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Discussion methods for learning

Group discussions form a main part of learning experience in schools and universities. Yet I have always felt many dissatisfactions with this traditional teaching method, that is where a teacher chairs or leads a group and the participants take it in turns to speak. Now, from recent experience in London of workshops run by the Quaesitor Centre for Personal Growth and from other scattered influences, I have come to believe that a much better method for learning-discussions can be developed. My main arguments in this article will be illustrated from history topics (I teach history at La Trobe University, Melbourne), but I believe they apply generally to a large number of courses in the humanities and social sciences, in schools as well as in universities.

Amongst the problems raised by traditional forms of class discussion there are two which trouble me most. The first is that of lack of space for self-expression for each and every student. In a standard university tutorial, of say a dozen students meeting for an hour or so, the average talking time for each student is very small. Allowing for settling in and for the teacher to ask questions and so on, it is only three or four minutes or about 5% of the overall class period. The space difficulties are merely increased in what are generally larger classes in schools. Moreover, in a good group, even a small one, students constantly interrupt each other. For a discussion of this sort to work at all it relies on a number of students being passive or else repressing a spontaneous urge to talk.

I believe we are facilitating by our group discussion techniques, in terms of academic purposes, a type of thought-inhibition such as that described below by Jerome Liss (making allowances for the fact that Liss is talking here about general personality problem):

> People in their daily lives are too often interrupted or not permitted to complete their thoughts. Direct interruptions meaning one person speaks while the other is still talking, can block one talker's mind if he does not finish his say. This inhibits or fragments talk and stops up feelings which remain as undischarged tensions. Repetitive interruptions not only chop up the ongoing stream of thoughts and feelings of the moment, but the two-person pattern is internalised and repeated by the interrupted person's mind when alone. Thus, people who feel 'blocked', 'stuck', 'bogged down' or 'hemmed in' have been stopped by others from unravelling their thoughts and feelings and are plagued by self-interrupted thoughts when alone.
>
> (J. Liss, 'Cooperative Help . . . ', typescript, London 1972.)

The second major problem I see with traditional group discussions rests in the role of the teacher-leader. There seems to me to be good evidence around on the value of neutral chairmanship in organized discussion, but teachers can rarely if ever achieve it in practice. Though many teachers can avoid expressing conclusions or values they can

seldom resist directing (interrupting) discussions from their own broad line of thought or sense of significance. They tend to choose a theme, or allow the group to do so, and then hold individuals to it. Under these circustances students begin (or continue) to direct their arguments through the teacher. The game can too readily become one of guess-what's-in-the-teacher's-mind; students are led like sheep (by various forms of approval and disapproval) into some final pen wherein they often have little understanding of where they are or how they got there. Even the most cautious teacher, under pressure of course requirements, assumes a sense of responsibility in discussions that students might under better circumstances learn to assume for themselves. An outside-imposed criterion of relevence is not, I believe, as effective as an internally discovered one. And I do not find that in traditional classes there is much room for each student to listen to and develop his own sense of relevance, that is of significance and continuity.

I have one other problem I wish to raise, going beyond traditional classes into the general university system of tutorials, lectures, essays and examinations. The testing of students on a given, common course seems to me to be essentially designed to induce them to work under threat of adverse judgement. In these terms it is somewhat effective; students can be force-led to acquire some information and absorb other people's ideas. However, it also forms a barrier between the learner and the subject in the following sense: instead of the student asking in, say, history, 'what happened?' and 'What does it mean to me?' he too often asks 'What does the teacher want me to know? and 'Is this what I am meant to believe?' Examinations directly cut across some of the most important things a student might learn, namely self-value and self-purpose. If coursework were in itself a more significant experience for students, examinations as inducement to work should be unnessary. The problem would then lie in finding some criteria by which to decide that a person had in fact 'done' a particular course (if he wants credit for it). For both these purposes, self-purpose and institutional purpose, it is now my hope that a better learning experience can be developed.

In sum, I am concerned with three inadequacies, as I see them, in traditional teaching practice, all related to traditional methods of running group discussions: One, the traditional methods leave inadequate space for uninterrupted self-expression or idea exploration for each and every student. Two, they tend to be unduly teacher oriented. And three, they do not provide students with enough incentive to work (except as induced by the overhanging threat of teacher initiated examination and judgement).

The discussion technique which I believe can go a long way towards solving these problems, as well as introducing new positive benefits, is what I shall call the one-to-one method. Broadly, it is where the participants in a group pair off and take it in turns to talk one to the other for specific periods of uninterrupted time on a given question. I wish to use this discussion style for learning in traditional academic subjects. It is my concern to develop various approaches to allow for different types of questions related to coursework and in conjunction with various injections of information (from set reading, visual aids or talk). However, I first wish to describe how I came to value the possibilities of the one-to-one style - which was in group work, in circumstances quite separate from the institutions and purposes of traditional learning.

My original and major introduction to the one-to-one method was at a three-day workshop run by Jeff Love, under the auspices of Quaesitor, at a Worcestershire farm-house. The central purpose of the workshop was for those attending to explore questions essential to an awareness of their own identity. To this end the question on which everyone worked, for at least two and a half of the three days, was 'Who am I?' The workshop was called an 'enlightenment intensive'. However, the term is one I do not propose to use generally in this paper. I have found that its overtones of Zen philosophy seem to alienate many of my academic colleagues, and this hinders my attempts to persuade them of the value of the educational method (as distinct from its purpose for the particular weekend I am describing).

Learning at the Worcestershire workshop began without dalay with a one-to-one discussion. That is, the fourteen people present were divided up into seven pairs, all in the one large room, and set to work. They sat on cushions or chairs, backs straight, alert, and facing each other. One person in each pair led the predetermined question to his partner: 'Tell me who you are?' and the partner tried to answer, turning over the question for five full minutes of uninterrupted time. At the end of the five minutes a bell was rung and partners were told to thank each other. Then the roles were reversed - the previous talker asking the question, the previous listener becoming the talker. Each pair proceeded in this manner for three-quarters of an hour. The pattern was concluded by a break for a few minutes for people to shake themselves out and perhaps do a few exercises. Everyone then took a new partner and began the process again. The listener would always pay attention, and would never interrupt except perhaps to repeat the question if the talker strayed from it too far. Even here, if the talker did not wish his partner to repeat the question he could ask him not to do so.

This one-to-one exchange with constantly changing partners turned out to be the basic learning technique for the whole three days, interspersed every two or three rounds with longer (but short) breaks for tea, meals, walking meditations, labouring (farmwork) meditations, and very occasional lectures on the ideas behind the method (as encouragement for everyone to keep going). The group began work at 6.00 a.m. each morning and went on till about 11.30 each night. Everyone slept in their clothes, on a scattering of cushions and mattresses in the main room.

The process of arriving at an answer to the question was that the individual should turn over various conceptions of his own identity until he had what he was prepared to offer as an acceptable (to himself) statement. This statement he would then present to the group leader. The leader's role was not to pass direct judgement on the answer, but merely to help the answerer, by a few questions, to determine its value more clearly. This generally resulted in the answerer going back to do further work on the question.

The process, then, was torturous. By the end of the first day most people had worked through the simple traditional and learnt concepts of themselves: self-history, physique, personality conceptions, occupation and skills, ambitions and so on. This was my own experience, too. Within about fifteen hours I had deeply exhausted my previously developed self-definitions. I found that each was inadequate but that I had no way of composing all of them into a broad, single statement. I became angry with the process, then depressed. By the start of the second day I was so depressed that I

sought to rescue myself from the mood. I made imaginative leaps into verbal activities to deal with the problem almost emotionally rather than intellectually. I whistled and sang ideas, I jumbled the words of the question, I toyed with the syntax, I flapped my arms and pulled faces. In effect, I stopped intellectualising for an answer and began to *experience* actual types of answers. I partcularly took up such activities during the walking and labouring meditations. By the late afternoon I was exhilarated, turning over the idea that I was 'a vast capacity for joy'. Then by the morning of the third day, after talking with the leader, I was back to a despondent recognition that even if a capacity for joy was central to my self-conception, it was not the whole of me. From an inner refusal to tolerate another period of depression I finally put the whole thing beyond definition and asserted that 'I am myself'.

The conclusion, as a particular set of words, may not seem important to an outsider. Nor would it have been important to me before the weekend. I might have said (and many people did say) that sort of thing early in the three day session, without adequate satisfaction. What was crucial for me was the intense two and a half days of intellectual, emotional, and physical activity that I had gone through. When I made my statement it was rich with meaning, and for me it was the end of that particular question-and-answer process. Other people by then had also discovered self-acceptable solutions, and by the end of the whole three days only three people had not settled for a single answer.

Those of us who reached some sort of satisfaction on 'Who am I?' went on, for the last half of the last day, to other Zen questions. These were 'How is life best fulfilled?' and 'What is another?' Working on these questions, beyond self, was less experiential than the previous long effort. We were quicker now at getting answers, as if some huge weight had been lifted from our shoulders and we could lift our heads and look at the world more truly and spontaneously. The pattern of seeking answers now, as opposed to the long work on the first question, was more free of self, less emotional and more analytical. In that we were now discussing the nature of the outside world, and doing so intensely and valuably, I became excited by the possibilities of the one-to-one method for a variety of learning purposes.

The Worcestershire workshop comprises two important types of learning process, closely interlinked. These are, first, the one-to-one method of self-expression, and, secondly, the general pattern of clearing oneself, of becoming self-aware (or aware of relevent preconditions), in order to deal more freely with new experience.

To turn these learning principles to traditional study I have planned a number of modifications. The immediate one-to-one structure I have in mind allows for the fact that for academic questions as opposed to personality ones the turnover of information by a student will be relatively small; he knows less about, say, history than he does about himself. Therefore, the questions set up for academic exploration by the one-to-one method need to be as wide as possible to catch a wide content and variety of conceptions. (For instance, 'What is the Mexican Revolution?' is better than something like 'Why did the Madero government fail in 1913?' The latter question can still be tackled by the individual student in response to the broader question, but he has more choice.) Moreover, students will need less time to exhaust their old attitudes

and ideas and also less time to exhaust new information as they acquire it. A useful structure for academic work could be one wherein the students in a given pair talk for only three or four minutes each, two or three times, and where they change partners every twenty minutes or so. I envisage the one-to-one discussion time on any central theme to last about an hour (depending on the students' extent of knowledge and on the type of question). This would be mingled with one-to-one work on specific problems and with a variety of individual or group activities (including reading). The whole would compose a workshop of about three hours, for twelve to fourteen students, to be run once a week.

The benefits of using a one-to-one method as a core for an academic workshop are numerous, both in overcoming old teaching problems and in creating new dimensions for learning. First, I wish to discuss an advantage that relates most directly to my experiences at the Worcestershire weekend - the possibilities of generating self-awareness about the existing or potential meaning of words. Problems about language and experience were a direct concern of the designers of that weekend at Worcestershire, as they explain it in a Quaesitor print-out. It is part of Zen philosophy that language for too many people has become sterile, out of touch with the immediate experiences that gave it form. The workshop I attended was set up with the intention that participants should go through a number of stages which would invest their language concepts of themselves with more experiential meaning. Stage One is where the learner from himself ideas of identity learnt from others (family, friends, society leaders and so on) and Stage Two is where he exhausts the process of intellectualising, of trying to determine who he is by rational means. From there on he enters a number of stages of energy and emotion that might be grief or anger, imagination or hallucination, apathy or serenity, and so on until his consciousness of himself, though symbolised by words in the actual discussion process, is beyond words and becomes direct experience. The anonymous writer of the Quaesitor screed finally expresses the faith that with the achievement of a 'steady state of consciousness of one's self as one truly is, one's interests turn to life and others'.

Whatever ambiguities I feel about conceptions that one 'truly' is any one thing, the workshop screed does broadly confirm my sense of what happened to me in the workshop itself. Above all, the questions it raises about the amorphous relationship between experience and words seem to me to be important for formal education. When teachers set reading for students they do so partly in order that students will receive, through words, an experience of the outside world, and partly so they will learn to compare experiences. But it is worth questioning whether and in what way different words, for different people, achieve that first task, of transferring experience. It seems to me that students from widely varying backgrounds of activity and verbal upbringings must receive quite varied experiences, if any, from any one pattern of words. For a student to learn he must be able to recognise how and why he is responding to certain words, what meaning they do or do not have, in order that he can build on them meaningfully. Otherwise he is merely juggling empty ciphers. Yet it further seems to me that a teacher cannot readily create such meanings for a student or judge for him the understanding and responses he (the student) already has. In these senses the student must work for himself. One of the first values I see in the one-to-one method of discussion on an academic subjects is that a student can do such

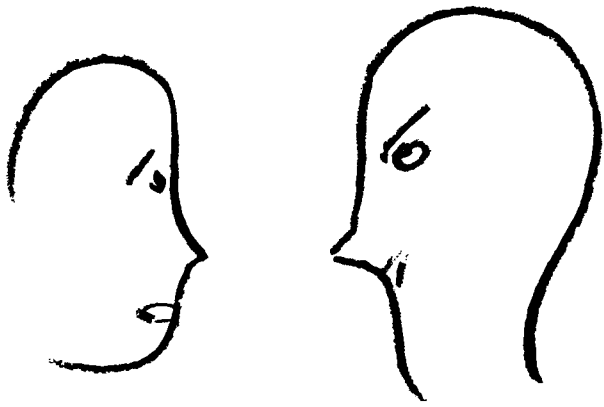
work. He can clear for himself, in relatively short bursts of one-to-one talking over an hour or so, what the words central to his study mean for him (for instance 'What is Mexican', 'What is Revolution'). And thereby he opens himself better to more subtle or richer developments of meaning from the experiences of others.

In terms of more technical considerations, the one-to-one method seems to me to offer a discussion style that can meet two of the major problems I have previously outlined in relation to traditional class discussions - those of lack of space and of undue teacher orientation.

The space problem of traditional classes will be solved in the one-to-one method in the following sense. While engaging in a one-to-one discussion each student will have room to talk not 5% of the time as in traditional groups, but 50% of the time. Moreover, he will have a longer general session in which to work. He will know too, that a particular stretch of space in which to talk is absolutely guaranteed. This will free him to listen to his partner, to be confident that when his turn comes he can talk at will, with room to develop an idea from scratch and without interruption or re-direction of any form.

The second problem in traditional classes, of undue teacher orientation, will be overcome because in the one-to-one method the teacher (as teacher) has no immediate role at all as talker or listener. Even if he wishes to listen, he can do so only here and there to one pair of students at a time. And he has no position to suggest any approval or disapproval of any ideas expressed. Within the rubric of a broad historical question (such as I have already suggested: 'What is the Mexican Revolution?') the student will be entirely free to construct his own set of problems and hypotheses and mull over his own evidence. He will be working for himself. This amounts, on these two issues, to freeing the student from interruption or inhibition by second voices that could come between himself and an idea.

The next question becomes, will he use that freedom to academic purpose? Or will he, like so many American students I have seen in experimental group discussions, sit and stare at the floor for minutes on end? I believe he will work. The differences in the one-to-one structure in contrast to traditional classes are that each student has a very definite question held to him, he has an allocation of space for himself alone, that is a specific obligation to talk for a specific period, and, above all, he has a facilitative listener, that is, someone whose only job is to sit and listen to him attentively. On the issue of extent of activity, the listener is crucial. From my own experience at the Worcestershire workshop I found that I turned over the question before me continuously and purposefully under the steady gaze of a listener, but on my labouring (I was gardening) or walking meditations I often let my thoughts ramble or I let them die off. (And of course that also happens to many students in traditional classroom situations.) But with a listener all of my own I always felt constrained to keep talking. It is worth noting too, that it never worried me that the partner *might* not be listening (I wasn't asking him a question), but it did worry me if he averted his gaze specifically to watch or listen to someone else. It was quite distracting and unfacilitative to have direct evidence that a partner was *not* listening. This highlights for me the importance of the facilitative listener. And, I must add, in my experience of group work I have only once had a partner who did not always listen adequately.



My faith in the necessary rationality of the one-to-one method gained further support when I discovered what is called 'co-counselling'. This discussion technique for self-help is being expounded and practised in London by a number of people. Two that I know of, the first a psychiatrist, are Jerome Liss (previously cited) and John Heron. My main holding of written material on the subject is a collection of pamphlets written by Harvey Jackins in the United States (e.g. *The Postulates of Re-Evaluation Counselling,* Rational Island Publishers, Seattle 1971). Co-counselling is essentially a one-to-one technique for dealing with the emotional ups and downs of daily living. The style can vary but mainly consists of two people arranging to meet once a week to 'co-counsel' each other. That is, for about an hour one person acts out and talks about his problems or upsets while the other takes the role of facillitative listener (neither judging, condoning, assuaging, interpreting or denying the talker in any way), and at the end of that time, the two people change roles. The advocates of co-counselling believe that self-expression with a facillitative listener helps a person to discharge preconditioned tensions and emotional blocks. And they believe that after this, still with the listener, the person will be able to sort over his problems more rationally and arrive at some sort of absorbtion of these ongoing life experiences into a developing scheme of understanding and awareness. Jackins argues that if people do not discharge, or deal with, tensions soon after they arise, then they will later meet new life experiences with an unrecognised interference of emotion from the previous similar, but not the same, experiences. Thus they will be unduly out of touch with the new situation and not able to learn from it. They will respond to the situation irrationally, that is, inadequately for the occasion. He claims: 'The essence of rational human behavior consists of responding to each instant of living with a *response,* created afresh at that moment to precisely fit and handle the situation of that moment . . . All other living creatures respond with pre-set, inherited response patterns . . . (The) ability to create new exact responses may be defined as *human* intelligence. It operates by comparing *and contrasting* new information already on file from past experiences and constructing a response based on similarities to past situations but notified to allow for the differences'. (Ibid; pp. 1-2.) Further, according to Jackins, people cannot satisfactorily relieve distress within a distress situation, but only away from it and, best, with 'the aware attention of another human being'. (Ibid; p.2.) He believes that rational evaluation and understanding occur automatically following discharge and

only following discharge. None of this is to deny one's emotions, but to be aware of them and their origins - in order to learn more freely from ongoing experience.

Both the Worcestershire workshop and co-counselling have been designed to release people into immediate contact and understanding with the outside world through different types of self-knowledge. They deal, in a sense, with personality problems. By contrast, traditional academic pursuits, it seems to me, seek to ignore personality problems in the process of learning and seek to deal directly with the outside world. One of the results of our traditional teaching has been the production of a number of us as academics whose rationality functions well mainly when isolated from social interactions (from the very situations where it might have most benefit). While we may be very logical and adequate in our research analysis of the behavior of others, in our immediate social environment we tend to slip back, to simply become part of an emotionally loaded interactional process. That is, in dealing with student unrest, self-promotion within a department, or money allocations at faculty meetings, there are too many of us who behave, to varying degrees, irrationally or, in Jackins' terms, inappropriately. Our actions in these latter instances mock what seems to be one of our main academic beliefs, that rationality is a key characteristic of our way of life. Moreover, we extend this problem to others. What we teach is essentially how to be rational in research. We do not prepare our students to cope with the irrationalities of day to day postgraduate work situations, to cope with their own and others' emotons as politicians, bureaucrats, managers, teachers and so on. It is my conviction that if those of us in the humanities and social sciences, especially at universities, wish to help students to become *generally* mature and rational human beings we should make moves, for ourselves and for them, to systematically explore deepseated *human* emotions and interpersonal relations.

However, proposals for new, total courses of this kind must be seen as a sideline to my main arguments in this article. Here I have more limited objectives, namely to generate better learning within traditional academic courses. For the moment this means dealing directly with academic questions and, as nearly as possible, only with those emotions, values, and relationships that directly effect such a particular learning task.

What interests me most in co-counselling ideas is that they, too reaffirm the value of the facillitative listener and of large-space uninterrupted self-expression. Moreover, the 'discharge' concept as an avenue to rationality also parallels my experience at the Worcestershire workshop; it further helps explain the value of the one-to-one learning method. Looking at the differences between the Worcestershire workshop, co-counselling and my proposed one-to-one academic groupwork, I can discover a sort of sliding scale of discharge-rationality patterns. In the Worcestershire workshop the discharge functions vary widely in intense self-discovery, helping towards freeing people generally to explore the outside world. In co-counselling the discharge is mostly on particular, limited, and personal emotional stresses. And in pursuing traditional learning goals, such as I am proposing, the discharge works towards better understanding of one's previous knowledge, attitudes and emotions (less likely to be ones of stress) specifically related to specific academic problems ('What is revolution?' etc.). I also believe the one-to-one method will stop the build-up in discussion of new stresses and frustrations. In my experience people are most likely to be irrational in

argument where their views are frequently denied or interrupted, when they resort to overstatement as a counter-aggression in order to grab space, and where, when this evokes most challenges, they become increasingly irrational in order to defend their self-prestige. In one-to-one discussions the individual participants will have too much protected space for such needs and reactions to arise.

My intentions and anticipations in relation to discharge and new learning in one-to-one work can be illustrated by the following hypothetical outline of a history workshop:

Students will be given a question, such as our previous example, 'What is revolution?', and be asked to turn over the idea in any form they wish - bringing up past accumulations of definitions and information and their own emotional or value response to the term and their understanding of where any of these ideas came from. There seems to me to be no necessity to stress the importance of any one of these aspects over any other. The individual student will naturally find for himself what is important *to himself* in the broad question. When he has exhausted previous knowledge and developed a strong self-consciousness of the significance of the concept for himself, he will, I believe, start working imaginatively with the possibilities of 'revolution', generating hypotheses of human behavior. (He might even speculate on how a revolution could function in his local suburb, who would participate that he personally knows, who not, why, how, and so on.) But in whatever way he explores the question over a long period of time he will, I believe, generate a huge amount of curiosity about what actually happened in the outside world (in the histories of particular revolutions). The process of discharge will necessarily clean him out towards a direct confrontation, a rational exploration, of new information. And it will make him much more aware of how other people (such as historians and politicians, from available reading) select, repress, and/or interpret such information themselves. Thus, in this learning technique the student will only be given reading on a subject after he has worked intensely, for himself and in his own terms, on conceptions behind it. Then too, as he proceeds in his reading he will be given further opportunity for discharge, self-expression and rational analysis in relation to the new material (experiences) that he receives. Concurrently with this he will be absorbing, without pressure to use it, information and ideas from his various partners. In all these ways the student is self-prepared to desire information and to seek understanding, and he is set up with the means to acquire and process information and to create understanding.

Overall, I am arguing that the one-to-one method will not only induce students to turn over ideas, but it will induce them to do so at a level of analysis which we as teachers, and the student himself for himself, will perceive as valuable and rational.

The next problem I wish to discuss, to return to the trio with which I began this article, is examinations. I have stated my objections to examinations (and the judgement of essays and so forth) in that they place an obstacle of undue concern between a student and the outside experience he is attempting to confront. I would now like to argue further that by pushing onto a student the concern 'What is wanted of me?' examinations intrude on his natural capacity for rationality. Immediate rationality must be confused where a student is induced to respond to experience in terms of the style or values of someone else, especially where they are styles and values

he does not understand and/or appreciate. He can be led by threat of adverse judgement to make connections he does not believe in and which too often emerge as awkward or even meaningless.

On the other hand there may remain the worry for many teachers that without examinations some students will do not work, that there will be nothing to justify, for the records of the institution and for public notice, any claim that they have 'done' a course. It seems to me that the one-to-one method might solve this problem. It is my hope that the talking-out in itself will so heighten a student's curiosity that he will willingly read up on his subject (and books can be recommended). I also expect that the individual student will feel obliged to read in anticipation of the next week, to escape a personal feeling of fruitlessness in discussion and from a peer-group sense of responsibility not to bore his partners. But if this does not happen, if students do not read enough between workshops, they can be given reading to do within each three-hour session itself. They can be read quickly and analysed closely. Further, it can be part of a course that students be required to maintain a journal week by week on their discussion findings, and they can be set special written assignments (on the broad topic but of their own choosing) which they can discuss in workshops during preparation, and afterwards, as self-criticism. The requirements would, therefore, be of quantity - of attendance and written work - but there would be not judgement of quality. The quality would emerge from the student himself, by his having the space and encouragement to think, and by the injection of ideas from his partners and written sources. The intensity of activity would I believe be quite sufficient to justify an official entry that a student had done, or Passed, a coursed. In first year university, well before decisions are made to screen off honours students for fourth year work, this type of approach could be easily adopted.

The one-to-one structure allows the teacher an important role to play, but without his interfering with students' self-direction and self-respect. First, he creates opportunities without predetermining or anticipating student responses. He sets up the main questions, suggests reading, selects documents for discussion, and chooses and directs special exercises. From journal entries which he reads each week he can judge the course as a whole and re-plan workshop activities accordingly. Secondly, he can present himself in the group as an ideas source. For instance, after reading students' essays he can in return outline his own views - not on the students' abilities but on the subject. From the essays he can also advise on specific academic skills, but essentially as outlining possible methods of approach. He should at all times respect students' thoughts and values and seek only to help students to express themselves (and mainly on request). His skills and insights should always be available to group members, but not pushed. One way for this to be effective is for him to participate in one-to-one discussion. Since no one is officially, authoritatively judging anyone, and each is working for himself, he should not fear to express his own views (again, on the question, not on others' abilities) as an equal member of the group. Other group members can then use these views as they wish. Overall, then, the teacher has a significant function in the workshop, not just as a chairman and timer, but as a positive force, generating opportunities and being available to provide information, skills, and insight for students to turn to their own purposes.

My final faith in the possibilities of a one-to-one discussion method rests in its adaptability. It can be used directly for a number of purposes, such as for encounter exercises for students to get to know each other, or for gestalt awareness activities. It could prepare students for short 'buzz' sessions in lectures to consolidate learning, and it is in no general conflict with lectures (which can work well as another source of information between workshops). And it lends itself to other patterns of sub-group work, say in fours or sixes, up to a full group discussion where necessary.

The plans I have at the moment for a series of workshops include carefully timed sessions for students to get to know each other, for special reading, for exercises in history method, for awareness exercises, and for continuous group appraisal of the learning process. Behind all this would be long one-to-one sessions where students hold to a single question over several weeks. These plans, however, because of their exact timing, would take me too long to describe and justify in this article. Moreover, I expect to change them in response to what happens as I get underway. In conclusion, then, I simply reaffirm my intention to develop the method for coursework in Mexican History at La Trobe University, Melbourne, and I invite anyone interested to write to me - either to help me or to find out what happens.

APPENDIX

Some plans I have for workshops in Mexican History are broadly as follows (for about 14 students taking one three hour workshop each week):

First Workshop

Students are told that the workshop is experimental and they are told where they can read about some of the ideas behind the techniques if they wish. Otherwise, students are given only a brief introduction and are asked to go along with the techniques for a while, that there will be room provided later for reviewing the experience and making adjustments. *First exercises* (for students to get to know each other, and to become physically familiar with the one-to-one method): students sit in pairs, one tells the other about himself for two minutes, the other gives feedback for a minute, then the process is reversed; this is repeated with three or four different partners, interspersed with some variations to heighten awareness, such as students telling a new partner something about a previous one; and then the activity is completed by a return to full group for a more collective exchange of names and one-to-one information (this is for the teacher, too, to get to know everyone). *Second exercise* (as an introduction to history method): students sit in pairs, and discuss 'What is a fact?', then they take it in turns to describe each other's face in exact detail as free as possible of interpretation; then they come together as a whole group and volunteers try the process under general group appraisal (if one partner tells another he has 'kind eyes' he should be enjoined to explain exactly what it is he *sees* that gives him this impression - what wrinkles, colour, shape, movement in the eyes etc. connate for him 'kindness'); then from this students work from copies of historical documents, one-to-one, to assess in what sense a particular description is objective or not, what are the differences (if possible to determine) between factual statements and different types of interpretation. *Third*

exercise (preparation for reading and introduction of the main one-to-one method): students in pairs analyse 'What is Mexican?'; where they become bogged on information they are asked to analyse the topic as a type of question - what does it mean to examine anyone as a particular nationality, what criteria could or should be used, and/or what is the value of such a quest? Reading will then be set for the next week (two large extracts from Mexican novels) and students will be asked to hold the question to them ('What is Mexican?') all the time while they read. Written requirement (before reading): a journal entry by each student on his experience of the first meeting.

Second Workshop

Part one: one-to-one discussion on each others' interests and experiences as students and expectations at university. Part two: one-to-one discussion on 'What is Mexican?' and some exercises around descriptions of artefacts and photographs. Part three: one-to-one discussion on 'What is revolution?', followed by collective discussion, then reading of short extracts of various ideas from various historians, political theorists and novelists, interspersed throughout with one-to-one discussion. This will take place over the bulk of the three hours. Note: there is no final group discussion on 'What is Mexican?', nor after the later discussion on 'What is revolution?' This is to avoid students seeking teacher approval or other teacher orientation in the answer formation. Written tasks for a journal will be suggested for conclusions on 'What is Mexican?' and or exploration themes on 'What is revolution?' Students will then be set reading for the week on the Mexican revolution itself.

Further workshops: four or five will be kept on the one theme, 'What is the Mexican Revolution?' but the types of reading will be varied, for instance, one week may be on actual battles and manouvres, one on a particular personality, one on some expressed emotions of revolutionary motivation and experience (from novels and participant accounts), and another on constitutional debates. Students will be free to re-shape their sub-questions at will, or not at all, according to their reading. Exercises of varying types, such as role acting, or gestalt orientation to written descriptions, will be undertaken to develop student understanding and vary the pace and style of the sessions. I also envisage taking a whole weekend for intensive information introduction (with film, slides, poetry readings and so on) couped with one-to-one and group discussion to facillitate the absorption process. After the first four or five weeks essays will be required, on topics chosen by each student, approved by me, partly discussed in class, and researched by each student from his own discovery of material in university and State libraries.