

# EDITORIAL

Special Education provision in Ireland developed largely in the decade of the deceptively short-lived "rising tide that lifted all boats". Even less than ten years ago over 60% of mildly handicapped school leavers were engaged in open employment. In 1983 this figure had dropped to 20%. The recruitment embargo in the civil service has virtually undone the 3% quota scheme for the disabled declared in 1981. Clearly the climate that influenced leavers' programmes in better times is no longer with us and changed circumstances demand appropriate curricular modification.

While the so-called work ethic may be outdated, self respect as a personal life-enhancing commodity has never been more at a premium. Self-respect comes from an awareness that one has something to offer which is valued by society and recognised by appropriate rewards. The challenge of engendering this awareness in leavers' programmes that promotes personal affirmation and optimism as well as a realistic and honest appraisal of imposed limitations is advocated in this issue (McManus). In the context of restricted work opportunities, the creative curriculum components developed by Killard House School, Newtownards (Davidson), point to a community based approach to the challenge of vocational development. The potential for community based co-operatives for providing an "appropriate and supportive work environment" was noted in the recommendations of the Report on *The Crisis of Unemployment* (5.5) reviewed in REACH, 1,1. Developments such as the Clashganna Mills Trust offer much needed hope in the face of official inaction and will be the subject of a future article.

Technical skills can be taught even to severely mentally handicapped persons as has been demonstrated by the work of Bellamy and others at the University of Oregon (see Adams, Fred ed. (1986). *Special Education*. Essex: Councils and Education Press p.186) but such skills are not transferable. Competence in one area does not necessarily mean that everyday life skills are automatically enhanced. Life skills need to be separately and emphatically taught.

In education for life, the role of the arts in developing self-help and self-awareness skills is often undervalued. The Drama Games approach permits training in self-confidence and the capacity to participate in group activities (Dunne). Ultimately the acquisition of such skills may be even more important to the young adult than work experience placement.

The lack of a comprehensive national plan for the post-school needs of young people with disabilities is perhaps the most disturbing fact of these recessionary times. Why has this country not implemented the 1986 EEC Model Code of Positive Action for the vocational training and employment of disabled people? A review of the progress of this recommendation in all member states is due to take place in June 1988. It should be watched for with interest.

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