

'The most effective form of education is one that takes place outside the classroom.'
What is your view?

Eu Shae-Yenne (16S41)

There is a well-known Chinese saying which goes 'As long as one is alive and well, one should aim to learn continuously throughout one's lives'. Indeed, learning is one of the most important lifelong commitments which we should all dedicate ourselves to, in order to continuously improve our abilities. The most conventional, stereotypical impression of what constitutes education is learning through formal institutions such as schools. However, I believe that although such formal, structured learning is effective in imparting economically useful skills and knowledge on a short-term basis, this is not enough; instead it is education that takes place outside the classroom which is the most effective in allowing people of all ages to engage in lifelong learning.

Of course, we should not discount the effectiveness of formal education systems in imparting skills and knowledge both quickly and efficiently. After all, it is worth noting that the original and sole purpose for which national education systems were established was to impart and upgrade the skills and abilities of the younger generation, such that they can quickly become useful, economically-valued sources of labour in a short span of slightly beyond a decade. In order to do this, formal classroom education is rigorous, even stressful, for both teacher and student. This is best depicted in the education scene in Japan, where the educational experience of students there is one of the most taxing in the world, what with more than 80% of students taking up additional "cram classes" in order to keep up with the intense competition. There is, of course, the unfortunate outcome of high student suicide rates, yet this only further highlights the intensity and rigour in formal-education systems. Japanese students do score amongst the highest under international standardised tests, thus showing that classroom education does have some extent of effectiveness in imparting skills and knowledge. However, one questions the price that is paid for such so-called "success" in education, which often is not only a short-term retention of knowledge limited to that which is quantifiable and economically useful, but also detrimental to the well-being of those being educated. If the aim of education is for the betterment of both the individual and society, surely there is irony in the current situation.

Of course, not all hope is lost. There are certainly more ways and forms of education that extend beyond the four soulless walls of the classroom, and I argue that they can indeed be more effective. At home, parents and family members play pivotal roles in imparting important life lessons to children. From a young age, many children grow up observing and emulating the actions and words of their parents, perhaps even adopting their ways of thinking and behavioural traits. This is due to the natural instincts of the young, who naturally tend to look up to their parents and seniors as teachers themselves, for guidance on how to act and behave. Whether parents consciously make an effort to teach their children or otherwise, they still have significant influence on their young nonetheless. In comparison to classroom learning, where the person taking on the role of the educator tends to change frequently, leading to less personal connections with those being educated, I argue that the form of education that takes place at home, with the parents of the young as their lifelong educators provide naturally more impressionable learning experiences that are closer to the heart, thus making it more effective.

Even one's social circle, and the day-to-day interaction in which one engages with others, has significant educational value which should not be overlooked. Humans are naturally social creatures: our continued survival and prosperity is dependent on our ability to interact, socialise and collaborate with other human beings. In schools, this highly important skill is often marginalised, if not only

included in the most superficial and tokenistic ways. Recalling again that the primary aim of education in schools is to make students employable, not sociable, educational experiences in schools are thus often centred around examinations, which are essentially individual assessments. In Singapore, for example, the most significant aspect of formal education is not the day-to-day group work and projects done in class, which often take the back seat, but rather major examinations such as the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), O-Level and A-Level examinations. In a sense, the outcomes of education through formal means deviate from emphasising the importance of social and communication skills that are actually highly important for survival. These skills are most effectively imparted through daily interactions that individuals have with one another, as when one is put on the spot in a real-life situation, one is compelled to immediately adapt and exercise such skills. Social interaction can come in a variety of forms that is impossible to enact in a formal school setting, thus I argue that such day-to-day interaction with individuals of a myriad of profiles and for a multitude of purposes, while seemingly inane and mindless, actually holds great value in effectively teaching people to be better communicators, which in turn benefits society as a whole by making it more cohesive.

Travel, too, is a highly valuable opportunity for learning, when done with the correct mindset and attitude. In today's globalised world, no man is an island and we are all connected through many complex ways, whether via the internet, through economic ties between countries, or otherwise. When one travels beyond one's own country, to experience the lives, cultures, and traditions of another, his or her perspectives are broadened, and the learning experience generated could possibly be one that is the most genuine, personal, exciting and most importantly, impactful of all forms of education. This kind of learning experience can never be replicated through standardised classroom learning: just consider the difference between studying about European history in school, as compared to visiting the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, the Tower of London, and the Colosseum in Rome. Of course, for travelling to be an experience that is rich and of educational value, one must first possess a mindset that is open and inquisitive. If one takes on the world with a desire to learn, surely the experiences gathered will not only be more valuable due to the significance of such events, but will also be retained in the minds of the learner for a longer period of time. The power of travel in teaching lifelong lessons should most certainly not be overlooked; in fact, one does not even have to travel to places distant and exotic – simply by being more observant and inquisitive in one's own society, one will find countless opportunities to learn from in a similar manner.

To conclude, it is undeniable that formal education in the classroom is effective in imparting set textbook knowledge to students in an intense and rigorous manner. However, education in its true form goes beyond learning about the gravitational forces acting on hypothetical floating objects and manually calculating the roots of mathematical equations. Formal education falls short of imparting skills and abilities that make people not just good future employees, but also successful human beings. It is in the interactions we have with others around us, the influence of our natural role models – our parents, and the physical real-world experiences we go through, that what we learn is the most tangible and relevant to our lives, and since our motivation to acquire such knowledge for survival far surpasses the motivation to pass exams or tests, I argue that education outside the classroom is indeed the most effective, for it is an educational experience that lasts a lifetime.

Comments:

A great introductory hook leading to an insightful piece with sound knowledge demonstrated and relevant issues discussed. Clearly articulated stand which shows the duality in perspective. This is also seen in the use of "Of course" in the second paragraph. Apt use of supporting examples and

illustrations to show e.g. the ineffectiveness of the education system. Although, some parts could have been clearer with better substantiation. Some sentences are too long and convoluted. Nevertheless, a decent effort.