

Ist sitting - 25th May

Schools are strange institutions ostensibly there for the benefit of pupils but increasingly to me, are best seen as organisations designed for the benefit of educationalists. Their purpose is to 'give' pupils an education - but this 'gift of education' is the only gift which I can think of, the refusal of which becomes a criminal offence. In this light education becomes a compulsory national service designed for the purposes of the state and no other. Some would argue that even if this is the case education should still be valued and purveyed. I would not wish to enter this argument except to say that from this standpoint the 'refusers' of education are at least afforded a more dignified status.

I am perhaps being a little hypocritical here: after all education has been good to me. I have had lots of it and it has been my chief source of income for 17 years. I am, as all educationalists are, an educational success. But my work, as teacher, youth worker or psychologist, has brought me into regular and committed contact with those pupils who, unlike me and other educationalists, are 'failures'. As teachers are successes they are naturally drawn towards pupils who are similarly inclined. The 'others', the intellectually less able, the socially deprived, the children from educationally non-orientated backgrounds create difficulties for the system. The system itself is caught in a Catch 22 situation - it would function much more adequately without 'them' but has a moral responsibility for 'them' and a philosophical interest in 'them'. These pupils are currently designated as having 'special needs' and some time, resources, and educational thought is put in towards meeting these 'special needs'. However this solution of nomination is merely a palliative and - even worse - unjust. It locates the 'problem' with the child and leaves the system to go on in its own sweet way - and with a clear conscience.

2nd sitting - 27th May

The statement I wish to make is simple. Justice appears to be lacking. The system is so big and our children are small and can be crushed under the weight of it. Particularly those very small children of whatever age who do not share, by inclination or circumstances, the 'correct' qualities which would make their passage through the system relatively safe. It seems so unfair to me that so often these frail ones, whose behaviour (either social or intellectual) casts them at odds with the system are the ones who are expected to make most effort to attain the norms which make us feel more adequate.

And that is the measure of it; educationalists feel more fulfilled when children behave at or above accepted norms. When they don't they are bullied, tricked, coerced in some way and the educators have the excuse that this is all for the pupils' 'own good'.

I would like to create a different scenario (which is not revolutionary - I am even proposing to leave the educational infrastructure intact).

When a child has difficulties it should be incumbent upon the rest, the able, the strong, the intelligent, the adjusted to make appropriate efforts to understand, accommodate and accept. After all, they, by definition almost are in the best position to make such adjustments!

4th sitting - 1st July

I have become increasingly interested in the language that I hear in schools.

"S/he must learn to behave him/herself." Social behaviour is so complicated that most educators have little knowledge of how it develops and only an intuitive idea of how it is operated. But deviance from intuitive norms, is easy to spot, on these occasions children are often exhorted to 'behave themselves'. The assumption here is (at least!):

- a. that the child knows how to 'behave'.
- b. that for perverse reasons has decided not to 'behave'

Neither of these assumptions is necessarily true. In many cases children simply do not know how to 'behave'. In those cases a simple command to behave differently, in a mysterious, unexplained way, is obviously inefficient. A sporting analogy will suffice. No coach would simply tell a sportsperson to play better - a step-by-step explanation of 'better' and a series of exercises designed to improve performance would be given. Education is operationally years behind basic coaching. I suggest a new phrase:

"Teachers must learn to behave themselves"

i.e.

- a. know what their job is in greater detail in operational terms
- b. have the techniques and the resources to do the job
- c. stop blaming their pupils for having the inadequacies which were created by educationalists in the first place
- d. stop blaming their pupils for having the 'inadequacies' which they must have by nature of their status as learners
- e. stop blaming the pupils for having those 'inadequacies' which it is the teacher's job to ameliorate (after all doctors would not blame their patients for being ill).