

**W**hat is education? Education is not simply being able to read and write. In the past, education was very different to what it is now. Many years ago, for some people education meant learning how to grow crops well, or learning how to fight well. These were some of the important things they had to know to live and survive. Today there are many different jobs which have to be done. Some people have to operate machines. Others learn to be teachers, doctors, lawyers etc. Different people are taught to do different jobs. These jobs require different types of skills.

Education has a long history which started long before there were any books to read. Education began when the first people learnt ways to survive. So education means having the skills which are needed for society to keep going. Education is the way that we learn these skills. The skills learnt depend upon what a particular society needs to continue functioning. In other words — how that society is reproduced.

Education also involves the learning of beliefs, attitudes and values which are accepted as 'normal' and 'good' by the society which we live in. What do we mean by this?

People have to live and work together. They have to do this in an organised

ago, people were organised differently to produce the food and shelter which they needed to survive. The type of education which was provided suited these conditions. There were no schools, technical colleges, or universities as they are today.

In England, at this time, the king and the church owned all the land. The king got the support of nobles by giving them large areas of land to control. The nobles supplied the king with armies and some of their wealth.

Most people lived and worked on the land and were very poor. They were the serfs (small farmers) who produced all the food and built anything which the nobles demanded — the serfs did all the manual work. The serfs were not paid for their work with money but with food and protection by the noble's army. Very often the serfs fought in this army.

The serfs were allowed to use a small piece of land for themselves. They could work on this land for a short period every week in between working for the nobles. The serfs had to pay large taxes to the church and the nobles. There were strict controls on their movement.

This kind of society, where the serfs worked on the land under the control of the king, the nobles and the church, was known as feudalism.

society was organised was explained through religion. It was believed that God decided who should be rich and who should be poor; who should rule the land and who should do the work.

But, as we know, society has changed since then. In England, feudalism no longer exists. It has been replaced with capitalism.

**G**reat changes in history do not happen overnight. The growth of a new economic system which was more powerful than feudalism took many years. Under capitalism production is organised in a very different way than under feudalism. Capitalism runs on wage labour and profits.

Capitalism grew alongside feudalism. It slowly displaced many of the ways that people were organised for production under feudalism. It took a long time for the capitalist class to weld itself into a strong force in society. Changes in education — the way people learnt to organise for production under capitalism — also took a long time.

It was the discovery of trade which started the downfall of feudalism. Kings and queens sent explorers from Europe to different parts of the world to bring back rare spices and cloths. The

ideas.

By the 1600s and early 1700s there were still no schools for the majority

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way. For example, when one person meets another, they don't start fighting. They will say 'hello' and maybe even shake hands. In the same way that we learn the skills, so do we learn the beliefs and behaviour of a particular society.

So education happens all the time through our lives. It is not something that we only do at school. We keep learning new things which are necessary for us to play our part in the way that society is organised. But, over the past thousands of years, the way that society is organised has changed and is still changing. Education has also changed.

Because education is related to the way that society has been organised, it is not neutral. Throughout the history of society, one group of people with power and wealth has dominated others. Education has played a very important part in this. Certain groups have been able to dominate others by controlling what and how they learn. So, if we are going to understand what education means for us today, we have to look at its history. We also have to understand the history of society.

**P**eople have not always earned a weekly wage by working on farms and in factories. Many years

**I**n feudal society very few people could read and write. In fact, there were no printed books. All books were written by hand. There were very few books and the main book was the Bible. Monks, who were religious men and lived on church land in large houses (monasteries) used to write these books.

People in the church (the clergy) were the only people who knew how to read and write. They learnt in small schools attached to the monasteries and the churches. They also read the Bible to others.

The serfs received their education through the family. If the serfs wanted to survive they had to learn to farm with very few implements. The methods used to farm stayed the same for hundreds of years. The children learnt the skills they needed by working with their parents in the home and in the fields. When they were old enough, they married and continued to live the same way as their parents and grandparents.

The other major part of education in society is the learning of beliefs and attitudes. In feudal society, there were no wide differences in ideas, thoughts and behaviour as there are today. There was only one church — the Catholic church. The ideas of this church dominated society. The way that

traders made a profit from this trade by selling the goods for a higher price than they paid.

Traders in the small towns also began to appear. Some people worked in these towns. They were mainly craftsmen who were their own bosses.

Over time, the traders began to get more powerful. They got their wealth and power, not from God, but through money and trade. The traders were a threat to the old feudal system. They wanted to make profits which feudal society and the Catholic church did not allow.

The ideas of this trading class came into conflict with the ideas of the Catholic church. A new type of religion began to grow which was suited to the needs of the trader class. It was known as Protestantism. Profits were seen as good and as proof of success in God's eyes.

With the rise of the traders, education began to change. The traders wanted to learn about government, law and administration. They believed that this would make them more powerful. So schools were set up for the sons of the rich — the nobles and the traders.

Both the Catholic and the Protestant churches started schools for the sons of the rich because they wanted the rulers to believe in their

of people. The education which the children of the small farmers (peasants — who were freed serfs) received was the same as under feudalism. In the towns, if children were going to become craftsmen, they went to work in the shop of the craftsman and learnt the trade by working with him.

**W**e have looked at how education began to change from the feudal times with the growth of trade. Education in schools was dominated by the churches and was provided for the sons of the rich traders and nobles. Here they learnt the things that were necessary to govern the land.

Most people still received their education from the family. Children learnt what was necessary for them to work on the land. The rulers saw no need to provide any other kind of education for the masses. The level of education suited the needs of the way society was organised to produce goods to survive.

In the next issue we will look at how this began to change as the trader class grew into more powerful capitalists. We will see how education changed as the capitalist class increased its power in society and how it had to meet the needs of production organised around profit.