

Education is a subject which causes paranoic discussion, similar in intensity at times to politics or religion.

What started as an idealistic idea by the church and philanthropists for the benefit of the lower classes has developed, for the want of a better term, to the hotch-potch of modern times.

Money and privilege has always enabled people to get a good start in life. But to enjoy a real life of success and enjoyment, knowledge and common sense are enduring factors to be sought, coupled with a will to succeed and the determination of the individual throughout life.

One does not need to be an ascetic to believe in principles and virtues which have appeared to have become unnecessary or outmoded by modern-day attitudes in life or educational methods. People and pupils have benefitted by self-discipline which has been instilled by teachers and their likes in the past.

Unfortunately, at the present time, we have succumbed to the political aspirations or egotistical mania by many in the educational system, who put their idealisms above those who matter - the pupils.

Discipline, respect for other people, property, knowledge and the basics in education for the majority are decried by the 'Whizz' kids, who have now created a system in which traditional ways of the past, which stood the test of time (in peace or war) have led to a breakdown of family life, lack of respect to elders and superiors, and a breakdown of law and order in our society.

Teaching as a career has suffered immensely from the manipulations of their political masters, D.E.S. down to Heads of schools. The various unions have never amalgamated to fight their cause, with the exception this year on salaries (Headmasters backed out). Progressively the position of the teacher's career structure has deteriorated rapidly in my teaching experience.

The career structure of teachers and lecturers has declined because of promotion prospects. Promotion from one scale to another alone appeared to depend on whether one forfeited one's principles, accepted begging bowls and worked far beyond one's time and pecking order. One sure method to obtain promotion was to move to wherever there was a need as usually no-one locally would accept the position. This is now an accepted part of one's career. Teachers who remain in their own locality because of their pupils and school are frowned upon as old-fashioned and not worthy of consideration, irrespective of the degree of success in that sphere, although the social happiness of the pupils may be ensured. The continuing exodus of teaching staff through drop-outs, continued shifting from one area to another, etc., never has ensured stability and understanding. This has a detrimental effect on pupils during their school career.

The stripping away of teachers' authority has brought about a terrible deterioration of disciplinary standards, which has resulted in verbal and physical abuse, not only on other pupils but also on staff. Much of this is hidden by request of the Headmasters, etc. for the benefit of the school's name or in simulating a position of grandeur. All pupils respect discipline as long as it is seen to be fair and justifiable. The social concept of the school is all-important in their upbringing.

Distinctions can be drawn between motivation, stimulus and inspiration. Motivation is a general influence. Inspiration is more like a blinding revelation arising out of the contemplation of a special circumstance, concept or objective, making use of one's senses, mentally or physically.

Pupils can be motivated, yet produce little work as they lack sufficient application. Motivation must be supported by positive energy, e.g. constant study. This depends not only on the individual but also on the environment in which they work, such as their school and their homes.

My experience has been mainly in practical subjects, where it is possible to teach basic techniques and impart information, providing one has the experience which the pupils respect. The more subtle processes of the development of sensibility, sensitivity, individual traits, likes and dislikes, which decide how the pupil deploys his or her technical skills, cannot be taught. They must be absorbed and developed through experience by the pupil, for themselves.

Schools in themselves vary greatly, for example, intake according to ability, the number of pupils, the size of the school and facilities, sports fields, swimming bath, etc.; last, but not least the type of school and the environmental area from where they get their intake. Even after this, financial backing and help can vary immensely between various educational areas. Devon has a poor record in this respect.

The curriculum timetable often offers numerous subjects, many of them modern trendy movements, irrespective of the abilities of the pupil intake. Headmasters or such compete with one another, irrespective of staff and facilities available and financial limitations. Therefore pupils can be forced into subjects in which they have neither the intellectual, practical ability or desire, because numbers and space availability vary immensely between various subject departments.

Certain subjects have had the advantage of finance and equipment, to the detriment of others because of modern trends, but is this advantageous to the pupils?

The Secretary of State for Education, I understand, is now beginning to realise the futility in the belief that all pupils are alike and have the capacity to compete in the world outside. Besides having a basic education, i.e. to be able to read and write, pupils should be able to use their observations of everyday life in their own environment, working life or among friends. If pupils are not given adequate education to meet their needs, many will feel insecure, anxious and improperly prepared to face their future. Inadequacy for the majority, success for the minority, has always prevailed, and I cannot see the educational systems of the present time altering that fact.