



Teaching Tomorrow

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This book offers a viable and attractive alternative to school-based teaching. It holds that with the wealth of resources already available and so many others in the offing, prospects for British education have never been so promising. But, as will be seen in this book's early chapters, these prospects will never be realised until there is a willingness on the part of the nation as a whole and the educational establishment in particular to consider revolutionary change. To

date there has been little sign of such willingness.

For instance one such revolutionary change, which would be resisted in many interested quarters, would entail the demise of the school as we know it today. But that demise is anticipated in *Teaching Tomorrow* where an alternative system, fully described and substantiated, is proposed. So, as a lead-in to the book, its short *Preface* is reprinted below, followed by an extract from the book itself.

Preface: The Institution

There is always danger in seeking to replace one of society's firmly established institutions with one that is radically different and largely untried. There is particular danger in proposing that the institution of school be jettisoned in favour of a family-based approach to the education of children: an approach which would mean that children would not attend any school-like assembly until they had passed their fourteenth birthday.

The danger is not, hopefully, that the proposer will be hanged, drawn and quartered for dissidence, but that in making criticism of school as an institution in society it might be read that it is individual pupils, parents or teachers who are under surveillance. That is not so. The school as a concept, in this case as a way of educating children, can be criticised over and above the people involved in its working. In the same way the hospital, prison or church can be rigorously scrutinised without detracting from the service provided by doctors, nurses, governors, warders, clergy and lay preachers. Similarly, no criticism of individuals or groups in schools or colleges is

intended here. As one who taught in primary, secondary and higher education for 32 years, I know how conscientious teachers are, how fully many parents support them, and how hard most children work. The point being made in this book is that if the institution were replaced, all this energy might be better used and the sum of human happiness increased.

Nor is it claimed that nothing is being done to promote the institution. Money is poured in: inspectors are appointed, class sizes are reduced, in-service training is given, the curriculum is revised, the importance of literacy is emphasised, Green Papers are distributed and computers are purchased by the truckload. The trouble is that this money might well be wasted unless the institution itself is examined rigorously. At the same time viable alternatives to the school could be considered, tried and tested. It is unfortunate that, as yet, there seems little inclination at a high level to look seriously and dispassionately at really radical alternatives despite worrying developments in various parts of our century-old school-based system.

The most cursory reading of any issue of *The Times Educational Supplement* (Britain's leading newspaper dedicated to education) will indicate unease in many fields at every level. But the really worrying aspect is that most of the issues raised have been around for decades and were familiar to teachers such as myself who began work in the 1950s. For instance:

- Teacher shortages and problems with recruitment.
- Teacher-dissatisfaction not only with the amount of salary paid but with the salary structure and the way money is allocated.
- Concern about literacy levels and uncertainty and argument about ways of teaching children to read.
- Concern that schools which get a 'bad name' often get worse because of that naming and the tendency of parents and teachers to avoid those schools.
- Concern about truancy levels.
- Teacher-anxiety about inspection systems and the effects inspection can have on the professional status of teachers as a whole.
- Concern that many parents never visit schools to discuss their children's progress and that these parents are often the ones it would be most helpful to see.
- Knowledge of the wide variation in educability levels at infant school age.
- Knowledge that parental help can enhance a child's learning.
- Awareness of the special needs of pupils and teachers working in socially-deprived areas, both urban and rural.
- Realisation that life-enriching non-examination subjects in examinations such as the old School and Higher School Certificates, Matriculation, 'O' and 'A' level G.C.E., C.S.E., and the highly

unpopular 11 plus, suffered because they were either not set, or not entered for, or not sought (on certificate) by prospective employers or institutions of further education.

- Knowledge of the importance of citizenship in a child's education.
- Awareness of the lack of physical resources in schools.

Also worrying is the fact that despite the passing of fifty or a hundred years and the employment of a small army of relatively highly-paid civil servants, politicians, academics, inspectors and advisors, these problems are still with us – some have got worse – and that many children are losing out as a consequence. In fact, as with disputes in such areas as methods of teaching reading, setting and streaming, much seems to go round in a circle and then start all over again. This can breed cynicism, indifference or despair.

Perhaps it is simply common sense which is lacking. Perhaps it does not need a series of committees, green papers, or a bevy of surveys to point out much of what is wrong. Any intelligent, observant, caring parent or classroom teacher can see where the difficulties lie and what causes them. And their 'on the spot' suggestions for remedies are likely to be as efficacious as those of the more distantly placed, deep-probing, slow-working experts.

We hope you enjoyed these extracts from
Teaching Tomorrow.

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John's other books, visit

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