

Cliff Harris  
Head of Year, Southway  
Comprehensive School;  
Formerly Teacher of  
Social Education

I, along with the others of my generation, experienced an educational provision whose ideological assumptions have been expressed as egalitarian.

Throughout my formative education, and indeed in my subsequent work, the paradigm of contest mobility (Turner, 1960) has been the norm: a system in which education was seen to be meritocratic and aspirations to life's chances mediated through it by individual ability and endeavour. Of course, such a paradigm has always been contaminated by private sector education, but nevertheless the public provision did allow the working classes to become socially mobile, and today, many of them function in positions which would have been inaccessible to them before 1960. Indeed, the education service itself contains a fair proportion of personnel from working class origins.

In a civilised society, contest mobility ought to be the modus operandi, which would include removing from that society anything which sponsors any individual unfairly in relation to another's life chance. Alas, as I reach mid-career in education, I can only perceive on the horizon a complete contradiction of egalitarian principles being asserted through centralisation, man-power and social policy.

A bid for more central control of what goes on in schools, currently an objective for the present Government was predicted by a civil servant in Ranson (1984):

"I see a return to centralisation of a different kind with the centre seeking to determine what goes on in institutions. This is a more fundamental centralisation than we have seen before." (p. 238)

The purpose of such centralisation is:

"to facilitate social control as much as encourage manpower planning." (p. 241)

How this control will be exercised is now much in evidence through course development and systems of assessment readily exemplified by TVEL. Certainly there is a concern that education linked to notions of social mobility should not continue without some intervention. Fear of the social consequences of not intervening centrally were expressed by a Labour Minister of Education in 1971, who said:

"by making continued full-time education the norm, we may be encouraging unrealistic career aspirations among young people." (p. 241)

In Ranson's research, this was echoed by a senior civil servant, who argued that in education:

"there has to be selection because we are beginning to create aspirations which increasingly society cannot match. In some ways, this points to the success of education in contrast to the public mythology which has been created." (p. 241)

and:

"There may be social unrest, but we can cope with the Toxteths. But if we have a highly educated and idle population, we may possibly anticipate more serious social conflict. People must be educated once more to know their place." (p. 241)

It seems I have lived through a unique period in educational history and that my experience and perceptions of what education is about has been affected by a philosophical orientation which has now become unfashionable.

I remain grateful, however, for the opportunity I have enjoyed to aspire beyond 'my place'.

#### References

Ranson, S. (1984) "Towards a Tertiary Tripartism: New codes of Social control and the 17+" In Broadfoot, P.

(ed.) Selection Certification and Control; Lewes, The Falmer Press.

Turner, R.H. (1960) "Sponsored and Contest Mobility and the School System, American Sociological Review, XXV, No. 5, December 1960.

some other measure, I do not know, but one inescapable conclusion may be drawn and that is, in the future everyone will have more leisure time. Whether this greater freedom from work will lead to boredom and the seeds of a future revolution or a more meaningful and fulfilling time on earth, only time will show. However, it does mean that schools would be failing to anticipate the future needs of their pupils if they did not 'educate them for leisure'. This phrase is now an old one, in educational terms, but one which will need to be examined more and more closely as this century draws to its close. Our aim must be to produce a complete person, for such a person has no need to be told how to fill her or his leisure time. Such a person has retained throughout life, the joy and excitement of being alive, intellectual curiosity and the ever present wonder of nature which far exceeds any vacuum space created by leisure.

Thirdly, more than ever before, there is a need for teachers to encourage and develop an enquiring mind, one which will ask questions and not easily accept answers without subjecting them to intense scrutiny. The pupils must become self reliant and be able to seek out truth by research and observation. Their minds must never be able to be captured by clever slogans, written or repeated ad nauseam. Their knowledge must include the religious and political forces of the world. However, it is not for school to teach ideologies but to ensure their pupils' awareness of the existence of these forces. Ours is fast becoming a participating society and it is necessary for our pupils to take their place in that society and be sensitive to and sympathetic of all people making up its structure.

Nowhere have I mentioned a subject's syllabus; this is the concern of the curriculum planners, not mine at this time, but, what is essential to say, is that every subject is important in its own right. A pupil must aim for excellence in every subject and its creation must bring the same reward whether it be an English essay, Foreign Language prose, a piece of pottery or a beautifully made coffee table. We must break down the attitude that that which can be written about and examined is of greater value than that which is made ... but this is another question!