Zambezia (1977), **5**, (ii).

CONFLICTS AND COMPROMISES IN EDUCATION*

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WHEN I BEGAN incubating ideas for this lecture some months ago I happened to pick up a copy of Arnold Bennett's *Clayhanger*. My subconscious mind must have been mulling over the lecture-topic ideas instead of concentrating fully on the book, because the following passage almost leapt out of the page at me. It describes Edwin Clayhanger, hero of the book, at the point when he had just completed his schooling:

> The various agencies which society had placed at the disposal of a parent had been at work for at least a decade in order to equip him for this very day when he should step into the world . . . Knowledge was admittedly the armour and the weapon of one about to try conclusions with the world, and many people for many years had been engaged in providing Edwin with knowledge. He had received in fact a 'good education' — or even, some said, a thoroughly sound education — assuredly as complete an equipment of knowledge as could be attained in the country. He knew, however, nothing of natural history and in particular of himself, of the mechanisms of the body and mind through which his soul had to express and fulfil itself. As yet not one word about either physiology or psychology had ever been breathed to him, nor had it ever occurred to anyone that such information was needful.

This passage set me wondering about how true the situation described nearly seventy years ago by Bennett is of people leaving school today. That is, how well does present-day education equip the young for their post-school life? Could it be, perhaps that they, too, are in possession of as 'complete an equipment of knowledge as can be obtained' and yet be inadequately prepared for the real world which they will encounter? It was but a short step from this speculation to identifying a number of important questions about education, which ought to be asked frequently, in any age, and in any place where education is publicly provided. Although the questions might remain the same, the answers would probably vary substantially in different periods of time, if they have been honestly given. This circumstance is probably the foundation of a story told about an eminent professor of education in a great American university. A woman who had been out of teaching a number of years to raise a family decided that she would take a refresher course at her old university before resuming her career, and found the same professor in charge. At the end of the course she was most surprised to find that the examination questions were the same ones that she had answered

*An inaugural lecture delivered before the University of Rhodesia on 11 August 1977.

many years earlier. Rather gleefully, once she had seen her name on the pass list, she tackled the professor about it. His solemn reply was: 'Madam, in education it is not the questions which change, but the answers . . .'

Here, then, are some of the unchanging questions which, as suggested above, should be frequently asked about education and answered with honesty and insight. Firstly, what is it expected, or intended, that the educational provision will do for its pupils and its providers? Secondly, how closely does the educational provision achieve these intentions? In fact, is there any conflict between the expectation and the realization? By implication, at least, part of the intention of the schooling which Edwin Clayhanger received was that he should be equipped with knowledge, on the assumption that knowledge, *per se*, would be sufficient to enable him to 'try conclusions with the world'. His academic success at school demonstrated that he had indeed, to the satisfaction of the school, acquired the knowledge which it offered. So on the face of it there was no conflict between the expectation and the realization. Obviously, then, more questions are needed, since it can scarcely be doubted that in Edwin's case there was conflict somewhere.

A third question worthy of consideration would be: What ought education to be doing for its pupils and its providers? With this question we are coming into the realms of both educational philosophy and curriculum theory, and are confronted with very fundamental issues indeed. Looking again at Bennett, we clearly see that he thought that education ought to have equipped Edwin, with knowledge certainly, but with knowledge of a different sort from that which he actually gained, that is, knowledge about his own environment and the people in it and, above all, about himself, his own physiology, insight into his own motives, interests and so on; in Bennett's words,

> natural history, and in particular of himself, of the mechanisms of the body and mind through which his soul had to express itself. As yet not one word about either physiology or psychology had ever been breathed to him, nor had it occurred to anyone that such information was needful . . .

While Bennett's own analysis of what education ought to have done for Edwin is not necessarily the best one, nevertheless it does illustrate the sort of thing I had in mind when selecting the topic of this lecture. Here indeed is a place where there can be conflict, between the basic intentions and expectations of the providers of education and what is actually needed by both pupils and the community which provides the education.

A further question to add to our list is how can educational provision be planned and structured to cater for the real needs of pupil and society? It is here that the area of compromise comes in. As I hope to show, education is increasingly expected to achieve conflicting objectives, for both groups and individuals, but it cannot be all things to all men (or women, or children) and it becomes largely the art of the possible, using compromise to reduce conflict. It is time that we looked at some less fictional examples of possible conflicts between educational expectations, realities, achievements

and provisions. Perhaps we may thus gain further insight into the processes at work and identify considerations essential in ensuring that our own educational provision is as free of conflicts as possible, through appropriate analysis of what education should achieve and what practical compromises may be necessary to achieve it.

Throughout history, the reasons for making educational provision beyond that found informally in the family and local community have been many. For example, among Australian Aboriginal groups it was customary to designate one man who taught boys between certain ages the very difficult skills of hunting with boomerangs and spears, and of tracking and capturing snakes and water creatures. The techniques of fighting, both aggressive and defensive, were also included. Life was so precarious in the harsh Australian countryside that it was essential for the physical survival of the individual and the group that all boys be schooled by an acknowledged expert. It was too important to be left to chance. So education here was intended to ensure survival; as long as it achieved this, there was no conflict. The need is easily identified, easily filled and the effectiveness of it easily assessed. Survival has been an important basis for many other informal, community-organized forms of education. The survival need not always be physical but spiritual, or the survival of the group through the preservation of its social structure, traditions, religious beliefs and similar intangibles, and such community education systems exist throughout the world and have existed for thousands of years (Boyd, 1964; Butts, 1955). Social anthropologists such as Mead (1942, 1943) and Benedict (1935) have studied and recorded such educational processes. The purpose was survival of the group and its method was to ensure that all young people knew and would accept the traditional ways. Essentially such educational provision was conservative in nature and intent. It was education to retain the existing community structure without change. Any deviation was socially unacceptable and threatened the survival of the community. And indeed, such communities preserved their traditional ways almost intact often for hundreds of years, with no real conflict between purposes and achievement, though there may well have been conflict within individuals, especially those who found it difficult to conform.

It would be interesting to look at the purposes of education which some influential educational philosophers have identified, to illustrate the growing complexity of expectation from education without, it would seem, parallel restructuring of educational provision to achieve the expectations. Notice that virtually all of them are analysed in terms of what the community or the state requires of its citizens, accompanied by the recognition that the community or state must thus make provision to ensure that its young are prepared for the sort of citizenship that is desired. For example Plato in his *Republic* says, that every person, irrespective of sex and social rank, should receive the training which would enable him to play the part in the state for which he would be best fitted. Each occupation group would receive an education to develop the particular aspect of its 'soul' which was most needed.

For the common people it would be temperance; for soldiers, courage; for governors, wisdom. The quality of the state depended upon the kind of education received by its component groups. A not dissimilar view is offered today by Young (1958). Notice that the earlier views presuppose that the class structure is fixed and social mobility between them negligible. This is in marked contrast to the more recent concept that education can be a promoter of social mobility and, paradoxically, egalitarianism. Aristostle in his *Politics* shifted the emphasis to some extent to include personal fulfilment as well. He maintained that education should train body, character, and intellect to ensure both the well-being of the state and the right enjoyment of leisure. Calvin (in Boyd, 1964) was much more down-to-earth. Education, for him, was necessary to secure public administration, to sustain the Church unharmed and to maintain humanity among men.

Much nearer to home, at least in time, President Conant of Harvard (in James, 1951) in the late 1940s put forward a view rather similar to the one offered by John Milton over two centuries previously, that there should be (in Milton's words) a 'complete and generous education, that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously all the offices, both public and private, of peace and war'. Conant's translation of Milton reads: 'a common core of general education which will unite in one cultural pattern the future carpenter, factory worker, bishop, lawyer, doctor, sales-manager, professor and garage mechanic'. The then High Master of the Manchester Grammar School, Sir Eric James (1951, p.34), takes serious issue with Conat because, he says, such aims are impossible to implement; there can be no educational compromise which can achieve these conflicting aims:

> . . . Professor Conant . . . is simply asking for the impossible. The demand for such a common culture rests either on an altogether over-optimistic belief in the educability of the majority that is certainly not justified by experience or on a willingness to surrender the highest standards of taste and judgement to the incessant demands of mediocrity.

So here is conflict, not only within the defined aims, but between definers of those aims who are men of considerable eminence and influence in educational matters.

There are many other attempts at analysis of educational aims, but I am afraid we will have to leave them here, with perhaps the final comment that the neatest of definitions is offered by Pickering, a medical academic (1969, p.28), who states that education is 'the preparation and training of young people for the problems, the tasks and leisure as these exist today and can be foreseen tomorrow.' This view is, of course, deceptively simple, but it has the merit of providing guide-lines for analysing existing educational provision in a variety of different historical and environmental circumstances. I myself would like to add a phrase such as 'taking due account of the human and financial resources available'. Idealism is excellent, but if not tempered with realism leads inevitably to conflict, and possibly inappropriate compromises made as a result of *force majeure* rather than intelligent planning.

The more one looks at existing contemporary education systems, especially in the more established countries of the world, the more one realizes that they have just grown out of what went before, the direction most obviously taken being one of expansion of size and scope rather than of fundamental change. It follows that the original purposes for which that education was established have been taken over as well, often without it being realized what those purposes were. This is not necessarily a bad thing since evolution is usually a less damaging process than revolution and human institutions are usually, like humans themselves, capable of considerable adaptation. But all too often, and for compelling reasons, the expansion and adaptation do not reflect the changing requirements of education, and a consensus on what those are and how to achieve them is near impossible. This is partly because of the sheer size and complexity of the existing situation. You cannot just shut down educational systems for a few years and start from scratch; inertia carries them on. Then, too, it is very difficult to effect fundamental change in people already working in an existing system (in our case mainly teachers and administrators) whose whole concept of a system and their place within it have become deeply entrenched. Very few of us have that sort of flexibility and courage, and there is the added danger that the results of extensive and speedy change, unless it is based on rigorous research, may be worse than the original. A further barrier to radical change is the fact that the clients of the education system (parents, employers and even pupils) resist change because of the feelings of insecurity which it breeds in them, on the principle that the devil you know is better than the devil that you do not know. The result is that purposes for which the education system was originally established become inadequate and inappropriate for a subsequent era, but the system based on them remains substantially the same.

Here, then, is a major area of conflict in education, a conflict between out-dated and contemporary purposes which, it is often alleged, produces an out-dated education system. An example *par excellence* here (Price, 1970) is that of traditional Chinese education, which attained a very high level of academicism over 2 000 years ago, initially to ensure a literate priestly, mercantile and administrative class of people. The content then became crystallized and remained an end in itself, and probably in turn crystallized the structure of society until revolution in this century created conditions, as well as an obvious need, for change. Few other systems remained as static as the Chinese one did. Most Western European systems while still retaining visible traces of their élitist and academic origins are today reasonably near to serving the purposes which the community thinks they should serve. In general, one can say that most advanced countries have highly developed systems with full-time schooling available for all young people, often up to eighteen years or more, and fairly extensive opportunities for vocational and higher education, though one could still often level the accusation implicit in the Clayhanger excerpt—that they may have much knowledge but are not necessarily equipped for the world in which they will live. Most educational planners in such countries think that changes and compromises

are necessary to achieve valid educational purposes. D'Aeth (1975, p. 56) summarizes them as follows:

> more 'democratization' of the educational system, more emphasis on 'learning' as opposed to 'teaching', and the development of an extensive and flexible range of opportunities to provide for 'recurrent edution' throughout the life span. Increasingly in the advanced countries development is being thought of in terms of maturing a system, rather than of continued expansion; and highly institutionalized systems of education, with large bureaucratic administrations, are slow in responding to changing circumstances.

Despite the recent extension and change in such sophisticated systems, there are many outspoken critics who urge that a far more fundamental overhaul of educational provision is necessary. Present systems, they say, are manifestly not producing people with the personal and intellectual qualities and skills (in contrast to knowledge) which are essential for people who will live in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. They allege that the sorts of intellectual activities required of pupils, and the classroom approaches used, all too often fail to produce people with critical and enquiring minds, who still retain their curiosity in the world around them. Along with this goes the further allegation that a great deal of the actual content of what was learned is lost, as soon as school is over, mainly because it was never seen as having any real relevance in the first place. These points of view are epitomized in books often with dramatic titles, by, for example, Holt (1969) in *How Children Fail*, Illich (1973 a) in *De-Schooling Society*, and Postman and Weingartner (1971) in *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*. They all, as do many others, in their various ways, point to conflicts between intended, even expected, achievement and actual achievement in the school.

It is worthwhile looking at Postman and Weingartner's thesis in more detail to illustrate the point. They start off by identifying two major assumptions about society: firstly that its survival is threatened by an increasing number of unprecedented and so far unsolved problems, such as pollution, exhaustion of the world's material resources, explosive population increase, increasing rates of crime and mental ill-health; at the same time the increasing possibilities of mischievously controlling and manipulating people, individually and in groups, facilitated by the communication revolution and greatly increased knowledge of group and mass psychology, are facts of life. Their second assumption is that something can be done both to solve the problems and to reduce the potential for the abuse of power over people. A major agent for preparing people for the solution of the problems lies in the sort of education provided. They support their arguments by quoting a number of influential contempory thinkers, including McLuhan, who holds that what is currently provided is irrelevant, Wiener, who holds that it shields children from reality, Gardner, who holds that it educates for obsolescence, Bruner, who holds that it does not develop intelligence, Holt, who holds that it is based on fear, Rogers,, who holds that it avoids the promotion of significant learning, Goodman, who holds that it induces alienation, and Friedenburg, who holds that it punishes creativity and independence (p. 13). As

an aside, it is interesting, and probably significant, that most of these critics are not 'educators' in the formal sense.

The blame for the alleged ineffectiveness of highly expensive, complex and sophisticated education systems lies in many areas, including the classroom climate and the teaching techniques all too often used. They say, as does McLuhan, that the 'medium is the message', and the messages that pupils get from most classrooms are the ones itemized above, even though the teachers had hoped, and planned for significantly different 'messages', or 'learning' to be achieved. Postman and Weingartner propose that the changes (or, in our terms, compromises) needed must be in both the teachers themselves and in the organization in which they work. Teachers, for example, must be shaken out of their existing ruts and challenged to change. Some of the rather bizarre solutions they propose (pp. 134-7) are, for example:

(i) there should be a five year moratorium on all textbooks;
(ii) teachers should be randomly assigned to teaching subjects;
(iii) all teachers should be limited to three sentences imparting information, and fifteen questions per lesson, none of the questions to be ones to which they themselves know the answers;
(iv) all teachers should be required to take a test, prepared by their pupils, on what the pupils know;
(v) classes should be optional and a teacher's cheque should be withheld if students do not show interest in going to that teacher's classes during the next month;
(vi) all teachers should be given one year's leave of absence in every four, in order to work in another field.

I suspect they had their tongues firmly in their cheeks when making some of the proposals. But the three-way conflicts between the acknowledged purposes for which the education is provided, the purposes which the real world demands, and the actual achievement of the educational provision are not thereby diminished, and there is, in this latter quarter of the twentieth century, great need for extensive and imaginative compromise. Such considerations are not irrelevant to this country, or indeed to any country of whatever degree of educational and industrial sophistication.

To summarize the argument up to this point, conflicts in education arise, firstly when the hopes and expectations of the educational providers and recipients do not coincide with what is actually achieved by the educational provision. Secondly they arise when what education ought to be achieving for the community is at variance with what it is hoped it will achieve, that is when the real educational needs of the community have not been clearly analysed. Thirdly, conflicts can arise when the community expects from its educational provision benefits which it cannot in fact provide. Educational provision for any community at any time will only be as effective as the quality of the analysis of the community's real requirements of education, which in turn must be catered for within the realities of the available resources, human, material, financial and methodological.

I should now like to pursue further the implications inherent in books such as that by Postman and Weingartner, that the solution to much of society's ills lies in the hands of the educators and the formal provision of schooling. It is important here to look at some of the aims and expectations of educational provision in developing countries in the last decade or two. It is largely a story of disappointed hopes, at least as far as the idea is concerned that educational provision is a panacea for all the problems of a developing country which is wanting to rush headlong into a twentieth century economy. In many such countries there existed a relatively limited educational structure designed initially, if it was designed at all, to provide potential employees to serve the colonial administration at various levels. The intention was generally not to prepare the country's inhabitants for a full and independent role in the world in the foreseeable future. In Zaire, to take an extreme example, there were fewer than thirty Congolese university graduates to administer twenty million people in a country the size of Belgium and France combined. In general, such education as there was for the indigenous peoples tended to be a close copy of that of the colonial power. The influence of the traditional British grammar school structure is obvious in the African secondary school system in this country. This is not to imply that there is not a place for such a grammar school type of education: I am merely illustrating the imported nature of school systems and, by implication their purposes, which have come from the best of intentions and often with great success in terms of what they were trying to achieve.

Newly independent countries especially those in South America and Africa, put great pressure on their political leaders to provide universal free schooling, at least at the elementary level, in order to ensure fast and effective economic and social development. Not only the leaders of the newly-developing countries themselves assumed that more educational provision of the traditional variety would promote rapid, beneficial and extensive change in the lives of the people. Major industrial powers anxious to assist economic development, and international agencies such as those of the United Nations, assumed the same thing. Plans for the development of education usually included an analysis of things which it was expected to achieve, often idealistically, though usually with great humanity. It was anticipated that education would lead to economic growth and hence improve the general standard of living through better employment possibilities. It would enable individuals and their communities to live richer, healthier lives, and thus to promote beneficial change in the communities. The development of the skills, technical and social, needed for life in a westernized society would lead to the development of such a society. A more equitable social structure should follow, thus reducing tensions and frustrations leading to stability. The key really was the relationship between educational and rapid economic development. Given this, most other things would flow from it, it was thought. Sadly, the reality often failed to live up to expectations. Since the model usually aimed at was a western one, problems of prohibitive costs soon arose even in providing only a minimum of primary schooling for all.

Thus an élitist system tended to develop. The bookish nature of the educational content tended to alienate the young from their families while at the same time produced too few skilled workers and a surplus of academic people. We must not overlook some of the carefully thought-out and persuasive educational programmes based on economic and political realities, such as that of Nyerere (1967) which aimed at the eradication of the capitalist and competitive aspects of education, the inculcation of approved social attitudes, the production of good farmers and the general preparation of children for the kind of life most of them will lead, and not for selection into secondary schools. Disappointingly, even when the strongly persuasive powers available were used to move populations into the collective villages which were central to the educational and political plans, some of the high hopes placed in education have not materialized and the economic situation, especially in the production of food, seems to have deteriorated somewhat.

This is not the place to make any sort of definitive analysis of why education is not, apparently, achieving what was hoped of it in developing countries, or even of what is really needed of it in highly-developed ones. All I am trying to do is to illustrate some areas where the aims and expectations of educational provision are in conflict with both what is being achieved and what, indeed, can be achieved by education. By and large the educational provision actually made is only minimally adapted from provisions made for a different historical time, or different social circumstances. The original purposes conflict with the present ones to such an extent that the results are often not merely disappointing but at times positively retrogressive.

I should like now to be rather more positive in my approach by identifying possible implications for this country, which is in the fortunate position to benefit from experience in other developing countries, as well as other industrialized ones. Here I am largely indebted to D'Aeth (1975). He starts from the premise that any educational provision must take into consideration both human aspirations and the practical realities of the situation. All too often the former were over-emphasized, while too little account was taken of the material and human resources available to achieve them, or even of appropriate techniques for their achievement. By and large the failure of educational provision in developing countries has been the result of an oversimplified approach, of equating education with formal schooling, which in turn was thought to be a direct and major causative factor in economic growth and improvment in social conditions. It is becoming increasingly realized that education must be part of overall planning, industrial, economic, social and political, and not be planned in isolation from all these. He identifies such an overall plan in a developing country as needing to include:

1. overcoming the extensive abject poverty which exists; this will include rural development;
2. improving the physical quality of living, which in turn may improve the social life and freedom within it;
3. providing opportunities for the young for self realization within their own culture (though not necessarily restricted to it);

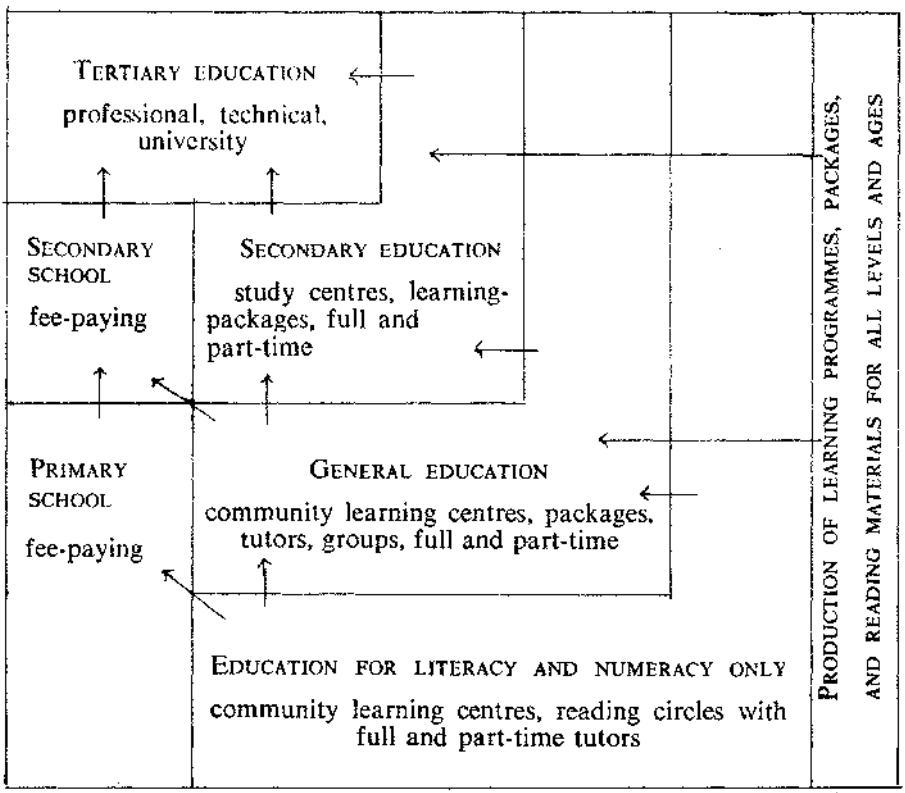
4. providing for the development of the modern sector, which needs people with high level skills, which in turn will create a new élite; education has not only to provide the manpower but also to act as a selection filter into its ranks;
5. ensuring a balanced development between the urban and rural sectors, especially in the matter of food production and population growth (i.e. more food and fewer babies).

He proposes that an education system which was integrated in overall planning would be much more flexible and much more community-orientated than commonly exists at present, and much less examination orientated. He rejects the concept of education being something like a ladder from which very many fall before they reach the top. He suggests that there should be a basic provision of education for literacy for all. This would not attempt to cover a general educational programme. In every community there would be literacy groups, for children of all ages and available to all adults. A great deal of the tuition here would be undertaken by local tutors, sometimes full-time but usually part-time, or voluntary, but supervised and helped by qualified people. Parallel to this must be a continuing supply of reading matter suitable for different age and interest groups, which could incidentally give information on a variety of matters (such as health and agriculture) which in turn could improve the quality of life. Reading circles would remain a feature of community lives so that literacy would be continuously improved and strengthened. Those who have achieved a sufficient level of literacy, and who are sufficiently motivated to do so, would have access on a full or part-time basis to a wider, more general education, perhaps in primary schools but probably for some time to come, in less formal community learning centres where learning 'packages' would be available, using self-instructional and mass-media material as well as tutoring and group work. This would, again be available for all ages, and while tests for adequate understanding and achievement would indeed feature, the purpose of the learning would not ultimately be the acquisition of a 'certificate'.

The provision of secondary schooling with a more academic bias (but not exclusively 'bookish' academicism) should be available, again for those with the aspirations and the persistence, as well as the ability, to achieve appropriate levels of general education, a major criterion for admission being motivation and persistence. A variety of entry criteria could be available here, and not the narrow age-criterion and passes in a defined range of subjects as at present. Again, much of the instruction would be 'packaged' self-learning, because the realities of the situation as regards availability of highly-qualified staff and the money to pay them dictate this. Much of the available highly-qualified manpower and resources would be devoted to producing 'packages' which had real relevance as well as appropriately-demanding activities within them. This, then would be the major route, and filter system, into the industrialized sector. Below is a diagrammatic illustration of how D'Aeth's principles could be translated into an overall educational

structure for this country. It attempts to show not only the relationships between the various sectors of the system but also he flexibility of entry methods and the way in which the relatively scarce high-level human resources could be used to the greatest benefit throughout all sectors of the educational structure. Further it attempts to demonstrate how the needs of the individual within his local community as well as the administrative and industrial needs of the country may be catered for.

A PROPOSED EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURE



Such a system of educational provision presents a compromise, a workable one, it is contended, between the human aspirations and practical realities of this and possibly other developing countries. It has something to commend it for developed ones, too. It also reduces conflicts between generations within the family and within and between local communities while allowing for individual and community aspirations to be achieved. Hopefully, it may even reduce the conflict between political aspirations and influences and the right of human beings to choose between alternatives, since, with properly-planned programmes and self-learning techniques the intellectual skills such as judgement and critical analysis can be developed widely in the community, without alienation from one's family.

It would be impertinent of me, especially in a lecture such as this, to imply that I have outlined even a partial blueprint for educational development in this country. Nevertheless it is vitally important at this moment in time in this country that plans for a realistic development of educational provision be made in advance of political change. Such plans must be made in the light of considerations such as those discussed in this paper and in a realization of the need for intelligent compromise in order to achieve valid twentieth and twenty-first century purposes: the preparation and training of young people for the problems, tasks and leisure as these exist today and as they can be foreseen for tomorrow . . . .

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