

Children Choosing

Choosing is difficult. We hear a great deal about 'difficult choices'. Life is made of choices, often mundane, but still with consequences. We grow by learning to make choices and by accepting the result; real life choices in real life situations. Education is by definition a stringent discipline making demands upon young minds. It is a process of helping children as they learn to make choices within their capacity to choose. It requires disciplined persistence, dedication and enthusiasm as they test the various avenues which open with the help of the teacher beside them.

While many teachers are interested in providing choice for children, government insistence upon examination performance has pressured far too many schools to bias their teaching towards training children for national tests. In contrast, education opens the fields of learning to the enquiring mind, ready to enjoy the rigours of choosing. Choosing is imagining the consequences, deciding between alternatives, making decisions, taking risks, and then assuming ownership and responsibility; much the same as in adult life. Training avoids risk or the possibility of unexpected results. It has a clear programme of inputs and outputs in a tightly controlled course of instruction. This results in children who can pass the tests but because learning is not imbedded they lose the superficiality of input and output all too quickly.

Education values growth through learning which enables ever more sophisticated choices in whatever subject discipline the enquiry may lead. It believes that children will be better informed in the traditional subject disciplines and will be confident participants in a democratic society.

The ability to choose depends upon the child's experience which at first may be limited. It is our task as teachers to know the child and to ensure that the choices he or she makes are within their personal capacity to choose. With the support of the teacher children become confident in their choices across the fields of learning, so confident that they eventually venture alone. It is such independence in imaginative endeavour which education seeks to accomplish.

