

**Education - From
Inside and Out**

Susan Avent
Mother of Charlotte, aged 7
Student: Religion and
Philosophy; B.A. in
Humanities, College of St
Mark and St John

I'd had a feeling for some time that competition was responsible for the 'unsatisfactoriness' of our existence. Completely unread and politically ignorant, I thought a degree might be useful and three years in which to philosophise on the subject seemed quite attractive.

Almost everyone I knew took competition for granted. They saw it as natural, "look at the natives in the jungle". But when I look at the natives I see them co-operating. For my own sake and for Charlotte I wanted to discover one of the secrets of human nature. Are we competitive or not? Can a society function without it? Can we function in this society if we fight it?

Twelve months further on I now realise that I won't discover the secret at Marjons or probably anywhere else for that matter. What I have discovered to my relief is that I'm not the first to have been pondering on the subject. Historians, theologians, philosophers and sociologists have been at it for centuries, churning out theory after theory. But still it remains ever present around us.

Whilst we discuss it in its many manifestations and usually end up condemning it, we perpetuate it in the way in which we run our lives. The education system seems to be operating with a double standard. In 'buzz groups' where we are presumably supposed to be helping each other, we guard what scanty knowledge we have in the fear that someone might steal it from us, only divulging enough to prove that we have enough intelligence (whatever that may be) to justify our presence on the course.

It seems to me that whether or not we are inherently competitive, the education system from beginning to end is determined to make sure that we end up that way. I now know that efforts are being made to minimise the negative effects of competition, especially in primary schools, but the way I see it as long as five year olds are forced to humiliate themselves in public by running in the sticky sports-day sun, then the system is not going far enough in its efforts.

I'm not much nearer the answers but at least I'm aware of the question, which is a step in the right direction. Education in general would benefit by concentrating more upon the questions and less upon the answers.