

Education to me is not a building, nor a structure, nor a "core curriculum", but an attitude of mind. An attitude of mind that is swiftly and surely becoming eroded and crowded into a mess of paperwork, financial obligations and petty intrusions which have nothing to do with the spirit of the child.

Children are an essence, undiluted as yet and waiting for someone to spread them around a little, or a lot, according to their potency. They are not a line of rebels waiting for facts and figures to be pushed into the right binary codes and programmed to react to society's correct stimulus.

But that is exactly what is beginning to happen to our computer-based and oriented child of today. They are being programmed - programmed for work when there are no jobs, programmed for the 'now' society instead of being programmed for tomorrow's world of science and space fact. We are guilty of not allowing our children to look, to any purpose, much further than their noses and handing them the man-given right of falling over their own feet, instead of handing them a pair of spectacles. Nobody is asking for rose coloured glasses - but teachers do ask for the child to be given the chance to, at least, blush upon the desert air. I uphold wholeheartedly the teaching of basic literacy and numeracy, everybody needs these basic tools to live a competent life. But, there is more to life than competency. I recognise that a person can get along with just being competent - but where does music, art, sport and sheer enjoyment of drawing breath on a Spring day come within the bounds of just competency? Education means more than just basic requirements. The basic requirements of a house are good foundations, but foundations will not keep you warm and dry, shelter your family, house your pictures or comfort you in your music. Foundations are necessary as the start of something good.

This "something good", this essence, this attitude is being pushed under and kept down as a matter of policy. Teachers are being regarded as renegades of society, people of no worth and little moral fibre. Their cries for the children are responded to as cries of selfish need and not as reasoned regard for the lives of young people. Maybe that is our fault. Maybe in the past we have been too ready to please all facets of society. Maybe we have been seen as willing to split society into factions of grammar, public and secondary modern schools. Maybe our chickens have come home to roost. Whatever the reason for the demise of the teacher, it has caused a confusion in the minds of our adult population who now do not know what to think or have never been taught to think to any logical conclusion.

Most schools have good teachers, not excellent and not poor, mostly good. They work hard and under considerable strain with young and demanding personalities and society demands from these people something akin to a minor miracle. Under a teacher's control society expects a child to become numerate, literate, moral, physically well developed, articulate, socially acceptable, mannered, well tempered, individually cherished, aware of its surroundings, conscious of its neighbour, instructed in religion, excited by science, healthy in mind and limb, musical, appreciative of art, experienced in handling a variety of materials and even being able to cross the road with an added conviction that they must never talk to strangers. All this and more from one primary school class teacher or from a host of widely varying senior school teachers.

Society as a whole expects all that; however, the average parent expects the child to become disciplined, able to do sums, able to read, make itself understood and be happy, and who, they ask, can grumble at that? So, we have society made up of parents looking for Utopia and the individual parent making up that society hoping for far less and fundamentally wanting to trust the teacher.

Society does not trust the teacher, that is obvious; look at the press, listen to the Government, hear the voices raised against the long holidays and the lack of tables taught in schools.

What a muddle; teachers, parents, society, all wanting the best for the child as they see it and pulling hard for their point and belief. No wonder Education is in very real danger of lying in ruins around our feet.

What to do? I don't know. If I did I would mount my charger, and foray off into battle. I do try to fight for my ideals. I have to work within the tight limits of financial restraint, lack of staffing and resources, and I am forced to follow the line of withdrawing my goodwill and alienating the very people that I need to talk to and have sympathetic dealings with. I feel I cannot win, nor do I choose to retreat.

The wheel seems to be going full circle. It was the poor intelligent member of the good family once who became the tutor or governess. If we do not do something soon of a practical nature for our education service, we will find that once more only an elite few can afford to be part of the teaching profession and once more the cries of dedication and professionalism will be taken up. Dedication and professionalism are fine concepts, but not ones that a beggar can afford. Gloom and despondency seem to be the drift of my arguments. I look forward to a term of work which I no longer completely enjoy, pressures that I find difficult to cope with and demands that I will not be able to meet. My triple job of part time class teacher, part time secretary, and full

time head teacher leaves a lot of work undone, or not done to a high enough standard to give me satisfaction. Nothing but the best you can offer should ever be placed before a child, and the best that the education service is being constrained to offer at the moment is not good enough, but not yet bad enough to alert the parents, parents who themselves have constraints and difficulties and to whom education is just a part of living and who do not see things through a teacher's eye.

I am not so jaundiced that I cannot see a time when education will not become a full and rounded entity once more and society will value again the beauty of learning and appreciate its value. I just hope that we have not much farther to swing down before the wheel takes a swing up for the better.