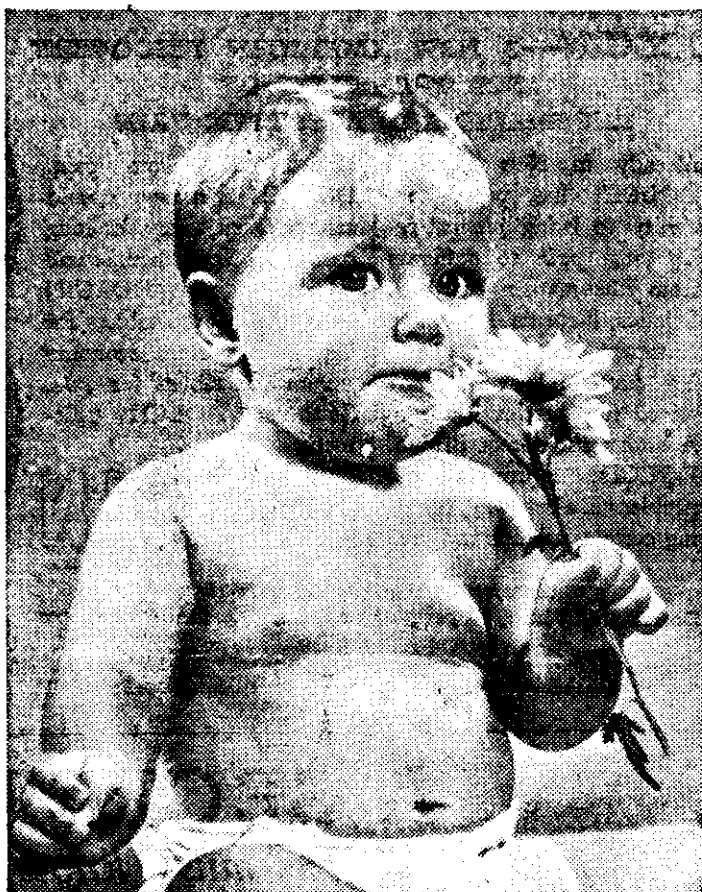




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Tangles and Dilemmas

THE District High School, says H. C. DENT, editor of "The Times" Educational Supplement, is New Zealand's version of the tangle every country has got into over the relative status of teachers. Other educational problems and dilemmas were also discussed by Mr. Dent the other evening in a broadcast heard from the National stations. Excerpts from this talk appear below.

EIGHTEEN days, which is all I have had in New Zealand, is, of course, not nearly long enough to get under the skin of a country's educational system. All I can pretend to give you is a few impressions gleaned in a succession of all too hurried visits. But I must say how pleasantly impressed I have been by the schools I've visited. I've spent some time in 18 of them; mainly High Schools and District High Schools, but also some Primary and three Intermediate Schools . . .

I felt quite at home in your newer school buildings. Their layout, architecture and equipment are not unlike those we are building in England—and incidentally we have the same profusion of "pre-fabs." You do not perhaps make quite such varied use of colour in interior decoration, and your classroom furniture is generally heavier and more solid. Your wood and metal shops—especially the latter—in the High Schools and District High Schools are more elaborately equipped with machine tools than are most English Secondary Schools, but your home science rooms seem to have rather less in the way of equipment. You have some shocking older buildings; but so have we, with usually far less playing space around them.

The few primary classes I saw gave me the impression that their work is

on more formal lines than in England. While most of their walls were gay with children's drawings, and some with friezes and brightly-coloured prints, I missed the wealth of toys and other teaching material (much of it made by the teachers and the children) which I would find in any good English infants' or junior school; flash cards for reading and numbers, cans and balances for weighing and measuring, grocers' shops, Wendy houses, nature tables, cut-outs, models in clay and plasticine, puppets and so on. I missed, too, the busy but orderly "family" bustle of group and individual activity so typical of our primary schools.

I am told that all these are to be found in New Zealand schools; and also that, as in England, there has recently been among teachers something of a reaction against excess of activity and freedom in the Primary School. That is probably all to the good, for liberty can all too easily deteriorate into license. But from what I have seen and heard I do not think you are in much danger of over-stressing activity and neglecting the formal aspects of Primary education. Your standards in the "three Rs" are, I should say, generally higher than ours.

Your intermediate schools interest me more than any other part of your educational system. They are, I believe, unique. So far as I know, no other country has deliberately created a school

between Primary and Secondary education for the express purpose of diagnosing children's abilities, aptitudes and interests, and so of enabling them to pass on to appropriate forms of Secondary education. I have myself for many years advocated this idea of a diagnostic period, and so you can imagine my excitement at being able to visit schools designed to carry it out.

But I must confess that I am left with something of a sense of disappointment and frustration. For I find among teachers and administrators in New Zealand two divergent—and perhaps mutually exclusive—opinions about the function of the Intermediate School. One is that it should be, as I have suggested, purely a diagnostic school, which will pass on all its pupils after two years into the High School. The other is that, while it should pass on its more intellectually able pupils to High School, it should also act as a finishing



H. C. DENT: "I don't like your grading system"

N.Z. LISTENER, JANUARY 18, 1952.