

https://dspace.org/

Teacher as model

Jarrett, James Louis

1974
Johannesburg College of Education
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/27518
Jarrett, J.L. (1973/1974). Teacher as model. Symposium: A Journal of Education for Southern Africa, pp. 63-67.

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

teacher as a model

JAMES L. JARRETT

A young teacher complains, after some failure of her pupils to come up with the right answer, "But I've told them that a dozen times." We all know her sense of exasperation. Yet, hearing this plaint, the experienced teacher says, not necessarily out loud, "Telling is not teaching."

Fair enough, but as with almost all the important things, it is much easier to say what teaching **isn't** than to say what it **is.**

The Concept "Model"

One sort of answer centres around the concept "model". To teach is to provide a model. However, perhaps "provide" is too weak, for just as I can tell without anyone really hearing, so I can provide a model without anyone noticing, or doing anything about it; and in both cases we have what some people regard as a contradiction in terms: teaching-without-learning. Still, let us see what providing a model means, and then supplement it, if necessary.

What is a model?

By "model" we should not mean an ideal. Most of us could not with a straight face present ourselves to our pupils, or anyone else, as paragons. Still, to the extent that we claim to be teachers we claim to merit a certain emulation. Perhaps this is not true for those who see teaching as simply transmittal: I, as teacher, know something that you, the pupils, do not, so I pass it along to you: there now! But if, as I think, learning has far more to do with certain ways of functioning than with bits of information or knowledge, then I as teacher need to be concerned with my pupils' acquiring certain facilities or skills. And though it is certainly not impossible or unheard of for the teacher who cannot swim to teach others to swim, for the teacher who is a poor problem-solver to help others to become expert problem-solvers, we would normally expect the teacher, with all due modesty, to put herself forward as an exemplar of the skill or facilities in question.

Equality

Suppose a class discussion of fourteen year olds — and I would claim that the following illustration could fairly easily be adjusted to apply to older or younger pupils — about "Equality":

Johnny: I don't think there is any such thing as equality. People are never equal.

Susan: Well, but don't we **begin** equal? I believe that "all men are created equal", whatever happens to them afterwards.

Johnny: No, that's not true either. Everybody knows that some babies are bigger and some are smaller. Some are black and some are white. Some are sick and some are healthy. No, even at the beginning there's no equality.

Teacher: I guess whoever wrote that about all men being created equal was the most ignorant person in all the world.

Johnny (suspiciously): What do you mean?

Teacher: As you say, everybody knows that even newborn babies differ — or "everybody", except the one who wrote that we "are all born equal.' ' So he must have been exceptionally ignorant.

Johnny: Well, I don't know about that, but I think it was wrong.

Teacher: Perhaps so, but don't we first have to tell what it means? You think that probably he too knew what you and I know about babies being born physically different?

Johnny: Yes.

Teacher: Then, is it fair to assume that he must have had something else in mind by "being born equal"?

Johnny: Yes, I suppose so.

Teacher: What other possibilities occur to you — any of you? . . . .

I do not, of course, put this forward as a supreme instance of good teaching. In fact, in order to serve as an adequate illustration of my point, it must be seen as the sort of exchange that very frequently goes on in a classroom. Neither is it necessary that in such a case, the pupils all say to themselves or each other, "What a brilliant teacher we have!" In fact, I'm going to assume that no such thought occurs to any of them. But I would assert that there is **content** to this teaching episode that is beyond "learning what equality is". (As in Socrates' colloquies, even after a long time the participants may conclude that they still cannot define the elusive term.) And that **content** is something like: "a good way to go about considering such an issue is . . ."; or, "We need to be careful about our assumptions when we are interpreting . . ." Or, at a much higher level of generality: "To straighten out our thinking . . ."

Thoughtfulness

In other words, in our illustration a teacher is exemplifying a kind of thoughtfulness, a certain degree of skill in thinking through a problem. I have said that it is not necessary that the pupils explicitly admire the teacher — and we would begin to get suspicious of the teacher who habitually acted in such a way as to evoke explicit admiration. But I imagine that it **is** necessary for the pupils, at **some** level of consciousness, to sense the effectiveness of the teacher's approach to this problem.

Perhaps this gives an example of providing a model. (It need hardly be remarked that just as one swallow does not make a summer, so one bit of "good thinking" on the part of the teacher is very unlikely to herald sunny days ahead.) But now there comes this problem: will it not remain a spectator sport for the pupils, so that they are as content to let the teacher do the thinking as I am to let the professionals play soccer for me? I think we have to admit that a teacher's effectiveness (in this and other ways) may even impress students to the extent that they will be less likely than before to behave similarly, in that they are newly impressed with the gulf between themselves and the exemplar or model.

Thinking

It is not enough to "provide a model" of thinking, or of thinking of a certain kind or in a certain way. The teacher is obliged to go beyond that provision so as to motivate emulation — that is, to make the model both effective, and effectual. There is far more to be said at this point than I know to say, or even within what I think I know, to take time for; so I will skip over the difficult matter of motivation by saying only that **somehow** the teacher will often need to make it seem a good thing, not only for herself, but for others, especially the pupils, to be similarly thoughtful; and in saying this I do realise that a given teaching context may be so strongly anti-intellectual, as to baffle even the imaginative teacher with the problem of how to be a strong countervailing influence. But even assuming that thoughtfulness can be accomplished, there remains one other important step. (Perhaps an adequate analysis would reveal it to be a series of steps.) That step is to help the pupils employ the model and to carry on the emulation themselves. This may be taken to be a matter of exercises which evoke and give outlet to thinking behaviour; exercises with sufficient variety of context to facilitate the transfer of this training.

But I imagine that there are many who would go along pretty well with all of this, perhaps even thinking that there was little that was novel about it, and who would begin to demur with my next move. For I want to explore educational goals that are **not** matters of thinking.

In 1961 the American Educational Policies Commission found, amidst a vast number of possible purposes of the schools, one that was **central:** "The purpose which runs through and strengthens all other educational purposes — the common thread of education — is the development of the ability to think."[1] If one follows this lead, one can then provide for educational variety by going on to speak of thinking about mathematics, thinking about biology, thinking about literature, and so on right through the curriculum.

Or one can follow the lead of Martin Heidegger and speak of calculative thinking, which has to do with virtually all of the intellective means of solving human problems ,as distinct from meditative thinking which consists in a

kind of **waiting** for aspects of being that cannot be taken by storm? Still again, Bartlett has distinguished between four kinds of thinking: the logical-mathematical, the experimentally scientific, the everyday, and the artistic.[2] Or, in some other way, **thinking** can be, and sometimes is, broadened, so as to include almost everything anyone would want to go on in schools.

Thinking and problem solving

However, there may be advantages in keeping to a somewhat more restricted meaning of the term, such that thinking has to do with the rational, intellective, typically analytic ways of approaching problems; expressions like "getting straight" and "sorting out" and "clarifying" as well as, sometimes, "providing" and "demonstrating" are closely associated with thinking. Thus, we may commend a person as a thinker but then go on to express reservations about other aspects of his human functioning.

For instance, to be a good thinker is not necessarily to be a good perceiver where perception has to do with sensory awareness and discrimination. ("I'm afraid I didn't really notice the roses; for, though I walked right through the garden, I was all the while thinking through a lecture I have to give.")

Or, again, nearly everyone has known persons who are much more highly developed on their thinking than they are on their feeling "sides"; and vice versa.

It is often held that however many 'sides' a person has or may have, the kind of education we associate with school is properly confined to thinking.: I should say that whether or not this is held to explicitly as part of one's philosophy of education, it nevertheless often seems the operative principle in determining curriculum, teaching procedures, pupil evaluation and staff selection and promotion.

Restriction

I myself believe that this is much too restrictive a programme for the schools, and has in fact very deleterious consequences on the development of pupils, but I will not here stop to argue this, only give it out as my belief that it is important for schools to provide education to the feelings and perceptions, as well as to other human functions that are different from (though of course they are related to) thinking, in the usual sense.

I should like to mention two or three of these other functions, now, in connection with our theme of "modelling".

Let us fix now in our mind's eye and ear a teacher sitting amidst a group of seven-year olds. She says, "Let me tell you what I saw while I was walking to school today, and then I'd like to hear what some of you saw . . ." and she proceeds to describe the sense she had as she first stepped out of doors of the sun warming and drying the night air, of the way the leaves of the maple trees turned mildly in the little breeze and glistened as they caught the sun's beams, and then of something that darted from one tree to the next — but it was to one side and she didn't get a good look. Then she stopped to watch and — there! It's a bird . . . a jay, its long tail trailing behind, and bluer than the sky, as blue as Susan's skirt, and chattering — as Susan **never** does — all the while . . . And so on. But I like to think of her as being a much more acute, more telling observer than I am, so that the children get a sense of a person who is remarkably open to the immense variety of sights and sounds and odours and textures surrounding her, of a person who registers and responds to them, who attends to them and reveals the pleasure she took in her responses.

Model perceiver

In short, again a model, now a model perceiver. This time I mentioned the pleasure, perhaps even the enthusiasm of the teacher: surely, here is at least a start on recommending, and thus motivating, the taking up of the model. And then there is what the teacher can do to facilitate the development of similar skills, her challenges, her exercises, her responses to their efforts, her helping them to learn from each other.

And though it may be easier to think of this activity with quite young children, it should be apparent that such teaching remains appropriate at every age.

Introverting and Extraverting

Now, for a final case, let me mention a pair of ways of functioning: introverting and extraverting.

Here too there is a vast range of human propensities and skills, though I would rather avoid the rigid typing of the words introvert and extravert (as I would of my IQ and yours and his in the sense of something we are stuck with). Some teachers are well equipped to exemplify how it is to turn to the outer world, let us here say especially to the world of **other persons,** and there to function sensitively, caringly, feelingly. Others are more apt at turning inward, there too finding a goodly company, and a myriad of possible inter-relations — or shall we now say, intra-relations?

The most direct way, of course, of exemplifying the outward-direction is with respect to the students themselves, and it goes without saying that every pupil has some sense of how the teacher responds to himself and to at least some of his fellows. If he knows teachers who respond abstractly and impersonally to the members of a class, as if they were as similar as the chairs on which they sit, he hopefully knows others who have the gift (not necessarily innate) of responding to each person uniquely and vitally . (As Martin Buber has eloquently taught, the very "I" of a person, e.g. a teacher responding to other persons-as-persons, to "thou's" is radically different from the circumscribed I that relates to objects, and to "it".)

The teacher able to respond in his own person as a model for relating warmly and vitally to others is of course a person who is not hiding behind a mask or a role, but who is **there** to the others, regardless of their age or sophistication, just what he is, which of course means with weaknesses (including ignorances) as well as strengths. (Some teachers seem to think that if ever their pupils penetrate their disguise, all is lost, their influence and teaching at an end!) And he is a person with likes and dislikes, values and disvalues, preferences and aversions. And he is amenable to change. And not least of all, he is interested in others, as will be indicated by the way he listens to and looks at them.

The teacher able to provide a model for inward-turning has, perhaps, a harder job, if for no other reason than that he must, by the nature of the case, turn outward sufficiently to make what he is doing observable. But there is no contradiction or paradox here, for the person who easily and naturally relates to his own ideas and feelings and moods and attitudes, is not by virtue of that fact a recluse, a social isolate.

Erich Fromm has pointed out that, "A person may mistake his own feelings by ignoring what he really feels and thinking that he feels what the situation requires of him.[3] The model we have in mind, on the other hand, is in touch with the way he feels, responds, and inclines, and is able comfortably to dwell with what is going on inside, but is also able to allow access to his own subjectivty. Thus, there are people who are able, completely without arrogance or self-centredness, to talk about themselves in a way that is interesting and informative. They may describe something as private as a dream or convey a novel feeling-response or improvise an inventive fantasy in such a way as to make some others wonder what they have been missing about their own inside-life. Such persons we have a sense of over-hearing more than hearing.

And from such persons, given the model and the appropriate follow-ups that elicit and develop the skills in others, pupils may learn subjectivity. From their more extraverted fellows, the pupils may also learn — once deliberately constructed means are devised — more effective and authentic other-relating functions.

Proper functions

I must leave it an open question what the proper list of functions is, and which are the most important ones, and which are especially appropriate for the school to deal with more than casually. But I do believe that thinking, sensory perceiving, inter- and intrapersonal feeling, and imagining-intuiting are all very important, and highly appropriate for the schools. And I do believe that all of them are teachable by the modelling pattern I have sketched. Of course I believe that all these kinds of teaching are currently to be found, even commonly found, in school-

rooms, from nursery schools to education for adults (including aged adults); but so far as I know, not much of it has been legitimised and made deliberate, except for the especially intellective kind.

In a day when most of us are no longer mesmerised by the cosmic inevitability of the school curriculum as it presently is, one can imagine subordinating the typical school subjects to the human functions, or at least of working out a grid, such that by putting the subjects in a vertical column and the functions in a horizontal column we might be encouraged to explore more thoroughly, say, such interesting questions as to whether there isn't a place for education of the feelings within mathematics, and a place for thinking within physical education, and so on.

And consider how, in better recognition of functions beyond thinking, school administrators might re-examine staffing problems. (Here, of course, we are wide open to some pretty damaging parodies, such as, "We've already got three thinkers, but we're short of feelers and intuiters", etc; but this is a risk of any basic reform.)

And as to the implications for teacher education . . .? Dare one speak of meta-models?

REFERENCES

1. THE CENTRAL PURPOSE OF AMERICAN EDUCATION. Washington DC: NEA of the US. p. 12.
2. Sir Frederick Bartell, THINKING: AN EXPERIMENTAL AND SOCIAL STUDY, N.Y.: Basic Books, Inc. 1958, p. 197.
3. "The Creative Attitude" in Harold H. Anderson, ed., CREATING AND ITS CULTIVATION. N.Y.: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1959, p. 50.

APPRECIATION

It would be stale news to say that SYMPOSIUM is struggling to hold down rising production costs. Who isn't?

Bearing in mind that we receive no state subsidy in any form, we are able to keep afloat because

* all contributions are unpaid
* all members of the editorial board and staff are unpaid
* organisations express sympathy with our work and make us an occasional grant. In this respect we are most grateful to the WITWATERSRAND COUNCIL FOR EDUCATION for a grant of R250, a sum that helped us to hold our selling price despite rising production costs.
* Our advertisers, knowing quite well that we are not a mass circulation medium, use us as a *prestige medium* and in this way contribute handsomely to our main intention

TO PROVIDE A TOP-RATE EDUCATIONAL AT A PRICE ALL TEACHERS CAN AFFORD TO PAY