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ON CIVICS EDUCATION

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Perhaps more than any other subject Civics can be used to encourage pupils to develop the tendency to notice socially important problems, and to take on themselves the responsibility for doing something about them, to develop integrated thought-action strategies which involve developing the tendency to spontaneously engage in effective behaviour - to be sensitive to the feelings that indicate that all is not as well as it might be, to bring these up into full consciousness and think about the situation, to translate these thoughts into effective action by collecting relevant data (and shutting off and ignoring irrelevant data, such as most of what pupils are taught at school) sifting relevant data from irrelevant information, analysing situations, planning action strategies, anticipating obstacles to goal attainment, seeking out needed help and information, seeking out resources, tracking on progress toward one's goals and, if necessary, taking effective corrective action, making use of the cues available from the environment which indicate ways of improving the effectiveness of what one is doing, working with others, learning to lead and to follow: learning to articulate goals and means to their attainment, learning to build up one's own understanding of a total plan of action and one's own part within it without having to be told exactly what to do and when to do it.

It should be noted that if our concern is to develop this tendency to engage spontaneously and effectively in socially-directed innovativeness it is necessary to avoid telling pupils what they should do; they need to practice these things in connection with their own goals; goals that are important to them. They need to clarify their own values and to plan effective action strategies for their attainment. They need to learn how to learn without instruction (the antithesis of what teachers have taught them in the past). They need to learn how the organisations of society in fact work, and to understand the reasons that lie behind the tendency of the organisations to function in this way; that is to say they need to come to accept people and social organizations for what they are and

understand why they behave as they do, rather than criticize them and refuse to have anything to do with them because they do not function as text books say they should. They then need to use this knowledge to set up new institutions and procedures in order to improve the organisation of society. Even more important than learning how organisations work may be developing strategies to find out how organisations work - such as stimulating them in some way and carefully observing the consequences of this stimulation, trying other strategies etc.

If pupils are to develop the tendency to notice feelings, to articulate their concerns and reflect on that which is important to them (the only way in which to be creative) teachers must avoid battering pupils with "facts" to learn: this only dulls the senses, stifling creativity and initiative, stifling feelings of competence to learn on one's own; one must encourage them to air their own idiosyncratic concerns, to entertain "crazy" and idealistic notions of ways in which these might be dealt with and then to translate these crazy ideas into more practical schemes. (The germ of most worthwhile ideas is crazy). One must avoid trying to force the whole of one's group of pupils to do the same thing, to value the same things, to think in the same way, to have the same concerns: one is much less likely to transform a "duty" into effective action than something that one is genuinely concerned about. Pupils must come to respect each other for their varied strengths, to look on each other as resources to help them and to be helped, through, for example, cooperative brain-storming sessions, data-gathering exercises, etc. - but not under the forced compliance of the teacher. Pupils have to learn to cope with controversy - virtually anything that is important is controversial, and things that are not controversial are rarely important. And it is a radical departure for teachers to become involved in controversy! Pupils must learn to tolerate the anxieties which come from trying to tackle new and uncharted problems, from tackling the unknown, from not knowing if one is doing the right thing, or even asking

the right questions, they have to learn not to worry too much about the possibility of making the same mistakes as others have made, to learn, in other words, what it is like to tackle new problems (as every school-boy knows, if problems are not new they are not really problems), to experience the satisfactions that come from successfully mastering a difficult new problem on one's own or with the aid of others, to learn that one cannot put the world to rights, but that one can do something to further understanding of the problem or to remedy the situation, to learn that one can take corrective action if, after taking as much into account as possible, one finds that one has set out in the wrong direction. One has to learn that one cannot be certain that one is doing something worthwhile, but that, even if one does not achieve the goal one sets out to achieve, one learns something which enables one to achieve one's goals more effectively in the future. Pupils need to learn to tolerate apparently wandering committee discussions in the knowledge that such discussions do usually move the group towards a better understanding of the situation, and simultaneously to learn the sort of responsible behaviour which enables committees to pursue their goals more, rather than less effectively (even though, necessarily, involving stumbling around in the dark).

We have hinted at some of the things Civics teachers have to do and to avoid; but their job is un-enviable. They have to tread the narrow path between generating effective action strategies and generating disruptive rebellion. The problem can be illustrated through the common question of "What to do about the Maoists." To take the line that the Civics teachers' job is to inculcate a respect for democratic institutions and show the pupils why the Maoists are wrong is to ignore the very real questions the Maoists pose, and to refuse to face the sorts of issues which most basically need to be tackled in our society. To stamp out this sort of sensitivity to problems, to fail to respect the concern if not the solution, is to defeat one from the object of one's exercise.

Equally to fan the belief that a "revolution" will provide the "answer", even though one cannot specify the institutions and personal competencies that are required to achieve the desired goals, would seem likely to prove non-productive. A more constructive course might be to consider the problems posed, the sort of political (management) institutions that would be required to tackle them, and the human resource competencies required to man those organisations. What sort of political structures are required? And what sort of competencies are required? And how are they to be developed if we are to solve the sort of problems to which the Maoists point? For of the facts that our people and our institutions have in the past been unable to cope with the problems of unemployment, pollution, war, cold war, poverty, and rich nations getting richer, there is no doubt. Why do our people and our institutions function as they do? What new types of institutions are required? And how could we get them set up? What sort of skills and competencies do we need to do that?

It is, of course, taboo to "attack" our "democratic" institutions in this way. It is even nastier to suggest that pupils be helped to understand the way these organisations really function and to develop the political (Machaevellian?) skills needed to deal with them and to get them to achieve the goals they want them to achieve. And it will be almost as unpopular to suggest that we need new bureaucratic institutions, staffed by more civil servants ("living off the tax payer") to deal with these social problems.

The trouble is that the terms "political", "bureaucratic", and "Civil servant" are perjorative. Less emotionally, what we are saying is simply that we want better organisations, staffed by people with the human resource competencies and knowledge that enables them to run these organisations effectively in order

to achieve the goals society wants them to achieve. That is to say our problem is a problem of developing appropriate management structures, management procedures, and management skills and knowledge. These, of course, have to be socially directed. Indeed one of the most important developments needed both in organisations and in the skills and competencies of those who staff them, is to ensure that these organisations do function to achieve the goals of the people they are intending to serve. The organisations have to take into account the fact that society is pluralistic - that a variety of goals have to be achieved and sub-sectors of the population have to be catered for differently: it is not a question of majorities making decisions which will be binding for all. Thus the organisations have to be, to a considerable extent, decentralised and non-hierarchical. The people who staff them have to learn to take several criteria into account when making decisions. They have to learn, for example, not just to consider the cost-effectiveness or efficiency of alternative policies in money/terms alone. They have, indeed, to recognise that there is no one best decision on most problems and, in particular, to recognize that that compromises which allow different sub-sectors of the population to go their own way are essential. (This, of course, is in complete contradiction to the belief that politicians should find the one right way to do things and not be influenced by pressure groups). They have to take care to bring out veiled issues to the open - instead of confining them to the back stairs so that the public can be hoodwinked into thinking that all issues have been discussed and that there is one best solution that can be found.

So, as the need arises, our civics teacher will have to provide help and resources to enable his pupils to develop management skills and to become familiar with the tools of management - fiscal policies (and the psychological processes which are responsible for their differential success,) subtle processes of leadership, management, and conflict resolution, and an

understanding of the management of motivation. The pupil has to be freed from restricting common-sense notions (such as "the government must balance its budget") and have his attention directed to problems which are closer to reality (such as inflation or the balance of payments). By directing attention to the reasons which lie behind abstract concerns, ways in which the problem might be solved may become apparent.

For the benefit of those Civics teachers who stress the development of citizenship it may be worth stressing that the development of citizenship involves an opportunity to practice citizenship. But children are the group most deprived of civil rights of any group in the population; they cannot choose their place of work; they have no say in decisions which influence them intimately; they have no part of formulating the laws which govern them; they have no right to aid to defend themselves against punishments which are daily inflicted on them for the transgression of laws they have played no part in formulating, with which they may not identify, and with which they may not even agree.

Achievement of the goals we have outlined is very demanding on teachers. The goals can only be achieved through highly structured educational inputs directed towards achieving them. If they are to be achieved teachers must be clear about what is to be achieved, how it is to be achieved, and how to find out whether they have achieved it. They must be able to pursue these things without being distracted onto many of the less important goals they have had to pursue in the past.