

Teaching Learning and Discipleship: Education beyond Knowledge Transfer

COLIN WRINGE

An attempt is made to identify what some have felt to be absent from recent official views as to how curricula and the transfer of knowledge are most performatively to be managed. To this end, particular conceptions of teaching and learning are proposed, and use is made of recent work by George Steiner in elaborating a third variant of the relationship between teacher, learner and what is to be learned, namely that of discipleship. While noting that Steiner is concerned with a small number of exceptional teachers, the possibility is considered that the concept may have some more general educational application, attention nevertheless being drawn to the possible dangers and drawbacks this may present.

PRELIMINARY COMMENTS

My purpose in this article is to consider one possible answer to the question: What precisely is it that many, including notably Nigel Blake, Paul Smeyers, Richard Smith and Paul Standish (2000), feel to be missing from the prevailing knowledge transfer model of education? If I spend some time setting out how I propose to interpret the mundane and already much discussed notions of teaching and learning, it is because they are often maligned and because I believe that critics of our current practice do their case little good by taking too negative a view of what may quite reasonably be regarded as normal, responsible and uncontentious professional practice. In my third section, discussing what, for want of a better word, I term 'discipleship', I make use of George Steiner's *Lessons of the Masters* (Steiner, 2003) with, however, no prior commitment to Steiner's moral acceptance and apparent enthusiasm for the relationship he examines between 'masters' and 'disciples'. In contrast to the rational and professional relationship expected between teachers, pupils and subject matter implied by our modern view of teaching and learning, that involved in the notion of discipleship is problematic, morally ambivalent and capable of raising a number of philosophical questions. These are discussed in the fourth and longest section of the article.

TEACHING

To avoid ambiguity I propose to reserve the term ‘teaching’ for activity that certainly highlights the teacher’s actions and expertise and may be characterised in the following way. Someone has something—knowledge, skills, techniques—to impart and simply does this by means of presentation or demonstration, which may, if necessary, be backed up by rehearsal and correction. The activity need not carry the negative connotations that used to attach to the terms ‘traditional education’, ‘didactic teaching’ or the like. For present purposes we may regard even so-called ‘guided discovery’, in which situation and context are set up so that the learner will ‘discover’ what the teacher expects him or her to discover, as a method of teaching rather than an example of ‘learning’, as the term will be defined below.

Those being taught may be old or young, the manner of the teaching may be perfectly friendly, supportive and egalitarian and in no way authoritarian or oppressive. Learners may, indeed, be the teacher’s equals or superiors who have simply come to benefit from transfer of the knowledge, information or skills the teacher has to impart. There is no implication that the presentation should be predominantly verbal or that any kind of uncomprehending drilling or rote learning is involved, though providing opportunity and encouragement for supervised practice may be part of the teacher’s role. The material taught may be vocational or recreational, part of a general educational curriculum or programme of cultural, political or religious instruction. The learner may learn willingly, be and remain the teacher’s equal, retain his or her emotional independence and, apart from acquiring the information, knowledge, skill or techniques imparted, remain unchanged in personality, attachments, commitments or general outlook on the world. It is, however, acknowledged by both parties that the teacher has knowledge that the learner does not and that the teacher rather than the learner is in a position to identify what needs to be learned, and at what point the learning is to be regarded as adequate. The teacher’s expertise may also extend to a knowledge of the best way of ordering, presenting or rehearsing the material to be taught.

Parts or stages of what is to be learnt may be separately identified and individually assessed as learnt or not learnt satisfactorily. Quantitative comparisons may in principle be made between good and bad learners, and good and less good teachers, as well as good and less good teaching and learning performances. A good teaching performance is one resulting in more learning rather than less, though we must be careful not to exaggerate the precision with which this can be assessed. Some learners, with their eye to the eventual monitoring process, will simply learn what is necessary to pass muster while others, those perhaps with a more genuine interest in what is learnt, will learn more than the teacher takes it upon him or herself to teach, and some teachers, deliberately or inadvertently, may do more to encourage this than others.

Teaching, as considered above, in which goals, methodologies, pace and mode of presentation are controlled by the teacher, is highly compatible

with styles of educational planning and management in which teachers are virtually required to plan in terms of learning outcomes. Though these in themselves may be subjects of evaluation, expertise is largely judged in terms of the selection of means to their achievement and the skill and effectiveness with which they are employed. Excellence in teaching is seen largely as a matter of technique. Exponents are interchangeable and the ideal is the reliable transmission of what the teacher, or those responsible for directing his or her professional activity, regard as desirable to be transmitted.

These remarks should not be taken as disparaging, particularly in the vocational field. We do not need to be told that we are best served if bus drivers, electricians, accountants and cardiologists have a reliable grasp of certain rudiments and if that grasp is reliably monitored before they are let loose on the public. Nor is it deniable that many of these rudiments are explicitly pre-specifiable and uncontroversial. These features of learning are not, however, limited to the field of vocational training. Certain kinds of learning are necessary to anyone's flourishing in the world into which, as Heidegger (1927) puts it, we are haplessly 'thrown'. Though, despite Allan Bloom (1987), we may baulk at the idea of attempting to provide an exhaustive list of what someone growing up in our culture needs to know, we cannot sensibly doubt that the basic rules of literacy and numeracy need to be learnt and that someone is seriously disadvantaged to the point of being a victim of social neglect if they have not been taught certain rules of conduct, courtesy, health and hygiene. There are also certain chunks of general scientific and cultural knowledge and understanding without which individuals would be incapable of social integration, let alone social mobility. There will be certain ways of teaching these things more rapidly and more reliably than others, and certain individuals who will acquire them more rapidly than others. Some teachers will consistently bring these results about more successfully than others. It is of interest to recognise these differences between methodologies and talents and to take account of them in devising procedures, managing institutions and allocating opportunities and resources.

LEARNING

The kindest thing to be said about a pedagogy conceived solely on the above lines, if such a thing were possible, is that however performative in its own terms, it would be impoverished, if not actually counterproductive, in terms of many well recognised educational goals, as well as dehumanising to operate. Some might be inclined to deny such a regime the title of education at all. Though there has been justified criticism of so-called child-centred pedagogies—not just of their excesses but of their underlying principles—it is nevertheless considered ideologically desirable these days to emphasise learning rather than teaching, to speak of the provision of learning opportunities, the student's learning experience and so on, rather than of teaching methods. Where, however, learning

outcomes are pre-specified, either explicitly or implicitly by means of course assessments, of which both teachers and students are bound to take note, the distinction is largely fraudulent. The 'learning experiences', study of particular texts, specimens or materials, the carrying out of certain experiments, the playing of certain educational games or other learning tasks, such as going to the library and looking up the three main exports of Western Australia, the use of discussion where the main points are summarised by the tutor at the end—these are not learning experiences in the sense in which the term will be used here but teaching methods, albeit liberal and often no doubt highly effective ones.

It was once a commonplace of educational discussion that while successful teaching is conceptually dependent on learning, much learning takes place without teaching. It will, I hope, not be thought too high-handed if, somewhat at variance with everyday usage, I distinguish between learning that comes about as a direct result of teaching and learning that pupils acquire in other ways, restricting my use of the term to the latter category. As we have seen, much that is essential for students and pupils to know may best be consciously taught, the more competently the better. But learning, open-ended, independent learning, which may in general terms be guided, even monitored, but which admits of no pre-specified outcomes that may be explicitly defined or consciously placed before the pupils, has traditionally been regarded as an essential ingredient in education. Much is learned when children interact with each other in the playground. To be deprived of the experience—and this is a criticism commonly levelled at education at home—would be a deprivation, and an educational deprivation at that. Teachers may supervise to ensure that undesirable lessons of bullying and unkindness are not learned, and school prospectuses may refer pompously to the value of social learning, but their writers would hesitate to list very precisely the specific learning to be achieved or the order, means, indicators or desired level of their achievement. Similarly unspecific in their outcomes are such undeniably educational experiences as participation in school clubs and societies, school visits and exchanges, residential and field courses (though the latter may also have some 'taught' objectives), work experience, wider reading beyond prescribed texts and the intense informal and sometimes passionate discussions and disputes that some university students still find time to engage in. Much learning, including learning in our present restricted sense, will also take place as a result of attending classes or lectures, and studying course materials or carrying out prescribed study tasks, but characteristic of such learning is the fact that it is incidental to pre-specified course objectives and, like the learning from the informal educational experiences referred to above, will vary widely from student to student, even where the same course of teaching is undergone. In following a course on the Nineteenth Century English Novel, two students may achieve the course objectives of acquiring a knowledge of the novels of Thackeray, Trollope and Hardy, especially if they have been adequately taught, but one may have learned to value compassion and modesty while the other has learned that, in order to get on in life, it is advisable to make

oneself discreetly agreeable to one's superiors, both of these being valuable lessons in their different ways.

It is through learning of this essentially unplanned and unguided kind that the individual pursues and constructs his or her own, individual, personal identity. It is not a process of spontaneous development or flowering, as traditional child-centred educators may have imagined. Contents, concepts, values and frameworks are necessarily involved, though these are taken up in an individual, personal and unplannable way, from the culture in which one has existed previously. They are, however, combined and modified in the light of one's ongoing experience, one's interaction with one's environment, notably one's social and interpersonal environment. Educators may seek to encourage the learner's openness to experience and steer him or her towards those experiences that are educationally rich and appropriately challenging. They may even attempt to correct undesirable or misconceived learning, as, for example, when secondary pupils returning from a school visit abroad appear to have acquired grossly unflattering stereotypes of those living in the country visited, but attempts to pre-specify, monitor or accredit individual learning (as opposed to accrediting participation in the experience itself) are problematic. To pre-specify the learning that is expected to result from these more open educational experiences is to constrain and restrict that diversity of aspiration and perception that is characteristic of an open, changing society, not to say of human progress generally. Formal attempts to monitor or assess such a process are bound to be ungenerous, detecting or recording only what is anticipated, or at least recognised by the assessor. The actual learning may be far more profound, differentiated or extensive than the assessor can conceive. This is bound often to be the case as each new generation builds upon and surpasses the experience of those that have gone before. Human progress is not the exclusive domain of the outstandingly able. We all come to understand things our elders did not, even though we may not match them in intellectual or vocational achievement.

No doubt it should be regarded as an important part of an educational institution's function, at whatever level, to provide imaginative and generously endowed opportunities for open-ended, informal learning in addition to well managed and agreeably presented teaching of the kind described earlier. This may meet some of the criticisms of those who complain of recent trends towards an exclusively performative view of educational quality. We may, nevertheless, still ask whether a combination of good quality teaching with enlarged opportunities for informal learning, does not continue to leave a significant lacuna in the necessary educational experience of future flourishing individuals.

DISCIPLESHIP

Steiner's *Lessons of the Masters* is, of course, not remotely concerned with the day-to-day routines of modern mass education. Proceeding more or

less chronologically, the author discusses the relationship between various outstanding individuals and their pupils or followers: Socrates and Alcibiades, Jesus and some of the Apostles, notably Judas, Abelard and Héloïse, Faust and his *famulus* Wagner, Husserl and Heidegger, Heidegger and Arendt, as well as Nadia Boulanger and her pupils and, for good measure, the legendary American football coach Knute Rockney and his players. In a variety of modes the theme has also been quite widely treated in literature and film: Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game* (Hesse, 1943), *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Spark, 1962) and the recent film *Copying Beethoven* come to mind. If I follow Steiner's terminology of masters and disciples with grammatically appropriate personal pronouns I do so without prejudice to the possibility that both roles may be occupied by persons of either gender even if, for obvious historical reasons, most of Steiner's 'masters' were men.

Common features of the relationship according to Steiner are:

1. First, the master is certainly not engaged in mere knowledge transfer. When Christ tells people they should love their enemies, or love their neighbours as themselves, this is not just a piece of useful information like 'This is the periodic table of elements' or 'This is the rhyming pattern of Shelley's *Ozymandias*', take it or leave it. However much knowledge is transferred to someone in this latter spirit, it will not change them very much. What Steiner's masters have to teach certainly will change the lives of their disciples and that of a lot of other people as well. The master's aim is not to inform but to convince, not to add a new bit of knowledge to the existing conceptual framework but to bring about a new way of seeing things altogether.
2. A second key feature of the relationship between master and disciple is its intensity. The master is totally committed to what he or she is teaching. It is desperately important to the master that he or she gets the message across even though it may cost them their lives—on the cross or in the cup of hemlock. This may result in unspeakably harsh treatment by the master of the disciple if he or she does not unconditionally defer to the master's teaching. Alcibiades is humiliated by Socrates as, according to Steiner, Judas is by Jesus. It did not do, Steiner suggests, to argue with Nadia Boulanger or, for that matter, with Knute Rockney if you wanted to stay in the team. Resistance or equivocation might result in the would-be disciple being summarily banished or expelled from the circle. This may seem to resemble Lyotard's (1979) academic terrorism: agree with me or disappear. But if the authority of the master is absolute for as long as the relationship lasts, this is not based on coercive power or social prestige but on the fact that the he or she holds the key to a kind of Arcadian realm (1) in which disciples will enjoy what they suppose to be a better, more fulfilling or in some other way superior way of life, understanding or being to that of the common run of their

- fellows. The master is also able to offer or withhold recognition that a particular disciple is on the road to achieving that state.
3. The essential mode of communication between master and disciple is oral and face-to-face, but it is not simply a matter of the master's telling while the disciple listens. The disciple may be cross-questioned, harried, persecuted, catechised by the master. One may recall Christ's persistent questioning of Peter. 'But who say *you* that I am?' Mere repetition of the standard reply will not suffice. The disciple is given the opportunity, indeed obliged, to perform and the performance is closely monitored and criticised, often harshly, and then repeated until the master is satisfied. The master has to be satisfied that the doctrine has been fully interiorised by the disciple. If it has not, ridicule and humiliation may be the sanction. The deferential raising of possible objections may be permitted, but only to enable the master to show that these are completely misguided. 'You are quite right, Socrates. Now I understand', or words to that effect, are the only acceptable conclusion to the discussion.
 4. The disciple is desperately and competitively keen to please the master, to be his favourite, his successor, the one whom Jesus or Socrates loves above all others, in our terms, to be 'top of the class' and share in the master's authority and prestige in the eyes of the rest of the group. This may result in intense rivalry within the group of disciples—jealousy, resentment, intrigue, the expulsion or persecution of supposedly deviant disciples, rebellion, betrayal. Alcibiades, having failed to gain Socrates' favour, storms out in a fit of drunken pique (Plato, *Symposium*). Steiner suggests that Judas' betrayal may have been motivated by envy of the other disciple 'whom Jesus loved'. Miss Jean Brodie's pupils slander her in an anonymous letter to the headmistress.
 5. In addition to being emotionally intense, the relationship between master and disciple may be reciprocal. Steiner identifies Eros as an essential element in the relationship, as do Blake and his colleagues. Master and disciple may become lovers in the sexual sense, though Steiner makes it clear that sexual exploitation (by either master or disciple) is what he terms the 'sin against the Holy Ghost'. Each loves and is excited not by the bodily other but by the doctrine, the performance, the understanding of what is being taught as it is present in the other: in its apparent perfection in the master, in its emerging development in the disciple. Total commitment and involvement in the holy thing that is being taught supersedes all distinctions and norms of society, if not of morality itself.

From a modern, democratic, student-centred perspective the above picture will seem educationally unattractive, not to say monstrous, grotesque and certainly archaic. Surely, reliance on face-to-face teaching began to go out of fashion with the invention of the printed book, to say nothing of the gamut of twenty-first century impersonal modes of communication that release teachers from the 'drudgery' of interacting

personally with students. The very term ‘discipleship’ must, in any case, invoke religious connotations of ministering to the poor and ignorant, seeking salvation through a fervent act of belief and subjection, quite inappropriate in this modern, secular day and age. At very least it would seem to involve the worst horrors of traditional teacher-knows-all, authoritarian education with its opportunities for classroom domination, bullying and pupil humiliation. The idea of students, especially advanced or semi-adult students vying for the position of teacher’s pet is not edifying, even if we accept that it may have been excusable in one or two historically noted cases. Most students are not fortunate enough to be taught by Jesus or Socrates or even Heidegger or Nadia Boulanger. The emotional involvement of the teacher, even excluding the issue of sexual impropriety, is decidedly uncool, not to say unprofessional. The modern professional teacher must simply perform his prescribed task competently and diligently. Where a distinguished teacher becomes a legend or creates a following or younger group of imitators, this too may have its disadvantages and be regarded as slightly suspect, giving rise to mutterings about the cult of personality, indoctrination or cloning.

DISCIPLESHIP: A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION?

In suggesting that there might be something positive in the notion of discipleship, and that this might possibly be one of the elements missing from the current regime of bite-sized assessable learning objectives and competent professional knowledge transfer, I have no wish to defend the pompous, self-opinionated bullies or warped individuals of both sexes for whom absolute deference of opinion or complete control of pupils’ behaviour was the be-all and end-all of the teacher-pupil relationship in the past. Nor is it supposed that every teacher can resemble Socrates or Jesus, or even Knute Rockney.

We must not be too disparaging of the normal, run-of-the-mill transfer of knowledge that young people, and also the not-so-young, need to flourish in the world in which they will grow up or in which they already exist. This may perfectly well include knowledge and skills enabling them to progress and find satisfaction in employment, to conform to social norms well enough to stay out of trouble and know enough about their society to understand what is going on, whether or not they wish to participate actively in their community’s affairs. It is also desirable that this be done as easily, as efficiently and (from the point of view of both teachers and pupils) as enjoyably, or at least as painlessly, as possible. Everybody needs this, and arguably everybody has a right to it. Certainly this is something those who employ teachers are entitled to expect.

But is it enough? If one is to develop a positive personality—let us not go so far as to say if one is to be a person at all—must there not be something one really cares about, something one thinks, one feels in one’s inmost heart, that has to be done properly, has to be got right? Without this, one is putty in the hands of others. One can have neither autonomy

nor integrity. For many people this may not have much to do with anything learned in an educational institution. Though everybody has to have the chance to learn what is taught in such places, this may not be what defines their personality. For some, however, especially those in any group of high academic achievers, it may well be. Many who read this will no doubt think it important that the expression of views about education has to be 'got right', and most would be not a little mortified if it were said that their understanding of these was careless and ill-thought-through or that it simply conformed to orthodox opinion.

For many others, however, what they truly care about may be more practical and down-to-earth. To give examples is to invite the criticism of trivialisation. So be it. What self-respecting tradesman enjoys being confronted with a bit of his own sloppy workmanship and has not somewhere ringing in his memory the stinging and, as it seemed at the time, unjustifiably harsh and impatient rebuke of his first instructor? Would he be as upset now if the rebuke had been less sharp or if he had been less keen to do the job well or gain the instructor's approval? Have we not all been rebuked in fact or in imagination when we were new to this or that role and anxious to perform it to perfection? Would a mere rational explanation of what needed to be done, however clearly and logically delivered, have created the same commitment in us? If we are to care, we need to know that someone else cares and we need to care about that person's opinion of us. This is best done personally, individually and face-to-face. I have to know the master is angry with me now, and that I would rather die than make the same mistake again. In short, is not some form of emotional charge necessary if one is to become truly committed? We might even be inclined to speak of an element of 'conversion' or 'enlightenment' in this process, even if others might think 'brain-washing' or 'indoctrination' more appropriate terms.

We may all betray or, as we will be inclined to say, outlive our masters. 'He was a good man to work for, but many of the things he insisted on aren't really necessary these days.' 'My Gran taught me a lot, but, of course, she was one of the old school, and times have changed.' 'Professor Smith was a brilliant sociologist, but these days, I'm afraid, his paradigm is no longer in favour with the funding councils.'

We cannot deny the religious or quasi-religious connotations of the term 'disciple'. We may think of the doctrine being revealed to the elect, the prophet or priest, by God through inspiration or text, and suppose that this must be accepted as given on pain of error, heresy or apostasy. It is true that not all religious believers conceive of their faith in these fundamentalist terms. The point of the Protestant Reformation was, after all, that God may speak to the heart of any individual and may reach him or her through their own reading and interpretation of the holy text. Such a faith, it may seem, has no need of priests, intermediaries or gurus.

But the believer must first catch the faith, which, in the first instance must simply be accepted on the authority of another. Religious belief and the like cannot be attained by common, everyday experience. Like the individual's commitment to what are the most important things in her life,

they are essentially transmitted, not as mere utilitarian pieces of everyday knowledge and skill but as special insights, things that are worthy of value and admiration, things that in turn make the individual special in her own eyes, things that she thinks she knows and truly understands in a way that others do not. It is an understanding the individual shares, or imagines she shares, strives to share and be recognised as sharing, with the master and perhaps a small band of close companions. It is something worth making the effort for and suffering mental pain for, and for the sake of which it is even worth risking the humiliation of initial failure. For the knowledge, skill or ability to perform that is truly worth having does not come easily. The disciple submits willingly to the discipline and to whoever can induct her into it, whoever holds the key to it. She does not have to be coerced or corralled, even by the law of compulsory education, far less by any syllabus of learning objectives or examination requirements. Those apply to the outcomes of teaching as described earlier, valid in their own terms (for we must render unto Caesar) but belonging to a different order.

Where real learning is going on, there will certainly be emotional involvement between learner and what is being learned, between teacher and what is being learned, and between learner and teacher, for such learning, such commitment cannot be caught from a teacher who is not him or herself excited by what is to be learned and by the spectacle of its being learned anew by someone who was previously innocent of it. What is being shared with the pupil is his or her authentic vision or understanding of the subject, not some concatenation of second-hand textbook propositions. Not all pupils in the class will be involved in this way. Some will be jaded or bored, just not interested, others will not yet be awakened. But the enthusiasm may spread and be shared by many who may all want to learn, to be included amongst those who get it right. To love a subject or art is to desire to excel in it: the more passionate the love, the stronger the desire to excel, to do better than anyone else, to do better than anyone has ever done before, to be recognised as excelling by the teacher, the one person whose judgement counts, to be, if only for a moment, the favourite, the one whom the teacher loves, the one whose hand goes up first and is chosen to answer the key question at the end of the lesson, which will signal to all that the point of the lesson has been grasped and which will resolve the almost unbearable tension and doubt in the minds of teacher and pupils alike. Is it surprising if, at such a moment, teacher and pupil are each inclined to think the very sun shines out of the other?

Just as not every pupil will be inspired by every or, in some cases, any subject, even though he or she may be acquiring good, satisfactory utilitarian learning, so not every teacher, even though competent, professional and diligent, will be inclined to inspire such enthusiasm. Some may even doubt the rightness or appropriateness of attempting to do so. Certainly none can do so all the time without grave risk to their sanity. And no employer can contractually demand it.

Public and official attitudes to teachers who are inspiring, charismatic or, above all, emotionally involved with their subject or their pupils are,

perhaps understandably, ambivalent, even though shallow lip-service to these qualities may sometimes be paid. What is needed are teachers who can be relied upon to deliver the required knowledge and skills to set pupils up with the knowledge to get a job and perform well in the workplace. The successful teacher is expected to get a good batch of exam results, not sweep his or her pupils off their feet, so that they flock to his options to the neglect of supposedly more important subjects or of a 'balanced' attitude to their academic work. Nor are they supposed to inspire too many promising pupils to go off to study Art or Music in Paris or Vienna, Medicine in Cuba or Philosophy in Lhasa instead of pursuing the more orthodox careers their parents and schools had in mind for them.

Those who excel as the masters of some craft, discipline or performance may create a following or leave a legacy. For this they are not always praised. A dedicated tradesman may, in later life, find that a number of his more successful local colleagues and competitors turn out to be his own former apprentices. This would seem to be entirely good for the locality and for the tradesman's own standing and self-image. Possibly, however, it may limit the range and variety of styles and types of handiwork available in the area. The dead hand of the former master may be difficult to escape, despite competition from elsewhere.

In the creative professions such as art, music, architecture or *haute couture*, an outstanding practitioner may establish a fashion, the tyranny of which is difficult to break, pending some further revolutionary change in taste. Something similar occurs in politics and the public services, including education. It is not clear that the long-term effects of this are entirely disadvantageous. Change advances by fits and starts, and it is driven forward by alternating enthusiasms inspired by master practitioners and continued by their acolytes until their negative side-effects become apparent or the master's charisma begins to fade.

The actual teaching profession at various levels may present additional dangers, the precise reasons for which may merit exploration. These clearly relate both to the nature and possible distortions of authority involved in the teaching situation and to the fact that teachers at all levels are involved with those, even at the more advanced stages, who may be relatively immature and uncertain about their own future development. To take an obvious example, a highly committed history teacher may, over time, come to number several distinguished academic historians among her former pupils. Some people, however, may doubt the value of her ability regularly to attract the ablest students into her subject when some of them might have gone on to be successful physicists or geographers, and when many may come to regret their subject-choice in later life.

At a more senior level, it is not surprising if musicians, painters or academics who arrive at a new understanding of their art or subject are imitated by others. It is important to distinguish between a personality cult of the individual, who becomes an icon and whose work becomes a bandwagon that ambitious colleagues must jump onto quickly if they are not to be left behind, and the situation in which the new insight is genuinely grasped by followers as a better way of seeing things, which

those whose life is partly constituted by a passion for the subject are naturally induced to follow. Such changes naturally create controversy. This may be the inevitable way of things, the process by which the new and better naturally supplants what went before. The downside, imposing a demand for moral care and integrity on those concerned, is that rival schools of thought may become hegemonic or stigmatic. Labels such as ‘Oxford Philosophers’, ‘Chicago Social Scientists’, ‘Anglo-Saxon Analytical Philosophers of Education’ or ‘Postmodernists’, etc., have all too easily become tickets of institutional acceptance or academic death warrants in a way that may have simply reflected transient movements of fashion and power and inhibited rational debate.

Nor is there much of philosophical interest to say about situations in which deep involvement with the subject matter, or the one who teaches it, gives rise to political, religious or, indeed, sexual exploitation. The boundary between shared enthusiasm and exploitation is real enough, even if its precise location may require scrupulous self-examination to determine.

CONCLUSION

What may be said in summary of teaching, learning and discipleship, and their place in the education and upbringing of each new generation? First, if education is to be in any way a planned process—and surely if we regard it as important, as it undoubtedly is, it would be irresponsible not to apply our collective thoughts to doing it as well as possible—teaching, the deliberate transmission of knowledge, must be a staple element. It cannot be wrong to investigate carefully what needs to be known and how this is best and most easily achieved.

Pupils and students will inevitably learn more than teachers can intend, not to say be required to teach. They will learn more than our generation knows or has thought of. This does not mean that the educating generation does not need to think about what is learned (in the sense defined above) or about the context in which it takes place. The contexts of home, school, college and wider community provide the background against which interests are acquired and valued and beliefs validated. Until it is refuted by empirical research, it is reasonable to assume, as educators always have, that contexts that are relaxed and generously endowed with opportunities to pursue a variety of unstructured interests and undergo a variety of challenging, absorbing or enjoyable experiences will result in more desirable learning than those that are not. It should in principle be possible to produce educational institutions of one description rather than the other by modifying educational policy to recognise the value of such learning and to prevent the imperatives of so-called effective teaching from distorting the whole educational experience. One cannot predict how such learning opportunities will impact on individual learners and it would be quite against the spirit of what is being proposed to set pre-specifiable, individual achievement targets, not least because something other than measurable achievement is here the primary educational goal.

Our attitude to discipleship must be more cautious. Not everyone will agree that discipleship, or something like it, is the element missing from our current conception of education or that it is something we should encourage or even countenance. Many will simply dismiss talk of it as fanciful. Whatever relationships may have existed in the past between the great teachers of humankind and their followers they may seem scarcely relevant to the run-of-the-mill teachers and pupils in our local schools. Others may, perhaps with some justification, be positively horrified by the relationship between teacher and pupils it seems to imply. Prudent head-teachers and school authorities may feel that, like all potential evils, the phenomenon of discipleship is both attractive and dangerous as various literary treatments of it make all too clear. The sensible thing may be to minimise its occurrence by disapproval and belittlement—to professionalise it out of the system. It may seem more appropriate to accept the neutered substitute for education Blake and others so deplore and simply to strive to deliver it as performatively as possible. The more positive, if riskier response is to accept and celebrate the fact that, in some admittedly attenuated form, something resembling the relations of discipleship is bound to occur between some teachers and some learners wherever the teacher is more than averagely committed to the importance and value of what he or she is teaching and that something of the kind may at some point be essential to the full development of everyone's personality. Necessarily, however, the phenomenon imposes on those teachers in whose presence it is likely to occur, an obligation of exceptional moral vigilance with regard to its consequences for those who, however temporarily, exchange the role of mere pupil for that of disciple.

Correspondence: Colin Wringe, Educational Studies, Chancellor's Building, Keele University, Keele, Staffordshire ST5 5BG, UK.
E-mail: c.a.wringe@educ.keele.ac.uk

NOTE

1. I owe this suggestion to Pádraig Hogan.

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