

It seems to me that before attempting to articulate my view I should first give an account of my personal educational background and professional experience. Since we are all to some extent prisoners of experience and it must be a function of education to liberate and broaden our views, it follows that the degree of freedom I have attained can only be judged and my views evaluated by first accounting my own background.

I belonged to a lower middle-class family, living in the 1930's in a South Wales erstwhile heavy industrial town. My family owned and ran a public house in a district which now would be described as greatly deprived. Thus, the pub was an island in a sea of working class unemployed and extremely poor people. Both my parents had been brought up in the town in more prosperous late Victorian/Edwardian times and we as a family had roots and an accepted, respected reputation in it. Life in the pub was socially rich and pleasant and we lived happily with our neighbours, despite any economic differences in our situations. I played well and happily with my poor companions. By the time I reached ten, three were dead - two from diphtheria and one from tuberculosis. At 4 I had overcome diphtheria myself.

My formal education was that of the state system: from age 2 - 7 an infants' school, then from 7 - 11 a boys' elementary school in the same large collection of buildings. Passing 11+, I attended a state grammar school from 11 - 18 and a scholarship enabled me to go on to university. I graduated as a biologist and trained as a teacher. After two years' teaching on national service in the army, I myself became a grammar school teacher and for eight years served in three schools - two Welsh and one English.

At this point, although I greatly enjoyed teaching, I felt that an educational career might have even more to offer and so I moved to a large college of education which specialised in training science teachers. Then, after six years there, to a university division of education where I was involved in teaching for the initial teacher training course and in courses for inservice education. Finally, about twelve years ago, having served for three years on a part-time basis, I joined the fulltime regional academic staff of the Open University, with a deep commitment to the importance of education for all.

Looking back on this experience, I least enjoyed and found most restrictive my four years as a lecturer at a traditional university. I managed to do some interesting things, e.g. run a full-time advanced diploma course for serving teachers and contribute to several other courses while completing a research project in some schools. However, the detachment from reality in the schools of the section of the institution to which I belonged left me very unhappy. Had I not joined the O.U., I should surely have left education as a profession.

At the other pole, the experience I have most enjoyed has been teaching itself, whether at school, college or in the O.U. Teaching is an extremely demanding profession; it draws on whatever talents or energy one possesses to the utmost. It follows that if to some extent one succeeds and communicates the joy and interest of learning to pupils or students, the outcome is greatly rewarding to a teacher.

When I am asked which books have most influenced me in the identification and adoption of an educational philosophy, just like most other educationists I think of Plato, Aristotle and of other profound educational thinkers who provided so much of what has become accepted wisdom and tradition. However, having accorded these their due place, I consider J.J. Rousseau's educational philosophy described in his book 'Emile' as central to a modern view of education. Rousseau advocates the study of the child to discover his/her disposition and inclination, thereby supporting the basic need for education for the needs of the individual. He depicts in the New Heloise children ideally growing up in the well-regulated liberty of an ideal household with the family standing mid-way between society and the child's nature. While family life can so often be troublesome and of nightmarish difficulty and isolation at times, perhaps it is still, when good, the best and most ideally supportive but nonrestrictive environment for bringing up children.

Returning to 'Emile', Rousseau identified four age periods in child development and related educational experience, including the importance of play to those ages. As well, he recognised the later profound importance of adolescent changes to education. Most importantly of all, through Rousseau's writings can be seen the fundamental part education must play in the reform of society.

Education for me is thus an individual process of enlightenment and enrichment which identifies and develops the interests and talents of each person to their own happiness and society's advantage. Education should not be afflicted with social limitations so that a child is only permitted to learn what controlling interests in society wish him to, merely for the benefit of the state and the preservation of advantage to some of its members. I believe there should only be one highly effective state educational system which provides for the needs of all. Most children would live with their families and attend nonresidential schools. However, boarding facilities would exist at some state schools where needed for parents who are forced, through government or

commercial/industrial service, for periods to live abroad, or in other special cases where children cannot live with their parents.

In any educational system, the essential pillars by which standards are established and maintained are the teachers. Candidates for teaching should be carefully selected for their abilities, personality and commitment to the value of the work. Teachers have in their care, the minds of children who will form society in the future. Attitudes developed at school will often persist throughout life, and success or failure during the school years greatly influences people's lives afterwards for good or ill. In the past, it is true, adversity in childhood has often been overcome, but this can hardly be used to justify adversity and it must sometimes, sadly, have been a decisive limiting factor. The responsibility borne by teachers, like parents, is enormous. The control of standards in the initial qualification and continuing inservice training of teachers should be largely vested in the most able teachers themselves through a General Teachers' Council with, of course, lay and governmental representation. It should be unacceptable that teacher training be led by those who often have either never taught at all, at least in state schools, or at best spent a very short time in them very early in their long careers.

The reform of school curricula is a constant theme of educational discussion and, of course, much needs to be done. In the forty years since the end of the Second World War much has been tried. At first practical 'activity' methods were introduced into infant classes, then progressed upwards into junior school classes at least to some extent. The integrated day displaced a rigid subject timetable in some primary schools and open-plan school design replaced separate classrooms. Tables sometimes replaced desks arranged in neat rows. Experiment also led to trials of vertical grouping by age instead of classes of a single year group, though in small rural schools such arrangements were more traditional than experimental. However, how much there has been a real improvement in childrens' achievement is a subject more for debate than general agreement. Moreover, many curriculum development schemes have died a quiet, inactive death or been exported, for example, the repeatedly unsuccessful efforts to introduce physical science into the primary curriculum.

One gains the impression that in primary schools much old-fashioned, dull, boring rote learning has been replaced with pleasant, time-filling activity which, in the hands of skilled, committed teachers, can be educationally valuable, but, under the direction of many others, who have less insight and who are less skilled, achieves very little for young children. Out of this, of course, has come the present consciousness of the need to assess teachers each year and greater awareness of the improvements necessary in the initial and inservice education of teachers. One hopes only that this awareness leads to sincere concern which, supported by adequate funds, is effective. Education is too important to be left to inadequately selected, often poorly-trained, teachers locked in the narrow confines of a busy classroom for their entire professional lives. Moreover, the loss of the 11+ examination with comprehensivisation left no yardstick whatsoever by which to judge educational achievement, limited though the 11+ tests were.

At secondary level, too, there have been many attempts at curricular reform. Various Nuffield and other sponsored projects have developed materials in a variety of subject areas, e.g. Humanities, Mathematics, Sciences (separate, integrated and combined 'O' and 'A' level). Some of these have had a profound and lasting effect. It is probably also true that secondary schools have always received a little more public attention than primary, if only because parents, like governments, realise that children are getting closer to job selection, or unemployment. However, external examinations, viz. G.C.E. and C.S.E., have long strongly influenced, if not controlled, teaching in secondary schools, assuring public concern and providing, albeit very vaguely and inadequately, an indication of educational success or failure.

At secondary level also, much remains to be done to improve the selection and training of head teachers and teachers. The new common examination system, G.C.S.E., may well give a much better indication of teacher performance as well as individual pupil achievement if it is kept faithful to its different psychometric basis of criterion referenced testing.

Teaching in the long term must gain in public esteem, which now it clearly lacks, and commensurate with the more careful, purposeful and thorough processes of selection and deeper professional commitment teachers should achieve the financial rewards due to the true leaders of society. Inevitably, the concern and commitment of parents to the real value and importance of education is essential in all this. However, it would be unrealistic to pretend that such developments can occur in any but the long term.

Schooling, clearly, is one of the most important influences in our lives. Through the increased priority accorded to it the lives of all could be enormously enriched. Man's ideal of equal opportunity for all can only be achieved through the establishment of a proper and effective educational system. Whatever inequalities and differences exist between people, and it is foolish to deny or ignore these, education should be instrumental in enabling the full expression of talents and abilities so that the world gains most from the existence of each one of us. The process is partly a matter of the individual discovering and being helped to discover his/her own interests, talents, capacities: partly a matter of enhancing and developing these in full variety in relation to the environment. Above all, education should not be afflicted by social or political limitations. Nor can severe economic criteria be applied, for who in the present state of things can know what is cost-effective in the education of a child?