

# LIBERAL EDUCATION

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# GENERAL EDUCATOR

Journal of the NATFHE General Studies Section

# LIBERAL EDUCATION

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Including General Educator

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## Editorial

This edition of Liberal Education has been produced by an editorial group with nominees from both ALE and the NATFHE General Studies Section. It therefore includes General Educator, the first edition of a Section journal. As secretary of the Section, I am convening this editorial group.

This arrangement stems from the resignation last summer of Ken Swallow, editor since 1980. It will be hard for his successors to approach the standard he set.

There will be another edition next term and we hope to bring out three during 1988-89. I apologise for the gap while the new arrangement was being worked out.

We need articles by and addressed to ordinary teachers in the field of general education. (If possible, please type, using double spacing.) We also need letters and pictures. By all means phone me (01 903 4940) if you want to discuss an idea for an article.

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# Association for Liberal Education Policy

The A.L.E. is concerned that education should help people to continue their personal and social development beyond statutory school-leaving age.

The Association believes that education should

- help people to fulfil their roles as citizens
- encourage and stimulate breadth of mind
- assist in the development of a satisfying social life both in and out of work
- promote independence in and empowerment of students
- develop a critical awareness of the social, political, cultural and economic factors operating in our society
- develop linguistic skills and reasoning competence.

These principles are particularly appropriate at a time of social and economic change.

The Association is committed to Equal Opportunities in education. We believe:

- (a) that positive action is needed to improve access to education for all disadvantaged and oppressed groups
- (b) that strategies are needed to combat prejudice against these groups.

Implicit within these principles and strategies is a critical approach to education and broader society. This can only be achieved when the curriculum contains time specifically devoted to the aims of general education

## Changing the image of General and Communication Studies

**Marilyn Fairclough**

At a time when many colleges are reducing or abolishing General and Communication Studies Aylesbury College is actually increasing the number of classes.

How have we done it?

1. We have provided programmes that students see as relevant to their needs.
2. We have experimented with the timetable, arranging for half day, whole day or 3 day block sessions, instead of the more usual 1 hour per week.
3. We are making courses more student-centred, involving students in the content, method, assessment and evaluation of their courses.
4. We are flexible when responding to requests from vocational staff, and encourage vocational staff to come and see what we are doing and to make suggestions of their own.
5. We are team teaching with other Communication staff and with staff from other departments.
6. We have responded positively to the new City and Guild 201 Engineering certificate and the new BTEC 1st Certificate in Engineering.

7. We broadcast our successes so that everyone knows when moderators, employers and students say we are getting it right.

8. We have regular team meetings and workshops.

#### Pilot Courses 1986/87

With the support of our Head of Department, and the Head of Department of Engineering and Technology, we experimented last year by arranging Communication on 4 full days (9.00am - 7.00pm) spread throughout the year. BTEC 1st Year Electrical Engineers and BTEC 1st Year Mechanical Production Engineers joined together. There was a theme for each of the 4 days: 'Health', 'Job Satisfaction', 'Stereotypes, Myths and Prejudices' and 'Working as a Team'.

There were two separate but parallel groups of BTEC 2nd Year Mechanical Production Engineers. Their themes were: 'Communication at Work', 'Rights and Responsibilities at Work', 'Setting up your own Business' and 'Job Search Skills'.

At the end of each day, students wrote an (unsigned) evaluation of the day. The evaluations were overwhelmingly in favour of continuing the format of a whole day at a time for Communication.

Examples of comments were:

'Today in my opinion has been the most interesting and educational session we have had.' (Stereotypes, Myths and Prejudices) 'I thought today was very creative, especially for those who have never spoken in front of other people and who have never had first hand experience of being on a committee.' (Communication at Work)

Advantages of half or whole day sessions: time to pursue a topic in depth in one day, student motivation is maintained, (it is often difficult to sustain when there is a break of a week). There is time for a topic to be introduced through speakers, video, case studies etc..., for students to work through an assignment, and for students and tutors to assess through discussion, and finally for the day to be evaluated.

Several staff or outside speakers can be involved, all contributing in a different way to the topic.

With the continuing support of the Heads of Department and the Section Heads in Engineering and Technology we arranged the following:

Craft Engineering classes: Half day every 4 weeks

BTEC Engineering classes (1st & 2nd Years): 1 day 4 times a year

BTEC Engineering classes (3rd Years): 3 day intensive course in the Summer Term

We have 2 Communication rooms, and the classes are timetabled on a rota system to make maximum use of the rooms.

Both rooms are resourced with TV, video and OHP.

In one room (A10) half the floor area is carpeted, with easy chairs.

There are plans to build a studio in the other half, for audio and video recording. We are still short of cupboards and shelves for materials, and for storing student work. We also need up-to-date simulation telephones with an answering machine.

There is still a long way to go. The second Communication room needs to be carpeted and made more attractive. The environment makes an enormous difference when we are role playing interviews or committees.

#### Student centred learning

Students have indicated that they find a student-centred approach more interesting, they feel more involved, and they get more out of the sessions.

For example:

a. students taking responsibility for their own learning

Two parallel groups of BTEC 2nd Year Engineering students each formed committees with an agenda item 'Organisation of a General Studies programme for a day in July'. The only proviso was that the programme would be one that Heads of Department and Moderators would perceive as being relevant to their course. One class planned a visit to London to the Science Museum and the British Museum. They costed the trip, produced a timetable with details of the journey, filled in the required forms for college, and compiled questions to evaluate the day in terms of organisation and content.

The second class was unable to reach agreement after 2 meetings. They were upset that the other class was having a day out, but learned, one hopes, that one must suffer the consequences of one's action (or ineffectual inaction in this case).

This year students are going to be asked to write their own integrated assignment.

b. student assessment of self and peers

Students were asked to assess their own presentation skills and those of their peers using a list of criteria.

A team of teachers gave marks to student teams. The teams were asked to nominate anyone who had made such a contribution to their team that they deserved an extra mark, and anyone who had contributed so little that they should lose a mark. The students initiated a discussion on quality v. quantity of suggestions, ideas, tasks done.

#### c. student evaluation

Students were asked to write at the end of each day

what have you learned?

what have you enjoyed?

how could the day have been improved?

Students were seen the following week with a summary of the comments. Suggestions were taken up eg. more outside experts invited, and it was pointed out to them that the changes to the programme were at their suggestion.

This system seemed to increase motivation and involvement.

#### d. student-centred methods

A good example is the new assignment we wrote for BTEC 3rd Year Engineering students:

### THE NEW SECRETARY

#### Tasks

You are the management team of an engineering firm:

1. Give the firm a name, decide its location, facilities, staff employed and nature of its business.
2. Your secretary is leaving:

Draw up an advertisement for a replacement.

3. Draw up a contract of employment for the new secretary.
4. Look at the replies to the advertisement (CV's and brief covering letter). Discuss what questions you are going to ask the applicants.
5. Interview the applicants. Decide who to offer the job to.
6. Give and receive feedback from the other teams, staff and 'secretaries' on what was learned from the assignment.

N.B. The secretaries were volunteer staff from the Business Studies Department, the Catering and Creative Arts Department and General and Community Studies Department, although students did not know this until the end of the assignment.

N.B. Students had had previous experience/knowledge of interviewee skills/conditions of employment/employment and equal opportunities.

#### Accommodating requests from other departments

1. BTEC diploma in Computer Studies staff asked for a 2 day Induction on presentation Skills and Team Building. Staff from Computer Studies took part alongside the students.

2. Motor Vehicle staff asked for Craft and BTEC classes to be timetabled on the same day to release staff for team meetings.

3. We were asked to provide a morning on Voice and Speech for 2 separate groups of Hotel Receptionists.

#### Team teaching within and between departments

1. Communication tutor went with Computer Studies staff and students to Amersham College to look at resources. This identified several student needs that the tutor was able to cover in subsequent sessions.

2. Staff from Business Studies and Catering & Creative Arts role played for a Communication assignment.

3. Communication staff team teach with 2 groups of CITB Construction, and with 2 BTEC Engineering groups.

#### Responding to changes in examination

##### 1. City & Guilds 201 Engineering

Students cover syllabus requirements on Health & Safety and Industrial Studies.

They also still take City & Guilds Communication Level 1.

##### 2. BTEC 1st Certificate in Engineering

We have followed the BTEC guidelines:

'Communication should be heavily weighted in all courses'

'The need to prepare students for adult life and work'

'Readiness to question existing approaches and to seek views of employers, students and others'

'Openness and willingness to collaborate closely with others from widely different specialisms'

'Self assessment and peer assessment'

'The process as well as the product assessed'

'Integrative assignments that particularly include communicating and working with others'

#### The Way Forward

##### 1. Staff development is being arranged:

visits to the firms where students work

workshops to write more assignments

workshop on audio visual aids and viewing videos

workshop on self assessment/peer assessment

##### 2. More interchange of tutors, so a class will have a variety of tutors with a variety of expertise.

##### 3. Working closer with vocational staff.

##### 4. More involvement with employers.

##### 5. More involvement of students eg. in preparing an assignment.

##### 6. Better resources Communication rooms.

##### 7. A policy on Health Studies (we are lagging behind other colleges in this area).

##### 8. Team meetings to review the innovations, and improve the quality of courses. At present we have an average of 56 hours a week of Communication across 3 departments.

We would like to develop the work we are doing into the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Business Studies.

In conclusion, two comments that confirm the success we are having with re-vamping Communication.

1. A member of staff in the Hairdressing section overheard a student say, 'I can't wait for Communications next week.'

2. 'I would like to take this opportunity to comment on the efforts made by the General Studies staff during my informal visit to the college. The enthusiasm and imagination shown by staff and students was a credit to the college. I hope that this format for general studies and communication continue in the future.'

(BTEC Moderator 1987)

This article is intended to be part of a series looking at Education and Training opportunities for unemployed adults. As many unemployed people are referred to Colleges running Restart courses, Job Clubs, JTS, APT and

Community Programme Training by Job Centres, the purpose of this article is to analyse the process involved in this initial contact "The Restart Interview".

The background research owes much to conversations I have had with the unemployed people I meet, as part of my role as the co-ordinator for MSC funded adult provision at Wigston College of FE in Leicester and to the conversations I have had with Restart Counsellors at Job Centres, some of whom have allowed me to sit in on their interviews as an observer.

Many of us in Further Education are at present working on MSC funded courses that form options on The Restart Programme "Menu". These courses are specifically targeted at the long-term unemployed and recruited, almost exclusively by Job Centre Restart teams.

On 1 July 1986 Restart teams were formed nationally, operating from within large Job Centres. The staff are often recently promoted to Executive Officer, the most junior management grade in the Civil Service, usually from within the Job Centre's existing staff, although in recent months some Restart counsellors have been transferred from Unemployment Benefit Offices, historically very different branches of the Civil Service, displaying different attitudes to their clients. The management of the Benefit Offices and Job Centres are to be one in the same where previously co-operation had been minimal. This will only serve to reinforce in a client's mind that a Restart Counsellor is assessing their entitlement to benefit and compound the problems faced by Restart counsellors in doing their job effectively.

### Directive

Training for Restart counselling lasts five days. The counsellors are trained in directive counselling with a little non-directive counselling in role play situations.

In reality the directive counselling must take priority as counsellors, due to their heavy caseload of 45 interviews a week, coupled with an expectation by their superiors to "close an interview" by referral onto one of the nine options or a suitable alternative and the need to record it as a "positive outcome" on one of the MSC's copious monitoring forms. The nine options on the menu are at present:

- 1 A job
- 2 A place on a Job Club
- 3 The New Job Training Scheme

# Restart — ways out of unemployment?

**John Adsley**

- 4 Community Programme
- 5 A Restart Course
- 6 Other Training Opportunities
- 7 Start Your Own Business
- 8 Jobstart Allowance
- 9 Voluntary Projects Programme

The official view of Restart is that attendance at the initial interview is compulsory but that a tenth option is to decline the Job Centre's help. The compulsion is indicated in the initial letters that are sent out to the long-term unemployed, a definition that was extended to those unemployed six months, where initially it had been those unemployed over a year, and is highlighted in the concluding paragraph which states:

"Please let me know if you cannot come to see me because under the benefit rules, people who do not attend interviews without good cause may lose their benefit."

The letter allows the person to reply if an inconvenient time or date had been suggested and an alternative can be negotiated with the counsellor. Despite the threatening nature of the concluding paragraph the overall tenet of the letter is that the interview has been made to help a person. It is also stated that travelling expenses over a distance of three miles will be reimbursed. The purpose is explained in the following paragraph:

"Restart is for people who have been unemployed for a long time. It makes sure that people know the different kinds of help they can get. It gives them a better chance of getting jobs and other opportunities that are going".

If a person does not attend or reply to the letter then a second letter is sent. It concludes with the following paragraph:

"Please note that if you do not keep this appointment or immediately give me a good reason why you were unable to keep it, the Unemployment Benefit Office will be told. They will stop your benefit and credit contributions, until

you come for an interview or until you show them good cause for not coming".

The intention that the interview is there to help is stressed but the overall tenet is questioning of a person's entitlement to be on the unemployment register, their benefit and even their pension rights. The strongest assumption is that person may not be available for work and not actively seeking it.

"You may be getting money from the DHSS but not looking for work. For example, you may be looking after a child or relative. If so, please get in touch with your local DHSS office straightaway, they will decide whether you need to sign as unemployed in order to get your money".

If a person is in a situation where they are looking after elderly or sick relatives or of course young children then the new "Are you available for work questionnaire UB671" for everyone who makes a new claim can be cited by the Benefit Office to exclude people from the unemployment register on the grounds of non availability for work. Question 8 on the form asks:

"Do you have any adults or children to care for during working hours? If yes can you make immediate arrangement for their care if you get a job?" (1)

Such new criteria for defining availability for work obviously results in a reduction in the unemployment figures as more and more people are being excluded, but the general belief is that this reduction is still due to an upturn in the economy rather than less people being "eligible for work" and more people coming off the register on Government schemes.

Coming off the register can affect a person's benefit entitlement, sometimes increasing it, sometimes decreasing it. If a person is signing on as unemployed their Supplementary Benefit entitlement is higher than the Invalidity Care Allowance they would receive for looking after an elderly parent if they signed off.

If it is discovered at a Restart interview that a person is not fully available for work then in practice it is at the individual Restart Counsellor's discretion whether or not to refer a person to the Benefit Office. If a person can receive the same or even more benefit by coming off the register, many will if given the choice opt to do so. The

underlying impression of the signing on process, queuing for half an hour to sign one's name once a fortnight in dismal and unfriendly conditions is that it is degrading and many people hate the experience, as I did when I was unemployed.

From my own observations of Restart interviews, most counsellors would not pass a person on the Benefit Office if they believed their benefit would be adversely affected, unless of course they believed a person was working regularly on the "black economy".

The whole area of availability for work and its consequent chasing people off the register by a Government who have made over twenty changes to how unemployment is measured, each time decreasing it "at a stroke", has led to the belief in people's mind that Restart interviews are synonymous with this process. This complicity in the process of reducing unemployment by placing people in schemes that are not necessarily going to place them in work is an accusation that has been levelled at those of us involved in Restart, JTS, Job Clubs, Community Programme and of course YTS.

## Morality

It is an issue that has been raised many times within ALE and much heart searching has been done concerning the morality of being involved in such schemes. The pragmatists, among whom I would number myself, have argued that non co-operation is unlikely to change Government Policy, merely allowing for private enterprise to move into the vacuum with its ethos of education for profit and result in consequent loss of quality. My personal belief is that we should change policy from within while ensuring quality and sound educational aims are continued within the schemes.

Many Restart counsellors care about their clients, like the rest of us if they relinquish responsibility because they believe they do not have enough time to spend with people, there are many to take their place. There is temptation for some of us to see them merely as unquestioning representatives of an uncaring Government whose role is to persecute the unemployed because officially many are seen as shiftless and not wanting work, a view articulated by Norman Fowler in November 1987 at the Conference of Conservative Trade Unionists, where he reinforced his commitment to tackle "abuse" of the benefit system.

This view of the unemployed is reinforced in the media and consequently shared by many of the working population, but it is not the view shared by Job Centre staff who know one of the realities of the unemployment is that there are not enough jobs to go round.

The main problem for an effective counselling interview is the threat of benefit loss. In reality nobody, at least, at present, can have their benefit stopped for refusing to

take up a menu option, but the degree to which people are given choice in the matter varies from Job Centre to Job Centre and counsellor to counsellor.

The threat of the letter may never be mentioned by either the client or the counsellor but many people I have spoken to, feel angry, confused and frightened and, therefore, it is unrealistic to hope that they will open out enough to be counselled. Many feel if they do not take direction from the counsellor they will lose benefit and accept with resignation disempowerment out of deference for authority.

The official rationale for the letters is that the postal contact initiative made by certain Job Centres for over a year prior to July 1986 had resulted in so few long-term unemployed coming into the Job Centre for help that it dictated that a coercive approach be tried in order to explain the Government's pre-election commitment to the long-term unemployed.

It was also felt that the Action for Jobs campaign should be backed up by 2 million being spent on slick advertising during peak hour television to sell the various options. If advertising is such a persuasive medium as we believe why was it not tried along with the non-coercive letter system to bring people into Job Centres? Ironically, although the letters do create antagonism towards the interview, there are a sizeable number of unemployed people who have said that they needed a veiled threat to galvanize them into action and go to the Job Centre.

The rationale being Action for Jobs was reinforced by several pieces of substantial research<sup>(2)</sup> that stated that the unemployed were taking a reactive response to unemployment and waiting around for something to happen rather than adopting a proactive stance.

Perhaps this view is a realistic one, as the experience of unemployment for many quickly produces apathy and also many were expecting a proactive stance from their Job Centre. Five years ago in one of its measures to massage the unemployment figures, the Government took away the compulsion of having to first register at Job Centres before claiming benefit. People still believe that although they do not have to register in person, that their details and job choices are on Job Centre's files and that if a suitable vacancy arises they will be notified. Even if a person registers at the Job Centre they do not remain so indefinitely, and since the demise of the long-term unit in 1986 the only department that operates a "case load" system of matching job vacancies to individuals is The Clearing House, which is designed exclusively for those unemployed who come off Restart menu options.

Restart benefits Job Centres as it ensures that their wares are on show and that people can receive some counselling at Job Centres. The most obvious need for



many unemployed people who possess no skills or redundant skills is expert careers guidance and this is sadly lacking and prevents unemployed people from being able to make informed choices.

Restart teams have a high turn-over of staff, for many a caring Restart counsellor it can be as frustrating an experience as it can for an interviewee, because barriers are difficult to break down.

It must be said that now 1 million people have had Restart interviews and that the "rolling programme" of interviews at six monthly intervals, people will perhaps become more used to them and less anxious, but given the pronouncements of successive Employment Ministers about the unemployed, the mythology that they are purely an exercise in determining if a person is working on the "black economy" looks like remaining.

Perhaps Restart interviews are a good method to advise people of what opportunities are available and in many cases are done professionally by caring counsellors even within the restraints of the system. The real problem is that the menu options have many pitfalls for an unemployed person and do not provide real alternatives to unemployment. This is to be the subject of the next article when the Government's plans for adult retraining hopefully are more clear and the consequences of taking Restart away from MSC and into the orbit of the Department of Employment.

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1. For information on the other 11 questions and how to fill them in without being classed as not available for work see; Available for Work? published by the Unemployment Unit, 9 Poland Street, London W1V 3DG
2. These studies are cited in The Restart Tutors Guide p. 4.
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# Controversial versus taboo: where do teachers stand?

**Steve Brigley**

**Peter Coates**

**Homer Noble**

What controversial issues are possible or practical for teachers to deal with in their classrooms depends upon their ability to assess shrewdly both the social and educational context in which they find themselves. This is particularly true when dealing with that range of provocative issues which rouses such powerful reactions as to be deemed 'taboo': eg. minority sexual mores and abuses (cited in Stradling, et al., 1984:104). In dealing with objections to such curriculum content from individuals or groups in society, teachers and educators generally must be armed with a theoretical perception and justification of teaching controversial subjects. When constructing such theoretical perspectives educators cannot isolate themselves from the contrasting, and often conflicting attitudes and values which characterise

contemporary social pluralism. This article argues that the lines between the personal and the public interest, the individual and the civil right, the reasoned and the emotional argument, the educational and the political domain have become impossibly blurred. Is it reasonable, in a society characterised by a bewildering variety of life-styles, values and beliefs, to exert pressure on teachers to inculcate proscriptive approaches to life's problems? Dogmatic moral guidelines are not sufficiently sensitive to this social heterogeneity. Any theoretical perspective which attempts to offer teachers assistance in tackling controversial questions in their classes must therefore not deal in idealistic prescriptions for the curriculum which are detached from the fact that moral relativity is the inescapable character of prevailing social and political norms.

Consideration of a number of current issues should illustrate the validity of this theoretical stance. In the realm of sexual values or mores many religious groups, social and political spokespersons, and the media, have expressed their concerns about morality in this area by insisting on the re-assertion of the traditional concept of 'family life' as the normative guideline for what is worthy and acceptable. Yet the examination of this issue reveals a number of startling inconsistencies, particularly within the media. The same newspapers which pontificate about the need to return to traditional family life, exploit in their sensationalised coverage stories, persons and situations which violate the standard moral and legal restrictions associated with marriage and child-rearing.

A case in point is that of Mandy Smith, who at the age of thirteen became, with her mother's consent and apparent approval, the mistress of ageing rock star Bill Wyman. Here what British law defines as a crime of sexual abuse against a minor was commented upon in the press with little, if any, consideration of the serious legal and moral implications of the relationship. Mandy Smith was able to capitalise on her new-found notoriety with her celebrity companion to the extent that even when the relationship ended, she was able to appear with a former Conservative Home Secretary during a prime time television programme. This double standard evident in media coverage of the relationship has glamorised the whole affair in a fantasy world where the 'jet set' appear to luxuriate in a moral licence not available to the ordinary man or teenage girl. This heroising of such behaviour prompts ambivalent reactions on the part of students, parents, and public which may present serious difficulties for persons involved with trying to establish and promote reasonable models of moral behaviour for young people.

A teacher involved in a similar relationship with a minor would face instant dismissal on the grounds of gross moral turpitude. If in a classroom interaction a student were to comment on this case and openly admire the relationship, a number of problems may arise. If the teacher condemns the behaviour, the students might

dismiss this attitude as old-fashioned and moralising: the teacher is out of touch. If the teacher condones the behaviour, students could well assume he is approving illegal sexual behaviour. Here is a clear example of how a media event places the teacher in a dilemma: a situation outside the classroom, if treated with tolerant ambivalence by the teacher, may possibly lead to criticism of the teacher's moral standards.

A second case is that of media-created celebrity, Samantha Fox, whose career was launched by her posing as a glamorous 'page three' model. From this wide public exposure, Ms. Fox has continued to develop this role as a 'sex icon' in her efforts to become an entertainment personality and pop singer. The effort to advance her career has involved even the educational setting; she has appeared on a national radio broadcast from a school in which she promoted the sale of her latest recording. The reflective teacher must ponder the situation which celebrates the presence of an erstwhile pin-up star as a guest performer during a radio show at which all the school was present. The same teacher will also reflect upon implications for educators and schools trying to reconcile the conflicting values of those who would deem such activity as acceptable, even admirable, and those who would not consider this type of person and performance as appropriate for the school setting.

The quotation of these examples does not seek to criticise the persons involved, rather to explore the way that media coverage of their careers indicates the extent to which dynamic shifts in popular attitudes have created a broad diversity of moral values. In the recent past the concept of family morality would have made it inconceivable for either of these women to have achieved popular acclaim and career success, rather they may have acquired notoriety. (Compare the example of how Mandy Rice-Davies, scandalous figure of the 1960's has become a respectable interviewee and author only in the 1980's, how Cynthia Payne's illegal activities as a 'party Madam' have become celebrated in a popular film, and how an M.P. allegedly involved in 'spanking sessions' with young male prostitutes avoided the immediate resignation which not long ago would have been inevitable). Consequently teachers experience a crisis of 'embattled consciousness' when pressed to convey any one set of established values. The teacher is faced with a situation of confused and variable public thinking. Which message does the teacher transmit, the view of the popular press that exploitation of sex is a legitimate ingredient of public and financial success or the view that sex is a private component of traditional morality which should only be touched upon within the context of the family?

Teachers find themselves trying to deal with a bewildering and ever increasing number of issues and circumstances which militate against a consistent approach to moral and values education. The challenge which the AIDS medical crisis has offered to the debate

surrounding social morality are intimidating in their complexity. How should anyone, let alone teachers, view the anomalies in the moral stance imposed by the AIDS crisis on the policies of the government concerning drug abuse and drug education. Hitherto these policies have reflected the traditional assumption within society that drug abuse is morally wrong and should not be condoned. Millions of pounds have been spent on educational and advertising campaigns to persuade people that drugs should be avoided at all costs. Now policy in some Scottish and large urban health authorities permits the issue of clean needles free to intravenous drug users; in a pragmatic attempt to prevent the spread of AIDS amongst the drug community, moral aspects of the issues have been virtually ignored. The promotion of the use of condoms as another preventative measure in connection with AIDS has caused a hostile debate amongst advocates of various moral, religious, medical and political points of view. Such moral opacity and lack of reasonable consensus can only heighten the diffidence and reluctance of teachers to handle this topic when raised in their classes by justifiably anxious students.

The overturning of long-standing and accepted approaches to intimate moral aspects of family life in schools may once again be discerned on the issue of child abuse. How should teachers react to the suggestion that their unique relationships with students indicates that they should look for and deal with this problem in their classroom? Milner and Blyth (1987) submit strong evidence that teachers themselves still have difficulty accepting this invasive encroachment on the private for two main reasons:

There may well be teachers in the school with unresolved bad feelings about their own childhoods... (Teachers may not) feel comfortable in undertaking sound preventive teaching with no fears of being accused of being filthy or immoral. (Milner & Blyth, 1987:28)

More generally, the strong emotional charge attached to the subject of child abuse may encourage teachers, who previously might at least have entertained a traditional dispassionate treatment of it in a class discussion or on a more confidential one-to-one counselling basis, to drop the whole subject as untouchable. Symptomatic of the current confusion is the rapid change of public perceptions which has followed from prominent media coverage of the distressing case of Jasmine Beckford and continuing reportage of child abuse. Calls to help lines have proven just how common child abuse is. In many areas the media and public concern about child abuse now seems to permit, perhaps even demand, that teachers should encroach unapologetically upon what has hitherto been a strictly private realm of family behaviour and morality. Teachers may resist having to assume the responsibility of dealing with this issue in their classroom for several legitimate reasons. First, they may be uncomfortable with "their own feelings of disgust, embarrassment and anger" (Milner and Blyth, 1987:29)

about this issue which can arise from personal experiences or other sources. Second, teachers who misread impulses as directives from an expectant public may find themselves in serious professional difficulties if their handling of the issue arouses antagonism and controversy in their local situation. Third, this public pressure, lack of specific guidelines on materials and methods, and fear of censure may only succeed in making teachers more wary than ever of tackling sensitive subjects like child abuse. When it is no longer clear where teachers are to draw the line between private and public content and between emotional and reasoned approaches to such content, a policy of avoidance may present itself as the safer course of action.

The shifting social consciousness illustrated by the above examples makes it especially difficult for teachers to determine in practice whether they are observing a correct distinction between wide ranging education and prescription of particular values. Whatever private priorities teachers may place on the consideration of such issues, they may be forced into the camp of curriculum conservatives like Scruton. These critics have already advocated the disarming of politically contentious subjects from the under 16's curriculum, apparently basing their arguments on an overweening respect for 'rigorous' academic subjects, paradigmatically exemplified in the sciences and mathematics (Scruton et al., 1983:49). Safe academic havens may be attractive to teachers in uncertain times. We argue elsewhere (cf. Brigley, Coates and Noble, 1987) that an effective and subtle constriction of the 'controversial curriculum' may be the outcome of teacher self-censorship, which is far more widespread than a narrow concentration on high-profile, urban educational authorities would suggest. Is this the only realistic option for teachers in the current social flux and unsettling moral relativity?

Essentially teachers appear to require a strategy which will relieve the many sided pressures afflicting their confidence in both their professional judgement and emotional capacities and in the public view of their moral standing and political motives. A recent reminder of Rudduck (1986) poses one powerful alternative to the ever narrower circumscription of the range of 'manageable' controversial issues in schools: a thoroughgoing implementation of the curricular principles and methodology of the Humanities Curriculum Project. In several crucial areas of teacher diffidence the HCP strategy offers hope of some security. For one thing the whole HCP approach is premised on the assumption that controversial issues can be studied within a strictly rational framework. Rationality is to be developed by upholding the diversity of student views on a particular issue, and encouraging them to appraise through the medium of reflective group discussion their personal feelings, conflicting evidence, and valid forms of argument. Thus the HCP draws a clear line between reasonableness and emotionalism by emphasising rational consideration of all sides of an issue in a non-

authoritarian and non-threatening class interaction. Corresponding to this framework of critical reflection there is within the HCP's approach an inbuilt vigilance guarding against possible charges of indoctrination. The most visible sign of this watchfulness is the insistence that the teacher should adopt the role of neutral chairperson in these discussions, being mostly non-directive in his or her interventions and concerned to assert the paramount value of legitimate feelings, evidence and reason.

In other words, CP encourages teachers to teach the issue, rather than a partial view of it, thereby sanctifying their educational purpose and evading some more obvious imputations of indoctrination. As Rudduck comments (1986:16), such is the HCP's embodiment of procedural values in its strategy that there is a legitimate role for students themselves to set the agenda of topics to be treated as controversial. Thus, controversial content in HCP classes fades into relative insignificance. By taking moral heterogeneity as the necessary starting point for the design of its curricular scheme, the HCP opens the field of controversial curriculum content and offers a practical dissolution of many doubts which may otherwise deter potential teachers of taboo subjects. The HCP methodology may be seen to epitomise an altogether more measured and controlled mechanism through which intellectual and emotional responses to inflammatory issues can be created. This approach provides a timely antidote to the sensationalism of the media and to related hysteria in public and private moral utterances on subjects such as AIDS, child abuse, and minority sexual lifestyles.

As Bridges (1986) has pointed out, the HCP strategy accepts as given the intractability of certain forms of moral disagreement. In placing moral diversity firmly at the centre of its curricular scheme, the HCP is able to accommodate the logic of moral arguments in which the individual disputants' chains of justification terminate in a final deadlock. For, in addition to a substantive difference of opinion in such cases, there may be just as much controversy over what counts as a relevant reason in settling the disagreement, that is, on the role of reason and feelings in such debates. In so far as neutral chairpersons strike a pose of impartiality in HCP discussions, they will not only remain faithful to the logic of this deeper level of dispute but also will retain a certain intellectual honesty in presenting what may be essentially "criterion-less" or "non-rational" choices (Bridges, 1986:29).

The great virtue of the HCP lies in its ability to present the widest range of facts, feelings and beliefs and to develop in pupils "the technique of seeing what is relevant in coming to a moral decision" (Dixon, 1972:150). It cannot be denied that the adoption of neutral procedural methods is in itself the outcome of a values assumption, and one which may be contested by, for example, an existentialist moral educator (Dixon, 1972:151).

Essentially, however, it is the political exigencies of the educational setting that invoke this particular values position as the only legitimate way for teachers to deal with controversial subjects. Day-to-day classroom interaction with pupils imposes on responsible teachers the necessity of engaging controversial issues and reinforces their need to combat their own diffidence and reluctance to do so. Many inevitably feel that to avoid controversial issues is to betray the needs and pressing concerns of their students. Yet in the highly-charged politicised climate of contemporary education teachers who, for the best of educational reasons, decide to handle such issues face possible attack and censure from anyone who chooses to disagree with either their lesson content or methods. As we have shown, teachers cannot hope to draw out of the shifting relativist values characterising today's pluralist society and definitive moral framework. In a world where a solid consensus about substantive moral values has collapsed, the reasonable alternative is to establish a strategy for handling controversial issues which is grounded in procedural values. Even if a traditional consensus did exist about 'family life' or other values, wise teachers would still insist that controversial issues be examined from many differing perspectives in order to enable their students to perceive and understand these problems and give them the power to make up their own minds. Thus it is possible for teachers to present important and controversial subjects to students in a way which reflects valid moral concern and stimulate them to consider these issues in a mature and reflective way. Beyond this point, it is impossible to justify any teacher brief.

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## Communication versus language: a comment on CPVE from an anti-racist perspective

**Kathy Leander**

The following discussion is part of a larger study (currently in preparation) of the CPVE qualification, which examines its location within the social and political context of education in the late 1980s. This study holds that the CPVE represents, for black communities, an intensification of the racial stratification of educational and employment opportunities.

This paper is confined to an examination of the language and cognitive skills fostered in CPVE curricula. Essentially, they are based on a 'language as communication' model upon which BTEC curricula are also based.

I am indebted for the concept of a language 'model' to Lander, whose (1983) paper examines the different models of language that underline English teaching in further education. She identifies four of these models, distinguishing them from linguistic and sociolinguistic models, though they have been influenced by these disciplines. She says:

"A model of language may be defined as a conceptual framework (either consciously or unconsciously held) which generates theories about the nature and functions of language, the relationship between the individual and the social, and suggests ways in which individuals can achieve what is designated as a desirable competence."

The 'communication' model of language teaching is described by Lan-

der as her "Model 3: Language for society". She commented in 1983 that it was firmly established in business education in BTEC curricula, and, of course, by 1987, it is ubiquitous in BTEC, City and Guilds, and now CPVE syllabuses, not to mention in other further education courses - so much so that a teacher of English can barely find a post that is not designated "Lecturer in Communication".

This model is based upon a view of language that considers it a channel for the communication of pre-existent ideas and for cooperation, through which the individual learns about appropriate language behaviour. It relies heavily on role theory - people are defined by and act according to the 'role' they have in society or in particular situations; hence, the CPVE profile item: "I can change my behaviour according to the situation I am in." In this view the social system is presented as a conglomerate of different interests and groups - arranged always hierarchically (students learn the appropriate ways of communication with subordinates and superiors), but presented always according to a pluralist consensus - that are able to function in harmony and synchrony, if the communication is clear and error-free. Part of this clarity is achieved by identifying the role of the addressee in order that the appropriate approach, medium, register and tone of communication may be adopted. Hierarchy is thus assumed, but neutralized within such

concepts as 'formality' and 'appropriateness'. This notion of register itself is confined to the appropriateness for certain situations, without any reference to the social structuring of the criteria for appropriateness. All situations - formal or informal - are theoretically equal, as are all variations of language; yet there is an underlying assumption that what constitutes the difference between situations lies in their differential positioning along the scale of status. And, of course, in situations where the theoretically equivalent formal and informal expressions encounter each other, it is the latter that gives way to the former. Communication tasks of BTEC and CPVE curricula rely on an extremely orthodox view of language as a simple instrument of communication, thus substituting a part for the whole. Language teaching confined to this aspect of language constitutes a denial of important linguistic and cognitive skills to sections of the population.

This view and its widespread use in BTEC curricula, we know, has not gone unchallenged. One of the first challenges came in 1977 in the form of a joint statement from the Councils of the National Association for the Teaching of English and the Association for Liberal Education. This criticised the lack of emphasis on the expressive and personal functions of language. Criticism has, in the main, been of this type, from those who feel that the emphasis in communication work on work-related language skills is too instru-

mental. This type of criticism is usually voiced by those teachers who hold to Lander's "Model 2: Language for personal development". This is a view influenced by phenomenological theories in that it stresses the individuality of our language development as we 'negotiate' with the world. It distinguishes between the transactional, impersonal and the expressive, personal functions of language, emphasising the latter over the former.

In general, as we know, the result of the 'clash of the models' has been victory for the 'communication' model. This is interesting, for, in certain important respects the two models are not opposed. For instance, both views take society and current social arrangements as given. Questioning of these, in the 'language for personal development' model tends to be within the context of the conflict between the individual and society. Further, 'reality', in both views, is conceived as 'out there' - a condition prior to language. In the 'communication' model, social reality is expressed and conveyed through language. The 'language for personal development' view concentrates on the individual's personal representation of the world as constituting his/her own 'reality'. Thus, for both, meaning is not contentious. Words are supposed to have a common core of consensual denotation; connotation (the province mainly of the 'language for personal development' model) is on the periphery of central social meanings. It is in the realm of connotation that unique, individual acts of interpretation are created in literary forms.

There is, however, a 'third voice', which, while recognising what is useful in the 'communication' and 'language for personal development' models, tries to get a hearing for a third model of language - one which takes account of the socio-political nature of meaning. This voice has barely been heard in further education, partly because those who advocate the 'communication' model of language have laid claim to egalitarian

ideals and purposes. Part of the problem is the way that notions such as 'linguistic diversity', which replaced the 'deficit' and 'pathology' perspectives on working-class and 'black speech', have been misinterpreted in such a way as to efface real questions of power. For the linguistic relativism that has characterised much debate since the late 1960s, has combined with some of the central tenets of the progressive education movement - child-centres learning and learning through experience, for example - to produce an outlook congenial to many teachers of egalitarian tendency: a refusal to make value judgements, and an equalizing in theory of all forms and varieties of expression. Such is the triumphant rhetoric of CPVE policy on communication, and this is what constitutes its attractiveness for the teacher of CPVE who is concerned with social justice.

### Fighting

This 'third voice', then, fighting to be heard in the further education environment, amidst the talk about the equal validity of all modes of expression, about 'appropriateness' rather than 'correctness', tries to say that the debate between the two competing models discussed above was carried out on the wrong 'terrain'. It tries to point out that no account was taken of the social structuring of meaning in and through language. Meaning, in the 'personal development' view of language, is uncontentious, disputed only in terms of what the writer, as an autonomous individual means - never in terms of social division. The 'communication' view of language - based as it is on notions of social consensus - cannot examine the social structuring of meaning. If it were to do so, the comfortable notions of 'appropriateness' and of the equal validity of all forms of expression would not hold.

The third model (which has affinities with Lander's "Model 4: Language as radical interpreter of society and experience") holds that the notion of linguistic

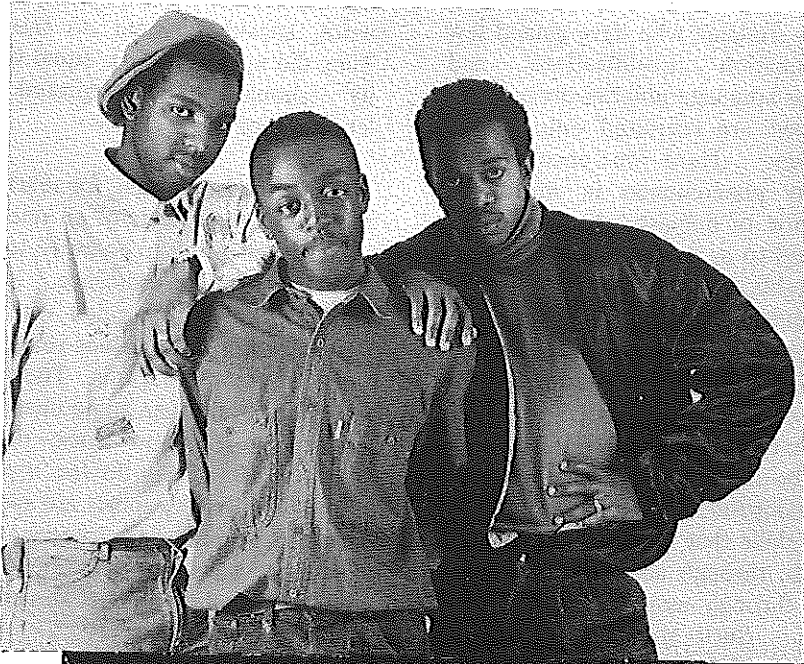
relativism is misleading in two ways. First, language does not possess a core of consensual meanings. Further, it is vital that the study of the social construction of meaning and of how some meanings dominate others, is vital to students' linguistic development. It holds that meaning is rarely neutral; that language both structures and is structured by the social context in which we live. It is, therefore, not separate from the economic and social inequalities which give rise to class, gender and race oppression. The meaning of a word is not given; it does not correspond to a 'piece of reality'; it is a reflection of the ideas, values and 'philosophies' of its social/political context. Just as these ideas, values and 'philosophies' are not fixed for all time, just as they develop, change and are contested, so word meanings - the medium through which this development, change and contestations takes place, are both reflections of and agents in these social-historical conditions. Thus, semantics is properly not the study of what meaning is but of how meaning is made.

Secondly, linguistic relativism, while correct to maintain that all varieties of language (such as dialects) are equally 'valid', does not allow for the notion that there are *within* any variety, different 'orders of meaning' which differ in the extent to which they lend themselves to intellectual activity. It is shy of entertaining ideas about 'levels' within the development of concept formation, for example, a development that can properly only be described as hierarchical.

Vigotsky (1962) unashamedly refers to 'levels' of abstraction and stresses the importance of adolescence as a transitional period in the process of the formation of "true concepts". He notes that the adolescents he studied had not fully formed the ability to give a verbal definition of a concept, and comments:

"Analysis of reality with the help of concepts precedes analysis of the concepts themselves."

He then describes the stage where



"true concept" formation has been reached as "defining a concept when it is no longer rooted in the original situation and must be formulated on an abstract plane, without reference to any concrete situation or impressions."

This stage of conceptual development does not form any of the subject matter of CPVE communication curricula. The concepts that do arise are those rooted in the situation; they are located at the lower level of conceptual development described by Vigotsky - the level of the "analysis of reality with the help of concepts".

To illustrate this matter further, some reference needs to be made to Bruner's (1966) work on language and cognition. He distinguishes within language three competences: linguistic competence, communicative competence and analytical competence. The two former are used at the level of concrete, directly experienced operations and the latter is used for abstract, metalinguistic thought. (Metalinguistic thought is defined here as that which is directed towards the analysis of language operations, using both linguistic and extra-linguistic concepts.)

Communicative competence he defines as: "the ability to make utterances appropriate to the context in which they are made."

Those who are familiar with communication syllabuses will recognise this. It is an important competence, of course. Communication units, however, do not progress beyond it, incorporating very little of what Bruner calls "analytical competence." This, he says:

"involves the prolonged operation of thought processes exclusively on linguistic representations, on propositional structures, accompanied by... strategies of thought and problem solving, not to direct experience with objects and events but with ensembles of propositions. It is heavily metalinguistic in nature."

With this in mind, we may examine the concept of 'integration' - one of the staples of CPVE 'philosophy'. According to this concept, students are to develop language skills through the achievement of other core competences, usually themselves achieved through assignment-based learning. CPVE programmes are to be perceived by young people as coherent wholes. What is aimed at throughout is the linking of

thought to specific contexts - work contexts. Important elements of Bruner's notion of analytic competence, however, are those semantic and syntactic features that are vital to the concept formation which is necessary for thought outside of the context of immediate reference. Metalinguistic activity cannot occur without these elements, and without metalinguistic activity, thought is tied to the realm of meaning posited by that context.

### Abstract

That is not to say that some communication tasks do not involve abstract notions; rather, that they are tasks tied to existing processes. The critical appraisal of a form of communication, for example, will always have reference to discrete, established, unquestioned categories of the social formation - the audience for whom it is intended, the technology that has influenced it, the function it is intended to perform, etc. In other words, this type of activity analyses the form in relation to the purpose, where the purpose is a given, consensual social category.

Communication tasks, then, involve a reduction of the scope of thinking processes to observable forms, so that all the complexities of the thought-language-society relationship are narrowed to an explicit concern with the efficient processing of messages. All the social, political and ideological factors that are embedded in such processing are effaced by concentrating on the context of interpersonal interaction. 'Interference' in the communication process may arise from a variety of sources such as noise, inappropriate tone, gesture, dialect of register. The only thing that never interferes is meaning; meaning, as has been commented, is held to be established, unquestionable and consensual. Language is held to be 'transparent' in that there is a clear, universally accepted relationship between the word and that to which it refers. The idea that the meaning constructions in language not only are socially constituted, but also in-

corporate the power relations in society would not do for the efficient processing of messages within pre-vocational education.

That language is an ideological medium is a notion not entertained in such a learning context. And yet an anti-racist perspective demands that we question precisely the givenness of such terms as 'business', 'technology', scientific method', precisely the way in which a particular Eurocentric view of the world is presented as universal. It demands further that students learn the language skills that enable them to question, using metalinguistic tools, the ways that meanings are constructed in a racist society. They need to understand that partial histories, political perspectives, cultural biases inhere in the denotations of words. They need, in short, to understand the ungiven nature of meaning, to understand that the relation between signifier and referent, is not fixed, but is a creative act in which both referent and signifier are implicated.

## Contradictory

This insight is derived from Volosinov (1973) who commented on what he called the "multi-accentual nature of the sign". This means that the meaning of a word contains contradictory and conflicting "accents", having reference - depending on the political, social and historical circumstances of its use - to no fixed or unified segment of reality. He observed:

"In actual fact, each living ideological sign has two faces, like Janus. Any current curse word can become a word of praise, any current truth must inevitably sound to many other people as the greatest lie."

It may be commented that many students who are recruited on to CPVE courses, far from being able to contemplate the multi-accentual nature of meaning, can hardly write the words that represent that meaning. CPVE documents make it clear that the course is not aimed only at students with low educational at-

tainments. However, in practice, many students who have gained few examination qualifications and whose language abilities are not developed are recruited onto CPVE courses. Here we encounter a knotty phenomenon in which the rhetoric of linguistic diversity is refracted so as to efface and make respectable low expectations; so that students whose language abilities are not developed are, in some further education institutions, told that the bad old days of school are behind them, that on the CPVE course they will be treated as adults learning in an independent and enjoyable fashion, skills that are relevant to their needs, through activity-based learning, through assignments and projects. Such students hear these words with ostensible pleasure, and there is nothing inherently wrong with this, of course. However, the spirit of egalitarianism referred to above, may tempt teachers, faced with the awkward fact of students who have no idea of alphabetical order, who cannot spell, who cannot write a grammatical sentence (in any language variety), to intimate that the written word is merely one mode of communication, and that other modes - oral or non-verbal - are equally valid. Modes of communication, however, are not varieties of English; but one may observe this sort of thinking in the further education context, and hear arguments to defend it that have emanated, by way of analogy, from the linguistic diversity perspective.

Those who devised the 'communication' model of language perhaps did not envisage how their emphasis on oral and non-verbal as well as written skills might develop in practice, nor what a boon it would be to teachers in further education faced with alarming numbers of students having difficulties with certain modes, particularly the written word. We can be sure that they did not mean to imply that the equal validity of modes of communication meant that one would do as well as another. When they advocated an increased emphasis on oracy, previously neglected in English teaching, they did

not mean that, if students could not write, speaking would do instead. They did not mean that 'equal validity' should be interpreted as 'equivalence'.

However, it is tempting for teachers, faced with the effects of an unequal society that refuse to go away, to define them out of existence. Some students, having struggled with the written word for laborious years, are only too grateful for this. They may experience, however, some unease as well; they somehow sense that a graph won't always do for a paragraph, and that if reports are spoken into a tape recorder, someone will eventually have to transcribe them, and that that someone should by rights be one of them.

This paper has been written from the point of view of one working in a college that recruits black students onto CPVE courses; in this context, any suggestion that spoken skills will substitute for written ones is racist; all over the country Saturday supplementary schools are set up and run by black parents, voluntary agencies and community groups to improve the literacy levels of black children in the belief that they have not been well served in schools. Any CPVE course that recruits black students whose literacy levels have not been developed must be dedicated to doing the same, and should not follow the diversionary route of 'equivalence'.

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