

Getting Personal

“I hate p’s!”

We were going over some vocabulary words, and the word was pneumonia.

“You know,” I said, “you’re probably the only person in the universe who has ever said ‘I hate p’s.’”

“I hate the universe too!” she added.

“Have you ever used algebra in your life?” is the sort of question Maya asks. Naturally, I refrain from replying, “Wait till you take calculus with differentiation and integration!”

“Why do we have to waste twelve years of our lives going to school?”

Her questions and remarks about school, in fact, never end. As for myself, being a conformist (or a sheep, according to some) and fortunate to have had a relatively pleasant school experience, I do my best to answer Maya’s questions and grace her with life’s wisdom about the benefits of going to school. So far, however, her mother and I have failed miserably!

In a selfish way, I am comforted when I hear about other parents who complain that they’re having difficulty in motivating their children to go to school. It gives me some assurance to see that I am not the only one who doesn’t know how to raise a kid to respect, or at least not to question, “the system.” My hunch was right. I’m not alone in this.

At twelve, my daughter knows exactly what she wants to be when she grows up, and she’s more than convinced that school is not helping her attain her dream. She realises the importance of acquiring (at least some) knowledge, but essentially what she’s saying is that school is not the right means for her to acquire that knowledge. Actually it goes beyond that; school is even hindering her from achieving her goal in life to become whatever she wants to be. Blasphemy!

I know this is sacrilegious to most people, particularly to those directly involved in our educational system; but call this a challenge to those who educate our children and possibly an eye-opener to others. In this age where access to practically any piece of information is just a few clicks away – even for a child, the pace of life is getting faster, and the world has literally become a global village – have our schools really kept up with today’s technological advancement and pace? I’m not even talking about some useless material – which we were taught 30 or 40 years ago – still being taught today. I’m talking about a system in which intelligent young human beings feel that they’re cooped up, being stuffed with useful and useless information, and being bullied by a system that labels them a total failure unless they get good grades. Whether those who feel this way are right or wrong, ask yourself this: Why do they feel this way? Is it an exception, a freak case? Or is it a phenomenon? Is it only complacency and the result of not being brought up the “right” way? Or is there something here worth thinking about? Maybe reading every single article in this issue will enlighten us.

The biggest challenge is posed by the fact that the vast majority of us have only known and experienced one way of learning. To tell someone whose entire life has been spent being an educator that there might be something inherently wrong with the system is like telling a believer: Oooops! Sorry, you’ve been practicing the wrong religion!

Can we discuss this further? Nationally, maybe? Should such an initiative come from the sceptics or perhaps from a bold Ministry of Education?

“What’s the best thing about school?” I asked Maya. “Friends,” she quickly replied. What’s the worst thing about school?” No answer, just an odd look with a raised eyebrow!

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