

## Why Have Exams?\*

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An H.M.I. said to me: "What would you teach if there were no G.C.E. exams?" I could not think of an answer, possibly because when one has been conditioned from infancy to accept school subjects as education, no one is free enough to answer.

That the products of schools are much more interested in things outside the school system . . . football pools, cheap press, television, sex, crime . . . than they are in all the subjects we teach suggests that our schools are never adapted to the life outside. This is primarily due to the fact that emotion is of infinitely more moment than is intellect; the above mentioned post-school interests are emotional ones, whereas G.C.E. subjects are all head subjects. We see the extreme result of this unbalance in books like *Blackboard Jungle* in the U.S.A. and *The Young Devils* at home. The raising of the leaving age has too often meant adolescents having to continue sitting at desks studying what has no appeal to their heads or senses. It is just nonsense to say that our schools give children culture . . . the sales of our most sensational newspapers prove this point; education precedes a national interest in the inferior and unessential.

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*LA PLUME DE . . .*

Culture! Thousands of our pupils learn French up to G.C.E. standard. Few ever will go to France, few will ever read French books; in two years most of what they learnt has gone. So with other subjects. Maths. What passer of the 0 level maths could do a quadratic equation five years later? English. What proportion of G.C.E. passers reads whodunnits instead of the cultured reading their grammar schools gave them . . . Lamb's Essays, Shakespeare, Milton, Coleridge? Geography. How do we apply what we learn after we leave school? When I motor to Scotland I cannot get rid of the notion that I am going uphill: the wall map had Scotland at the top. The only geography we use is of the place-on-the-map variety and that vaguely, to be sure. How many of us know exactly where these places are . . . Thursday Island, Vermont, Salzburg? Post-school life does not concern itself with the exports of Brazil or the climate of Timbuctu.

*WHAT TO TEACH*

I feel like replying to the H.M.I. by saying: "I'd scrap the lot," but then I would have the painful task of saying what my school would teach. Painful because it is so difficult to assess change of values. In my youth a university education was the criterion of an educated man; the scholar with his Latin and Greek and philosophy was the man to respect and emulate. To-day that is not so. The standard has altered, mainly because of the great and rapid advance in mechanical theory and practice. In terms of utility to-day the expert who can make or even repair a television set is of more importance than an M.A. who has specialized in — say — English, for the M.A. can only *teach* in a small circle while the other man can *do* in a large one. We see the same in music. Whatever a school may do to give pupils a love for classical music, the fact remains that (I am guessing here) the records of the rock'n'roll singers far exceed in volume and sale those of all the classics lumped together.

Given freedom from examinations I should aim at catching the children's interests and following them. Rock'n'roll? Good. The music of the school would start with Elvis Presley and Tommy Steele. Reading would be all the whodunnits the school could procure. I should reverse the process by which the school begins with Addison and goes on to the post-graduate *News of the World*,

feeling uneasily that my pupils' daily perusal of the *News of the World* might not automatically lead later to the reading of Addison.

But perhaps I should teach nothing at all on the ground that you cannot teach anything of importance. I know of no school that has been free enough to follow in its teaching the dictates of child nature; every school is to some extent divorced from outside life and interest that follows the pre-psychology period that treated children as small adults. Adults must work and therefore children must be taught to work. Since the importance of play in a child's life has been recognized, no fundamental alteration has been made to the timetable. I can fantasy a non-exam school which would be a large playground . . . not playing fields which are not really play at all. Play with books and tools and music and dance and — in Utopia — play with love. I doubt if the adage that tells that the hard way forms character has any validity in psychology. I see rock 'n' roll as a flight from the hard way of schooling with its insane demand for homework. Yet to be honest, I do not think that is the whole truth for my pupils who are as free as can be in a school today love rock 'n' roll records, but to be honest again, they do not seem to carry on the interest into the later teen age. Nor are my own pupils free from the G.C.E. obstacle to real education.

### FORMING CHARACTER

I ask: What does it matter what we teach? The only importance in education lies in character formation, and here many a teacher will agree. But not many will agree that character formation must come from inside. No study will form a good character. Indeed character is seldom mentioned by teachers; the cry to-day is not for better character but for better science, better science in an era in which knowing has run far ahead of emotion, and science has almost become synonymous with keeping up with the Joneses.

This insistence on the importance of playhood may sound mad to many a teacher. Maybe it is mad, but it is at least a tentative suggestion for coping with a most dangerous situation, that of a sick world whose values have little or nothing to do with schooling, and I do not mean Britain alone; the news of anti-social rebellious youth in Sweden, America, Russia shows that schooling is failing in many lands. Personally I think that conscious or more probably unconscious fear is at the bottom of youth's revolt . . . Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die. Sex repression is not enough to

account for it; we had sex repression long before the H-bomb appeared and it did not seem to go so far as flick knives and cycle chains.

### *REVOLT AGAINST SCHOOL*

The question is this: Is youth rebelling because of its education or in spite of it? I suggest the former. I question if a lessonless school would produce any anti-social, any criminal products; I feel sure that most hateful coshings and stabbings are the result of un-lived-out play, but again that cannot be the whole truth, for children of the upper and middle classes are not usually teddy boys. I am not wise enough to pose as an authority, but in the days when I had to deal with many anti-social adolescents, I saw most of them go out cured, not by lessons, not by my analyses, but cured because they had freedom to live out their playhood, cured because allowed to be themselves. And of moment, cured because relieved of guilt about sex. An odd thought to end up with: When any madman or fool of a statesman can press the button that could kill us all, why does such a small thing as sex retain its Victorian significance? Until the guilt complex of youth is relieved, all or nearly all of our school subjects, will remain useless and a matter of indifference to the young.