

Dear Robert,

This statement will tend to be personal and biographical as my feelings and beliefs about education are a function of my experience and are inseparable from my personality. I had a very strict Christian upbringing

and although I rejected this faith in adolescence I have been left with a strong belief in Christian philosophy and principles but without any religious convictions. These values have always influenced my educational practice which I have tried to base on an ethic of love and humanity. Intellectual education is not enough. Emotions and feelings are within my educational territory. I am an idealist and an optimist. I believe in striving for an ideal goal but I am prepared to compromise and be pragmatic.

I can remember, quite clearly, as a young teacher, fresh out of college, looking at my Headmaster, his balding grey head, his gown and his stick. I thought "I never want to be a Headteacher" and yet here I am, twenty five years later, in that very position. I do not think that I have "sold my soul" as my fundamental concerns about authority have remained and I still feel as though I am swimming against the tide. My values and beliefs still determine



my actions.

This brings me to my choice of literature for my portrait ~

THE

BEANO

BOOK

~ in simple terms school education is for and about children and should be fun. One of the main concerns I have about much educational practice is the great distance which so often exists between educational management and the children they serve. They sometimes each appear as if from different worlds, with different cultural values, different emotions, feelings and desires. Each puts on a facade of behaviours to impress or influence the other; the educators to impose and control and the children to perform to expectations. The whole institution can become a pretence, an edifice of dramaturgy, denying the real world.

I believe that the process of schooling for children should be honest, a mutual experience, a pleasure shared, an empathetic understanding of each others' problems.

Paper mountains of policies, reports and systems are created by education-
alists to explain schools' philosophies and practice; these often



bear little resemblance with practice in the classroom and reveal little of what actually happens between teachers and pupils. Few teachers can afford the tidy luxury of running classrooms which comply with theory or ideology. Teaching must be pragmatic. The only people who really know what happens in schools, who can really tell a good teacher from a poor one, who can really recognise good practice, are the pupils, and they are usually the least consulted.



The way in which the curriculum is delivered must always be a fundamental concern. I was taught at school to hate maths. I was taught maths on the "terror" principle. I gained an "O" level in maths but have avoided the subject like the plague ever since. All the gaps and weaknesses which exist in my own education are

in those areas where I was taught to hate, fear or be bored by a subject by a bullying, sarcastic or insensitive teacher. Those subjects I was taught to enjoy, by enthusiastic and inspiring teachers have been the dominating and central experiences of my

life. It has always seemed to me to be pointless, if not negative to teach by fear. Fear can only create hostility and breed failure. Too many pupils in our schools are taught to reject their education because it is presented to them as an unpleasant chore, imposed by an authority who treats them as second-class citizens who can only achieve status by exam results. Ironically those who so reject their education are often those with the greatest need.

Education should be presented as a fundamental pleasure,

a lifelong activity to be enjoyed for its own sake by those who choose to participate. Too often

it is offered like nasty medicine which will do children good, like a

cure for which the disease has not yet been discovered. Any child involved in an activity and enjoying himself is learning.

Those qualities of a person's learning which can be carefully measured are not necessarily the most important, the final test of education is what a person is, not what he knows.

Finally, I think I am expected to express an opinion about corporal punishment. When I was appointed as a deputy head in a large, tough all boys secondary school in 1974,

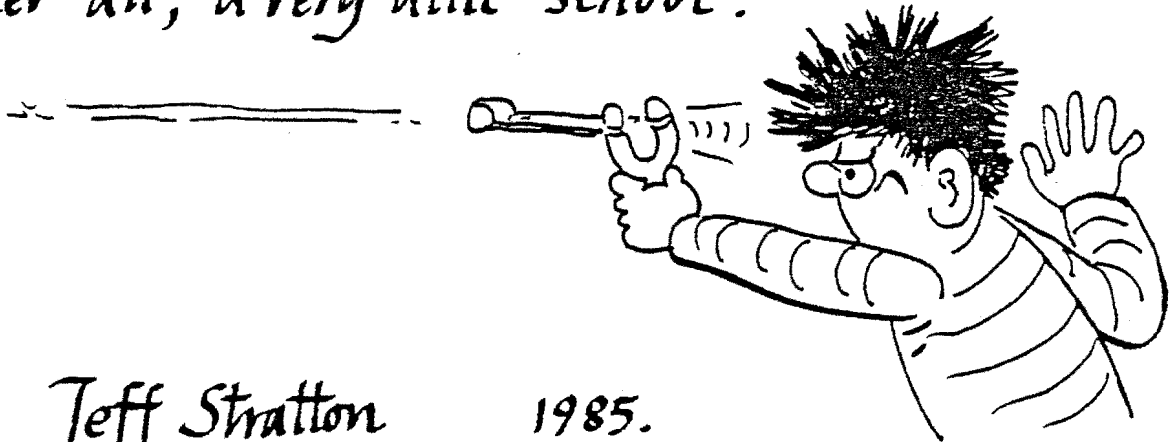


responsible for discipline, I soon discovered that corporal punishment was not educationally viable. It had been used mainly to support inadequate teachers (i.e. punishing children for teachers' failures). In classrooms in which the teachers knew their jobs it was never required. It still surprises me that sensible and intellectual educators still wish to retain it. The whole concept of controlling behaviour by fear and pain in an educational setting is anathema to me. Children should be taught concepts of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, right and wrong, morality, - by example, by debate, by experience, by advice and by negotiation with each other, with teachers and with their parents. Corporal punishment is always negative in its effect as it only superficially modifies behaviour and imparts the message that "good behaviour" (as defined by authority) can only be imposed by fear. When authority embraces painful punishments it confers respectability on them and renders physical cruelty legitimate. No exemplary authority ought to be identified in young minds with the power to inflict pain. Even if children could be "tamed" by the fear of hurt the ends would not justify the means. Surely the practice of a school should attempt to emulate an ideal society, rather than one dependent on repression. Corporal punishment can only be of use in a school which aims

to keep the enemy in place while they are on the premises. In all other circumstances it is counter productive. It makes anti-heroes out of troublesome children. It promotes resentment, anger and fear. It is like painting over rust, disguising symptoms without tackling the cause. It tends to inflict further punishment on those children who are already victims of circumstances beyond their control.

As an idealist I have tried to pursue the goal of a school without any punishment. As a pragmatist I have achieved a well ordered school without corporal punishment and, in fact, with very little punishment at all.

"Ah well" the sceptics will say "it is after all, a very little school."



Jeff Stratton

1985.