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**Letting the Past Speak**

**Contributor**

John Fines (1938-1999)

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## **5 Pedagogy**

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## **John Fines (1938-1999)**

John literally fell asleep on his sofa on 2 April 1999; a neighbour found his car door open in the evening, the car was loaded ready for John to leave to visit his nieces in Cardiff. On entering the house the neighbour discovered John in what seemed to be a deep repose. Fortunately John left behind him a compilation of his papers *Letting the Past Speak* in a form ready for publication – he had sent them to me with a request to see if I could get them into print. This, through the medium of *IJHLTR*, I am delighted to do. The first five sections of *Letting the Past Speak* were on the teaching of history, the sixth, significantly, a series of academic history articles. These we will place on the website [www.ex.ac.uk/historyresource](http://www.ex.ac.uk/historyresource) in due course - the articles exemplify how John 'Did History'.

For over forty years John had had a glittering career that illuminated all that it touched, a career that bridged the worlds of academia and education. Born in Lincoln, John was the son of a railwayman who kept close links to the countryside through his mother's farming family. Most memorable of his stories was the tale of the sad demise of the family pig during the Second World War, when John came to the rescue and literally saved the family bacon in the face of obdurate officialdom, which was on its way to confiscate the animal's corpse. From an early age John had set the tone for his career: enlightened opposition to mindless, meddling and basically destructive bureaucracy.

Grammar School was a triumph and a trial: he told the tale of his greatest achievement in the face of a headmaster who prophesied nothing but doom and disaster. John's best moment was confronting the head in his study when the results of his Cambridge entrance exams arrived. The head had dismissed his application as being pointless and futile: that made John's exhibition to Corpus Christi, Cambridge, even sweeter. At Cambridge John spent his time in the traditional manner of undergraduates with a license to roam to expand interests and hobbies and money to burn. Yet he fell in love with medieval and early modern history: he told a story of how he would have long and intense tutorials with Walter Ullmann, with Ullmann running up and down the step ladder in his study to check out the references that John made in his essays. John worked hard and played hard – both with infectious joy and enthusiasm.

John went into teaching against the advice of his university tutor, who even took the trouble to write to all teacher-training institutions warning them against taking such a feckless student. Despite this he launched himself upon a teaching career, soon to be disillusioned with the lumpen-mentality of traditional school mastering with its routines, demands and grinding, boring, institutionalised repression of the young. Here John empathised with the young D.H. Lawrence. Not surprisingly, a pack of Lawrence material served as John's introductory element to his teacher training courses. Enlightenment came from John's detention classes – his disciplinary powers were such that he was always guaranteed a large attendance. Soon he put the detainees to work sorting out and working on his research cards on religious heretics of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Detention took a different turn: soon queues of volunteers formed outside the door to join 'Mr Fines's' club'.

Detention had a double benefit: it resulted in his doctorate at Sheffield and a sudden realisation that the teaching of history should involve children directly with the experience of meeting people from the past through the record that the past had left behind. And, who better to take them there than a teacher steeped in the past with a deep and passionate love of what it revealed?

John's damascene conversion led to him to experiment with a range of ideas and approaches for the teaching of history. In 1965 he moved to Bulmershe College and from there four years later to Chichester, to what has become the West Sussex Institute of Higher Education. In his pedagogy the Cam flowed into a number of streams, usually through the medium of an inspiring individual he encountered, Freda Saxey, Ray Verrier and Dorothy Heathcote are three who spring to mind. There may be others whom I do not know about, and to them, sincere apologies. These muses passed John the ball; he picked it up and ran with it, re-writing the rule book in the process. Story-telling, drama and museum education were three areas where he blazed a trail in introducing what has now entered the mainstream of history pedagogy. John also made a more general, universal contribution to history education: his and Jeanette Coltham's 1971 Historical Association pamphlet *Educational Objectives for the Study of History* set the frame for the debate on history education for the next decade. The pamphlet stimulated debate and helped shape curriculum development at all levels, from the classroom up to examination board syllabi. Also, as a member of the Schools Council History Committee, John played a key and seminal role in ensuring that what is now the Schools History Project was launched successfully.

From the late 1980s it was my privilege and delight to work with him on a number of mainly Nuffield funded projects on the theory and practice of history teaching for first the 16-19 and then the 5-11 age range. John retired from West Sussex in 1991 to focus upon both the projects and his wider work in history education. The link with Exeter resulted in his visiting professorship of education. The supreme accolade he received during the 1990s was to serve as president of the Historical Association from 1994 to 1996. John brought to the role vision, directness and a clear sense of purpose – qualities not always appreciated.

Insight and understanding tempered with a great humanity and deep scholarship pervaded all that John did in the field of history education. It was an ability to go to the heart, to the core of issues that made him the giant, the colossus that bestrode the world of history education. As such his writings have a deep, major and lasting relevance. Indirectly they reveal the posturings of those who have developed the accountability culture, grounded in yahoo ignorance and distrust of professionalism, to be facile, irrelevant and deeply damaging. Today we are told of the need to bridge the gap between scholarship, research and the world of learners in the arena of applied professional knowledge. John's great ability was to reflect both on and in practice: as such he was a model reflective practitioner who both practised what he preached and preached what he practised.

On a personal level I greatly valued John's friendship and company. Here within the comfort of my home he showed why he is a model educationalist: he tempered kindness and consideration with concern. In particular, he would listen to and spend time with my children, responding to their whims and wishes. This, in terms of history education, is what he had been doing for the nation's children for forty years. It is a privilege in *Letting the Past Speak* to present the papers he had chosen to represent his values and beliefs about educating the whole child through the lens of history.

## ***Letting the Past Speak***

When I was approaching the barely honourable close of my undergraduate career those kind souls who had charge of my education discovered to their deepest shock that I intended to be a teacher, and that the higher degree I planned I would do whilst teaching. Dr. Roach explained in his kindly way that I was 'a nervous subject' and unfitted for the classroom and wrote diligently to all those Universities offering PGCE courses to beware of me as some kind of classroom leper. Professor Cheney explained that to one of such limited gifts as myself research could only be undertaken under close and careful supervision.

Wilfully I ignored them and marched off into teaching and did my PhD in three years with no time off from school. Not bad in some ways and at that stage I might very well have grown up into a proper historian. In fact I became more of a teacher than an historian as the years wore on and indeed I slowly began to realise that what I saw as 'history' was substantially different from what the academic community saw. The academic community is always right, of course, but I reserve the right to one last squeak before I retire into the 'defeated' corner.

Yes, yes, yes I know my carelessness and laziness will always declare me outside the pale, as they should - that I would never defend. But what I find interesting is the proposition that the past must be analysed and explained, it can never speak for itself.

Analysis and explanation are at the heart of the historical process and define what is happening as History rather than Antiquarianism or Biography. Yet the initial, deep-rooted call to listening to the past is the beginning of everything. We begin by hearing a fifteenth century lady speak with passion in a court record (I found that manuscript). We start by marvelling at the story William the Marshal has to tell to his chaplain (John of Early - I used to live there too). We wonder at Alexander burning Persepolis and corresponding with Aristotle - in all these cases the past cries out to us with a clear voice.

Of course we are the listeners, selecting what we hear. Of course we can never understand in any full sense what it was like to be a person in the past. But as we listen and imagine, some doors do open, I swear it. For that reason I have committed my life to opening doors upon the past for children, and to the bold attempt to see real people whole as they say their piece. Shortly I will be off again to Fontevault to see the tomb of Henry II, and there I shall hear the cry 'shame, shame upon a vanquished king' and see the Marshal, finding the body stripped to its underclothes, tearing some gold trimming from a cloak to put across his brow and make him king again. Romanticism? Yes - but listen and see, and tell me whether analysis and explanation have half the kick as this.

# 1 History in Schools

## *What is History for in Schools?*

**Source** *History Resource*, Vol 1/1, 1987, Wheatons/Pergammon

The traditional distinction between aims and objectives has tended to revolve around the notion of the time required for their achievement, as well as the relatively specific or general nature of the goal in question. An aim is defined as something that may be achieved in the future. Achievement will be partially as a result of education, although it may not be fully realized or observed during the course of that education.

Objectives, perhaps because they are a specific outcome of a given input, may be taught towards and assessed in some way, probably separately, in the course of education. When regarded as such, objectives are behavioural in nature, and carry Skinnerian overtones of pigeons in boxes responding to stimuli.

For these reasons objectives have a somewhat specious attraction to those in the education business. They clarify the issue of the work to be done, and, in their assessment, set a value on that work. Thereby they introduce rationality and motivation into the process of working towards their achievement. The process appears to become less vague and irrational the more task-orientated it becomes. Clearly, objectives may be both ordered and patterned - one may set them in some hierarchy of valuing, and one may relate them in a framework which demonstrates their interconnectedness. Yet the attractiveness of an objectives-based approach lies in the specificity and the achievability they seem to provide as both clarifiers and rewarders of what is going on.

This slightly naive and heavily dated exposition of the difference between aims and objectives has raised a host of hostile statements. It is to this body of literature I wish to contribute but one strand. Briefly stated, it is that there is a difference between the possession of an objectified quality and the rational, thorough and wholehearted use of that quality. How often, in staff rooms, do we hear physics teachers denouncing mathematics teachers and geographers denouncing english teachers for not having taught some aspect of mathematics or english they for the moment need, when in fact those aspects have been thoroughly taught and tested in previous mathematics or english lessons? The test has been passed, sure enough, and all aspects of the objectives-based learning have been thoroughly achieved, but the transfer into use has not happened. Usually we state this case in the form that children don't perceive that what they learn in mathematics may be used in physics. They are unable to perceive that their knowledge from one area can be applied in another. This is only part of the case: much more substantial is the question of how to use knowledge acquired elsewhere. The pupil may perceive that the knowledge can be applied, but has not had the practice which translates that knowledge into an achieved objective.

Perhaps we can hold this in frame for a moment by posing another common figure: the child who can pass the spelling tests, but doesn't in fact regularly spell well. This may be laziness, carelessness, deliberate opposition to received authority, but it is also a failure to see that spelling is an activity, continuous in its requirements, and thorough in its demands.

Now an immediate reaction, and in many ways one of the most sensible reactions to this perceived problem, might well be to reform our practice as teachers. We should begin to put the emphasis more on teaching for use than on teaching for

achievement. Pupils frequently do perform better when they 'see the point' of what they are doing. The curriculum would surely benefit from a new perception of its integral nature as a preparation for life outside and after school, rather than as a series of discrete units whose only true reference point is the school community itself.

Such a change in teaching would inevitably involve a change of emphasis. It would mean moving sharply from strict behavioural objectives to be achieved in particular, even peculiar, school contexts to a commitment to aims that looked more profoundly at the future of the pupil and at the hopes and aspirations inherent in our teaching about that future.

Of course there are many problems in a more generally utilitarian perspective. Most notably any practising teacher will tell you at once that it is not always possible for the pupil to 'see the point'; the relevance can only come later. The happy speaker of French might look back to the miserable days of learning cases and conjunctions and be thankful for what was then done to him very much against his will. A subsidiary point is that children often get rather tired of the grand view, fed up with being told what it is all for, bored by the grandiose visions of an after-life that to them is too far away to have any reality.

However, in curriculum theory we do need to make constant reference to the condition of the pupil, for what might well be ideal in theory can often be defeated by practice itself. Too often the pupil is given an image of what he is doing in school that so reduces his own role that he becomes either a slave or an enemy to the system, in no way receptive to changes within that system.

Of course the way the pupil views the system is hard to describe, for it is a tacit, intuitive, unthought-out response, just as what we used to call 'the hidden curriculum' was in no conscious way elaborated by the teachers. Thus it is difficult to describe the precise circumstances, but here an image may help. In order to clarify the picture I wish for a moment to consider the image of pupil as patient.

In many learning situations the position of the pupil vis-à-vis the teacher is best described in terms of the former's inadequacy, his faults and mistakes, his lack of knowledge or skill, his unformed state. The teacher (theoretically at least!) is seen to be the reverse of all this. We test the pupils and analyse their state by the number and kind of mistakes they make in the assessment procedure - indeed much educational research is based upon this system of analysis.

Thus the pupil is the patient, to be operated on, to be remedied, to be reshaped. He is having all his weaknesses attended to. Indeed, the image of success in schools changes from the medical to the sporting field - the most applicable metaphor here is that of fitness. The weak, weedy, and sickly child has now been transformed into a strong and capable person, ready to run the great race of life, and win honours to be inscribed in gold upon the school board.

There is no need to spend much time elaborating the strengths and manifold weaknesses of these images, for they serve here merely as a measuring stick from which to derive a clearer view of students' use of what they have learned. I wish now to contrast the view of pupils as patients with that of pupils as agents.

We have many views of the end of schooling. The most recent is the able and penetrating study by John White, *The Aims of Education Restated* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982). In it he defines the educated man as one capable of achieving

satisfaction and self-fulfilment. The educated man can be at the maximum, because he knows what there is on offer, has the skills to get at it, is able to cope with others en route. He is also in possession of some sort of framework in relation to these experiences which shapes the morality of living a full life with others. No doubt this does less than justice to Mr White's admirable philosophical formulation. But the point I wish to make is that it all involves knowledge viewed as not just for action, but knowledge about action, and knowledge in action. Without doubt Mr White's pupil needs teaching and lots of it, but he is an active learner, an agent in his own right.

Thus if we are to see the end of education in terms of the competence of the learner there is no hope for most of the patients or athletes. Only one fit person can win the race, the others are losers. However, we can have many competent agents measured against objective criteria of performance. If we see society as the paymaster and controller of education that is precisely what it wants (or should want!).

How may we see pupils as agents in their own learning moving towards competence in adult life? Well let us take a subject area (history, of course) and see how its aims, rather than objectives, might move us forward into the practicalities of what you might hope to get, and how you might go about it in school.

History in education can do many things, but on thinking about it in this light, four stand out clearly.

1. It can teach us to assess the plausibility of statements (and, by implication, of people, if we are to forward our knowledge into use)
2. It can teach us to assess the significance of various kinds of evidence and events and actions.
3. It can help us see the implications of statements and actions.
4. It can help us assess the potential of factors in a given situation.

Each of these four characteristics may, I believe, be carried forward into training for adult life, that is, they may stand as knowledge in use.

Every historian when faced with a set of evidence has to ask himself the questions 'What may I believe?' and 'How may I best know what is the truth of the matter?' These questions are resolved by the exercise of certain definable skills, but it is quite clear that it is the practice of those skills in concert that leads to the experience on which an historian may rely. Eventually, just as a driver isn't consciously aware of the individual actions he is taking, but nonetheless manoeuvres his vehicle safely and expertly, so does the historian take his decisions about sources. The look of the thing is one of intuitive judgement. Now the pupil will certainly have to learn the skills of validating evidence, but by far the most important thing for him will be the constant practice of these skills and the increasing difficulty of the subject matter, as his expertise grows. We need to devise work for practice, and allow time for discussion of performance, not just plan for the teaching of skills.

But if history were to take plausibility as one of its major aims, would the results pay off in maturity? I would think that the case argues itself here. In all walks of life we need to assess relative truth, we need to assure ourselves with confidence how much weight of belief we put behind what we see, hear and read. The case the politician puts requires such judgement from us; the arguments the unions and management put forward demand assessment; the media need reading with care; other people in daily life require a similar assessment, down to such tedious problems as 'Is my son really being truthful?'

But relative truth finding is only a preliminary part of the historian's task. It plays such a large part in our thinking because it is indicative of the special nature of the discipline, and we are all keen to know what makes our discipline different - a key problem of curricular thinking today. The historian would probably place more weight on the finding of significance in what he has found out. For example, Newton contradicts what he has had to say in the Principia when writing the Opticks - so what? Does this mean anything, is it important, had it any real influence, does it change any of our received opinions? Here the historian is forced into a different kind of assessment, and has to chance his arm in an arena where his powers of argument and his convincing tone must win the day, not any mechanical application of the rules of evidence. This is the point where the antiquarian gives up, where the obsessive collector of evidence is replaced by the creative user of evidence.

Now in fact we rarely reach this stage in school, because we recognize it as being a high level of thought. This seems to me an unwise presumption. Too often we say 'Not yet, you are not ready for this', when in fact the pupil should be being prepared for the day when he will be ready, when he can operate autonomously, without a teacher's help, when he has mastery. So in history we should be trying all the time in school to help pupils towards assessing the significance of what they are working on, at however naïve and seemingly ridiculous a level. We need to allow time for discussion, because to ask pupils to write in such a difficult area without preliminary discussion is most unwise.

Is this quality of use in adult life? Again, I believe the case proves itself. To be able to put significance on events, actions, statements is a major part of successful experience of life at every level. 'Is this seemingly tragic event as important as it seems? Does this hopeful and optimistic news really mean the end of the problem? Is this a major or a minor step we are taking?' It is a putting of action into perspective, an establishing of a hierarchy of importance in real life -and it is a vital quality for us all.

Historians are also adept at seeing the manifold implications of seemingly unique items of evidence. They know that cause and effect is not a simple matter at all, and that simple cause and effect explanations are the weakest of all arguments. Each event has many ramifications, backwards and forwards, and to understand that event we must understand as many of the implications as possible. The actions taken by the sovereign in the first year or so of Elizabeth I's reign were contingent upon a whole host of determining factors from the past (many of them half understood, then as much as now), and a dubious looking forward into what might possibly happen if one course of action were given priority over another. To understand that time we must ourselves understand what it is like to tread carefully, to wonder and to worry about past and future, to try to weigh up what might work, or what might just work, in the knowledge that no course of action may be deemed best - someone is going to suffer, whatever we do.

I don't think I need comment here on the usefulness in adult life of such thinking, if it is properly carried through and seen as a training for adult life as much as a training in history. What might be worth noting is that this important part of the historical experience needs time. We need a great deal of empathetical consideration of problematic situations, painstakingly considering all factors, and working at life-rate through time in the right direction - not looking backwards, but moving forwards with the history itself.

Finally I feel that historians are concerned with seeking potential. In using this word I wish to join together two different concepts: in the first place I am talking about the search for power - where does it truly lie, where does action have its roots, from whence do great issues spring? Secondly I am putting forward the allied concept of potential as being those elements that exist in any time and which might spring into action, but actually don't. The scientific historian to my mind is not the narrow empiricist who simply repeats his PhD experience over and over again, but the man who is inspired to hunt for the answer to the question 'What makes things work?' In asking this question he is inevitably leading on to the questions of how they work, how it is that things end up the way they do, and in all these questions he is seeking potential, looking at power. Yet it must be stressed that history is not just the record of one success story after another, it is full of abysmal failures, and although the historian who gets obsessed with failure turns into Spengler in the end, we do need a balance. We must keep asking the question 'Why did this early promise come to no fruition?', as well as marvelling at the sequence of lucky changes that led to a particular success, for chance is a major factor here, and that in itself is a lesson to learn.

This sort of exploration is some of the best education that history has to offer, but again it is rarely done, possibly because it leads one so frequently into the unfashionable biographical approach. The proper study of mankind can lead on to a life in which some of its lessons may be seen in action, in use; but the proper study must be active, and it depends on the pupil making the judgements, not just parroting back those of the teacher or the text. All this need not lead us to major alteration of the history curriculum; you may learn from any part of history. What it does require is a different use of time, and a different set of teacher behaviours. It requires discussion, slow and mature consideration, detailed investigation, and the demand for judgement from the pupil. In any course I have come across that contains a well organized project the universal cry of the students is that that was where they learned the most. We teachers should draw a lesson from that ourselves. The change may be hard, but if the aims are worthwhile, then the effort is worth the candle.

## ***The Respect that is Owed to the Past***

**Source** *History Review*, No. 15, 1993

That's me – the one in the middle in the General's uniform [ed – photo supplied]. It was taken in Custer, South Dakota - I had been travelling America with my friends the Waterfalls in a pick-up truck, and by Custer we all felt like pioneers, so the photo seemed a good idea. I still consider that Mrs W should have worn the 'naughty nineties' costume and joined the picture instead of standing by and holding our coats 'just like real pioneer women did', but there you are.

Silly, weren't we, four boys playing at the past, or maybe better say playing with the past? Of course we didn't believe we were there, or that these were real clothes of the period (I don't think they had velcro then, as one of the boys said) nor did we imagine that what we were doing was anything like what really happened there a hundred years before. We were just using the past to express ourselves - we were finding cute, romantic ways to say 'It has been a hard journey, and we are glad to be here', as maybe others once were, in vaguely similar ways

### **Ourselves and the past**

The past and the future are our playthings – the one bit we cannot alter is the present. That is, we can look forward and plan, or imagine great things: 'next year in Jerusalem' ; 'tomorrow I will win the pools'; 'next time I see her, I shall certainly give her a piece of my mind', and so on. It is harder to admit that we play with the past in some similar, some dissimilar ways - surely historians tell the truth, try to be objective, show it as it was, rely on sources and careful source criticism? They try not to force the past into a prepared mould, make thorough surveys of the evidence, try not to make too much of a small piece of evidence, nor to hide inconvenient bits. True, these are the commonly accepted rules of the game, but at the same time historians would also agree that you can never actually reconstruct the past from the many shreds that survive. One can try, of course, but the picture we draw of the past is always our picture, and it has as much of us in it as it has of the past.

Let us examine in a bit more detail how people actually use history , and we will start with a letter I got the other day addressed to Mr and Mrs Fines - a bit unnerving for a crusty bachelor by conviction (and what about the PhD?). It told me of a new publication, *The World Book of Fineses*, in which my name was listed, and it offered to tell me about the antiquity of my name, where all the family were, and what our coat of arms was. Nice - maybe I am descended from a line of princes, as I have often privately thought; maybe I will find a rich American cousin and never want again; maybe I will feel flattered and distinguished by what I read. Of course many people do practise family history with a much more serious intent than this, and use all their industriousness and desire to collect to build up a huge archive - Bishop Stubbs, perhaps the greatest nineteenth-century historian did precisely that. So who are we to mock? History can help us develop a self-image, can make us feel we fit in, that we have roots, as they say, and where's the harm in that?

We can feel this same nostalgia for a region, or a topic, wishing to rescue parts of the past which may seem to illuminate our love for a place, an idea or a pet subject or hobby. They tell me that a new museum opens every two weeks in England, so heaven knows what the figure must be for America. There, I am credibly informed, they have just opened the museum of the potato in Washington (an American contribution to the world, so celebrate it) and I only just avoided visiting an Historic

Fish Hatchery recently - coming up for its centenary. What makes people open such places at such inordinate cost in effort and money to themselves, and why do we flock there? Partly it is rarity, I suppose, for we have a reverence for anything uncommon, and give it value - or the fact that it has survived, particularly if it has survived *in situ*. There is a quality of place, by which one may say, here, a long time ago, these strange and moving things happened and being here, aided by the subtle skills of the reconstructor and refurbisher, I am moved to reverence the place because I feel a mystic sense of its reality.

But hang on a moment - is it all as real as it might feel? I read for example last year in my English Heritage magazine the news that 'On Sunday October 14, three hundred Norman and Saxon soldiers will be fighting in an accurate re-creation of the battle of Hastings.' Well it's the right day, and I am sure their costumes and weapons would have been well researched, and that they would have tried as hard as they could to stick to the battle as they knew it from the best authorities, but can three hundred take the place of thousands, and is it right to make a battle whose death and destruction shook the brutal Duke William into an entertainment in good taste; is it fair to the past? To return to where we began, is the past a playground? It certainly can be, just as a graveyard can be, but is it decent to trip laughing through the graves?

Another thought - museums have a habit of cleaning up the past, making it tidy and aseptic and with all the smashed bits repaired. The past, whatever it was, wasn't like this, so now we have displays adding bad smells and gouts of blood to redress the balance. But it is still there for a show, for entertainment. There is nothing wrong with entertainment, a bit of fun is hard to find and all the more relishable for that, but is this what history is for?

### **Politicians and their use of the past**

But before we get too deeply embroiled in the behaviour of heritage mongers, let us pause to consider how politicians (and their dogs, the journalists) use history. They are very keen on noticing anniversaries, which are used to express some present desires as much as to promote the past. Columbus was glorified last year by some Americans and most Spaniards (although he has taken a few shrewd knocks from those who wish to recall the fate of the indigenous people of the Americas at the hands of Western intervention). But how much of the celebrations were intended to honour and remember Columbus and his men and what he stood for (or to remember those who suffered as a result of what they did) and how much is to do with trade fairs, jollifications, the promotion of the name of a country? But politicians also raid the past for language to define the present. Thus a left-winger might well want to define his opponents as 'feudal' or even as 'fascist'; proponents of defence or indeed of war are keen to call their enemies 'appeasers', some folk get branded as 'Trotskyites', others as 'Stalinists', and I have found myself on occasion thinking of someone as a 'little Hitler'.

It is a bad habit. Stereotyping not only provides unfair insults for one's enemies, but also it demeans the past and, most importantly, it demeans oneself. To shout 'fascist' at someone who is trying to reduce a budget is certainly unfair, but it also promotes forgetfulness of the true awfulness of fascism, a forgetting that allows fascism to begin to flourish. It further demeans man's attempts to do well, for many historians would now tell you that the policy of appeasement, rather than a slinking, cowardly, time-wasting and time-serving policy was instead a noble attempt to struggle with the problems of the times that in the end allowed success for the righteous cause.

## **History and its part in the truth**

When we abuse the past, we damage ourselves. When we allow people to go around saying there was no holocaust then we collude in a disrespect for truth that is deeply hurtful, and is a progressive illness. Saddam Hussein can publish a book on the historic claim of Iraq to Kuwait, and Britain can neatly forget that the first aerial bombardment of rebellious Kurdish tribesmen was carried out by the RAF. If we regard truth we must tell it about the past in order to have the political strength to tell it about the present, a hard lesson that is being painfully learned at this moment in the former Soviet Union. The most hopeful picture I have seen in the newspapers in these last months has been of a Polish workman removing the lying lettering from the Katyn memorial, so that a true statement might be inscribed.

Can history help us further? Well, we must be careful here not to claim too much. Historians are as surprised as common men and women when world events take a sudden turn, and then they work hard at looking for explanations so that they should not need to continue to feel surprised. For some years, for example, we have had solid positions on such notions as nationalism and federalism. We saw nationalism as uniquely dangerous, and federalism as a fine example of the possibility of lions lying down with lambs. Now, when we have to make up our minds on what to do about the states arising out of the ruins of the Soviet Union we are in a quandary - many historians cannot help remembering how some of those states, so much admired nowadays, were once eager agents of the Einsatzgruppen. The noble experiments of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia which were once seen as such a credit to the men who made peace at Paris in 1919 now present a picture of disunity growing towards hatred, warfare, even genocide. Why didn't historians predict this? Why do they often get their judgements wrong?

## **The study of history and sound judgement on the future**

The only picture I can give you that might help towards an answer is the notion that I, writing whilst Yugoslavia is falling to pieces in flames of war, will be read in the future by people who will know what comes next, and will perhaps nod and say, 'Silly old buffer, to get so worked up'. It all worked out most interestingly, which of course it always does, but the curtain that divides us from the future is thicker than that which covers the past; all we can do, effectively, is use the crumbs that come to us from the past to help us prepare for the future. We use the past as a source of analogy to help us understand the way forward, and it sharpens the intuitions and insights that are all we have with which to operate. It gives us experience that helps us to be sceptical about what we read, and to be aware of motivation and intention as forces promoting action and the dangers of accepting an unexplained selection of evidence to represent the whole.

History then is not just about the past, it is a melange of past, present and future. We go to the past with present problems in mind (even sub-consciously): Why are people gratuitously violent? Why is co-operation so difficult to achieve? Why does crime increase and poverty grow when otherwise things seem to be getting better? Why does the world seem to go into some kind of moral recession every now and then, seeming to lose the will to live well? Why don't we seem to be as inventive as we once were?

All these questions crowd in from the present, and form a context for anxieties about the future, and we go to the past, as it were, to sleep on the problems, waking not necessarily with answers, but refreshed with new insights that can strengthen us in

various ways. Three particular ways come to mind: history as warning, history as encouragement, and history as a source of materials with which to create working theories.

### **The ways history can make us more wise**

History warns us by reading the example of the past as tragedy. Thucydides, in perhaps the earliest genuinely historical work, tells the story of how the noble city of Athens, filled with all the virtues of mind, art and politics, above all the bastion of democracy, fell into the sin of imperialism, and how imperialism brought that city down, with its armies rotting in the stone quarries of Syracuse. A great story, one to read and reread (and, by the way, one to criticize and contend with) whose message is plain enough without speaking.

But messages from the past are not all bad, for all human life is there (as well as in the *News of the World*) and we can examine the story of St Francis for its encouragement to struggle to do well and live in harmony with our fellow men and women, and with our world of nature. Francis died many years ago, but retains his living power to influence and to encourage us to action, through history (and, of course, equally to re-examine that story in different ways to see new ways of reading it, critically, not just as mindless hearers).

And, of course, the past is our great resource of evidence about human nature, human behaviour, how we relate, the systems we set up, how we make changes and how we are affected by them. This is the storehouse upon which sociologists, philosophers, politicians, all kinds of human scientists may draw in order to construct their webs of explanation and plans for action.

Yet the past is not just there, waiting to be used; it needs historians to interpret it, and historians who understand the need constantly to renew their vision. There is never a definitive work in history - we can read a good book on the French Revolution, indeed, and be impressed by the grasp of the author, the width of his vision, the intellectual power to explain, but that doesn't mean we couldn't write a different one, maybe even a better one (although that is not quite the point) tomorrow and the next day.

Sometimes history changes simply by looking at different kinds of documents or deploying new techniques not previously available. Up until the 1960s the sources of the historian seemed well established - State papers, the letters and diaries of eminent men, the documents of management. But when historians began to look more closely at statistics, they found, with the aid of the computer, they could discover things about ordinary people. The demographers, for example, using life statistics began to suspect that birth control was being practised widely long before we had thought. They found lots more of interest, too, and one of their leading proponents wrote a seminal book with a good title, *The World We Have Lost* to celebrate what they were doing.

Other historians deliberately set out to look for evidence that would illuminate dark corners, redress the balance of the past. For in England history had been largely seen as the history of Anglo Saxon white men in positions of power in the south of England. What about the 'Celtic fringe' (significant title), what about the 10,000 blacks who lived in London in the eighteenth century, what about the history of technology, what about the poor, what, above all, about the history of women? In the 1970s and 1980s there has been an increasing determination to set the record straight, to get the balance right. As E.P Thompson said so memorably in *The*

*Making of the English Working Class* (without doubt the most influential history book of our time), he was trying to rescue the people of the past 'from the enormous condescension of posterity'.

### **The history student's rule book**

Yet whatever kind of historian you might be, we all have to keep the ground rules. We seek evidence in the records of the period we are studying. We pay especial respect to contemporary evidence (what is often called primary sources) but we examine that with care and detachment, looking at it in terms of the point of view it represents. We research thoroughly – we don't just leave the archive when we have found a useful bit of evidence that confirms a previously held theory, we examine everything, or use some stated logical sampling procedures. We try to listen for the voice of the period, and so we must ask our questions in terms of the ways people thought and behaved and lived then. We try not to judge, but always struggle to explain, and here we draw upon our own experience of everyday life, our knowledge of the past at large, and on the basic rules of logic. As we meditate for meaning, searching for something real to say about what we are describing, above all we attempt to let the past speak through us, difficult (some would say impossible) though that might be.

### **The respect that is owed to the past**

For we are not writing fiction, and that indeed is where the playfulness of the beginning of this article must end, on a more serious note. We have a solemn duty to the past, not to misread it if at all possible, not to tell lies about it, even by mistake. Queen Anne may be dead, but she is not for insulting, she is not our plaything, she is worthy of respect. I remember many years ago being taken to the cinema to see a film about the life of Becket. 'You will enjoy it,' they said, 'you being an historian.' As the story rolled on about the child of Anglo-Saxon parents revolted by Norman rule, I too revolted, and stormed out. Oh it was a good enough story, but I knew that Becket's parents were of pure Norman blood, I knew a lot about Becket, really knew for sure, in my bones (there are seven fat volumes of materials for his life collected in the Rolls series). I know the exact words he spoke to Hamelin at the Council of Northampton, and the tawdry inventions of a French playwright are as nothing in comparison. History is real, it is there, it is worth the sweat of excavation, it is worth the anxiety of explanation, it is worth all the quarrels of interpretation quite simply because it did once really happen.

## ***Making Sense out of the Content of the History Curriculum***

**Source** *The History Curriculum* ed. Christopher Portal, 1987, The Falmer Press

Being asked to write about the content of the history curriculum, I turned again to an image that came to me many years ago: it is just like trying to stuff a barrage balloon into a Gladstone bag, with the train already prepared for leaving the station. The too muchness of it all is perhaps the most impressive sensation, the smallness of the space allocated a close second, but possibly it is the haste of the operation that we all recognize, racing like demented jockeys for 1945 (or whenever the syllabus ends), feeling that there might be a winning-post after all.

Yet there are other problems, for the debate on the content of the history curriculum has gone on for many years now, and there are many positions held in the battle for the one true curriculum. For twenty years the 'skills merchants', offering a curriculum that would leave people able to do things rather than just knowing facts, seemed to be holding the fort with spirit. Then new troops, claiming to be in support, moved up, firing concepts into the arena, urging that history should teach our children basic organizing principles that were essential to the understanding of the world at large. They wore the same history uniform, but in their rearguard came people who cried that history should not be taught for its own sake but for wider educational purposes, for understandings about humanity, morality, society and (whisper it not in Gath) politics.

This war over the history curriculum went largely unquestioned for it is fun taking sides, and sniping the greatest sport around; but it doesn't take a masterly intelligence to realize that you can't do history without content, without facts, that the practice of history is inextricably bound up with knowing history. On the other hand it is perfectly clear that there is no point in history in knowing what, without also knowing how: unless you are that mindless heap of junk, a computer, you simply cannot merely know about the battle of Hastings, for example, for to know about it at once promotes reflection, and that reflection cannot be restrained within the confines of that one battle itself: the mind flies off to general ideas about rights and duties, promises, kingship, power and violence, human folly and the clash of cultures. There is no true separation of content from skills and concepts, to separate them involves ripping to pieces the very fabric of history itself.

Thus I shall be talking of 'content' in this chapter without reference to uneasy attempts to demarcate factual information from skills and concepts, but as the whole content of the curriculum, a living, working process rather than a dissected dead body.

One aspect of the last twenty years of debate about the shape of history in schools has been an attempt to reduce the subject to logical dimensions, to set it in some kind of hierarchical order, to see it as an adult, comprehensible and well-ordered process. Although I have had some part in this myself, I have very great doubts about its utility when one is thinking about how children learn their first history. In effect I believe there is a logical fault in the attempt to impose a logical pattern on children's learning - a paradox I must try to explain.

Of course men and women are compulsive pattern-makers; arranging, ordering, sequencing, they push their material around until it makes some kind of sense to them. But the sense they are making is the sense of someone who has completed a very long journey, which has involved not just school learning but also a wide range

of maturational experiences. The pattern made by those who have arrived (by diverse routes) at an acceptable result does not necessarily make sense to those starting out on that journey. The only sense it can make is if you want to impose exactly the same scholastic, emotional and social experiences on the children that the deviser of the curriculum had. Professor Elton's sense of the past began as the child of an ancient historian in Prague. Mine began as the son of a railway porter in Lincoln. He is a fine Tudor historian, I am a rotten one, but we can't make Tudor historians by shipping them off to Prague University's Department of Classical Studies in search of fostering.

Children's learning processes are not logical, indeed they frequently seem quite jumbled, incoherent, inexplicable, zipping backwards and forwards without any pattern at all. 3z seemed yesterday to understand the whole process, to have made a major breakthrough in learning, yet this morning they have turned, as if by magic, into a bunch of untamed, sullen, silly animals. We search for a reason and none comes, for there isn't a clear answer to be found, there are no stages of learning, like platforms on the way up the wall of civilization (oh Arnold, you have a lot to answer for), securely achieved, ready for the next climb. There is no sequential development that makes sense to our eyes; we are lucky in classrooms if we can apply a few broad and general propositions, observe some overall tendencies (and often they don't apply to individuals), living in hope and trust that it is all worthwhile.

The reader may find these statements anti-intellectual, perhaps anti-educational, certainly quite gloomy; but I think teachers will recognize them as realistic. If we are to set out on a trip to find a history curriculum, we cannot expect order and good sense to prevail. In every way, I believe that to teach children effectively we must somehow divest ourselves for the time being of our learning and our scholarly habits of mind, accumulated with so much effort over so many years, and stand beside the children who know so little, who have few developed abilities, are subject to pressures we forgot about years ago. Above all we must remember that they are not there by choice, we are. Long ago in Lincoln my peer-group was perhaps 1300 pupils: all got history taught to them in some shape, but only four went on to university to study it. Of that group of four, I alone remain teaching it. I must constantly question my right to teach history to all pupils, and the stance from which I teach it.

This leads us to a major question about the status of what we teach (for if it is not important then we must at once pack up and stop). Perhaps this should be a matter for philosophers to enquire into, but I think history teaching has had its fill of philosophy. Perhaps a time will come again when it is useful to invite the philosophers back in, but the damage done to the subject by the last major interruption is incalculable. So I intend to ask the question 'Does historical knowledge matter?' for purely pragmatic reasons in a purely practical way. It may seem that at this stage I shall be entering the debate between factual content and skills and concepts once more, but what I am really after at this stage is the status of historical information in the context of learning. One might ask similar questions about skills and concepts in a skills-dominated or concepts-dominated curriculum, but I ask them here about the facts-dominated curriculum because that is largely what we have on our hands, in ninety-eight schools out of a hundred.

So, should I feel in some way ashamed when all I can recall about the Directoire is that they invented knickers (I don't even know that; I am assuming, making connections)? Maybe the reader will find that a typically frivolous and flippant remark, but let me tell here a story that puts it a little into context. Many years ago, when the Schools Council still existed, and overlooked all sorts and conditions of

examinations, a paper was put before us as a sample of what the less able might be tested upon. Then (as now, alas) the assumption was that because they couldn't write well they should do multiple-choice questions (which demand an infinitely greater expanse of pure historical knowledge than a formal essay paper does). One of the questions was 'Who invented the flanged wheel?' I slowed up business a little by enquiring mildly whether any of the distinguished gathering actually knew the answer to this little question. None did. I slowed business some more by asking whether anyone cared. Not a person there could persuade me that this piece of knowledge was worth knowing as such. It was inert, non-functioning knowledge, and as it stood, quite worthless.

Now there are situations in which such knowledge may be applied, and indeed situations in which lack of such knowledge can be a serious embarrassment. If I have presented myself to Magnus as a wheel man, not knowing matters. If I am at a conference on Russian history in this century and cry out merrily 'Djugashvili, who is he?', why, then it matters. If at a party I find myself unable to understand what is going on when the baroque is mentioned, then I am embarrassed. In effect inert knowledge is of value for the self-announced expert and for those who inhabit a particular cultural milieu (usually, but not always, an elite).

But we are not in the business of creating experts nor are we, I hope, continuing the old-style snobbish education of the grammar schools in which the cultural information was passed on for recognition purposes only. Can you recognize a postcard illustration of a Pinturiccio at twenty paces? Good, you are a member. Can you spell the name and give the dates? Good, go one step higher, friend. You can now come to our parties.

Is this unfair, my description of historical knowledge of this kind as essentially bunk? I think not, for such knowledge known in these ways can be very dangerous, because it is not true knowledge, very frequently as mythical as Robin Hood. Is Magna Carta really important? Well, if you know that it had a legal life of ten weeks, you start to think better of it. What about Habeas Corpus, great defender of English liberties, our gift to a wicked world? We don't actually operate it here, and it was passed by the crookedest Whig peer of them all (and my goodness wasn't that a high distinction?) acting as teller and counting at least five more votes than were cast in its favour. So what does knowing about Habeas Corpus mean, where is its value, when does it matter? I am prouder of knowing that the stetson hat was invented to cure TB. That fact quite moves me.

Knowledge only matters in a context, it cannot live in a vacuum; its reality consists in the need you have for it, in the use you want to put it to. Let me give a practical example: I was recently asked to do some demonstration lessons using the Schools Council Project materials on Richard III, and when I reread the pamphlet I became uncomfortably aware of why all the lessons I had seen using that pamphlet had failed. I am second to none in my admiration for the project, but those materials are terrible: they assume that having a hunch-back matters (which is pretty hard on hunch-backs, the kindest bookseller I ever knew was one) and they assume that you can find out who murdered those dratted princes. Pure piffle - history is not about detection, never has been, never can be. Clearly the only worthwhile question to ask about Richard III is what happened in those hectic months between the death of Edward IV and the death of Buckingham, and how that knowledge might make some sense of how Richard behaved. How did Richard tumble into kingship - did he fall or was he pushed? Did he react wildly, or did he plot? Was there some sort of a plan, or was what happened the unexpected result of a nexus of forces? These are real questions, they are historical questions, and we do have some chance of answering

them, but to answer them we need facts - lots of them - all set out in careful chronology, for in this case time matters greatly. We must go back to Miss Hanham and Mr Wolfe and look hard at what difference it might make if Hastings were executed on the 13th or on the 20th.

The students who watched me teach were somewhat astonished to find the arch-hater of historical facts presenting children with a detailed chronology of the subject, carefully grubbed from the remoter shelves of academe, and proclaiming that the booklet wouldn't do because it told us too little information. No doubt some of them (and some of the children) thought I was showing off my knowledge, but it is important to say that knowledge is not for all time. I hope I forget it, I don't want a cluttered mind, I don't want to win competitions. But when I need knowledge, when I want to put it to some use, then it has real status, and only the best and fullest sets of materials will do.

Thus I am no despiser of information: I love it as all historians should, and have a huge appetite for it. To illustrate my meaning about knowledge in use, let me provide an analogy (I suppose I should call it a model, these days): the reserve of historical information (in libraries, archives, museums, wherever) is rather like a wood store, where all types are kept, all shapes, all sizes, because all is worth preserving (why, even sawdust may be glued together to make blockboard). The good craftsman will know his yard, appreciating its value, and he will never throw anything away, always be collecting. But the yard doesn't dominate him, he rules it, makes it serve his purpose: his own skills and the demand for them are what condition the enterprise; they are what make sense of this heap of junk. Given a job to do, he first hunts around to see whether there are materials there to complete the task (not all jobs may be done). Some jobs need oak, some require big stuff, some are inlay-work, some veneering. Some craftsmen work to the market, knowing what they can do best, knowing what will sell; others lavish endless hours on careful work that will spin no money at all. But all need the wood yard, and upon the quality, suitability and strength of the woods will depend success.

Maybe the reader will sniff, in all this heady talk of craftsmanship, that I am reviving the old heresy of turning all children into practising historians. I hasten to disavow this always ridiculous assertion. Children cannot be historians in the same sense as university professors can, nor should they be. If our aim in teaching was to produce historians, then one look at the over-crowded profession and its regrettably low standards of all sorts of behaviours would turn us away at once. No, we are after experience of using information because that is the only way that sense may be made: learning is not just by doing, it is essentially about doing, it gives the power to do, and each time we waste children's time by telling them things, letting them copy, making them learn by heart, then we are avoiding that action which is at the very heart of the learning. In a moment, when I have stopped being negative, I hope to expand on what that action is for.

But first we must pause to do Quixotic battle with three desperate enemies of a good history curriculum which are ever present in the wings of change, and need constantly beating down: I speak of nationalism, breadth and development. A brief tilt at each, and then I promise to be positive.

Under nationalism I want to include a whole load of isms. I rejoice in the Foreign Office comment on the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact - 'all their isms are now wasms'. For wasms are surely what we want: does not the whole of human experience shout aloud against that vaunting pride in your own side, whatever it may be, British, white, Christian, men, and should we not simply stop now? Well, not according to our new

criteria, I read, where the elect nation is given special protection, presumably on direct orders from above. How strange it is, when Sweden, after years of ideological commitment to teaching children only the history of modern China and India, has now turned full circle to look again at itself, of course most dispassionately. But no to isms, even to flash and trendy isms - feminism may take its place in this queue, and no cries of 'unfair' will move me, this is a principle.

Secondly let us say no to 'breadth' (which sounds like a motto for slimmers) in the sense that Tout originally saw it. Breadth was a feeling that real history implied an attempt to swallow all of it, however superficially treated, so that students should do ancient, then medieval then modern (although in his day there was no attempt upon the contemporary world). The lads who survived this course could have in their final year a taste of 'depth' which involves really knowing about something, however small it might be. Real knowledge, of course consists in knowing how little you know, how far there is to go, still at the end of the day, but perhaps that kind of knowledge is reserved for the very good PhD, the gloria cum laude boys. Tout's ridiculous notion of a curriculum governed by this first breadth then depth notion has done infinite harm to history teaching in schools. It turned history into a race which nobody could ever win, with the teacher getting faster and faster the nearer the exams they got, leaving out greater and greater chunks of reality in the hopes of making it to the winning post. Fast history teaching leaves out all the best bits, the stories, the detail, the rambling by-ways which intuition tells you to follow. Fast history tells lies, for it paints history not as it is, confused and confusing, bedraggled and messy, gloriously cluttered, inexplicable and maddening, and sorts it all out into one almighty washing line with only the pegs left in place. More of this later, in a more positive vein.

But first a third no, this time to development in history, which has many roots: some in good old Whig history, in the progressive view of the story of how dreadful savage cave men grew steadily and slowly until they got to be beautiful and perfect old us; it also grows from Toutism - if you teach a 'breadth' curriculum then chasing development through it is a secondary product; above all it comes from the dreaded 'lines of development' notion that did so much harm to history in the immediately post-war period. Recently Schools Council history has added weight to this notion, taking it on board for its history of medicine project. Denis Shemilt, in demonstrating with great skill what children could logically deduce about the processes of time and change from this experience, gives it a spurious glamour, but to show that children can manage to work out some positions vis-à-vis cause and effect does not prove these are worthwhile things to learn about, or that they are specially to do with historical learning.

In fact I would suggest that this is very dangerous ground indeed, for even in areas where a developmental model might seem appropriate (the most obvious example being the history of Parliament) we find false logic at work. Simon de Montfort had really nothing in common with William Ewart Gladstone, even though the latter thought he did. There is not growth in the history of Parliament, however much people want to show it that way. Certainly we can observe through many years a determined continuity, a reluctance to change, a tendency to hang on to past ways in the face of the whirling crises of the everyday world. But to stalk development in this way is once again to tell lies about the past: it may be convenient in the text book to block all we know or want the pupils to know about Parliament in the nineteenth century in one chapter under one heading, but such change as did occur in the nineteenth century was intimately associated with all the other aspects of life, and the only thing that demarcates parliamentary history effectively is its institutional reluctance to face change. We cannot take a longways slice out of history and thrust it upon the unsuspecting public: that is a lie.

But enough for the time being of negative bluster (clear signs to the reader that I fear the challenge of saying something positive on this knotty matter). The first positive proposition I want to push is the reverse of my second negative, anti-Toutian statement. I believe the history we should present to children should be depth, by which I mean real history. In universities we often comment on the success of special subjects where third year students suddenly come alive because we allow them to get at the real meat of history, the documented, detailed, slow and thorough study of something that clearly defines itself. The students enjoy their work and clearly do better than before, and I ask 'Why can't we let them do this kind of work all the time - why must they be forced through endless trackways of mediocre failure before the few who survive to the end are given the rewarding plums of the real stuff?' Good question, but one rarely answered, for it turns the whole of the curriculum neatly on its head. If first and second year university students should be able to study in depth, why not children too?

Much of the experience of what I have called 'fast history' is indeed an experience of mediocre study in which failure is guaranteed. We tackle a patch of history so fast that nobody can catch it, understand it, enjoy it, and all the students look fools when they answer their tests because we haven't given them time to be anything else. By the time one or two of the brighter ones are getting a grip on one subject, and feeling some confidence in it, beginning to perform rather well, we whisk them on to the next, where they can look foolish all over again. I am not a great believer in conspiracy theories, but if history teachers really wanted to fix their pupils into the role of permanent inadequate idiots, then they couldn't have chosen a better way of doing it than to move through a breadth curriculum at speed.

So a 'hey!' for the slow, thorough specialized study that we would normally associate with higher levels of learning; but immediately we must add two further propositions. First of all I think it vital that we have variety in the curriculum, for pupils can't learn if only one dimension is being examined. They will frankly grow very bored if one topic is spun out at too great a length, and they will revolt if the next topic turns out to be a mirror-image of the first. Good for them, they are wise about their own learning: pace and challenge are major requirements, they need constantly to turn corners and bump into something new.

This is not that easy for a teacher to manage. We all have our specialisms, special areas of knowledge, special interests and particular delights: the pupils get to recognize these quickly. At first they can be fun, and a strength, but the teacher who is always 'going on' about Henry VIII, or the teacher who will always stray onto battlefields whatever the topic in hand soon becomes a bore. Those who tell teachers to teach what they themselves are interested in are talking about first lessons only, in my experience. We have, in fact, a duty to present to pupils the many-faceted nature of our subject. What are some of the necessary constituents? Here we will meet with disagreement in detail, but what follows might make a first stab at such a list.

First of all I want to sketch in two major dimensions which in their contrast seem to me to hold together the dynamic of the subject: I believe when we come to study history we need to discover something strange and distant and also to study something very close and familiar. In that statement the reader will at once see bound up the war between local and world history in the syllabus as well as the relevance argument of the values of the recent as against the values of the long dead. These are the two great arguments in the field, yet I would not pose them in that form, for I think they are unanswerable; I cannot judge Tutankhamen against

Mubarak in terms of curricular value, nor can I honestly say that the parish church on the corner is of greater importance than knowledge about Mr Deng's China. Greedy as I am, I want them both.

The demand for both types of history might evoke a number of responses, but two major ones must be dealt with here. First of all there are the advocates of a coherent curriculum who will say that it will confuse the children if you dash from one disparate subject to another, and that it is better to stick to one thing. In answer to this I would say that I want to do every topic thoroughly, and I would want to demonstrate the interrelationship of the various topics under study. And the evaluation of the Schools Council 13-16 Project showed quite clearly that children did not worry when faced with a four-fold history curriculum.

The second challenge might be to say that this is to use history in an anthropological rather than in an historical manner, thus denying the integrity of the subject. That one is harder to get away from, for I do believe we have much more to learn from anthropological approaches to the humanities curriculum than Bruner had to tell us. What are different, however, are the material and our ways of using it, and if these remain strictly historical and the intent remains historical, then all will be well (and fascinating as anthropological reports may be, they have proved as charmingly unreliable as any historical controversy, and I do believe history to be more interesting, if just as messy).

The important constituents in holding these two dimensions together in some sort of real focus are discussion and comparison. Thus it is not enough to go from a phase of oral or family history about the recent past of our own locality to the wildly different story of Cortes and Montezuma; what we must do is to reflect on both, to do this rigorously and repeatedly, and to look in a comparative vein all the time. We must say to the children that the problems we had when the two old ladies we interviewed disagreed violently about Mr Churchill are similar in some respects to the problems of the different story told in Cortes's letters to his king from that we found in the Aztec pictograms. If we do not stop to reflect in this way then all the learning will be lost, will seep away, leaving vague memories and the question 'Why ever did we do that at school and why did we work so hard to have nothing explained in the end?'. We must test, not the knowledge of the children, but the quality of their learning, and how fast and in what directions it is growing.

Thus far with the positive: the curriculum must be detailed, specialized study of the distant and the local, with full examination of all the implications. Let us get a bit more practical: just what shall we study? There are a number of possible constituents here, but not all are equally attended to at the moment: our history in school is often the history of events, ideas and institutions (that is, a very abstract rather than a concrete selection) and we often leave out those noble constituents of older, outmoded histories: people and places.

Fear of Carlyle (a perfectly natural condition, but one hard to cure) has driven historians away from biographical approaches. 'Great Men' (although not yet 'Great Women') histories are derided, and the role of the masses, of trends and tendencies, of revolutionary forces as major instruments of change are regularly stressed. Now I would accept that there were times when Disraeli was no more than a leaf blown by the winds, and that at other times the grand puppeteer had a few hands up his own coat, but take Disraeli away from history and what is left crumbles into a much less orderly and comprehensible scenario (which is probably a fair thing) but also one that lacks the verve and interest he supplies. I don't wish to worship him, put him up for a role model, or suggest that he was more instrumental than in truth he was, but I don't

wish either to steal him from pupils' experience of history either. So let's us have some biography.

Let us also have some geography. It is astonishing that so many schools teach history and geography as if they were cognate subjects, and so many of our French masters of the Annales school tell us how desperately important a sense of place is, and yet it plays so little part in our teaching.

To many students of medieval history Byzantium is more of a concept than a place, and for the Russian Revolution, well the Finland station may raise the image of a book rather than a real place of railway trains. I think we need to see places (in photographs and maps if not on trips) in our history almost as much as we need to think about the time that history took to happen. How different might the history of sixteenth/seventeenth-century Europe be in school if seen in the context of Venice, Antwerp, Amsterdam, Hamburg and Bremen? I know it all seems as old hat as biography, smacking of those little grey volumes on medieval towns or the green and black Stories of the Nations we see mouldering in second-hand shops. Perhaps their time has come again. This is not, of course, to decry the other components listed above. We do need to study some of the prime institutions of world history, we need to be learning about farming and village life, about food and its place on the world stage; we need to know about factories and cities, about all kinds of governmental constitutions and instruments; we need to know about things that connect and divide us, about exploration, warfare and travel. These great overarching concepts in history should be by no means ignored in curriculum building, but let us, for the children's sake, take the abstractness out of them, put the stories back in. We can, indeed, look at international relations, but not in the first instance merely as an idea: look instead at the astonishing story of the Congo crisis, and then, on the basis of interesting knowledge draw out in discussion some of the more general principles that may be learned from such a study.

We are beginning to fill out the content of the curriculum in relation to principles; let us now add a third, the vital quality which history illuminates is the nature of change. I have talked a little about this before, and it will be clear to the reader that I am slightly ambivalent on the subject. Change in revolutionary circumstances is interesting to look at and often useful, but it is by no means typical, and it is unwise of the curriculum builder to be over-impressed by the noise and bustle of a subject. The change that is important is the change induced by ideas, that slow and anxious accommodation to the new by those who wish to continue just as they were, but know that something has to give. Thus the notions unleashed by Marx, Freud and Darwin were much more significant in terms of real change than most of the great events of the last 100 years. To recognize the nature and power of class in shaping society, to see man as the most recent part of many millions of years of development in the context of the survival of the fittest, to unleash the yoke of inhibition man has borne before, these ideas (however simply and therefore silly expressed) have changed the world dramatically, and should be the subject of study.

My penultimate dimension of curriculum building is one that could cause lots of debate: I believe that if we wish to use history to teach children effectively about humanity, what human nature is, how it works, its problems and possibilities, then we require a moral focus. I really do seem to be dragging history teaching back into the nineteenth century with a will, don't I? Yet I am unrepentant; I believe children need to find out about human behaviour and they need to study many examples of many different types of behaviour, and of course reflect upon them and discuss them fully. To do this in a perfectly objective, so-called 'scientific' manner is quite impossible even if it was desirable, and I doubt that. We must judge, we must order, we must

arrange, we can't stop ourselves doing that it is part of our nature, an habitual pattern that comes with our thought processes. Children who are growing up into a baffling world where laws and commands seem to conflict with behaviours all the time ('BE QUIET' bellows the teacher) need to find out first what is fair, then what is wise, then what is right and finally what is just - find it out for themselves, I hasten to add, not have it thrust upon them as a ready-made code of conduct. History provides an endless sequence of examples on which we may draw, ranging from St Francis right through to Hitler. In our days we feed the children quite a lot about the bad end of the scale (why does almost every pupil get a dose, however small, of Hitler, I wonder?) but very little of the good. Is it that history teachers fear to look like nineteenth-century Sunday school teachers, fear the children's conventional mockery of the good, the wise and the just? Perhaps a little of both, but I believe we must learn to cope with both fears if we are to offer children a good diet of examples on which to cut their wisdom teeth, on which to learn how to make judgments.

Lastly, perhaps the most obvious dimension of them all: all the time, in every aspect of their work, whatever it might be, children should be learning how to find out, how to cope with materials from the past, how to assess their findings, how to use them to make their own historical statements. When people ask about the real worth of history in the present-day vocationally oriented curriculum, I tend to use this as a prime statement, for it really does answer the question. To give a pupil the chance to learn how to find out information; to give him the confidence to deal with a lot of material and learn to analyse it; to give him some of the skills needed to judge the relevance and validity of the evidence that he finds; to give him the power to pull this all together into a convincing and coherent statement - these are no mean gifts, and though they are here specific to history, they contribute notably to the whole school curriculum, and relate immediately to major educational goals.

So these are some of the dimensions that structure the choice of content in any history curriculum. They point towards a set of educational aims, and perhaps it is time to formulate these more precisely. There are not many, but I find them important in governing my own choice of material. I want to imbue children with:

- (a) a sensitivity to the hugeness and complexity of problems, with a willingness to admit that it is not easy to get things right, however much you might want to, and however clever you think you are. A properly educated person will not feel that peace could be available in Northern Ireland by banging a few heads together and sitting around a table with a crate of Jameson's to hand;
- (b) a knowledge about humanity, about suffering and achievement, about order and disorder, about good and evil; some feeling for how things tend to happen, how they got the way they are;
- (c) some understanding of the difficulties involved in getting at the true story, how things really happened, who was responsible and why. I want children to begin to feel for the provisional nature of historical statements, to understand the need to interpret, to question, to analyse and to rebuild the story for oneself;
- (d) an enriched and inspired curiosity about positively everything from simple scandal right through to the meaning of world religions, and the confidence to let that curiosity flow and feed on finding out;
- (e) some security of spirit from the knowledge of the times out of which we have stepped, what lies behind our births and origins. A delight in the past, a desire to preserve and treasure the past.

What help is all this, you cry - I read thus far in the hope that you would present me with a curriculum, with hints about what to teach, and now, you rat, you are ducking the great question once more. Well yes, I am, regretfully. Wherever you turn there is

too much history to teach, and there are no ways inherent in the content itself for judging its value. Whatever you teach you are leaving out a host of good things. Anything in that great toy box of the past will do, we must judge alone by fitness to purpose. Choose your own historical content, then, but know above all what you want it to do for your children.

## ***History and the Challenge of Multicultural Education***

**Source:** ed. A. Fyfe and P. Figuera *Education for Cultural Diversity*, 1993, Routledge

### **Why teach history?**

As I write, I think about what is going on around the world. Azeris are massacring Armenians, and vice versa; Bulgarians want to deny the Turkish minority their rights; Romania is struggling to face up to its Hungarian and German populations; in France anti-Arab racism is rampant; in South America, the Indian tribes continue to be wiped out on a scale that makes Europe's holocaust look small. I recall the time I spent in an Aboriginal quarter of Sydney more than a year ago. Why teach history? All these situations are capable of some sort of historical explanation, but can learning about them do any good? Surely it was the teaching of history in Northern Ireland that did most to establish the stereotypes on which hatred and violence have fed. Is it not the greatest arrogance in the world to imagine that history teachers can actually do some good?

Maybe we must consider the matter. There are schools of thought about this. Perhaps the prime responsibility that is placed at history's door in education is that of reminding people about the past, and thereby warning them about man's potential in the future. This function is in part noble, for it insists that we never forget what people have done to each other simply because we don't want them to behave that way in the future. Thus when we record the actions of Nazi war criminals we proclaim to all the truth that you cannot hide from history: Beware, your sins will find you out.

Clearly this function is an important one. When we know of people who stand at school gates delivering pamphlets that aim to show that the Holocaust never happened, we must move, and although I would personally find it very hard to agree with the proposition that there are things in history that all children should know (since that would mean shouldering out a host of other things that might prove in the end more important), I could hardly fail to hold up my hand for the teaching of the Holocaust.

And yet, and yet, as the Yanomami choke their way to death in the wake of the gold hungry invasion of their territory, I wonder at the figure given of twenty million Indians dead as a result of white expansion in Latin America. Should we not be teaching about that?

A second function for history that has been seen to be important is in the provision of role models for depressed or oppressed groups. History is indeed full of such examples: Mary Seacole has lived in hundreds of classrooms in the last decade and has continued her good work way beyond her own life span. There are others to be found, and one of the main suggestions of this chapter is that we should continue to hunt through the archives using the new lenses which can see what has been missed.

And yet are we looking for the right things when we search for people who were successful in white society against all the odds? Will this not produce conformist, assimilationist heroes? Is it not those who struggled against the cultural pressures, the social and economic blights, the snuffy hauteur of those who thought themselves heirs to the kingdom that we should put before the children? At least the children deserve a choice.

A third possibility which seems much favoured is to establish a consciousness of a group within the larger society in the past. The message 'We have been here longer than you think, and we have known ourselves, and kept ourselves in times past when it was much harder' is in many various ways a rich one. There are problems here too, for I think that the simple recording of black presence can be merely an antiquarian activity that says nothing and therefore shames itself.

However, there are plenty of occasions when one can feel the power. I recall teaching on the south coast a class of top juniors with just one black girl in it. We were doing a local history topic and I had dug up heaps of resources, including a record of a ship being beached in 1555 just half a mile from where the classroom was now. A pirate couldn't quite get her home and had to run her ashore, and so the local owner of the rights stepped in and an enquiry took place. In the enquiry the pirate declared that when he had taken her there was nothing aboard but negroes'. Although all the children were embarrassed by this, I asked them to look more closely at the evidence and read its meaning. If there were 'negroes' aboard when he took it and he beached it as an empty ship, what had happened in between? It took ages, and a mounting sense of shock, to realise the appalling truth that he had thrown the lot overboard to drown in order to get his prize home.

Several weeks later we came across an entry in the churchwardens' accounts about a collection taken up to buy out an Englishman who had been taken by the Barbary pirates. The black girl looked puzzled for a while, and then asked for confirmation: 'Do you mean that Africans came here, to these coasts, and took white men slaves?' She could hardly believe her ears, nor could she restrain a little smile of revenge.

The resources are everywhere, waiting for us to pick them up; we need only to ask the right questions and look in the right places. Every record office, every local collection in every public library in the land contains materials.

### **The National Curriculum**

But into what kind of a context will all this potential work fit?

One of the very basic positions of the National Curriculum in relation to history has been a determined attempt to pull back the content into British history, and to see British history as some kind of machine for assimilation. This in itself is worrying enough, but when you add to it a determination to have a purely content base in the first instance, and to eschew skills and concepts, then the position looks a great deal worse. Without some articulated view of the nature of imperialism, for example, and some notion of how power works in society, how are children to begin to interpret these reams of materials and begin to see a use for them?

In a sense, the push that lies behind the National Curriculum History Working Group involves an understanding that history is a deeply political study and that political standpoints must eventually be taken and so they want the classic definition of 'history with the politics left out'. For this reason they tried to exclude much of the twentieth century warfare that requires one to take up a point of view in order to study it.

The National Curriculum devotes twenty-five lines to multicultural education, attempting to defend the proposition that the history of Britain is the history of the growth of a nation from many cultures. So that is all right. To be fair, in the Final Report a number of options were put into Key Stages 3 and 4 that would direct pupils' attention to Europe, the wider world and the Americas, but they have retained

a heavy British emphasis, with a study of the Empire at its 'zenith', and the Secretary of State in his response has smartly collapsed the wider world and the Americas together. Equally he has suggested that the studies at Key Stage 4 should be more broad and general, leaving many pupils who do not take the full GCSE course with no chance to take such useful courses as 'India and Pakistan 1930-1964' or 'Africa South of the Sahara'. At the time of writing, the NCC (ed: National Curriculum Council) is taking advice on the Secretary of State's response to the Final Report, and one hopes that many respondents will note how little attention is given to the real issues of Britain today.

'Immigration' is listed as one topic in 'Britain and the Twentieth Century' in Key Stage 4, but one notes that the much braver Welsh Report has 'Migration and Emigration' as a major option as early as Key Stage 3. The committees seem to have seen English and Welsh children as largely white and unproblematic (and, of course, mainly boys). They have not addressed the pupil who feels both Muslim and British, or who looks forward to a holiday in Bangladesh as a return home, and who sees his or her eating and dressing habits as infinitely more rational than those the school promotes.

It is also clear that the working group sees thinking as something that the pupils will do after learning all this information. Unless pupils understand what the learning is for, and where it is tending, they will not do it, and teachers will not have the support of parents and users of the pupils' qualifications in the long run. Only the learners can do the learning, and they need to see exactly how that learning relates to themselves and to their needs.

We cannot answer these needs with simple responses such as those offered by the National Curriculum Working Group - the problems are too great and too complex. We have a great deal to do if we are to move to a position where our schools are truly serving the needs of today, and to diminish the prospect of racial animosities on the scale that exist in other countries, such as those mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

### **History and morality**

In searching for a reason for teaching a kind of history that demands thought, the idea of moral justification arises. To admit to such a function leads to trouble whatever the shade of opinion dominant at the time.

No kind of history can be 'balanced' or 'germ-free' in a way that allows us to take a dispassionate position. Nowadays we tend to reject the moral stance as wishy-washy liberalism, rather than the correct, committed position-taking of my juniors, who clearly want to do something with their history.

The rejection of liberalism is understandable. Since the outcome of human action is usually quite dreadful, is it not wise to suspect that this was intended by the apparently liberal governors in the first place? If people really did mean to do well by others, surely there should be some signs that things are getting better? Since they are in fact getting ever worse, it suggests that even humanitarians are working in their own interests or those of their class. Hence it is that the helpless get worse damaged and the so-called helpers continue to flourish.

There is a lot to be said for such a gloomy view - especially when we examine the history of racism. Surely the main duty of the historian in this sphere is not to preach but to record, to make sure the horrors of the past, the insults to humanity - slavery,

the Holocaust - are not forgotten but are placed before an unwilling public's eyes, to be grieved over.

It is like building a war memorial, stone by stone, a duty of the survivors to remind the future of the suffering of the past and, to a degree, to lay blame where it should be placed. And in examining our reasons for building such a monument, we must ask ourselves what we expect to happen when we have built it. We have built war memorials before and written on them all 'never again' but, somehow, that has not worked. We need in this matter not just the will to do well, but an understanding of how evil came to happen in the first place.

We must find some way of linking the past with the future and discovering the springs of action in history education.

### **Suspending suspicion - settlers and Aborigines**

Perhaps it would help us to understand how evil happens if we were to suspend our suspicion for a while. Suppose we believe that those who set out to do well really do have just that in the centre of their minds, and yet when they fail, what then? If we can find out how good will fails, we will have learned something.

I can illustrate what I mean by using some work of my own in which I set out to find something of what went wrong between the settlers and Aborigines in Australia. I had quite a few useful resources, mainly letters from a missionary who set out to work for the people of Australia and ended up having a huge row with his missionary society and almost everyone else. I asked not just 'What went wrong?' but also 'At what moment did the first thing go wrong?'

We worked through drama, discussion and widespread reading. I must emphasise that in my work I encourage children to think their way towards the beginning of answers to questions posed. Thus, we developed lessons around their ideas - some naive, some shocking but demonstrating a struggle to find useful answers to these questions.

One group wondered if the English had gone out looking for idealised 'noble savages' and had been disappointed in what they found. Others wondered if the white settlers had blamed the Aborigines for their inability to resist the seeds of disaster the white people had brought with them: disease and social problems such as squalor, drunkenness and dependence. I do not mean that the pupils in my class saw the Aborigines as particularly weak or prone to squalor, only that they tried to empathise not only with the Aborigines but also with the settlers and imagine their reactions as the problems built up around them.

Another group compared the different attitudes of the settlers and the Aborigines to property - in which the white people saw their liberty as dependent on the preservation of individual property rights and the Aborigines had no such ideas. Owning everything in common, they saw nothing wrong in taking, say, an axe, while the whites believed this to be a hostile act.

In these ways they began to build up a vision of how racism began. Their thoughts were not those of careless or prejudiced people and I believe that they will remember these lessons much better than a conventional session in which I simply taught them what racism is and why it is wrong.

Of all the ideas that came up, the most significant was about the religious goals of the missionaries and settlers. They saw that the missionaries intended to convert the Aborigines into the equivalent of 'good children' and, being very experienced at being children, the class quickly saw the dangers and stupidity of this view. Children, after all, grow up and can disappoint adults.

These ideas seem to me to share two qualities: they are simple and naive and yet they are also attempts at an explanation that promotes understanding of the problem. Here, the learner was not being hectored about the wickedness of the past, but was in a position to invent explanations that promoted thought.

## **Resources**

Now I would like to introduce the reader to the sorts of teaching resources I intend to use in future lessons. They are given in some detail because I think they exemplify rather well the position I am trying to establish in this chapter and they demonstrate that there are ample resources waiting for the teacher who wishes to engage in this sort of work.

### **An African prince**

The first concerns one James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African prince. I had never heard of him until I saw his Narrative in a dealer's catalogue. It was once clearly a popular piece of reading. It had first appeared in Bath in about 1770, with an introduction by Walter Shirley (ob. 1786), cousin of Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntington, and a strong Calvinist and hymn writer. There were many later editions (one in Welsh in 1779). Mine is dated 1840.

The introduction states that it was first 'committed to paper by the elegant pen of a young lady of the town of Leominster' with no intention to print, but its emphasis on Christianity and fortitude was such that it had an appeal to Calvinists, who ensured that it was eventually published.

Born in Bornu in what is now northern Nigeria, James Albert was the grandson of a king. He paints a picture of himself as introspective and anxious, often 'lost in wonder at the work of creation' and enquiring who was the 'Man of Power' who lived beyond the skies.

Indeed, he asked so many questions ('Who was the first man? Who made the first cow, the first lion. ..?') that his family thought him mad. When a trader from the Gold Coast offered to take him for a holiday to his home, they hastily agreed.

Being such a misfit makes James Albert a subject for sympathy, as does his anxiety when the travellers build rings of fire around their encampment to keep out lions. The merchant's companion hated James Albert and kept suggesting that he should be dropped, Joseph-like, into a deep pit, or drowned in a river. It seems that a process of softening up was happening - these were clever slavers, who planned to make their captive leap into slavery.

When they reached the Gold Coast, his rich golden ornaments were polished up and he was sent to see the king who, he was told, planned to execute him personally because he was suspected of being a spy on behalf of his grandfather. In the event he was not executed but, so that he could not return home with the secrets of the Gold Coast, was sold into slavery instead.

After being turned down by a French slaver, because he was too small, he was taken aboard a Dutch ship, where he overheard his master and companion agreeing that if he were not sold, he should be thrown overboard. To save himself, he rushed to the captain and cried, 'Father, save me.' The captain did so - giving two yards of check cloth for him.

He claims to have been devoted to his owner: 'My only pleasure was to serve him well'. He saw the captain's lips move as he read and thought he must be talking to the book, so the book must have the power to talk to him. But when he put his ear close to a page he heard nothing. 'This thought immediately presented itself to me, that everybody and everything despised me because I was black.'

The ship reached Barbados and James Albert was sold first to a young man from New York and then, eventually, to a minister, who taught him to pray. James Albert felt he was about to unravel the mystery of the 'Man of Power'.

He describes how he felt a sense of guilt and how, after reading Bunyan's Holy War and other religious books, he remained in a state of despair and attempted suicide. He found some peace in a favourite oak tree, which he used to visit 'whenever I was treated with ridicule and contempt'. Then one day as he prayed, he felt suddenly bathed in a most comforting light and longed to stay there for ever.

His master died suddenly, leaving him his freedom, and six years later he decided to go to England. 'I imagined all the inhabitants of that land were holy', since he had met English visitors like Whitfield and had read holy books written by Englishmen.

He was astonished, on landing at Portsmouth, to hear people cursing on all sides. He met a landlady of a pub, who said she was a Christian. He gave her his watch and £25 to look after, asking her to spend £6 on clothes and giving her a handsome looking-glass from Martinique as a reward. She bought the clothes, but kept the rest of the money. 'I thought it worse than Sodom, considering the great advantage they possessed.'

He took a stagecoach to London, where people charged him 75. 6d. to show him the way to Whitfield's tabernacle. Safe at last, Whitfield found him a protector, one Betty, a silk weaver of Petticoat Lane. She took on his education and tried particularly to stop him from giving half-guineas to beggars. After a year-long trip to Holland, where thirtyeight Calvinist ministers heard him every Tuesday for seven weeks and authenticated his conversion, he married Betty and moved to Colchester in Essex.

Betty could have done well in London as a weaver, but James Albert writes of riots which he feared the weavers would make him join. These may have been the Wilkes disturbances of 1786.

They moved to Norwich, where sickness and poverty plagued them. When a daughter died both the Baptists and the Quakers refused to bury her. They eventually moved to Kidderminster. James Albert was too old and ill to work but the hard work of his wife and the charity of neighbours supported them.

*Why this example?*

I give an extensive review of the contents of this slight pamphlet for a number of reasons. Firstly, I think it is worth knowing about, yet it does not appear in any substantial way in literature - Peter Fryer provides an abstract in *Staying Power*

(1984, pp. 89-91) and there is a brief account of his English residence in Shylon (1977, pp. 169-71).

Secondly, it shows that material does exist, and I think all teachers would value it. Thirdly, it speaks for itself. I believe, particularly with autobiographical materials, that they should be left to whisper their own message direct to the hearer, unimpeded by the historian or the teacher's fumbling towards explanation and generalisation.

But, most of all, it raises issues that could be explored in classrooms. The example of James Albert partly explains how abused people come to give themselves up so readily to the control of their torturers: we can tell at once that other terrors have been used to make him not only amenable, but actually ready to run into the arms of the slavers to escape what he believes will be a worse fate. He is grateful to his masters and anxious to serve - which brings us to a second point. Servants do often serve with good will. This is often met with cruelty but it is a feature we should not forget when we come to add up where good will has gone, who put it into the system and why it failed.

The power of religion is never far from James Albert's account (although, of course, some of this comes from the elegant pen of the lady from Leominster). What this shows all too well is that the white Calvinists saw James Albert as a 'poor heathen', a lost and sinful child struggling towards God. They delight in the missionary act and warm to the agonies of conversion, seeing him as a pleasingly vulnerable child who, because of good will, struggles to be 'good' for his mentors.

James Albert behaved as a very good child, but he made the mistake of believing that people would do what they said. He gives us the clearest view of his disappointments: though beives of ministers listened to his story, though a woman of status and skill married him, he still, as a black man, felt the lash of poverty. In Colchester, when his first job ended and starvation lay ahead, he recalls how a farmhand refused him a job and then gave him four very large carrots to help feed his family until more charity came their way. Without charity, it seems, he would not have survived and yet, he notes, there was at least charity.

### **Jews in London's East End**

Well over a century later, one woman observer watched the influx of Jews into London's East End. On 1 February 1895, when she and Sidney had finished their first book, Beatrice Webb wrote in her diary: 'The truth is, I want to give full play to whatever faculty I have for descriptive and dramatic work. I am sick to death of trying to put hideous facts into readable form' (Mackenzie, 1982, p. xvii). In July 1893 she had written: 'What is wanted in London is a body of persons who would make it their business to know thoroughly each district. London is so huge, and the poor are so helpless' (ibid. p. 89). She wanted to find out from the inside, and so became for a time a rent collector. She learned not just to pity what she saw and to seek remedies, she also began to feel an affinity, even an envy for their carelessness and generosity that in the midst of squalor and despair created moments of joviality and love that were missing in her own life.

On another occasion, having prepared herself with much care as a trouser finisher, a lady down on her luck and needing work, she visited the sweat-shops. The other women saw that her work was poor, but none the less looked after her in various ways:

*I have my cup of tea. The pale weary girl is munching her bread and butter. 'Won't you have some?' she says, pushing the papers towards me. 'No thank you,' I answer. 'Sure?' she says. And then, without more to-do, she lays a piece on my lap and turns away to avoid my thanks. A little bit of human kindness that goes to my heart and brings tears into my eyes. Work begins again. My friend has finished her trousers and is waiting for another pair. She covers her head with her hands and in her grey eyes there is an intense look of weariness, weariness of body and of mind. Another pair is handed to her and she begins again. She is a quick worker but, work hard as she may, she cannot make much over 1s. a day. (ibid. pp. 248-9)*

Beatrice's publication of material like this won her much acclaim; in her empathy for the subject she had steadily moved from straight reporting into a fictive (though truthful) presentation.

Her contribution to Charles Booth's survey on the arrival of the Jews begins unashamedly. 'Let us imagine ourselves on board a Hamburg boat steaming slowly up the Thames in the early hours of the morning.' She describes with a painter's care the men and women, and shows with quick, subtle touches the effect of their background and experiences:

*You address them kindly, they gaze on you with silent suspicion; a coarse German sailor pushes his way amongst them with oaths and curses; they simply move apart without a murmur, and judging from their expression, without a resentful feeling; whilst the women pick up their ragged bundles out of the way of the intruder with an air of deprecating gentleness. (Booth, 1902)*

She describes those meeting the boat and hints at their stories:

*Presently a boat rows briskly to the side of the vessel; seated in it is a young woman with a mock sealskin coat. She is chaffing the boatman in broken English, and shouts words of welcome and encouragement to the simple bewildered peasant who peers over the side of the vessel with two little ones clasped in either hand. Yes! That smartly dressed young lady is her daughter. Three years ago the father and the elder child left the quiet Polish village: a long interval of suspense, then a letter telling of an almost hopeless struggle; at last passage money, and here to-day the daughter with her bright warm clothes and cheery self-confidence - in a few hours the comfortably furnished home of a small wholesale orange dealer in Mitre Street, near to Petticoat Lane. (ibid.)*

Not all faced happy receptions - for those lost souls with none to help them there were the eager touts, offering lodgings, onward tickets for America, taking what little they had and condemning them to the sweaters. The man from the Hebrew Ladies' Protective Society did his best to rescue unaccompanied girls, but most of the incomers were condemned to a life of bitter exploitation and maltreatment –like James Albert they found the holy city of liberal England strangely different from what they had expected. We could follow Beatrice's account further, it is fascinating, and like James Albert's account would make an ideal source for children to use. It has detail, depth and texture: all the qualities that the brief skim over the surface of a textbook lacks. But it also has a deep sympathy and concern for its subject, and that is what I wanted to bring before you when I started this chapter.

## **Empathy**

There has been much debate among history teachers in England in the past few years about empathy. Some have seen it as an examinable commodity whilst others have seen it as an intellectual and emotional capacity way beyond the grasp of mere schoolchildren. Yet it is clear that if we are to understand in any meaningful way how it was that things went wrong in the past, why they still go wrong for us today, then we must attempt to rethink other people's thoughts, we must try to see the world from their position in time and space and circumstance.

As we approach this tangled and thorny problem of teaching pupils about race relations, it seems to me that the empathetic understanding of particular experiences in the past has much to offer as a technique, particularly if we can use rich and detailed resources such as have been displayed here.

And I think something within me urges dispassion in this work so that we can think our thoughts without the pressure of nervousness about possibly getting it wrong, and so that we may look not just at stories of bad and wicked men oppressing others brutally, but also offer examples of those, the oppressed and the oppressors alike, who none the less showed that goodwill towards their fellow human beings which is, surely, what we all aim for in the end.

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## ***Is There No Respect of Place, Person nor Time in You?***

**Source:** *Education for Teaching*, Autumn, 1971

Recently a number of educationists have come to agree that in history teaching one should grant priority to method rather than content; instead of learning the matter of history, children should learn to use historical skills and attitudes, and to apply them correctly in a variety of situations and media. To call this type of history teaching 'new' would be not only presumptuous but also incorrect; nonetheless it is already under heavy attack, along with other 'dangerous novelties' in education.

The main burden of the argument is that one should learn the facts of history 'for their own sake', and that it is clearly important to know the 'important' parts of history, and to be able to fit these into the grand sweep of chronology, so that one may be able to relate them together.

One does not need to emphasize here that no-one has ever indicated what history's 'sake' is (other than Maitland, in a different context, regrettably), nor that no-one has ever found any way of dividing the unimportant from the important in the whole of history. These two points are clear enough. Clearly too, we may state that without comprehending the basic concepts and methods of a discipline one may do little with its materials other than store them as efficiently as possible, and retrieve them when asked and when one is able. A content-based education is concerned with little more than the general knowledge of its pupils.

Now general knowledge has its uses - on a desert island where no libraries exist, in quiz games, and in those one-upmanship duels that still occur occasionally amongst older and class-conscious people facing a new entrant to their society. Other uses are hard to think of: one certainly does not sit in one's bath hugely enjoying one's knowledge of the causes of the French Revolution; problems at work or at home are rarely solved by reference to one's perfect grasp of the rotation of crops in eighteenth century Norfolk. General knowledge is in effect froth on the surface of the mind - some first indication of the presence of intellect, but neither proof nor savour thereof. For example, I have no doubt but I know a great many facts that fall into the domain of Science - some fascinating, some amusing, many dull - but my knowledge is not more than an ill-composed hodgepodge, for I have no means of validating my information, nor of using it. I am not scientifically educated.

The house of cards falls easily, bar one storey: chronology remains obstinately standing. Surely time is the very essence of history, the air it breathes, the vital element; without it there is no history, and because of it we have our perfect excuse for teaching the subject as one damn thing after another. Let us then come to the nub, and examine the place of chronology in the teaching of history, for this I perceive to be the greatest problem of them all.

I do not propose to give here any kind of review of research though there is plenty of it. This job has been efficiently done already. Rather I wish to offer some personal views on the subject, views formed over some years of facing teachers in conference who never fail to raise the question of time as being the most difficult of the questions they face in thinking about their teaching.

Time, *pace* the hymn, does not flow at all like an ever-rolling stream; if one absolutely requires a geographical analogue, then the absurd notion of a meander with rapids set in it must serve. It wanders along inscrutably, and suddenly, for no

apparent reason, begins to rush; equally without reason it will slow to sluggishness once more. To the historian it is all very odd, for he has to use a measuring device offered him by astronomers and mathematicians (who originally saw themselves as the servants of farmers and priests, not historians). Time measurement was invented for a present and future purpose, not to serve the past (though, as in all things, past experiences went toward its invention). Time tells us when to sow the crops, when to worship our God, when harvest will come, and when we must prepare for the festival.

True, in relation to the past, the invention of time helps us out, providing a handy washing-line on which to peg events in some kind of visible order. If we had to store them in any other way they would fall from view, hidden beneath the increasing jumble; sort as we may, we would still not see them. Time is the historian's index, and this kind of indexing is built into his mind; he does not search for wars, but for the Crimean War, and time tells him he need not walk so far in search of this as he must if he is searching for the Punic Wars.

As an index, time has proved invaluable to the historian, faced with his massive problem of storage and retrieval; but unfortunately man is a pattern-making animal, and desires to read a significant order into everything he sees, for pattern-making has proved successful on so many occasions. The book itself produces useful patterns, why not the index? Hence the heavy distortions that men have placed on history, reading into the index a developmental line of progress, leading inevitably to lonely us - history the gigantic cause, we the happy event.

It has taken this terrible century to disprove the progressive view of history, to show the complex nature of the evolutionary process; yet we must remember that it was immediately before the last war that the 'line of development' approach to history teaching was advanced, and its dangerous effects are still with us. We must be very wary of mistreating time. One factor that is of prime importance is that events are attached to the 'washing line' with deliberateness; historians are in the business of preservation, and it is their action that establishes a 'fact' as being of sufficient significance to be remembered. Even with laundry bills the historian must find them, transcribe them, edit them, and print them before they become 'History'. He must even engage in the mechanical task of dating them, but this, though necessary, is quite subsidiary to the value-judgments he makes in the other processes.

Let us take an example of valuing: it is discovered at some state in historiography (the date is not relevant to the argument) that Leonardo da Vinci invented a flying machine. This was some four hundred years before the Wright brothers flew. Now a number of comparisons come to the historian's mind: did Leonardo influence the Wrights? (Look up what happened in the intervening period). Leonardo was the first to invent, but the Wrights were first to fly - which was the greater? Does the distance in time affect one's answer to the last question? Did conditions at the time favour Leonardo or the Wrights? Which had more effect on Society at large?

Such questions are those that come at once to the mind of any historian engaged in such a problem; they are central, historical questions and one should note that they are largely to do with comparison. The actual place in time of the two subjects has significance only in this context; time is being used simply as an index.

Let us now examine the process the historian undertakes in posing his questions, in relation to time. First it is plain that the point of interest (that which arouses the historian's concern) is change. He wants to examine how society is changed by an event, action, invention, idea - what you will. He desires to measure the extent of

change in a quantitative and a qualitative sense – he sees war affecting man's technological ability and his desire for peace.

As a measurer of change the historian has to live with the fact that he measures *perceived* change - he and others may have missed something, and both may have got it wrong; his sources are participants (who may have seen the years before the first world war as a splendid epoch, or the ultimate in the degradation of man), participants with hindsight ('they were the great days' or 'they marked the beginning of the end, I saw it all'), and the hindsight of historians of varying abilities and placed at varying distances in time. Out of this confusion he must make a decision - he must isolate a change and make it a part of history, subject to the criticism of his fellow historians. This may involve agreeing with a contemporary judgment - the years of Stephen's reign were indeed nineteen long winters, in which people learned the horrors of the breakdown in feudalism - or he may agree with hindsight, which pinpoints a moment when change began, though it could not have been recognized as such at the time.

Having recognized a change, the historian must begin to analyse it, and here again he will be using comparative reasoning. Briefly, he will concern himself with three criteria: duration, relationships and pace. These three criteria are of course closely related one to another.

Duration is not simply a measurement of length of time, but a measurement with values in mind: it took a long time for Magellan's crew to circumnavigate the globe in comparison with the present day, but they were the first, so by noting how long it took the next few cruises to do it, we may reach some sort of judgment on whether they went fast, given the conditions of the day. The actual time they took is not more than rough working data, the beginning of a long and arduous historical enquiry, the result of which we have called duration (time in relation to values). No measurement of time stands by itself, it receives significance by comparison with time taken for similar acts, events, etc., to take place.

Plainly also historical time is observed in relation to significant contemporary events and conditions. The speedy success of the Russian Revolution of 1917 is set in the background of a century of planning and abortive revolutions, and is significantly related to the First World War. The spate of inventions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is related to a slow pattern of more basic inventions in many previous centuries, and the triggering effect of the opening up of world markets. We do not despise the Neolithic inventor because he took longer than the Victorian engineer to produce results, rather do we look to contemporary conditions in order to make a proper assessment.

Finally we have pace, that element that seems to make time go faster at one period rather than another. The author of a book about Europe in the nineteenth century faces a far greater problem in terms of significant things happening than the author of a book about ninth century Europe. There were the same number of minutes in both centuries, and though population was vastly increased in the later one, this cannot explain the vast increase in significant events; nor can the overwhelming number of records surviving from the nineteenth century really explain its greater business for the historian - had we the most detailed records of ninth century life, and were they so multiplied as to take into account the larger population of the nineteenth, still one would instinctively declare that the pace of life was faster during the later century.

## ***Strength in Depth***

**Source:** *Times Educational Supplement*, 7 April 1985

Philosophising is not something I am good at. Truth to tell, I rather despise the business. In history teaching it has been the philosophers who have done most harm to the profession, and the very habit of definition and logical thinking seems to me to be wholly unsuitable to describe the essentially messy and disorganised process of learning. When someone 20 years away from the classroom sets forth yet another theoretical pattern to explain what it is all about, I sigh and say: 'Try that on Billy.'

Billy is a nice boy, cheerful, open and desperately anxious to win. I like him a lot. But he is unpredictable. At times he is uncontrollable, at other times silly, or just a plain nuisance. And then, just when you have given up all hope and yearn for the days when you could just whack him, Billy produces a statement, an idea, an explanation that takes your breath away. Momentarily Billy is a genius, and then of course he is a nuisance once more. A nice nuisance, but still a nuisance.

Who is to plot Billy? Who can pattern a whole class of children, a school, a generation? Well, of course, the philosophers of education will – and they gain their coverage and confidence from never having met Billy.

It is the generalisations of the philosophers that constantly leave me standing, while the rest of the community hastily takes them on board and tries to make them work. Three generalisations above all seem to me to be not only wrong and perverse but also dangerous:

- That there is somewhere to be found a body of knowledge, understanding and skills that should be given to all children to help them in their future lives.
- That this body of knowledge, understanding and skills is what we, the adults have arrived at as a result of our lives. What helped us make sense of the world must help the children in the world into which they are growing.
- All of this learning may be packaged in such a form as to be taught to all people coherently and effectively and may be objectively assessed. We will then know whether they have learned or not.

Read at a glance by the average person, these seem perfectly logical, but anyone who lives from day to day in classrooms knows that they are in fact absurd. The knowledge you arrive at as a result of education is not information popped into you by the teacher. Only the children can do the learning for themselves and the knowledge they arrive at will be different from ours. Above all, knowledge does not come packaged in handy bite-size lumps: growing into knowing is an experience, a process of struggle and disorder, of as many leaps backwards as there are forwards.

No outsider can test what I know, for what I know is now a functioning part of me, it cannot be extracted for the purpose of ticking a form. Ask a pianist how it is they can play when you can't; ask a linguist what it is that makes them so fluent; ask a car driver how they drive their car – they no longer know how they have broken through the veils of ineptitude into use. But you can see that something pretty wonderful and useful has happened out of the years and months of messy, arduous and so often tearful practice.

But of the three statements it is the first that most upsets me. In history teaching we commonly hear people talking of 'a framework', 'a mental map', 'general knowledge – part of what one might expect an educated person to know'.

In the warfare over what goes in and what is excluded from the curriculum what are the casualties? Well, stories go – they take far too long. So does the examination of motive – that could last forever. Certainly detail must go. We have no room for colour. The battlefield grows clear – we have a few selected pieces of information hanging on the chronological wire, with all the good bits left out. Dem bones indeed. And don't tell me it doesn't necessarily have to be so, for we all know in our hearts that outline history has always been so.

The framework, once arrived at, is immensely hard to learn – there is no interest and no sense in it. It is perfectly simple to forget, for there is nothing in it to make it stick there. So the practitioners of outline history try to give it some meaning, some importance by shaping it, by generalising, by seeing patterns, by seeing uses in it, by looking to see whether it could point to the future. Well I did think that we had learned the lesson of outmoded generalisations such as 'Our Island Story', 'The Growth of Democracy', 'The Rise of the West' and above all 'Das Kapital'. Have we not burned our fingers enough?

Yet surely, the outlinist protests, there must be value in having a simple chronological framework into which the child may fit what he or she learns in the future. In fact the framework notion is of little use as soon as you examine it: what is the use of knowing about Normans, Georgians or whatever when you are studying the Egyptians? They don't relate to the rest, in fact the only bits of history that do are perversions of history in later periods, like the idea of the Norman yoke in the 17<sup>th</sup> century or Margaret Thatcher's misuse of the word 'appeasement'.

Thus the superficial scamper through the whole of history, for so long advocated and recently readdressed, is a waste of time, a way of making history boring and an avoidance of doing real history, where true knowledge may be found: history in depth.

The more you know about a subject the more you think about it, the more you want to know and the more confident, the more expert you become. Teaching is less a business of instruction, more an act of faith. We cannot know, despite all the objectives we write, whether what we do does any good. What we do in school is done because we believe in it, hope for it and see in values and behaviours the prime objects of our schooling.

In the making of men and women it is the parental and the priestly figures which count. We nourish children on what we hope to be good and appropriate foods, we nudge them gently in directions we discern might be correct, we comfort and aid them in a time of uncertainty and anxiety. Our loving concern, coupled with our determination that a disciplined life can develop a confident, self-regarding and properly competent person govern our own behaviour and mark our vocation with its mission.

What, then, must history do to fit this cause? Well first, and above all things, it must be material in depth – the topic must have the potential for thorough enquiry, indeed for multiple enquiries. In a properly open structure of learning children must have the chance first to catch on to their own interests, to stay with them and become masters in the field.

Second, it must be material that is essentially to do with people, people who present problems. If we are feeding growing minds the supremely important interest for them is people's behaviour, their motivation, how they struggle to cope with events, when and where does principle work and where is self-interest the order of the day?

Third, we must take serious issues. Not that the classroom isn't a place for laughter, but in that we are privileged to examine the people of the past, their private, most intimate papers, in that they may well have endured tests and trials that daunt us and make us wonder whether and how we might endure them, in that their heroism and their failures could form a framework for our walk into the future, we have a duty to take it seriously, research it thoroughly, debate it with passion.

Finally, we need time to play with all this material, test it, learn from it, make it our own.

How do I know all this, how can I be so sure? Well, much of it Billy taught me as I struggled to educate him, and the others in the class, and all the other classes I have taught. I have only pretended to be the teacher, secretly taking the privilege of being the learner, so that I can really know something about educating Billy.

## ***The Place of History in the Third Version of the National Curriculum - a Discussion Document***

**Unpublished:** 18 July 1997

I propose to open and close this paper with quotations from Dickens - something so unfashionable it might strike some readers as clever, but in truth I find them powerful in positioning the argument. In *Bleak House*, when Rick, after a good education is beginning to meditate a career, Esther says of him:

*He had been eight years at a public school, and had learnt, I understood, to make Latin Verses of several sorts, in the most admirable manner. But I never heard that it had been anybody's business to find out what his natural bent was, or where his failings lay, or to adapt any kind of knowledge to him.*

However wonderful this great skill was,

*I did doubt whether Richard would have not have profited by someone studying him a little, instead of him studying them quite so much.*

In this paper I will follow for a while the brief and simple nostrum here so well expressed, that it is not subjects but children we are to teach.

As we begin to consider phase three of the National Curriculum, History like other 'Foundation' subjects finds itself in a somewhat ambivalent position. On the one hand it cannot be denied that our presence in the National Curriculum ensured that vastly more History was taught in schools, especially primary schools than previously. Of course we regard this as 'a good thing'. On the other hand, because of the insistence that individual subjects must be separately taught, History has often been apportioned too little time for effective study. Even then, there have been grumblings from the 'core' areas of the curriculum that Foundation subjects are frivolously detracting time from the 'basics' and as popular opinion and government thinking have increasingly swung in behind this position, the place of History looks uncertain and the subject needs to lay clear arguments on the table in its own support.

Yet it is very difficult, if one is honest, to argue for History's place in education for its own sake. It seems to have little distinctive to offer other than its content information - which to be fair is more interesting than other subjects' and capable of satisfying the deep mood of curiosity that dominates childhood (and stays with us in adulthood in slightly more convoluted forms). But I doubt whether we can survive on the simple assertion that History can be fun - is it, say the bearded ones, any use? Does it make people better? What measures can we use to find its added value?

Well, before we come out with our hands up, let us query for a moment the criteria in use. We too readily admit that some things are more useful than others - Maths, Science, Language spring to mind. Now there are plenty of circumstances in which I can admit of the usefulness of these subjects, but we should note that they are not universal. I, for example, read and write a lot but I know vast numbers of people who do not and seem to manage perfectly well. My life requires very little (indeed I am tempted to say with absolute truth almost no) use at all of Mathematics - a subject which I richly enjoyed and did very well at when I was at school.

So are we wise to apply simple, universal criteria of use when we consider the curriculum? Value might be judged in a variety of ways - do I feel better for this

knowledge? Has it entertained me? Can I share it in significant ways? Does it satisfy my needs? Can I take it further, to my own good? One could go on, but perhaps the important thing is to concentrate on what might happen with pupils as they meet fields of knowledge, the diversity of what might happen and the various kinds of fruitfulness that might ensue.

So I do not think it hopeful to repeat the exercise of the two previous National Curriculum documents and look hard at History with the question in mind 'What History should all children know, what good can it do all children?' This eminently logical and sensible approach denies the reality of learning which is messy, inchoate, slow, backwards and forwards, a constant struggle and never, never clear. To decree that all eleven years olds should be busily engaged studying medieval England is an act of such lunacy it defies belief - surely we can do better than that? Perhaps we can if we follow the line indicated by Dickens at the head of this paper - let us fit the subject to the needs of the children.

Throughout our experience (which has been wholly practical) on the Nuffield Project we have come to realise and stress the role of History as a support subject rather than as a separate integral element. In many lessons, for example, I have found myself involved for 90% of the time in Mathematics, in others with Geography, in others with Science. You can't do the Greeks without Science, but it was the children's understanding of the nature of scientific thinking that was the outcome. You can't do Local History without maps, and how much improved their understanding of maps was at the end of that study! You cannot follow the development of an entrepreneur without getting in deep on subjects like risk capital, interest, profit margins, investment etc.

These are valuable liaisons and one should pause to note at this stage that learning things for use is faster than learning things for their own sakes. Thus if I conduct a class on the nature and workings of interest it is hard, hard work, but if I need to know about interest because we can't get any further with our study of the developing coach firm then we learn it fast. 'For its own sake' rarely works, 'for our project's sake' often does.

History can contribute to learning across the whole spectrum of the curriculum and does so effectively, I repeat, because its materials, problems and methods are uniquely interesting. But there are three broad areas in which the contribution is strongest – as the practice-ground of language (listening, talking, reasoning, reading and writing), as the provider of exemplary materials for social learning (in which one might include human nature, the functioning of human groups, politics and morality), and perhaps most urgently as a bulwark for cultural learning in which we consider what and why we might come to respect out of the past, and to understand the way that past has shaped us and can shape us better.

There is no arguing the primacy of language in our curriculum, nor should we be so foolish as to deny the failures in this field which regularly stare us in the face. Yet the conventional solutions - make them read more books, make them do more grammar, make them do spelling tests - these every teacher knows won't work - driven horses kick up traces, more often they die. What we need is circumstances in which use of language is an obvious, undeniable need, so we just get our heads down and get on with it. Over the past five years of the project's life I recall the debates, the discussions, the dramas, the desperate hunt for information, the reading of lengthy and difficult documents, the writing of vast numbers of pieces from informal to formal, and I wonder whether I shouldn't change the sign on the door to 'English' - for that is what we are doing and doing it effectively. I don't want to replace 'English' but I do

want it recognised that we provide the arena in which 'English' is most constantly and thoroughly practised.

The world is a strange place for children growing up. They observe adults making rules which they constantly break; they notice adults behaving with apparently wild irrationality; they notice on TV that over the world there are killings, robberies, wickedness galore when society is chanting mantras about democracy and religion. How to make sense of all this? Very difficult, directly, for we find it hard to face up to such huge issues in real terms. I could go into a classroom and try to discuss the issues of men and woman's sexual relationships, but I think I would find it hard and the children harder. I could go in to talk about Henry VIII and we are away - zooming with questions and possibilities, with arguments, with ideas - and we are safe, because it is not us we are talking about. King Henry, like Queen Anne, is dead and they won't mind us investigating their private lives and documents, a thing we dare not do today, however much the Royal Family features in TV and newspapers. The past gives us that wonderful right to gossip, and how valuable that is to children who really know nothing, however bold a face they put upon it. And my goodness, they want to know.

They want to know also how people work together in groups and how they regulate (or more often fail to regulate) their behaviour. We have so little real teaching of politics in our schools, largely because we are afraid of party politics which need not enter the scene if we have good sense. But without some teaching how can we expect young people to grow up to want to participate in the governance of their nation and the world? History is the study of politics and we can ensure that without the boring repetition of ministries and bills. Quite simply, as children look at the course of Richard of Gloucester to the throne and his attempts to protect his position they can begin to see the complexity of the world and the irrelevance of snap decisions against 'the murderer of the Princes in the Tower'.

But History constantly struggles with moral dilemmas and the complexity of moral decisions and here is the best ground for examining them rather than in the arid soil of PSE and such like. Is loyalty to a cause more important than loyalty to a friend? Must one always tell the whole truth? If nobody will ever find out, might I do this wrong thing to aid myself or my cause? History is full of such cases and as children visibly worry their way through them one may see how important this learning is - literally it is character-forming.

Finally I would turn to the support History might give to the cultural education of pupils. In many ways History, because of its stern need to warn the world about the dreadful things that have happened in the past seems to show a bad face. In every secondary school in the land there is someone teaching about Hitler (and necessarily so) but in how many of those schools is someone teaching about St. Francis, Michaelangelo, Pope, Schubert, Rilke? Few, I would guess and I think one of the relatively new responsibilities History should have in the new National Curriculum is to show that the past is worthy of respect, that we need not all be cynics, vandals, gaping fools in search of kicks and laughs but we can too stand still and stare in wonder at what man has achieved from time to time.

If we could begin to see this massive foundation of History as underpinning the major themes of children's learning, would not its place enlarge in all respects? I would like to see it so, but before we finish, I have two reservations. The first is that past experiments in interdisciplinary curricula have often proved to be failures, rapidly losing shape, coherence and direction. What started off as crusades often ended up like the real crusades, lost, confused and failing. If History is to serve as the

underpinning of the whole curriculum, as it surely should, it will need careful thought and planning to preserve the integrity and authenticity of what we do in its name in schools. We should respond to calls for interest and relevance but we should equally oppose the watering-down of our subject that has so often been the result of attempts to answer such calls. And finally, let us beware of too much curriculum building based on an addiction to logical patterns and theoretical structures. We need to leave room for growth, for movement, for life, not putting further strangulations on the system.

Above all, we must not fall in love with our own ideas to the extent that we believe we have the right answers, the only right answers. We all remember the setting up of the Victorian curriculum enterprise at the start of Hard Times, but how many of us have read on to its conclusion? Gradgrind's daughter asks of him:

'How could you give me life and take from me all the inappreciable things that raise it from a state of conscious death? Where are the graces of my soul? Where are the sentiments of my heart? What have you done, O father, what have you done, with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here?'

Later, when his son Tom is revealed as a common thief and the star pupil of the Gradgrind school, Bitzer is set to bring him to justice, Gradgrind asks him:

'...have you a heart?'

'The circulation, sir,' returned Bitzer, smiling at the oddity of the question, 'couldn't be carried on without one. No man, sir, acquainted with the facts established by Harvey relating to the circulation of the blood, can doubt that I have a heart.'

'Is it accessible,' cried Mr. Gradgrind, 'to a compassionate influence?'

'It is accessible to Reason, sir' returned the excellent young man, 'And to nothing else...'

'If this is solely a question of self-interest with you – ' Mr. Gradgrind began.

'I beg your pardon for interrupting you, sir,' returned Bitzer; 'but I am sure you know that the whole social system is a question of self-interest. It's your only hold. We are so constituted. I was brought up in that catechism when I was very young, sir, as you are aware.'

## ***Principles and Practice***

**Source:** *Teaching Primary History*, 1997, Heinemann

### **Introduction**

History in the context of teaching has two meanings. There are the findings of historians - their histories - and the process of enquiry that led to their conclusions. History as enquiry is based upon the mostly random, surviving sources that come to us from the past. At no stage is history a body of definitive knowledge. Historical enquiry results in propositions for debate, and there are as many histories as historians.

Since it is history as a process of enquiry that we teach in schools, it must be done in terms of investigation and debate.

Involving children in the process of enquiry means that they engage in genuine historical learning activities from which they construct their own views of the past, that is, their own histories. Children's histories, however, must be rooted in the authentic record of the past, otherwise they are fiction. Here the historian questions rigorously the integrity of sources. Without seeing the source in its own context, the historian cannot evaluate its worth as evidence. Yet to set a source in context, the historian must use imagination and experience of life. Thus, in history in the classroom, imagination, questioning, critical awareness and scepticism must work hand in hand, with the teacher supporting the pupil at every stage in making sense of the record of the past. Many children equals many histories, but for each one to be complete it must reach the stage of presentation. This too can take many forms, including poetry, drama or display.

### **Economy of sources**

Since knowledge of history is based on sources, it might seem the more sources the merrier. In history we need at times to survey all available sources, but then to focus on a manageable amount of evidence from which we may ask questions about authenticity and use. In classroom terms, this is the function of the teacher through lesson planning and resource provision. The narrower the focus, the more intensive and rigorous the questioning of a source must be, and it is our experience that an economy in resourcing is also best in the classroom. Often we use only one document, one picture, one object or one story to work on in depth.

### **Challenge**

However, this economy is not advised as a way of making history easy or simplistic. Indeed we have noted throughout that it is only when you use challenging materials that you get a good response. Questioning drives the enquiry process forward. Children must be faced with open, speculative questions, either their own or the teacher's. In pushing forward the enquiry the children must refine and focus the initial questions and develop their own. Within a co-operative pattern of learning involving both the teacher and the children, the pupils must be essentially in charge of their own work.

## **Study in depth**

Our experience on the Nuffield Primary History Project has taught us that the more pupils go into depth, the more professional they become, the more confident they grow in their abilities and the more they treasure the knowledge they find. This knowledge, and the experiences, skills and values learned in its accumulation, means that the pupil acquires the expertise to 'do history' .

Within a study in depth, we include the development of an understanding of the concepts, themes, information and chronology needed to make sense of the topic being studied. By the end of their study in depth the pupils will have acquired the outline knowledge and skills the National Curriculum requires. But, it will be real, significant and meaningful knowledge, anchored in a specific context. By definition, any genuine historical knowledge must arise from study in depth.

## **Accessibility**

History, by its very nature, involves pupils in reading and writing. Here we see clearly the divisions between those who can and those who can't easily use written materials. History reveals a hidden past, hard to get at and understand and riddled with value-loaded questions. So, how do we make it accessible to all children?

The teacher is the key, but it must be a teacher working with all the children in a co-ordinated way, making the written sources in particular accessible to all pupils using verbal, visual and enactive media. We see teaching and learning as both a social and an individual activity, with the teacher, crucially, at the centre of the social dimension. The advantages of getting all the children close to you so that you can see their eyes, spin your questions to everybody and judge with care their reactions is clear and obvious to the NPHP (ed: Nuffield Primary History Project) team.

Similarly, by going through all our materials and questions verbally with the whole class so that everybody has a chance to understand, the least literate children have a chance to show how clever they are and to take courage from their successes. The challenge of having everybody working on the same real question (at their own level of ability) can thus prove viable, and wherever the result is at least partially verbal (as in debate or drama), it is a joy to see how well those children whose written work usually lets them down can do. This does not mean, of course, that we do not at all times stress the importance of reading and writing in our work, and drive all children to attempt to do their best in these fields of learning and expression.

## **The teacher as expert**

The teacher's role is that of an expert who directs, manages and supports the pupils' learning by drawing upon his or her own knowledge of history: both the record of the past and how that is treated to produce history. The teacher transforms such knowledge into teaching strategies that engage pupils using historical sources to create their own, personal views of history.

Teaching strategies, the craft of the history teacher, have been at the heart of the NPHP, ranging from approaches to the use of artefacts, pictures and documents, to storytelling, drama and site visits. The strategies provide teachers with a reservoir of ideas to adopt, adapt and build upon in creating their own teaching programmes tailored to their specific needs.

## **Managing the classroom**

The children's learning needs to be managed and guided throughout. Setting the scene first is vital. A great teacher, Dorothy Heathcote, once said 'Think where you want to start the lesson, and then take five steps back'. The NPHP has helped us understand the central importance of this principle. The first minutes of a lesson are crucial, and if you get it wrong there, it is hard to recoup. We go in as teachers, full of our plans, of the exciting material and questions we are to use, inspired by knowledge itself - indeed we have quite forgotten what it is like to be at the start of the process of learning. So we must restrain our enthusiasm and give time for settling down, for building confidence, for putting the first planks down on which the rest is to be built.

And by planks we don't necessarily mean information. Often we try to make something difficult accessible to children by starting with something they know and can do with confidence. Recently one of the team had set to a class of ten year olds the hard task of reading substantial tracts of Anaximander and Heraclitus in order to think about the Greek view of the world. He knew what he wanted at the end; it was the beginning that would count. Eventually he decided to spend the first half hour (half the lesson) getting the children to list the contents of a modern scientific laboratory. Then he looked at the list and ticked those items the Ancient Greeks might have had. It was, of course, pathetically small, and it gave the children a structure by which they could approach the texts with the question, 'Given how little they had, how well did they do?'

## **Pacing a lesson**

Starting right is vital to success, but the other element that governs the rest of the teaching is pace. The formula for correct pace in teaching is simple to write but complex to achieve: you must make the children feel that they are hurtling ahead whilst really you are going slowly enough for everyone to keep up. This is something we can do, but is hard to describe because it is a function of the teacher's role as an actor. For example, we use the pressure of time a lot - 'Only three minutes to do this, hurry, hurry' - and that hides the fact that we may use the next twelve minutes hearing the responses of every group or indeed of every child in the class. Then more scurry and flurry, but we know where everyone is and have time to devise the next necessary step. Part of this game is for the teacher to give him or herself time to think so that when the next task is set it has a chance of being the right one!

Much of our work necessarily stresses the importance of whole class teaching, but children need sometimes to work on a one-to-one basis, sometimes to work alone and sometimes to work in groups with or without the teacher.

The NPHP's precepts underpin the project's central tenet, that school history is a creative art in which the teacher and pupils construct their own histories on the basis of available sources. Questioning drives the process forward. This results in a piece of history that the pupil or pupils may communicate in a variety of ways. The form of teaching depends largely upon what you believe history to be. What is the nature of history? How do you go about mounting an historical enquiry? How do you reach conclusions and substantiate them? This book will address these and related issues, hopefully presenting history as a discipline accessible from a myriad of starting points, using the full range of teaching methods.

## Doing History

Of all the historians who have set out to explain in layman's language the nature of history, we are convinced that the most successful has been Jack Hexter. He shows that history is an activity, a process, and that those who make a living from it are members of a profession. It is from him that we have borrowed the idea of 'doing history'. The phrase seems to us to describe effectively the very personal, positive and active approach to the subject which we favour in the school context.

This is not to fall in with the rather twee notion of children being historians, rather we see children as acting like historians, doing their work the historian's way, following the rule book of historians and understanding that what they are doing is historical, and how that differs from doing English or Geography. In our teaching of history, pupils interact with the teacher at all stages of the enquiry and its resolution. We present 'doing history' in the classroom as a collaborative activity with the teacher in the driving seat. The idea of pupils being let loose as creative, independent souls, 'doing' their own history while the teacher assiduously studies *Sporting Life* or, more likely, the situations vacant column of the *TES*, is daft. So let us first define what 'doing history' consists of, then describe the elements that are involved, and finally illustrate it with an example from the classroom.

- First, we must be examining a topic from the past and raising questions about it.
- Second, we must search for a wide range of relevant sources to provide evidence to help us answer our questions.
- Third, we must struggle to understand what the sources are saying (and each source type has a different language) so that we can understand them in their own terms.
- Fourth, we must reason out and argue our answers to the questions and support them with well chosen evidence.
- Finally, we must communicate our answers for the process to be complete.

## ***Speaking and Listening – All Aboard a Coach and Three***

**Source:** *Times Educational Supplement*, 21 April, 1996

All experienced teachers have their own tried and tested set of teaching styles which they have developed until they are almost intuitive. I do not wish to question this or to try to unpick what is working already. But I do want to hold up for inspection a style not commonly used that has begun to pay dividends for me. It is not intended to supplant other styles, merely to enlarge the repertoire.

The theory behind this lies in what I regard as a failure of the system and its relationship to the predominance of reading and writing. Outsiders constantly demand that we do better - get more children reading and writing fluently - and because we are judged on this kind of success or failure, we respond. We do more and more reading and writing, test more frequently, and rarely have time to pause for breath to see what is happening as a result. Yet if we do pause for thought, we know in our hearts that many of our children cannot read or write effectively and that some will never improve. Our system has ensured that they have failed so often at these skills that they are now convinced they are hopeless cases, with no confidence to persevere. The more we push them in the direction they believe they cannot go, the more they dig their heels in.

So is there an alternative? I believe that lessons that consist of talking and listening can help those who are otherwise disbarred from success to have some. They may see, to their own surprise, that they have minds, and can use them. They can be rewarded by teacher praise (the most important resource in education) and they can be encouraged to try harder and even to write and read. Talking and listening lessons come in many shapes and forms. Below is but one example.

In this history lesson I had certain objectives. First, I wanted it to feel like fun - to go like a roller-coaster and yet at the same time press the children to think. Above all I wanted this, as part of a sequence of lessons, to give them a chance to meditate on the difference between reality and fantasy. This is hard for 10 year-olds who quite enjoy resolving problems via a fantastic escape route. But they will never be able to work on the past in this way - they must at least distinguish between two kinds of imagination.

The content requirement of this sequence of lessons from the school was that they must be about transport. We had done a fair bit of work on time-lines, discovery and development and I felt they were ready to flesh out the principles they had established.

I set the lesson in 1560, with Queen Elizabeth just established on the throne. I talked with the children about the problems of getting from Chichester (where I live) to the school in Midhurst – a distance of some 12 miles. You could walk or come on horseback or in a farm cart but by which ever way you chose, it was going to be long, arduous, messy and dangerous.

### **Getting There**

What about a coach service? The children allowed that this might be a good idea, while pointing out that it wouldn't resolve the problem of bad roads and highwaymen. One child said it would be more sensible to establish a toll road first, but acknowledged that we didn't know much about road building in 1560.

So we decided to go for the coach service and see how it ran.

The first problem we encountered was a lack of ready money. I only had £5. A new coach, we estimated, was going to set us back £45, a second-hand one £35. The children opted for a new one. It was, they said, less liable to breakdown.

Having sorted the coach, we then turned our attention to the horsepower . We would need two teams of horses, one at either end. Best to have four in a team, but at £6 a horse we would try first with teams of three.

The bill mounted up – we would have to spend £129. The mental arithmetic in this lesson was a bit mind-stretching for the children and also revealed that some were none too good at it - they reached for their calculators but I reminded them it was 1560, not 1996.

### **Counting The Cost**

How were we to raise the money? We thought about how much a person might have available to lend in 1560, and how they might want to check on the reliability of the borrower and about interest. They asked me some grilling questions. Getting 10 per cent of £33 quite foxed them for a while but we struggled on. I was going to need £18 just to pay back interest each year and if I intended to pay off the capital then lots more had to be earned.

The children were quite tired by this stage. but if we wanted to finish the job we must know how much we could charge and how many customers we needed to have, with six inside and four up top.

They wanted to cheat and charge high prices, and it was a struggle to get back to reality. Eventually, we established that the cost of our coach rides would be a penny a head. More desperate calculations ensued, ending with the appalling discovery that when we had paid our interest we would have a paltry £5 15s as profit. In a later lesson they established scenarios for journeys - a good day, a brilliant day, a bad day, a disastrous day. We suffered a nasty 'ham bush', which left the coach in the ditch with someone injured. However, a glorious meeting with Queen Elizabeth gained us her patronage as well as her bag of gold.

### **Pause For Thought**

This difficult thinking convinced everyone that inventions and developments had a hard time taking off. We could put the date on our timeline, but it involved some tortuous calculations. It was a hard lesson, hard on the children and the teacher. I wouldn't want to set up a coach company every day, but consider what we achieved. At least one third of the children would not be able to write effectively about this. Perhaps half would not have done the figuring on their own. Ninety per cent would not have persisted with the thinking. Maybe fewer than 10 per cent would have understood the ideas if I had just told them, or they had read about it. The success lay in every one of them working together, talking, listening and thinking.

I am very proud of what those children did, and saddened when I see other classes, their heads bowed over books in silence, doing undemanding, tedious work. I am sad, too, when I see so many regarding themselves as failures, lacking confidence and determination because of their experience with a pencil and paper curriculum.

## 2 Using Sources

### ***Reading Historical Documents with Children***

**Source:** *Enjoying History* No.6 (Teeside Polytechnic), Autumn 1979

When an adult calls for a document from an archive he is very much in the position of a shopper choosing goods: he wants the item, he's hunted it down and has such a clear purpose in mind for its use that he is willing to spend the effort to get it. Children who are given documents by their teachers are in a quite different situation - they must take what they get on trust, and must try to understand without knowing how or why. Frequently they have neither background nor resources to establish the document as anything other than another piece of information from teacher. Instead of a textbook, today there is one leaf, but frequently it comes in the same style and context.

Yet not having the background (that is, not knowing a great deal about the period from which the document comes) is by no means the greatest of the difficulties children experience. They are not document handlers, as adults are, with forms and licences, letters and bills to cope with; to them documents have no particular associations. The few letters they have written and received will have been to do with birthdays, and as any parent knows the thank you letter is not only an agony to the child but also he does not believe it necessary – it is a stupid ritual invented and imposed by adults.

Indeed the very greatest of the problems relates to belief; for children do not believe in the existence of the past other than as a part of family memory. They live in the present, which often goes so slowly that it is hard enough even to believe in the possibility of a future - will Christmas never come? The past is partially fairy stories - never-never land - and partially a kind of junk room, without meaning or order – occasionally existing but always dusty.

Such an introduction may well sound deeply discouraging but it is designed to make the point (simple but essential) that we cannot take documents into the classroom and just begin. They need establishing in children's minds first, and this is essentially a preliminary exercise of some length, not a few hasty words while the documents are already on the table.

What must one explain? Well, there are three basic qualities of a document that require understanding before it may be used by an historian:

1. that it was made in certain circumstances and for certain purposes;
2. that it had a contemporary use that conformed in most respects to the conditions of its making, though not all;
3. that for some reasons, often quite different from those one might expect, and subject to the laws of chance that govern survival, it was kept.

Children need to understand the various reasons why we keep a record - jotting down something because we distrust our memory, calculating because we cannot effectively work in our heads, informing others because they are not present at this moment, recording because others as yet unknown will need to refer later to our decision or action. This is a big subject and not easily dealt with, but some reference to contemporary records can help. Why does a teacher get involved in paper work about the class? Does it matter? Would we miss it in some way if it were not done?

Well of course grades and certificates stand high in people's minds, and the difference between being present or absent, being immunised or not can count. Some people carry their blood group in their wallet, or a note of their allergies, in case of accident. When we travel abroad we take a passport, and when we drive, a licence. Being without them presents problems. We keep records for tax purposes, and to see whether our expenditure is reasonable - will we last to the next pay-cheque? We keep records to see that people do not cheat us, or by mistake mark us as owing more than we do. We make shopping lists and laundry lists. Above all we write to friends who are away from us, and just occasionally we write diaries.

The list is almost endless, and in class a list is best elicited from children and discussed with them rather than told to them. A teacher may think he is helping by providing examples, short-circuiting a seemingly endless process of slow groping, but it is best to resist this feeling and allow the process of discovery to work itself out. An occasional physical example - such as the documentation a teacher carries or regularly uses, is splendid confirmatory material - 'Yes I can see what you mean, I have such a document myself'. Always the concrete example to match the abstract idea, the physical proof of something vaguely in the mind. Each point needs discussion - 'Well, how does one get an identification?' - because children who seem to have latched on to something need time to fix it into their minds.

Also, they need to feel something of the circumstances surrounding a document, both from the point of view of the issuer and the receiver. In this context it is sometimes valuable to play a little in order to establish more clearly the difference between the two. For example a teacher might write out a pass 'valid for one indiscretion' and give it to a pupil (the language would change according to the age and ability of the children). What does the teacher intend? What circumstances made him do such a thing? What does he hope for from the action? These are questions relative to the issuer. The receiver might say 'What does he really mean - how far can I go?' and those around might well say 'Why him, why not us? And what are we going to do about it?'

The keeping of documents is a much more complex process than the first two, involving three separate aspects (of which there may be many phases in each). In the first place, some individual has to decide that he will keep an item rather than throw it away. Modern consumer societies tend to destroy more rapidly than ancient peoples: we are familiar with documents, we are threatened with inundation by them and so we do not treasure them as earlier people would. But what is it that makes people keep things? This needs discussion at considerable length and teachers may be surprised to find that children are fairly expert on this subject.

Secondly, chance takes a hand. Rats, water, fire, war - oh so many things (including good old carelessness) conspire to destroy, and it is important for children to see that documents are chance survivals. This is not an easy matter to demonstrate, but nonetheless needs careful attention. One way of beginning might be to give each child a piece of paper and ask them to write down what happened the previous afternoon. When they have finished the teacher can say that we have now a good record, by all the experts, but what happens when time starts to eat its way into that? A third may get thrown away (though it is unwise to do any physical demonstrations - simply denominate an area of the room); another third may be destroyed by natural events; the remainder may be nibbled away by chance, until only one survives. This is then read out, and the teacher asks the class what has been lost.

But then the document has to be saved and stored and cared for, and this is the point where some of the story of the patient work of the collectors and archivists may

be told. At this stage all information that is available is valuable in that children should know that what they will receive is a treasured item that people value - for it has survived. Possibly a visit to an archive, a visit from an archivist, or a film about their work will aid the teacher at this point.

Facing a document for the first time, in a formal situation where the children have little idea of what is expected of them, can be a trial of no mean order. The teacher must do everything possible to minimise the children's fears, and provide ways through to reading that will give immediate success and support. Each child, whatever his ability, will have already struggled through one kind of reading problem, and will expect to face a similar situation, whereas it is quite different. In the first place, the kind of decipherment is different - what is presented is irregular, individual; but, more important, the mode of information - gathering from the process of reading is different. Printed prose is taken in either by reading solidly along, accumulating the messages in due order, or by skimming, picking hints here and there that point to the desired message. Historical documents contain many kinds of messages, and much of the message may be in the mode - that is why we use original materials. A scribbled message done in haste on the battlefield, a confession written by a tortured hand, the cross of the illiterate (and the cross put by a wife whose other documents prove literate, but who will not shame her husband) all tell things about an event and must be read by an imaginative eye that is busy trying several modes of decipherment, and seeing, as best it may, the circumstances of the document. Novels and textbooks take pains to communicate all this; documents only tell their story to the inquisitive.

At first, children should be asked only to scan the page, looking for something - a letter, a number. Or even perhaps a whole word they recognise. Names can be hard to read in script sometimes, but if the document is known to be about a place or a person this can be searched for. At this stage it is all a collaborative effort. Even the least able may see something, and the teacher's role is to encourage, to congratulate, to increase the excitement of the chase. One should not even suggest at this time a straight read through, even though this may be within the powers of some of the children, for the teacher's main aim should be to take all of the class as far as possible on the road to understanding. As contributions are made the teacher should get all of the children to see what the contributor has seen (and here an overhead projector transparency of the document can be very useful indeed). With each new word transcribed, though not yet on paper, the habit of the writer should be examined: 'See how strange those W's are, I will draw one in big on the board so we remember it.' Soon the board will be full and much of the document will be read, though not in sequence.

Now is the time to draw attention to the most difficult words and phrases - the ones no one has mentioned. Here the children should be encouraged to guess, and wild guesses should not be frowned upon. If someone who guesses wrongly is ever so slightly reprimanded or mocked, the shy child with the right guess may well decide it is safer not to bother. Children are indeed shy of guessing, because most of their education has taught them the virtues of precision, but in reading, guesswork, by using the context and the stock of information (in this case the alphabet) is essential. 'It says 'he rode on a. ...' now would that be a car, no I suppose you don't ride 'on' a car, what do you think? No, 'donkey' is a good idea, but it seems to me to have too many letters, and these don't seem the right shape for 'donkey', do they?'

The great problem at this stage is to make the search feel genuine, not some arid guessing game in which the teacher knows all the answers and is bored by the children's slowness in getting there. The words the teacher uses should indicate a

shared activity: 'I think George has got it - the number of letters seems right, don't you think? Let's count: one, two, three, four, yes five, and the first letter surely is the same as the 'h' we drew on the board, see...'

This all takes a long time, but it should not be hurried. The children must know the document if they are going to interpret it. Now is the time when they can have a try at a transcription. This can be oral straight away if the teacher thinks the children are ready, but they may prefer to spend a few minutes writing it in rough, for the sake of security. Then the teacher can lay out the challenge: 'Who thinks they can read the first three lines perfectly? Remember we shall all be checking, and if anyone disagrees they will shoot up a hand at once.' Then the document is read, giving as many turns as possible, and considering closely any disagreements. The emphasis now is on getting it right.

But not, of course, so that we can put it on one side and turn to the next document: the process of interpretation has yet to begin. Here one might pause to commend the reading of documents as a reading activity that is complete. So often reading in school is mere routine decipherment, and nothing more, whereas the full reading process is immensely richer and more complex. That is not to say that reading documents doesn't help decipherment, for its necessary concentration of alphabet formation, distinguishing between letters and completing gaps by constructive guesswork is a great contribution to reading skills.

To interpret is, in the first instance, to translate into another, more manageable form, to itemise, to categorise. This process of representing the information is an essential tool in coping with all sorts of documentation and is of course a major reading skill. Simple decipherment and basic comprehension, sentence by sentence, are not more than a quarter of true reading. It may take place either after decipherment, or, preferably, alongside the process, for a growing feeling of working on the document and of using it gives the reader confidence and supplies a large fund of contextual cues.

There are many forms of translation - one may take certain types of information and put them on graphs, others may be more usefully shown on maps, whilst others may be best broken down under tentative headings, to be re-examined and rearranged when the process is complete. The last is often the best way, and to achieve the headings three questions need to be asked: What is this document about (remembering that it is most likely to be about a number of things, some more significant than others)? Who are the people involved? What parts can tell us about the time in which it took place?

The first question will provide some broad general headings, and if the teacher emphasises that these are tentative and will need reassessing this will encourage the children to be constantly criticising and evaluating the picture they are building. Finding the correct words to set as headings is a finely critical process and children should be encouraged to search for accurate and descriptive headings rather than just lifting words from the document itself. Thus a document may describe a journey, but the children might begin to list its contents under the headings of the annoyances and the delights of travel.

Placing the information under the headings of the people involved is a more intensive but a more revealing activity, in that every nuance of phrase will need examining, and decisions taken as to where to record them. 'If that phrase indicates that George feels Charles is lazy, can we write under 'Charles is lazy', or must we write 'George thinks he is lazy', or must we set the whole under 'George'?' This is a complex

question in that it challenges children to come to a reasoned decision about meaning based on a careful critique of motive.

But history is not just about people, it is about people in time, and few documents will reveal their meaning without reference to the circumstances under which they were written and read. A letter written in London to someone in New York in 1872 was written in quite different circumstances from one written today. It was probably accorded more thought and care than now, because it was an expensive and relatively rare activity, and people had more time for consideration and had been cultured by schooling to write with deliberation; it was certainly not written with any expectation that it would be read and acted upon within the week.

It is useful to get at some of these points by setting out a time line for the document itself: 'What happened that gave Mr. Jones the idea of writing? When was this, do we guess? How long before he settled down to write? How long did it take - did he do a draft and a copy, or was it also entered into a copy ledger? Would it be posted at once? How long before receipt? What were the circumstances of the receiver before it arrived? How might it have been received and what impact might it have had? What action might the receiver take as a result?'

This process of compiling both a biographical and an historical account of the document will aid in establishing the meaning and importance of its contents, and make the refinement of those first general headings much more simple. But clearly there will be a great deal more work before understanding is complete. Much of this work will deal with reference books and one cannot emphasise too much the value of reference work in inculcating habits of study. The teacher may well know what 'excise' means in the context of the document and it may seem a simple and expedient matter simply to tell the children as they are going along. But this is no replacement for pulling out the largest dictionary available and finding the definitions and discussing how to decide between the offerings.

Similarly, atlases and gazetteers, charts and date-tables are essential tools for the learner. See any historian at work and he will be leaping up at any moment for the Oxford English Dictionary, the Dictionary of National Biography, Chaney's Handbook of Dates, Powicke and Fryde's Handbook of Chronology and Lewis's Topographical Dictionary. If he needs them to work on documents, children need them and their like too. But there must also be reference to formal historical accounts for information about the period. Each document considered should fit into a real background, so that children may more thoroughly understand what they read and weigh its importance. 'What does it mean?' must not rest as a simple comprehension question, but should be answered in historical terms as well. In this way, moving backwards and forwards from book to document, children will gain a much more mature understanding of how information gets into books and on what the received opinions in print rest. For many children the printed book has a god-like quality - eternal, immutable, therefore to be taken because it is good for us. Such children may pass reading tests, but they are in no true sense readers.

For them books are simply a part of an educational jungle they blunder through hopefully, arriving nowhere. Education at its best is about improving pupils' competence in a journey that leads to successful autonomy, and if we delay that journey by forcing passivity - receptiveness without resultant activity and respect without understanding - then we are not just wasting children's time, but also wasting the time they might have used as adults had they learned well.

Using archival materials is an immensely time-consuming activity, requiring great patience on the part of the teachers and tremendous efforts and costs on the part of archivists and administrators. To many teachers it seems little more than a decorative flourish to be added to 'normal history', a nod to a passing educational fad; to many archivists it seems the straw that will break their backs; to many administrators it seems yet another needless expense. Improperly carried out it is indeed all three; yet with care and attention and some inspired teaching it can make a remarkable contribution to the whole process of children's learning. The question remains - is it worth the effort? All teachers need to answer this before launching out into this kind of work.

## ***Teaching with Documents: A Personal View***

**Source:** *The History Teacher*, Vol. 22, No. 3, May 1989

I am a natural user of documents in the classroom. As a county record office-based historian who did the usual empirical research for a Ph.D. it is to be expected that I should turn to the materials I know and can trust myself with. Indeed I have two special reasons - if I may tell you a bit of my life - to be grateful to historical documents. In the first place, I must ask you to summon up a pale, weedy, cold and miserable boy who stood in a sea of mud waiting for the rest of the school to run over him, grinding him into that mud, so that he came out after much exertion with a hearty plop, to await the repeat of the activity (known for some reason as 'playing football ') That child saw a notice on the school board: 'Boy wanted to sweep out archive office, Wednesday afternoons.' Wednesday afternoons were football time and before you could say Jack Robinson I was there at Exchequer Gate trying to negotiate my broom up an iron staircase that spiralled shakily up into a suite of rooms that quivered visibly as you pattered across them, broom a-sweeping. Unfortunately, I was not too hot on the cleaning as Dorothy Williamson, as she then was, pointed out rather sharply, and I was told to sit down and she would teach me to read. It proved painful, but exhilarating, and through her efforts and those of the softer-edged Mrs. Varley, I transcribed my first document for publication at age 17.

More importantly, documents came to save my career in school. I began my teaching career in a school where the main item on the curriculum would appear to have been flogging the infants, and most teachers were very well qualified in this (the palm, though, went to the Religious Studies teacher, to be fair). I was both physically weak and a wishy-washy liberal, and felt that even if I hit a child they really wouldn't notice. The staff urged me to practise my follow-through with a gym shoe against the edge of the billiard table in the staff room, but I had no heart for the matter. Even the children urged me just to try, but things got worse day by day and despite the immense thickness of the walls and doors in that old school, I guessed that folk outside could hear the riots I was conducting in there. So I took action, and I nominated three naughty boys to stay in. They would have to do hard unremitting and boring work - that is, they would help me with my Ph.D. thesis which was on the conduct of heresy trials in the fifteenth century. That would teach them a thing or two - after an hour sorting out my card indexes and taking down Latin at dictation as I read from microfilm, they would trot home and reflect mightily on their sins. Next day, well pleased with myself, I chose three more villains and when I opened my door at four o'clock to let them in I was rather disconcerted to find twenty boys waiting to ask whether they might 'join the club'.

For various reasons my discipline got better, but for a long while after that I taught History from 9 to 4 that satisfied no-one (least of all myself) and from 4 to 6 there were shoals of boys helping me deal with materials that should by any definition have been way above their heads. A strange paradox - whatever was going on? Slowly I began to realize that the boys were interested in the process of the subject. They wanted to see someone who was doing history, not just telling them about it (perhaps only in woodwork and art did they get a chance of a similar experience of seeing their teacher doing his subject); but more importantly what was happening in the daytime was superficial, lacked the guts of real life, whilst the depth study of the after-school session, baffling as it might be, satisfied the lust for real knowing. Slowly, as time went by I began to realize also that when we were working on those documents in the evening we were working at the right sort of pace, slowly, deeply and really. In the daytime we were just skimming over the surface, turning a page

and letting forty years pass by as if it didn't matter. In the document work everything mattered, for accuracy was obviously necessary when everything might be a clue.

Of course I then decided that I had discovered the secret of the universe and was the greatest discoverer since Einstein. In truth, people have been using documents in teaching pupils since poor Bishop Stubbs set out his wooden basin for the students' pence in Oxford and did the only thing he knew about when he miserably began to teach - he taught them from documents. Rather dull documents, I must admit, for the constitutional niceties have little power to rouse me, basically a scandal sheet person by nature, but I recognise what was going on. In 1912 a magazine known as *The School World* had a high-powered issue devoted to the use of historical sources in teaching, and two years before that, M. W. Keatinge, a pioneer in this field, had published a major book containing studies on the subject. In the late 1920s F. C. Happold was doing splendid work in the field, and in the post-war period Gordon Batho revived the study of documents with his archive teaching units, which were shortly taken up by record offices and publishers, notably in the *Jackdaw* series (regrettably well titled, but a series that made an impact in its time). (Palmer and Batho, 1981)

New or old, I must tell you that the method works, and I want here to put forward six reasons and a worked example - the rest is up to you, dear reader!

My first reason for using documents is, strangely enough, what Dorothy Owen set out to do with me years ago - to teach the reader how to read. Now she was admittedly teaching me different letter fonts and shorthand signs but nonetheless it was a new reading experience, and one much needed. We have produced a semi literate generation of pupils times without number; the complaint recently articulated by George Steiner about the end of bookishness (Steiner, 1987) is by no means new, but it is true.

We train pupils to read books as if they were detective stories, to be read word by word, line by line, from page one to page 264, when it is revealed to us that the butler done it. We do not help pupils in this plan of reading, for we generate people who are the slaves of books (and often the resentful and rebellious slaves of books) not their masters, casting about to make their own sense of the text, moving to what is important and interesting to them for the time being, and ignoring the rest. A good reader treats a text like a pirate does a treasure ship, but good readers are scarce.

One reason is that we fuss children into reading at speed without giving them the opportunity to skip or scan - we insist they read everything, but do it fast and efficiently. If they can't after a period of instruction, then that proves they're clowns, Q.E.D. Not so, if you give a pupil a text that will slow him or her down to their own natural pace of reading, because of its complexity and challenge, then they have time to make their minds up about what they are reading. I was recently working with a group of nine- to ten-year-olds on some seventeenth century churchwarden's accounts (of course in the original hand - their teacher never could read them, the children tried to teach him, but he failed). We came across a piece which was to do with a collection for the redemption of someone stolen by the Barbary pirates. We puzzled over 'redemption' in both transcription and meaning. One little girl who obviously went to Sunday School gave her definition of redemption, and after a minute's cogitation a little boy challenged her reading with 'Well, why do they have to pay for it then?' We struggled on, looking up 'Barbary' in a dictionary and at last we made meaning. We have done some reading - at the pupils' own pace.

My second point is that working with documents helps pupils most directly to understand the need for reading the past in its own context, and not in terms of stereotypes produced by hindsight. Each document presents a point of view, a set of circumstances that are conditioned by being in a particular place at a particular time, and if we are to understand the document we must start to take account of those matters. Children readily assume that the behaviour of people in the past or in distant places is somehow stupid in relation to us, and this is a natural and healthy reaction from people who are reasonably well convinced of their own righteousness and standards. But clearly it is a major role of education to question these assumptions, to examine them with some care, and to come out of the experience of looking at people who behave differently from us with respect for them and their world, with an understanding that it is allowable, even occasionally admirable, to be different.

All this needs a great deal of checking; a lot of looking up in reference materials, and this is indeed my third claim for the power of documents in education. Every document presents problems - words that we don't understand, either because we haven't come across them yet or because we find they had a different meaning in the past (I rejoice when children giggle over the word 'gay' in an older context; it is an opportunity for learning - indeed it is several opportunities for learning). We may need to look up places in historical atlases, dates in chronologies, people in biographical dictionaries, concepts in dictionaries of ideas. The process of reference is one of the most important learning activities we can undertake with pupils, showing them the power of the powerhouse called the library, and ways of using it effectively.

Most documents I use tend to be personal and private rather than public and official, and they reveal endless opportunities for examining motive. Why did the writer put it in those words? What is she hiding? What is the intention of this letter? What might have been the frame of mind of the person receiving it? The questions one asks so frequently require an understanding of human motivation that it seems a lot to ask of inexperienced children. Yet here we have a major point - because children are inexperienced in understanding the roots of human behaviour, it is more important than ever to give them some experience, if only vicariously. Their ideas may at first be rough and crude, but as one persists one sees them begin to grow in sophistication of understanding, and a very good purpose is served in the process.

My fifth point is that working with documents shows you something of the historian's process, just as my children, years ago, came after school to see an historian at work. As we ask the important questions of documents, questions about the selection process that got them onto our table, questions about their viewpoints and assumptions, questions about their context, then pupils start to see that every source must be examined with care and logic, that the historian must spend time establishing the likelihood of the version presented by his source. Of course the process is not one limited to primary sources (and how very silly and purposeless that distinction between primary and secondary sources is - it simply confuses children and should be quickly forgotten). One needs to look at the versions other historians have prepared in examining similar documents about the subject under study. Unfortunately, such is fashion in education that the advent of documentary work in British schools drove out work on secondary sources as brown rats drove out black, and most pupils aged 16 will confidently assert to you that secondary sources are worth less than primary sources to the history writer.

Yet of course secondary sources are history, and we ignore them at our peril. Certainly working on documents can lead you quickly not just to an examination of what other historians have said about the topic, but also to writing your own version, and this would be my sixth statement in defence of the use of documents: pupils get

to write history faster when using documents, because they require you to have an opinion about the subject - they demand that you enter into the debate.

So, what does one do when using documents? Let me give you a very simple example of how I have been using one particularly fruitful document recently. It is a letter to an astrologer, asking for advice about a projected wedding. Here it is - read through it quickly and see whether you can write me a brief character sketch of the writer:

Letter I

R. KNIGHT to WILLIAM LILLY , the Astrologer.  
Consultation relative to the probability of a Marriage.

September ye 8th. at half an hour after 4 in the afternoon

SIR,

Having been with you divers times, upon the 24 of December, 1647, and upon the 27 of Sept. 1648, and twice in the latter end of Aprill last, at all which times I made bould to desire your judgement concerninge some thinges I then propounded unto you, wherein you were pleased to give me some satisfaction. You may happily remember me by this character: I was borne three weekes before my time, neare Newberry , on the 16th of August, 1619; but what houre I cannot learne, I am very tall of stature, goeing stooping a little at the shoulders, I am leane, havinge thinne flaxen haire, of a longish visage and a pale complexion, gray eyed, havinge some impediment in my upper lippe, which hath a small mole on the right side thereof: I have alsoe of the right side of my forehead an other little mole, I am of a mellancholly disposition, havinge beene all the course of my life in an unsetled condition. When I was last with you I was very desirous to knowe your judgment about what time you did thinke I might be settled, and I did then acquaint you that there was a match propounded unto my father for me unto a gentlewoman who lived south from the place of my usuall residence; she was borne neare Worcester, in May, 1613, but for the most part of her life had lived south or southwest from me. She is an Ayresse, of a reasonable tall stature, of a brownish haire, of an ovall visage, and a saturnine complexion, very discreete, and excellent well spoken, all which when I was with you, you described unto me, and told me that possibly I might succeed in the businesse, if she were not pre ingaged which I should knowe before the 10th of Maye then followeing, and in case it did come to any thinge, it should notwithstandinge goe but slowly on at the flrst, and that I should have many rubbs and delays, duringe the time of Mercury his beinge retrograde, but at his comming to be direct all thinge should goe fairely on; but however this business did succeed you did assure me that I should be settled before the 20th of November next. Nowe, Sir, to acquaint you howe much of your judgement proved true, I refrained to make any addresse unto her untill those aspects were over in the 9th of May, but afterwards I went unto her, when with some difficulty I obtained leave to waite on her, and at last procured of her to thinke of a treaty of marriage, which she did, and appointed it three several times, during the time of Mercury, his last being R. but still by several accidents unexpectedly put of, yet at last it was appointed to be the 22cond or 23d of August, so my father, with my selfe and some other friends set out towards the place appointed for the treaty, (which was southwest from us, and west from the gentlewoman) on Munday the 20th of August, at halfe an houre after twelve, and on Thursday, at the place appointed, the treaty beganne between 2 and 3 of clocke, P.M. at which time they could not come to

an agreement but proposalls were tendered by my father, the which were by her commissioner to be delivered, or sent unto her, and after she a little had deliberated upon them, I should goe to knowe her answeare, and soe I went on the 30th of Aug. but it was 31, about 2 of the clocke, before I came to her, where, after an houres stay, I demanded her resolution, but before she delivered he answeare we were interrupted, and soe continued all that day, but the next day after a great deale of arguinge upon the proposalls, she told me that she wold not accept of those termes proffered upon which we broke of. Nowe, Sir, beinge not a little trowbled, that havinge revolved the Ephemcrides, where findinge soe many of the planets neere the places they were in at the time of my birth, this businesse should goe soe crossely, and beinge by this meanes for a long time likely to continue in an unsetled condition, my desire unto you is that you will be pleased to resolve me, or at least to lend me your opinion in some of these ensuinge questions. First, whether or noe you wold advise me to make another attempt to endeavour the bringinge about the businesse I have here mentioned unto you, if soe what possibility I have to be likely to speede in my desires, and by what meanes I am likely to doe any good in it, and at what times I were best to make an newe addresses unto her, or secondly whether or noe you are of the same judgment still formerly, that I shall assuredly be settled about the middle of November next, if soe, by what meanes it is likely to come to passe, and lastly, if neither of these thinges should come to passe, whether or noe there be any probability for me to travell beyond seas as I very much desire, of which let me desire your speedy answeare and judgement, by which, if I receive any good, I shall be thankful unto you: let me allsoe desire you to let me knowe whether or noe, you can resolve a question without seeinge of the party, in case they acquaint you with their desires as I have done, for heere are divers whoe have had experience of your art, whoe can not conveniently come to London, that doe intent to trouble you. Thus hopinge to receive a speedy and satisfactory answeare from you, I rest,

Your humble Servant.

Roger Knight, Jun.

I pray send your letter by the Bristoll post, and direct it to Mr .Roger Knight, jun. at Greenham, neare Newberry, to be left with the post master of Speenhamland, to be conveighed unto me.

I have sent here inclosed a 11s. peece for your present paines.

To his ever honored  
Friende Mr. Lilly  
att the corner house  
over against Strand  
Bridge in London.  
post paid.

Usually I find the results of this exercise vary between psychoanalysis and character assassination, and a debate ensues. I then ask whether we could glance through the document once more and see what we might say about its recipient. Again the tone tends to be critical, even sharply so, but soon people reveal their questions: 'Was astrology respectable at that time?' 'What were the patterns of marriage then?' 'What was going on at this period?' 'Who were these people, anyway?' We look up and find information and then I ask the students to formulate for me a thesis - arising out of

their study of the document; where would we go next?, what Ph.D. would we write?, and off they go, full of ideas.

And above all they have enjoyed it, they have talked, they have argued, they have felt confident, they have understood what has been going on, they have achieved an idea. Not bad for one day's work really - a damn site better than beating them, for I have never really managed that follow-through...

### **References**

- Palmer, M. and Batho, G.R (1981) *Source Method in History Teaching*, Historical Association Pamphlet Series (London)
- Steiner, G. (1987) *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 September 1987

### 3 Imagination – Stories and Drama

#### *Imagination in History Teaching*

**Source:** previously unpublished

I wish to consider the nature and function of imagination in the teaching of History, and I must confess straight away that this is not the first time I have attempted such a task. Indeed it is perhaps worthwhile admitting that I approach this essay with three largely different drafts behind me, and hope that in the writing they might consolidate themselves somehow into a more coherent picture.

It may seem strange that such a topic should be so daunting, for we use the word imagination in education with fair regularity and not a little conviction: we urge our pupils to show imagination, we often judge them ostensibly on the quantity of imagination they have demonstrated and, to be brief, apart from some caveats to which I shall return in a moment, we consider imagination to be a good thing.

I think also that many teachers would automatically assume that imagination shown by the pupil would come in a written response, rather than in any other form. I suppose the long traditions of English education partially dictate this, but it has also been reinforced by the 'creative writing' boom of recent years as well. We should note, however, that imagination can be just as well exercised and shown in speech, painting, construction, dance, acting - a plethora of things; but it may also be seen at work in how one tackles humble jobs, too: it takes an imaginative person to work well in the confines of time, and in strange places (like libraries); people should see the need for imaginative design of approaches to work and study.

For most people, I guess, imagination as shown in a pupil's response. It consists in the individuality of that response, its uniqueness, as it were. From our own imaginations we pluck that which is new, but it is not just the novelty we admire, for any piece of trumpery rubbish could be novel; the newness of the idea produced by the imagination is a newness that we all suddenly recognise as valid, and wish, perhaps, that we had thought of it first; indeed if it is a particularly good idea we have half a mind to think we did vaguely approximate to that idea ourselves, but never quite got round to expressing it, a night thought that got away. Some new ideas are so blindingly simple as to draw universal conviction, as when the poet speaks. The line of poetry, the form the sculptor finds, the theme of the symphony, all seem to have been present from the beginnings of time, only awaiting discovery and expression.

And here I think we meet the first major difficulty in considering the use of the term imagination in education, for it is a word that attaches itself to the finest products of the greatest minds much more naturally than to the grubby essay of the schoolchild, and in a comprehensive world are we at all wise to expect such quality? Imagination deals with images and symbols, helping us to enter new worlds and fix their dimensions with a figure. It aids us to engage in mental gymnastics in which paradoxical associations and reorderings of the known can effectively create new views of a startling and stimulating nature. It enables us to break the normal rules of thought by using exhilarating side-slips, free-wheeling, out of gear racings to fit together intuitions, hunches and guesses into whole new sets of possibilities. It enables us to think in other men's minds, to assume roles for the time being in order to understand more completely than our own personal vision can manage. To be brief, it enables us to see, and to see how, beyond the capacity of our neighbour.

And we expect this of schoolchildren? Why, surely not? Yet without falling completely into the romantic traps of the Blakean image, it is fair to say that the child's mind, whilst not possessing the capacity of that of the poet or inventor, does frequently operate in similar dimensions and uses similar techniques, until the twin forces of social and physical maturity clamp down those inhibitions that make so distressingly many of us into 'normal chaps'. The child can frequently operate in the domain of 'let's pretend' and 'what if' when the 'normal' adult will respond with cries of 'Don't be silly, dear, that's pure imagination on your part'. For we must not forget the pejorative use of the word in education (and indeed the world at large); to say of someone 'he imagines things' can be very close to saying 'he thinks he's Napoleon' which tells us at once that the man is mad. We have a wariness about 'let's pretend' and 'what if?' that indicates a deep-seated fear of fantasy; it is all very well for novelists, but children are told 'now don't tell stories' for 'stories' are lies, assaults upon the conventional picture of the world, attacks upon normalcy.

This fear of and easy denunciation of 'silliness' is a constant factor in adult-child relationships, and is very natural. Anyone who has taught will recognise the potential for destruction, chaos, wild uncontrolled giggling that rests just underneath the surface of groups of children who are 'off the hook.' What teachers need to see (and here they must use their imaginations) is the direction that children's imaginative perceptions might tend towards, if given sufficient support and encouragement. Good teachers learn that at the moment they wish to say 'that's just silly, dear' they should be thinking how it might be made into a greater sense.

But before we can encourage imagination in children we must needs consider its relationship to other forms of thinking, knowing and learning; a simply unrestrained encouragement to imagine can produce all those false notions bound up in idle fantasy we have noted above as constituting the adult's fear of imagination. This may be seen in the sort of vapid question teachers often ask, such as 'Imagine you are Louis XIV. Write an essay on how you spend your afternoon'. The setter of that question quite clearly deserves all he gets, and is of course in no way promoting imagination, merely behaving stupidly.

I want at a later stage to suggest that imagination is a quality intermixed with other processes, and treat it as best understood and best promoted when it is seen in that way; but at first we must attempt to crawl, rather than to run, so I will be making two propositions about imagination assuming it to be an entity; later reasoning may well require some modification in these propositions, of course.

First I wish to propose that there are two kinds of imagination, similar in process but leading to different ends, and second that both involve certain levels of imaginative thinking that may be roughly defined.

The first kind of imagination, I would suggest, concerns itself with seeing and picturing a part of the past, a faculty that at its extreme and yet most primitive form is expressed in the notion of the seer, the conjurer-up of the dead. This, in History, is the function of the story-teller, and may have many dynamic aspects, in that the story may well be complex and moves forward in time; yet the basis is an attempt to picture one thing, to show what happened more than to explain. Now it is well appreciated that the narrative form is one vehicle of historical explanation, indeed for many historians (and for most historians for a proportion of their time) it is the supreme explanatory tool. We cannot deal with the past except in terms of an answer to the question 'What happened?' (or, in the more simple form of the extreme narrative historian, 'What happened next?'); yet there is a somewhat static form to

this visionary aspect of the imagination, for it is a unitary task (however great may be the effort) to see and to show. The very choice of subject for picturing implies some comment, and in the telling, all sorts of points of view may be used, moral values implied, but the imaginative artist is trying to paint one picture, and if he has any respect for his craft as an historian, he will be trying to paint it in Rankean terms. One need only pose the opposite position (that is trying to show the past as it didn't happen) to show the poles of historian/not historian. One may, of course, debate the possibility of the Rankean aim, its sensibility, its implied assumptions endlessly, but that is not the point here. All we need to know is that this kind of imagination is trying to show a portion of the past as it actually happened.

If we, for the time being, call that the static imagination (and I am all too aware at this moment of the falsity of many of the implications of this term) what of the dynamic? This I wish to denominate the perhaps more scientific cast of the imagination that wishes to explain, to interpret, to evaluate, to understand, to reconstruct in action.

In this domain we might put questions of the order of 'Why did she do that?' 'Why did prices increase?' 'What effect did that have?' 'Was this caused in this way or another?' 'How did this happen?' 'When did this begin or end?' and 'Where was the centre of this movement?' The list of questions could be much more thoroughly explored and examined, but it is their type I wish to explore for the time being. Now all of them require many other features of thought than just imagination (the detective function of logic is clearly important here) and we shall be exploring that interrelationship in a later part of this essay; but what elements of imagination do we see here?

Interestingly I think it is that intuitive aspect of empathy that comes to the fore, for unless the thinker can see different propositions at work in a human context (of real and specific human beings about whom we know some unalterable facts) he cannot proceed. Logic may aid the student to reclassify his evidence (he may for example have learned by rote to rearrange his evidence in terms of chronology, geography, or the standpoint of individuals concerned), but until he may see the reclassified evidence working according to the new pattern he cannot judge the validity of the reclassification.

Effectively, explanations made largely by logic may only be tested and enlarged by the imagination. I say here 'largely by logic' because it is very clear that imagination frequently takes a part in the making of that first hunch about association, but this is a factor not easily explored in the historical process, and requires considerable psychological expertise which I lack, so for the time being I must leave that aspect alone.

My first proposition, then, suggests that there are two ends to the imaginative process in historical learning, one that produces a picture, the other an explanation. Quite clearly these processes cannot be seen as exclusive and we should not give the name of 'History' to anything that doesn't partake of both; this is merely an attempt to classify that may or may not prove useful in the end. Their interrelationship is most clearly shown in my next proposition, in that they share a similar hierarchy of achievement.

One might pause here to question whether we actually need a hierarchy of achievement. It is easy to see the need teachers feel for some way of testing how well their pupils are doing in any particular piece of learning, but it is not always right to follow this need and provide the tools. What I am suggesting here is one possible way of defining the steps taken along the road of learning, in the knowledge that

these steps depend on circumstances, and may be taken many times. This implies that a very great historian may, in certain circumstances, find him or herself in the position of taking only step one, and a small child might well find in his circumstances the need and the possibility of taking step three. The hierarchy I shall put forward is a very simple and unoriginal fourfold sequence: moving from description, through analogy (or simile) to image (or metaphor) on to the final stage of symbol. These terms are mostly drawn from aesthetic domains, but for the moment they will serve our purpose.

The first level of the imaginative process is the minimalist position of describing, in which the learner is saying 'I can only tell you what I see'. It is this level of description which has brought a bad name on narrative history and on what I have called static imagination in both historians and students of history. For although the imaginer is making a small effort to see, to define the area of problem, he is for a variety of reasons unwilling or unable to go further. Yet that cautious first step is a necessary part of the sequence if the remainder is to be undertaken with any honesty and critical skill. Alone it is pointless; without it, the rest is merely fantasy.

The second step is a large one, the move to show and explain by reference. What the pupil is saying here is 'What I have described looks like so-and-so, or seems to be this type of thing.' Here knowledge and experience are brought into play in order to give focus and actuality to the subject in a process of discovery of what is really going on. But we should also note a larger, more poetic quality seeping into this simple exercise, for each comparison enlarges our view of the nature of the object of study.

The third step is even greater, for it involves a movement from 'it looks like' nearer to the area of 'it is' and involves that willing suspension of disbelief so essential to the imaginative process. The metaphor that becomes an image has a fixing quality when we dare to use it, and it requires us to enter the subject of study with our whole personality and belief. Here the empathetic process must take place in which people are not just described as 'working like ants', for example, but where we get a sense of their sweat and the cracking pains of their muscles. Similarly in dynamic imagination this is the stage where the theorist must start to believe in his theory a little in order to test it out: 'So, now let's imagine Hitler didn't intend to go to war, how would it all look then?'

The fourth step, into symbol, is the hardest yet and in that it crowns the process we might reserve it as an unachievable peak. This is a matter of judgement, but there have been many occasions in classrooms when I have seen it quietly but perfectly competently achieved. The level of symbol in this formulation is the level where one hunts out the words and phrases (following the pictorial and comparative pattern enunciated above) which will give newness to old material - succinctly it is the putting of old wine into new bottles, a thing the historian constantly attempts. Thus all historians of the period knew the old facts and interpretations of Thomas Becket, and felt that they could not be surprised when Professor Knowles gave his Raleigh Lecture. He didn't tell them anything new, any fact they didn't know, but by the stresses he placed on certain elements, by the arrangement he made, they saw afresh the man Becket, and said 'How true it seems - I never really thought of it that way, yet it rings true to my way of thinking as well'. For Knowles took the blushing of Becket and made it significant, made it a symbol of the man - the man who lacked control, who stammered, grew angry, loved, was impetuous - and flushed with pleasure. Thus the little was made big; because it showed and explained, the symbol held.

So far imagination has been treated as an entity, a type of behaviour that may be viewed separately. This has been for purposes of analysis only, for it is obvious that there is no state of mind which may be defined as 'just imagining' nor is there any classification of mental activities wherein we may apportion exactly some parts to imagination and others to logic. Thinking is an intermixed process, and when we try to reduce it to tabular arrangement we are in danger of over-simplification.

It is clear that there are a number of elements that go to make up 'historical thinking': we need knowledge of historical facts and a store of experience about human behaviour from which to draw when we are trying to understand those facts; we need a number of skills of organisation and deduction; and of course we need imagination. It may be objected that the knowledge of facts and experience is merely 'mental baggage' which shouldn't be accorded a place in a study of mental processes, but the having of these things is inextricably bound up in the desire to gain more, and the ability to make use of the materials themselves. Of course all this depends absolutely upon the motivating power, the will to do History (which we can most conveniently call curiosity); without this, the ghost in the machine, nothing can work.

Wherever we look at the use of facts, experience and skills we find them not only bound up in one another, but also reliant upon imagination in some way. Without prior knowledge, for example, speculation cannot begin, but it is the speculation that drives us to search for more, and it is the speculation that uses the knowledge, validates it for memory. The more knowledge we have, the more we soak ourselves in the period or topic, the nearer we are to getting the picture, but without the functioning of the imagination the picture will not come.

A similar interconnection may be established between experience and imagination: the person who lacks experience cannot compare, cannot ever find a name for what he sees. On the other hand the unimaginative person may be possessed of a wealth of experience which is never used: haven't we all met the bore who has been round the world? The child with a very small amount of experience can still recognise anger, for example, by reference to his small store of experience, and can look for causes and results of that anger, if he has the imaginative capacity to do so.

In relation to the operation of skills (particularly the use of logic) imagination has also a vital role to play, and is totally intermixed in the process. One may operate the rules of deduction automatically at command, but if the activity is to be self-generating, the idea behind the deduction must appear first, to stimulate and guide the process.

Let us take one simple operation to stand as an example: we often ask learners of History to apply the test of plausibility to evidence; in doing so we require all four aspects of historical thinking. We need to know the facts, and almost certainly to find more; we need to draw on experience to say 'Would I believe it, would they believe it?'; we need a number of technical and logical tests (was it possible for this man at this time to have said such a thing?); and finally we need imagination to summon up the picture and to suggest and test the hypotheses for explanation.

Thus we must be very wary of considering the function of imagination in isolation; clearly it is both allowable and valuable for philosophers to attempt a separate definition, but if we are considering the working of imagination, when defined, we must see it as it is, but also as a part of the process. How, then, might we act as teachers, following this discussion of the issues? Only a tentative answer may be given at the moment, because this paper is concerning itself with principles, but it

should be possible (if it has any validity) to translate those principles into action fairly readily.

First, teachers should recognise what they mean by imagination in historical learning (which may involve being aware of the two kinds), and encourage it by rewarding it. Once they have seen it in action they should be able to operate a simple scale, looking to the fourfold hierarchy established here as a guide. Quite certainly, few pupils will reach the fourth level, but it is still important to press most pupils to reach levels two or three when the occasion offers.

Secondly, teachers need to be clear that, although they may recognise and reward imagination separately, they must encourage it in all aspects of historical learning. Thus when the pupil is searching for information this must not be seen as merely a routine operation, but an area where imagination can operate as well. The pupil must ask some questions of the process: not just 'What am I looking for?' but also 'What will I be surprised to find, and what will confirm present opinion?' The formulation of questions which guide the process is a most important issue in determining its success.

One thing is very clear, at least: if we are to encourage imagination in every aspect of historical learning there will have to be a great deal of thinking, talking and discussing about what is happening, in process terms, and not just talk about the materials, the evidences themselves. One of the great lessons of the evaluation of the Schools' Council Project History 13-16 has been that asking pupils to think and talk and debate about what they are up to when they are doing History is one of the key factors in developing historical learning. It is the consciousness with which we do things that counts in success; this is not to deny the validity of the intuitive steps the poet and the inventor takes - the most important things they know are that they are poets and inventors.

## **The Narrative Approach**

**Source:** *Teaching History*, No. 4, 1975

*Tale-teller, who 'twixt fire and snow  
Had heart to turn about and show  
With faint half-smile things great and small  
That in thy fearful land did fall,  
Thou and thy brethren sure did gain  
That thing for which I long in vain,  
The spell, whereby the mist of fear  
Was melted, and your ears might hear  
Earth's voices as they are indeed.  
Well ye have helped me at my need.*

Envoi to The Eyrbyggja Saga, *William Morris*

Story-telling shares with drama one important quality as a tool for history teaching: it must for a large part of the time treat history as a forwards moving development (or change, or accretion of events, according to circumstance) rather than a backward looking analysis or explanation. The future is revealed in the course of the telling, and in the best stories is kept quite as dark as our own future here and now is, until the curtain draws back, to surprise, delight or consternation on the part of the audience.

This is a factor of some significance for a generation that seems to have largely rejected retrospection in favour of an anxiety-ridden futurology. Our children really do want at least to be orientated in a forward-looking situation, and can see little point in agonizing or rejoicing over the past. Similarly, teachers and curriculum designers (possibly in response to children's demands) have rejected the theory of education by which the best products of the past were arranged like choicest fruits for children to sample and enjoy; in its place they have put a utilitarian doctrine of searching the future to find what they will need to prepare children for and have devised curricula that are largely vocational. Retrospection for pleasure is denounced as escapism and nostalgia, and analysed out of court as man's foolish desire to conquer death by remembering the dead: historians are intellectual resurrection men, they say; *experientia non docet*, remember Lot's wife.

So the forward stance is important, but a second quality is associated: story, like drama, is lived at life rate. The backward-looking analyst may sweep over vast periods with his heady generalisations at hand, and the explainer may collect and connect events from a wide time range, but the story-teller is concerned with moments, with split-seconds when decisions were taken, truths perceived or realized, disasters struck, or providential salvation was offered. Consider for a moment the following paragraph about the Stresa agreement:

*Mussolini for one left the meeting under the impression that the shadow had been lifted, especially as the representatives of three Powers agreed on fourteenth April to sign a Resolution affirming that they found 'themselves in complete agreement in opposing, by all practicable means, any unilateral repudiation of treaties which may endanger the peace, and will act in close and cordial collaboration for this purpose'. Mussolini raised his fountain pen and asked Flandin, Laval, MacDonald and Simon if it was agreed that he should insert after 'peace' the phrase 'in Europe'. He asked again, waiting for the British to respond to this clear intimation of Italian resolve not to keep the*

*peace in Africa. Flandin nodded; Laval smiled; and the British said nothing. The Agreement was signed; and the fate of Abyssinia had been decided.'*  
(Barclay, 1973).

Here we have a story that somehow takes us on a flight to where the action is. We may see the action taking place (and this is a prime quality of story, as will be shown later) but above all we may feel the movement of time in it. The real significance of the story is the perception of real time and its significance; many of the most important moments in good stories come in the pauses, where there is only the tick of the clock to count the racing thoughts of the inspired imagination.

Stories are, above all, the food of the imagination - food that everyone needs at all ages. There is a strange assumption among many teachers (most of whom read novels or watch plays on the television) that stories are for the little ones only, and that story-telling is the art of the specialist infant teacher. This is a sad reflection on our culture, for it is not long since adults and children alike listened with pleasure to a huge body of folk tales as well as to true stories of the past, and in this folk culture is to be found much of the common experience that bound society together. A recent dictionary of folk stories which gives largely resumé material extends to four very substantial volumes, and to hold their great weight in your hands is to feel physically the great loss we have experienced in modern times, for the television hero is no true substitute: his adventures titillate or excite for one viewing only, whilst the tales of Robin Hood were refined over several centuries in a genuine evolutionary process to find qualities of lasting value (Briggs, 1970-1).

Our imaginations are stultified by this lack of story material and, though we appear to live in a wider world, our experience is becoming ever blander and more common. I am writing these words in Los Angeles but, setting aside the weather, there is little to tell me I am 7000 miles from my home. Each international airport has been a similar experience, each company that has serviced my needs has viewed competition as a fight to keep up with the rest by copying them. Our world protects and shelters us by providing as few as possible dissimilar environments and experiences, so that what is different is seen as frightening, threatening or outrageous.

Now few people would argue with the theory of education that sees development as based largely on experience as processed by the imagination. The restricted mind cannot cope with new images, with fresh experience or alternative ideas; conventional and conservative, it continues as far as possible its circular track, and greets novelty with aggression. It is restricted both by its range of experience and by its powers of imagining. If there is little experience to choose from there is little hope of categorising or evaluating the new, and if these processes are not constantly practised the imagination withers and dies in the same way that conscience can die in those who practise evil as a daily round. The threats posed by withered imaginations are as large and serious for society as those posed by the withering of conscience, for the aggressive resistance to change and to novelty shown by the inexperienced and unimaginative has quite as much explosive and disruptive power as the mind undirected by conscience - more in fact, for the man without conscience is frequently found to be obedient to an almost excessive degree, and it is possible to posit him as harmless in a well directed society .

In a perfect world we would remedy this fault by the provision of real-life experiences, and many attempts are made to do so. Children from urban environments are taken on stiff climbing expeditions, and others from democratic and rich societies are taken on trips to see totalitarian or underdeveloped nations. Such activities are of course worthwhile, and the more they can be expanded and enlarged, the happier we all

shall be; but they are limited, and must be so, for we are simply not rich enough and probably never will be to provide a full range of real-life experiences for all children. In some cases it is dubious whether children should have real-life experiences: we would protect them from observation of, say, public executions, whilst admitting that they should know that man often displays carelessness and contempt for human life; we would not knowingly place them amid flying bullets, though we would want them to know that men will eventually rebel against the control of wicked and self-centred despots.

Here, then, is the place in education for vicarious experience, and one of the best ways of having it is without doubt in the hearing of history stories. Some are short, some must be long. There is a real place for the anecdote, the capturing of a moment; what better way is there for example, for capturing in amber the delight and wonder of the discovery of the new world than in Las Casas' letter home telling how he had read service from a book of the smallest print at night on Hispaniola by the light of the dancing fireflies (Elliott, 1973)?

How may we know the true mind of Queen Victoria better than by reading her prayer on the death of Peel: 'Oh! God who alone knowest what is best for us, may Thy will be done, but it does seem mysterious that in these troubled times when he could less be spared than any other human being, should be taken from us'(Longford, 1964).

Sometimes one needs length, and full description, and the simple anecdote just will not do. Consider these two following extracts, widely differing in content and style, but joined by their concern for a true understanding of a moment of history that is hard but important to perceive; important because, having perceived them we feel richer, more filled with life and understanding of life, wondrous at the ways of men, their achievement and their tragedy in a context of struggle.

This is the story of the erection of the great bridge over the Tamar at Saltash in 1857, a technological feat than can only be paralleled in our day by the moon shots. Vast crowds came to see the first gigantic truss lifted into place. ..

*At this moment, like the conductor of an orchestra, Brunel moved to his place upon a platform mounted high in the centre of the truss. Directly above him were his signallers, standing ready with their numbers and flags. He had insisted that the whole operation must be carried out in complete silence, and his wishes had been widely publicized. Consequently, no sooner had he taken up his position than there fell a dramatic stillness like that which follows the tap of a conductor's baton, and every eye in the vast crowd was strained towards the distant figure of the engineer. Numbers whose purport was unintelligible to the crowd were displayed: flags flickered, and the huge truss swung slowly and majestically out into the Tamar .*

*'Not a voice was heard' wrote an eyewitness. '....as by some mysterious agency, the tube and rail, borne on the pontoons, travelled to their resting place, and with such quietude as marked the building of Solomon's Temple. With the impressive silence which is the highest evidence of power, it slid, as it were, into its position without an accident, without any extraordinary mechanical effort, without a 'misfit', to the eighth of an inch.'*

*Just as the time of high water came at three o'clock, the ends of the tube were secured in their positions on the piers from which they would be raised by hydraulic presses as the masonry was built up beneath them. As soon as the*

*truss was safely in place the tension was broken. A band of the Royal Marines struck up 'See the conquering hero comes' and Brunel stepped down from the platform to the accompaniment of a storm of cheering. ..But not one of the thousands of west-countrymen who cheered themselves hoarse that day realized that their tribute was also a valediction, that their hail was also a farewell.*

*It was Brunel's chief assistant, Brereton, who superintended the floating of the second Saltash span in July 1858, and who saw the work through to its successful completion in the following spring....But the engineer was not there. No flags flew, no bands played, no crowds cheered when he took his first and last look at the completed bridge. He lay on a specially prepared platform-truck, while one of Gooch's locomotives drew him very slowly beneath the pier arches and over the great girders. For his railway career was ended. Broken by the last and the most ambitious of all his schemes - his great ship - Brunel was dying. (Rolt, 1957)*

The next extract deals with Spiridonova's attack on Lenin. She was a great heroine of the revolution, having assassinated the hated Lujinovsky when a mere girl, and having suffered fearfully at the hands of the Tsarist regime:

*....Spiridonova then rises, and from her first words one realizes that this is no ordinary congress, that today the Bolsheviks and the Left Social-Revolutionaries have come to the parting of the ways. She is obviously nervous. Her delivery, too, is monotonous, but, as she warms to her subject, she acquires a hysterical passion which is not unimpressive. Her attack is concentrated on the Poverty Committees. With pride she refers to the fact that her whole life has been dedicated to the welfare of the peasants. Keeping time to the rhythm of her sentences with an up-and-down movement of the right arm, she bitterly attacks Lenin. 'I accuse you', she says, addressing Lenin, 'of betraying the peasants, of making use of them for your own ends, and of not serving their interests.' She appeals to her followers: 'In Lenin's philosophy,' she shrieks, 'you are only dung - only manure.' Then, working up to an hysterical peroration, she turns on the Bolsheviks: 'Our other differences are only temporary, but on the peasant questions we are prepared to give battle. When the peasants, the Bolshevik peasants, the Left Social-Revolutionary peasants, and the non-party peasants are alike humiliated, oppressed and crushed - crushed as peasants - in my hand you will still find the same pistol, the same bomb, which once forced me to defend. ..' The end of the sentence is drowned in a wild torrent of applause. A Bolshevik delegate on the parterre hurls an indecent assault at the speaker. Pandemonium ensues. Brawny peasants stand up in their seats and shake their fists at the Bolsheviks, Trotsky pushes himself forward and tries to speak. He is howled down and his face blanches with impotent rage. In vain Sverdloff rings his bell and threatens to clear the theatre. Nothing seems more certain than that he will have to carry out his threat.*

*Then Lenin walks slowly to the front of the stage. On the way he pats Sverdloff on the shoulder, and tells him to put his bell away. Holding the lapels of his coat, he faces the audience - smiling, supremely self-confident. He is met with jeers and catcalls. He laughs good-humouredly.*

*Then he holds up his hand, and with a last rumble the tumult dies. With cold logic he replies point by point to the criticism of the Left Social-Revolutionaries. He refers with gentle sarcasm to their illogical and frequently equivocal attitude. His remarks produce another storm of interruption. Again Sverdloff becomes excited and grasps his bell. Again Lenin raises his hand. His self-*

*confidence is almost irritating. Then, swaying slightly forward, as he accentuates his points, but with strangely little gesticulation, he proceeds as calmly as though he were addressing a Sunday School meeting. To the taunts of servility towards the Germans, he replies that the Left Social-Revolutionaries, in wishing to renew the war, are carrying out the policy of the Allied Imperialists. Coldly, and without a trace of sentiment, he defends the Brest treaty, points out how bitter a humiliation it has been, but underlines the grim doctrine of necessity. He almost exaggerates the difficulties of the present situation, praises the courage of those who are fighting the battle of Socialism, counsels further patience, and promises a reward for that patience in a glowing picture of the future, when war-weariness must inevitably produce a revolution in all countries. Gradually the sheer personality of the man and the overwhelming superiority of his dialectics conquer his audience, who listen spellbound until the speech ends in a wild outburst of cheering, which although many of the Left Social-Revolutionaries must know of the preparations for the morrow, is not confined to the Bolsheviks....(Bruce Lockhart, 1932)*

It is then the realism of the story, the empathy involved in being suddenly there, that attracts and has value. Students with no feeling for the medieval period will thrill to the story of the inquest held 7th December 1301 on the drowned body of John de Neushom, a schoolmaster, who had unwisely gone out after dinner to cut willow rods by a mill pond in Oxford and had climbed out too far for a cane that would really sting. 'Serve him right', they say, and they are really there.

Similarly the tales of John Aubrey have thrilled thousands who have found no other way into the seventeenth century, as much for the gaiety of:

*Captain Carolo Fontam, a Croation, spake thirteen languages; was a Captain under the Earle of Essex. He was very quarrelsome and a great Ravisher. He left the Parliament Party, and went to King Charles the first at Oxford, where he was hanged for Ravishing. Said he, 'I care not for your Cause: I come to fight for your half-crowne...'*

As for the sadness of the ending of James Harrington:

*Henry Nevill, Esq., never forsooke him to his dyeing day. Though near a whole year before he died, his memorie and discourse were taken away by a disease ('twas a sad sight to see such a sample of Mortality , in one whom I lately knew, a brisque, lively cavaliero) this gentleman, whom I must never forget for his constant friendship, payed his visits as duly and respectfully as when his friend was in the prime of his Understanding - a true friend'.  
(Dick, 1962)*

Stories are needed, that is clear enough, but how are they done - is it a gift, an art or a learnable skill? Let us first consult a master from the literary field - Mikhail Bulgakov, in his *Black Snow*, describes acutely how a story came to him:

*I somehow found myself taking the copy of my novel out of the drawer. In the evenings I began to feel that something coloured was emerging from the white pages. After staring at it and screwing up my eyes I was convinced that it was a picture - and a picture that was not flat but three-dimensional like a box. Through the lines on the paper I could see a light burning and inside the box those same characters in the novel were moving about. It was a delightful game. After a while noises began coming from the room inside the book. I could distinctly hear the sound of a piano.... But that was not all. Whenever the house*

*grew quiet and nobody could have been playing anything I used to catch the heart-rending strains of an accordion through the storm, mingling with plaintive unhappy voices. They were certainly not coming from downstairs. Why did the little room grow dark, why did the pages fill with a winter's night by the Dnieper, why those horses' heads and above them men's faces under sheepskin hats. I could see their sharp swords, hear them as they whistled through the air ... I could have watched the page play this game for ever.... But how was I to pin down these little figures so that they would never run away from me? One night I decided to describe that enchanted little room... (Bulgakov, 1971)*

Aptly put by a novelist and playwright, we have here a statement about how stories are conceived that is of utmost importance. First of all they are born in the head - pen and paper are no real use at this stage, and the storyteller must let the elements of his tale jiggle about in his mind for a long period of brooding, until he knows their shape and texture, their weight and mood, their relationships and significance.

Perhaps the reader will here pause and suspect that what is being talked about is the creation of fantasy stories, novelistic notions such as those that inspired Bulgakov; if this were so, history would be really in danger. It should be emphasized that the historian story-teller does all his research first, respects his sources' integrity absolutely, refuses to allow himself to reject facts that don't fit his present schemata, or to alter them or put spin on them, or show them in false lights and wrong perspectives. It is this very commitment to his sources that make essential the long period of brooding, of getting to know inwardly his materials before ever he dares attempt the feat of presenting them in the real-life context of a story.

As the elements of the story become known to the teller the imagination begins to work on them in a sensory vein: the imaginer must hear the noises of the world around, the tone of voice and pace of the speaker - he needs to listen inwardly for the sounds that fit the facts; he needs to see the sights - the glare of the sun, the sheerness of the buildings, the colour and shape of the rocks, the size and build of the protagonist - he must look inwardly and look closely, though never forgetting the important side glances and peripheral vision that make up a scene; he must feel, feel the sensations of mind and body, not disdaining to re-create in his mind the sensations of being wounded and the fear of not knowing how serious the wound is; inwardly he must sense the taste and smell of things, the pleasure of flowers in a garden after a furious quarrel inside the house, the freshness of water on the parched throat. All this is his responsibility, and one recognized just as much by historians as by novelists; did not Prescott (half blinded in a bread-throwing session in College days) enquire from his home just as carefully into the flora and fauna of Mexico, and the effect on the body of travelling in very different terrains, as he did into the contents of Spanish royal archives?

Once a story is truly sensed, it is ready for telling - there are no problems of memory, for the sense-impressions imagined by the teller in the preparatory period flood back in sequence just as though the story happened to him. This is a remarkable experience first time round for those who distrust their memories, and a most invigorating one - to be able to tell, and to tell all, has a power about it that William Morris recognized so precisely in the extract that heads this article. It fills one with a strange compulsive power, like some ancient ritual re-discovered after many years of disuse, but backed by the experience of all mankind over the whole of history. It is an urgent, vibrant moment, one of those eccentric trips over the edge of time into another level of experience, a level that ignores death and decay and joyfully recognizes the infinite, the extra-terrestrial, the immortal.

Telling involves no books, no notes, no writing, not even drawing; it is far older than such advanced and modernistic techniques. Telling is not, however, a voice to ear experience, it is essentially eye to eye. The contact that may be experienced by a teacher who is willing to drop his book, or his notes and to raise his eyes to the level of the class is astonishing; many teachers work entirely without feedback, attempting somehow to guess the reactions of their students, but the story-teller may tell it at once. The eyes tell, with the absolute accuracy of a dial, the degree of concentration of an audience, and in an uncanny way keep the teller informed of the type of material or mood that is most needed or desired. Now many teachers forbear to look into the eyes of their children because they fear to see boredom there; yet the message is so frequently 'go on - we like that, don't stop' that eye contact can be far more of an encouragement than the reverse.

Thus the children can to a certain extent control the story they are receiving, whilst the teller remains in complete control of the accuracy of what is being given. The children may flash the message 'Enough blood - move away from that scaffold' or instead they may say 'How far did they go, we really want to know' and the story-teller may move around in his story to suit the needs expressed.

Much work of story-tellers looks and sounds as though great instinctive powers were required; you must be a great actor, or have a big voice, or be highly inventive; of course, natural talent can play a large part in the success or failure of a story-teller, some are well-endowed and some have few gifts, but if the rules of preparation and eye-contact sketched out above are kept it is amazing how much will be added into you. A few further points may help.

Firstly, a story should be relatively simple: few characters, few scenes and few changes of direction. A good working maximum to keep in mind is five; certainly children work well with stories with four characters, and are most comfortable with two to three scenes, but if there are more than five major changes in direction they can become very confused. To be ordinary, then a queen, then in prison, then to die is enough - for us too much, because the extent of change from one situation to another is enormous; but for children the change of mood itself is the problem, not the extent of the change, so that from one log cabin to another is as difficult as from log cabin to White House.

In fact, contrast is a highly desirable element in a story for children. If there has been a period of horror it must be followed by some light relief, and the story-teller may have to travel some considerable distance to find it honestly; but change there must be. Change is also necessary in the voice, from loud to soft, to harsh, to small, to big, to low, to high. The monotonous voice that works on one level is anathema, and in this area teachers may have to work hard to extend their range, but considering that the voice is their most used and most versatile tool, it is surely worth it. Most people have good voices, but are inhibited against learning their power and variability. To try to do this alone is fatal, and the only practice available is in the classroom itself, which may seem hard to the uninitiated. Remarkably, however, it is true that if you really know in advance the kind of voice you want to summon up, whether a piercing whisper or the booming tones of an eastern God, when called upon it will come. Just as the imagination will shape the story for you, and memorize it, if left long enough to do the job, so it will programme the kind of voice you need.

I have mentioned earlier the power of silence, the significance of the pause. As a teacher-trainer my constant signal in the classroom is 'shut up' - but the silence must be significant. It may be the silence of waiting in danger, or the silence of listening or looking long distances; it may be the silence of shock and dismay, or the silence of

admiration, of close examination. Maybe it is just to hold off the inevitable, to provide that moment of preparation before it comes. A pause can mean many things, and like the tone or pace of the voice it must be programmed in advance by the imagination. It is essential to know exactly at what point you will pause, for how long and in what stance.

Which brings us appropriately to gesture and movement. Some very foolish teachers sit down to tell stories and have children crowd in a half-moon around them; nothing can be more constricting. Whatever shape you have your class in, someone has to be at the back and missing the immediacy of contact that children cherish as a part of story-telling hours. You must be able to move to get to him, to be by him and to bring him into the heart of the story. To move towards a child whose mind is wandering away, or who is uncomfortable is to convey a reward that if fully appreciated by the giver would endue him with overwhelming arrogance - a touch, a glance, a direct question or a use of him as some kind of physical example as a part of the story ('and they all turned their heads right around', turning the child's head) can bring into play the attention of children who find it difficult to concentrate; for one moment they are the centre of the world, and yours, really in deep communion with you.

Perhaps even more important, it is necessary for a teacher to have freedom of movement to create in children's minds the environment of the story. The mountains must be over there, and only over there, and they must stay there, for the whole of the story. The prince's palace must be here, and the walls must go up so, and stretch so far into the sky. The fish that is brought for the king to eat must be so long and so round and so heavy - all gestures that require a facility of hand and body movement in different areas of the classroom. The body must be able to sag beneath its burden, to spring into action to ward off blows; and the face must be open to sadness and sorrow, delight, surprise and love.

All this may only be done by a teacher who has learned to march around his classroom assured of following eyes, and to express emotion fully and freely without fear of derision. The rewards, as indicated, are huge, but the courage required is great at the start, and one needs to be loose and relaxed, determined to try it through at full pace, reacting without fear, fearing nothing, devoted only to the success of the story. Fear of children is the teacher's greatest problem in school, and even very experienced and competent teachers work under this cloud; the best way to lose it and break into a whole new style of teaching is story-telling.

Story-telling is very tiring, and only a fool would suggest that a teacher can engage in such activity more than two or three times a week. In itself it is an occasion, and must be occasional; therefore one must choose carefully the times when it enters the curriculum. It may be at the start of a piece of work as an inspiration, and a source of presenting children with problems and material for question building. 'Why did he do that?' may be the research problem posed, or 'Was that typical - did those people often behave that way?' Perhaps the best and simplest question, however, is 'What happened next?'

Similarly, the story may be a staging-post on the way to completion of a piece of work, summing-up progress to date, carrying it to a new stage and posing new questions. And of course it may come at the end of enquiry, the true end of the historical process, for we must not forget that in the two-fold definition of history, enquiry and story, narrative comes second.

Children love to see their own materials placed, to see what they have found and presented set in a work of art. For most of them this is impossible: they lack the talent, the experience and the words. Hence often what should be the most exciting stage of a period of study, the end, turns out a flop, a disappointment.

Have we as adults, as teachers, any right to deny children the services they have received through many thousands of years of forming and shaping for them the experiences and ideas about which they long to know more? Dare we deny this right, or dare we advance to accept the manifold pleasures that story-telling offers? So often teachers complain about their lot, but they could be kings or tribal leaders; they could be the cult of their own subjects, in a loving, giving relationship where art is truly humane.

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## ***The Revival of Narrative in History and the History Classroom***

**Source:** not given

More years ago than I care to count, when I was a sprig of a fellow and convinced that I knew it all, and if only folk would stop a minute and listen to me, the world might well get straight, I was running a conference for history teachers and came by a problem. In those unregenerate days we were mainly men, a fairly rough and casual lot, prone to laugh at most things and very cynical; in this group there was one odd colleague, a lady with a slight accent and rather more pronounced ways who kept asking me for a slot on the timetable for telling us all about story-telling. Story-telling! Good grief, that was for babies, Joyce Grenfell stuff, not for us who tackled serious matters with big fat difficult lads - I puzzled how to protect my colleagues from this dangerous lady, and managed to do so until the Friday, when she found a spare half hour, and I had no excuses left. So I opened the bar, gave the lads a stiff drink, and we all giggled mightily at the prospect. We trooped in, prepared for a big laugh, and within thirty seconds we were entranced, delighted, joining in, putty in her hands. 'That woman is a genius', I confided several drinks later, and, my courage improved, I approached her and apologised for my stupidity: I had been looking at a greatly gifted teacher, with much to give, and with my bad eyes I had seen a clown. With great good humour and not a trace of triumph, she agreed to teach me how to do it.

Freda Saxey taught me many things about story-telling, about eye contact, about movement and gesture, about the shaping of a story, about the importance of characterisation by voices, and I practised these assiduously until I became quite good at it, and my goodness it was very enjoyable. I learned more about teaching through the business of telling stories than in any other way, and the pleasure of the event was remarkable - somewhere between Dickens and Max Miller is about the mark of it. I recall one summer's day returning to a school I had not visited for some time, and I was observed through the open windows - 'Ere, Miss, this Mr, Dr, oh, you know - it's Julius Caesar back again', and all the children cheered. Poor teacher - but she didn't seem to mind.

All very delightful for all concerned, but with fairly typical perversity I had discovered the power of story just at the moment when academic historians were consigning it to the lowest depths of hell. All of my colleagues were plodding through Annales with a dictionary of sociological French to hand, reading counterfactual analyses from America, logging parish registers onto computers, applying Marx like billy-ho and pondering on Freudian explanations of the odd little ways of the great and the good and conveniently dead. One Third Programme broadcast on the homosexual dreams of poor old Laud had me worried for weeks. Models were erected then deconstructed, and by the time post-deconstructionalism came in I was frankly lost - History had turned into the quaintly daft or the frankly boring, and the only point on which everybody agreed was that story-telling was a bad thing.

In some ways those who attacked narrative were taking a very simple-minded position: because story was an essentially literary art it was too much invention, it was a perversion of the truth. This feeling had a long history in itself; we must remember that it was way back in 1931 that Herbert Butterfield had defied the Whigs and identified a sequence of biases in the great narrative historians that smacked of liberal conspiracy. What seems so odd in all this is that the opponents of story in history were all perfectly agreed that one could never get at 'truth' anyway and were using models and interpretations and analyses that put an equally powerful set of

reins on the subject matter. Many of the more advanced in this school poured scorn on research techniques themselves, on 'empiricism', with an equal zest. Could it be that they felt more justification in presenting a biased view than the old masters, and if so, where did they find this justification, other than in an ideological commitment that had little to do with the craft of history itself? One thing was certain, they hated narrative, and along with Levi-Strauss denounced it as 'fraudulent'.

No wonder I turned my coat collar up as I slipped in at the back doors of schools to indulge my secret vice of story-telling, and no wonder that my colleagues, when they caught me at it, clicked their tongues and cast their eyes to heaven. I was at such a loss that I even applied for a job in Coventry, anxious to make it a free-will move. They didn't even want me there. But hope was round the corner, and from the strangest quarter, for it was one who danced in his time to many a modern tune who, in *Past and Present* of all places, announced the revival of narrative. There was some immediate response, some of it well reasoned, but on the whole, it seems, Lawrence Stone's announcement held its own: story was back again.

It is one of the problems we have to face in schooling that the teachers of History are trained in one school of thought and go on busily teaching it for all their days, when the historians themselves have changed their minds and are going full pelt in a different direction. We have here in England teachers who slash away at children's essays, commenting 'more analysis, less story' whilst those children who survive to become university students find themselves surrounded by story-makers. What a surprise for them to find events, moments, places and even people taking the front of the stage, whilst tedious old trends, movements and explanations of an ideological or more mathematical kind get stuffed into the bin!

It is for far higher flyers in the world of historiography and philosophy of history to explain all this effectively, but I wish to put forward a humble and simple suggestion at this stage, for it will govern much of the rest of what I want to say. I believe those who mounted the grand attack on narrative did so for many reasons, most of them perfectly valid, but there was an underlying theme to their attacks that barely broke water: as committed theorists, as indeed, explainers, they disliked narrative because it was the supreme form of explanation, the most powerful way of presenting the past as a coherent, understandable entity. Those who chose the narrative form were not silly school teachers, historical novelists, simple-minded nationalists or narrow minded antiquarians: no, they were people with messages (maybe messages we now reject, that is our right) people who could put their messages over with the power of story, and succeed. In this sense there is little difference between Macaulay and A. J. P. Taylor: here are people who want to make sense of the past in the strongest way possible, via narrative. The success of the theoretical analysts, it must be said, pales by comparison. So what is it about narrative that makes it so powerful? How does it work? Of course much of it is purely magical, utterly inexplicable, we just know it works. I have just been preparing a lecture on William the Silent, and my memory is in a state of wild confusion, but one thing sticks: when he decided at one moment early in his life to have an economy drive he sacked 28 of his cooks. It is strange, it is different, it appeals to one's sense of humour, all sorts of things, but the most important is that suddenly, for a moment the man is there, we are calling up ghosts, and that is big magic.

Yes, yes, yes, I know one could do a comparative study of the number of domestics employed by North German princelings in the sixteenth century, but God forbid, for here we have something that smacks of a real man, an extravagant moment, something that happened, not an average, nor a symbol, nor a political statement.

There are many philosophers of history who are so delighted with the distinction between the past and history (which they repeat *ad nauseam* as if it were something new) that they topple over into the position of proclaiming that the past never speaks for itself, but is always 'constructed' by historians in their typically 'provisional' manner. Yes, I do understand what they mean, and allow the importance of their primary distinction, but I can never agree that the past does not speak for itself. Read this letter from Lord Leicester to his daughter condoling on the loss of her husband in the Civil War, read it and I defy anyone to proclaim that it is not a voice from the past, speaking clearly and effectively to us in our present:

*...And your reason will assure you, that besides the vanity of bemoaning that which hath no remedy, you offend him whom you loved, if you hurt that person whom he loved. Remember how apprehensive he was of your dangers, and how sorry for anything which troubled you: imagine that he sees how you afflict and that though he looks upon it without any perturbation, for that cannot be admitted, by that blessed condition wherein he is, yet he may censure you, and think you forgetful of the friendship that was between you, if you pursue not his desires in being careful of yourself, who was so dear unto him... I know you lived happily, and so as nobody but yourself could measure the contentment of it. I rejoiced at it, and did thank God for making me one of the means to procure it for you. That is now past, and I will not flatter you so much as to say, I think you can ever be so happy in this you so much life again: but this comfort you owe me, that I may see you bear this change and your misfortunes patiently ... I doubt not but your eyes are full of tears, and not the emptier for those they shed. God comfort you, and let us join in prayer to Him, that He will be pleased to give His grace to you, to your mother, and to myself, that all of us may resign and submit ourselves cheerfully to His pleasure. So nothing shall be able to make us unhappy in this life, nor hinder us from being happy in that which is eternal; ... that you may find the comforts best and most necessary for you, is and shall ever be the constant prayer of your father that loves you dearly.*

*Oxford, 19th October 1643*

Further, I would claim that it is those occasions when the past speaks for itself, in words, in pictures, in views (Tintern Abbey, whatever) that are the high points of our experience of the past, and are the real induction to history. I cannot imagine being attracted to my subject initially by an historiographical debate. I do know that it was rambling around the medieval cathedral and castle of Lincoln as a young child that switched me into the business of exploring the past, of becoming an historian. And those places still have voices for me.

I would like to continue in this vein, for the reality of history, the importance of what really happened and the feelings that are aroused in us by knowing these things, the very credibility of it all, these are important constituents of what makes a history story so radically different from what some people call a 'fictive act'. Yet I don't think it is our business at this moment to engage too much in the description of that feeling tone of history; now we must face up to the issue of what story does to history, how it shapes what comes to us out of the past, the artistry of the craft.

There are two aspects of the 'literary' side of narrative to which I wish to make reference: what Hayden White has called 'employment', and a related matter, the signals for recognition that a storyteller embeds in his story in order to make it work more thoroughly. Both are essentially literary devices, and I don't see why historians should feel guilty about this: is there anything wrong with literary work, is it in some

way sinful, deceptive, sneaky? Is literature more sneaky than the application of theory? Well, it works better, and so the theoreticians may well feel it is more sneaky: but there are some of us who would claim that without art there can be no meaning, and I think there are a lot of us, in fact. The important caveat here is that we are dealing with real, rather than with invented materials, and we work under a structure of rules that bring us to the bar of judgement from time to time. Peter Geyl's introduction to *The Revolt of the Netherlands* (you see I am working away at my subject) brings Motley, a great nineteenth century story-teller, to the bar and finds him guilty: he wanted one picture to emerge, and so he failed to check the alternatives and now we all know he was wrong. Interestingly, Geyl, who is quite scathing about this failure, confesses that he does not want to, nor can he demolish a great book, which, flawed as it is, will be great for all time. But rules are rules, and historians work under their own set which are totally different from the set under which novelists work. We are sharing skills, but doing an essentially different job.

As soon as Aristotle tells us that stories have beginnings, middles and ends we realise that a story fixes its materials in a special way, an expected way, an acceptable format. This is not, of course the way things happen, for time and change are continuous, if madly irregular processes. If we wish to take a part of history and show it, we must act as an experimenter, or as a cameraman, understanding what we are doing. The experimenter knows that he is destroying what he is working on at the same time as examining it, and that his intervention in the process is changing that process, yet he can only have two choices - to experiment or give up. Heisenberg's uncertainty theory has lived with me, a non-scientist absolute, since I first heard of it: you can know a particle's position but not its speed, you can know its speed but not its position (maybe I got that wrong, but the point is clear, I hope). The photographer knows that in stifling the action into a frame he is in fact rejecting all the other possible frames and focusses, but he must choose in the end. Form is a necessity with which we must learn to live, and our form in story is the plot.

A part of the plot is the depiction of character and motivation, two important explainers that dominate story. This involves highlighting one or several characters as against the whole body of participants - there are in effect far too many with whom to cope. Here, of course is where the narrator is open to the greatest threat of mistake - suppose he chooses the wrong man or men, suppose he highlights and undervalues people in such a way as to give a wrong picture? Well, of course, he often does; the essence of the matter is to do the choosing and the highlighting according to the evidence as it is best seen, one may do no more. There are, after all, endless versions of the same patch of history, and the validity of the version is partially in the artistry of its presentation, but much more (for us historians) in the reasons for the choosing, and how those reasons are shown in the story itself. For story must show not just a version of history, but some understanding of why that version has been arrived at, why it might be seen by the receiver as credible, plausible, food for thought.

One 'reasonable version', especially in the context of schooling, is the relevance of the story to stated needs. When I choose to tell the story of Francis, pop singing leader of the gilded youth of his town, super-sensitive and utterly revolted by the thought, least of all the sight, of leprous beggars, then I am talking to children who can understand and reflect effectively upon his story. When he hides in a pit from his father's wrath, is thrashed, abused and 'kept-in' for his seemingly feckless ways with money, children know they are hearing a truth. And when he stands before the Bishop, and strips naked so that even the breeches his father bought him may be given back, then they glory too in this wonderful revenge.

There is yet more to be said about the manipulation that is involved in emplotting: clearly there are story types that may be easily recognised; equally clearly there are story clues and cues which may lull the receiver into belief more readily than if they are ignored. It doesn't take much for the story teller to indicate, or for the listener to recognise, that this is a 'wicked uncle about to get his comeuppance' type, and similarly it is easy to see what is going on when the story is spun out at one stage or rushed at a gabble at another. The literary devices involved in cueing the listener or reader are well known and easily practised, but more importantly they are clearly a necessary part of story itself: repetition for example is an almost essential feature of build-up, where the reader/listener begins to get the feeling that something is going to happen, and grows ever more certain of what it is to be. The shaping of the story, the cueing of responses and the delighted recognition on the part of the receiver of the story serve as a cover for the explanation of the content of the story. The story's pretence of reality makes its message easier to accept.

This process of cueing and recognition reminds us strongly of Hexter's presentation of 'the second record' at work: when the reader/listener responds with recognition ('I know, I know', 'I see, I see', 'Yes, something similar happened to me') he is drawing on his own knowledge of human behaviour and the ways things tend to fall out in order to make a larger sense of what is being presented. He is fitting it into a personal framework, certainly, but the process of fitting it in is more than one of pairing up individual concrete items of behaviour with universals, or more properly with generally received notions of universals (I do not propose to get inveigled here into a discussion on the validity of the idea of universals, nor with discussions of Jungian collective unconscious - we must keep some sense of proportion!). It may seem, using Hexter's notion, that children are in fact the least able to work in this way, in that their experience of the world has been slim. I think, on the contrary, that children have a great pool of experience on which to draw (an awful lot of what is going to impinge upon us in terms of human behaviour has already happened to us quite early on) and they are rather more concerned to think about their experiences and make sense of them than an adult who may have come to his own terms with the world. Very young children know a lot about anger, and puzzle their heads about it in a way we don't, and when they recognise anger in a story this provides a safe area in which to brood on the subject.

Stories are very much the dreamtime for children, in that all sorts of nastinesses and inexplicable things may be examined without any personal threat - how else could the extraordinary (and to adults seemingly inappropriate) goings-on of folktales as mediated by people like the brothers Grimm have lasted, and remain popular? Stories are a safe ground for mental debate, and as they formalise and explain they provide solace and comfort. Indeed they make their own special contribution to the developing second record: some pretty odd types of human behaviour can be first introduced to children in the Tom Tiddler's Ground of story.

Of course, Bruno Bettelheim has discussed such matters in some depth in his *The Uses of Enchantment*, with its important message that children are not just wide-eyed pretty innocents listening to grisly tales, but confused, guilt-ridden souls, searching to make sense of a baffling world and of their own plainly nasty instincts. Why do adults scream at children 'Stop shouting'? It doesn't make sense. Nor does it make sense that sometimes the child feels so cross with those he loves and needs he would like to kill them. But Jack the Giant Killer does make a kind of sense for the time being, it does fit all the disparate pieces together in a most comforting and entertaining manner. Where I cannot agree with Bettelheim is in his strange assertion that it is only fantasy that will work in this way, that real stories offer no assistance to the child. This strange suggestion grows from an addiction to Freudian

explanation, so that at one point we find Bettelheim castigating Perrault for moralising Little Red Riding Hood whilst at the same time confidently asserting that the young child sees the handing on of the little red cap from grandmother to Red Riding Hood as the ritual transition of sexual attraction.

Of course children don't work at this sophisticated level of understanding. They can say to themselves 'These night-time anxieties of the prince in the story are very like mine, I wonder what will happen next?' but little more, unless some teaching takes place, whereby an adult leads the child to understand the metaphor and build the analogy. What is clear, however, is that if we are in the business of giving children comfort and self-understanding through story, the more real, the more true the story, the better it will work. Red Riding Hood is obviously untrue, but something that is told as having really happened with full belief on both sides is worth thinking about. That is why young children so often stop the story-teller quite early on with the simple but important question, 'Did this really happen?'

We must also remember that if stories are to work in the way suggested, adding to the 'second record', explaining complexities and comforting anxieties, then we need lots of them. The bland assumption that learning is an event that takes place in a moment of time is the most dangerous of all misconceptions about education. We know that it will take a long time, with many trials, before Jimmy can make a cup of tea, simple though that action seems to us. Practice is regarded as essential in learning languages and music, repetition, trying again, essaying, experiment, these are accepted features. Similarly with story, children need lots of them, regularly, all through education (don't you still read novels, watch films, tell jokes in the bar?) if they are going to serve their purpose.

Often the border-line between truth and fiction is hard to seek, and it is true, if perhaps embarrassing to some historians, that history and fiction may often share objectives, especially in education. But I must repeat here that we are dealing with materials, however carefully shaped, that come to us from the past, not uniquely from our imaginations, and that the rules about truth seeking and truth keeping are obvious to all historians, who know that they must be kept. Why play about and give Becket Anglo-Saxon parents when we know they were of Norman extraction? The beautiful thing about the story of Becket is that we know so much, we have no need to invent a thing, merely to shape, to see it for children. We know that he blushed when deeply moved, the record (seven mighty volumes of records in the Rolls Series!) tells us so; it is our job to be a seer for the children and show him colouring up at the entry of the knights.

This is not just important for the historians, a keeping of faith in the profession, it is equally important for the children, for the commonest question from children when a story is being told is 'Is this true?' They have had the fairies and the Father Christmas fiasco, up to their ears, they now want to get it clear; we tell them not to romance, not to 'tell stories', well we have a moral duty in their eyes too. The special quality of a history story is indeed that tension between reality and imagination, the dynamic of understanding between the present observer and the past observed. Not to break faith with the past as we find it and can manage it, yet to show it as lively and comprehensibly as our imagination may serve, this is our joint aim. For people need the past in special and deeply significant ways: a recent book on the subject, David Lowenthal's *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985) reminds us that the word nostalgia really means homesickness, and we need to return to our roots constantly for refreshment, comfort, puzzled discourse and learning.

Stories don't tell you things, they tell you about things, and it is for that that we turn to them with an eye to learn. Story transcends the whole of human behaviour, for the past is everything, and somewhere in it may be found whatever you need. I guess the first educational act in human history was a cave-man telling his children something about what happened before they were born, and we have gone on doing it ever since, because it is an inescapably powerful relationship. I am privileged to watch teachers at work regularly, and I often watch their work by looking at the children, noting the varying levels of concentration and response. However lost a class may be, when the 'story voice' is found by a teacher, ears prick up all round. It is like magic. No, dash it all, it is magic.

## ***Stories for Choice: Winners, Cheaters and Surprise Winners***

**Source:** *British Journal of Religious Education*, 1982, pp. 157-59

Story-telling (as distinct from reading stories to children) is a relatively rare thing in school today, and having spent some time trying to remedy the defect by doing courses for teachers I do know how deeply afraid most of them are of this simple seeming occupation. They worry about remembering the story, about their flow of descriptive language, their ability to act it all out and above all about their power to hold children's attention. To those of us who have come through these stages they seem an odd lot of worries, for story-telling is one of the most pleasurable, rewarding and profitable forms of teacher-pupil contact, and we find it hard to imagine anyone rejecting all that pleasure.

Because of this odd dichotomy of view, it is equally hard for story-tellers to analyse why they do it, how they do it, and what part it plays in their curricula. When head teachers ask me to come in and tell stories I leap at the chance without too much thought, because I know in advance that it will be a lot of fun. But 'a lot of fun' is not usually acceptable as the language of curriculum analysers, so we must try to do better.

In this paper I want to examine one of the most common sources of story material I use, and question why it works so well for me, and what kind of work it produces. Usually I have three choices of material: I can make up stories according to children's requirements, and fully involve them in the business of story-building (their material varies rather wildly between the absolutely contemporary and a deep commitment to witches and magic-making these fit together is a nice challenge); secondly, I can choose material from history, and as an historian this is very frequently my choice, for the bare narrative of the past appeals to me much more than any historical fiction; but there is a third area to which I very frequently turn - the area of folklore.

When I purchased Katharine M. Briggs' *Dictionary of English Folk Tales* (4 volumes, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970) I thought I was extending my reference library with yet another sequence of heavy tomes that would get average usage. To my delight (for they were costly) I have found myself turning to them more than to any other source, and they are among the most well-thumbed books in my collection; many hundreds of children have been regaled with stories chosen from the incredible sequence of precis items they contain, and some of the stories have been told dozens of times, to increasing delight.

There are a number of reasons why folk tales are immediately attractive to young children, but I suspect that the most obvious is the most important - the stories are the product of natural selection, they have stood the test of time. Story-telling as an activity must stretch right back to the earliest days of human communication, and over the years the habit of turning to certain themes, certain responses, certain character types and certain types of action has been refined by acceptability. These stories (although many have contemporary references) are for all time, not just old tales; in constant retelling to eager listeners they have been refined into universality.

Many of the themes common to folk tales are calculated to appeal to young children, naturally. So, often the stories contain the sad sufferings but also the eventual triumph of the little, weak and stupid (for *sancta simplicitas* has its part to play in a pre-11 plus world); similarly there is a lot of fun poked at authority figures, revealing

their feet of clay. The stories have lots of simple humour, dealing especially with sudden reversals of role and fortune, and in many the fun is concentrated in the triumph of the trickster, who wins by breaking all the rules, but has our sympathy, for we should like to do just that ourselves. Yet also the folk tales do not turn their backs on the dark side of life, but cheerfully enter fields of cruelty, fear and death. The stories intend to make us shiver in our socks, because the folk tale tradition has learned over the centuries that this is a necessary part of our existence, that not all is cakes and ale.

This sometimes leads teachers to be wary of using such stories, for there is a strong element of moral bowdlerism in many primary school teachers, and there is an aversion to dealing with 'nasty' topics. Many teachers would like the stories their children hear to be wholly consistent with the bland atmosphere and rule-bound life of their classrooms. I have frequently been criticized for suggesting stories to teachers they feel will frighten or ethically confuse children. Now, of course, whilst I will always respond to children's clearly expressed wish to experience in total safety 'spooky' sensations in stories, I would never set out to frighten anyone, and am sensitive and experienced enough never to do so. When telling a frightener to children I tell them first that I can see the signs, and if it gets too frightening I will see their smallest move - no need to put a hand up and show yourself a coward in public - one small wriggle and I will see and lower the temperature.

The ethical argument is harder to handle, for on the surface some of the stories I use have large contrasts with the social, moral and religious education the children will be receiving as another part of their curriculum. Let me give an example: some time ago in a Church school I chose to use a very old and popular trickster story that comes from the tradition of the poor suppliant for the princess' hand having to do impossible tasks that her father sets. Perhaps I should pause here to underline the nature of the general appeal of these stories: I find children rapidly associate the situation of the suppliant symbolically with their own, at home and in school. They are offered tempting rewards, but their tasks seem insurmountable, unless, of course there is magic or tricks to help you out.

But to continue: one task set is to get the miserly parson to give up all his wealth voluntarily, and to place him in a bag on the breakfast table in the morning - a pretty difficult task for the small suppliant. He gets out his nightshirt, dons it, and stands in a tree at dusk hard by where the vicar takes his walk. When the poor man comes by, a sepulchral voice is heard from above 'Beware, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.' After much talk the angel/suppliant persuades the vicar to bring all his money at midnight and give it up in return for the angel's promise to carry him straight to heaven. At midnight the parson comes to find a large bag on the ground, and the angel tells him to get in, leaving the money on the ground. The suppliant shins down the tree, ties the bag, and transports it and the money to the royal breakfast table. After breakfast (and the humiliating opening of the bag, to the laughter of all but the disconsolate vicar) the wedding takes place.

Now I can see the point of the teacher who worried lest the village parson who served the school so well would now be a butt for the children; and I understand the fears about bringing received ideas about the after-life into scorn; also I appreciate that we do not want children to admire the humiliation of anyone, least of all a priest. The teacher worried about the quality and nature of the children's laughter, and wondered whether there was much difference between what I was doing and the stupid and hypocritical sexual innuendo of the worst television programmes.

A cogent case, and I wish to put only two points (and they are radically different) in response. First a very practical consideration - the story is wildly successful (you do not have to be Max Miller to get a load of laughs) and children respond to it with a commitment I don't find in a lot of other material presented to them. They remember it, retell it with gusto, write and draw about it with gusto too; a lot more gusto than when they turn to their cuisinaire rods. It is an immensely enjoyable occasion, and there is a strong bond between teacher and pupil at the time of, and as a result of, the telling.

This, of course, does not validate the activity in itself; indeed, on its own it smacks much more of the entertainer than the teacher. What it does do is provide a ground for discussion with children about serious matters that would not be easily found in any other way. I find it positively valuable to be able to discuss with children whether all vicars are good men, and now that we have come to the conclusion that not all are, shouldn't we respect a vicar more because he is good than just because he is a vicar? In my experience of using this story in several infant and junior schools, the children have looked at their vicar as a man for the first time.

Similarly the discussion may turn to deeper topics of why we should be good, and whether heaven and hell are rewards and punishment for a wholly good or wholly bad life. I have had some very fruitful discussions on a high theological level with children about the nature of repentance and whether fear should play a part, as a result of telling my story. Of course the children and I are talking on their level, about being sorry, not about 'repentance', but the results have seemed to me good.

Finally we can discuss out of this and many other trickster stories the possibility of winning by cheating, and what does the behaviour described in the story really mean. Children enjoy in the story the humiliation of the adult (this enjoyment is a part of the story tradition) but after the story they find it equally valuable to grow towards sympathy with his plight. We not only rejoice in saying 'I bet he felt foolish', but we go on to question 'Have you ever felt foolish? What is it like?'

Too strongly moralistic discussion of folk stories can turn them sour, of course, and the sensitive teacher will want to continue the serious and the comic on the same dimension. We must not throw away the valuable fun that the initial story has supplied. What we must do is put it into the hands of the children, to give it educational power.

To do this effectively can be to explore some very deep things indeed that children would not be ready to discuss face to face. The story is the vicarious ground on which we may discuss big issues, and take from the discussion the comfort we need. May I provide one more example in order to make this point?

Another story I frequently use is the equally old tale of 'Up sticks and beat them.' Briefly it begins with a child whom I show as rather dull-witted, and annoyingly prone to making grandiose statements about what he might do, if he tried. His father tries to beat him out of this habit, and eventually he runs away. I make a great deal of the beating, which sometimes shocks teachers, but the children understand what is going on, for all of them in imagination see the smallest assault upon their persons as big a flogging as anyone may describe.

Having run away, the boy is employed to do monstrously difficult tasks by a strange old farmer who at the end of a year gives him a donkey that coughs gold sovereigns (again a lot of business that seems a little objectionable to teachers at times, but I suppose that is just the Max Miller in me!). He loses this at an inn on the way home

to an innkeeper who substitutes an ordinary donkey. On arrival at the village he makes grand claims about his donkey, but on pulling its ears (the switch that does the trick) the donkey simply kicks him, and the boy is driven out of the village by a crowd, his father at the head, denouncing him for a mad fool.

The story goes through the same cycle once more, this time the reward being a table that lays itself with a banquet at command, again lost to the innkeeper, and with the same disastrous results in the village. By this time the children fully recognize those sad playground occasions when all gang up on one, and listen fixedly to the driving out of the boy.

His last reward from the old farmer is a stick in a bag, which at the command will beat until you call a halt. The boy, having learned his lesson, goes to the inn and allows the innkeeper to persuade him to show his third present. One can have a lot of nice by-play here ('Oh no, you wouldn't like it at all' 'Oh I should, I should I should' 'No please don't make me show you' 'Oh please, please do' 'Oh very well, here it is - up stick and beat him.')

The innkeeper is beaten until he yields up the donkey and table, the boy loads the table on the donkey, and returns to his village.

There he feeds all from his magic table, gives gold from his donkey to all who ask, but at the end his father leads the demands that he should show his third present. By this time the excitement of the children is very high, but I ask them to make the choice as to how the story should end - does he use the stick and get revenge, or does he act kindly?

Their decision must be respected, of course, and the story must end as satisfyingly as may be, whatever conclusion is chosen, but clearly we have here the beginning of a lot of thought about some basic issues. Revenge, of course is central, and one can spend some long time considering that; but we cannot avoid the issue that the revenge we are talking of is revenge against parents and teachers.

I have had some most sensitive, revealing, and I believe therapeutic discussions with children after this story as to what it is makes adults so angry with children, and why life can prove so difficult. The boy was indeed very annoying, his father had many problems, who could tell that such magical growth can take place? Indeed every time I tell this story, at some stage a child will stress in talk afterwards the fact that being stupid at first, and persisting in silliness, doesn't mean a boy won't turn out well in the end.

Tricksters, magicians, jokesters and story-tellers combine together to give children a field of discussion of ethical issues that I don't believe is to be found elsewhere, and that we ignore at our peril; but much more important in the end is that a part of the fun, the essence of the pleasure, is the optimistic vision that they give. It is possible to win, despite the huge obstacles that block our path; the world that seems nonsensical in itself, and so depresses us and frustrates us, is answered in its own terms by the folk tale, with all its nonsensical solutions which, for little children and their teachers, can take on for the time being a delightful new sense, a sense of laughter and shared pleasure.

## ***Looking at History: Learning History through Drama***

**Source:** Jon Nixon (ed.) (1982) *Drama and the Whole Curriculum*, Hutchinson

As a teacher I am most usually employed to demonstrate teaching methods to others, sometimes students, but more usually fully-fledged teachers. I have two sorts of audience, usually: history teachers who want to know about drama, and drama teachers who want to see a teacher from another discipline using theirs. Although the audience reaction differs in many respects, one comment usually comes up whatever the circumstances: 'Ah well, you see, you are a special case, there are not many people like you, so we shall not be able to take much notice of what you have to say.'

This is an annoying comment, but it does have a grain of truth in it, and before setting out in this paper why I use drama in the teaching of history, perhaps it would be wise to set out those special circumstances. I am for half my life a scholar, devoting my attention to the personnel of the English Protestant Reformation in the period before Elizabeth came to the throne. This half of me is the dry old stick, of importance to me and a very few others; but it does mean that when I am a teacher I come from a background with strict disciplinary requirements. This other half of my life, as a teacher, is dominated by two factors: first, I actually find deep pleasure and reward from teaching children, and secondly, I am profoundly dissatisfied with what is called 'History' in school. Thus I wish to do better, to give to children something more approaching the virtues, delights and lessons of that other side of my life, in scholarship.

The fact that I have so frequently turned to drama to do this may seem astonishing to some, and audiences often suggest that what I am doing is expressing a strongly repressed love of the theatre. 'Were you ever a professional actor?' is a common question, and frequently I am asked 'What playwright, producer or actor has influenced you most?' Well, I am old enough and wise enough to know that self-analysis never works, so I don't really know whether I am a repressed actor, but I do know that, apart from school plays and college reviews, I have not trod the boards, and do not wish to; I think I would never make a good actor. Living in a town with a famous theatre, I only go when I have guests who wish to attend, and usually groan with boredom throughout. Frankly, a sentence of no further theatre attendance for life would leave me with a broad grin on my face.

Thus, when I talk of needing drama in my teaching, I am speaking of a need to make the history more historical, not more dramatic. When, as so frequently, I find children producing real drama for me, I am moved and grateful, but I often do not know what to do with it and gently shift the focus back on to history, to the grievous annoyance of my audience and probably, alas, of the children too.

Let us begin from the point of what it is I am using drama to set right - what is wrong with school history. This is best seen in the school textbook, whose aims are pretty easy to define: to simplify the vast and intractable mass of history so that pupils can cover it in the time allowed. This process of simplification leads first to a form of précis, a cutting out of as much detail as possible to leave 'the main line' clear, and a reduction of complexity on the level of understanding, whereby big issues and events, large and demanding concepts are explained in simple language and sharply patterned focus. Thus, in the books the feudal system becomes a triangle, with the king at the top and the peasants at the bottom, with the nobility and clergy wedged neatly in between.

Simplification seems a noble aim in teaching, and there would be many circumstances in which one might yearn for it: if I had to learn to fly, for example, I might feel very grateful to an instructor who said, 'It's all simple, really, you pull back to go up, press forward to go down, and side to side for turns.' The cockpit might still be a baffling place, but at least basics would have been made clear.

But history is not a machine, nor does it have convenient basic elements or 'main lines'. My experience of history is that despite the great mass of material available, it is riddled with holes, with patches where there is no evidence to go on. It is never simple, each nostrum breaks to pieces in your hands the more you know, the more you think about it; there are no rules, no real guiding principles, and each new historian on the scene sees things differently, sometimes markedly so. History is about people trying to act in circumstances they do not thoroughly grasp because they cannot know all, and least of all can they know the future. Chance, or an unimaginable divine providence rules the world. Things that promised well turn out badly, and tragedies have heroic consequences. The attempt to explain human actions is one of the most arrogant of all our sciences.

Thus, to me, simplification is the negation of history as I know it; indeed it is the complicatedness of history that is its main interest and its major message. If I can teach children that things are not as simple as they first seemed, I have, in my terms, done a good job. This may seem a negative aim, but if you consider for one moment the dangers of stereotyping, of snap answers to political problems, of easily arrived at assumptions about how society works, then the corrective power of this learning will be seen in all its glory.

And the detail is compulsively interesting, for it is our curiosity, our thirst for detail about other people's lives that draws us to the subject. We can't (or shouldn't) poke about in our neighbour's private letters, nor (unless by virtue of some unprincipled newshound) can we see the intimate details of the lives of the mighty; but we can when they are dead, and it is all right then. The detail that the texts omit is just the stuff which switches on the compulsive power of history. Think of all the grand design politics you had to learn about when studying Richelieu at school, and have since forgotten (because, of course, they are of no *use*); then think again of the information that Richelieu spent a half-hour every morning leaping over a vaulting horse to keep in trim. Haven't you now a little urge to see the old fellow as a human being, who might, after all, be interesting? It is the detail that gives life, the simplified skeleton that illustrates dramatically only death.

Now, in the context of these beliefs about history and historical education, drama, as I have come to use it, has a very rational role to play. It brings with it four cardinal virtues which I wish to discuss in this paper: first, it allows one to see history as a largely unknown area in which one must experiment to find ways of understanding (whilst admitting that the understanding will never be total, never be provably true); secondly, it allows one to take history at the right pace - not the whoosh of the textbook, but the real time in which it happened, in which it was experienced; thirdly, it allows one to handle issues in which the search for human motivation and the assessment of significance are clearly the main constituents of the learning - it makes the study of past humanity relevant to our present concerns; finally (and possibly most importantly for me) it allows for a set of relationships in learning between teacher and pupils that I find most comfortable and conducive to good work - it is a natural way of doing the job.

I wish to take each of these four points and show a little of what I mean by them, and what they mean for me. I will try to illustrate each by practical examples, but space is short and anecdotes are not always the best medium of explanation. Where I use an example it is not as a proof (each teacher needs to prove everything for himself, I have found) but as a handy way of suggesting a larger meaning.

One of the commonest topics set on school syllabuses for 11 to 12 year-olds is the subject of Norman kingship. This is usually written down with an airy disregard for the complexities of the concept (which still puzzle our best professors of medieval history in the western world) and the assumption is that there are two ways to teach it. First, you can tell the children (or order them to read about) what the Norman kings did; then you write down as much as you can remember and move on to the next topic. On the other hand, a keen young scholar fresh to teaching might wish to take the generalisation as a generalisation, and tell the children the major aspects of Norman kingship as an institution, and then they will write down as much as they remember and move on. Because the topic is so complex and difficult the assumption is that children cannot be operators here, they must receive and commit to memory, digest as well as they can.

Yet the topic may be explored, may be experimented with in a diversity of ways, and although the children's thoughts will not be at the same levels as their teachers' or their teachers' teachers, the thinking process is what we are after. In fact, children have a lot of experience to bring to such a topic, if teachers will find a format in which it may be used.

I taught the subject recently and began by asking the children whether they thought Norman kings had an easy or a hard job. They discussed this question tentatively, and came to the conclusion that it depended on a lot of things about which they really didn't know very much. I sympathized with their position, and suggested that we could run an experiment to find out some more things to say about this question. In this experiment we would put a king through some of the circumstances they had mentioned, and see what happened.

So the king held a court, and we quickly discovered that it was hard to impress people and make them subject to you when in fact you needed their support and advice rather badly. At this stage the group thought the answer was 'more firmness - execute a few people, just to show.' So we went on to explore an area where firmness was needed in getting hold of money. That proved pretty difficult too, as castellan after castellan reported back with excuses as to why they couldn't pay the amount the king suggested. We then explored the getting of information - were these barons telling the king the truth, and how could we know? This involved a grand tour of the country (a large hall in which castles were scattered neatly) and the great risk of visiting one area at the expense of another. When we were in the north a rebellion broke out in the south.

What the children learned from this experimenting was that their advice to 'be more firm' was just not enough to cope with the manifold problems our poor king was facing. It became clear to them that control was in fact a relationship, and somehow the king needed to relate very closely indeed with all his barons. In the letters of complaint that flooded in at one point of our exploration, the main cry was 'We don't see enough of the King - he should bring his justice to us.'

In an hour and a half there is a limit to what one can learn about power, but this particular lesson opened up a wide range of issues that could have been followed up in relation to the Norman kings and to the study of power in general. Whether it was

or not, I am not in a position to say, but two points are clear and need making: first, the format chosen for the work gave the children great confidence in their power to discuss the subject and set them in a good relationship with their materials of study; second, there was no acting, no drama, such as a drama teacher might have recognized - we hadn't needed acting in order to explore the topic, we had only needed elementary roles, a willingness to take them and a willingness to use what we found as a contribution to discussion. The lesson had been a kind of very active discussion, with breaks for experimental work.

There has been a great deal of agonizing by history teachers about children's understanding of historical time, ranging from problems of knowledge of sequence ('The Anglo-Saxons were followed by the Romans') to problems of understanding how time works, in great ages and periods long ago. I am not sure whether I can *understand* a century, even though I could make a stab at doing it, and I suspect that many of the arguments about understanding time are of this order; but what I would like to stress here is that work in role on particular situations can aid one to understand time as it happened, and allow people to see that minutes, seconds, hours, days and weeks had the same signification in the past as now - an important move in the understanding of historical time. Time is of the essence in understanding history, and if one doesn't get it right, then no understanding can be achieved.

Recently I had a class of 17-year-old pupils in America who were set to interpret a document detailing activity in the police station nearest to Ford's Theatre on the day of Lincoln's assassination. The two pages showed the routine activities of the station, suddenly interrupted by the big news, and lots of things happened suddenly. This 'suddenly' was the key the pupils took for their interpretation of the document, because after a short period of discussing and then accepting its authenticity, they latched on to the interesting notion that we didn't know when the desk sergeant lifted his pen and when he put it down. Now it is precisely what we *don't* know in historical evidence that requires imaginative thought, and this is where drama can help.

We replayed the document, trying to feel for the time that was hidden beneath its surface. The pupils in discussion after each fragment of replay reached for words to describe the quality of the time, not just its duration, but also its pace. They examined with some care words like 'pandemonium' to see whether they felt right in the context of the known. Various checks were possible - we noticed, for example, that in the middle of all the Lincoln material one Francis McGee was brought in - presumably just an ordinary criminal brought in by an unsuspecting officer on the beat, who couldn't have guessed what would be going on in the station. We tried to think through his reactions, and McGee's, as they pushed into history, trying to reassert normality. It was an interesting moment when two kinds of time and routine were seen commenting upon one another - the regular drunk or sneak thief, or whatever, the normal business of the station, interrupting for a moment the hugely fast pace and undirected, unusual and unexpected great assassination of a supremely important man.

The quality of the discussion on the time we were adding to the record in the document was very high, very philosophical, because we were talking about things known through experience, however vicarious that experience might be. We *could* talk about what we *had* lived through, and these students (who were undertaking a course in the arts at the time) showed me their capacity in understanding by turning the document into a musical score, adding time in the most formal way possible, during the last few minutes of the class.

In this class there had been some stronger feelings of being in the drama, because we needed those feelings in order to do the work. We had concentrated on building the police station, working out its routines and personnel, and we had tried to keep as much as we could to the known sequence, the known words and routines we found in the documents. But what we had been reaching for was not the play about the police station but an experience that would teach us more about the time element in the document we were studying. I hardly have to add that by the end of the class those pupils knew the document almost off by heart, without ever attempting a formal reading of it. Had I asked them at the start to read it through they would all, I am sure, have told me it was too difficult. By dipping into it, by using it as a resource, by consulting it for specific purposes, we all read it thoroughly, but not line by line, word by word. My questions had not been of the order of 'Who can read the first line?' but more of 'Does it tell us anything about what the desk sergeant was supposed to write down about an accused person?'

The third gift of drama to the history teacher is that it enables him to talk with children about the important things, rather than the trivial issues; it helps him explore types of human motivation, and helps children begin to give significance to what they are doing. So often in history teaching the learning is just received, the two elements of human motivation and significance are precisely what is lacking. Because there is no frame of understanding for the children to use, the big and important things they are supposed to learn are treated in a trivializing fashion, and the past and the people in it are simply insulted. 'The Vikings sacked Lindisfarne' the children copy out and what does it mean? Another dreary piece of work for most, for some a gigglesome image of monks being put into bags. At least they have a laugh out of it.

Now birth and death, cruelty, despair, destruction and creation are trivialized at a cost; of course Queen Anne is dead, we all know that, and you can't hurt the dead any more, but in our failure to respect the past and see it as a way of elevating ourselves, then we fall and become mindless, thoughtless, careless. If we do not respond to these great stimuli, that is one more proof of our own inability to live proper lives. Those who stultify history have a great responsibility on their shoulders.

So when I taught the Vikings recently, to a group of rather small 9-year-olds, I determined that we should come out with some understanding that would help us, make us better. I had with me a good reproduction of a Viking brooch, a work of very great beauty. I asked the children what they knew of Vikings, and they gave me the stereotype - big, rough, hairy men who went around killing, stealing and burning. That was the kind of knowledge they had, and I accepted it as such, simply commending them for their ability to dredge this information up for me. When they had given me all they knew, I put to them the paradox (and how powerful the paradox is in drama - there's a whole book to be written there): how could these wicked, hateful people come to a stage when they could make an object of such beauty as this?

The children examined the brooch with care and agreed that it was an object of great beauty, and cunningly wrought. They saw the problem straight away - we must try to get an explanation, but how? When I suggested that we could experiment and produce many possible solutions, and consider them all, they heartily agreed, but clearly found a problem in seeing Vikings in their puny bodies. Luckily I had the audience there, a fairly beefy lot, so on this occasion I turned the children into directors, using the adults as their actors. The audience were told firmly that they were merely tools, and the directors warned that they would have to be pretty firm, and full of ideas. Certainly the children appreciated the role-reversal, and lived up to the situation remarkably well. One little 'football terraces' was so lost in his work that

when I quietly asked him how *they* were getting on, he just muttered out of the side of his mouth 'magic, mate, they're just magic'.

As the directors showed their work (and the actors did work very well for them) at the end, we had something like seven different explanations of how it came about that the brooch was made. There it sat glistening in the middle of the floor, and around it came evocations of the moment of its making. I found them very moving indeed, for they were all so astonishingly different, ranging from the fierce to the gentle. One group were melting down treasure when a girl said 'No, this Anglo-Saxon brooch is too beautiful to melt' and the leader roughly took it and cast it into the pot, saying 'We can do better' and was then fixed to do so. Another group at an opposite pole discovered the division of labour, all working extra hard in order to support the one artist in the group.

This power to see a multitude of explanations, to consider them from the point of view of human motivation, and to go away enriched in all sorts of ways is a power I bid for constantly as a teacher. Indeed if nothing else at all had happened that day (and I believed a great deal had) a whole class had given careful and respectful attention to a work of art from the past. They had seen it in a framework - how was it made? - they had studied it with care; next time they visited a museum, they would be able to look and think, and see people as well as gold, see the need to look with care.

I mentioned in the last sequence the boy who was so lost in his work that he used his most natural language, and that leads me to the final gift of drama to the history teacher. It is sometimes difficult to talk of pleasure and comfort in teaching, partly because of a puritan ethic that makes one feel education should be hard work, and partly from observance of the staff-room convention that it's a battlefield out there. Certainly many teachers find it strange and somehow wrong when I talk of my pleasure in teaching, and my need for comfortable relationships.

I must try to illustrate what I mean. Recently I was set a particularly difficult task in teaching involving appreciation of an abstract work of art. I had to move gently towards a position in which the children could be triggered to talk about the picture in a positive way, unhampered by inhibitions. Towards the end of the lesson, as we sat together on the floor of the gallery (surrounded by a crowd of official and, increasingly, unofficial observers) the children began to talk in a reflective, unforced way, with no hands up, throwing in ideas as they came, not bothering to notice that there was any conflict in their views, just gently talking.

That gave me great pleasure for two reasons: despite the difficult circumstances, we were managing to relate happily outside the conventional structures school so often imposes, and there was both sharing and equality in that relationship; but in addition it was that context, and that alone, which would allow me to reach my objective - the children could only make personal appreciations of the picture if the situation lacked force, and the observations they made were powerful - far better in quality (to my mind) than any comment any adult had made to me.

Thus, although I may sound somewhat idealistic and soft in wanting comfortable teaching relations with children, I also have some very hard-edged educational reasons for needing them. It is worth making a little list of these, for although I see at once that not all teachers will want the somewhat avuncular relationship I enjoy most in my teaching, I do think many teachers will see the educational values of such a style of work, and will be able to build in their preferred form of relationship to it.

Basically, this kind of work depends on three things one must win from and for the children: willing participation; willingness to listen to others and see the sense of relating to what others have to say in this mutual enterprise of learning; and the understanding that one may do better if one tries, and the willingness to try.

Winning participation is a complex procedure, for it has nothing to do with forcing everyone to join in: one thing I have learned very slowly as a teacher is the importance of letting the shy and reserved watch and think - a year or so ago I allowed two girls seemingly to swim with the tide for fifteen hours of work before they suddenly entered the drama and made a magical climax for it. No, you must win trust by establishing that you are honest and reliable, you do not play tricks on children, and you do always listen seriously; you may laugh with them to hysteria, but you never, never laugh at what they have to say when they are serious. Above all, you must show in every way you know that they have a right to say something in this matter, and that it will be worthy of attention.

To do this is especially difficult in certain circumstances, for the conventions of the social system of the school build up the authority of the teacher, the passivity and unreliability, the immaturity of the child. When I come to a school to teach, I carry a double weight of authority, for I am Doctor Fines, the learned man, the famous man who is watched by teachers; there is an audience, and no doubt the day before the headmaster has warned them all to be on their best behaviour, OR ELSE. . . . So to them the most sensible stance is to sit back and listen, sit tight and say nuffin. Thus I have to go to somewhat absurd attempts to get rid of my authority and place the responsibility back on the learners' shoulders; often the role is the clue in all this - I have learned frequently to take roles that lower, that demean, my own status. I noticed this first when working with a group of pupils, who had very little respect for their own ability, on a project about old age. The key for them came when I took the role of a senile old man they had to care for. I did very annoying things, like losing my keys, and they had to search around in my pockets for them, saying 'Come on, Pop, they must be somewhere'. With each session their ability to contribute grew, and what I noticed with great interest (and some relief, naturally) was that as soon as I put down the stick and became the teacher again, they recognized the change of role, the change of relationship. This they tended to exaggerate for themselves, for although I had urged them to use my Christian name, at all points when they had stopped dealing with 'pop', I was then Doctor Fines, in most formal manner.

As one breaks through the conventions of normal school relations to work with children on much more equal terms, as participants in their own learning, there is great pleasure, and great desire to do better. I recall now ruefully the days when I fought to make children obey me, and got surprisingly little pleasure from the work, and grew more and more pessimistic about the possibility of progress. Now I have stopped fighting I am always thinking about doing better, about them doing better.

To do this one must constantly praise that which is good in the children's work, so that they can see in the clearest possible way the direction of growth. The best of today must be made better tomorrow, so when someone finds some good words in a particular situation one must find time to brood on the quality of the words, note where they are doing a good job, express one's pleasure in the child's success, in the hopes that this will breed more.

For me this is the ultimate aim of all - that pupils should have pride in speech, as a part of a shared enterprise. Were one to be offered three - for a child in school - literacy, numeracy and oracy - I know where I would put my money. To think hard and be able to speak those thoughts in a willing debate is the best of all the skills.

We may forget the history we learn, the dates, the names, the details, but if it has been a medium for this kind of achievement, it has earned its place in the curriculum. In my own struggle to get there as a history teacher, drama, whatever that funny name means, has served me well, and I express my gratitude with pleasure.

### 3 Teaching in Museums and Sites of Historic Interest

#### ***Starters: Using Objects from Museums***

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I have just returned from teaching for two weeks in Washington DC museums for museum educators to watch. Basically what has been happening is that I have been asked to deal with a museum object previously unknown to me with a group of children also unknown to me (on occasions, when classes were cancelled, the organisers had to go out and 'hijack' a group). For the museum educators this was in many ways an ideal situation, in that they had little planning time and were almost always meeting fresh classes. For classroom teachers this may seem a highly unreal situation in that they are primarily interested in building on learning. For me it had two advantages in particular, in that it gave me a continuous set of challenging experiences and enabled me to isolate a number of problems which I do not see too clearly in more normal situations, mainly about how to begin the process of learning, just where to start teaching.

The two allied problems I wish to discuss in this paper are: how do you trigger learning quickly and how do you focus it so that it will achieve something in the time available? They were particularly clear as problems in my situation (having only an hour and a half with each new group) but I believe they have great relevance to more normal situations. As the experience developed for me, I became more and more interested in the development of devices to achieve these aims, and although this led me on occasion into refinements of the elegance of my teaching (rather than refining the efficiency of the learning, and these are two very different matters) I feel that it has given me much food for thought.

Most teachers are well aware of where they begin and where they want to get to. For everyone this will be a slightly different, individual formulation, but I guess that it would for most conform roughly to the following proposition: you start with three elements: children as learners who are conditioned by capacity, experience, mood and circumstance; teachers who will function as directors, organisers and evaluators of learning; and materials, the elements of the learning which may be either the end of learning (that which has to be known) or facilitators of learning, moving pupils in their work towards a range of aims. The teacher knows that all three components have a part to play, and that disrespect to any part of the triangle will lead to an imbalance in which damage will be done to the learning itself.

The teacher also knows the end of learning - that the pupil is to be put into a more autonomous position in relation to the materials. Perhaps only geniuses can be described as totally autonomous in their relationship with the materials of learning, but because Wordsworth's reaction to nature was so good (for example) we don't feel inhibited from making our own reactions to nature, nor do we feel that others should either. The end of it all is an individual statement, attitude expressed, confident use of what is known etc.

The problem that most teachers face is, how do I move from point *a* (the known constituents at the beginning of learning) to point *n* (the end of learning as suggested above)? Well, obviously there are lots of choices; one may try to use force - bullying and pushing the pupils in the direction as seen by the teacher; on the other hand one may follow as a shepherd, allowing a vague and rambling course at the pupils' own pace, gently correcting the direction as and when side-tracks are seen to be

explored. These two approaches suggest the largely active and the largely passive teacher at work, and both have their relevance. Situation might govern the choice: if pupils *have* to learn Italian in one month there might well be some arguments for the former; if pupils have five years with you to explore literature, it might be more sensible to choose the latter. What I would like to suggest here is a combination of the two, one that goes for quick success, but allows a position within the learning for the pupil's pace and nature to take control. This is what I would call a device, and to show what I mean by the device I will give some examples.

In the Museum of Modern American Art I was asked to work with a most remarkable assemblage called the throne of God. It had been made by a deeply religious garbage man over the course of many years, using the materials to hand - dud light bulbs, cigarette packets, silver foil from chocolate bars - in fact junk. He created a throne for God to sit on at the second coming, with a large number of accessories, and the effect is stunning. It glistens and shines, and its message is clear even in the complexity of its form. I found it an immediately appealing object but wondered at once whether children could relate to it, and where they might find a beginning for their looking. The wandering eye doesn't pick up much, except sense impressions which are hard to formalise and therefore almost impossible to use. I needed to find a focus for their looking so that we could see, and say what we had seen, and think some individual thoughts about it.

Therefore it struck me as fatal to approach the material in an unprepared state: we must begin away from the throne and then approach it in a state of mind for looking and doing something with it. I couldn't stand with a class of children and say, 'What do you think? What do you feel?' when I hadn't prepared them for this process. Many teachers hope enthusiasm will carry them through this stage, telling children in an excited way how important the object is, what a thrill it is to see it. I find that enthusiasm can often switch children off, for they suspect something is going on about which they do not know and that this is a subtle cover for some move not in their best interests. Often they are right.

So I just sat with the children first and asked them to define Heaven. They were very good at it too; we covered a chalkboard very quickly and could see lots of interesting things there. It was so unearthly, with no violence, no difficulties, no wickedness, and lots of angels and other nice people, all living in a golden kingdom in the skies. I turned their definition into a sermon for them and they liked that, clapped with pleasure at their work turning into something so attractive.

Then I put to them the question (and in this case what I am calling the device was the question): 'Do you think you can make Heaven out of a trash can?' No, of course not, they said, quite ridiculous. So I was able to say that someone had tried, and would they like to see it? They were all glad to, but in a meditative mood - was I conning them? What was going on here?

As we looked at the object (which delighted them but also puzzled them) I asked them to list the differences between our Heaven and this one, which was the second part of the device, allowing them to throw away the first part. They were quick to point out the difference - these were not comparable: our Heaven was real, it had got God in it, it was in the sky, and nothing bad was there; his Heaven was a Heaven on earth, unpopulated, in a museum (and what a wealth of meaning they gave to that) and not real, because although the man had done very well, and they appreciated the difficulties and the skills in the act of making, this was made of trash and ours was made of gold.

As they unpicked the first part of the device and told me firmly that my question about Heaven out of a trash can had been quite inappropriate, they moved to a critical stage and now was the time to trigger the last part. My question was designed to bring them back hard to the materials, and so I asked them to look for clues as to what sort of man made it. I didn't order them to look hard, I gave them a reason for looking hard, and I brought them face to face with the creative moment by organising my work about that moment.

The children wrote meditatively about the man, and as we read out our work we saw something of what he had undergone in the act of creation, something of what made him create. When I met one of the children a week or so later her first question was whether she could go back to look again.

The various triggers outlined above are simple enough in format. They need some analysis from the point of view of timing and purpose, but much more of their sequence, for one destroys the preceding one, building on its ruins. A last question might well be, as it was of the observers, how do you think of the device - how does it come to you?

My first thoughts are that this is a process of step-framing. One might describe the steps in a number of ways: from the general to the particular is but one typology, and there could be many more. What interests me, however, is why I needed these steps: one simple answer is to get a sequence in the lesson and co-ordinate the movement forward. The three steps establish the task in a doable format. Secondly, the steps have a delaying function: children can hurtle along in a very disturbing way and just fall over or get lost if not restrained. These steps put a set of reins on them and established the pace. Thirdly, all the steps had the deceptive appearance of simplicity and inspired optimism, but actually led into work for the children - none could be taken by the teacher for the children, all were framed in such a way that the children had to do the job. Fourthly, they led towards a positive look at the material and provided the necessary context. They made it possible for the children to come to terms with the material in their own way; thus to Brenda: 'He is very holy. He maybe has talked to God. God might have told him what Heaven is really like. He might have prayed and God put a picture in his mind. He was probably a very nice man and believed in God. He was probably old, about fifty-six or something. He probably had been experiencing being with God half his life.' This final analysis for me is the validation of the exercise - Brenda has broken through to a personal statement about the material - the device has worked.

Yet it can only work if one is prepared to throw it away when it is done with. As the focus narrows and we grow more convinced of our powers we may despise the first steps we took in learning, and the teacher must be prepared to despise them too. All too frequently I see teachers who use devices for learning, but wish to keep the device alive after its period of usefulness, and so damage the learning. This is particularly true of those of us who use role-play as a device, but in our enjoyment of the role-play and our promotion of its existence demonstrate to the children that the play's the thing and not the learning.

To demonstrate what I mean let me take another lesson, this time at the Hirschorn, a museum of modern art. I was told that museum educators found introducing modern art to both children and adults very difficult, especially with paintings that have a surface look of careless application, and seeming lack of finish. One, a large canvas by Jules Olitsky, was pointed out to me as being 'particularly difficult'. In examining this work, I tried hard to postpone my own judgement and to see my role as a facilitator in introducing the work to children, and it was clear that this postponement

of judgement was of the essence: were I to structure an occasion that allowed for ready condemnation, I could not rescue it. A negative evaluation is rather like hanging - few people recover from it.

So, in preparing the children, away from the painting, I told them the job - we were to try to interpret the painting for the adults present, but as this was a big task we must start somewhere. I suggested a start might be to see ourselves as x-rayers, looking at the various layers of paint, and we would first look at the top layer. We would search for the last things the artist did before he said to himself 'It is finished' or 'That's enough' or whatever. I spent some time emphasising that for the time being we would ask no other questions about the picture, we would simply be technicians, looking for clues. They agreed that this was a fairly simple job and off we went to look.

It was indeed a simple job, and we soon had a list: 'Pink line across middle-changes to blue and white: finger scribble in top left hand part; dribble down lower left hand side; line drawn with a stick; paint squeezed up and then depressed in lower right side etc.' The children went back with me to the workroom to make a record of their findings. Drawing and planning is a good exercise in recording, but it is also a good time for quiet chatter and as I moved about the group I could pick up a great deal. The children were becoming very interested in the variety of tools the artist used and in the strange brown surface underneath the top layer. Now both of these observations contradicted my first instruction - the children had themselves spilled over into the second layer of paint without my permission; in some ways I think my forbidding that may have been the come-on for some of them; whatever the reason I didn't comment, but went along with their suggestion that we were now in stage two.

Some of the children were making lists of artists' tools, others were experimenting with crayons, trying for that elusive brown. I decided that, even though I was short of time, I would let this happen. The struggle was a kind of winding up of the elastic preparatory to our second visit to the picture. When we got there, there were whoops of discovery: 'My, nothing less than a yard brush would have made that brush-stroke'; 'Most of the brown is really grey - see how much of it there is, like some kind of shadow'; and 'Isn't there a first layer of paint - kind of blue, that he has left bare at the edges?' As they chattered excitedly about their observations and discoveries, I waited for the moment when the last piece of the device could be sprung. It came with the realisation that there might be meaning in it all, as well as puzzles.

So far, we had been close up to the picture, almost with noses in contact, acting as scientists. Now I removed the group to the most distant point of the room, where we could take it all in. We sat in silence for a while, with evident enjoyment. Then a little girl said: 'It's like a dream, right at the beginning when you can't sort it out yet, and don't know what will happen.' A boy spoke next: 'It's like curtains, with shadowy things behind - that's all the grey, see.' Another child viewed it as a foggy day on a farm. As we sat there, with no hands-up routine, children just throwing in observations as they thought of them, we built towards a common view that it could be anything, each observer could make of it what he chose.

I sent a little girl to read the artist's title and she came back to tell us that he had called it *The Creek Princess*. The group looked hard and rejected this, preferring to call it *The unknown painting*. We sat and looked a little more and then it was time to go. Two or three looked rather disconsolate and asked whether they couldn't look at another picture with me. Another day would have to do for that, but again I felt they had proved the value of the device.

This last example has shown a little more of what I am trying to express by the term 'device', and suggests very strongly that the slowing down has in it some element of tightening the concentration, implanting some of the will to look, building expectations. It also shows that a rather idiotic way of beginning to look at a picture can be useful, if you are willing to scrap it when its usefulness has ended and move on to higher things. The device most useful at the stage of moving to higher things is that of translations, for the act of translation is the ultimate in understanding and it places the focus squarely on the translator himself. I found this useful in different ways on a number of occasions in Washington, but will describe only two here.

The first example of translation as a device is rather complex, but shows well, I think, the difficulties one may resolve by devices. At the National Archives I was set to interpret a police blotter from the day of Lincoln's assassination - very appropriate for an historian well used to handling documents, but the group of students who arrived proved to be working very largely in the field of the arts (they would have been more appropriate at the Hirschorn, at first glance). So it seemed to me from the first that I *had* to interpret the document from their point of view, I couldn't assume that they would happily take mine. So I promised this from the start (none too sure as to how I might achieve it).

At first, when we looked at the document, there was no clear point of contact with the arts. It was a formal piece of official recording, written in official language, chronicling event-by-event, just as the rulebook laid down. In exploring how it might have been made, what were the rules for writing a police blotter, and who was involved in the business, one point of interest became clear: we accepted fairly readily that this was a record of events, but the students noticed that there was a missing element what we didn't know was how it was written *in* time - when the desk sergeant took up his pen, when he put it down again.

This problem of adding time to the record was explored in several ways - making it stand up experimentally to see how it felt, with pauses in activity followed by patches of frenetic hurry. There was quite a lot of fun in the role-play, but it seemed to me at that stage it was just fun and getting acquainted with the material. The key came at the end, with only a very few minutes, when I asked the students to translate the document into instructions for an artist of some kind.

One team programmed a novelist, because they felt they needed the 'human background'; another felt so unclear about the realities of what was written that they turned to commission an abstract artist to help them; but the most interesting team by far programmed a musician, giving him cues to govern the pace and shape of the music he was to write. In a very real way they were adding time to the document, doing just what needed to be done in the best way they could do it.

Thus the act of translation found the central problem of the material under consideration, and I yearned for the time for us to make that music - time we didn't have. On another occasion we had the time, and a product that I found most moving was created.

A rather nervous and ill-assorted group of children were apportioned to look with me at a steam engine. This rather beautiful machine had a board with details and a pamphlet with more details. I read these avidly, because I don't know too much about steam engines. The details told me about Pittsburgh, iron foundries, owners - all sorts of things, but at no stage did they explain how the machine worked and it struck me that this was the necessary beginning point.

I commiserated with the pupils, because they had a guide today who knew very little more than they did; but I encouraged them to believe that, by looking sensibly, we could find out most things. I asked them where we should start, and they sensibly suggested the boiler, the source of the power. We looked and found it pretty baffling, so I allowed them to follow the impetus of power, concentrating on the connections.

As the pupils gained confidence in guessing what the rocker bar was for, why it was so shaped and how the connections worked, so their confidence and their ability as guessers grew, so we returned to the boiler. We couldn't see inside and so we had to reason how the steam pushed the piston up and what could happen when it reached the top to let it down again. It was rather slow and painful but with careful nurturing they got most of the way to understanding, although my rather shaky knowledge of the working of valves made it all the harder for them.

Then I sprung the trap: the audience were going to be inhabitants of some strange Stone Age island who didn't speak our language and they desperately wanted to know how the machine worked. We would have to try to teach them, some way or another. The children felt very unconfident, but saw that they had a choice between pictures and mime. They had a fair struggle but one boy was very successful. As he went along he showed a capacity as a choreographer that made me marvel, for he turned the steam engine process into a ballet, forcing his Stone Age team to join the dance to prove to him that they had learned well.

They began all seated, hugging themselves with crossed arms as a sign for 'cold water', then they fluttered their fingers in the air and steadily rose in token of steam. About the mid-point of the rise, their hand movements changed to pushing up, in sign of the piston's rise. When fully risen they all hissed loudly for the escaping steam and, with hands on their heads, forced themselves to a sitting position once more.

In fact the ballet got no further than explaining the boiler. But it was both beautiful and clear - it did its job, and the team knew in a way that was eminently satisfying and good what steam engines were about. They would never forget.

The beauty of the product of translation is somehow an image of that autonomous thinking about the materials of learning that I spoke of earlier. It is a new creation, it is an independent success, it destroys all that went before it. For now with our knowledge we are giants, when we began as pygmies.

What I have tried to do in this paper is to demystify a little the process of pedagogical decision-making, looking especially at starting points and the teacher actions that nudge the learning forward when it has already started. Perhaps the most important point I have to make is that the teacher is charged with the business of starting the lesson and he must start somewhere - almost anywhere will do. It is the decisive focusing at this stage that ensures the willing attention of the pupils - indeed it enables that attention. I recall of all the lecturers I had at college by far the best was Herbert Butterfield. There he was, charged with teaching us all the intricacies of the history of Modern Europe, an insuperable task, or so it seemed to us; but his beginnings always won us: 'Twelve midnight, August the Second, 1764 - the bedroom of Catherine the Great . . .' and he was away, but he was away with us all following.

Once that attention has been obtained the teacher must then take an observer's role, for his next teacherly step can only be devised in the knowledge of where the children's interest is today (probably quite different from yesterday) and what their capacities are like today. With this information, based on quiet observation of the

children at work, the teacher can start to devise the next step that will carry the learning forward in the right direction and as far as it can go, without over-stretching the children or forcing the learning away from their declared line of enquiry. One further factor involved in devising this second move is, of course, time available: can this device, which is right for the children's interests and pace, actually work in the time available? This is a complex question, for often children who are hooked into a piece of work will quite suddenly work faster and more efficiently, because they know and like what they are doing.

The great device which both crowns and tests a piece of learning is the act of translation and wherever this is possible (given the constraints outlined above) it can lead to the best conclusion ever; it is something we employ too rarely in our teaching, and is well worth thinking about at every stage.

## ***Working with Pictures, Artefacts, Architecture and Landscape: Nuffield Primary History Project at Petworth***

**Source:** *Teaching History*, 87 and 88, 1997

### ***Pictures and Artefacts***

When we set up the project we looked at every aspect of history teaching in primary schools, and without doubt the worst aspect was visiting historic sites. So when Dr Diana Owen, the curator at the National Trust House at Petworth, invited me to come and construct some new ways for children to visit, I was pleased. Richard Saffrey at Petworth Primary School was also pleased to provide some Year 3 and Year 5 children with whom I had worked previously. I decided to go for action - no theory, no sitting working at a desk. We would get in there and do some work and just report what happened. To help me I asked along a number of parents to write down every word the children said. That was a crazy idea, they thought, but they did what I asked. I think you will agree as you read the reports of what happened that it was a good idea.

### **Petworth House - First Visit**

Twenty-six Year 3 children, their class teacher, head teacher and four parents are going with me to look at the recently restored North Gallery of Petworth House, where the third Earl of Egremont kept his sculpture and picture collection. The parents were to act as observers and write down as much of what their children said as they could. The children had been told when they got there to choose a picture for us all to look at. I proposed **three rules**:

- Let us not anything by touching it because the sweat in our fingers is acid.
- Let us not risk damage by running.
- Let us not interfere with other people's concentration by too much noise.

The children listened carefully and agreed to the rules, and (by and large - two small exceptions) obeyed them with great care. They now scattered to survey the scene.

Although the gallery is only one small part of the house, it is full of works of art, some hung high up and hard to see. The antique sculptures are frequently nude and caught the eyes of seven to eight year olds. Above all, it was a bit dark and quite cold. Gavin said at once, 'This place makes me shiver'. Other children liked the mystery of darkness. Tim said, 'I don't like these paintings, they are old'. One boy thought they were 600 years old.

Catherine found Gainsborough's dog. It was love at first sight. Matthew knowledgably pointed out the cracks in a statue, noting that it must have fallen down to do that. Natasha hadn't found anything she liked yet. Matthew was very keen on the St Michael statue. 'I just like the look of that statue.'

Gavin found the statue of the naked boy on the snakes' nest being licked by a bear and with the goddesses hovering above and sending doves with healing herbs. The statue fascinated many children, but many were disturbed. Three boys raced up to me and said, 'Ere, we've found something rude.' We went and looked, and I said, 'Oh, I see, men and women with no clothes on - is that rude? Some felt it might be, but most settled down. It was interesting to see how little this issue was to bother us afterwards.

Many children looked for reference points. 'That's an angel.' 'That's Mary and Joseph.' Sometimes the discrepancy between home and here was itemised. Kaylee liked 303 because it showed a dog as the little girl's friend. The rest of the group vigorously reminded Kaylee that she was terrified of dogs, but Kaylee stuck to her ground – in the picture it was all right.

Another group liked dogs, parties, nice painting ('The sky looks real'). James on arrival at one statue laughed: 'He's showing his willy'. Vicky was frankly disgusted: 'They are a bit rude.'

All this in one quarter of an hour. It looked inchoate, disorganised, but the chance the children had to stare and chatter was, I think, very important. Here they were making their judgments, were beginning to make up their minds, and as a result were now ready to come together for a bit of learning.

The children chose three pictures to look at - the *Reception of the Emperors at Petworth* (they called it 'the one with a lot of people in it'), the sculpture of the boy on the snakes' nest and the Gainsborough dog. We had half an hour to do them all!

We looked first at the *Reception of the Emperors* and I asked the children the simplest question of all - how many people can you count? This is a simple focusing question that makes a first step at getting the children's eyes fixed upon the picture. For those who were having trouble I gave the easier question: 'And how many dogs?' (Answer: 2).

At the picture I had a small set of steps which children could climb to confirm their answers. The steps had many advantages. First they gave the children an adult's level vision of the picture. Second, they were an adventure. Several children, even with me holding them, found the climb a little tough, but above all they were the chosen people - the only ones on top of the steps, and with a huge responsibility to see something.

We looked a little more carefully. 'What is going on, what is the story?' I asked. 'A celebration', 'A party', 'A wedding'. At this stage I accepted all answers because they were good - it would have been pointless to ruin their confidence by the imposition of my tin-pot knowledge. I asked them next who was the most important person in the picture, and a little trail of children came to mount the steps and point to their candidate. They usually identified the person by the colour of the clothes, so I next asked what was the artist's favourite colour - 'No, hands down, all look over the whole picture to see for sure'. They looked and struggled hard to define the colours, with some good effects.

We now moved to the sculpture and the children were very excited by this. They quickly told me that the naked boy was lying on a nest of snakes and maybe was dying. The bear that was licking his leg caused problems - was he a lion, a fox or yes, a bear. Was he going to eat the boy? No, his licking was to get the poison out.

All this was achieved with troops of children coming up for a look from the steps and confiding their opinion. I now pointed to the top part of the sculpture, where three anxious goddesses looked down on the scene. 'What are they thinking?' I asked, and loads of children tried to see in their faces the answer.

I suggested they were sending help: What was it? - they quickly found the doves. What were they carrying in their beaks? Twigs to cover him up. Well maybe, what else? 'Herbs to cure him' - well done Matthew.

The children still wanted to look. 'I like the ladies', said one boy; another said, 'I like the boy', another said, 'I like the snake'. Some liked the bear, too. At last, with minutes ticking away, we made it to Gainsborough's dog, hung maddeningly behind a statue and hard to see. Many children, after three quarters of an hour's looking were now tired, but struggled on. Zoe confessed to be 'getting bored'. I asked them to home in on the colour of the dog. How was it made? They looked and made various suggestions: 'Blue and yellow', 'Pink and brown', 'Yellow and orange'. I knew we had to do some colour mixing next. OK - what sort of dog is it? 'A Labrador'; 'A spaniel.' We noted it was like a spaniel today, but not quite. Final question - Why paint a dog? 'Its colour'; 'Its furry legs'; 'Its tail'; 'Its paws'; 'Its back'; 'Its nose'; 'Its eyes'; 'Its ears'. We would be still worshipping that dog now if I hadn't called a halt. We had been in the gallery for one hour.

### **Petworth House - Second Visit**

Before the next visit I explained that this week we should be trying to find out just how hard it was to paint a picture. I wanted them to use this experience in order to have respect for what they see. We would start with pencil and then if there was time add just one bit of colour. Then we would all look at one picture, but I was keeping it a secret which one it would be.

One group homed in on the picture of the Princes in the Tower (I am surprised no-one noticed it last week). Tim asked, 'What are they doing to the children?' Philip asked, 'Are the two men bad?' After a while they settled to drawing. Meanwhile Emma and Amy had hived off from the group to draw what they called 'The Black Beauty picture'.

The next group also had some problems - those wretched girls had 'bagged' Black Beauty and we wanted to do it. They wanted to do the lion attacking the horse but realistically thought it would be too difficult. Eventually some went to the Gulliver picture and worked with great skill on parts of it, not trying for the whole, whilst others went for a Turner seascape. They thought that Turner did the sea first, the sky second and the ships last. They found the sky hardest - difficult to get the right shape and so many colours - blue, yellow, white, pink and black. Another group was working away very successfully on a castle picture. They chatted as they drew:

Paul: *I can't draw straight.*

Alan: *You don't draw the frame.*

Paul: *Which way round should I have the paper?*

Alan: *I'd like to live in the castle. I've still got more to do to it. The trees are hard – no the trees and the water are hard. And the castle.*

Gavin: *You shade like this.*

Paul: *It's harder than I thought ... the castle was quite easy.*

Quite a substantial group had run straight away to Gainsborough's dog. Sophie, who adores dogs, was distressed to find that she wasn't proficient in drawing one, and needed a lot of support. Others grew depressed - Catherine said, 'I don't know how to draw... it is hard, I can't do it'. Natasha looked gravely at her picture and declared, 'He's gone all wobbly'. They mocked their drawings - 'Mine looks like a dinosaur'; 'Mine looks like a rabbit.' Natasha was anxious to have done her dog all in brown - 'Have we any white please?'

Another group was having problems with the light - it made the pictures hard to see and harder to draw. They set to work on a big landscape but were worried by the amount of detail in it. Paul began to sketch in the trees but quickly wailed that it was

too difficult. Layla worked in a businesslike way from right to left; Louise simply sketched out a feel for the picture. David struggled with drawing the cows, carefully and precisely. Paul tried again with one tree.

Elsewhere there were similar problems. Reuben grumbled that there was a statue in the way of his vision of the picture and Vicky said very firmly, 'I'm not a good drawer'. Reuben soon settled and James was going great guns: 'I'm just doing it with streaks'. Vicky pushed on, despite feeling below par because her best friend was away: 'I like the picture, but I don't like mine ... The lady was difficult, very hard to fit her curls, the body and the baby all together.'

At 10.15 (after a half hour's drawing) I drew the children together and we spent a quarter of an hour reviewing their pictures and experiences. I lavished praise on what they had done whilst the children voiced the difficulties they had had. The children admired each other's expertise: 'That drawing of James, it's perfect!' said Philip. Others modestly down played their work - 'The cows were very difficult', said David. Layla airily informed us that she had had no difficulties - drawing was easy.

For the last quarter of an hour we turned to look at a large, not very inspiring, full-length portrait of the Third Earl of Egremont. It was hung high, so parts were gloomy whilst other parts were invisible because of light bouncing off. We had, however, our trusty steps and the good heartedness and willingness to try of our children.

I asked them to move around until they could find a position where they could see the Earl's face. I then told them that this was the man who had collected all the pictures and sculptures in the gallery, and asked them to think of three words to describe him. The words flowed freely, with some repetition of the word 'old'. The words were: old, elderly, intelligent, important, special, nice, kind, rich, lazy, likes dogs, happy, scruffy, posh, smart, small, clever, weak, wonderful, like an old lady.

I then gave the children the opportunity to stand on the steps to see whether they could find what was important to Lord Egremont. Emma had already noticed that the sculptures we had behind us were behind Lord Egremont in the picture. Reuben thought he favoured nice clothes, and Layla thought pictures mattered to him. Amy thought his dog was important and saw the same dog in the *Reception of the Emperors* picture we had studied the last week. James thought the rich and colourful cloth cast over the table in the picture was valuable to him, whilst Amy came back to point out 'the gold thing on the table'. Vicky said his house was important and Matthew with some difficulty made me see the model of the racehorse on the table. On the way out Reuben came up with an addition to our list: 'His friends were important to him.'

In this second session the children's concentration had lasted longer, and they seemed much more at home in the gallery and with the idea of pictures and sculptures as objects worthy of our attention.

### **Petworth Primary School**

I went to see 27 fifth year children at Petworth Primary School where four observers were ready with their clipboards to write down everything the children had to say. I am delighted with this mode of work as it enables me to 'hear' all the children at all times in the lesson, something a teacher rarely experiences, and it adds great depth to my understanding of what is going on.

We talked in the classroom about collections. Melissa collected badges and had 112. David collected football magazines and had 124. William had 71 strikers. Stephanie

had 50 soaps. Daniel had 11 stones. Laura had 8 animals, real ones. Lee had 58 toy sports cars. Andrew had 208 bottle caps. Greg had 1214 stamps.

I asked them whether they had a 'best' item and they readily agreed, but when I asked them to tell us how they might feel if they lost a good item they were a little reticent: 'A bit upset' was as far as they would go. You don't tell a stranger such things.

So I moved on to say that we were today to visit someone's collection. This was the Third Earl of Egremont who had so much money he could buy what he wanted. And he did: lots of pictures and sculptures. I told the children that although I didn't know them, I had learned something about them when they told me about their collections. Could we find out some clues from the Earl's collection that would tell us about him? At first the children were dubious - this sounded a hard task, but when William suggested we could find his favourite artist by looking at the labels, others quickly volunteered ideas. We would be detectives. Sounds fun. Feels better. Off we go.

When we got to the gallery we sat down for a minute to recall the task, to consider the rules we must obey here, and to get organised into our groups (you can forget a lot on the way there). Each group was to work in a different area of the gallery and then swap over with another group.

When we gathered together we first asked Diana, the administrator, our questions - quite a good list:

*Why do some pictures crack?  
Why do they cover up some pictures with cloths?  
How did that huge picture get painted on squares?  
How long would it take to paint a big picture?*

We then pooled all our clues on the Earl of Egremont and I told the children just how clever they were to have so many. And, being clever, they could now attempt the hardest task of all - which one picture or sculpture told us most about the Earl? They scurried off at once, determined to choose a really good one.

There isn't space to record all the discussions, but let one stand for all. Here are William and Matthew standing in front of Turner's *Teignmouth, 1812*:

*Lots of landscape and water, people and animals.  
Good background - it fades away into the sky. It's got ships and wrecks of ships. I can't see how it can have been true.  
There's a lot of sky. It isn't just blue, it's a kind of faded orange or yellow golden.  
There are some parts of this painting that are a mystery - very dark.*

Such close observation was richly rewarded when we had just enough time to look at two pictures and two sculptures whilst the children who had chosen them (experts now) stood up and told us their reasons. We had to hold over some for next week, as the hour had finished and we needs must return to school.

On our second visit with the fifth years we had a number of things to do. We needed to look at the pictures we hadn't seen last week. We needed to sum up about Egremont and then we needed to switch to a second focus - what they liked, and why.

So we began by reviewing the rules and our purposes and then went with Luke and David to look at Turner's *Hulks on the Tamar*. The boys were excellent as our guides to this painting, and quite enjoyed their role. We focused on the sky and saw in the murky mist grey, white, yellow, brown, peach. I was frankly surprised to find how much the children favoured the rather dirty colours and misty outlines of Turner, but as I was to find from many more children, this was just exactly what they *did* like. Matthew and William now led us to Turner's *Teignmouth* where again they pointed to the land merging into the sky and the creamy, frothy nature of the sky. Lee and Jamle now showed us *Swimming Horses* - dark mysterious colours, water, wrecks, animals, people and a creamy sky boiling up for a storm.

After our guides had finished we sat down and I told them a bit about the Earl, a shy but enthusiastic man who loved novelty but admired the past. As I told them about him they showed pleasure in the fact that the character they had drawn of him from the pictures was correct.

Now we had to change quite radically. We were no longer looking for what Egremont liked, but for what *we* liked. I cast them as rich people to whom I was giving a million pounds each with which to start a collection of their own. Which picture or sculpture from this gallery would they choose to form the foundation stone of their collection? They could only choose one.

They were full of enthusiasm and set off to choose. Some were keen on subjects - dogs, horses, birds. William and Andrew were soon busy sketching. Several boys were called to *St Michael Slaying the Beast* and again were quickly drawing from a particularly difficult angle, underneath. Several girls were drawn to portraits. Charlotte wrote:

*Once upon a time I went to a gallery. I had £4,000,000. I wanted to buy a girl with a pretty dress and I saw one and I bought it. It was painted by Lely, Sir Peter. I like the sky. The colour was whitey-bluey. She looks sad.*

Charlene worked on the same picture and had problems with getting the colour right in her sketch:

*The colour was quite hard to make but what I did to get the white colour was to rub some of the blue colour out.*

*[The children go to work on their favourite paintings]*

I urged the children to concentrate on one small area of the painting to get the colour there. They worked so hard with coloured pencils, with smudging with their fingers and with writing verbal descriptions of the colours and enjoyed the task. It made them quite sure that painting was hard work and a very skilled operation. We went away very happy, but regretting we couldn't take our pictures.

## **Analysis**

My biggest problem in all of this is the weight of my own cultural burden and the attitudes to culture I have inherited. When I was at school we did art in the sixth form by looking at hundreds of postcards until we could recognise a Pontormo at twenty paces. We weren't required to look, only to know. As I watch people in galleries I see the result - they read the labels - oh, Rubens, isn't that good, and on to the next one. We connect with what we recognise, but we don't think about it or look sincerely and slowly, because there are 150,000 other paintings waiting for us to glance at.

Instead of recognising our own failings, the failings of our own education, we instinctively try to pass it on. 'Now stop here, children, this is by Gauguin. No, it's very good, very fine. Cost the gallery two million. He was a savage man, and liked savage subjects. See, isn't it good?' And the children dutifully look and are given no chance to say yes, and certainly no chance to say no.

If we are in the business of teaching values then we can only do so if the children build their own, slowly and carefully, over many years. But they can only do this if we free them from the constraints of our values and allow them to value themselves sufficiently to make up their own minds.

This is what I was trying to do in these visits. What do I think I have learned? Well, I think the most important thing is the need to give time. We are, as teachers, rather inclined to start our lessons straight away. Yet children in galleries do need to wander around and chatter, to settle themselves to the job in hand, the place where they are at.

But if they are to wander and chatter, they need also the teacher to help them to *focus*. Children find choosing very hard and they need help to come to *just one thing* they are to look at. If progress is to be made there isn't really time for more. To achieve this focus the teacher needs some *devices* to help the children feel the special nature of the occasion. Thus with the younger children I used a stepladder, with the older ones a torch. It *requires* you to see something - if you get the privilege of the stepladder or the torch, the teacher and the rest of the children expect some results!

The teacher's questions, especially at the start, must be very *simple and non-threatening*. The first question should be one everyone can answer. But all answers must be taken, for as soon as you say 'no' to a child you have effectively excluded that child from future attempts. Often answers that sound quite daft or muddled will turn out to be very clever with a little gentle probing.

Another feature we should note is the immense value of *the second visit*. Now I am well aware that this is not always possible, but am simply pointing out that where it is, it yields rich harvests. The children have had time to think about it all in-between the visits, and when they arrive the second time there is no shock of the new, merely a recognition of old friends and the chance to do more. Both classes coped with very much more skill and indeed coped with very much deeper tasks on the second visit.

Yet of course work in the *classroom* is essential. You do need to talk beforehand, to discuss and generate Ideas. You need to experiment with colour combinations. Above all you need to encourage the children into a questioning attitude. Children who are relaxed yet purposeful do not ask silly questions, but very sound ones and it was a double pleasure to have Diana the administrator there to give authoritative answers.

As the children grew in expertise it was important to give them the *confidence* to show it and use it. The children were very proud to stand up and address their seated companions on their selected painting, and the experience was very educational. This is one of the many points when the teacher needed to step back and let the children have their head. Each teacher ought to have a vision labelled 'Don't interfere' from time to time!

I think of the delight the children had in their visit and the skill they showed in their work and then compare it with the basic bossiness of so many 'well-controlled and well-managed' visits. We need to know what we want to do more clearly and then relax into the work.

Finally we should beware of putting overall categories onto children. These were all Key Stage 2 children, but my goodness the difference between them! The Year 5 children could do so much more, and needed to. We must supply experiences for all ages and all abilities - quite a daunting task. But if we can learn to make ourselves open to the potential of whatever age group we have with us, then we shall truly fit our work to their needs.

### ***Landscape and Architecture***

The second component of our work at Petworth involved a happy return to the Year 3 and Year 5 children of Petworth Primary School with whom I had worked in the Christmas term. I was lucky enough to have the help once more of Ray Verrier, and also to have in the team a distinguished artist, craftsman and teacher, Jeff Lowe.

Summer was clearly the best time for working in the park, but I had left landscape and architecture until last because I found them the most difficult of our given subjects. Pictures, sculptures and objects are hard work for children, but at least they have some experience of looking at them, trying to make sense of what they see and even of making some kind of personal appreciation. Architecture and landscape, however, are almost abstract and most children will not ever have looked carefully at either, leaving them without experience and above all without criteria. We must also bear in mind that Petworth's west front looks dull and regular to the modern viewer, and that the park looks natural. To persuade children to see that the west front is 'modern' and the landscape man-made is not an easy task.

As I began to research the topic, flitting through the guide book and the sources quoted, it came upon me even more strongly that I must *personalise* these topics, and search for problems in their stories that would form a frame for looking and judging. That would keep the topics in focus long enough for the children to understand what they were doing and fulfil the requirements of the task. As I searched through the sources I discarded all the pages speculating on who the architect was and all the comparative materials. These are useful for art historians but not for children who need realities and a good deal of simplicity to hang on to. So the fact that Capability Brown shifted 48 million kilos of earth to create the mound was in, while vague French influences on style were out. Thus I painstakingly created two stories which I felt would catch the children's interests and hold in focus sufficient information to enable them to tackle both extensive looking and taxing questions.

The first story concerned a little girl, Elizabeth, only child of the Eleventh Earl of Northumberland, and thereby the last of the Percys. With her, the name would go from Petworth where Percys had ruled for 500 years, for when she married she would have to take the name of her husband. In 1670 when her father died, she, now an orphan of four years old, was taken into the care of her crabbed grandmother who soon set about hunting for a husband. When she was 12 she was married to the sickly heir of the Duke of Newcastle, but he died within the year and the hunt was on again. Suitors, drawn by her immense wealth, came from far and near. One, Count Koenigsmark, came all the way from Sweden. But instead she was married to the rake Tom Thynne of Longleat. She was so horrified by him that she ran away, and Count Koenigsmark sent men who assassinated him as he rode in his carriage down

Pall Mall. But she wasn't to marry the Count. Instead she was married to the 'Proud Duke of Somerset - an extremely handsome but not intellectual aristocrat. He made everybody other than his wife stand in his presence and when one day his daughter saw him nod off and took the chance of a quick rest he disinherited her on the spot. Also, when his son-in-law got into trouble for Jacobitism, the proud Duke sent back all the great symbols of his office at Court as Master of the Horse, to the Queen - in a dust-cart. When Elizabeth came of age and the money became available, the Duke decided to use her wealth to put a palace front on to Petworth House, as well as to extend and rebuild the interior in a grand fashion.

Two questions remain in my mind about this story: Do you think the Duke was pleased with what he got? Was Elizabeth pleased to see her money spent in this way?

The second story took place half a century later. We have new owners at Petworth - the Wyndhams, Earls of Egremont. No doubt they were pleased with the palace they had inherited, but when they looked out of the windows what a poor view they had! To the left a road to Tillington, close to the peasant cottages; dead ahead a huge stable block, enough for 62 horses, entirely blocked the view. Beyond that a few ponds, some marshland and, the ultimate eyesore, the terraces - formal gardens with straight lines and sharp angles, made to 150-year-old taste.

It would all have to go. Capability Brown and his huge workforce moved in, shifting 48 million kilos of earth to make the lake and to round off the terraces, putting in miles of pipes to bring water to the lake and moving the road and its inhabitants a good way to the south. It cost a lot, but was it worth it? And how did the people cope with the impact of such change?

Having got the basic questions sorted out, we planned to take the third year and the fifth year children on two visits to Petworth, one visit focusing on the palace front, the next on the landscaping. We would follow up the work back in school during the rest of the morning and the afternoon, and we reserved two days for possible further activities in art and drama. As before, we asked for parental assistance to write down what the children said as they worked. At the house, Dr Diana Owen offered her usual full cooperation, to the extent of letting us raid her and her colleagues' offices to get the best view.

### **Day One, Third Years at Petworth**

The children were very excited by the prospect of another visit to Petworth (some of them wanting to make it a 'real' outing by taking packed lunches). We started with the story of the little girl Elizabeth and all her suitors, and the children found it pretty horrific. Indeed, when the handsome 'Proud Duke' appeared they were already on his side and felt he had every right to use his wife's money to make a 'palace' (although they were astonished that it would have to be a palace on one side only).

I stressed that this was a big expenditure, and suggested that when we got to the park we should avert our eyes from the 'palace' west front until we were almost at the lake, and then all turn round in one moment to see whether we thought the architect had been successful and whether Elizabeth's money had been well spent.

Jeff introduced the children to the idea of using the graph paper we had given them, and to the simple card rulers that he had provided. They were a little unsure of terms like vertical and symmetrical, but were keen to carry their boards to the house where we all sat down to draw. The children expended a great deal of effort on this enterprise and worked in remarkably different ways. Some took parts of the building,

others took the whole, some examined details while others were broadly sketchy (Craig told me airily, 'I often sketch at home'). Let us eavesdrop on a couple of groups:

*There's 100 windows.*

*I'm going to sketch the whole thing.*

*There's not six chimneys, you haven't done the little ones - see that lump.*

*There are nine chimneys, actually.*

*That isn't a chimney.*

This wholesome chatter whilst drawing helps the children to focus comfortably on their task, and as a result they begin to see more and more. When we broke off after half an hour (I let the children have a quick run before we gathered to share ideas), the children had a great deal to contribute. They liked the windows, which one child commented, 'gave it the character of a 'palace' and they were beginning to see that the frontage was not grey but in fact multi-coloured. They saw its shape as somehow important, and began to explore details of sculpture and mouldings.

Back in the classroom I put the crucial question - had the money been well spent? The children felt that the Duke and Duchess would have been well pleased, because the architect had spent time and care, effort and concentration (all their words) on the job.

Over lunch, Jeff and Ray discussed plans for the afternoon. The children would be working with Jeff on developing their morning drawings through a number of artistic media (see below for details). We wanted to place this activity firmly within the historical context established by John in the morning as otherwise the class would simply see the afternoon work as an 'art lesson'. So we decided to start the session with a short piece of drama in which Ray took the role of the Duke of Somerset receiving from the architects of the 'Jeff Lowe Partnership' their ideas for developing the new and vast west front of his palace. In order to prepare for Jeff's work later on, the Duke would focus his comments on four aspects of the architects' plans:

1. how and where pieces of statuary should be placed (to enhance the frontage);
2. the variety and colour of the stonework of the frontage;
3. the positioning and design of a grand entrance door;
4. the symmetry of the windows both horizontally and vertically.

Ray started the session by asking the children what they understood by the word 'architect' and a number suggested ideas relating to the drawing and planning of buildings. He then explained that today the Duke was meeting a group of architects who all worked for Jeff. Each architect would present his or her plans to 'His Grace'

In the discussions which followed, the Duke drew the architects' attention to some of the aspects mentioned above, thus pointing out his concern for an enhanced frontage through the use of statues, the need to have interesting shades of colour in the stonework, his absolute need to have a very grand entrance door for his royal visitors, such as King William, and his desire to have windows which were balanced throughout the wide frontage. However, His Grace found something in each architect's plan which pleased him and should be retained and developed further.

Finally, after inspecting most of the plans, the Duke told the architects to meet with their chief architect to take their plans further in the light of his requirements. He would graciously give them some more of his valuable time later on to present their revised and more detailed plans for this new west front.

The children then took up the morning's work and began to sharpen the images, working with great commitment and producing some remarkable results. Indeed, they seemed to take on the spirit of the architect who had had to work so hard, with such care, effort and concentration. The children ended the day rather pleased and proud of themselves.

### **Day Two - Year 5s**

The older children received the same story as the third years but their added experience of life made them more capable of using it. They were shocked and moved by Elizabeth's experiences and understood that she might well have had some feelings about how her husband spent her money.

*[the pattern of the third year day is repeated, but the children work in a much more sophisticated way on the problems posed.]*

### **Day three - Third Years again**

As usual, we began the day with the story - this time of Lancelot (Capability) Brown. The children listened well (later I found they had listened better than I thought) but found this story less exciting than Elizabeth's. Nevertheless they marched up to the house with a will, now largely convinced that this was 'our palace'. We went upstairs to the first floor where we stuck acetate sheets to the windows. I explained to the children that they would need to work close to the sheets and keep their heads still in order to retain the focus. We tried it out, and then everyone had a turn. 'Wow!' cried Craig, 'There's a deer'. It must have taken a long time to grass it all over. The water is still. The lake looks silver. 'It's quite nice - pretty', says Layla. 'It probably took two veers to do the whole park', says Ami. 'I think the stable was by those trees', says Layla.

*[the children work on their drawings, and visit the mound for some exercise. They return to school.]*

Meanwhile, I took a small group out to do some practical earth moving. A portion of the school garden was given to us, and after some vigorous weeding we filled a bucket with soil and weighed it. We filled a wheelbarrow with buckets of soil and when it was full we did time trials wheeling it over a stated distance.

It all took some time, but when we got back in we began a monster sum. If a wheelbarrow contained 32 kilos of soil, and Mr Brown had moved 48 million kilos, how many wheelbarrow journeys were made? One and a half million journeys. If we allow a minute a journey, how many hours, weeks, months, years would it have taken? We got the figure of 8 years and 7 months. The children were most impressed - what a lot of work! We put it all together in a poster.

### **Day Four - Fifth Years again**

The children listened to the Lancelot Brown story with care, and I have no doubt it was better.

*[the pupils work on drawing the park, visiting the mound and considering how it was constructed.]*

Back in school we spent half an hour beginning to consider the implications for the cottagers who were to be moved. Working in role as the agent, I visited a number of cottagers and whilst some were cooperative others were clearly going to cause

problems. We realised that it was not just a matter of 'move that road' but that there were many human implications and indeed obstacles.

In the afternoon, Jeff worked with the children making 3D stage sets, blowing up the acetates onto a big roll of paper, and working with wax and wash over dyes with some scrape-through techniques to create hugely impressive results. Some children preferred to work in detail, one working on a grotesque mask, one on an urn with gumstrip and wax and wash, and two worked on a stand-up heraldic dog.

### **Day Five – Year 5**

Jeff made two further visits to the school to work with the children on their art. One challenge he left them with was to work in a very small format by scratching through the emulsion of a spoiled 35mm slide. These could be developed by projection or printing.

### **Day Six - Year 5**

On my last visit, I spent the morning working with Ray and the children in role, trying to explore the implications of change that all this landscaping had had. I emphasised that it had been 50 years since the last big alterations at Petworth and now some 500 labourers were to get to work. I asked them to supply me with some characters' names, backgrounds, what they would say to the overseer to persuade him to take them on. They produced some good ideas and I asked them to draw their character on a large sheet of paper, backed by nineteen other labourers so that, when we put them all together, we could get a sight of the 500.

They did this very well and I then put them into groups of unemployed labourers who were trying to get a job working for Lord Egremont and Lancelot Brown. I took the role of Egremont, and Ray that of an agent of Lancelot Brown. It began to emerge from the interviews that Lord Egremont was prepared to offer far more generous terms of employment than the agent of Lancelot Brown.

After morning break we resumed the role-play in the school hall and began by asking the children to observe a meeting between Lord Egremont and Lancelot Brown in which the latter accused his lordship of offering far too generous terms of employment and also failing to properly check the work capabilities of the new employees. This interchange brought out for the children the possibility that the Earl and his landscape architect might not have seen eye to eye on everything to do with the massive enterprise at Petworth. In their role-play interviews, the children started to develop ideas. For example, one pupil, William, developed the idea that he was an inventor and had produced a machine that could carry large amounts of earth from place to place. The machine required a team of four or five workmen, but would certainly reduce the overall number of labourers who would be required without it.

We explored the problem with the class. Here was a machine that would deprive labourers of their work. How would they react to William's new machine? Could they think of a non-violent way of coping with the new machine? In role-play, the class planned out and then demonstrated a number of ideas involving deception - pretending to be government inspectors, using the idea of pollution against the machine, creating an act of sabotage against the machine.

We also considered through drama personal problems and difficulties, such as the able but alcoholic worker and the labourer who disapproved of chopping down trees. In this manner, we began to explore some of the huge problems that change brings into little communities such as that at Petworth. Lack of time prevented much development in depth, but we felt pleased at the way the class eagerly contributed,

both in ideas and through drama, to the exploration of the human implications of change.

*[the classes worked on their art work at school, and presented their ideas in a variety of forms to the other pupils.]*

### **Analysis [editor's comment]**

The most striking thing about John's approach to fieldwork is the use of his imagination to try to bridge the past and the present. In tackling the problem of bringing the past to life he engages a range of techniques and approaches that force the children into a thinking, reflective, musing and problem-solving mode. Thus we find him deciding to use story, but stories that intrigue and entrance and transport the children's mind to the point where they can begin to appreciate the past as seen through the eyes of the agents involved. Role play is another prime medium for involving pupils in the historical situations – the earth moving is a classic example, when he talked about it the children remarked not only on how much earth he moved but about the prodigious quantity of sweat generated! At each point in the teaching we see the active involvement of the children; they either listen, look, discuss, draw, enact or move meaningfully. Throughout the process the teacher is drawing out the best in them, moving forward. What we have is the dynamic relationship between the 'plan' and its implementation. John knew what he wanted the children to learn: how he got them to learn often involved quick thinking and planning, changes of both shape and direction in the teaching. At the end of the day we find that the pupils have achieved their learning objectives. But, we need to bear in mind that the teaching style is one directed towards long-term, accretionist goals that clearly aim to produce saner, more civilised and humane citizens.

## 5 Pedagogy

### *What is a Good Lesson?*

**Source:** *London Drama*, vol.5, No.7,1971

Three problems face anyone attempting to define what is a good lesson: one is simply false modesty on the part of the writer, whereby it is deemed arrogant to instruct others on how to do well in a field so notoriously difficult. The second is related and has to do with the general feeling that teaching is somehow instinctive, intuitive behaviour, that teachers are born and not made, or that the rich compound of personality and experience that makes up a good teacher is too complex for analysis. The third problem relates to the dominance of objectives-based thinking in recent discussion of the art of teaching, producing two armed camps - the one claiming the technological model of teaching, with one goal in view, and a series of carefully thought out manoeuvres leading up to the score, and the other proclaiming that all teachers all the time have a wide range of objectives and that they work best who take note of the situation in the classroom and try simply to develop that. By and large, the latter camp appear to be winning at the moment, and this makes it less easy to define the good lesson, the variables being so many.

Yet good lessons exist, however we define them - we have all been in some as learners, as observers and, just occasionally, as teachers. We know the feel of good teaching just as much as we know the feeling of bad; rarely indeed do those whose duty it is to examine teaching performance disagree about the extremes. One may sense progress in learning, just as easily as one may sense children standing still, confused or ill-motivated. Therefore, though the task be dangerous, it seems at the least theoretically possible to sketch a definition of what a good lesson might be.

First we must indicate the sort of teaching/learning situation being considered, but this need not necessarily be in terms of subject or age group. Patently, one uses slightly different kinds of language according to the subject being studied, and may well undertake different kinds of activity; certainly relationships vary according to the age group being taught; but a more important distinction is between the introductory lesson and the practical following on or doing or completing lesson. There must be a balance of this kind in all teaching, for just as children need time to practise what they have learned, so teachers need time to recharge their batteries sufficiently to stage another introductory lesson. Those teachers who try to make every lesson a grand occasion soon wear themselves and their children out.

Practical work, following on, may well need its own kind of definition, but it is certainly easier to organise effectively than the introductory lesson, which can be a very complex affair, and is in itself the make-or-break situation in teaching; without good introductions there is no possibility of following on. So we will examine some of the constituents of such a lesson, one by one. They will be set out as assertions, the result of observation and thought, rather than as a theoretical plan, but the sequence is roughly related to the sequence of the lesson itself.

The first essential is that the lesson should be about some one thing, however many subordinate ideas it may have, however many decorative or explanatory appendages. Teachers throughout history have shown a tendency to generalise, to chase abstractions, neat definitions, laws, and in such a state they are a ready target for those who would seduce them from the point. A teacher I remember well spent

four years of religious instruction periods moving gradually from the Bible to discussion of the growth of lilies, his private passion. The abstractions he was after (on our behalf) were difficult to apprehend, hard to pin down, and delightfully easy to stray from.

To find something hard at the beginning of the lesson that can gain full agreement of teacher and pupils about the subject of their work may seem like the provision of objectives, but this is not what is intended. Objectives, in that they relate to achievement of specifics (and all too often specifics solely in the fields of knowledge and skills), refer very much more to the ends of lessons than to their beginnings. More important at the start is clarity, such that all in the room are agreed, and in full possession of the point of their meeting.

Thus, a good lesson starts from something specific and clear, and the smaller that something is the better, for it is easier to manage, to hold and to explain. This is not to suggest that lessons should begin with simplicities, with baby talk or tiny ideas. The beginning, however small, must be an issue, a principle, a formulation or a question of real and demonstrable importance presented through a concrete specific. These words read as rhetoric, but are not so intended; the importance must be real and demonstrable, and a teacher needs to think hard about his subject to avoid presenting instead mere conventions of school or of subject. Secondly, the teacher must consider the nature of the importance, whether it is important to himself, his age group or class alone, or is it truly important for the pupils as well. Finally, the teacher needs to think hard as to how to demonstrate the importance - for if pupils are to take it on trust (as so often) without understanding the importance, the teacher must judge whether there is the trust in his pupils in himself; if it is not there, we can gain nothing.

We have become too used to compulsory schooling and many of us have forgotten the reasons for school, and take it as a self-evident necessity, justifying itself without need for further thought. Institutionalisation brings with it a complacency about routines which leads to a lack of thinking on the part of the providers of education; instead they devote their energies to subjecting the receivers to the routines and conventions. This struggle to socialise the child to the institution avoids the child's own basic tool of learning, the question 'Why?' and makes teachers forget the principle that the learner must be the operator, not the patient, if true learning is to take place.

I am reminded of a recent lesson with some 8-10 year old children in a rural school which had an early foundation date strongly displayed over the door. I asked them how they thought schools started, and quickly set up a small community where the only employers were a farmer, a wool-packer and a stocking-knitter. The children settled into these occupations fairly easily but plainly had little idea what was happening. I went around trying to get the employers to give me some money and their employees some time to go to school. A nice old conflict developed but it came over me that there was no feeling at all of the possibility of a school starting. We could see the difficulties but could not see the school, and the impetus was all from me. Then, by accident more than anything else, I asked where it was to be held, and the children quickly imagined an old ruined barn, with no windows and a dangerous roof. We had about £1.50 in funds and the school couldn't begin until the barn was repaired. But it was the barn that made the school - the children could at last see what before only I had seen; the barn had to be repaired and they knew a lot about that and could help - it was something they could manage and understand. As the barn grew habitable so the school grew real. An idea had become tangible.

## Clarity of Expression

In the domain of ideas, then, clarity of expression on the part of the teacher is the first great key to success. Those first few minutes of the lesson so often govern its success or failure, and upon them depends the willingness of the child to go on. If this is lost it is hard to regain, and often done only at the expense of concentrating attention on one pupil, to the detriment of the morale of the remainder.

The teacher's clarity comes primarily from his perfect knowledge of what the lesson is to be about, and this entails a process of refining the ideas backwards from vague and general notions to the hard core of specifics. To do this a teacher must slough off all he himself has learned (either artificially or through experience) and all that internalised knowledge that is now almost a part of his subconscious mind. So often we forget that the things we do automatically without thought are to the unlearned still huge challenges; an experienced driver finds it hard to comprehend the wild terror of the learner.

The philosopher constantly tries to refine back to the heart of the matter, and his job is hard enough, but at least he is doing it only for himself. The teacher must refine back towards the point of first perception of the idea by others - a double problem, for though he may be able to summon up some of the quality of his own first perception of an idea, it may not be the way others would best first see it. The beginnings of perception may best lie in the *easiest* element, possibly in the first part of a series, possibly in the most recognisable element, or indeed in the part it is most easy to accept or digest.

## Clarity of Ideas

The thinking process leads to clarity of ideas, but these must be expressed, and one needs the words as well. There are many fine, clear thinkers who find it hard to explain themselves to others for lack of thought about the words, their arrangement, their intonation and orchestration. Thus a major part of a teacher's preparation should concern itself with the form of the initial presentation to the children, which will entail thought about position, attitude, body language and form of interplay between teacher and children, as well as the actual words themselves.

For ideas to work, for them to become usable, they must become part of action - they cannot remain in the head, they must have some concrete substance on which to work. The basically essentialist propositions of Piaget and his followers make a division between abstract and concrete that confuses the issues of the classroom, for learning is a process of making abstract ideas work through concrete materials so that children may retain them and make them work again autonomously. An abstract idea that does not work really is still in the mind of God alone, and may not be passed on. An abstract idea that may not be carried away and reused with profit autonomously is a convention of a basically ridiculous institution.

Thus, ideas must have material on which to work, and the choice of this material is something rather more important than what is commonly called 'resourcing'. This term has brought its connotations of supplies, technology and desirable goods which largely confuse the issue. The choice of a lesson's material depends on two conditions - its genuine applicability to the matter in hand, and its potential as learning material, which may be judged in terms of the amount of work that needs to be done before true learning may be achieved. The tendency of resource-based learning today is to provide 'stimulus material', concentrating on the attractiveness and motivational quality of the resource. This can often be a distraction from the

subject under consideration, and become an end in itself — the film that is so difficult to obtain and project becomes its own event, and the individual learning packages take up so much of the teacher's time that he becomes a resource provider rather than the director of learning. The major question remains 'How much work can I get out of this stuff, and how much of it will contribute to the matter in hand?' A subsidiary rider might be added 'without exhausting myself in the process'.

For we must remember that each bit of material chosen will have its own *modus operandi*, and this might require further explanation on the part of the teacher. Sometimes the method of using the material can take over the whole direction of the lesson - all rejoicing in its complexity (and its irrelevance); simulations and games often fall into such a trap. On the other hand, the explanations may be so complex that the material itself does not survive the explanation - the pupils are browned off by the time they get their hands on the material.

Yet the way the material is used will again govern the success of the lesson, and often material that has no immediate attraction can be made meaningful and exciting and workable by a novel way of using it. For example, we often use pictures in lessons and often they do not work because we have not thought out an operational context for the picture. We show and say, 'Look'; we play and say, 'Listen' but we have not asked the question the children must ask 'How?' This problem came to me very clearly when I wanted to use pictures in a lesson about the Middle Ages. My first thoughts were those any teacher would have had - get a big picture and concentrate on it. Yet I had tried so often before to do it this sensible way, and failed, and so I thought I would turn the whole thing on its head - I would choose a small picture, hard to see, and I would only allow a glimpse of it. The picture was from a book of hours and showed a typical rural scene in front of a castle. I told the children that this was a way of looking at pictures - we were going to get a glimpse into the past, seeing for a moment what a man saw four hundred years ago. When they felt ready I showed the picture round very swiftly and put it face down on the floor. The children had seen quite a lot, and all very accurately in that moment, but one, amazingly, had seen a bicycle! The rest of the class tried hard to persuade her not to be silly but I said it just might be true - possibly a very early inventor whose invention was forgotten for hundreds of years lived right there. The children wondered gloomily what to do - and then asked to break the rule, and have a second glimpse. I agreed, on condition they really looked for the bicycle, and for as much else as they could see. I flashed the picture again, and to my own astonishment I saw a tiny cartouche at the top with a thin gray painting of the chariot of the sun - with spoked wheels! We learned a lot about looking, and in two glimpses the children *knew* that picture well enough to recreate it in drama, to bring it alive.

Much time is spent by teachers on making the activities they wish to promote seem desirable and enjoyable. This is done from the best of motives, and often results in real enjoyment and more willingness to learn. But we are not in the entertainment business, and it is a sham on our part to suggest that learning is easy and delightful in itself. One little-regarded aspect of the teacher's contribution to the success of the lesson is his determination that thinking and learning shall happen because it is a matter of importance to him, the children, their parents and the world at large. School is children's work, and like all workmen they respond to a sound taskmaster who knows what he is doing and is reasonable about the relationship. An industrialist does not try to make his work jolly, or fun, or exciting - he tries to make it meaningful. This is a matter to which we shall return.

## **Pace**

One of the qualities of a good lesson that is often ill-judged is its pace. Even in streamed classes there remains a wide diversity of abilities, and also of sensibilities and temperaments that may change subtly or dramatically, day by day; but the widest divergence is between the teacher and his pupils - in most things to do with learning he is far ahead of them or, in the odd exceptional case, has the wit to make it seem so. To get the right pace for learning is most difficult but also desirable, for too slow (rare event) or, more commonly, too fast and some pupils will step off the bus.

The pace referred to is not the pace of teacher-talk - you may read Aristotle as slowly as you like and still get lost - it is the pace of propositions, ideas, and the pace of thinking and working of the children. This may only be judged from pupil participation. Pupil participation is often encouraged from vague, democratic notions on the part of the teacher; whether this works or not is hard to judge, but there are far more practical reasons to be advanced in its' favour. First, it gains the willingness of pupils most quickly, for once they have joined in they have made their bow to the subject and are held by some ties of loyalty; secondly, it gives the teacher a number of gauges to test the mood and understanding of the class; thirdly, it suggests (when honestly operated) that the teacher values the children's ideas and contributions to the work in hand, and recognises their part as learners; but, most important, it tells him when to slow down, or (very rarely) to speed up. The signals offered to the teacher in class responses are manifold and complex to a degree, but when well interpreted they may tell him when to move on, to go back, or to pause. Often the need is simply to pause, to admire, to reflect, to consider, and we pause too rarely in our lessons.

The debate must be genuine and open, and is always vitiated by the teacher who clearly knows the answers, but is hiding them in order to conduct that most servile routine of school - the guessing game. Each response on the part of pupils must be judged on its quality as a willing contribution, as a thoughtful attempt to go further, as a true contribution to a chain of cooperative thought. We often judge simply by marksmanship - how near to 'the truth' a child is getting, careless of the meaning of the child's attempt, and even more careless of the meaning of 'the truth'.

Yet we must know what is the end we are aiming at, we must have some agreement between teacher and children (and indeed between teacher and each individual child) on what is success. Of course we used to know this in the 'good old days' when we knew what was right and had the tests to prove it, but since then a dispirited confusion has set in, and all is doubt now. With the cane went the prize days, too, and we feel guilty enough if we have a star-chart behind the cupboard door. Yet children need to know when they have learned something, when they have done well, when they have taken a step. Commendation and encouragement would seem as much part of a good lesson as any other constituent. If the commendation is agreed between teacher and children, and they know securely what it is for, it will work in favour of learning, and give pleasure to both. Pleasure in success, that shared look around from the peak of a conquered mountain, is a part of teaching as much as it is a part of learning.

There we have them - clarity, wise choice of material and activity, drive and determination, the ear to listen and the heart to understand, the grace to commend success and the pleasure to share it - these are for me the constituents of fine teaching; but all these depend on clarity without which we may provide, drive and listen in vain, for there will be no success and no pleasure.

## **Sequence in a Lesson**

**Source:** 'Roundtable Reports', *The Journal of Museum Education*, Washington D.C., Vol.7, No.2, 1981

The following paper was written as a result of experiences in Washington where I was invited to teach for museum educators (mainly voluntary staff, called there 'docents') in order to show how children might relate more effectively to objects and pictures on display. Despite the somewhat unnatural circumstances of this work, I found it challenging and rewarding, and this paper explores an aspect of teaching I had not really thought about before. Is there a structure hidden beneath the apparent free-flow of open teaching? If so, can we define the steps a teacher takes in this sort of work? What follows is my first attempt to answer these questions.

### **Preparation - attitudes towards teaching**

The first stage is previous to the teaching, and concerns what I take in to it. I suppose the most obvious thing is a negative, I don't appear to take in lots of knowledge, even though in some areas I possess a fair amount, I take in a determination to focus down, to be economical to the point of parsimony. To many docents the most shocking thing about the work they have seen is that I concentrate on one object and usually on one aspect of the object. Worse still, the aspect is most usually in the domain of ideas not in the domain of information.

Let us illustrate: with the Museum Education students from George Washington University I explored one aspect of a large steam engine on show in the Museum of American History. I had read the sign-board and a pamphlet which was provided, and was soon awash with information, but the one piece I picked up was that the engine was often run without the condenser, in danger of blowing up presumably, because that meant more work and the risk was regarded as worth taking. I don't happen to know what a condenser is, but that seemed no great problem. So we explored for a little while a community with that steam engine in it, running without a condenser. We lived their lives as best we could (and of course the possibility of living other people's lives is limited, but the aim is to explore by trying, not really to live other people's lives, and to explore incidentally, which validates the means used) and we learned a lot, a lot about those who knowingly took the risk and about the balance of optimism and pessimism in those who had to run the risk.

In discussion afterwards, one member of the group explored with me the implications of this kind of work in terms of the particulars and the universals. We had noted that most new power sources carry risks (present day nuclear power is a very apt example) and that our steam engine exercise stood in the universal area of 'risky new power sources'. I had not worried too much about the particulars of that engine, but how I could use one particular to spin off into an exploration of the universal.

Thus, it is very clear that I carry in with me various attitudes about the purpose of education that may conflict with those carried in by some museum educators. For they celebrate individual items of supreme quality, whilst I use them for an exploration of humanity at large. This is not to say that I disregard for a moment the individuality and quality of items, but I aim to draw the larger implications.

So what are the attitudes I carry in? Difficult for me to see, for I am the expresser of the attitudes, mostly too busy to notice and categorise them. But briefly I would say they are threefold: I am concerned to explore ideas, and most often ideas on the

moral plain. I am not a very moral man, but I do have a profound respect for moral issues and a concern for the practice of morality. Secondly, I am work-centred: I have a passion for work as a way to lead to understanding and satisfaction; above all, I want others to share the pleasures and results of work, and I am by nature a setter-on. Directing the labour of others is a natural affinity of mine! Thirdly I want to emphasise respect - respect first of all for ourselves and for each other, for a willingness to listen and share, and a pride in achievement. But also I want to encourage a respect for quality. In my life I have been greatly privileged, inordinately so. I have seen, heard, read, tasted some of those things that inspire one towards that maddest of dreams, that there are pinnacles on which heaven rests, and some men have reached them and beckon us on up. The other factor is that I have been given respect, lots of respect and love, little if any of it deserved, and I have enjoyed it. In a world where so many people see so little of heaven, win so little respect, and in the blackness of their hollow can see only the struggle with others as a way forward, I want to say that you too can have some of the joy I have seen.

Two further things I carry in with me, much less high toned, but of great importance. I take in experience - quite a lot by now. Those watching me now see teaching such as I watched years ago, and lusted after, but I was a baby then and needed to grow slowly. Many kind people watching me now say how gifted I am and I growl back that I had few gifts at the start. Once I taugth so badly that I cried each night with rage and frustration like any baby should. I have had to itemise the gifts I wanted, and go buy them with experience.

This has meant years of doing teaching, true, but also years of thinking about it, writing about it, trying to itemise my shopping list of what I need, what I lack, how precisely I might practise to get it. I remember once wanting so badly to play thepiano, but seeing the vistas of practice, I realised that I must decide what I wanted most. I still yearn for the piano, still marvel at others' expertise, but I know I haven't time to touch it.

The third thing I carry in is the will for the pupils to win. That sounds a little like a fight, doesn't it, yet I do not fight people any more. My will is still partially my own egotistical desire for success, of course, and that is a drive we should never despise but always seek to control. The will to win grows better, stronger, more useful the more it becomes a will for the others to win, for us all to breast the tape together. To make this happen I have had to learn to concentrate, to push all of my attention, all of my powers out to the children. Many people watching wonder how I cope with audiences: like many other seeming constraints, audiences have been the best thing that has happened to me, for, because I must shut them out, I have learned the better to put all my attention on to the children. When teachers come to me with a problem, I say to them that it is, if only they could see it that way, the best thing they have. Tie my hands and I use my face and body better. Deny me pencil and paper and I learn to remember.

Concentration sounds very cerebral, and may be explained in cerebral ways, but it has not been my experience. Concentration comes with caring, with focussing our common instinct to love and teach others. What I focus is not my mind, but my heart. When children fall for me it is not because I am Svengali, not that I have used clever tricks, but because I first fell for them, and they saw that. Certainly I offer something for the children to respond to, largely by personalising my teaching. Both as a teacher and an observer of teachers I have learned that pupils are vastly interested in the person of their teacher, and try desperately to relate to that (when often enough the teacher is trying hard to de-personalise himself, assume the role of 'teacher', not that of John Fines or whomever). I recall a student conducting a brilliant

question and answer sequence and at the climax when he posed his key question (the most difficult, the one he had been aiming for) one hand shot up at the back. 'Yes', he cried exultantly, and the little girl said, 'Please sir, I know your Auntie'.

So I use a great deal of myself in my teaching, offering children lots of personal anecdotes - lots of information about me. I frequently refer to my own childhood, and demonstrate at these points with great clarity that I am trying to relate to their condition, to relate to them as person to person. Once they know I am glad to be there, to be with them, and am ready to have a real relationship, half of my problems as a teacher vanish at once.

It has taken many words to describe stage one, the 'what we carry in to teaching' bit, but I feel that this is the important stage, and reading it over, it looks like shorthand to me. For the rest of the stages are very technical, almost pragmatic. Beware, dear reader, of assuming that because these programmed behaviours may be learned, you can put them into action without first analysing what your stage one is. For it will be different, it should be different, and will involve many different patterns and sequences of learning. I, in describing mine, am not setting up a model to follow, but a framework whose constituents are variable, a way for you to examine how you might work out how you work and how you might work better.

Because my job takes me all over the British Isles and abroad to teach for others to watch, I am always meeting fresh groups of children. At the end of each lesson I yearn to go on and build more and more, to profit from the contacts I have established with children. I look back to my days as a class teacher with a feeling of loss, the loss of that day-by-day growth in learning together. But the process of meeting fresh groups has made me a specialist in those initial stages of meeting and making relationships out of which learning can grow. If I am good at anything in teaching, it is that. Let us examine the constituents of that stage.

### **The beginnings of a lesson**

In looking at what is effectively for me 4 or 5 minutes' work, I am surprised to find there are 10 constituents. This must seem hard and complex, but however I try I can't see a way of deleting one.

First of all I am polite. I think many teachers emphasise politeness but tend to view this as something pupils offer them, rather than what they offer the pupils. Even if this were to be the right balance (and there are plenty of arguments in its favour, I would agree) it is clear that pupils do need an example on which to model themselves. Teachers need to think carefully about the image of politeness they present: the felt and sincere 'good-morning' greeting as genuine welcoming rather than the ritual expression of words to cover the lack of contact; the proper sense of 'please', which is an understanding of the dimensions of what it is you are asking, what it involves, how much effort; the real 'thank-you' that is the surprise of an unexpected gift and the gratitude that goes with it.

Secondly, I show no marks of authority expressed by assumption, word or gesture. This is a difficult aspect to explain, yet an important one, on which so much of my success rests. First let us clear the negative aspect: I am not saying that for one moment I renege upon my responsibility as a teacher; I am in sole charge and things that happen are my responsibility. I decide on how and (most importantly) when things happen. For if I am not in charge, who can be? If I lose the responsibility to orchestrate the event so that changes happen roughly every ten minutes (to preserve concentration over the long stretch of time) and move, step by step towards a

satisfying conclusion, then once again, who will?

Yet I know the extent and power of adult threat. The experience of childhood is very largely made up of failure and correction - this is inherent in the complex business of learning for adulthood of any sort. As will be clear from future sections, my kind of learning depends on structuring towards success and for this to work I need to abolish all threat and all superiority.

Thirdly, the pace of my teaching is slow - to many watchers painfully slow. There are, however, two reasons for this. First, very simply, children don't like being made to jump. Babies will play boo with known faces, but the stranger who cries boo creates tantrums. Children hate to be taken unawares, to be rushed into things. Running for a bus, the adult knows why it is important to catch it, but the child does not and screams with frustration and fear, So I at this stage must move slowly and gently, not progressing to the introduction of b until a has been satisfactorily comprehended and explored.

The second reason for slowness is a teacher's reason. At this stage I am giving out lots of signals to the children about the nature of the relationship and the activity I plan, and this is relatively easy. Complex is receiving back information of two kinds: my signals are read, or are missing the mark, and I need to see how they are being read so that I can adjust the range; but also the children are sending back their own signals to me that need interpretation. Is that yawn a sign of tired children, bored children or nervous children? Is that kittenish smile mere coquetry or is it a response initiated by me? Is he ready to speak, or is he just uncomfortably shifting on the hard floor?

To do all this receiving and interpretation and redirection of my own signalling, I require time more than anything. I think fairly fast, but I know that I am often not too good on first impressions, and that quick decisions are often folly, so I must pace it slowly, for my sake as well as for theirs.

Fourthly, I must smile - oh what a book I could write about smiles and their many shapes and functions, but I will never get finished on this if I do. The smile resides not in the mouth, as clowns think, but in the eyes and in the lift of the cheeks. God gave me bright eyes, the optician gave me glasses, but God also gave me a saddish but highly mobile face. At rest it is a solid rather miserable pudding but in action (as I have learned) it can flash so many messages. I have had to learn to twist my face and pull it into many shapes to make it useful, and now it is working for me quite well. A six-year-old once said to me 'I like you for my teacher, you have such a funny face' and the audience laughed but I felt that was my Nobel prize. For I have worked at it all my teaching life.

But the smile can be vacuous if it only leads to another smile. It should lead to laughter too. Self-examination often drives me to be solemn, and although I respect above all moods the serious, I have also learned to reject the solemn. The greatest human bonding of the stage of introduction is shared laughter.

Let me pause to illustrate: at the National Archives we had quite a tricky beginning. In an elegant eighteenth century style reception room sat about 30 highly successful and well integrated docents, who were very much at home and who had the best chairs all around the walls. After a few minutes talk enter ten 17-year-old black students who had to sit in a horseshoe in front of me. The signals they gave were not so hard to read, but we had a document to read too - a police blotter from the day of the Lincoln assassination. I knew I must move with cat-like tread, but here I had to

get quickly to laughter, and so it wasn't long before those students were running a police station and I was being brought in on a charge of mugging an old lady. The document would wait - it had waited a century and more already - but the laughter wouldn't. And of course the reversal of roles and all the silly incidents involved gave me what I wanted, the shared laughter that bonds and relaxes. Soon those fine students were insisting that the docents join our game, and share it all too.

Fifthly, how is all this achieved? – well, very much (if not all) by eye contact. In our world of pseudo-politeness we often avoid eyes, feeling that the contact brings an intensity we don't happen to want at that moment, But at moments of deep inquiry, at moments of greatest sharing, at moments of true intensiveness, we do seek each other's eyes. The teacher must learn to do so all the time in this first stage, and to move the head from person to person to seek out all the eyes - for eyes can speak over long distances. They also carry the strongest messages - the glazed eye of the switched-off or the self-protective, the sparkling eye of the one who wants more of that stuff, the wandering eye of the insecure, hyperactive or lost child, the solemn eye of the wondering receiver, all bear messages. Why is the mother's cry of 'I see you' so strong an evocation of the bond she has with the baby? Why do the children's eyes follow the thing most desired, even before the pointing finger adds a level of communication above the primitive? These questions need no answer, nor do we need to articulate why the angry teacher shouts 'Look at me when I am talking to you' to the errant child.

We must take the message and use the signalling and receiving power of our eyes more and more. But we must also use our bodies. Gesture and movement are so powerful: I recall with great pleasure how at the Museum of American History these tools, so much more than words, helped the children explore the workings of a steam engine, so much so that one of them produced out of this a ballet of profundity and great beauty.

We must also be ready as teachers to communicate with our own bodies, for gesture that may seem extravagant in polite adult conversation can convey so much in the classroom. Watching myself on videotape I am often embarrassed to see a character as visually noisy as Mussolini, but I know the need to enlarge the meaning of words by shape and style of movement. And are we not too easily embarrassed, too frosty cold in our relationship? Our unwillingness to use touch as a medium of communication is understandable, I appreciate, but we deny ourselves much by not using it. Touch brings presence, immediacy, comfort, the strongest symbol of our sharing, and it can get you there faster with the disaffected than any way I know. Of all the 'naughty' children I have met, and I have met many, I would say that some are truly creative individuals, fighting off their bonds, but most are deprived of warmth.

I spoke earlier of the saddest aspect of childhood, its consistent experience of failure, a problem that all children meet, whether deprived or gifted (and many gifted children are heavily deprived, but that's another story). My eighth aim in my opening stage is to raise children's self esteem and to inspire them with optimism. Here I have a weapon in my hand (and it is a weapon rather than a tool) most teachers lack - I have the audience. In demonstration teaching there are a hundred and one ways available to me to down-grade the audience and up-grade the children. I can, for example, tell the children perfectly honestly that they are the most important people there, without them nothing would happen, and that the audience is either a nuisance we shall ignore like lords, or use as slaves for our needs. I do this partially to upgrade the children but of course it does also help in getting them to feel comfortable about the audience.

The teacher on his own has to use other devices, and because I am so rarely on my own I have little advice to offer, other than to say that the children must begin to feel like operators before they can operate. Role is a help - pretending to be someone more important than you are is one way to assume authority. Facing the fact that the task is hard and will demand great things of the children is another way. Often I say to children 'I give you such difficult things to do - are you sure you can manage?' And they do. Trust is another feature - 'I know you can work on your own very well, so I am going to shut up now, and leave you to it.' Praise is another and I will return to that. Simple things can help too, like saying to children that their answers to the question you have posed will be important so we will write them on the chalkboard just as they are spoken. At the National Portrait Gallery we wrote up a definition of heaven before visiting the throne of God, and it got better and better as the chalkboard filled. The effort to provide better answers was encouraged by the waiting time involved whilst I wrote.

Ninthly, we must establish our role as fellow learners. The difficulty here is one central to the whole role of the teacher at this stage, for it depends on honesty, a quality hard to find in circumstances so unnatural, but it also requires a kind of external vision which is directing the process and both shaping and using the honesty.

To get near an understanding of this complex process we should start with one of its most sharp and defined constituents: for example, the asking of real questions. In half a lifetime devoted to education I have heard some very spirited guff talked about open and closed questions, and have come to the conclusion that there is little point in the discussion on these grounds. There is, for example, nothing wrong with the question 'What time is it?' and nothing right with the question 'How do you feel about war?'

What we need to have are real questions, honestly posed, because you desire to know an answer or many answers. Children are often exposed to both closed question routines in which right or wrong is the result, and elaborate guessing games in which the teacher's fixed opinion has to be found, by hook or crook. Therefore, when faced with genuine questions, they pause to consider the nature and implications of this new game, and the teacher may have to wait.

When I asked the children at the Portrait Gallery to help me imagine the man who created the vision of the throne of God they had just seen, this was something I wanted to do and was asking their help. When they knew I was genuinely asking their help they gave it, and I shall find help from the idea of 'a lonely man in a shed' when I am privileged to see that object again.

But behind the honesty of purpose there must be a purpose for honesty, a reason for it to make us see how to use it other than just radiating virtue, and this leads me to my last point in this introductory phase of the lesson: the nature of the conspiracy to learn.

I said at the start that I am interested in work, that it has given me a lot, that I want to share it with others; but this doesn't blind me to the fact that work is hard and all men preternaturally lazy - me I often find most of all. Almost anything could stop me writing now - food, the doorbell, the newspaper, the desire for sleep. I have a pain in my hand (at least!) and my head aches. What makes me go on? - the desire to make, the desire to achieve, the desire to communicate, these things fuel the rushing pen.

But what makes children work, work freely and with pleasure? I believe we need to think hard about this in structuring our opening stage of relationship building, for if the foundations are not there, the building will at some stage fall. I think my honesty, my desire for an answer and my willingness to be a co-worker with my children makes them work. The desire to please is the hardest taskmaster I know, and children have a strong desire to please, to satisfy, to do well. But not just for me, with me as well, because they believe I am telling the truth. To lie to children, to attempt to hoodwink, con or in any way to deceive is to invite not just failure, but hatred as well. Beware, your sins of dishonesty will find you out.

## **Tuning in**

Whilst this stage of getting to know the children and them getting to know you has been going on, a new stage of teacher thinking should have got well started for it is essential for children who are readied for work that they should then have clear and achievable tasks to do. What follows suggests that, although the teacher will have come to the lesson with a great range of ideas about how it might go, the real planning takes place in situ. Believe me, I do not wish by this statement to denigrate lesson planning: before my lesson, my head churns with possibilities, and I work hard to extend the list and imagine them through the process of teaching so that I can see when the problems and possibilities might be. What I do not do is to decide what will happen, for only God is supposed to pre-ordain events, and there are many times of doubt when even the most godly must question His judgement.

During the initial stage, one picks up a whole range of information about what is possible that day. All sorts of factors contribute to this: moods, weather, state of health, conditions and events in general. The appearance of a child to ask who has lost a blue sneaker in this class right in the middle of your build-up can deflate it beyond repair, as all teachers know to their cost.

So you will learn that some things cannot be today, but some things can, and the next stage is to mesh this information alongside the material you are going to use. Luckily the material doesn't change from day to day, and your knowledge of that remains a blessedly stable factor.

Thus you might have some very still, quiet, defensive children who are rather weary to show an exciting spark-filled picture, for example. Your mind must now race to find the way of bringing the two together, but if you are wise you will first try to find what is at the centre of the experience you now plan, to know it for yourself, to find words to make it clear to others. The centre of the situation I have described is the noise/silence or the active/passive dimension, and my problem is to join them. Thus I will beguile the children with a paradoxical conundrum and say 'I expect you find my questions strange and provoking. A lot of children do, but sometimes these questions help us understand things. I'm going to give you a very strange question to brood about. It's not one of those questions you can answer straight away. You have to think about it. Ready? Well, here it is: Have you ever seen a noisy picture? I know, it does sound silly, but in a moment we're going to look at a picture I have found to be rather like noise. If I promise to keep very quiet while we stand and look at it, will you look at it with me, just quietly and restfully, and see what you can see?'

The edging-in process of being both clear but also wrapping the event in sheltering clothes is most important and it yields results. At the Corcoran I had quite a shy group looking at pictures and I wanted them to have the feeling of expressing their own ideas, so when they were looking I gave them adult secretaries to write down every word they said. When we got back to the group to report our ideas it was clear

to me that the children had some fear of expressing their ideas in public, so I used the following beguilement: 'I don't know what would be best, for you or for your secretaries to read. It's quite nice to listen to your own words read out by others, isn't it? But on the other hand, these being your own words, they might need your own voice. I'll leave it to you to decide.' Each child read his own piece.

### **The question**

Most explorations of material must begin with a question, a problem which supplies both the reason for looking at the material and a framework for exploring it. Most gallery visitors seem only able to scan material, never to penetrate it, because they lack a personal reason for looking ('I suppose it must be good, it wouldn't be here otherwise. So I'll take a quick look, pay my respects') and they lack a way of looking. Thus, when my children faced the steam engine with the need to find out how it worked (because we were going to use that information later, not just because ...), we had to find a starting point. We would gain nothing from just staring vaguely at the lot, and all the children agreed we should start where the power began and try to understand that, ignoring all else. Slowly we allowed our eyes to follow the line of impetus of power, pausing at its connections, and by the end of a very quick look we did know quite well how it worked - enough to go back and explain it in mime, which was a very hard task indeed.

The question that begins the process of exploration needs, then, four constituents: it must be simple, not daunting or complicated, it must be clear (must make sense in pupils' terms, which can be a different sort of clarity from the teachers), it must be seen to be answerable in the time and circumstances, and to be worthwhile from the pupils' points of view. Above all it must lead straight into action for the pupils, for they have been long enough with teacher and need a change in which all those claims about the children's work having primacy must be honoured.

But before they rush off into action one more wind of the elastic is needed: you can think great things one moment and forget them the next, so the ideas must be written down - just well enough for the pupil to read them back, no more is needed. And of course everybody will write their ideas because I am the kind of teacher who wants to hear everybody's answers, not just those old eager beavers with their hands up, and if everyone has something on their paper no one can respond 'I dunno'.

### **Children at work**

Whilst the children are at work, it is time for the teacher to watch and think. He can see how they are coping with the task, where the problems are, where they are edging forward. He can observe and note the varied capacities of the group. Some he can help, pick up the birds who have fallen out of the nest, but if he is wise he will leave well alone most of the time, receiving clues from the class in action and thinking about the next stage. Lots of teachers comment that I always seem to know precisely where to go next, and are genuinely surprised to find that I use the children's action time for working out just that.

### **Reporting back**

The teacher must be ready at the end of stage 3 to welcome back the children as successful explorers, to compliment them on their discoveries and express amazement at their ability to cope with so many problems en route. I will discuss this attitude in more detail later, but suffice it to say that this must be no sham, for children can see through really good acts.

The teacher must be in a listening mode, ready to receive all contributions and process them in two ways: first, to make all positive and second, to mould it all in the simple direction already established, not confusing the issue or allowing irrelevance to mess the simplicity. In doing this, the teacher must not damage the child's communication, nor steal it by prettying it up beyond recognition. Nor must he throw it away. All must be seen as categories of the heart of the matter.

This means hard listening and hard thinking, lots of patience with stumbling speech. I often tell children at this stage 'When we can say it straight away, nine times out of ten it is because it's easy. When someone is reaching for words and just can't quite get them, I usually think that that person is on to something big. So we all listen hard, and try to help.' At the Corcoran a girl said of one picture 'It would cost more in the shops, it's kind of muzzy' and could get no further, but by listening and thinking sympathetically we began to see that she was saying that some paintings that were straight representations were more like photographic records, but this one was more like an artist's vision.

As the responses to the initial question accumulate into an untidy heap, two aims must be held in mind: first, the good must be praised, so that the children who have found the good will go out and find better. Secondly, the material found must be organised so that its significance shows in a shape with a forward moving front.

The function of praise is vital at this stage, but one must be clear why it is being used, otherwise it will degenerate into a vapid promotion of 'niceness'. I use praise because I need it for imprinting success, it is a part of learning, and without it learning slows down, often to a stop. Praise and correction are vital tools in the process of development, but praise wins where correction fails. A thoughtless, wilful child needs correction to protect him or her from danger - personal danger like creeping towards the fire and social danger like developing nasty habits such as spitting at others. You can stop these things with a slap and there's nothing wrong with that (except the guilt the adult feels, I suppose). But you can't promote learning with slaps as the lisping child at the start of *The Way of All Flesh* tells us so clearly.

Praise is a reward all of us enjoy. I pretend not to notice the clapping at the end of my sessions, brush off the words of thanks, but I enjoy it, it confirmed me in my vocation. And this is the function of all praise, not only saying 'Well done' about the past, but much more importantly 'Go on in the same way.' For praise to be effective, it must say why you have found the action or the statement good - the mere cheer is nice, but the statement 'I liked the words you used there, will you say it again for us, they were too good and thoughtful for us just to pass by' will guide me to a deepening understanding.

The other teacher function at this stage is to order the material contributed by the children, and as I have said already once, to order it pointing forwards. There are two immediate ways of doing this: to categorise or to sequence, and it is important that the teacher chooses the right format, in terms of the material contributed and the tasks that lie ahead.

When I was working on the police blotter at the National Archives, it seemed very clear to me that I should group the students' perceptions in terms of sequence. It was clear that the document was written in sequence, as events happened, with pauses of varying length in between. Clearly, if we were to look at the document as a representation of events, then we would need to attempt to resurrect those events with its aid and add to them the extra dimension of time.

Many objects may be studied through the dimension of time. Looking at cultural objects in museums I often feel the absence of the maker and the moment of making; and perhaps the explorations of objects, just as presented rather than in terms of how they were made, may be one of the problems for pupils trying to find a focus.

To categorise is a very different activity indeed. It involves moving the materials around under different headings and searching for clearer, simpler and (above all) fewer headings. Looking for the word (and if you can find one word, that is the supreme moment) is a hard activity for teachers, for they must do it whilst listening. This involves a splitting of the mind but no splitting of the face. Whilst half the mind is thinking 'Where is the centre, the heart of all this' the face must be saying 'I hear, and I understand' with absolute sincerity.

Once the centre of what the children have discovered is found by the teacher, it must be interpreted to the children by the teacher. This point is easy to miss because the teacher who has thought it all through (and is justly proud of his discovery) can simply forget that no one else has done that thinking through which alone makes sense of the discovery. So a phase of explanation is necessary and it must be done slowly.

To get the slowness required it is useful to assume a meditative mood in which the thinking through is role-played by the teacher: 'Do you remember when we said that piece about Art - remember, well I was quite excited by that. It set me off thinking, because Denis here had been using that word 'reality,' and lots of people seemed to perk up at that, and it made me think a bit - is it possible to divide pictures that way - this one more about reality, that one about Art, I don't know, what do you think? ... let's think about just these two words then, to see whether we can see more in them ...'

### **Towards the second piece of children's work**

The steady growth towards understanding of the second task is important, for the pupils must catapult off in real knowledge of what they are doing. This fifth stage of the lesson is crucial if real depth is to be achieved, if the central question is to be answered. All that has been described so far has been preliminary to this. So when they seem ready to go, hold them one more moment and check.

In stage five, the teacher is once more a watcher, but now he has an additional worry - time. I often say that my best teaching aid is my watch: quick glances tell me whether I have been going on too long in one phase, and need a change of concentration; but more importantly, in this stage it tells me how much time I have got left to satisfy the children, the material we have been using and the direction we have been going. The most foolish lesson of all is one that runs out of time and yet has to finish; the best is one where all can see the point they have reached, and feel good about that achievement, and then the bell goes.

So the teacher is now busy calculating what can be done in the remaining time and how fast he dares to go. But he must not communicate his worries to the children, they must be allowed to explore the question reflectively, quietly, unhurriedly. As so often, the teacher needs total internal tension and to express total external relaxation.

There may be time for retracing and further exploration stages. Children can go back and back to their material with ever deeper, more refined questions. Let us assume, however, that time is short, and in receiving the children's ideas resulting from their

exploration in stage five, the teacher is once more arranging the results either in sequence or in categories towards a final conclusion, the end of the lesson.

## **Ending**

How may we best understand what we have found in all this work? Well, the teacher can just announce it all. On the other hand he can orchestrate a reading from the children's records where they are the announcers. Both techniques were used in the lesson at the National Portrait Gallery: at the beginning, when the children had filled a chalkboard with definitions of heaven, I stood back and assumed a parsonical stance and voice and turned it all into a sermon. At the end of the lesson, when each child had prepared a piece on who was the man who created the throne of God, I organised a quiet reading, moving without comment from one to the other, emphasising the importance of the moment, but also emphasising that it was all theirs by my keeping silence, only touching a shoulder to indicate the next person to read.

On the other hand, there may be time to heighten meaning by an act of translation, which in learning terms is the ultimate in understanding. To take what is written and turn it into pictures, to take pictures and turn them into movement, almost any act of translation is a challenge to total understanding. With the students at the National Archives (despite very little time) I asked them to take the Lincoln document and turn it into instructions for an artist. One group briefed a novelist, because the document lacked background; another briefed an abstract painter, because so little was known for sure, so little of the information had sufficiently hard edges; one group briefed a musician about a piece that started slow and orderly, was suddenly hit by chaos and pandemonium, then suddenly ended in silence, like the end of the document.

Whatever is done, it is the teacher's duty to make clear at the end what has been achieved, that the children did it, that it has been worthwhile, and that there is more to do. Whatever devices and games have been used to focus attention and provide the framework for exploration must now be disassembled so that the end may be seen clearly, and not mixed up with the means. The achievement must have its own satisfaction, far and above the routines that allowed it to start. It is not the oxygen bottles that got to the top, but the climbers and they must know the summit they have reached, and once more be congratulated.

## **The teacher as learner**

And at last the teacher can sit back and survey all the mistakes he made, all the wrong judgements, and all the little things that worked, and, with thought, might be made to work again. Like children, I can't remember without writing, so I scribble all this down, and try to see the meaning. Why don't you, the reader, try this out now? I have chosen to couch this paper in terms of sequence. To check your understanding of what is being said, and to check its worth, why don't you engage in an act of translation, wherein you categorise what has been put as a sequence? It is worth doing, but like all good learning, it is hard. I set no easy goals.

## ***Training Student Teachers: Your Turn to Dish Out the Stars***

**Source:** *Times Educational Supplement*, 2 May, 1997

During the 30-odd years when I was a teacher trainer I gave little thought for planning. There, as in all phases of education, I believed in trying to do this day a good job with the inheritance of yesterday - to catch the moment, sometimes even the right moment. But there was one little dream I used to have that might count as planning. It was a silly notion, but I thought that one day I might be offered a lot of money to set up a new, better kind of teacher training college and I would found the College of Three. Three staff that is, for one of the things that strikes you all the time in teacher training is the vast array of redundant staff.

One of my staff would be a comedian - my preference at that time was Eric Morecambe for, although I naturally wanted my students to be able to make children laugh, I felt that he could also teach projection, posture and, above all, timing. Poor man, he would have had to work very hard indeed.

The second member of staff would be a salesman I knew who, although often tired, was never short of energy because he was powered by an invincible spirit of hope. He had a lot of messages to give.

Finally, of course, there would be me. I can do lots of things in teaching moderately well, but my best quality is listening. I have a good listening face and I am honourable in my listening - I pay attention. So I would teach the students how to listen, to children, of course, almost never to adults or authorities (except us three, sometimes).

You will not be surprised to learn that the College of Three remained a dream, but it does in many ways permeate the planning set out below. I have been asked to provide a 10-session course for teachers in training (although I know a number of experienced teachers who might also find it useful).

The entry qualifications are fairly simple: optimism, charity and a sense of humour. I am assuming these days that the students will have a degree, but I regard this as more of a burden than an advantage. However, pilgrim, we can still travel,

### **Session One: Stepping on stage and assuming the mask**

Becoming a teacher requires a massive personality change, or rather the capacity to assume another personality. Sincerity will get you nowhere unless you have a passionate desire to rival Saint Sebastian. Such cynicism, so early. What a shock! But to be more down to earth we must learn a different code of behaviour to be a teacher.

The traditional shaping of an Englishman is aimed at restraint, quietness, self deprecation and avoidance of contact (not least of the eyes). I know things have changed recently, but not that much, so we must learn to assume the character of a teacher who walks tall, looks people in the eyes and carries an air of conviction and purpose. He or she must speak clearly and directly, not necessarily loudly, but must have a voice that is loud enough when necessary for playgrounds and halls.

But this is not a total shuffling off of the old character and the assumption of a new and seemingly false one. Teachers in one sense offer themselves as the ultimate reward. Children love to find out details about their teachers, to discover aspects of

their life outside school, and an appropriate revealing of this from time to time can be wonderfully helpful in a developing relationship. Of all the stories I tell children, the ones I tell about myself hold the strongest attention.

So part of the trainee teacher's job is to learn (and assume) the mask, but also to examine themselves and find out who they are and what they have to offer to the hungry hordes.

### **Session Two: Communication – listening, talking, face, hands and body**

Talking in public is one of those skills that seems to go against our own training and socialisation. We are bred to be quiet and undemonstrative, to suspect and dislike the noisy and arrogant people who invade our space. We are also not well trained in listening - we perhaps have had enough politeness drummed into us to wait till the other person has finished speaking before we leap in with our five pennyworth, but that is what it often is - we are waiting our turn, not really listening.

We need to listen to children to find out where they are, and they are often not just a long way behind where we hoped they might be, but also in some place completely different. If we don't listen and just blind on regardless then we need not be surprised to discover very shortly that we have lost nearly everybody. This feedback is important, but listening also feeds out signals: it tells the children you are concerned with them and what concerns them; it tells them you will be patient and willing to go at a suitable pace for them to learn; it gives them a chance to establish their role in the learning partnership.

To listen properly, you need to give a child your whole face and to signal that you are really taking things in rather than just saying 'ah ha' while in the back of your mind you are writing a shopping list. Your eyes, your face, your body all have a part to play, just as when you yourself are communicating.

You must learn to talk - most teacher trainees go down with bad throats after a week in school. They haven't learned to talk in classrooms using the soft yet clear and confident voice that will not strain the speaker nor challenge the listeners to have a fight. So this session, practice listening and talking - believe me you will need to work as hard on this one as on any two other sessions.

### **Session Three: Knowing what you know and how to find out more**

Most teacher trainees would be shocked to find themselves classified as 'learned'. Their higher education has probably convinced them that they are unutterably stupid. Yet in truth they are a highly select group in terms of a comprehensive population (the ones they will be teaching) and they do know a lot. Their problem is accessing their knowledge – pulling it out in a useful format, making it available first to themselves and then to their pupils. This needs practice – quite a lot of practice in fact, but it is worth the effort, otherwise all that knowledge will fester, unused and increasingly unusable.

A second aspect under this heading is what the trainee teacher knows about finding out. Their higher education should have trained them into being highly effective researchers. But even if this has not been formally done on their courses, students will have learned in the very process of doing their work some techniques of finding out. These must be rescued and practised at this stage in order to put them at the service of the intending teacher. Of course, a good teacher spends much of his or her time teaching children how to find out, but the same teacher, to be effective, must continually search for new knowledge, first experiences, different resources to fund the classroom. So, once more, practise finding out.

#### **Session Four: Selection, simplification, clarification, explanation**

Of course, knowledge alone is going to get you nowhere. Just telling children undifferentiated information will not help them. Some information is of course important – you need to know that England travels on the left, for example, but even that is no use unless you have learned in practice your left from your right and can use this knowledge readily. Thus the teacher's job is to select the key material, to render it comprehensible to young minds and get them to a position to start using knowledge.

This point is a key point – often teachers can learn quite quickly to select and to simplify, but when it comes to explaining to children what they want them to do with information, they fall flat. Often enough that is because they have not thought it through themselves. So this session, practise processing materials for children and explaining what to do with them.

#### **Session Five: Praise and blame**

When I watch teachers, I hear lots of blame and little praise. Understandable in a busy, taxing profession, but it is counterproductive. If blame is frequent, it will be ignored in the end and if only a few children get praise, and that infrequently, then it is not worth struggling to succeed.

Consider what you think is important to blame in your classroom. I blame not listening (especially to each other) because that is important to my style of teaching. If I did find lying or cheating or not trying I would want to know why rather than be anxious to blame. So, make your list.

Praise is vital; it is what makes good classrooms work. I use buckets of it. The value of praise is threefold: it makes the receiver happy and makes for a happy atmosphere, but above all it provides a model of success. Most of the time children have little clue about what you want from them: but when you say 'My, my, you are doing very well today, let me read your answer to the whole class' then the listeners say in their minds 'So *that's* what he wants from us. I will try to give him some and then maybe he will pat my head too.' It is simple, it works and it leads to happiness. But at first it is hard to practise - we are too empathically tight-fisted to say 'Well done' in a noisy open fashion. So, go on and practice – what will you say, how will you say it? 'Have a star, sunshine' or what?

#### **Session Six: Writing on the board and display**

When I was a teacher trainee, I despised the whole process, I fear, but the class I cut completely was one on blackboard writing and display. If I could whistle myself back in time, that would be the only class I would attend every session. Writing on the board is necessary all day every day, and if your presentation is sloppy and careless, how can you criticise it in a child? So, you need to get titles up, you need to establish vocabularies, you need to keep notes in a discussion so that children's contributions are not lost. You need to draw diagrams and sketches and, if you are me, you are severely handicapped.

Similarly, you will need to display your own materials and children's work effectively in the classroom and the simple pointers you learn in this session will save you a lifetime's agony. Why, in the middle of a superb session on reading a picture does my Blu Tack come unstuck and the picture falls to the floor amid wild giggles all round? I never took this session, you see.

### **Session Seven: Designing lessons, keeping records**

No, this is not a session about keeping a teaching practice notebook with objectives underlined twice in red, nor is it about writing a neat 55 in the right column of your mark book. Planning and assessment can sound so tedious that you switch off straight away, whereas in fact in this session you should do your hardest thinking of the course.

First of all, in lesson design let us remind ourselves that this not a record of what I the teacher intend to do, but of what the children are going to do, and, above all, why.

Every lesson should have a real purpose, even if it is Friday and we are all tired and we are going to play together. Other good purposes are 'The need to finish off a lot of things and I need a bit of a rest, 'We do the same as last time, but in a different way because I don't think they really got it then.'

The best lessons, I find, are lessons where I am helping to use knowledge the children already have in a practical way with the result that they know what they know and understand it. A quick example: recently I had a class of children who had been to the *Mary Rose* at Portsmouth and now 'knew' a lot about it. So I gave them the chance to take on roles as experts: divers, archaeologists, historians, fund raisers, museum experts etc. Then I introduced an imaginary character who came from a very poor country where, by chance, they had a 16th century ship sunk in one of their ports. Should they go ahead and raise it?

The experts consulted and began to give their advice, but some disagreed. Without lots of money it can't be done. If the ship breaks up when you are raising it, all will be lost. If you get it, tourism will double, etc, etc. By the end of that exciting lesson, the children really were experts and had some genuine interior understanding of the knowledge they had, but which might otherwise have slipped away.

Second, think how you are going to find out whether your children are successful in their learning. Those *Mary Rose* children were; they could show me and tell me. In other lessons I might need to look more deeply. Consider how you are going to find out how well your children are doing, and how you are going to record it so that it doesn't slip away out of your mind.

### **Session Eight: The structure of schools and the law and the teacher**

A bit boring, this one, but vital to success. Some trainee teachers enter schools thinking that the head and the deputies are the important people. Clever ones know that a quick word each day with the secretaries and the caretaking staff will ensure a happy life - these are the important people. Find out about governors, and how school policies are devised.

Check what the Government says you must and you mustn't do. Consider your own position and safety. You may feel that you are the world's answer to children's problems and, in wanting to help them, step in deep waters. An interview without witnesses is not always bad but sometimes can lead to bad results. Not reporting clear breaches of school rules may make you feel you are on the children's side, but the senior staff will not be happy. Look it all up, make some lists of dos and don'ts - not many, just the vital ones.

### **Session Nine: Recognising problems**

You are not the school's medical officer, clearly, and as soon as you see a problem do your best to pass it on. But a teacher is a vital mesh in a very faulty system which

children fall through every day. A 13-year-old falls into a fit of sobbing in your class for no apparent reason. What to do? What might it be? Is it your business? Could you help anyway? How? A 10-year-old is falling asleep regularly in class. Ask yourself the same questions. What might those spots be? Why is Jemima always at the sick room? Those are strange bruises, Alec. Yes, she smells, what am I supposed to do about it?

Read it up, get some advice, don't wait for problems to happen and then go check the literature.

### **Session Ten: Managing time and energy**

Sometimes, as a young teacher, I found myself yearning for a carer who could organise me. I would set vast amounts of work and then have tons of marking. I would make huge promises to classes ('I will take you all to a dig') and when the promises fell due I realised how much I would have to pay. I would be awake half the night worrying about why I seemed to get across Peter Haigh so badly.

So, in this session make some plans that can help you with time and energy. First, assure yourself time off, recreation and relaxation (not least, enough sleep). Second, look at the loads you create for yourself (especially in marking) and work out a system to manage that. Try not to scowl and groan and worry. Have fun, even if you have to write it into a timetable.

Now go to school and practise. Check how well you are doing. Keep a little diary in which you allow yourself to confess the bad bits, but only if you can match them with good bits. Don't forget how important you are, how important your job is and how important it is for you to succeed and enjoy your success.