

As a classroom teacher my predominant feeling when facing a class is one of exhilaration. No matter how I have been feeling when walking down the corridor - possibly ill-prepared, almost certainly rushed - whenever I walk into the classroom and meet the eyes of the class, there is that feeling. In it there is a sense of anticipation, of anticipatory pleasure, and it is the same whether it is a class of fractious first years, wondering whether to draw a margin or not, or a class of petulant fourth years, trying to disguise fear of inadequacy. This sense of exhilaration must stem from the fact that one is dealing with youth and all the demands, problems and challenges which it makes. It follows, therefore, that a good teacher should like the young and like a challenge. Wishing to spread the word about one's own subject is insufficient. And I have to be confident enough and stable enough to cope with the unwilling, the non-cooperative and the downright aggressive, and to be flexible enough to draw them into a rewarding learning experience or, to put it in a more old-fashioned style, draw them into having "a good lesson".

A subsidiary feeling is one of satisfaction; not self-satisfaction, but the satisfaction gained from seeing others achieve through the medium of one's own efforts: tomorrow's voters do understand the reasons for the quarrel between Charles I and Parliament, and so they learn about power and the true basis of power; the VIth Former, his thoughts and ideas initially cloaked by the "misery of language" really does learn to write an articulate essay. Of course, this satisfaction can only apply to objectives fairly easily identifiable as being "good" or "worthwhile". There has been much agonising over what should/should not be taught in schools, which is doubtless inevitable. The classroom teacher, acting within the bounds of what is fashionable, at the time, should choose material for pupils with two objectives in mind: that they should think and that they should know, always remembering that they cannot do the one without the other.

The sphere of the teacher, however, does seem to be expanding. Pastoral care, tutorial work impinge on the realm of the parent, the social worker, the doctor, the priest and the new teacher, immersed in her own subject, an expert in that alone, might well feel not only bewildered but threatened in the face of these new demands. The answer seems to lie in a commonsense response, always realising that the influence of the teacher is limited. The home and the home environment are, and rightly so, the dominant influence in the child's development. I remember only two of my own teachers.

To return to the matter of material: it is in this respect that a feeling of doubt casts its cold shadow. It takes time, very much more than is allowed for, to find and exploit appropriate material, not so challenging that it will produce failure, nor so lightweight that it will produce boredom. It takes time to present a syllabus in an appealing way and too often the energies of a classroom teacher are drained by administration, though who is to say that that is unnecessary? Doubt creeps in where the material is unsatisfactory. Self-questioning is a good exercise, but too much doubt saps confidence and - for a teacher anyway - produces ineffectiveness.

I have a feeling that a classroom teacher should be young or certainly young in heart, or should come to it either early then leave, or come to it late and stay on. It must be difficult to maintain enthusiasm for forty years and cynicism is the enemy of youth. Yet how difficult such a policy would be to put into practice, how difficult it is to satisfy everyone's career hopes, whether realistic or not, how difficult for the individual also to change boats in mid-stream. How refreshing it would be to have sabbaticals, on the university lines, how refreshing to have job sharing, more part-time work, more materials and, above all, more time. Yet the new examinations do offer hope that an individual's skills will be recognised, that success, though by no means guaranteed, will be attainable.

Then perhaps in the classroom we will hear
the surprised laughter of unexpected achievement
the murmur of committed discussion
the quiet turning of pages during engrossed reading
and perhaps we will see
the quick, sharp glance of the pupil who has learned
the upward smile as sensitivity softens the heart
the quick turning of head and eye as argument ebbs and flows.

We do see and hear these things now, most definitely we do, but not frequently enough. It is the classroom teacher who, with the right backing, will generate them.