

DISSEMINATION OF INNOVATION

The Humanities Curriculum Project

Jean Rudduck

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Dissemination of innovation: the Humanities Curriculum Project

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Preface

This account of the dissemination of the Humanities Curriculum Project has been written retrospectively. As I read through the manuscript I am aware that there emerges a rather tidy picture of a coolly managed process. This is far from the truth. As I looked back, things fell into place, patterns emerged and issues were clarified. At the time things were not as secure as I have made them seem. Missing are the puzzlement and opportunism that characterize such ventures, and the sense of responding to events rather than controlling them.

The account is a history rather than a sociological analysis and it is written from sources which were not originally conceived as data for a study.

I should like to thank those people who have talked to me about their experience of the Project or have allowed me to quote from or describe their work. For the most part their names have not been disclosed in the text and I cannot therefore make a formal acknowledgement. I should also like to thank the Inner London Education Authority for their permission to reproduce in the Introduction an account of the Humanities Project that was first published in their series of occasional papers, *New Educational Developments and Aids to Learning*. I am also grateful to the Open University Press for allowing me to reproduce in Appendix E two profiles from *Problems of Curriculum Innovation I*, edited by Eric Hoyle and Robert Bell.

I should like to acknowledge a debt to my colleagues on the Project team and to Barry MacDonald and his associates on the evaluation team. A group that works closely together for a number of years will tend to take up the ideas of individual members, argue them, explore them, test them, until ultimately, if they prove useful, they become common property. I have greatly benefited from working within a common tradition.

The Schools Council/Nuffield Humanities Curriculum Project was directed by Lawrence Stenhouse and based at Philippa Fawcett College, Streatham, 1967–70, and the Centre for Applied Research in Education, University of East Anglia, 1970–72. Packs of teaching materials on the following themes have been published by Heinemann Educational Books: *Education* (1970), *War and Society* (1970), *The Family* (1970), *Relations between the Sexes* (1970), *People and Work* (1971), *Poverty* (1971), *Law and Order* (1972), and *Living in Cities* (1973).

Introduction

It seemed appropriate, since this book is about dissemination, for the Humanities Curriculum Project to be introduced in an account written by someone who was responding to the experiment as it was disseminated.* Alasdair Aston, an English Inspector, was the HCP contact in the Inner London Education Authority. It is an account which the Project team reprinted for circulation because we respected the grip it had on the issues that seemed to be important in the Project.

* * *

The Humanities Curriculum Project

Areas of study

In 1965, Schools Council Working Paper No. 2 (on raising the school leaving age) † defined the aim of humanities teaching as the forwarding of understanding, discrimination and judgement in the human field. Since 1967, the Humanities Curriculum Project, sponsored by the Schools Council and the Nuffield Foundation, has been conducting research into methods of promoting understanding through humanities teaching and, in particular, has pioneered discussion techniques for handling controversial human issues with adolescent pupils. Adopting from Schools Council Working Paper No. 11 (*Society and the Young School Leaver*, [HMSO] 1967) the idea of areas of enquiry, the Project team, under its director, Lawrence Stenhouse, has turned its attention to nine main areas that can profitably be explored in depth and that are relevant to young people. The study areas developed by the Project are: education, war and society, the family, relations between the sexes, poverty, living in cities, people and work, law and order, race relations.

* A. E. Aston, 'The Humanities Curriculum Project', *New Educational Developments and Aids to Learning (NEDAL)*, No. 6 (ILEA, 1971).

† *Raising the School Leaving Age: a co-operative programme of research and development* (HMSO, 1965).

Exploration through discussion

Since issues in each of these controversial areas may divide a democratic society, in which individual pupils, teachers and parents will often hold differing opinions, the Humanities Project saw its task as that of promoting open discussion between individuals who hold divergent views and of ensuring that, as far as possible, the views should be thoroughly explored so that they might be responsibly held. It is important to remember that the Project was briefed to pay attention to the needs of pupils in the 14–16 age range who are of average and below average ability, but yet do not experience serious reading difficulties. It is also relevant that, with more and more of the pupils in the age range staying on at school, it has been gradually realized that schools might need to treat these pupils in a more adult way. Hence, several factors seem to have contributed to the Project's emphasis on the pupil's own accountability for his ideas.

Role of the teacher

When a pupil is not responsible for his own ideas, in that he has come to rely overmuch on the guidance of the teacher or of some other 'authority', there is no guarantee that issues will be discussed in depth or that the pupil will properly comprehend where he stands or why he holds his viewpoint. This is partly why the Project has seen humanities teaching as non-instructional in essence, why the students are not encouraged to accept a body of knowledge merely upon authority and why the teacher makes it a point of honour not to state his own viewpoint or to provide any 'answers', in the naïve sense of the term. Whereas, traditionally, teachers have often believed that they can take part in open discussions as equal members with a group of students and that they can participate without imposing their own views, in practice it has been noted that pupils tend to defer to the viewpoint of the teacher, simply because he is a teacher and an adult. Similarly, if teachers look frankly at their own practice in managing the usual run of class discussions, they will observe how frequently they urge towards a consensus of opinion which, consciously or unconsciously, is often a reflection of the teacher's own viewpoint. And, of course, this oblique domination or tendentiousness is not limited to situations in which social issues are being discussed: it is, for example, salutary in this context to listen to pupils responding to literature under the guidance of a teacher who makes his views known, who tells the class 'what the poem is really about'. The Humanities Curriculum Project has therefore sought an enquiry technique that protects the students from the teacher's individual

bias, not just because the teacher may indoctrinate in any obvious sense unless there are safeguards, but mainly because the students' views are those that the situation is intended to develop. It is the student's turn to think. In some ways, then, Humanities Curriculum Project teaching, although it operates in the traditional subject areas of English, history, geography, social studies and religious education, can be seen to have aims differing from any academic discipline that sees teaching as the direct, efficient transfer of a recognized body of information.

Many teachers have found it difficult to understand what this shift of emphasis means, the shift from class-instructor to group-chairman. It may seem to some that if they are not directly instructing they are abdicating from their role as educators: they regard it as the teacher's duty to initiate the class into his maturely acquired wisdom. On the other hand, the Project sees the teacher's role as that of the chairman to a discussion group. The chairman by no means abdicates responsibility, in that he watches the standards of learning within the group, he ensures that issues are discussed relevantly and that the views of all members of the group are treated consistently. The teacher, although he is impartial and neutral, will, in fact, be active as a chairman, ensuring that all members of a group can have their say, identifying the issues, providing fresh evidence and resources when these are needed and generally helping the group to find its own way to an understanding of the issues at stake. Often, it will be his responsibility to provide resources that enable the students to explore a controversial area through many media, activities and skills, for discussion is only one aspect of humanities work.

Experience suggests that if the teacher alone determines the direction of a discussion, the students will tend to delegate further responsibility to him or may opt out of exploring the issues for themselves. For this reason, the students are best asked what they wish to discuss. It is generally very unhelpful to the learning situation if the pupils are given an agenda by the chairman or if the chairman has a hidden agenda through which he attempts to steer the discussion. The group will merely attempt to meet teacher-expectation by a kind of guessing game and their understanding of the issues will not be increased. It is all too easy for a teacher to limit the group's exploration by deciding in advance what is going to be discussed, by asking leading questions, by approving only certain responses or by imposing fresh evidence which does not meet the needs of the discussion but which meets his expectation of where the discussion should be going.

Considerable restraint is incumbent on the chairman of the group if the group is going to find its own way to an understanding.

Inspirational teachers, who have gained much satisfaction from teaching and from firing classes with their own enthusiasms, often view the chairman's 'neutrality' with dismay, since positive instruction brings with it the sensation, perhaps illusory, of doing a job well, but experience with the Project suggests that impartial chairmanship can be equally rewarding in that the art of chairmanship is a challenge. Making students responsible for their own learning can be demanding. The chairman may need patience when a group seem to have 'got the wrong end of the stick'. He may have to bite his lip through periods when the group reflect or are in doubt. He will have to remember that it is his duty not to prompt by introducing his own ideas. At times, he may find the pressure hard to bear and this can particularly be the case with a new group who may use silence as a weapon to make him lose his nerve and take on responsibility for the discussion. In the early stages, one determinant of the success of a discussion group may be the chairman's ability to ride the silences until the group begin to offer their views. An over-anxious chairman may not allow the students time to assimilate the evidence, especially if it is printed evidence. However, with a proper allowance of time, the group's offerings usually become more frequent and a point is eventually reached at which controversy emerges. It may then be the chairman's duty to clarify the main differences through questioning and then to throw the discussion open to the whole group by attempting to draw in other members: 'What do other people think?' After a period, the group may decide that they wish to find further information or they may reach a surface agreement. At these moments, the chairman may need to use his knowledge of the Project's packs of evidence so that he can introduce a fresh piece of material to break up an over-easy consensus or force a deeper analysis of the issue under discussion. The chairman ought to be very familiar with the materials in the packs and familiarization takes time. He also has to be very discriminating in the introduction of fresh evidence: it must meet a real need of the discussion.

The materials and facilities

For each of the Project's nine themes, the central team collected a large number of pieces of evidence which were issued for trials to 32 schools * in the United Kingdom. In the light of experience gained, the central team selected for each theme a foundation bank of some 200 pieces of properly

* 36, including 4 Home Office approved schools.

indexed evidence that may take the form of printed matter – reports, extracts, literature, pictures – or taped material. There are also lists of recommended films and film extracts. Evidence is whatever is relevant to the issue under discussion and almost certainly schools and students will find it necessary to supplement the published materials with their own local additions. The published evidence is not intended to carry authority or to represent ‘the truth’ on any matter: it is merely evidence of the existence of a point of view. Indeed, the evidence has been carefully selected so as to reflect a balanced spectrum of viewpoints. The *War and Society* pack, for example, includes a mediaeval defence of the concept of a just war, as well as facsimiles of letters from the First World War trenches and comments about the situation in Vietnam. The function of the evidence is that of disciplining the discussion. It provides a framework within which views can be exchanged but to treat the evidence as literature or as matter for comprehension is not to make the most of the material.

The Project’s materials on the first five themes (*War and Society, Education, The Family, Relations between the Sexes, People and Work*) have been published by Heinemann Educational and are being used in large numbers of schools.* As the Project believes in small-group discussion, the packs contain sufficient evidence for up to twenty students. Each of the 200 items is clearly indexed to aid easy retrieval and the printed materials are stored, twenty strong, in polythene envelopes.

Each pack of theme materials also contains 2 sound-tapes, 2 general handbooks to the project, 2 teachers’ sets of all printed evidence and 2 handbooks particular to the pack (e.g. *War and Society*), including lists of films and other resources.

Each pack costs about £37 but a school has also to make regular provision for the Project, in that money is needed for film-hire and may well be needed for outside visits in connection with theme enquiry. Quite apart from money, teachers need space in which to store the packs, rooms in which to hold the chaired sessions, timetable allocations and equipment – especially tape-recorders and film projectors. It is important for the Project that it should receive adequate staffing support (1 teacher to 20 students) and that senior staff are aware of its aims and methods. Teachers in the Humanities team need time for regular meetings so that they can compare experience and discuss problems. It has been found helpful to invite the parents to the school so that they can experience using the

* Packs of material on three more themes – *Poverty, Living in Cities* and *Law and Order* – have since been published.

materials and so that they will understand this particular handling of controversial issues with their children.

In-service training

Above all, the teachers in the participating schools need initial training in the use of the Project's methods and materials. The ILEA induction courses are run by a team of about a dozen teacher-trainers who use videotape and sound recordings to analyse classroom procedures and who regard the Project as a major move in teacher education. Evidence is just beginning to come in from many of our schools that, after some initial floundering, pupils are learning almost for the first time to manage their own work, that writing is developing from the discussions and that young school leavers are becoming well motivated. In fact, as Lawrence Stenhouse has said, 'Experience with the Humanities Curriculum [Project] suggests that in the past we may have tended to underestimate many of our pupils.'

I. The task of dissemination

Within the tradition of our curriculum reform movement, dissemination is about making accessible the insight and experience of a small number of schools as a basis for judgement and response in the system at large. In the Humanities Curriculum Project there were 32 schools, scattered through England and Wales, which gave shape to the ideas of the Project during its experimental phase, 1968 to 1970. As soon as the first public, widespread communication to schools was made in 1969, over 1600 responded with interest. The dissemination task was to be formidable.

Underestimating the task

We have gradually become aware – and partly through American experience – how vulnerable innovations are at the stage of dissemination. Herron¹ identifies the problem:

For nearly two decades now, we have seen large amounts of capital invested in the production of a variety of new curricula. Unfortunately, evidence is beginning to accumulate that indicates that much of this effort has had relatively little impact on the daily routine of the average classroom teacher. Why? (p. 47)

He goes on to describe the process of extinction: ‘a grant expires and an outside consultant or team leaves the scene’ and the common occurrence is of ‘the new program or project being introduced into a school system and then disappearing without trace.’ (p. 47)

In the spring of 1969 the Schools Council organized a conference in Scarborough on curricula for the young school leaver (reported in Working Paper 33).² The Humanities Curriculum Project was fairly extensively discussed in the several working groups. At the final plenary session, its director, Lawrence Stenhouse, prophesied that the Project was likely to fail in dissemination for want of adequate provision for training and support. The group dismissed him as a Cassandra. There were public rebukes and private reprimands. The reaction was not, at the time, unusual. There are still vestiges of a touching belief in the notion that good

ideas make their own way, although in reality they may not travel even the length of a school corridor:

Even in those schools where primary experiments have been carried out in selected classes, the experience has not been spread to the rest of the classes! Schools in the same neighbourhood have for a number of years been unaffected by these experiments, and schools in surrounding communities have shown very little interest in them.*

Curriculum innovations that are left to make their own way may travel comfortably for a while on the passport of their distinctive authority, but they are unlikely to survive; without adequate structures for communication and support they will more readily fall prey to teacher mobility, become vulnerable to competing demands and alternative pedagogies, and be more subject to distortion.

The haphazard spreading of ideas we would call diffusion; we would reserve the word dissemination for a policy which is built on a recognition of the difficulties of innovation and which seeks to provide ordered opportunities for communication, training and support.

Misunderstandings complicate the task

The status of the materials

Unlike a marketing approach which aims directly at influence leading to purchase, the dissemination programme of a curriculum project should aim at providing data so that informed decisions may be made by prospective adopters. The achievement of this aim was in our case threatened by the not uncommon view that projects which produce classroom materials are primarily about materials and that the materials are the key to successful implementation in the classroom.

We came to see that the Project would require of most teachers some unlearning and re-learning and that training courses would be a central feature of our dissemination programme. We suspected that it might not be easy to build a climate in which this view would be widely respected. There were several reasons: there was already some evidence of a belief in the magic of materials; the materials of the Project were widely available;

* Per Dalin, in an unpublished paper on the process of innovation in education prepared for a workshop held at St John's College, Cambridge, in 1969. For a report of the workshop see *The Management of Innovation in Education* (OECD/Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 1971).