Yvonne Blumenkhal
Parent

Our society today governs that children attend school from the age of five years at a state school. This is the conventional attitude, but from a personal view I have found it difficult to agree with. Firstly, because I think education has started from the moment a child is born. Secondly, a child who is eager to learn, and able to mentally absorb and actually enjoy being taught before the so-called 'school age', is being deprived of a place at school; formal learning should not begin at the age of five. Thirdly, I think that a child with a higher than average intelligence is frustrated, bored and can even become destructive, if he does not have an opportunity to channel his energy productively.

I believe that children could and should be capable of attending school from the age of three. Luckily, both my children were able to attend a small school with few pupils to each teacher from about three years. This made an enormous difference to each of their characters, and both have such individual personalities, that from my point of view was and I hope will be of great benefit in moulding them towards a more stable and happy life. For example, by the age of five years, my daughter Natasha was able to read virtually fluently, and write her own stories without prompting. Sums, such as adding, subtraction, multiplication and even division were within her grasp, and her confidence shone through. Conventional teaching at that level would not have commenced until _after_ the age of five, which proves my theory that children _can_ develop and learn before their fifth birthday, and they need to be encouraged.

I find it very hard to grasp that not enough emphasis is made on pre-school facilities. Toddlers seem to be shunned and frowned upon in public; I feel this attitude to be very prominent in England, whereas Mediterranean countries are far more flexible in their approach towards children. They are made to feel wanted and liked. In my opinion children should be treated with respect.

There are not enough opportunities in state primary schools today, such as learning musical instruments and languages. It has been proven that young children learn quickly and easily. So many years are being wasted. I do think it is important to cram in as much as possible as early as possible without confusing youngsters. They do have such amazing memories, and as they get older it seems to slow down; some children even lose interest as they get older, and simply do not want to learn in the confinements of school. And for this reason I believe that there should be an alternative. There should not be a fixed leaving age, for these children who find school an unhappy event, they should be steered into new environments, finding out a skill that will interest them. Unfortunately, although my own experience regarding my own education was a happy and very varied one, it was not in any way beneficial to an interesting and fulfilling career. I realise now that from the age of about thirteen, subjects that were compulsory would be of no use to me. Actual lessons about life in the big wide world were non-existent. Reality was not a subject. I now see that school cocooned me. In fact leaving school was a traumatic and depressing event, because after so many years of having a regular timetable week after week, a way of life, that after the final exam everything came to an abrupt end. Far more emphasis should be made on life after school for people who are not yet aware of their vocation. This is the problem with the system at the moment, this is why the unemployment figures are rising dramatically, because school leavers have not been steered into an interesting career.

Education is important, but I do feel that the English class system categorises people and makes it impossible for everyone to have an equal opportunity, unless they are very intelligent, or very determined to succeed.

In the end I think life is the biggest education of all. Contentment and happiness cannot be taught at school, only life itself does that.