

OPEN-MINDED TEACHING

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Will the role of teacher in future be much more like that of the impartial judge? Instead of putting across opinions, he will help in a weighing of evidence.

"The aim is to forward understanding, discrimination and judgment in the human field—it will involve reliable factual knowledge, where this is appropriate, direct experience, imaginative experience, some appreciation of the dilemmas of the human condition, of the rough-hewn nature of many of our institutions, and some rational thought about them."

It was in these terms that the Schools Council's Working Paper No. 2 (on raising the school leaving age) defined the aim of humanities teaching. That was in 1965. Since 1967 the Humanities Curriculum Project, sponsored by the Schools Council and the Nuffield Foundation, has been doing research into the problems that this approach raises for teachers. We selected for experimental development the topics, war, education, the family, relations between the sexes, poverty, living in cities, people and work, law and order, race relations. We set ourselves the task of developing understanding about these in schools.

By definition, a controversial issue divides society, and hence divides pupils, parents and teachers. This was our starting point. A democracy values a dialogue between informed views, rather than a consensus. Teachers whose views range over the whole spectrum of opinion will have pupils whose own views and whose parents' views similarly diverge, so teaching should be based on open but disciplined discussion rather than on formal instruction. The project is therefore committed to responsibility (the acceptance of one's own accountability) rather than to authority (depending for justification on others).

What, then, are the main characteristics of the teaching strategy towards which we felt we had to work?

Teaching must permit and protect divergence and maintain respect for individual opinions. It would be absurd to push for agreement (rather than for understanding) between a Quaker child and the child of a regular army soldier about war. Our strategy must renounce the position of the teacher as an "expert," capable of solving by authority all issues about values that arise in discussion—because this position cannot be logically justified. Yet it must be disciplined, so that the teacher understands his purely procedural authority in the classroom—his authority as "chairman"—and can maintain it. Teaching must be based on discussion and inquiry. In sensitive issues, thought must be given to preserving privacy and protecting pupils. Thus, illegitimate children, the children of prostitutes, orphans and children from broken homes must be borne in mind when pupils are discussing the family or relations between the sexes.

We therefore aimed at a form of discussion in which the teacher should be a neutral and impartial chairman and resource consultant. He should help a classroom discussion group to find its own way to an understanding of the issues at stake and should try to moderate the group pressures on pupils to conform insofar as they express themselves socially rather than intellectually. "Neutrality" means that the teacher should not propagate his own view, but be prepared to see the pupils treat all views according to consistent critical principles. By the principle of "impartiality" we mean that all pupils within the discussion should be treated alike unless unlike treatment can be justified on good grounds. The protection of a child with problems at home might be good grounds, for example.

Our experience shows that these principles of neutrality and impartiality are easily misunderstood.

In order to teach controversial matters well a teacher must believe them to be important, and this implies that he must have deep commitments of his own. He is not teaching neutrality so much as the nature of responsible commitment. Let me give an example of an attitude which does not do justice to responsibility. We asked a teacher: "Do you meet the problem of pregnancy often with your pupils?" Her reply was: "Almost never, and you'd be surprised the number who get pregnant in the year after they leave school." She said this with satisfaction. If we are to move from this attitude of custodial containment to the desire to help pupils to cope with life after they have left school, we must at some time



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"The policeman behind him is restraining him."



"No, he's egging him on."
"I don't think he is from the position of his feet."



"Maybe the girl has fainted and the policeman is fanning her with his truncheon."



"Maybe the people we think are police are demonstrators dressed up and the demonstrators are plainclothes policemen."

The Times

wean them from dependence on our authority.

To justify neutrality and impartiality in practical educational terms one has to consider what goes on in a classroom. The chairman of a discussion, if he is not careful, breaches his neutrality by a series of small intrusions on points of detail. He may say "Yes" or "A good point," and thus endorse a particular point of view. He may ask leading questions: "Don't you feel that dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima was morally wrong?" or "Do you think that people who have 'done wrong' are bound to be afraid of contracting VD?" or "Do you think it's unnatural to live in cities?"

Our study of tape-recordings of class discussion shows clearly that such leading questions and confirmatory responses from the chairman-teacher destroy a discussion by redirecting it from an attempt to understand the issue involved into a guessing game about the mind of the teacher. A "guessing game" is merely disguised instruction. Neutral chairmanship is thus not only a professional ethic in controversial matters but also the means to put responsibility on the pupils in the task of gaining understanding.

If one accepts the principle of neutrality, the teacher cannot be the source of information for the discussion group. Information must come from elsewhere. The Humanities Curriculum Project has adopted the idea that discussion should be based on documentary materials—print and pictures and tape-recordings. Thus the discussion is supported and disciplined by raw evidence, *not* material processed by teachers or textbooks.

How is evidence used in this style of discussion?

When any discussion group—not just in a classroom—meets under a chairman, they tend initially to look to him for authority. If they are pupils and he is a teacher, they assume moreover that he knows the answers and is setting up discussions with a hidden instructional agenda. Even without leading questions by the teacher, their responses are often attempts to guess what the teacher wants rather than face the task of understanding through the discussion of evidence. When they do work in terms of evidence rather than in terms of the teacher, pupils often see the documents as raw materials out of which they are expected to build a didactic, clear-cut case. They expect that the more evidence is produced, the more their discussion group will come to agree with them. Often they adopt a sceptical approach and try to make the least of a piece of conflicting evidence. Only gradually do they learn to make the most of evidence and to aim at deepening their understanding.

At first, too, pupils often regard documentation as evidence only about facts or events. It takes time for them to understand that a poem can be evidence for a mood or emotion, that an ambiguous photograph can be evidence for the general dynamics of a social situation, that a piece of didactic prose can be simply evidence for the *existence* of a point of view (not *proof* that it is right). Skill and judgment in learning to make different responses to different types of material develops only through experience.

Here, a single example must give the flavour of this approach. We have had class groups discuss the photograph of the October 1968 Grosvenor Square demonstration (opposite), and they are often at first frustrated by its ambiguity. It tells us little about the event. "The policeman will hit the girl," one pupil will say. "No, he's just angry and waving his truncheon." "The policeman behind him is restraining him." "No, he's egging him on." "I don't

Imperial Maritime League

2, Westminster Palace Gardens, Victoria Street, S.W.



KEEP The FLAG FLYING

GERMAN ATROCITIES ON CHILDREN

The following atrocities are certified by the Belgian, French and British Governments, or by Dr. Arthur Hadden, Englishman-in-Ordinary to H.M. the King of the Belgians, and are set forth in the Official Book of German Atrocities, the Belgian Blue Book, or in the Supplement to "THE FIELD," of February 19th, 1915.

A Child Bayoneted.
On the 26th August, not far from Malines, a child of about fifteen was tied up, the hands behind the back, and the body was completely torn open with bayonet wounds. (Official Book, p. 14)

Women and Children used as Screen.
On August 29th, at Herent, the Germans forced 500 women and children to march in front of their forces. (Official Book, p. 49)

Women and Children Burnt.
In Tamines many persons, including women and children, were burnt or suffled in their homes. (Official Book, p. 79)

Murdered.
In the Faubourg de Nefle an old woman and all her children were killed in their cellar. (Official Book, p. 81)

Abuse of Girl of Eleven.
On the 3rd September, at Suppes, a little girl of eleven was subjected for three hours to the fabricity of a soldier: he had taken her to an empty house, where he stuffed a handkerchief into her mouth to stop her cries. (Official Book, p. 113)

Mutilation.
The Village of Sommeilles was the scene of a terrible drama. When the War broke out Mme. X, whose husband is with the Colours, took refuge in a cellar belonging to a couple called Adnot, together with these latter and their four children, aged respectively eleven, five, four, and one-and-a-half years. A few days afterwards the bodies of all these unfortunate people were discovered in a pool of blood. Adnot had been shot, Mme. X. had her right breast and arm cut off, the little girl of eleven had a foot severed, the little boy of five had his throat cut. The woman X. and the little girl appeared to have been raped. (Official Book, p. 115)

Little Boy and Babies Shot
In the Faubourg de Namy in Nomeny a little boy of ten and two little girls of three were shot. The little boy had the crown of his head blown off, and one of the little girls had her elbow almost severed. (Official Book, p. 117)

Girl of 12 Outraged.
At Magnieres a German soldier with a knife obliged a young girl—aged 12 years, to accompany him into a room. He violated her twice, in spite of her protests, and the cries for mercy kept up without ceasing. (Official Book, p. 127)

Living Child Photographed on Heap of Dead.
At Dinant they wedged a little child alive, found on the top of a heap of corpses. They then photographed the gruesome exhibit. ("Field" Supplement, p. 4)

Mother Forced to Bury her Murdered Child.
Again, a mother saw a child killed before her eyes, and the soldiers compelled the unhappy woman to bury the child in their presence. ("Field" Supplement, p. 5)

Girls Outraged before their Parents' Eyes.
Under the command of Von Birckenstein at Ellwangen nearly all the young girls were violated before their parents' eyes. ("Field" Supplement, Feb. 13, 1915, p. 9)

Baby Disembowelled.
At Haecht a child of 3 with its stomach cut open by a bayonet was lying near the house. (Official Book, p. 124)

Baby Crucified.
And a child of 2 or 3 years old was found nailed to the door of a farmhouse by its hands and feet. (Official Book, p. 125)

From a Private attached to the Headquarters Staff.

"I believe if men at home could see the millions starving, with their dead children strewing the fields, and if they could see the women and children being massacred in places in their own houses, perhaps it might teach them to see the man!"

"And it might appeal to others not to force us to force us to force us. We must have GUNNERS! GUNNERS! GUNNERS! for without them we are at sea!"

SAVE US FROM THE HUNS.

J. WOODROFF & SONS, WANDSWORTH.

No. 22.

think he is from the position of his feet." "Maybe the girl has fainted and the policeman is fanning her with his truncheon." "Maybe the people we think are police are demonstrators dressed up and the demonstrators are plainclothes policemen." The beginning of a true understanding lies in the group's assessing the relative likelihood of these hypotheses.

Often a group begins to make general statements about demonstrations. "They seem to create difficult situations for the police." "It looks as if the police don't always know how to act." Together with other evidence, the picture can eventually tell them a great deal about the dynamics and the quality of the situation the camera has caught.

To subject such evidence to traditional exercises in "comprehension" kills the discussion. The pupils themselves must be trained to ask question about the meanings of words or passages: the chairman must not do so. Misunderstandings should only be dealt with if they crop up in discussion. As chairman the teacher cannot, without risk to the discussion, ask questions to which he thinks he knows the answer. But this leaves him free to ask a wide range of questions, pointing out ambiguities which he himself cannot resolve. This elicits interpretations

from the group and raises questions about values which have no simple answer.

Successful classroom work of this kind gains its shape and unity from the dynamic flow of discussion. Most of a group that discussed the first world war poster of the Imperial Maritime League (above) agreed that though they doubted the truth of some war on both sides. Someone mentions the Moors individual reports, such incidents did occur in murders and the fact that people like the murderers must be in the various national armies. Discussion then turns to the question: "What do we mean by an atrocity?" The chairman-teacher brings in an excerpt from the Geneva Convention. A pupil raises the justification of codes of conduct in war. The chairman introduces the attempt by the medieval church to lay down the criteria for a just war. The group moves towards the view that there can be no standards in a modern totalitarian war. The chairman introduces a description of the job of a forward air controller in Vietnam who has to decide whether or not to napalm a village. In making such decisions, are criteria and standards necessarily implied?

At this stage, the efforts of the project's central team are mainly directed towards selecting and designing appropriate collections of evidence which can be "foundation" collections for schools, and investigating the emergent techniques of discussion. In the schools we are studying, this discussion approach is being used as a core for the children's work. For two terms now, teachers in 32 secondary schools—ranging from Hartlepool to Merthyr Tydfil—have been conducting experiments in teaching as part of the project. From next spring, the project hopes to offer "stimulus, support and materials" to a wider range of teachers. In what form?

First, we hope to publish a series of studies in the teaching of the humanities which will outline in detail the logic of the kind of teaching we have been concerned with, offer teachers guidelines about how to chair discussions, and report the experience of our study schools in timetabling and organisation, indexing and storing resources, developing pupils' research work, organising pupils' summing up of the inquiry, and examining.

Secondly, we hope to publish "foundation collections" of evidence for each of our themes. We don't mean these to be definitive; they ask to be added to by teachers' and pupils' own research. They will aspire towards balance, as a library does, but they will inevitably fall short of this.

Thirdly, we intend to offer local authorities and teacher-training colleges courses which will ensure that there are enough people conversant with the work who can train teachers to use these materials and techniques in schools.

There can be no prefabricated solution to the problems teachers will be encountering with adolescents if they teach like this, and the project does not pretend to offer such a solution. But it will

offer the raw materials and the experience on which a local authority or a school can undertake a thoughtful and self-critical programme of teacher development to meet the opportunity provided by the raising of the school leaving age.

Some further general points are worth making. The change of role in this kind of teaching is not easy for a teacher to achieve, we have found. His personality comes into it. But a teacher who is interested learns a lot. Almost all schools and teachers are more authoritarian than they realise. This new pattern of teaching radically changes teacher-pupil relationships and has profound implications for the authority structure of the school. Schools are not likely to succeed in the changeover if they won't face a move from authoritarianism. Teachers are not likely to succeed without some retraining. Pupils of average academic ability can achieve intellectual levels in this work which indicate that they have been greatly underestimated. The kind of materials we offer and the method of discussion, are equally suitable for *any* "adult"—from a school leaver through sixth former to university student.

This last fact is an important opportunity. Academic subjects have been a divisive influence in the secondary school. The demands of the sixth form tend to mean that each subject is taught as if it were a preparation for specialisation, and this creates a pressure towards having streaming or "setting" by ability.

But it now seems possible to assimilate our kind of "humanities" teaching to the tradition of "general studies" teaching in sixth forms. This creates a bridge between the teaching of those pupils who will leave at 16 and those who will continue in full-time education. Corresponding to this opportunity, there is a threat, of course. If one tries to introduce into the curriculum an element such as "humanities" which has no immediate reference points outside the school, which does not relate to vocational demands or the demands of higher education, then there is a real danger that content will be devalued and standards will slip.

To bring out the potential of this work in the classroom will demand considerable thought and professional skill from teachers. If the right critical climate is to be created there must be in the inspectorate, in colleges of education and on examination panels, as well as in the classrooms, people who understand this type of teaching and care intensely for its rigour and quality. The new methods will cost money.

It is too early to report any full results from the project. My own view is that if the financial and institutional support is forthcoming, it will make a lot of difference in the 20 years after the raising of the leaving age in 1971. Its characteristic contributions will be in intellectual quality and the growth of responsibility.

