

At the present time educationalists are experiencing a tremendous conflict within themselves. The moral fabric of our society is being undermined, with the result that constant demands and pressures are brought upon teachers who are blamed for all the world's ills.

The children in school now will be looking for work in the twenty-first century. How can we tell what the working world will be like then? The nature of job opportunities will be vastly different, with a shift towards more technical and skillful jobs. This change continues to accelerate and we will have to learn to live in a rapidly changing society dominated by microtechnology. The pattern of work will shift; there will be a well organised leisure industry staffed by people who will need very special social skills, devising pursuits and relating to people, many of whom will require motivation.

Why is it that one child in six leaves school unqualified, engendering a major social problem? Unqualified for what? - Learning by rote is not the answer. Teacher roles are changing. I see teachers as transmitters of knowledge, providing a wide curriculum, but more than that, I see them helping children to acquire a core of skills, skills necessary for enquiry-based teaching. I feel it is imperative to equip children with special skills - to be articulate, curious, able to judge, to discriminate, to respect others and their property, to aspire to goals which seem beyond their reach and strive to attain them. Unfortunately, I find children's language skills sadly lacking. If they are linguistically deprived for five years before entering school, how can we hope to build into their learning higher skills of reading: how to read quickly, slowly, how to skim, precis and decode, how to foster functional reading for a purpose, as in maths and science? Reading is the most overt sign of language achievement, but it is only one of the modes. A very small percentage acquire language and ideas without adult intervention.

Society has a certain store of values, conventions, skills and knowledge, which it will expect teachers to pass on to children. Teachers, in their turn, have to reconcile these demands from society with what is humanly possible in today's situation. Adequate provision of materials can no longer be maintained, the fabric of buildings is deteriorating, pupil- teacher ratios are increasing. We have to break down traditional barriers and prevent isolation in learning and make our teaching more relevant to children's needs. Morale is low; there is a lack of promotion, dissatisfaction with pay structure and a need to feel valued. I realise there has to be a yardstick by which parents measure their child's ability, but how can we measure caring, concern and empathy? We cannot set exams on all these important attributes so ... we must involve parents more and more. Thus they will appreciate our difficulties and witness our dedication. We must not be afraid of assessment if we have the courage of our own convictions. The greatest majority of teachers are dedicated and solicitous of children's needs, but we have to explain our individual approach. Our education system is second to none, in that in our schools teachers are free to choose their apparatus, approach and method of evaluation. This is so important to produce endless variety, stimulation and infectious enthusiasm.

Teachers are trained to recognise children's needs, intellectual and social, also physical, and to initiate activities to satisfy these needs, giving support, guidance and instruction. Alas, too much time is wasted on non-professional tasks because parents must be held to account for their failure in preparing children for school. In some European countries, I understand, children have to complete an aptitude test before being admitted to school. This might not be a bad idea. If entry depended on children acquiring certain skills, parents might be better disposed to help in their acquisition.

Equality in education is an impossible dream. We can provide equal opportunities but socio-economic considerations make for stratas in our society and we must be careful that, in striving for this equality, there is not a general lowering of standards. The present system of intake is unequal in that even different parts of our city differ in the time children are admitted. The upheaval in secondary provision is ample proof of this inequality. I personally approve of grammar schools, because I consider that there are some children who will benefit from this more academic approach. I am also convinced that what happened in Sheffield will happen here - that the comprehensive schools provided in certain areas of the city will become first and second class, because ambitious parents will be prepared to move out of areas in order that their child shall attend the more prestigious schools. These schools will have the monopoly of able children and supportive parents, and will achieve results which, in turn, will attract more parents to seek entry for their children. Other schools will lose the cream, not achieve results, and a vicious downward spiral results.

I have always aimed to make every single task I present to the children worthwhile and relevant. Much time can be spent on aimless activities from which no real sense of achievement can result. I also consider it to be of the utmost importance to find a way of making a child succeed. Every child has something worthwhile to

offer even if he/she is not academically bright - nothing succeeds like success. If I can instil in the children a love of God's creation and a thirst for knowledge of the world in which we live and may come to live, then I consider I have done my duty. Praise and support along the way will enable each child to reach his full potential and whilst I know smaller classes would be a great help, the quality of the teacher is the one overriding factor for success. The secure surroundings, the stilumi we provide, the stable relationships we establish within the community are our trademarks.

I will end by expressing the fervent hope that the latest trend in teaching training will mean an improvement for the profession. The students will spend far more time in school working alongside experienced teachers. It always seemed ridiculous to me that teachers, among all the trades and professions, were the only ones who were not involved with the experienced people, thus preventing them from becoming familiar with the tools of their trade. The student/school adoption scheme is a huge step in the right direction.