

If one tries to analyse those influences which have produced a particular personal educational stance, there is a danger of becoming either introspective or unduly pompous. However, for those who would claim to support an egalitarian view of education, both a personal and intellectual justification is required as a substitute for its lack of historical legitimacy. Indeed, the concept of equality of opportunity is far from universally accepted even today and there are always attempts to reverse any progress that has been made.

The three significant personal influences which underpin my perspective of education are religion, a background in the industrial working class and the inadequacies of my own and my contemporaries' education.

As a practising Christian, I realised in my late teens and early twenties that the Bible had to be taken seriously. Thus it became clear that in God's sight there was no difference on the basis of race, social status or sex (Gal. 3:28) and hence Christ's followers would be untrue to Him if they discriminated between people unnecessarily and unfairly. It is interesting to observe that almost all British Christians would oppose racialism but far from all would oppose educational apartheid which has been shown for many years to be substantially class based. There is an essential dignity and equality in man which results from his being formed in God's image. The Christian must attempt to approach his fellow men in the way of Christ, that is, balancing care, love and a firmness in dealing with that which is wrong. Needless to say, one's dealing with others often fails to reach the ideals professed.

A further aspect of Christianity which has a bearing on my approach to education is the assurance that the answers to man's deepest needs exist outside himself. This surrender of one's personal autonomy is, of course, an individual choice and having the information, skill and independence to make valid choices is one of the fundamental choices of education.

The realisation that access to material comforts and wider cultural horizons is partly a function of education was impressed on my mind from an early age. However, it took many years to realise that access to education depended not only on innate intelligence and studious application but on social background and Local Education Authority sponsorship through a discredited procedure called the 11+. The way in which a one hour verbal reasoning test opened doors for me but closed them for equally intelligent friends and relatives has slowly developed into an abhorrence of the whole selection process. Indeed, the discovery that the fundamental research by Burt which underpins selection was bogus ensures that those who continue to justify the practice are guilty of intellectual dishonesty.

I confess that I have not resolved the question of whether selection on the basis of wealth which tends to produce an increasingly divided and heterogeneous society should be allowed or halted. The conflict between egalitarian and individual freedom is difficult to conclude. Is it legitimate to force those who are rich to do that which might be most advantageous for the overwhelming majority of citizens? Access to education based on wealth may be no more acceptable than it does on successfully solving some word puzzles and sorting strange shapes on a dull November morning.

If one accepts that early discrimination is educationally unacceptable, i.e. that all people have a right of access which has neither to be earned nor result from charitable benevolence, then it is important to decide on what education people should be able to obtain. The inadequacies of the traditional academic education, which was often no more than the incoherent sum of a number of examination subjects, is now generally accepted. There is, however, now an insidious trend to limit education to those skills which might be economically advantageous. This attempt to produce an updated elementary and utilitarian education suitable for a technological world is both illiberal and diverse. It is significant that the control of some facets of education is slipping away from the Department of Education and Science to the Department of Industry.

The doctrine of separate but equal has never been successful. In the eyes of society as a whole one of the educational paths will have higher status than others. Reform can only come about by altering the high status track and not merely by improving those less valued systems. It is very easy in a school to alter the curriculum of the less able or younger child. Very little pressure will ensue on a Head who does this, either from parents or the public at large. The introduction of more relevant curricula for those who are already disadvantaged is relatively easy but a price has to be paid. This is the reinforcement of second class education designed to give limited horizons.

Reform of the school curriculum will only come about when we stop pretending that pupils' needs are limited to that which can be loosely described by seven or eight subjects with labels which are generally recognisable. The needs of all pupils must be the starting point for any discussion on the whole curriculum. It

would appear to me that education has the purpose of promoting personal autonomy within a framework, where the needs of others and how one interacts with them is fully appreciated. One man's freedom may well be another's constraint. Education must therefore balance individual desires with collective needs. When such an analysis of the knowledge, skills and attitudes which the young person requires is established, then a coherent educational programme might be arranged to meet it. There is, however, a certainty that such a programme would be radically different from the organisation of learning which is regarded as appropriate today. It is not until we abandon the use of high status, single subject tests as the assessment of who is regarded as educated that a more valid form of secondary education could be established.

The question must be faced, however, who is to control the analysis of needs and the subsequent education which flows from it. The current position is that schools take upon themselves the burden of this task. However, the pressure to conform to what is perceived as desirable in maximising the number of pupils obtaining high results in high status subjects produces a considerable degree of uniformity. We have substituted an undemocratic national examination system for central control of education. The timidity with which Government of any colour approaches even relatively trivial reform of this system, e.g. the joint 16+ proposals, is amazing. We have a highly centralised system of curriculum in this country, which is based on no theory but on the principle that only a limited number of pupils must be allowed to jump over the hurdles at sixteen or eighteen. The demise of the Schools Council indicates clearly a shift of power away from the teaching profession as such and towards nominated and less co-ordinated bodies. However, if the broad outlines of the curriculum of schools is to be produced instead of the present incoherent examination system, then it is most likely to come from a broad based national body. The task cannot be left to politicians alone, nor to teachers, never to civil servants, and the conservative nature of parents would make reform by them impossible.

What of the pupils, how do we give them a say in what they should learn? Should we allow pupils to miss out parts of the established educational programme because they wish to? To what extent should pupils have control over their own destinies?

In order to acquire personal autonomy, it is important that young people have some control over what and how they learn. However, when should one allow a pupil to take steps which will inhibit future development? The balance between freedom, coercion and counselling is one which needs a long debate. Suffice it to say that a programme of essentials plus balanced alternatives may allow for individualism without too much detriment.

My conclusion is thus that English secondary education needs a total rethink. It must move away from the needs of higher education and more towards the needs of individuals and society as a whole. The idea that employment is no more than a means of preparing people for employment should be resisted. We need curriculum led assessment rather than the present assessment led curriculum. If we desire a more homogeneous society, then we need a more, not less, homogeneous curriculum and school system. All pupils have a right of access to education and such education needs funding in a way which clearly indicates the priority we give to the needs of future generations.