

A rough diamond's true value cannot be decided until it has been polished. Education is the polish which has to be applied to the human rough diamond. The true value of many of our city children is hidden by the 'roughness' caused by the numerous problems they have to face in their daily lives. The message to the city school is clearly, "get polishing".

Every school has its problems, many of which are relative to its physical situation. It is an ironical but true fact that the more problems a school has to face up to then the more opportunities are provided to achieve the rewards offered by solving them. Unfortunately all too often the problems are never-ending and no sooner is one solved by the teacher than another presents itself. A city school therefore seems to be offered an unending supply of sources for rewards and so the head and staff must have devotion, patience and perseverance above the levels expected from the average teacher. Situations arise each day which challenge their skills and confidence. The weaker teachers often struggle, achieve less and are more vulnerable than they would be in an average school. The children's special needs seek out their professional weaknesses, the skills required are so demanding. Discipline, lesson planning, classroom technique and determination all require that extra 'something' in the city school. On the other hand the stronger teachers are at their most successful in the city's most deprived areas although they often don't realise their success at the time, because it is not necessarily shown as an academic achievement. The improvement in a child's social behaviour can be the result of a steady 'drip feed' provided by his teacher over many months which has gradually brought about a change in attitude. The work of the teacher in non-academic areas is of vital importance and yet is so often unseen and unrecorded, whereas examination results show themselves so clearly on paper. It should be compulsory for all teachers to have to spend at least one year out of the first five years of their teaching careers, working in a city school. They would all learn the true meaning of 'teaching' and would return to their own schools strengthened for the future.

Challenging situations present themselves nearly every day, created almost always by home or area circumstances. Academic progress is frequently hindered by a lack of the basic knowledge of life, the children arrive at school unprepared to absorb the primary techniques which are the basis for the learning process. This is sometimes caused by a total lack of interest by the parents in education, whilst all too frequently the adults within the family have no self-confidence or ambition because of their own lack of achievement during their school days or later on in employment or unemployment. When they were young they probably had a fear or hatred of school themselves and it takes a great deal of patience and effort on the part of school to build up sufficient trust and confidence to enable them to discuss their children's, or often their own, problems with the head teacher. Bridge building is an essential part of our function. The other environmental pressures on the inner city school are well known and numerous. They must be faced up to and overcome by staff and pupils alike. The distress and hardship caused by poverty is all too obvious. Over three quarters of the children receive free school meals, which is the most reliable indicator of the genuine low income families. We are reassured that at least once a day they can enjoy a good hot meal, but will this continue to be the fact when free meals are no longer provided? I personally doubt it. Some families have an aversion to any form of authority. School can soon overcome this but when the aim of the exercise is to project the fact that an excellent community policeman is a friend to all, much more effort and persuasion is required. Parental control and attitudes to discipline vary considerably and are frequently inconsistent. All too often the child gets its own way at home and expects the same treatment at school, so we have yet another problem facing us. Emotional problems can be traced back to various sources. Domestic flare-ups involving arguments and violence, the pressures and restraints imposed by living in multi-storey blocks of flats, and differences of opinion with their peers whilst out at play in the evening are typical reasons why a child may be upset at school. We must always ask ourselves why is he frightened, withdrawn, aggressive, tearful, etc. and then, when we think we have found the answer, try to find a solution to the cause, in the meantime compensating in whatever ways we can to alleviate the child's distress.

It is fortunate that our rewards are many. An upset child responding with a smile can fill your heart with joy. A light fingered shoplifter "going straight", a fighter losing his aggression, a withdrawn child gaining confidence, a hungry child relishing a school meal, a parent coming to school for the first time to discuss a problem, a child with learning difficulties reading his first words or understanding how to solve a previously insurmountable task are but a few examples of how our difficult job is made worthwhile. Yes, the rewards are there, and they are most welcome.

The cost of polishing our city diamonds is great, for many of them are bruised and damaged, and need much specialist work on them to bring out their value. We need more polishers and extra polish if we are to succeed in our task, but who can provide them? Frustrations abound. Many of the difficulties are deep rooted

and take patience and determination, as well as individual attention, to overcome. No-one can offer us a complete solution but we do need extra help. We receive the same financial allowance as a school in the wealthiest part of the city, where parents can double or treble the capitation total by their own efforts. We cannot raise even an extra quarter of our allowance. The inner city school should be given extra financial help to compensate for this deficiency. The Educational Priority Area schools provision should be reviewed and the cash released distributed to schools in deprived areas as finance for school equipment and not to supplement teachers' salaries. Many E.P.A. schools are now in relatively wealthy areas as the environmental conditions which existed when they were established in 1972 have since improved considerably. More teachers are required in order to substantially reduce class sizes in socially deprived areas, for the vast majority of children who experience learning difficulties are to be found amongst our pupils. We do get some extra compensatory staff and their assistance is of immense value and greatly appreciated, but they cannot be used to reduce class sizes.

The city school head has to be an adaptable person. He must be primarily an educationist but he must also expect to be a social worker, marriage guidance counsellor, child guidance officer, psychologist, doctor, hair hygiene nurse, financial juggler, community worker, youth worker and detective, etc. as well, if the situation demands it. He must be prepared to take on difficult, unpleasant or even seemingly impossible tasks. He must continually encourage his team of polishers to persevere with their work, for often they have great difficulty in removing the roughness their diamonds have accumulated within their short lives. However, we must never give up in despair, for every one of our little gems has a value. Our task is to find it, expose it, and then teach the child to use it for his own and the community's benefit.