

## EDUCATION WITH AN 'E'

There is an extraordinary novel called "Gadsby" written by Ernest Vincent Wright in 1939. What is extraordinary is that not one of the fifty thousand words written in the novel contains the letter 'E', which is all the more extraordinary in that the letter 'E' is generally accepted as the most common vowel in the English language. (You may note, for example, that there are 24 usages of the letter 'E' in the previous sentence). The story itself might appear incidental but it does describe the efforts of a small community to revitalise itself through its young people into a dynamic cosmopolitan centre.

There is an even less well-known story called "Gullible's Travails" (not to be confused with the better known "Gulliver's Travels") which tells of an ACE world of gulls, made up of various rankings. There are A gulls who fly over the land, never venturing far, pecking on seeds (often *ex-~~seed~~-ing* demands). There are C gulls who like to fly further out over the sea (eating off '*super-fish-ials*', '*arti-fish-ials*', '*of-fish-ials*' and '*sel-fish*'). Finally there are E gulls, large, strong, noble, quick, able to fly higher, with an eye-sight that can pick out the minutest detail from vast distances. Unlike the human world that grades the beings in descending alphabetical order, which would make A gulls better than E gulls, an E gull is greater than a C gull and A gull.

Into this world flew our hero Gullible – always innocent, at times apparently silly, occasionally overconfident, still inexperienced but wildly enthusiastic. This was a gull that was searching for meaning, truth and new boundaries, wanting to be strong and to soar. This was a world where E gulls dare; this was where A gulls fear to tread.

This is the world that affirms the wise truism that "The last will be first and the first will be last." Education and society in general too often has it the other way round – the first are the only ones, the ones who follow are nobodies, losers. Yet this is the world that also affirms the equally wise truism that "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." The pupils that the educationists rejected have often become the cornerstone; the pupils the society has placed last will often be first. We need not only to get used to it but also to both teach and live it.

Many in society are like the ACE story's hero Gullible when it comes to education and what is meant by education. They go along with the C gulls' view, without thinking, the superficial, the artificial, the official view, that education is about getting lots of 'A's on one's report card. Furthermore they think that education is meant to be all about the 'A's of Achievement, Advancement, Alignment, Amusement, Amazement, Assessment and Appointment. They do not have the E gull's vision to see from far off in minute detail that education is in fact all about 'E's – it is about Empowerment, Enrichment, Enlightenment, Enjoyment, Excitement, Endorsement and Endowment, with not an 'A' in sight! Forget words having no 'E's in them; when it comes to education think of the opposite, of words beginning with 'E's but with no 'A's in them. That is precisely what we will do in the articles that will follow in the succeeding weeks; we will look at these 'E's and discover new and far-off lands for our children to explore, to be strong and to soar.

Ernest Wright described his experience in writing his novel thus: "As I wrote along, a whole army of little Es gathered around my desk, all eagerly expecting to be called upon. But gradually as they saw me writing on and on, without even noticing them, they grew uneasy and began hopping up and riding my pen, looking down constantly for a chance to drop off into some word, for all the world like seabirds perched, watching for a passing fish! But when they saw that I had covered 138 pages, they slid onto the floor, walking sadly away, arm in arm, but shouting back: 'You certainly must have a hodge-podge of a yarn there without us! Why, man, we are in every story ever written! This is the first time we ever were shut out!'" They were like C gulls, watching for their passing fish.

Let us not be gullible and think that education is all about stacking up 'A's. Education must begin with 'E's. If we want our young people to be extraordinary, then Education must be full of 'E's – we simply cannot have a book or life without 'E's! It is Education with 'E's, (not 'A's) that will transform our whole society through our young people. That will be novel, will it not?