is rare because educational provision is constrained not only by lack of money, but also by cultural outlooks.

Non-school work is not necessarily bad. It can be a source of personal fulfilment at any age, and can provide a positive stimulus that enhances the quality of life. But it can also be a chore that comes from acute financial need, and often consists of mind-numbing tasks for small reward - no more than destructive drudgery.

As we approach the year 2000, a conservative estimate of the number of children under the age of 15 in full-time work is 52 million. Child soldiers are recruited in countries such as Ulster, Sri Lanka, Nicaragua and Peru; in Bangkok, children as young as 6 years-old swell the ranks of prostitutes, of whom about 30,000 are under the age of 16. By the end of the

century, half the world's population will be under 25 and there will be some two million children concentrated in the world's largest cities. Their chances of receiving the education they need in order to achieve their potential are slim.

For millions of the world's children, schooling must seem almost an irrelevance in the daily battle for survival. Despite their potential ability, bright working children lack choice, career goals, and hence any incentive to persevere with formal learning. Absenteeism from school, whether voluntary or not, has a poor prognosis in many respects. For example, longitudinal British research on truancy has found that truants are significantly more prone to breakdowns in marriage, health, and achievement (Hibbett and Fogelman, 1990). This individual human loss is enormously significant in world terms; in a country like Brazil, for example, where 41% of the population live in poverty, 50% fail to finish their fourth year of primary school (Alencar, 1988).

For most children who work, however, there is no alternative, because they are contributing to essential life support, and may even be the family breadwinner. In India, children as young as three years old are rounded-up to work a 12-hour day in the match factories, though their fathers have no work, because employers find children cheaper and less trouble to employ. Work bondage is also not uncommon for parents and children; the pitiful earnings ensuring that the cycle is perpetuated, because bonded labourers can only obtain their freedom by pledging their own children into bondage. Working conditions for these children invariably lead to disease of one sort or another, and often early death.

Even though not all working children face such dangers at the work-place, they are highly vulnerable to the compound problems of poverty, such as low level housing and diet, and may suffer ill health as a result. The environments of poor children are often unhealthy places to grow up in, both psychologically and physically.

Inadequate food contributes to the odds stacked against a poor child's development, an effect seen in the recent results of an experiment with food supplements carried out in relatively rich Britain. Experimental and control groups of children were asked to take tablets daily, some being placebos and others containing vitamin and mineral supplements (Benton and Roberts, 1988). The researchers used a double-blind approach, so that neither they nor the children knew who took what. After eight months, no change was found in the children taking the placebo, but those who had taken the supplements had increased their non-verbal intelligence by 9 points. The exact cause of this improvement has not been identified, but no critic has succeeded in casting doubt on the integrity of the research. International study has also concluded that improved nutrition results in children having increased IQs, correlated with increases in their head size and height (Lynn, 1989). Clearly, the better-nourished child will function better at a biological level, and this can be expected to support a higher level of mental functioning. This effect is recognised in many countries such as Brazil and in some areas of the USA, where feeding very poor children is an important part of school life; indeed some children are motivated to come to school to eat.

The way that a child's potential may be used is also dependent on the less tangible nourishment of the social environment. In most parts of the world, the least attractive work is done by immigrants - and their children. They and their children often suffer from the major handicap of not speaking the host language as their native tongue. Although some studies have shown that bilingual children can have greater cognitive flexibility, social sensitivity, and adeptness at creative thinking (Wiles, 1985), that research was conducted with children

in full-time school. Working children have neither the time nor the facilities to exercise those gifts.

When they do go to school, immigrants may also come up against the teacher's unconscious prejudices against foreigners, which tend to be reinforced by the children's lack of verbal fluency - which may appear as stupidity. Schools have been seen to allow under-achievement in immigrant children such as Gypsies in Hungary or Turks in Germany. This is not to say that all immigrant children succumb to such problems, as evidenced by the brilliant performances of Vietnamese and Korean children in California, or of Jews in Western Europe and America in the earlier part of the century. The essential difference seems to be in parental attitudes to education, so that in families where children do have to work and miss school, there can be some form of alternative at home.

The majority language of a country implies much of the outlook on which that culture is based, and partly indicates loyalty to a common form of government. When children are brought-up without that language basis, they are somewhat barred from those ways of thought, and so effectively remain `foreigners' in the country of their birth. Although it would be unreasonable to expect either food or compensatory education to overcome all the ills that befall children - however potentially gifted - if we can see where the problems lie, then we can attempt to put them right.

Loss of childhood

The part played by the wider social context is extremely important in children's development, whether emotional, cognitive, or creatively productive. The cultural structure, in the sense of what is or is not `permitted', can radically alter a child's mental growth, though such effects vary with different ages. Strongly unsuitable gender roles, for example, can even push youngsters to depression and breakdown (Parsons, 1985), and children who work to earn from an early age can bypass some stages of vital psychological development, producing stunted maturation.

This psychological deprivation is not only from the children's own experiences, but is also usually inter-generational. Other family members have probably built up similar attitudes during their own lives, and from the same poor social and physical circumstances. In the formation of their own attitudes and behaviour, children will accept and interact with those who are close to them, although that process is modified by individual personality and ability. Feelings about one's place in society, which are based on the cultural environment, largely determine a child's will to strive for achievement. This self-perception has a strong effect on whether or not there is to be any change in the next generation's economic status.

There may be a threshold effect in the development of intelligence, in that a minimum input is needed at any age for progress to take place. If the minimum is missing, the intelligence may not develop. Evidence for this idea comes from the stories of children who have been severely deprived of possibilities to develop, such as those brought up in isolation from other people. With special care, such children have improved, but if they could not talk when they were found, they never reached a normal level of functioning. However, lower IQ children from poor homes who have been fostered to professional homes have improved their scores significantly.

A particular difficulty for children who start work very young is that although they may learn to cope with everyday obligations, they may have difficulty in thinking and planning

beyond the present - and the younger they are when they work, the worse the problem is likely to be. Child workers are often given the most menial and boring tasks, during which they survive by `switching off' mentally, so damaging their developing ability to think and to acquire a feeling of control over their lives. Just as babies leave the cradle to stand on their own feet, working children need help towards taking the psychological steps to autonomy. The time that working children spend in school, limited as it may be, can have life-long value, if it is used to enhance their sense of self-efficacy and competence.

The value of play

Intellectual and emotional maturity comes from the experience of both success and failure, and in learning how to cope with either. Such experience begins with play. A small child building a tower of bricks, for example, is learning about mathematical and physical concepts. He learns that a tower supported by several bricks can be built higher than one based on a single brick, and he also learns that patience and perseverance make their efforts more likely to be rewarded with success. Even play, which may appear to have no purpose, is a form of practice that aids flexibility in intellectual and physical performance. Feelings about other people are worked out through play-acting, a procedure which is also a recognised source of creative endeavour for both young and old.

A child actively shapes herself through play, as noted by Jerome Bruner (1972), who saw play as a valuable use of immaturity. In this way, a child can experiment with new and risky ways of behaviour, by trying them out in different but safe ways - a pretend fire is not hot. Working children miss out on play, that state of psychological transposition from one realm of being to another. Such children may appear very `grown-up', yet this superficial mantle of adulthood that has been laid on their young shoulders is no replacement for real maturity.

For a child who has to work, there is no time for the slow, steady, trial-and-error development of maturity, the kind which allows decisions to be made with knowledge gained from experience. Role-play is enormously important in giving children a balanced view of themselves; in this imaginative world, they can take turns in being Mummy, Daddy or Teacher, and so develop a self-image of control over their own lives. Very young working children may grow up learning that they must do as they are told by employers. In psychological terms, this means that their sense of control over their own lives is shifted to figures of authority, such as their boss and others who they see as being in a superior position to them.

Working children who fall behind emotionally, educationally and creatively are unlikely to ever catch up with the missed stages of their development. Even if information is acquired later, it is received into a different mental set-up, and the end-result is bound to be different. For those who are aware of their loss of development time, it may be important to express it and grieve for it consciously, just as one should with any loss, before moving on to make the best of the circumstances. Therefore it is vital to help children who are likely to work or who are working, very early in their lives. But what form should this help take?

Home provision

For all children, by far the major part of their learning takes place outside the classroom ; but in the case of working children, unfortunately, this is not always of the enriching kind. However, some clear guidelines are now coming from research about the kind of home preparation which helps children do their best when they reach school -

information which all parents could use. Stimulation, for example, is recognised as a prerequisite for cognitive growth, but unless it is meaningful, it may only be confusing.

Almost all longitudinal research has shown that the main factors intrinsic in the formation of children's competence are family and school, but when school influence is minimal, the family becomes particularly important in the development of motivation and abilities. Unfortunately, working children are very often deprived of both.

The 15-year follow-up study of gifted children and controls by Joan Freeman (1991b) identified two highly significant home influences which enable bright children to work at a gifted level - provision of learning materials and parental involvement. Parental involvement has also been found to increase reading skills, as in the study of inner-London primary schoolchildren by Tizard et al (1982), where children whose parents listened to them learning to read were more advanced than those who only learned at school. Not only do little ones need to be taught specific skills, but they have to be given the chance and encouragement to practice them. They benefit considerably from the enrichment provided by parents who are involved in their play and conversation, to the extent that the quality of verbal interaction within the family is strongly correlated with children's verbal abilities, even by the age of five.

However, a working child's home is often a difficult place in which to provide effective outside help, because it may be relatively inaccessible, and parents may reject professional assistance. This may be because they may feel inadequate at providing what might be asked of them, particularly if they themselves cannot read or write. The result may be that they put up the subtle barrier of agreeing to a home study programme, and then failing to carry it out. The problem of ignorance and prejudice against schooling that social workers in poor districts often encounter is considerable. Girls particularly may get a raw educational deal from their parents' cultural attitudes. In India, for example, education is far less often given to daughters, just as the best food is often given to the boy and not `wasted' on the girl. So there is great illiteracy among girls, just as there is malnutrition with which to face a life of hard work. Relatively few Indian women have access to the printed word or know their rights.

THE EDUCATION OF HIGHLY ABLE WORKING CHILDREN

The major vehicle for upward social mobility in most societies is education, especially the kind which results in autonomy, so that school should be the most effective place for helping working children, even though they are only there part of the time. But the educational picture which comes from studies of poor societies is of children who spend only a minimum time in school, and even when there, experience a knowledge-based curriculum and passive methods of learning. This is seen when children unthinkingly recite the lesson, or when the teacher asks questions which require a preordained answer, producing an education which is convergent, factual, and confined to accepted knowledge. The outcome is often a low level of educational attainment, and it is certainly not the best way to develop potentially gifted minds.

The loss of schooling deprives the gifted working child of basic education, such as understanding how numbers work, scientific relationships, and aesthetic awareness. Obviously, it is possible to get by with enough superficial information to earn, but without tuition and practice in cognitive skills, the children are unlikely to reach the higher levels of

thinking of which they are capable - analysis, synthesis, evaluation and creative problem-solving.

Gifted working children face particular problems of educational deprivation -
* poor contact with school-type learning
* such talents as they do develop not fitting into their world of work
* isolation from other children of like ability, with whom to share thoughts and experiences.

The teacher's approach to working children must be different from that to other children, because the facts of the children's lives are different. It is vital to gain the participation of the children during the time they are present, which calls for a difference in teaching style. The task of realising the children's potential is considerable and teachers cannot be expected to do it from instinct. Teachers need help to support their own sense of competence, so that they can put the special teaching skills that are required for working children into practice.

The identification of working children who have high potential presents its own problems; for example, teachers have to be particularly aware of the danger of applying their own personal constructs to their pupils' way of life, and so undervaluing them. The most common example of this is in relation to gender, where boys are seen as having a greater future need to support a family, and so are encouraged into practical male-type skills, while girls are filtered into low-level service jobs, such as domestic servants, or worse. This stereotyping results in two boys being nominated for every girl, when parents or teachers are asked to pick out exceptionally bright children. The working child, who sits in class tired and listless - when she comes at all - often evokes an equally strong stereotype of neither being expected to do well nor even of doing her best. Yet such children may be quick- witted and articulate in their own environment with excellent fluidity in `street language. Teachers' expectations can be highly influential, and it is only too easy for them to overlook working children's potential.

Finding gifted working children is not a search for a stereotyped minority who display intellectual brilliance, but for individuals with sometimes very lopsided development. This involves looking for day-to-day clues and careful record keeping.

A particularly useful approach to educating bright working children is to build up the area in which they are most competent, rather than trying to develop all areas at once. If the child is delivering parcels within a city, for example, it could be his directional and spatial skills which are available for enhancement and transfer into other areas. The required technique is one of task-orientation, rather than self-orientation, so that the material is more in keeping with real life, and the goals are obviously related to what the child is doing. It can result in children making distinct progress in the good part of their lives, so that they feel better about themselves and so do better all round.

Teaching in a context of social relevance is known to be the most effective kind. Although bringing the children's everyday world into their educational processes is not as easy as straight-forward classroom teaching, it is much more rewarding for everyone. The education of deprived children should include the social and moral implications of behaviour, helping them to develop responsibility, self-esteem, and confidence.

Active participation in school life by children can be of positive help to their scholastic achievement; Rutter concluded (1985) that the optimum results in very varied schools were achieved by a combination of active learning experiences and a social context which

promotes self-confidence and an interest in learning outside the formal environment. It might help to think of the school more as one without walls - where children can flex their psychological muscles. Their development, in turn, will hinge on what they do there, including responsibility in working for that school community. With help, they could be involved in administration, the accounts, and especially the syllabus, but it would have to be done in such a way that the children did not lose money by it. Governments and industry could help such children by paying them something for their work in the school - preferably as much as they would have earned working outside.

Project Mala was set up in 1988 in Uttar Pradesh in India, as an attempt to free children from the exploitation of the carpet-weaving industry. Six schools were due to be opened, offering education together with vocational training and health care, and paying a small wage to replace the money earned from weaving. Yet despite the help of the state government, only one school exists to date, and the national government shows no sign of expanding the project.

Educational programmes

Several ready-to-use teaching packages are available, though they are not suitable for all populations, and some claim more than they can deliver.

The Cognitive Research Trust (CoRT), was devised by Edward De Bono (1976), and has been extensively used internationally. It aims to teach thinking skills as a curriculum subject in their own right, without reference to the particular subject matter. It uses exercises or `tools' which are methods of directing attention.

However, there is little reliable evidence that it actually fulfils it's goals, in spite of the thousands of children who have taken the courses. The results presented by the publishers are based on reports which are scientifically invalid, such as those in which the improved performances described are entirely subjective. A typical research procedure is to teach one class with the CoRT system, while another class of similar pupils is taught with traditional methods as a control group. The thinking skills of both groups are tested before and after the treatment, and the CoRT class is seen to have improved. But there are three problems with such results -

a) No-one knows if it is the CoRt method which is working or the change from the traditional method and the extra attention given, because no other new programme has been tested at the same time.
b) The post-programme testing is usually done with a CoRt procedure, and is therefore not objective.
c) The programme is limited with regard to the richer and more critical nature of creative thinking, particularly at the level of excellence.

It is strange that valid research has never been done on this popular programme (as far as the author is aware), for it would not be difficult to carry out. Two control groups could be measured, along with the group of children receiving the specific treatment: one of them would be left untouched, while the second would undertake an alternative course. Pupils' performance in school has been found to be enhanced by increased attention in various ways, such as physical exercise, and it is possible that any concerted change would also be effective.

Instrumental Enrichment, devised by Reuven Feuerstein, takes an entirely different approach. Information is taught along with the skills, so that children can build on it for their intellectual development. Specific key learning skills must be acquired as early as possible. Teachers are therefore trained to be aware of pupils' levels of competence, and to encourage the children's explorations towards developing their existing knowledge

The training programme for this requires a minimum of 40 to 60 hours of teacher's time. However, evaluation of Instrumental Enrichment demonstrates that the method can indeed benefit children who are under-performing for their age, and an improvement in problem-solving skills has been shown to extend beyond the training materials themselves. Feuerstein claims that the effects become greater over time.

When assessing the value of such packages, it has to be remembered that all forms of education are likely to reap some improvement. Moreover, the energy and expense involved in putting one of these ready-to-use educational programmes into practice is not necessarily the best way to help disadvantaged children to realise their - often high - abilities. The thinking skills encouraged by such packages do not necessarily transfer directly to real life unless there is deliberate bridging action by the teacher to relate the programme to the facts of the children's lives. Some areas of any basic school curriculum, though, will encourage further learning more effectively than others. Reading and writing, for example, are both prime enabling skills, particularly when a creative approach is encouraged, and emphasis is laid on the processes of argument, construction and evaluation, rather than on issues of literary expression.

A few advances have been made in different parts of the world in improving the performance of poor bright children who do not attend school regularly. For example, the Centre for the Advancement of Academically Talented Youth (CTY) in Baltimore, USA, achieved good progress (Lynch and Mills, 1990). With the California Achievement Tests, they selected 45 high-scoring 13 year-olds of mixed socio-economic backgrounds, and after exposure to their programme, compared them with a matched control group. The index group had improved in mathematics, though not reading, sufficiently to go on to higher education without the special entry privileges given to poor black children called `affirmative action'. The authors lay no claim to their procedures being a `cure', but in the process of devising it, they have clarified the educational needs of disadvantaged children as a basis for further development. These needs are -

a) Basic skills in academic areas, such as reading and mathematics
b) Higher level abstract reasoning skills, to be systematically taught
c) The development of helpful psychological behaviour, such as increasing attention span and study skills
d) Encouragement of positive affective traits, such as self-image and love of academic activity.

Applied psychology in the education of gifted working children

Applied psychology is a distillation of psychological research findings into their practicable aspects. It is an effective way of managing the precious resources of energy and time available to teach children who attend school infrequently. In this way, teachers are enabled to be at their most effective in using their professional expertise. For example, a teacher could use selective reinforcement to increase motivation, rewarding adaptive, rather than maladaptive, behaviour. Or, a teacher can alter standards, raising or lowering them temporarily to give the child the appropriate impetus and feeling of success to act as a further spur.

This does, however, imply teachers's awareness of the emotional development of their pupils. Such matters as self-confidence, perceptual abilities, and personal relationships are as important in the education of the highly able as the mastery of skills and knowledge. Time in school should develop the child's feelings of social competence, and not just focus on the mastery of academic subjects.

In the education of highly able working children, the application of psychology is most valuable in the following areas -

1. Understanding different styles and levels of communication and relationships, including the teacher's own outlook.
2. Improved coordination of working relationships within a school, so that staff are able to adapt and function together to an optimal level.
3. Enabling a flexible approach to teaching and learning, for example in the management of outside-school influences within the school.
4. Understanding and use of the means of some psychological testing and intervention techniques.

The most important part of the educational process is learning how to learn. Although children can be helped by adults to study, the process still has to be done by the individual, and the involvement of the whole self is essential to the accomplishment of learning. This is why, when teachers are concerned with the structure of learning rather than merely with the passing on of information, they can find such great satisfaction with gifted children in school.

Teaching gifted children whose interest in school learning is marginal should be seen as facilitating, at least as much as straight teaching. The children should be the focus of their own education, with genuine account taken in lessons of their concerns and values. True recognition of working children's own values and interests may mean making the change from a dominant concern with knowledge to one with competence in what the pupil (and not the teacher) values, thereby encouraging their motivation to come to school and to put some positive effort into their time there. If working children are helped to feel good about school learning on a basis of their unconditional acceptance as people (Carl Rogers style), they will feel less inhibited about using their old learning mainly as a springboard for the integration of new ideas and information. The children can also be encouraged to value each others' performance in class, to be open to each others' contributions and to give praise as appropriate.

Whatever the method and style of teaching, whether it be an emphasis on the verbal dimension or on spatial ability, the end-results are recognisably affected by it. Teachers' outlooks have a strong correlation with results, so that when they are committed to realising the potential of all their pupils, it improves the general motivation for learning.

The key to all effective teaching is interaction; and doing things **with** children rather than for them provides the best possible conditions to motivate learning, thinking, and creativity. Cognitive growth entails doing things for oneself, rather than the passive experience of being taught. In addition, the teacher becomes closely involved with the way the pupils are learning, and this more personal relationship with the children has other positive effects, such as an increase in teacher-pupil respect, and pupils' respect for others of different abilities and backgrounds.

Summary of teaching techniques using applied psychology

Though all the following points are equally valid for all children, they are particularly constructive for working children to improve their motivation to come to school (Freeman, 1990).

Selective reinforcement - The teacher rewards adaptive, rather than maladaptive behaviour. However, a reward such as praise is much less effective if the child does not feel somewhat in control of what s/he is doing. Everyone needs some risk of failure to feel truly effective, and too much supervision can work against motivation, because autonomy then becomes a psychological impossibility. It has been found that if children are given a reward, such as money or sweets, they are far more likely to choose only easy tasks that lead them more easily to the reward. But if they are doing it for the love of the activity, they choose harder tasks, just above their last level. In following their interests, children have a natural tendency to take on challenges that exercise and expand their competencies.

Altering standards - The teacher can raise or lower standards temporarily to give the child the appropriate impetus and feeling of success to act as a further spur.

The learning tasks - should be meaningful, with obtainable goals, though some effort must be made to reach them.

Working with the children - communication lines should be kept open for feedback to the teacher, and use made, as appropriate, of different approaches to the same group of ideas, such as cooperation, competition, or discovery methods. Different groupings of children might be tried for different areas of the curriculum.

Creative teaching - use of an open-ended, counselling style of approach, such that children are not always expected to produce the `correct' answer (the one in the teacher's mind), but feel sufficiently free to try a new angle (Landau, 1985).

Assessment - is an important part of teaching, not least because it affects the formation of what is taught. But it needs a light, sensitive touch with working children, since being examined is not usually an encouraging experience. The answer is to have the children assess themselves to a large extent, and use themselves for reference. The teacher, however, also keeps careful record of all this.

Education out of school

If the pursuit of excellence is valued, educationalists may have to look to methods such as those used by managers and industrial psychologists for nearly 50 years. Experimental work by Kurt Lewin, begun in the 1940s in America, has been instrumental in developing our understanding of how individuals react within their environment. His Field Theory showed how people's outlook could be changed by indirect means. Rather than approaching them directly, their public commitment to different allegiances could be obtained by a process of discussion and interaction with the instructor. This feeling of being both involved and effective is fundamental, and the approach applies as much to parents as to children.

Quite a number of people may be called upon to change their attitudes if working children are to be helped. Not only the families, but employers too, who may be helped to realise that present working children are also future employees, and so worth bringing to full potential (Coe, 1989). To some extent employers might help from a sense of philanthropy, but they should also be encouraged to see the real benefit to themselves: for example, that those children who can read and write have greater possibility of contributing to the work force.

Open learning centres may be an answer, if equipment and teachers can be available outside school hours for those who have difficulty in attending normally. Very many children of high potential leave school early, with their ability unrecognised, but given the opportunity to attend such learning centres, they could develop decision-making skills and methods of learning which would enhance their futures, not only in the workplace.

Breaking the Chain

The cycle of deprivation which afflicts successive generations is, for many, impossible to break. Children who live in situation of grinding poverty are not entirely open to the concern of teachers, who are themselves often struggling in poor circumstances. And yet, if there is any way out for the bright working child, it must be through education - taken in its widest sense of enabling children to develop and use their abilities to the full.

The British `experiment' in breaking the chain, which was by most countries' standards a lavish provision of free education and welfare, was not entirely successful, and has largely been abandoned. Beginning in 1945, an ability examination taken by all children at eleven-plus years classified them as suitable for academic or non-academic schools. Many children benefitted considerably from selection for the academic schools, such as several British Prime Ministers from modest homes. But the proportion of poor children in Britain who reach higher education is still low, and has even declined in recent years, which has become the subject of concern. For example, the low educational achievements of West Indian children in Britain cannot be attributed solely to racial discrimination, since Asian children, often of immigrant parents, actually do better than whites in advanced-level school examinations. The root influence is probably in family attitudes and hence motivation.

The failure of the American Head-start program, designed to motivate very poor children, is considered to be due to a number of causes. Possibly it started when the child was too old, and then it failed to follow the program through at home or in later life.

Government excuses for holding back spending on education, particularly special education for the gifted, are many. This may be due to a fear that they could be accused of

elitism or - which would be worse - taking money from other vital welfare services. It may be said to be a shortage of money and other resources, though that cannot be true in the long-term, because input into this area of development will more than pay for itself. It seems more like a fear of allowing people to learn and be creative at a high level. That fear is deep-seated, and usually serves to keep certain groups in a superior position over others. In many parts of the world, even minimal education is severely restricted, such as for women in some Moslem countries, India, and parts of Soviet Asia. To make the point further, women there are restricted in many other ways, such as not being allowed to travel without male permission or even drive a car.

If people are able to learn, who knows what they might do with it? For example, the first printing by Guttenberg was condemned by the Church at the time because it made alternative literature available to all, and who could then have control over what people might believe? In much earlier times, the things we now consider every-day, such as a child's learning to recite the ABC, were often highly charged. For generations, the alphabet in northern Europe was transmitted in secret by bards who sang riddles, notched trees, and made hand gestures of the letters that could only be deciphered by those who were learned in the mysteries of words.

It **is** possible to do something to help working children become productive adults, and at the same time make the world a better place for everyone. But real help for the brightest children in the worst situations has in the end to come from the top, from governments for their own children. The gifted do not deserve be neglected for, given just a little support, they have so much to contribute to society themselves.

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