

Despite the fact that education is failing everywhere, we still call for schools and more schools. School is still thought of as the means to employment even though unemployment is rife throughout the world; thousands are losing their jobs and marching in protest. It's no use blaming governments for growing unemployment. Politicians are simply administrators, not innovators. If we are to 'blame' anyone, it would have to be scientists and technologists. They are the innovators and it is their discoveries that lead to major and continuous changes in society; their discoveries and inventions radically transform the way we live, think and interact. They have made possible our evolution from simple communities into ever increasingly complex societies.

At present we are being carried out of industrialism into the electronic-nuclear age. We are in the midst of a revolution. Only the wisest can see its ramifications, the rest of us remain within the old paradigm, clinging to the institutions of the industrial revolution. School is one such institution. It still operates on the principle of standardization, like a factory, churning out mass produced education that sends students into the world to seek work and serve with machine-like precision.

Before industrialization, the home was not simply a place of nurture, comfort and relaxation; the home was an economic unit in which a family operated a trade or small business and children born into the family were in apprenticeship from childhood. Even today, parents who share their occupational interests with their children provide them with a vital stimulus. The likelihood of their children becoming independent is greater because they are learning from live models and gaining real, practical experience.

Industrialization took away the economic independence of ordinary people and broke the routine of children following in the family tradition. Education was taken over by a centralized government and schools were established to prepare children for employment. The purpose of the Industrial Age School was to produce compliant workers for factory-type institutions and the teacher's role was to inculcate. And school became an institution in which the learner was processed in a production line. Like a factory, a school is a cloistered environment because its operation is more important than the learner.

- 1. **competence in the 3Rs** so workers could read and understand instructions;
- 2. **punctuality** because factory work is synchronised through division of labour and each worker has to be in place on time in the assembly line;
- 3. **obedience** because mechanised work needs absolute conformity to the process.

Children in school are regimented and ruled by the clock. They attend between specified hours, are divided into class groups of the same age, and are fed the same diet of abstract information. They move through school from grade to grade on an assembly line picking up more and more abstract information as they go. This kind of socialization may have been sufficient as long as labour intensive 'factory' type institutions needed workers with only basic skills.

Those times have changed; factory assembly lines are becoming mechanised and we no longer need masses of semi-skilled workers. New technologies are replacing the worker, not only in factories, but in all institutions and bureaucracies. The worker is becoming redundant. School, therefore, can no longer guarantee employment.

In the 1970s, when Ivan Illich spoke of deschooling society, I believe he meant getting rid of the institution and turning the whole of society into a place of education – as it had been before industrialization. Before the establishment of the 'factory' school, skills and training were acquired through apprenticeship. We seem to be moving in that direction with the establishment of learnerships, apprenticeships and institutions of technology but learning is still happening in factory-like conditions.

Our schools are still providing a standardized education that divorces theory from practice so that learners can be instructed in the mass not as individuals. Education has to change its focus from the group to the individual. We need a new education system that encourages the development of individual interests and talents in real working environments, not in programmes that simulate reality.

That means opening up schools, not separating them like prisons, but integrating them into the community. Furthermore, the confined populations of schools are sitting ducks for the disaffected who cannot fit into school or society – as various shooting incidents have shown. And herding children into schools turns schools themselves into breeding grounds for violence – witness the increase in bullying and hazing, even incidents of rape and murder.

Education should be offered in the way goods are offered in shopping malls, and made as easily accessible to all. The individual learner should have the opportunity to choose what, when, where and how she wishes to learn. She must be allowed the freedom of choice to create her own individual curriculum rather than being forced into the formulas that others think are

best.

To gain the knowledge, both theoretical and practical in her chosen fields, she should be able to move easily between places of learning that specialize in the areas of her interest. She should no longer be confined to one school building in one place and time. And she should not be restricted to a class group of the same age. If she has the freedom to join interest groups, she will be with learners of all ages

Education has to become the means for self-discovery and that should be the basis for the acquisition of knowledge. A learner's education must enable her to discover her talents, aptitudes and interests and develop expertise, both practical and theoretical. That means specialization in the areas of her choice. That means specialist rather than generalist teachers. We need specialists who can offer theory in practice.

Strangely enough, something like this is happening in a prison, Boksburg Prison, as was shown in a programme in the TV series *Leihlo la Sechaba*. Having received hands-on training with the proper equipment in the proper environment created on the prison premises, prisoners have set up a bakery business and are supplying other prisons with bread. They speak of opening their own businesses when they are released. They are being empowered.

To try to develop work skills in the abstract environment of the traditional school is to continue providing the world with disempowered semi-skilled workers who go out to look for jobs instead of creating jobs for themselves. Learners need to be prepared for economic independence, not in abstract school situations but in real work environments. Their learning should not be for marks but for actual practical application. Mistakes will then become part of the learning process and not be treated as a failure of intelligence. In that way, we will rid the learner of the fear of failure.

In the 1980's Alvin Toffler advised us to become 'prosumers' – to reclaim our function as producers and not remain dependent consumers. As consumers we depend on governments for services and on corporations for jobs – they are the producers and we, the consumers. And society is divided between producers and consumers – power and dependency – an unequal division that often corrupts the practice of equality before the law. Dependency is evident in all the protests of the unemployed, of students who cannot gain entry into higher education and of workers who rise up against poor pay. The universal cry of protest is "We DEMAND". It is a declaration of dependency, of disempowerment. It is the declaration of the dependent

consumer.Â

We need education that empowers; that nurtures creativity; that leads to the economic independence of the individual. Education is a process of self-discovery; why should it be postponed to after we leave school?Â