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ABSTRACT

The conventional textbook approach to English, at Saint Augustine's Secondary School in Glasgow, was replaced with an anthological project--a class newspaper. To prevent plagiarism and to stimulate creative thought, students were asked to use April 1, 1984, as the publication date. Initially, the class was divided into six groups to represent the various sections of a newspaper; later, this formal organization was relaxed to permit more individualized work. In addition to his normal reporting duties, a staff member was required to review a TV show, a film, or a book every 2 weeks. The teacher, with the writer in attendance, generally scrutinized every fifth exercise, and samples of good and bad writing were regularly duplicated and evaluated in class. (A brief outline of another anthological project, "Romance-Wedding," is appended.) (MP)

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TE001503

Anthological Project: Newspaper, 1st April, 1984

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I like a Course Book. It gives a certain orderly procedure to a lesson, provides a useful retreat when a register or form has to be completed, imposes silence on a class in moments of stress, and creates the comforting illusion of a steady advance in literacy. With the introduction of the anthological project type of lesson that particular pattern of organised study is gone for ever. Routine, the regular course of procedure sedulously cultivated in all other activities to make life more efficient, and indeed more tolerable, is, for the moment at least, suspended.

Last year, we at St Augustine's decided to abandon the old approach to Standard English in favour of the new, and I forthwith announced to my IISB3 (a typical second year class—with a roll of 44—of a comprehensive school) that from henceforth we would pretend to be a ship's company. Our ship was duly named "The Golden Hind" without incident, but the appointment of its captain and crew was the occasion of some dissent. That perfidious bark never left port.

It was then that I decided to produce a newspaper. After the ship's company debacle I jettisoned the democratic principle in favour of a not-so-benevolent despotism. It was to be no ordinary newspaper, however. Certainly no newspaper based on the school community was envisaged; such a publication too often runs short of copy, and irresponsible juvenile reporters are then tempted to pen irreverent articles about their mentors. A current newspaper was also rejected because the pupil merely transcribes from the more lurid columns of the daily press. It was decided, therefore, to produce a paper from April 1, 1984, the date to set the tone for the futuristic, the horrific and the ludicrous. Nothing creative on the education grand scale was being attempted. The whim of Big Brother determined all.

The class was divided into six groups of seven, to represent the departments Home, Overseas, Crime, Business and Financial, Entertainment and Sport. Editors for each group, to act as controls in giving guidance to the members, were appointed. Each editor was issued

with a dictionary and a thesaurus. Desks, up till then arranged in decorous rows, were re-arranged in clusters of seven so that groups could discuss quietly the various topics of the day. Assignments were issued; pupils were instructed to find out all about what should be covered by their department. These assignments the pupils in the main ignored. Members of the Home, Overseas, Entertainment, and Business and Financial sections knew that they were potential ace crime and sports reporters, and that once again, as in the Ship's Company affair, an ignorant Authority was putting square pegs in round holes. Flexibility being the keynote of the anthological project, the groups forthwith became merely nominal in function, and all were tacitly recognised as crime and sports reporters.

It was easy enough to provide, or elicit from them, the headlines for the more sensational reports that filled their jotters. These headlines, often done in felt pens of varying colours, stretched across the double page. The more meticulous writers arranged the double page in three columns and usually confined their report to that length. Any odd space was filled in with a joke or illustration. Drawing pictures in class, however, was frowned upon, paste and sellotape rigorously excluded. Embellishments of such a nature were to be done at home (and surprisingly some seemed to take a real aesthetic pleasure in adorning their work). More serious topics were insidiously introduced: thus a headline such as:

**ROBOTS TAKE OVER FACTORY
1000 ROLLS-ROYCE MACHINISTS DECLARED
REDUNDANT
WORKERS THREATEN TO WRECK MASTER
COMPUTER**

provided an opportunity for discussing labour problems, and the whole machinery of arbitration and conciliation. The pupils could readily enlarge on the topic from some current industrial crisis reportage on T.V. From the headline such varied topics as the Luddites, redeployment of labour, euphemism in such a word as "redundancy" could be touched upon. There

was no shortage of material: storms, floods, tempests, wars, rumours of war, U.F.O.s—all the ills that afflict our modern world—were natural grist to this particular mill. Preparation of the lesson by the pupils was already done by T.V., and inveterate viewers, often the most reluctant of scholars, assumed a new stature because they could speak with authority on some issue of public import. The topic for a particular day was usually determined by the current calamity. Even the unfashionable "Business and Financial" can come into its own with some sensational take-over bid, as bulls, bears and stags are stalked in the City, Wall Street, and the Bourse. Those sinister shadowy figures, the Gnomes of Zurich, may emerge as ready-made villains in some tale of international financial skulduggery. Once a fortnight the whole "staff" was pressed into the service of the Entertainment Department; each pupil was expected to write a review of a T.V. show or film he had seen or a book he had read. "Review," of course, is a somewhat pretentious term for a simple piece of writing which usually follows a rather rigid pattern of introductory comment, setting (when? where?), plot (what?), character (who? why?) and concluding comment, praising or condemning. There was also a monthly "Top of the Pops" chart, as pupils nominated the ten best books they had read that month. Leaders, articles, letters to the editor, weather reports and any other features can be incorporated at will.

Correction, however, of the written word is still essential. Bacon's dictum "Writing maketh the exact man" must not be taken too literally; it cannot be assumed that the pupils' writing will necessarily improve simply because they write more. Correction must be done, but no ordinary mortal can hope to cope with such a spate of writing. Assessment, the new refuge for English teachers, resolves this dilemma. All work which is assessed as having been done with tolerable care receives the red tick of commendation. About every fifth exercise is scrutinised carefully with the writer in attendance. He then writes on a red Banda skin any typical non-sentence precisely as he has presented it in his jotter. Writing that has particular merit because of sentence pattern or vocabulary is set down on a green Banda skin. On occasion I take the opportunity of re-writing a small part of the composition of some pupil to

introduce a particular sentence structure which I want to teach (for most pupils in the class, whenever they do write in sentences, adhere to a rigid SPCA pattern of the simplest type). The pupil will then record for duplication such a sentence as "The masked bandit brandished the gun, coshed the teller, snatched the money, dashed out of the bank and jumped into the waiting car"—a sentence, of course, which will be publicly attributed to him, and which will evermore be referred to as the "Smith" sentence. When the duplicated sheets are issued, pupils seem to take a personal interest in the defects and merits of their writing. Such discussion, based on class work, may prove useful, as the pupils are then expected to correct the non-sentences, or construct sentences on the models provided.

Occasionally some attempt was made to promote a critical awareness towards newspapers by contrasting reports of the same incident from a quality and a popular newspaper; or from the *Mail* and the *Mirror*. These readings were always pre-recorded on tape so that suitable emphasis could be given to the significant parts. Pre-recording is useful for two other reasons: first, the whole presentation can be done efficiently and quickly with a certain authority that the disembodied voice gives; second, the class requires strict supervision when some subtle point on semantics or tone is being attempted.

Only once was there an attempt to introduce into class actual newspapers—forty old copies of the *Guardian*—to illustrate stocks and shares columns. As soon as these had been issued, it became evident that a serious tactical error had been made, as pupils accepted the opportunity of pursuing non-academic activities under such splendid cover. Big Brother had boomed.

Finally, the interest of pupils in term test marks was exploited by awarding twenty per cent of the marks for the newspaper produced by them in their jotters.

The pupils seemed to enjoy the project, which extended over the session. For them the text book tends to have an academic formality, no matter how flippant and avant-garde the writer strives to be. Ideally the newspaper project has the essential qualities of success: immediacy, concreteness, spontaneity. The pupils talked, wrote—even listened. Yet this activity had obvious shortcomings, some of them grave.

Where are the telling readings from poetry and prose to show the class how the great writers have commented on a situation similar to the one under discussion? Where is the final product of the class newspaper to give the feelings of communal achievement which is so important? Where is recorded the visit to the newspaper offices to give reality to the whole venture? Why were films not used to give depth to the discussion—films such as the excellent documentary issued by the Stock Exchange, specially produced for such an audience? Such questions inexorably pose others. How do fourteen

English teachers effect the social and educational revolution—implicit in the new approach—for over eighteen hundred pupils whose abilities range from the barely literate to the “A” Level English standard? How can those noble ideals formulated in the Newsom Report—of improving the quality of living, of enlarging the area of concern and acceptance of responsibility—be achieved in such a welter of humanity?

I liked a Course Book. It gave a certain orderly procedure. But that particular pattern of organised study is gone for ever.

OTHER ST AUGUSTINE'S PROJECTS

1st Year - - Holidays
The Beehive Travel Agency
Houses Through the Ages

1st Year (remedial) - Safety First
2nd Year - - - Romance—Wedding
Bridges

Outline Sketch of Project “Romance—Wedding” Done with 2nd Year

EXPERIENCE

1. Describe a wedding or engagement party you have been to. Was this a family occasion?
2. Describe *your own* feelings at the time.
3. Your brother/sister wants to get engaged. Parents object. Why? Unsuitable person? Mixed marriage? Job? Too young? Going abroad?
4. Tell what happened from *your* point of view. Do *you* approve of the match? Why or why not?

SOCIAL

1. Engagement/wedding notices for newspaper.
2. Telegrams of good wishes.
3. Letter to sister in Canada telling of engagement and wedding plans.
4. Invitations, menu, programme, etc.
5. Study ads. in papers and write some yourself. Make up ad. setting out requirements of young couple.
6. Thank-you letters for presents.
7. Letter from bride telling of experiences on setting up home in different town or country. Write account for Diary, showing how this differs: neighbours, climate, etc.

CREATIVE

1. First meeting—at dance, work, party, etc., or.
2. Marriage Bureau interview.
3. First date—misunderstanding over arrangements.
4. Proposal—in dramatic form.
5. Visit to fiancée's home to meet parents and family.
6. Write a humorous short story about such a visit. Write what happens when bride's father meets groom's mother and realises she is a former girl-friend: reactions of their families to this situation—outcome.
7. Write a poem or dramatic account of any of these.

REPORTAGE

1. Write account of wedding for local paper describing clothes, church, weather, reception, etc.
2. Write article for magazine telling of different marriage customs in different parts of the world or in other times. (Research will be needed.)
3. Write about a royal wedding or “pop” star's wedding.
4. From point of view of bridesmaid write an account of the wedding to aunt/cousin/pen-pal.
5. Review of book or film or T.V. programme dealing with preparations for a wedding.