

submitted to the Department, but even these do not present a true picture unless the variety of subject and level per teacher is also considered. It is within the Department's responsibility and jurisdiction to supervise the efficiency of its teachers, and a re-examination of demands on individuals could be handled even in the present system.

Curriculum

It is ingenuous to discuss curriculum without ever having mentioned the purpose of education itself. But as "my friend" Mr. Jordan says, "In the matter of educational aims it is odd that no satisfactory official statement of such exists in respect to Irish primary education."*

Let us say that the main requirements of a subject should be to make life in this world relevant and life in the next possible. Practically, this may be translated in many ways, but the student should receive a grounding in subject matter, by instruction, through practice. He should also receive stimulation, for education does mean a leading-out, a development and encouragement of individual potential.

But for the teacher on a day-to-day basis, his program is guided by the syllabus which his administration offers, and by the method of evaluation which it prefers. In Ireland, a syllabus is given in each subject, at three levels; junior, intermediate and senior. In effect, the intermediate or senior sections detail texts or areas on which the exams will be given. The result is confining. (Of course, the good teacher anywhere adapts and improvises and encourages as he sees fit, but it helps to have a structure which permits this.)

And the only real method of evaluation is also departmental: the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate examinations. I say real because I never had to submit any kind of cumulative mark for the work done by my students.

The value of administering only two effective exams over a five-or-six year period should be considered. Psychologically, the students tend to relax during non-exam years and to regard material covered then as non-essential or, correspondingly, "stuff" that will be reviewed again. During the exam years, pressure is crushing. Two years ago, when secondary teachers decided not to supervise exams (such supervision is not part of their duties but another salaried short-term post) the journalistic cry was raised "Our children will suffer because the exams were valid." No official reproof was made to emphasize that the education mattered as much as the exam. Again, because the material suggested for the exam could be covered in a year, many schools follow the practice of teaching the same course twice; this may give the student the impression that education is not progressive.**

The structure of such tests, which are overwhelmingly of a problematical rather than an objective nature, should be considered. Objective questions never appear, yet they are adequate for testing factual knowledge. I don't think a long question on parsing proves knowledge of grammar better than a multiple-choice question would. Also, older methods of instruction, based on imitation or memorization, are better suited to impart factual knowledge than to encourage problem-solving. Certainly the exam should test what the student thinks he has learned, and an objective test would more appropriately follow these methods. A combination of short answers and problems would seem more just.

* op. cit., p. 8

** More importance should be placed on school exams; the practice could be begun of the Department requiring passing marks from the schools, before admitting students to the national exam. Of course, departmental exams could be given in every subject each year, which would do more to insure proportioned instruction. Exams which climax a two or three year learning period are more suitable for older students, those whose achievement must be cumulative.