

Joy! July 2000

Expectations of your youth

MARTIE DU PLESSIS

I asked one of the mentors of Dynamis, Jan Viljoen (an educational psychologist from Pretoria) to help me with some of the questions from home schooling families, such as: How will I know that my child is sufficiently trained to enter higher education? What about matric and after matric? What about further education? Do I do enough?

Jan agreed to give some valuable information of his experiences with the youth. In the next few issues we will focus more in depth on how to prepare our young people for life in South Africa.

“As an educational psychologist dealing with young people for the past 15 years and experiencing their problems first hand, I can safely state that: Although they are under no illusion about the lack of stability and the reduction of prosperity in the country, most young people of today show an astonishingly tough-minded willingness to accept the challenges of the future.”

“Thus, it is quite safe to assume that in spite of everything, young people need us (as responsible adults) to guide them to meet such challenges, not our sympathy for their presumed ‘uncomfortable’ situation. There are still plenty of obstacles to overcome, but if we can harness the strength of our young people, we would be able to

build a country of which we all can be proud.”

“What do our young people actually think?”

“The following is a brief synopsis of the ideas of the young people I have dealt with in recent years. “

“They are understandably polarised on certain issues such as politics, safety, security, future, goals, etc....but amazingly most of them agreed on the following: *“Few will actually leave the country of their own free will; “Most of them distrust the police to protect them from crime; “They all feel that the present school system is not preparing them adequately for the job market; “The majority think that irresponsible actions (such as using drugs) are morally wrong; Quite a number would rather place their trust in the church, than other institutions, especially politicians.*

“It is quite interesting that most of the young people with whom I deal still feel that the way to secure their future is through education, but only a few actually have any confidence in the current educational system. After decades of inferior education, it is not a big surprise that black youth have little trust in the system. But why do the white youth rate it so low?

“There are presently many reasons and therefore I am only going to focus on two of the most important ones:

- 1) “The negative attitude of parents and teachers regarding the present educational system and
- 2) “the lack of career guidance. A staggering number of young people feel the educational system (schools) provides totally

inadequate direction. When they matriculate, they feel they are ill-prepared to study further and to look for and keep a job.

“They feel that they should be exposed to more vocational training, in other words, to be able to do something useful, rather than learning a lot of facts in order to pass a test or exam. They prefer to master skills and avoid the consumption of “useless” facts to please parents or teachers.

“If the teaching of facts (subjects) is not enough to prepare young people, *What should we teach them?*”

“This question is quite difficult to answer and there never is a simple solution.

However, if you can guide a child to become a generalist-specialist and an independent-team player, you could equip him/her with enough skills to deal with the challenges of a future workplace.

“Being a generalist-specialist and an independent-team player seems like nonsense to me... or is it?”

“Although it seems like a contradiction in terms it is actually quite simple. The philosophy behind it all is not to replace an empty mind with facts and knowledge...but to replace a closed mind with an open mind. Thus, the collection, processing and application of information is to serve a particular purpose.

“Therefore to become a generalist-specialist implies the ability to apply your field of expertise within a variety of situations and not to be restricted to your area of functioning alone. To become an independent-team player implies an ability to perform efficiently

with different groups of people when solving different kinds of problems.

“This may seem an impossible goal to achieve, but remember, children are natural learners and problem solvers, to stimulate their interest do not teach them, but be a willing student yourself.”

It does seem as if, even in public schools, it will be more and more the responsibility of the parent to guide the youth towards their destiny. Home schoolers have therefore a greater advantage, for many are doing it already.