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English, history, geography, social studies and religious studies. A Schools Council Survey¹ revealed that the humanities subjects as at present taught in schools were generally rated poorly for interest and importance by adolescent students, who attached most value to studies which seemed to them to have immediate vocational relevance.

For the purposes of our work we did not define the humanities in terms of subjects, but adopted a more integrative approach. The humanities would be concerned with important human issues. In the study of these issues two modes of study would be kept in dialogue with each other. One of these modes might be described as behavioral, in the broad sense of that term as used in the social sciences. In this mode one seeks objectivity and attempts to view human behavior dispassionately from the point of view of the observer. The other mode, more characteristic of the arts and religion, might be called the experiential or existential. In this mode one attempts through imaginative and sympathetic insight to understand the quality of human experience. The attempt is to view human situations from the point of view of the participant. A helpful oversimplification would be to define the humanities as an inter-relation of the approaches and attitudes of the social scientist, the artist, and the man of religion.

Following up policy statements made by educationists and official reports, we saw humanities teaching as a possible response to the demand that the curriculum offered to adolescents should be relevant and that schools should face controversial issues with these students in an honest and adult way. We thought, therefore, that we should select as "areas of inquiry"² social and personal issues which ought to have significance for the lives of everyone in our society. These areas we intend to develop experimentally as examples.

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Our topics are: war; education; the family; relations between the sexes; poverty, people and work; living in cities; law and order; and race relations.

These topics have in common high controversiality and high value loading. A century ago, the impulse would have been to teach on the basis of authority in an attempt to produce social consensus in these areas.

In a pluralist democracy, this is not a tenable position. To say that an issue is controversial is by definition to say that it divides ^{both} parents and teachers. It is not merely that in a teaching profession containing all political views from right-wing conservative to communist - even Maoist - and all religious views from fundamentalist christian to hard line atheism, there is no basis for consensus teaching. If parents have any rights in the education of their children, they are entitled to ask that the teacher should not propagate his views in the classroom. If professional ethics demand that teachers adopt an impartial position on such issues - and I would argue that they do - then we face a profound pedagogical problem. Virtually no teaching, as we know it at present, meets the criterion of impartiality we are setting up.

The pattern of teaching we looked to must, we felt, have the following characteristics:

- (1) It must renounce the authority of the teacher as an "expert", since he is not an expert in value issues;
- (2) It must be disciplined, so that the teacher understands and can maintain his procedural authority in the classroom;
- (3) It must be discussion-based and inquiry-based since instruction and discovery imply authority.³
- (4) Divergence must be protected within the discussion group: individual opinions must be respected: the aim should not be consensus but a dialogue between responsibly held views.
- (5) In sensitive issues, thought must be given to preserving privacy and protecting students, e.g., illegitimate children, children of prostitutes, orphans, children from broken homes must be borne in mind when we are discussing the family or relations between the sexes.



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On these grounds we looked towards a form of discussion in which the teacher should act as an impartial chairman and resource consultant, helping a discussion group to find its own way to an understanding of the issues at stake and working to moderate group pressures to conformity insofar as they express themselves socially rather than intellectually.⁴

In this sketch of a model of a teaching process an important element is so far missing. There is no input of information. Now, obviously students can undertake individual or group research assignments in order to provide the informational basis for discussions, and this is desirable. But it is not sufficient. Students are not likely to achieve balance in the information they can produce through research. It is true that teachers can do something to redress imbalance by finding additional materials themselves, but this makes heavy demands on their time, and in rural areas or small towns teachers may have considerable difficulty in achieving balance in their own materials because of limited research facilities.

Accordingly, as we look towards the establishment in schools of documentary resource collections intended to service discussion groups facing controversial issues, we face the need for foundation collections to get such resource centers going and provide a base on which teachers and pupils can build. We shall publish a foundation collection in each of our areas of inquiry to serve this purpose.

These collections include statistical tables and graphs, non-fiction prose from the social sciences, history and journalism, fictional prose, verse, songs, photographs, film stills, paintings, sculpture, and audio tapes. Each collection will have approximately 150 pieces of evidence and will have twenty copies of each piece as well as single copy teachers' collections. A complementary film hire service is being set up, dealing in fiction and documentary

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films, film extracts and specially made newsreel compilations.

On the basis of resources of this kind we are working experimentally towards a style of discussion which we have called "discussion disciplined by evidence." We are now experimenting with this teaching pattern in approximately 130 discussion groups in 32 different schools throughout England and Wales.

Thus, we are concerned with a particular case of decoding symbolic materials including reading materials. We have a particular strategy in "the process of making discriminatory responses," which might be described as "group interpretation of documents as evidence bearing on controversial issues under discussion." We are handling controversial issues by reading in the context of group discussion instead of by instruction.

This is an instrumental kind of reading and interpretation, in which the process of reading must be subordinated to the needs of discussion. What we mean by the use of written or visual materials as evidence is their use, not for their own sake, but for their relevance to an issue.

Our experiment has been in schools for only half a year. Our findings must be tentative at this stage, but some points can provisionally be made. They may be subsumed under four heads: the nature and interpretation of evidence; the pattern of discussion; the role of the chairman; the authority structure of the school.

The Nature and Interpretation of Evidence

When discussion groups meet under a chairman, they tend initially to look to him for authority. They assume, when he is a teacher, that he knows the answers and is setting up discussions with a hidden instructional agenda. Their responses are often attempts to guess what the teacher wants rather than to 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, they often regard evidence as raw material out of which to make a didactic case, or expect that the more evidence is produced, the more a discussion group will come to agree with them. Often they adopt a sceptical approach and try to make the least of a piece of evidence. Only gradually do they learn to make the most of evidence and to aim at deepening their understanding.

Groups often tend to regard evidence as bearing on fact or event. It takes time to understand that a poem can be evidence of the existence of a possible mood or affective reaction, an ambiguous photograph can be evidence of the general dynamics of a social situation, a piece of didactic prose can be evidence of the existence of a given point of view. The skill and judgment involved in learning to differentiate one's response to different types of symbolic material develops only through experience.

All evidence contains some value element, even if only in the categories chosen for a statistical table. Most evidence is ambiguous, in the arts purposely so. The interpretation of evidence therefore involves judgments which are based on the intersection of the meaning contained in the symbol and the experience of the interpreter. In facing ambiguous evidence the most productive procedure is often to produce a range of likely and unlikely interpretations. The gradient of likeliness implies an interpretation.

Successful discussion work gains its shape and unity from the dynamic flow of discussion. To subject evidence to traditional comprehension exercises kills the discussion. The students must be trained to ask questions about the meanings of words or passages: the chairman must not do so. Misunderstandings can only be dealt with if they make themselves manifest in the discussion. It seems that the teacher as chairman cannot safely ask any question to which he knows the answer. This, of course, leaves him free to ask a wide range of



questions pointing ambiguities which he cannot himself raising value issues which have no simple answer.

The process of interpretation of reading in group not yet have the material to support a detailed analysis clear is that, at the secondary school level where most materials are rich and faceted and ambiguous, it is of teacher to dominate the reading of the text by his own through discussion is a device not only for overcoming also for breaking through dependency to autonomy in re

Groups gradually recognize that in facing a cont take the evidence into account and use it to deepen un They also come to grasp the point that value judgement to a decision which cannot be proved to be the only co decision the individual must accept full responsibility of dependence on the authority of another. It is this pendency to responsibility which is the main purpose o Only in the light of such learning can the nature and controversial issues be grasped.

The Pattern of Discussion

At present, the most successful pattern of discu practice in schools is slow in pace, deliberative, ref long pauses. It would appear that a fair indicator of group is likely to thrive is whether long pauses are t speech or pupil speech. Where the teacher cannot ride group will unload more and more responsibility on to h task he has set them and settling for a comfortable de

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Leading questions are always destructive of discussion. They imply that the teacher knows the answer and develop the "guessing game" described in the previous section.

There is a problem of balance in most discussion groups. When this is due to dominant personalities commandeering the discussion it is possible to evolve strategies to redress the balance. For example, the chairman may summarize the argument of the dominant individual or group and then lead the rest of the group to discuss that view while those who have put it forward remain silent now that they have effectively stated it. The most difficult imbalance to deal with is that in which some individuals are silent because they feel that they are not able enough to reach the standard of the others. We have not yet found a solution to this.

We hope to case study individual non-participants to ascertain whether they benefit from being in the group. We are optimistic about this. It would seem that teachers are confident that students can learn by listening to them and if this is true, we should expect that they can also learn from listening to their peers.

A key to success in discussion appears to be that both teacher and group should concentrate on understanding the issues. The work should be intensely task-oriented. For various reasons, too complex to rehearse here, it seems profitable to avoid specifying behavioral objectives in this kind of work. Principles of procedure and hence criteria for controlling the operation can be derived from the general aim of understanding, the principle of controversiality and traditional discussion procedures. In a discussion where the participants face evidence rationally and sensitively divergent student objectives may well be served. One of the characteristics of this kind of work may be to release students from the dominance of teachers' objectives. 5

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The Role of the Chairman

The role of the recessive, non-dominant but inquiring chairman is a difficult one for teachers to fill. Teachers are often accustomed to dominate their classrooms and their techniques and personality adjustments to their professional role may be maladaptive in the discussion situation. There is intense intellectual interest and reward in following the discussion and also a particular satisfaction in turning oneself into a thoughtful student of one's adolescent pupils' thinking. But it would be wrong to minimize the difficulty of the transition that teachers are required to make if they are to master their role in this style of discussion. They will need all the help they can get.

Convinced that chairing discussion work in controversial issues is a skill which is likely to be learned slowly and thoughtfully, we have set out to offer the teacher the means of self-appraisal and self-development. We have inducted our experimental teachers by means of a four-day course based mainly on simulation, and expect to train agencies already in the field to mount such courses.

In addition to publishing teaching materials and case studies of individual school settings, we shall offer teachers a set of procedural rules for discussion and an array of hypotheses about how they are likely to behave within these rules. Both rules and hypotheses will have been tested in our experimental schools; and they are intended to give to each team of teachers embarking on discussion work in controversial areas a viable experimental framework. They provide a definition of the problems and a starting point, not a hard-and-fast prescription. Rules will require to be reviewed once the teachers have gathered experience.

Typical of rules would be:

The chairman may summarize or clarify a point of view put forward in the

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group in order to promote understanding. He should get the agreement of those whose view he is summarizing that his summary is a fair one. He should avoid summarizing two points of view at once since it is difficult to do so without playing one off against the other in such a way as to suggest a preference on his part."

Typical of hypotheses would be:

"Whenever a student expresses a view with which the chairman disagrees, the chairman's next question to the group will tend to force the critical examination of that view. Whenever a student expresses a view with which the chairman agrees, the chairman's next question will tend to move the argument onwards without subjecting that view to full critical examination."

The Authority Structure of the School

Insofar as the authority structure of the school is based on teacher dominance and authoritarian and custodial attitudes, the work of the project has profound implications for change in the school as an institution. It would appear difficult to stimulate a relaxed and free-speaking atmosphere in a discussion group contained within a repressive and authoritarian school. When such an atmosphere is achieved, it leads to tension with other more authoritarian teaching patterns and forms of organization. Most school principals taking part in the project recognize its potential as an agent of change in teacher-student relationships.

If this broad implication is true, it would appear that the attempt to develop autonomy in reading skills and in value judgement strikes at the heart of the problem of authority in staff student relationships. English observers see this problem of authority as a central issue in the raising of the school leaving age and the retaining of adolescents in school.⁶

