

Unit 1

The Concept of Education

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Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- distinguish between literacy and education;
- discuss the multiple dimensions of education; and
- explain the interrelationship between education and value system.

1.1 Introduction

You must have heard your parents and teachers telling you how important education is for securing a job, receiving honour and respect in society, and above all making you a 'refined' person. Have you ever wondered what the concept of education is? Is education merely a means of securing a livelihood or prestige in society? What is it in education that people think brings about refinement in personality? Is education confined to teaching and learning activities in schools and universities? Often the term education is used synonymously with literacy. We begin this unit by highlighting the difference between education and literacy. We will also explore the meaning and different dimensions of education as also the interrelationship between education and value system in general and in the context of India in particular.

1.2 Education and Literacy

The term 'education' is derived from the Latin word, *educare* which means, 'to bring up', 'to lead out', and 'to develop'. In the simplest sense, therefore, education refers to the process of bringing up, leading out, and developing individuals as mature, adult members of society. There is no denying that the meaning and usage of the word were excessively pervasive and generalized till industrialism gained ground. Peters (1977) explains that the coming of industrialism was accompanied with greater demand for knowledge, skill and training which called for formal means of imparting these in specialized institutions that came to be referred to as 'schools'. Consequently, education, in its earliest conception as training or the handing down of knowledge and skills, got associated with schools. Over time, the scope of education got delimited to the development of knowledge or understanding.

In its widest possible sense, education is characterized by the moral, intellectual, and spiritual development of a person. It may be noted that the conception of education as the all-round development of an individual, as

distinct from training, emerged in the nineteenth century. The process of education comprises cultivation of distinct qualities and traits through explicit instructions or through implicit inhibition as part of growing up amidst family members, kin and peer groups. Surely then, the domain of education enfolds both, what children learn in schools as also in families and peer-groups as part of the process of socialization. More specifically, Peters writes (1977:11), "In other words, though previous to the nineteenth century there had been the ideal of the cultivated person who was the product of elaborate training and instruction, the term 'an educated man' was not the usual one for drawing attention to this ideal. They had the concept but they did not use the word 'educated' quite with these overtones. Education, therefore, was not thought of explicitly as a family of processes which have as their outcome the development of an education man in the way it is now".

The Renaissance humanists emphasized learning Latin as also other classical languages. An educated person was described as one who had mastered Latin and classical languages and had studied classical literature. The Renaissance educators believed that the endeavour would instill humanistic, human-centered knowledge in the minds of children. These educators were largely literary figures — writers, poets, translators, and teachers. They encouraged the learners to develop their faculties in a way that they would be able to challenge existing customs and mediocrity in literature and in their own lives. Such education was reserved for the elite (Ornstein and Levine 1993).

The invention of the printing press in the year 1423 was a milestone in the history of education. Books and print material now became readily available. One consequence of this was the spread of literacy. The Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries extended literacy among the masses. Vernacular schools brought the curriculum essentially consisting of reading, writing, arithmetic and religion among the masses in the community's own language.

In common parlance, a term that is often used synonymously with education is literacy. Much in contrast to education, the scope of the concept of literacy is delimited to the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic — the so-called three R's. The literacy campaigns of the government bodies, non-governmental organizations, as also international organizations seek to initiate people into the skills of reading and writing with the expectation that literate individuals are better able to secure a livelihood, raise productivity, and safeguard their own and their nation's interests more competently than their non-literate counterparts.

At the time of its founding, UNESCO sought to enable as many people in as many nations as possible to read and write. Mass education campaigns were launched. Over a period of time, however, it came to be realized that literacy programmes did not match the needs of adults. In the 1960s UNESCO adopted a functional view of literacy following which the focus shifted to fostering reading or writing skills that would raise productivity in agriculture, manufacturing and other jobs. The functional approach to literacy was evident in the Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP) in which UNESCO was an important participant. It was found that the focus narrowed too sharply on needs of national economic development. Consequently, the socio-cultural and linguistic context in which learners acquired and applied their literacy skills as also the needs of learners in their local context remained largely ignored.

In the 1970s the concept of literacy got widened, particularly after the intervention of Paulo Freire who emphasized literacy as an educational process. The chief concern was with encouraging the people to question why things were the way they were and striving to change them if need be. While earlier

literacy programmes treated the learners as beneficiaries, Freire treated them as 'actors' and 'subjects'. The major fallout of the change in approach was that literacy, which had hitherto been confined to classroom learning found place in the socio-political domain of society. The socio-cultural and linguistic contexts assumed significance. UNESCO bestowed one of its literacy prizes on Paulo Freire in 1975 as recognition of the contribution to what was termed as 'critical literacy'. The term critical literacy was used to refer to the capacity of an individual to participate as an active citizen given to critiquing national and international practices, claiming rights, and challenging power structures. We can now appreciate better the broadening of the concept of literacy and its rising affinity with that of education. In the 1980s, UNESCO recognized the clear-cut distinction between 'autonomous literacy' (referring to a skill acquired with no reference to values and context) and 'ideological literacy' (referring to mediation of literacy by social or political ideologies). Modes of schooling and ways of transmission of knowledge acquired greater importance in the larger framework of consolidation of and expression of power particularly so because it was recognized that literacy was a major means through which power is both, acquired and exercised in society.

Box 1.1: Literacy as an evolving concept

"The concept and practice of literacy are in constant and dynamic evolution, with new perspectives reflecting societal change, globalising influences on language, culture and identity, and the growth of electronic communication. In this development, two fundamental notions are clear. First, literacy is ambiguous, neither positive or negative in itself, its value depending on the way it is acquired or delivered and the manner in which it is used. It can be liberating, or to use Freire's term, domesticating. In this, literacy matches the role and purpose of education more broadly. Second, literacy links with the broad spectrum of communication practices in society and can only be addressed alongside other media, such as radio, TV, computers, mobile phone texting, visual images, etc. The massive development of electronic communication has not replaced paper-based literacy, but provides a new context for it; graphics have an increasing place alongside text; computer-based learning and play occupy both children and adults and displace the reading of books — all these phenomena are changing the way we view literacy" (UNESCO 2003).

1.3 Education as Preparation for Social Role in Ideal State

Some of the earliest ideas on the concept and meaning of education have treated it as a process by which children acquire moral values that are essential for harmonious existence in society. Both Socrates and Plato upheld that it was morality alone that ensured happiness and a sense of fulfillment in life. Moral existence, they said, was derived from rational understanding of the virtues of human nature as also truth. Cultivation of philosophical reason, therefore, was imperative to 'good life'. Moral reason enveloped all aspects of existence. Plato explained that since the source of intelligibility, nature and the very being of everything is the supreme form, a philosopher aspires to attain knowledge of it as the ultimate objective of life. Plato was convinced of a pre-bodily life in the course of which the soul gets originally acquainted with the supreme form, and by implication, the all-pervasive moral reason.

The task of the teacher in a classroom was limited to reminding the children and enabling them to recollect all that they innately know or are aware of. Cultivation of moral reason comes from the study of mathematics since it fosters abstract, disciplined thinking. When abstract, disciplined thinking develops, an individual is able to transcend mundane, empirical reality. Plato vehemently guarded the idea that education is essentially the training of

character. He was sure that culture (including music, architecture, literature) provided an appropriate learning environment to the child and created an indelible impact on their minds. His concern was with the effect on characters of literature, dramas, and other forms of representation that lay at the core of Athenian education and formed the basic medium for transmission of information and ideas. He was critical of works of literature (including Homer) that failed to display respect and honour for gods, heroes, and great people who would otherwise serve as role models that children could emulate. Furthermore, he did not approve of the idea of young people enacting mean-spirited or otherwise contemptible characters in plays and dramas. He felt that such people would somehow acquire the nature and character of the character they were portraying. Plato was severely criticized for his protective attitude towards cultural education in which the autonomy of children was laid down in favour of totalitarian ideology.

In his widely read, oft-quoted work, *Republic*, Plato divided people in society into different categories based on their intellectual development and acumen. The major classes were: the intellectual rulers or philosopher-kings; the auxiliaries and military defenders; and the workers who produced goods and services. Individuals received education appropriate to the category to they belonged which determined the tasks they were required to perform in the course of their lives. He devised the curriculum in that the educational needs of people in the ideal state were met appropriately.

1.4 Education as Cultivation of Reasoning Ability

In contrast to Plato's belief that all knowledge lies innate within the individual, Aristotle upheld that knowledge was derived from sense perceptions. A child observes the objects and phenomena through the five senses. This observation forms the basis of developing a principle or a set of principles for understanding and explaining them. The process of arriving at general conclusions from specific, or particular observations is known as 'inductive reasoning'. One example of what inductive reasoning means is that of a child who sees the buds turning into flowers over a period of few days and concludes that the rose bud in his/her garden will also turn into a flower over a period of time.

Like Plato, Aristotle believed that the control of education should lie with the state. This would enable the state to employ education as a means for preparing the desired kind of citizens. He felt that the major aim of education was the cultivation of moral values and virtues. His model for moral education centered on the notion that children acquire the traits they practice. In Aristotle's own words (trans 1976: 91-92), "We become just by performing just acts, temperate by performing temperate ones, brave by performing brave ones". Evidently, the guidance that a child receives from parents, elders and teachers is crucial. He said that till the age of 7 years, the focus of a child's education should be on physical training and character building. Between the age of 7 years and 21 years, the education imparted to the child should be state-controlled. In this period gymnastics, reading, drawing, and music are the basic subjects that should be taught. Training in these subjects would prepare the children for the final period of education which would last for their lifetime extending beyond the walls of the school. Unlike Plato, Aristotle did not speak of higher stages of education for women. He referred to the last period of education as one of liberal education that, "frees the mind from ignorance and is also the education appropriate for free men. The subjects to be studied in this period are similar to those that we believe were taught at Aristotle's Lyceum, chiefly mathematics, logic, metaphysics, ethics, politics, aesthetics, music, poetry, rhetoric, physics and biology" (Hobson 2001:18).

1.5 Education as Learning What Children Want to Know

Education is commonly understood as confined to information essential for an individual to live intelligently as a useful member of society. This implies the perpetuation of basic information in schools that tends to get monolithic and uniformised. In corollary, educational curriculum needs to be revised regularly in order to cope with social change and all that it needs to enable an individual to be of use to society. It is only natural then that children compete with others and seek to establish their own credentials and potential for learning more rigorously than others. There is much talk about how to universalise education and make it more effective and efficient. Holt attacked the system of compulsory and competitive education entailing the system of compulsory and competitive education which brought with it the system of rewards and punishments. According to him, the conventional practice of education was, “the most authoritarian and dangerous of all the social inventions of mankind. It is the deepest foundation of the modern and the worldwide slave state, in which most people feel themselves to be nothing but producers, consumers, spectators, and ‘fans’ driven more and more, in all parts of their lives, by greed, envy and fear” (Holt 1976: 8). What needs to be done then? Well, following him, the education system in its present form needs to be done away with more so because it constraints an individual to an extent that his/her innate potential and capabilities get curtailed. This means that the basic right to take decisions about oneself, to control the mind and thought, to explore and experience the world and make meaning of one’s life are conveniently handed over to the external agency — the educational system. Such an educational system that exercises complete control over a child prepares the groundwork for raising slaves (rather than vibrant, socially and mentally independent, intelligent adults) driven by greed, envy and fear.

Does this imply that one person should not interact with another or seek to influence another person’s thought and behaviour? Is it possible to live in complete social insulation? Certainly not, because in the course of our daily life we meet and interact with several people and often touch and change them, sometimes marginally and at other times substantially. Alternatively we are also shaped and influenced by others. What is important is the conviction that we should not put others in a situation in which they feel compelled to be influenced by us. In essence, we need to allow an individual to accept or reject our viewpoint and make sure that his/her freedom to choose is not curtailed. In the context of education, the argument is in favour of encouraging the children to learn what they most want to know rather than cram their minds with bits and pieces of essential knowledge that we think would be of relevance to them. Holt refers to this is ‘real learning’ or ‘true education’.

True education is acquired, by way of ‘doing things’ rather than by ‘learning things’ which then cannot be imparted fully in schools which are identified as places of learning. The fact of the matter is that true education comes from experience. We tend to learn i.e., imbibe from what we actually do and experience. We are influenced by the quality of our experiences, the satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) as also the excitement and joy (or unhappiness) that we derive from them. Children who experience humiliation, threat, and unhappiness in school will not be able to learn what the teacher tries to teach. In case such children do manage to learn something, but they tend to forget it in a short span of one or two days. Learning is greatly enhanced when the children are filled with confidence, boldness and the eagerness to learn.

Reflection and Action 1.1

Visit a nearby school and find out from at least 20 children of classes X and XII what they think the process of education should consist of. Discuss your findings with those of your co-learners at the study centre.

1.6 Built-in Value in Education

Some of the earliest ideas on the concept and meaning of education were those of R S Peters for whom the very term education enfolds normative implications. He explains the concept of education in terms of initiation into activities that are worthwhile to pursue for their own sake. These include, among others, the pursuit of sciences, history, literature and philosophy. An educated person is one who has been able to understand the broad perspectives characteristic of these disciplines and their influences on other domains as also on human life. The prominent argument is centered on the imbibing of values and ideas that are worthwhile. Peters (1966:25) maintains that education has the criterion built into it that "something worthwhile is being or has been intentionally transmitted in a normally acceptable manner". By implication, a person who has undergone the process of education has been essentially transformed for the better.

The critical issue at this juncture is the determination of what constitutes 'worthwhile' or what is worth cultivating and pursuing. Peters clarifies that those activities and pursuits are worthwhile which are thought to be valuable. Education, therefore, can be said to have 'built-in value'. This is a positive view of education which takes a position that if any teaching-learning enterprise is treated as education, then it must necessarily be valuable failing which it cannot be treated as education.

Box 1.2: Criteria of Education

According to Peters (1966: 45) the basic criteria of education are:

- i) "that 'education' implies the transmission of what is worth-while to those who become committed to it;
- ii) that 'education' must involve knowledge and understanding and some kind of cognitive perspective, which are not inert;
- iii) that 'education' at least rules out some procedures of transmission, on the grounds that they lack willingness and voluntariness".

More importantly, education is not a monolithic concept applicable to chalk-and-blackboard teaching within the four walls of a classroom. Getting children to make things, showing them how to do things, making them find out and explore are educative processes. A person may not be called educated simply by virtue of the fact that he/she has mastered a particular skill. A person who is educated in the real sense should have acquired understanding of principles for organization of facts. This understanding affects his/her outlook. More explicitly stated, a person who has specialized in a particular discipline may be said to be knowledgeable but not educated till his/her specialization influences his/her perspective on other dimensions of life. When the knowledge a person has acquired affects the way in which he/she looks at, understands, and explains different aspects of life, the person may be said to be educated. This is what Peters meant when he said that education has a transformative effect on an individual. An educated person (i) places an issue in a larger framework of reality; and (ii) is committed to the standards imminent in his/her field of interest. It is believed that all forms of thought and awareness are characterized by distinctive standards for appraisal. This boils down to the conception of education as all-round development of an individual for which Peters used the expression, 'Education is for whole man'.

1.7 Nature and Scope of Education: Cross-cultural Perspective

We have already read in the previous pages that the concept of education is not monolithic or uniform across cultures and periods of history. Educational

ideas are known to have developed out of the human struggle for survival and enlightenment. The educational heritage of the western civilization has greatly influenced American education. World educational history has, however, also benefited greatly from Mero-American, Africa, and Asian civilization. The Mayans in Mexico's Yucatan peninsula and Guatemala developed expertise in the fields of architecture and astronomy. Equally specialized was a type of writing based on word signs or logographs which the Mayan priests taught their apprentices in religious schools. Similarly, the Chinese developed an elaborate educational system which was based on Confucian philosophy. Civil servants who administered the Chinese empire were those who passed the formal examinations (Ornstein and Levine 1987). Education is, however, not confined to developing expertise in word signs or architecture and/or astronomy (as the Mayans did); or preparing people to rule the state as civil servants through an examination system (as the Chinese did). The indigenous people or tribal communities also develop skills for survival and a way of transmitting the language, skills, knowledge, beliefs and values to their children which prepares them for adult roles. Those who subsist by hunting and gathering teach their boys to make weapons and their girls to collect food from forests. Similarly, those who subsist by cultivating teach their children to prepare the earth, sow, transplant and harvest the grain. These are not isolated activities rather they are interrelated with the entire way of life — knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals and customs of the community. In the absence of written texts and formal schooling the transmission of information and cultural wisdom takes place through oral tradition. It is through songs, legends and stories, proverbs and riddles narrated by the elders that the children learn about the group's history, wars, victories and defeats and heroes. These were the non-formal ways of preparation for adulthood (as a useful member of society) among indigenous people who were not exposed to the formal system of education in schools. Many sociologists believe that they were in no way 'less refined' or inferior to those who pass through the formal education system.

a) Education in Ancient Greece

Ancient Greece is treated as the epicenter of western culture. It is important to understand how and what kind of knowledge was transmitted there. As we know, Homer's poems provided Greeks a means of defining their cultural identity since they explain Greeks' origin, portray their struggles and provide a model for the future. Children who study the behaviour of the epic heroes learn (i) the characteristics and qualities that make life worth living; (ii) the behaviours expected of warrior-knights, and (iii) the flaws or weaknesses in human character that brought harm to oneself and one's friends (Ornstein and Levine 1987: 84). Greeks laid greater emphasis on participation of children in culture than on formal schooling. Athenians believed that liberal education was needed by an individual to discharge duties towards the state and for self-development. Since slaves were required to serve the masters, they were kept away from liberal education. Instead, they were trained in skills for specific trades. In Athens women had no legal or economic rights. The vast majority of them were excluded from formal education. Girls in Sparta were, however, more exposed to schooling. Here the thrust was on athletic training that would prepare them for healthy motherhood to future spectrum soldiers.

In the middle of the fifth century BC, the commercial class began to take over the landed as aristocrats. Consequently traditional ideas about education came to be diluted. This led to the rise of a group of professional educators who came to be known as sophists. The sophists were wandering teachers who specialized in teaching grammar, logic and rhetoric. They instructed all those who could afford to pay them. Education no longer remained confined to select groups of people but was made available to a much larger number of people, leading to socio-economic mobility.

Box 1.3: The Greek Contribution to Western Education

“Western culture and education inherited a rich legacy from ancient Greece. It included the following:

- 1) A profound conviction of the possibility of achieving human excellence;
- 2) The idea that education had civic purposes related to the political well-being of the community;
- 3) A distinction between liberal education and vocational training, which has led to curricular controversies throughout Western educational history;
- 4) The legacy of the Socratic Method, by which skilled teachers might use dialectical processes to ask universal questions relating to truth, goodness, and beauty” (Ornstein and Levine 1987:93).

b) Education in ancient Rome

In ancient Rome education was aimed at raising politicians and able administrators. It was reserved for those who could afford to pay for it and had the time to attend school. Children belonging to poor families could not attend school, rather they were taken as workers. Most of the children of slaves were trained to perform certain tasks. They were denied education. Girls of upper classes learnt to read and write at home while the boys attended primary schools, later secondary schools in which they learnt Latin and Greek Grammar.

The educational ideal in Rome was the orator. An orator was a well-educated man in public life. He could be a senator, lawyer, teacher, civil servant or politician. A good orator was one who won debates and arguments in a forum. Cicero (106-143 BC) was a distinguished Roman senator who was well versed in Greek and Latin grammar, literature, history and rhetoric. He believed that the educational ideal (i.e., the Orator) should have command over astronomy, ethics, geography, history, law, medicine, military science, natural science, philosophy and psychology. Knowledge of these disciplines helped him in many ways e.g., developing and presenting an argument, engaging with the emotions of the audience, and influencing public affairs.

c) Education in Middle Ages

In the middle ages or the medieval period, European education was imparted in institutions associated with the church — the elementary parish, chantry, and monastic schools. The knights received training in military affairs and in chivalric code of behaviour in palaces. Monastic and cathedral schools, however, followed the general studies curriculum at the secondary level. There were some schools that provided basic education along with training for a trade. These were maintained not by the church but by merchants and craft guilds. Most of the learners in schools were those who planned to embark on religious life as priests, monks or clerics. The serfs confined their activities to the estate of feudal lords as agricultural workers.

By the eleventh century, the scholastic tradition emphasizing the spirit of inquiry, scholarship and teaching set in. Faith and reason were identified as complementary sources of truth. In effect, the teaching clerics, better known as scholastics, believed that God's words were revealed in the sacred scriptures and in the writings of church fathers. They also accepted the importance of human reason. In scholastic schools, the disciplines of logic, mathematics, natural and moral philosophy, metaphysics and theology were taught as part of higher education. The education encouraged inculcation of deductive reasoning among learners.

Over a period of time the number of students enrolled in cathedral schools far exceeded their capacity. As a result, universities were established to impart higher education. Since the basic constituent of knowledge was believed to be the authority of the scriptures, medieval universities emerged as centers of theology. A high level of scholarship, however, developed in secular disciplines too. The universities set up professional schools of law, medicine along with theology. These were in addition to the liberal arts. There is no denying that education in the middle ages was formal, organized and institutionalized to a large extent.

d) Education in the Renaissance period

In the Renaissance period, the scholastic model was challenged. The cleric who was trained in scholastic logic was no longer regarded as representing an educated person. Instead, the courtier who was liberally educated in classical literature, a capable diplomat, a man of style and elegance was treated as a model to be emulated by children. Education now basically consisted of learning classical Greek and Latin literature. The aim was not merely to teach the nuances of logic but to develop the all-round personality of an individual. It was in Italy that the effect of the Renaissance was most clearly marked because here the revival of commerce generated a financial surplus that was directed towards extending support to the arts, literature, and architecture. The elite of the country established their identity as custodians of knowledge, while the rulers set up court schools that would impart 'new learning'.

The Renaissance humanists identified the study of Latin as the marker of an educated person. An educated person was one who had studied classical languages and classical literature closely. The emphasis was on a human-centered conception of knowledge in which human beings were not studied as objects for scientific inquiry but indirectly through classical literature. It was later that undue emphasis on the study of literature at the cost of experience was questioned by Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Dewey and others.

e) Education in the age of Enlightenment

In the age of Enlightenment, the reason governed education as also all other major institutions. Scientists used objective methods to formulate 'natural laws' that established the idea that all the natural processes follow an order. The Enlightenment period encouraged rationality among people particularly for improving their lives and solving their problems. Against this backdrop, school education was designed to develop reasoning ability in students. The major challenge before teachers in schools was to cultivate the spirit to raise questions among students and the willingness to apply scientific and empirical methods of inquiry in understanding social reality. Enlightenment marked the creation of an education system based on equality, individualism and intellectual reasoning.

1.8 Cultural Dimension of Education in India

In the traditional sense, education in India was based largely on respect, concern, and sharing. In rural areas, the people would contribute in whatever way they could towards the construction of the school building and meeting the needs of the teacher. It was only later that the government officials exercised control over these institutions to an extent that the people felt alienated. While the villagers were asked to make contributions and take care of the infrastructure, the school belonged to the government. It was the government which would recruit teachers, decide the admissions policy, and frame the curriculum.

Joseph Di Bona wrote *One teacher One School* which dealt with basic education in pre-British India. Now, in this village school there was only one teacher who

was a local person and highly respected by everyone. The villagers provided for all his requirements. The teacher was the custodian of the financial resources of the school. A sum of money would get collected by way of nominal fees or donations. The teacher would keep a token amount for himself and use the remaining amount for providing writing material and playthings to the children. When some amount of money got accumulated, he gave scholarships to children. He was guided by the tenets of *gyan* i.e., knowledge, *seva* i.e., service, and *tyag*, i.e., sacrifice. One can appreciate the one-teacher-one school approach which appears to be governed by concern, commitment and accountability. This may be contrasted with the governmental approach of appointing several teachers in one school and the rising concern about teacher absenteeism, particularly in rural and far-flung areas (see Naik 1998).

According to Coomaraswamy (1983) a meaningful educational system pursues the following ideals: (i) universal philosophical attitude; (ii) recognition of sacredness of all things, which is the antithesis of the Western division of life into the sacred and the profane; (iii) religious toleration based on the awareness that all dogmas are formulae imposed upon the Infinite by limitations of the finite human intellect; (iv) etiquette — civilization conceived as the product of civil people; (v) relationship between teacher and pupil implied by the terms *guru* and *chela*, respectively, in memorizing great literature — the epics as embodying the ideals of character, learning as a privilege never to be used merely as a means to economic prosperity; (vi) altruism and recognition of the unity of all life; and (vii) control not merely of action but also of thought. In the traditional sense, the essence of education lay in realizing one's potential and developing it as an integrated aspect of growing up. It is for this reason that socialization as education assumes greater relevance in the East. This is education for life.

In India several Education Commissions have been set up since Independence with the chief purpose of initiating reforms in the present educational system — the foundations of which were laid by the British. Why were these reforms thought to be important? Well, one of the major reasons has been the discontent with the present system of education. The so well established educational system lays excessive emphasis on literacy, reason and rationality, success, achievement, material progress and competition and all that makes for prosperity, richness and affluence. The content of education is designed in a way that the child acquires the basic information and skill-set that would enable him/her to do well in the global market. What happens in the process is that the child gets alienated from his/her own, local environment and concerns. In this sense, education becomes a process of uprooting and alienating children from the culture(s) to which they belong. Individual creativity, initiative and spontaneity get clipped to a large extent.

Increasing attention is, therefore, being paid to the need to take the cultural dimension of education into cognizance. It is being felt that meaningful education (one that integrates education with cultural values) has to be developed so that the values, ideals and goals of education imparted in schools do not conflict with those imparted to a child at home as part of socialization. Much earlier, Gandhi had advocated a system of education better known as basic education or 'nai talim'. He advocated a kind of education that would develop among children self-reliance, commitment to non-violence, awareness about others' and their own rights, responsibilities, and obligations in society. An important aspect of 'nai talim' was the inculcation of appreciation for manual labour. To this end, he incorporated activities that involved working with the hands or manual labour as a major component of basic education. Gandhi's ideas on education seem relevant as an alternative way of a total development of the body, mind, and soul through self-restraint, self-reliance, self-sacrifice, self-fulfillment, and community participation. Its relevance is greatly enhanced in the present day fraught with tension, conflict, violence

and intolerance. At this juncture two questions assume significance (i) how can education be webbed with ecological concerns; and (ii) how can education ensure peaceful coexistence of people. These are fundamental issues that touch upon the basic philosophy of life in India and in many eastern countries. Of course, we will learn about Gandhi's idea of 'nai talim' as also of other Indian thinkers in the third Unit of this Block.

Reflection and Action 1.2

Do you think the traditional system of education in India provides a valid alternative to the Western system with emphasis on competition? Discuss.

1.9 Sociological Perspective on Education

The sociological perspective on education focuses on both, the process of education and the interrelationship between education and different aspects of society. The chief concern is with understanding how education influences social processes and gets influenced by them. The seeds of sociology of education were laid in the writings of Plato and others (about some of whom we have read in earlier sections) who focused on the role of education in laying the foundation of social order and supporting the state. Sociology of education was, however, carved as a specialized domain of enquiry much later. Emile Durkheim, the French Sociologist, stresses the need for a sociological approach to the study of education.

Jayaram (1990) explains that what was earlier called 'educational sociology' was born out of the need of educators in the United States of America and Canada to integrate the large number of immigrants (around the turn of the twentieth century) with the school and the community at large. The complexity of demands imposed by industrialization confounded the problem. The major questions before them were regarding (i) effective means by which immigrants could be blended with the community; (ii) nature, scope and design of education for rural children who were being initiated into the formal means of education for the first time; and (iii) influence of languages, ethnic identities and religious affiliations on patterns of learning behaviour. In order to address these issues, it was necessary to gauge the social problems of education, to understand the linkage between social factors and education. The result was the coming together of sociologists and educationists and the consequent emergence of 'educational sociology'. The scope of educational sociology was defined in terms of providing the basis for determining the, objectives of education; place of education in society; and interplay between school and the community. Over the years educational sociology failed to keep the interests of both educationists and sociologists alive and gave way to what is now referred to as 'sociology of education'.

Sociology of education surfaced as a legitimate field of enquiry due to the interest of sociologists in the process of education. More and more sociologists endorse the contribution of education in society. In the words of Mannheim (1940: 271), "Sociologists do not regard education solely as a means of realizing abstract ideals of culture, such as humanism or technical specialization, but as part of the process of influencing men and women. Education can only be understood when we know for what and for what social position the pupils are being educated".

The sociological perspective on education establishes the importance of social and cultural context of education. While Durkheim focuses on the role of education in the preservation of society and culture (which happens though the transmission of values, knowledge, beliefs and skills of culture through the family, kinship group and school), Dewey distinguishes between the growth of the individual in accordance with the goals of a specific society and the

natural growth of an individual. We need to understand that the goals, values and skills identified as critical by the social order are transmitted through the process of education. Now, these undergo change as social order itself transforms. It is for this reason that education is spoken of as a dynamic process (see Shukla and Kumar 1985).

From the vantage point of the aims of education, the dynamic character of education may be explained from a historical perspective. The education system in Greece and Rome was designed in a way that children learnt to subordinate themselves to the collectivity. Durkheim (orig.1956, 1985:11) explains this aspect more clearly in the following words, "In Athens, they sought to form cultivated souls, informed, subtle, full of measure and harmony, capable of enjoying beauty and the joys of speculation; in Rome, they wanted above all for children to become men of action, devoted to military glory, indifferent to letters and the arts. In the Middle Ages, education was above all Christian; in the Renaissance, it assumes a more literary and lay character; today science tends to assume the place in education formerly occupied by the arts". The individual identity was merged with the society. Over a period of time there was transformation in the aims of education noticeable in the shift of emphasis from individual's subordination to autonomy. In the present day, the education system seeks to develop autonomy and self-identity in an individual's personality.

Sociologically, the dimensions of education that have a particular salience in society are, the role education plays in the maintenance (or throwing a challenge to) of social order, social control and power structures on the one hand, and its contribution towards effecting social change on the other. A large part of these are determined by the schooling which includes the pattern of interaction between and among teachers and students, nature and content of teaching, extent of learning and other aspects. Another aspect is the school-community matrix.

Box 1.4: Areas of Research appropriate for sociologists

"In order to better explain the social phenomena of education Durkheim identified four areas of research appropriate for sociologists. They are:

- 1) Identification of the current social facts of education and their sociological function.
- 2) Identification of the relationship between education and social and cultural change.
- 3) Cross-cultural and comparative research in various types of educational systems.
- 4) Investigation of the classroom and school as an on-going social system" (Jayaram 1990:2).

According to Carnoy (1974), in the United States and the countries in Latin America which were gripped by industrialization, schooling was geared towards the development of the factory system in the sense that children were prepared to serve the factory system in different capacities. The economic and social change due to the spread of capitalism in the metropole favoured mass schooling which would raise children of the working class in a way that the class structure was maintained. After World War II when the United States emerged as the leader of the capitalist world, its models for controlling social change and assigning economic roles to different groups came to be adopted by the Third World countries. Schooling played an exceptionally important role in the postwar international scenario. It has been employed as an agency of promoting the interests of powerful economic and social groups. The present day debates in the area of society and education are those that relate with

the role of schooling, nature and extent of the role of education in society and human development. In current years, the politics of educational curriculum, medium of instruction, and the role of the school in society are the crucial issues before sociologists. Interestingly, the role of the school in society is being re-examined by sociologists. In fact, the sociologists are questioning the basic premise that education is the sole factor that leads to social and human development. Alternatively, does it lead to social and human development at all?

1.10 Conclusion

In this Unit we have explored the concept of education from different perspectives. We began by distinguishing between the concepts of education and literacy. We found that in the real sense, literacy is confined to the skills of reading, writing and doing arithmetic while education is a broader concept enveloping the all round development of an individual. Taking off at this point we discussed the concept of education as, preparation for social roles in the ideal state, cultivation of reasoning ability, and learning what children actually want to know (rather than what they ought to know). Thereafter we explored the value component in education. Here we discussed the premise that education has built-in value following which we looked into the values that the traditional education system in India affords. We realized that the education system in India laid emphasis on discipline, honesty, truth, kindness and integrity.

1.11 Further Reading

Hobson, P. 2001. "Aristotle". In S.A. Palmer (ed.) *Fifty Major Thinkers on Education from Confucius to Dewey*. Routledge: London

Naik, Chitra. 1998. "Prologue". In B. N. Saraswati (ed.) *The Cultural Dimension of Education*. IGNSA and DK Printworld: New Delhi