

## GEOGRAPHY FOR THE YOUNG SCHOOL LEAVER -

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### A CLASSROOM OPENER ? \*

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The Geography for the Young School Leaver Project represents a radical strategy for change within the geography curriculum of the secondary school. That so many schools, throughout the country, are successfully using the Project only two years after the publication of the first box of resource materials is testimony to a strategy which focuses not only on the publication of teaching materials, but also on collaboration with Examination Boards and the creation of local curriculum groups to consolidate and further development. In this article I propose to examine the impact of the Project on teaching and learning styles, and to suggest that while the adoption of the Project may release the teacher from certain constraints it will inevitably pose new problems. I will further argue that certain features of the Project's current development serve to accentuate these problems. It is assumed that the reader is familiar with the Project's philosophy and materials.

Geography for the Young School Leaver may be seen as an instrument to change, or reinforce, the teacher's pedagogy - that philosophical position he adopts towards himself, his subject, and his pupils. That our behaviour as teachers of geography is the result of a body of principles and assumptions collected together in a piecemeal fashion can not be disputed. Such beliefs determine the teaching and learning styles we favour in the classroom, the manner in which we plan and implement curricula, and the resources we use. Much of the current change in our secondary schools can be understood in terms of a shift in pedagogy, or a move towards the open classroom. (Hawkins and Vinton, 1973). The accompanying table contrasts the role of the teacher, and that of the pupil, in an open as opposed to a closed classroom. While few teachers adopt a pedagogical position at either extreme of the closed/open continuum, many have adopted a more open approach in the belief that the environment so created fosters inquiry, reflective thinking, and the development of personal values, a pupil educated in such a classroom being better able to face the demands of responsible adulthood.

An examination of the teacher's guides which accompany the GYSL materials gives an indication of the desired pedagogical stance.

The three themes, (leisure, cities, and work) have been chosen because of their lasting interest and relevance. There is an expressed desire by the Project team to further all aspects of pupil development, with the adopted methods encouraging pupil involvement and participation. In describing the desired styles of learning the team stress the need to promote pupil centred activity in which a wide range of techniques are employed, and individual decision making is highly valued. The dominant learning style is structured

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### CLOSED CLASSROOM

#### The teacher:-

- exercises power and control.
- fears debate.
- is intellectual leader.
- is concerned with a body of essential knowledge.
- prescribes content.
- is concerned with pace.
- hopes to transmit key values.
- is slow to respond to social change.

#### The pupil:-

- is passive and accepting.
- learns 'right' meanings.

#### In the classroom:-

- teacher talk dominates.
- teacher/class interaction.

### OPEN CLASSROOM

#### The teacher:-

- produces a safe environment for learning.
- values pupils' contributions.
- is manager of learning environment, a consultant.
- regards knowledge as tentative and open to new interpretations.
- content by negotiation.
- is less concerned with pace.
- is concerned with value analysis and clarification.
- is more ready to respond to social change.

#### The pupil:-

- is active and challenging.
- expands number of meanings he has available.

#### In the classroom:-

- pupil discussion dominates.
- small group interaction.

discovery. The pupil is to be given access to an increased range of meanings in a manner largely dictated by the nature and ordering of the resource materials. Compared with the majority of current practice within the geography classrooms of secondary schools, GYSL represents a shift towards an open pedagogy. While I will later argue that several characteristics of the Project's development serve to conceal its true pedagogical stance, it is first necessary to describe the problems facing the teacher adopting the materials.

The pupils for whom the Project is envisaged are a group often associated in the teacher's mind with problems of control. In the open classroom the teacher must negotiate for control and employ a similar type of rational authority to that which he is so anxious to reveal in many of the case studies being investigated. By discussing such issues as urban zoning and unemployment he must be prepared to be challenged by inarticulate pupils. The curriculum offered is subversive in that it challenges deeply held beliefs, and offers the pupil alternative ways of comprehending his environment. By promoting the recognition of attitudes and values it forces the teacher to manage the resulting discussion, and educate his pupils in such a way as to avoid value confusion.

GYSL also places other demands upon the teacher. While the geographical content of the material is clear, there is a wide gulf between the course advocated and many present CSE and GCE syllabuses. The accepted teacher of geography

is threatened with identity loss in that elements of his existing knowledge and expertise are no longer so highly valued. He is asked to co-operate with other geographers and with specialists in other subjects, the result being that his role is less insulated. In addition he is asked to become an agent of curriculum change and engage in curriculum development. The Project demands new skills in lesson preparation and resource management, skills which are being effectively learned in local curriculum groups.

If GYSL is to be successfully adopted into a school the staff concerned must recognise that the problems described are a result of pedagogical assumptions which the Project makes. There is a danger that an inadequate commitment to the Project's pedagogy will cause teachers to revert to a closed classroom in which they feel less threatened, but in which the objectives of the Project can be only partially realized. Several characteristics of the Project's recent development provide such teachers with added reasons for confusion.

Firstly the Project's content is exhaustive. Many schools, often due to the pressure from Examination Boards, are attempting to cover all three themes in two years. This emphasis on prescribed content, and the resulting pace of lessons, leaves the teacher with little time for open outcomes and discussion. The rapid growth of CSE examinations, to cater for the majority of pupils using the materials, has provided educational respectability but has also served to direct attention away from a change in classroom climate. Despite the claimed flexibility of Mode III examinations there is a danger of the Project's content becoming 'ritualised' to the extent that the envisaged ongoing curriculum development is stifled. In the publications issued by the Project, and at meetings of local co-ordinators which I have attended, there has been inadequate attention given to integrative courses. That GYSL provides a framework for a course in social studies, with much opportunity for community action (Ball 1973) is widely recognised. Geographers must not regard the material as their property, and must be prepared to discuss its content and philosophy with other subject specialists. A united approach to the needs of the young school leaver should, one feels, produce more integrative courses involving community service. Barriers between subjects, and between the school and society, have no place in open education.

GYSL clearly wishes to deal with attitudes and values, and so promote affective outcomes. It is the failure to produce more precise affective objectives, and describe appropriate classroom techniques, which is perhaps the major weakness in the Project's revealed pedagogy.

Publications by Rath 1966, and Metcalfe 1971, reveal that there is a considerable body of theory and techniques relating to education for value analysis. Without the benefit of this rationale and methodology there is a danger, as with the Humanities Curriculum Project, that the teacher's experiences will cause him to abandon an essential element of the intended curriculum. The experience of the Elementary School Teaching Project in New York (Weinstein and Fantani 1970) suggests that the affective curriculum is indeed the key to the education of poorly motivated adolescents of low attainment. If values are the key tools for finding meaning in a complex social environment, it is in the affective area that geographers must now concentrate their attention if they are

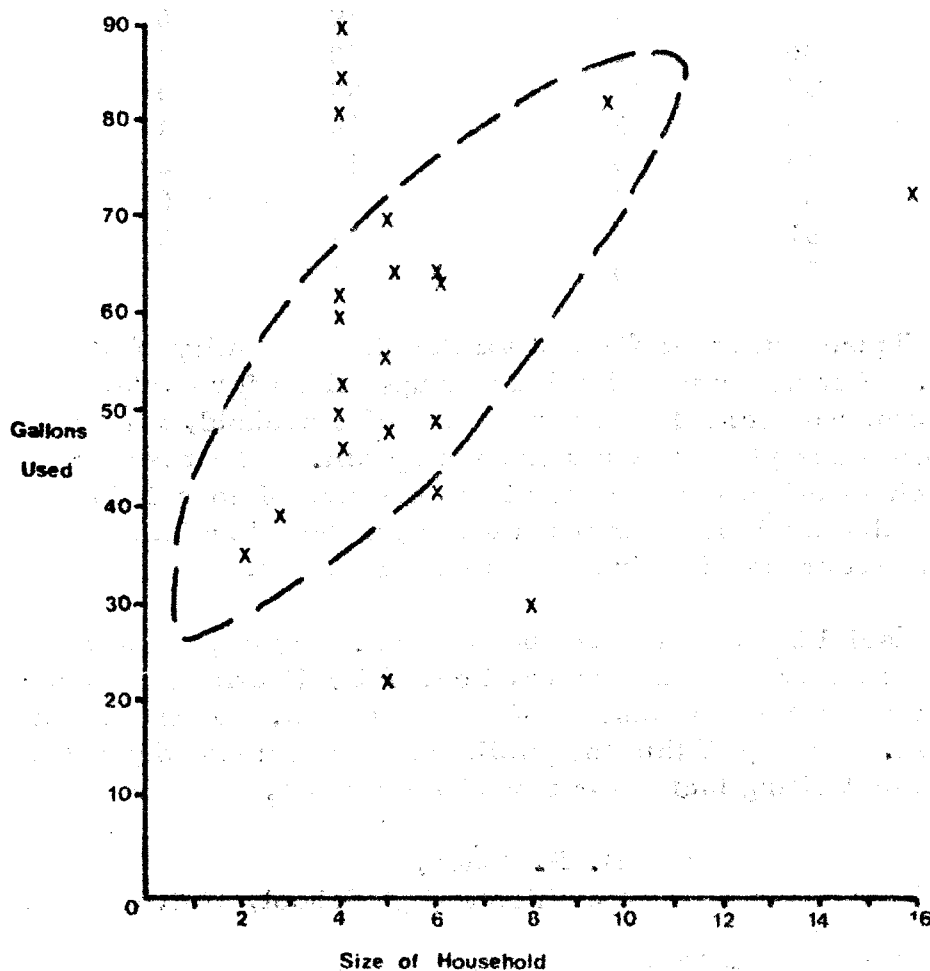
to provide a balanced curriculum.

GYSL is a welcome strategy to open up the geography classroom. If teachers are not to be overcome by the problems which this task presents they must be helped in several ways. By its emphasis on external examinations, its failure to promote integrative courses involving community action, and its lack of direction as regards the affective component of its curriculum, the Project's early development has served to delay the transition to a more open classroom and a more responsible output of school leavers. These features, while minor setbacks compared with the great leap forward which the Project represents, deserve the consideration of all those currently engaged in the implementation of the Project.

#### References

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Relationship between Water Consumption and Household Size