

As a School Governor, I am not part of the real core of the educational system. However, four or five times a year I attend Governors' meetings and, for a short while, a window opens onto another world. It is a fascinating, perplexing world in which two problems seem to stand out.

The first is that of language. Simplicity and conciseness of the written and spoken word appears to have been replaced by complexity and length. It is accepted that every profession uses its own jargon to speed up communication and to ensure better understanding within the group. But should such licence be given to the educationalists? They must teach the young, talk to each other and to the outside world. In my view, they should talk to these three groups in the same language. A language that is simple, clear, concise, devoid of jargon and generally understood by all. A language that is the basis of all our communications and the base upon which other groups may or may not add their own embellishments. What is disturbing is that complexity and bulk seem to be aims in themselves.

The second problem is one of direction. I see vigorous streams of ideas driving in various directions. One mainstream harbours the doubt that our educational system is becoming a "free for all" where discipline and respect for adults and traditions is a thing of the past. Mediocrity reigns. Another stream takes the view that we impose rigid out of date concepts on the rising generation so that their natural creativity is stifled. Their lives remain unfulfilled and they provide nothing to the community other than fodder for the "establishment", whatever that may be. Between these extremes lie a multitude of different opinions, twisted one way or another by political thought and dogma. These viewpoints fight for recognition through letters and articles, discussions and debates and even paintings and exhibitions. Who is right? Is there a "right" way? How can we recognise it? Is there an underlying reality or is reality merely an uncontrollable continuous movement of ideas and dreams and ambitions providing a sense of fulfilment to those caught up in the streams?

Reality there is and it must start at the national level. Britain is no longer a world leader. It is one of many nations competing for limited world resources. In constantly changing economic and technological environments, there can be no single pathway forward. Survival and the ability to meet the aspirations of individuals can only be achieved by generations having flexibility of thought and the willingness of adapt and compete. The educational system must provide these generations and obviously it must itself be continuously responsive to change. How is this to be achieved if we cannot first define the path forward?

In most professions there are a few who have a special vocation for that particular type of work. Teaching is such a profession. Many in teaching claim such a vocation but few really have it in its truest sense. Of the few, some are not even in the profession because it cannot provide, to their satisfaction, other needs such as financial security, happiness and freedom of action in their work.

The national challenge must be to structure the rewards in the profession so that everyone who has a real vocation for teaching or administration within the system is attracted to it. Rewards for the great mass of teachers must be equated to what is the rough average for the total workforce and within the capability of the nation to pay these rewards. However, the limited number of top and influential jobs in teaching and its administration must be linked to very high financial rewards and freedom of action. By the same token, incumbents of these positions must accept the right of the state to quickly remove them if a high level of dedication is not evident and good results not achieved. This qualification will provide no barrier to the truly dedicated.

To me, the reality is clear. The nation must fight for its survival in an ever-changing world. Flexibility of thought and the willingness to adapt and compete are the characteristics required by successive generations. These can only be provided by the educational system which must be of the same mould. It has no such characteristic at the moment. What needs to be done cannot be predicted. The most likely solution is to get the "right" people into the top and influential jobs within the system. These jobs must be highly attractive and clearly accountable. If they are they will automatically attract the "right" individuals, namely, those with a true vocation. We must leave the future in their hands but who else can better handle the situation?

I have met enough really dedicated teachers to know that, given an assurance that the top jobs in their profession are well rewarded and have considerable freedom of action, they will accept accountability and the need to first progress through the lower less well rewarded echelons before reaching their goal. They will provide the "direction" needed.