

WHAT ARE THE QUALITIES OF A COMPETENT WALDON FACILITATOR?

I have struggled for a good many years at trying to discern living patterns in the behaviours and the changes of behaviours shown by humans from time to time and in their growth towards maturity ... It has been when I have longed to share an argument with others that I have felt dissatisfied and frustrated, and since I began in the light of my studies, to view our manner of seeking deliberately to influence the lives of children, under the banner of education, that my feelings have been unduly disturbed.

Since that time my thinking has taken two parallel pathways: one the pursuance of the ideas per se which until recently [*late 1987*] has not seemed to interest others; the other the application of the relevant ideas to the processes of deliberate education. Here my examining current practices, both standard received and less orthodox, has led me to the belief that, in our attempts to foster the abilities and happiness of children, we commonly leave much of importance undone, and persist in many practices which have no rational basis and indeed actively pervert the course of satisfactory development.

The current curriculums seem to suggest that we want future citizens to be unquestioning, biddable and suggestible people, well-trained to fill the various roles required by a separately governed system. Government plans are currently afoot to render this form of 'education' even more efficient in the future.

If, on the other hand, we want our children to grow up prepared to participate in government at all levels as free but responsible individuals, we may well prize such characteristics as openmindedness, scepticism, originality, a critical habit, strength of purpose tempered with tolerance, and creativeness, and be willing to give children the opportunity to develop their own notions of fitness etc. If this is so then we must set up our educational system so as to help to bring about this end, or rather beginning.

Our theories are about individual learning and development and about the thinking individual's likely and spontaneous recognition of the advantages of cooperation to all the members of society, as well as the less obvious disadvantages of slavish dependence on the favours of 'society'.

In promulgating the word the emphasis must be on quality and comprehensiveness so that the spread of understanding emanates from firm and true foundations - the establishment of principles which inform all practice - the proceeding from generality to particular - progress at a rate which never outgrows its strength.

As I tried to point out at the inauguration of the Association, although we need increasing interest in our project we must ensure that we spend more time and effort on securing and enriching our foundations than on expanding our membership of enthusiasts.

Over a period of years I ... have tried various ways of introducing ideas to others. Some courses have consisted of series of evening sessions. The earlier of these consisted of my delivering a series of 'talks' supported by handout material, followed by a series of practical assessment-teaching demonstrations with children brought by the course members. How valuable these courses were I have no idea. How much information the course members were bombarded with can be judged from the series of papers for a 1976 course for teachers entitled 'Educational Approach to the Handicapped Child in the Classroom'. [*These are the 'Teaching Sessions' on the Waldon Association website.*]

More recently a few discussion courses have been run here in Manchester. These are much more nearly to my taste, although invariably much too brief. The intention is not to instruct but to encourage or facilitate the participants' arguing themselves first down to basic principles and then to the pursuance of the subject matter through conjectural argument. The form and method is intended to follow (recapitulate) precepts which derive from the hypotheses themselves and towards which the course members are unashamedly led. The participants proceed through episodes of small group argument followed by plenary examination of the various ideas presented whilst sceptical and critical questioning tends to comb or tease out the useful strands of argument and organise them into a summarisable form. This approach is not unlike Socratic dialogue.

The aim of these courses is to eradicate some of the prejudice and bias which tends to distort our observation of behaviours in children, and so prepare the participants for the study of development in understanding and the analysis of behaviours monitored during teaching/facilitation.

In a year's full-time course for facilitators I would want some forty hours of such discussion prior to the offering of information and work, and thereafter all material to be studied in this way, understanding in the student facilitators being practised through spoken and written expression and practical demonstration.

Following the foundation work I think that I would favour some sort of apprenticeship; however there is much thought to be given to what we need to impart before deciding 'finally' on how we should go about imparting it.

Geoffrey Waldon
December 1987

This article is from the first issue of KOINE, the Waldon Association's publication.

In the same issue the matter of getting sufficient purchase on Geoffrey Waldon's ideas so as to be able to facilitate children's learning was described as a tripartite process: philosophical enquiry into the origins and nature of knowledge; scientific observation and close analysis of the movement patterns ('play') of babies and young children; and, lastly, a technology for intervening in a child's learning-development in the asocial lesson.

It was suggested that this was the appropriate order in which to investigate the theory that we call, simply, Waldon.

Terry Buchan
February 2017