



Discipline in schools

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1. Introduction

It's not an uncommon headline these days: *Progressive teaching methods have fuelled rise in poor discipline, bad behaviour tsar says*. Not only are standards of behaviour in schools in decline but they are so bad, it would seem, that someone with rather extraordinary powers is needed to reverse the trend.¹ Is it the journalist's intention to spread alarm about the nation's schools or should we only concern ourselves about schools that use progressive teaching methods, whatever they are? What might indicate poor discipline—violence towards others, the damaging of school property, the disruption of lessons, a lack of attention in class or a failure to return homework on time?

It is not difficult to see damage to school property or disruption of lessons as evidence of poor behaviour that a school's system of discipline should address. Such behaviour frustrates a school's purposes and cannot be tolerated. In contrast, failure to pay attention or return homework on time does not significantly affect the overall work of the school but reveals failure on the part of particular pupils to cooperate with the school's purposes for them. Here the harm done is to themselves and the school's response will be driven by concern for the individual rather than to protect the ability of the school to function as an organization.

In order to define discipline the Oxford English Dictionary usefully has: control or order exercised over people, a system of rules used to maintain this control, the behaviour of groups subjected to such rules and, only lastly, mental training. Another useful view of discipline applied to learning and teaching came in a conversation with Prof. John Davies,² whose work takes him to universities around the world; he was able to explain the importance of truth in the work of universities, not only in the common sense understanding of research and teaching within universities, but also between universities in countries with different political systems. He spoke of a South American university whose vice-chancellor was subject to frequent death threats lest he adhered to unpalatable truths. Not least at the most elevated levels of learning

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¹ C. Turner, *Progressive teaching methods have fuelled rise in poor discipline, bad behaviour tsar says*. *Daily Telegraph* (12 May 2019).

² Former Pro-Vice-Chancellor at Anglia Ruskin University and now Visiting Professor at Bath University.

there is clearly a concern to pursue the truth, the most basic of disciplines; indeed the concern is universal—without truth there would be nothing to teach.

Let us return to schools, the purpose of which is to secure learning;³ to teach children. This implies that we have two aspects of school discipline to consider: the attitude required for learning to take place—a respect for truth, attention to the subject to be studied etc.—in other words the discipline of learning; and the conduct or behaviour required of those gathered together in order to learn.

2. The problem

The School Run is a website that “gives you all the tools you need to understand what and how your child is learning at primary school”. It uses a thousand words to explain sanctions of one sort and another, but only 157 words to address the rewarding of good behaviour and a further 200 words to explain something of a parent’s responsibilities. The writing is clear and the information could be very helpful, but it is only concerned with bad behaviour and the means by which schools can address the matter. For example, the typical punishments that schools may impose are listed:⁴

- A verbal “telling off”
- Extra work, or repeating work that wasn’t done satisfactorily
- Written tasks, such as “lines”, an essay or a letter of apology
- Loss of privileges—for example, being excluded from a treat such as a school trip
- Confiscation of property such as mobile phones
- Breaktime or lunchtime detention
- After-school detention
- School-based community service, such as litter-picking or cleaning up graffiti
- Being placed “on report” for ongoing behaviour monitoring
- Working in isolation
- Temporary or permanent exclusion.

Similarly, the DfE has also set out the sanctions that teachers can use to deal with poor behaviour;⁵ here “discipline” is also clearly used in connexion with poor behaviour:

- Teachers have statutory authority to discipline pupils whose behaviour is unacceptable, who break the school rules or who fail to follow a reasonable instruction (Sections 90 and 91 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006)
- The power also applies to all paid staff (unless the headteacher says otherwise) with responsibility for pupils, such as teaching assistants
- Teachers can discipline pupils at any time the pupil is in school or elsewhere under the charge of a teacher, including on school visits

³ Particularly during the current Covid-19 disruption, it would not be difficult to see a different purpose for them, namely child-minding. At the start of the crisis the UK Department for Education (DfE) declared that “Schools are only open as a last resort option for vulnerable children and the children of key workers who cannot be accommodated elsewhere during the day” (DfE website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/departments-for-education> on 30 March 2020). This purpose also comes to light when schools are closed for other reasons, such as a teachers’ strike.

⁴ Secondary school discipline (25 July 2020) <https://www.theschoolrun.com/>

⁵ Discipline in schools – teachers’ powers – key points (January 2016) <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/departments-for-education>

- Teachers can also discipline pupils in certain circumstances when a pupil's misbehaviour occurs outside of school

- Teachers have a power to impose detention outside school hours

- Teachers can confiscate pupils' property.

It would appear that the discipline required for learning has become conflated with the orderliness or suitable behaviour required when groups of children are gathered together, by compulsion if necessary, to form a school where, it is intended, learning should take place. As long as a class is disciplined, in the sense of behaving itself, a teacher can address the matter of teaching and learning. Then there are the matters of the best way to make progress, of assessing needs, providing materials, explanations and encouragement, and monitoring progress. All this requires a minimal standard of behaviour. Where a significant proportion of a class does not behave, or where dominant individuals or the whole class does not behave in a way to permit teaching and learning, then there is failure of a key relationship.

Dr Rob Loe, CEO of the Relationships Foundation, writes about the Foundation's work and the challenge of examining good relationships in schools:⁶

Our work—our research, our analyses, our data—is beginning now to provide a powerful confirmation that good relationships are actually fundamental to the achievement of all the educational goals we seek. We would even go so far as to say that they are at the root of a successful education. ...

So, we need relationships in our adult lives to be healthy and happy, and to live long lives. But we also know that the ability of a child to connect to school (particularly from the age of 10 upwards) is a key protective factor that lowers the likelihood of later health-risk behaviours, while also enhancing positive educational outcomes.

The first of these relationships is that between school and home (for it is parents who, in a legal sense at least, choose to send their children to a school). Scholastic Publications suggests this much to parents:⁷

Children benefit tremendously when you help them bridge their two most important worlds.

As a parent, you are the major provider of your child's education from birth through adolescence. You guide the development of her character and mental health and help form the foundation from which she'll develop lifelong attitudes and interests. And because your home is the primary environment in which your child's potential and personality will take shape, it's important to make sure that you create a positive, open atmosphere that will not only support what goes on in the classroom, but will also instill the desire to learn.

This makes a great deal of sense, especially when we consider the proportion of its time that a child spends with its family, and has already spent with its family, before it goes anywhere near a school. Consider too the rewards and sanctions available for a parent to use. Then contrast the virtually unregulated powers and opportunities of parents with the closely regulated world of a school.

⁶ R. Loe, The value of prioritising relationships in schools and elsewhere (4 June 2019) <https://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/blogs/the-value-of-prioritising-relationships-in-schools-and-elsewhere/>

⁷ Connecting home and school (25 July 2020) <https://www.scholastic.co.uk/>

Hence, the matter of discipline in schools is to be found somewhere resulting from punishments in school, good relationships in schools, effective relationships between home and school, and good parenting.

3. The problem analysed

In 1880 education was made compulsory in the UK for children aged from five to ten. In some quarters this was seen as an attack on parents' rights over their children. T.H.Green, an Oxford professor, found a plausible counterargument, namely that compulsion would be required for only one generation of children: "Those who have been educated ... will not have to be constrained to submit their children to the education process".⁸

Of course, as we are still discovering, it is one thing for a child to attend school, to comply with the law's requirement of parents that they should secure effective education for their children; it is another to insist or ensure that education takes place.

During the 1970s large numbers of former grammar schools were becoming "comprehensives" and in some quarters there was regret at their passing and wariness of the new system. Typical were Duncan Sibley's parents, who had hoped he would attend the local grammar school. By the time he reached the age to do so it had become a comprehensive. In court their evidence included a diary that Duncan had been able to keep of the disruption due to misbehaviour in some classes. His parents' concern was that this was not simply unfortunate but wrong, because the boy would become adept at frustrating the school's purposes, one of which was, presumably, learning. They concluded that the school lacked control over its pupils and felt obliged to withdraw their son in order to protect him. Eventually the Court of Appeal had to choose whether to leave Duncan with his parents, by whom he was well provided and cared for, or to place him in care, very likely with children from disturbed and disruptive backgrounds, so that he could be forced to attend this comprehensive school. The court chose the latter option. The judge hoped that Duncan's parents would accept it:⁹

Duncan can then live at home and go to the comprehensive school, one hopes with his parents' blessing, because if they express confidence in the school the boy will have confidence in the school. If they do not, he will not.

Although the interval of more than 40 years that has elapsed since that judgment was delivered makes it harder to perceive its context, it is surprising that it was deemed acceptable for a boy to be forced to leave his parents and be put in care ("home" in the view of the judge) to attend a school that they had found to be bad, when other, more humane options such as home schooling would presumably have been available. Possibly we see here the baleful State determined to force the nation to accept its education policy. It could have become more of a *cause célèbre* but no prominent citizen came forward to take it up in a far-reaching way (cf. Voltaire and the case of Jean Calas).

I will return later to the matter of compelling children to attend school. For the moment I want to look at the matter of adult insistence that children learn.

⁸ P. Inson, *Consideration of Two Aspects of Compulsory Attendance at School* (MA dissertation). Institute of Education, University of London (1978), referring to T.H. Green, *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*. London: Longmans, Green & Co. (1895).

⁹ Geoffrey Lane, Lord Justice in the Court of Appeal (4–5 April 1977). All England Law Reports, vol. 3, p. 582 [1977] EWCA Civ J0405-6 (docket no Q.B.F.222).

Those of us who are parents will doubtless have observed the natural curiosity and inquisitiveness of babies and small children. We will have seen determined interest in some matter or other and will have reacted with encouragement or caution depending on the object of the child's interest. Then there are matters of interest to adults, the things we would like the child to learn, for its safety, for its advancement and out of consideration for others. This represents the deliberate imposition of aspects of our culture, such as being literate; we therefore oblige children to read in such a way that they will come to see the point of being able to read. It is an extension of parental care beyond the expectation that we will intervene physically to prevent a child harming itself: to remind adolescents that a certain action might have harmful consequences for them, confident that they will understand, that they will trust us not to interfere without good reason. We have to lead children beyond what is often a natural resistance, to appreciate things on which they, and the community of which they are part, depend (e.g., effective use of language). Through this extension we expect that offspring will cooperate with their parents, will learn to trust them and will go on to achieve adult independence. In my dissertation,⁸ I pick out an examination of this aspect of education by Richard Peters, who explains:¹⁰

Education consists essentially in the initiation of others into a public world picked out by the language and concepts of a people and structured by rules governing their purposes and interactions with each other. In relation to this the teacher is not, as it were, an external operator who is trying to impose something of his from the outside on children, or trying to develop something within them which is their own peculiar possession. His function is rather to act as a guide in helping them to explore and share a public world whose contours have been marked out by generations which have preceded both of them. There is always what D.H. Lawrence called "the holy ground" that stands between teacher and taught to which both owe allegiance.

For this education to start there is clearly then a need for adult insistence: to nucleate the activity or start the ball rolling and keep it rolling until it builds up a momentum of its own, as evinced by young adults able to conduct their own affairs, in harmony with others and with the means of addressing conflict with reason and with respect for other parties.

Sometimes young people challenge the adult world in which they have grown up. Sometimes they are incredibly brave when determined to pursue what they believe to be right and proper. Most of us will have been impressed by the courage of a Pakistani girl determined to seek an education where the Taliban wanted to deny girls and women an education. For her pains she was shot and seriously injured by the Taliban; she recovered and for her determination she became the youngest-ever winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.¹¹

Other determined young people are less well regarded. Charlie, aged fourteen, asked his teachers why it was that they insisted that he attend school while at the same time complaining about his behaviour—he acknowledged his bad behaviour, caused, he told them, by boring

¹⁰ R.S. Peters, Aims of education – A conceptual inquiry. In: *The Philosophy of Education* (ed. R.S. Peters), p. 26. Oxford: University Press (1973).

¹¹ M. Yousafzai, *I Am Malala. The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson (2013).

lessons. By the time I interviewed Charlie for *The Guardian* he had used his entrepreneurial guile, with some support from his parents, to vanish from the school long enough for it to cease troubling him. He had found illegal employment with an enterprise with which he had undertaken work experience and which liked him well enough to take him on. With the enterprise he grew up in the company of grown-ups whose respect he soon earned. Some years on he now runs his own business and has kept out of trouble. Whether Charlie would have grown up as well corralled for another two years with other resentful adolescents, resenting his own incarceration, I rather doubt.¹²

Schools have to engage with children and young people in ways that allow, if not encourage, learning to take place, whether they are comprehensive schools like Charlie's with all the sanctions listed above^{4,5} with which to maintain order, or progressive schools like Summerhill and Dartington Hall. Summerhill battles on and was once seen as the poor relation of Dartington, which closed amid scandal over thirty years ago. In both schools, as a visitor, I have seen something of their positive and constructive engagement with young people, but also a kind of liberalism that would frighten those who need to be sure that they have everything under control, especially when the inspectors call.

What then have I learned of what it means to work in a disciplined school?

4. Establishing and restoring discipline

The English department for which I was responsible was short-staffed but at very short notice the head had been able to engage someone, a former junior school deputy head, who had been relentlessly bullied by his headteacher and had resigned, exhausted. As he started with each of his classes I accompanied him to introduce him to boys I knew well. It was only afterwards that I realized that the boys had behaved well because they knew that that was what I expected. They also realized that they had shown their new teacher that they knew how to behave. They were effectively trapped and with this knowledge Jim was presented with a culture that would respond positively to his skills and talents and he blossomed. Essentially my confidence had rubbed off on him, just like the trainee beekeepers I have taught, handling a colony of bees for the first time.

More importantly perhaps, Jim had joined an established school culture where what was expected, permitted, tolerated or ignored was clearly known and accepted. It was a church school where it was easier to establish trust between parents and teachers, and where shared values enhanced the work of the school and underpinned our expectations of the boys who had been entrusted to us.

In other situations when we take responsibility for other people's children, as friends or neighbours perhaps, we would expect there to be at least some minimal discussion, or giving of assurances, especially if travel or an overnight stay was involved. This minimal understanding allows the host to confidently act *in loco parentis*, the basis on which it is supposed that teachers will function. Just as a friend's children will understand that they are expected to cooperate

¹² P. Inson, Work ethics. Charlie, 15, is a serial truant who prefers employment to the classroom. Ex-headteacher Peter Inson asks whether compulsory schooling is socially excluding some youngsters. *The Guardian* (15 November 2006).

with their hosts, so should pupils understand that they are expected to cooperate with their teachers to whom their parents have entrusted them. In a culture supported by mutual understanding trust can be built, and with it the basis on which we can function when we take responsibility for other people's children, whether as neighbours or as teachers.

Stuart was fourteen and relished the endorsement of his classmates as the class clown. His friends' approval turned into encouragement and Stuart's performances became excessive for his teachers, and his friends then tried to emulate him. I held a discussion with his father, who shared my concern. Next week Stuart was surprised to see his father appear with me on the school stage at the morning assembly. I stood up to welcome our guest and then Stuart found himself also invited up onto the stage, where he received a dressing down from me and then another from his father. The effect was immediate and sustained for, as I soon came to appreciate, four hundred boys were now wondering whether their fathers might also be invited to join us for a school assembly.

What about children whose parents are unknown? How can we expect them to behave and cooperate with us? I have in mind secondary pupils who may have been assigned to a school simply on the basis of a paper exercise, with no contact between the home and the school until a place had been awarded and without a shared and agreed understanding with the parents of what the school expects and requires of the pupils. What about children who resent school discipline, pupils who at least fail to follow their fellows when it comes to cooperation and joint enterprise?

There are the sanctions and punishments set out above,^{4,5} and as long as they are successful and do not become a distraction from teaching all is well; learning to grow up involves the making of mistakes for which due allowance should be made for young people. It is not easy to expel pupils (i.e., exclude them permanently), and sometimes schools find themselves forced to continue their efforts with a particularly difficult pupil without the kind of parental support that can transform a situation. In these circumstances the teacher is in a situation not dissimilar to that of a prison officer. The child has no option but to be in school and sees no reason why it should cooperate with the teacher. This is how some teachers have to begin their attempts to engage pupils in worthwhile activity.

Supply teachers¹³ can find themselves cut off from a supportive school culture simply by dint of not knowing the school. Sometimes they have to rely solely on their own resources, maintaining discipline in both senses, reasonable behaviour and engagement with learning. Three examples from my days as a supply teacher will suffice to indicate the varied levels of discipline I found in three schools.

At Westminster Cathedral Prep School a class of twelve-year-old boys was lined up in silence. A smile and a gesture had them walk into the classroom where they stood, still silent, behind their desks. I invited them to sit down whereupon they opened their books and worked in silence until the end of the lesson. I had merely triggered the boys' responses to the school's expectations of them. They were not robots and it was clear that I could have taught them all sorts of things, but of course there was the expectation that they would tackle the work set for them.

¹³ A supply teacher is a teacher sent to a school to stand in for an absent regular teacher.

At a comprehensive school in west London I took a geography lesson with some fourteen-year-olds. I started three times to read the instructions left by their regular teacher and each time I had to stop and begin again because some members of the class were clearly not paying attention. Then I rounded on them in anger and, cowed, they listened, until one boy interrupted in a reaction to my raised voice. Very quickly, I told him that I would come and listen to what he had to say, once the class was working. To him I apologized for having raised my voice and explained that as the class had not listened together I would have bored or annoyed them by repeated attempts to get the lesson started: the instructions only needed to be read once. The boy listened, nodded and thanked me. It seemed to me that as a class and as individuals the pupils had accepted that there were times when a teacher would need to take them to task and they had respected that.

At another comprehensive in west London it was the indiscipline of the staff that troubled me. As I moved around the school at the start of the day I had noticed one boy jumping up and down in front of other children as if he were trying to impress his fellows with his apparent lack of concern about suitable conduct in a crowded corridor. Somehow he was able to ignore the remonstrations of passing members of staff. As I shepherded my class into a room for a Spanish lesson the same boy was attempting to entertain the class, of which he was not a part, and to ignore me. The class settled down in the classroom. No work had been set so I took out my copy of *Winnie the Pooh* in Spanish. Six members of the class had given me report cards on which, the classroom assistant had explained, I was to report on their behaviour at the end of the lesson. The classroom door opened and the same boy again (whose misconduct I had noticed outside) came in, walked up to the teacher's desk and grasped the six report cards. When I held out my hand and asked him to give them to me he held his hand aloft and taunted me. I took hold of his wrist, retrieved the cards and propelled him to the door and out into the corridor. Within a few minutes the deputy head came into the room, carrying a sheaf of paper. She ignored me, one of the most egregious examples of discourtesy among teachers I have ever seen. The class was told to write an account of the incident with the boy on the sheets of paper (a terrible piece of incompetence, because the children would have been open to peer pressure as they wrote their accounts—committing their view to paper in private brings home to children the need to be accurate and truthful in their accounting of something). The classroom assistant was asked about the incident, which had occurred in front of the whole class; she had seen nothing. This school seemed to have little to offer either its staff or its pupils, and in so far as it was able to function as a school this seemed to be a matter of chance rather than something planned, expected and insisted upon.

Something planned, expected and insisted upon; we are back to the beginning, the admission of a child to a school. No parent can be obliged to send a child to an independent school, an academically selective school or a religious school and, generally speaking, places in these schools are particularly sought after. Such schools are much better placed to expect the support of parents and the benefits that come from such support. The governors of the Oratory School in west London used to claim that the interviewing of parents who wished to send their sons to the school was the most important aspect of their role. On the school's website it was made clear that the governors then sought to assure themselves "... whether the aims, attitudes, values and expectations of the parents and the boy are in harmony with those of the school".¹⁴

¹⁴ *Arrangements for Admissions*. London Oratory School (October 2006).

In this way there is a clear opportunity for a two-way discussion before the two parties, the parents and the school, agree that the school should share with the parents responsibility for important aspects of a child's life. The intention is that home and school should work together harmoniously for the benefit of the child. Such interviews as part of the admissions arrangements for state-funded schools were, however, banned in 2006 by the Blair government on the grounds that they would confer an unfair advantage on children whose parents were particularly articulate and able speakers.¹⁵

There is now a legal requirement that schools publish annually their behaviour policies, but without any requirement that parents and pupils acknowledge or accept the policies of the school to which admission is sought; there has only to be a tacit acceptance, on the parents' side, of any supposed understanding between home and school and a very legalistic one at that. Such a supposed understanding ignores the spirit of a school enterprise, the education of children, what might be referred to as the human aspect of running a school, and the problem of implementing a policy when it is less than helpful. The DfE website indicates two behaviour policies that are required of state-funded schools.¹⁶

Imagine parents being required to draw up a parenting policy before the birth of a child. Unlike schools, parents are trusted with their children by the community. There is talk of parents' right to have a child and a tacit understanding that, unless and until a child is harmed or neglected, the parents' bringing up of that child will not be challenged. Schools, however, are expected to show that they are prepared and qualified to take on the responsibility for educating other people's children; but anyone may inflict themselves as a parent on a child with infinitely greater powers and opportunities to influence and nurture that child for good or ill with no expectation that they should first demonstrate that they are prepared and capable of undertaking such a responsibility.¹⁷ Indeed there is no check to ensure that they have not previously abandoned or harmed a child of a fellow parent.

It might be suggested that, instead of requiring the parents of prospective students to submit themselves and their children to interview as part of the awarding of places in a school, they should meet the school once a place has been awarded but before the child joins the school. This is what schools may do now, but it is not something upon which they can insist and it is at that stage only the parents who can withdraw from the arrangement. This is unlikely to happen for to withdraw at that late stage would put the parents at a great disadvantage in seeking a place elsewhere for a child. Hence, essentially, state-funded schools have now to commit themselves to a partnership with families without first ensuring, as far as possible, that they share aims, values and expectations that will enable the school to play its role effectively.

There were complaints that one girl in the school where I was head had been bullying fellow pupils out of school. They lived near one another and the bullying had been directed at the neighbours' immigrant origins. The bullying and its effects followed the girl into school. The father appeared in my office to tell me that it was none of my business what his daughter got up to out of school. I told him that if it damaged relationships between pupils in school it was

¹⁵ S. Doughty, Crackdown on 'back-door' school selection. *Daily Mail* (8 September 2006).

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statutory-policies-for-schools-and-academy-trusts/statutory-policies-for-schools-and-academy-trusts>

¹⁷ P. Inson, Parents: Our expectations. *Nanotechnol. Perceptions* 17 (2021) 82–92.

my business. His appearance was aggressive and I gained the impression that it pleased him to appear aggressive, and for a moment I thought he was going to launch himself at me across my desk. I explained that we would continue to expect his daughter to behave considerately towards her fellow pupils, at school and elsewhere. We continued to insist upon reasonable standards of conduct between all our pupils and failed to make an exception of his daughter who, a few months later, attempted to kill herself. Her parents blamed the school, the poor girl spent some time in hospital and that was the last we heard of her. Very convenient for the school but how, I often wondered, would life turn out for the poor girl?

The school had a clear policy towards drugs; expulsion would result should anyone bring them into school. One boy who had just moved up into the sixth form was caught; for five years he had been a good student but with an expulsion on his record life would be more difficult. I suggested to his parents that there was a way round this. Instead of their trying to find a place somewhere for a son who had been expelled from his school, I would try and arrange a transfer for a young man who needed to learn a lesson, but who, I believed would learn quickly. He was not expelled; a neighbouring head agreed to take him on and he quickly resumed his studies with a minimum of disruption while his fellow students saw their school's rules respected.

Sometimes maintaining discipline requires counterintuitive measures rather than following procedures laid down away from problems presented by real people in real situations. So often it is important to consider not simply the particular individuals drawn into a particular situation but others who will be watching. How often does an angry or frustrated teacher come to explain or demonstrate the need for discipline? Imagine explaining to a class the need for the perpetrator of some outrage to own up lest classmates fall under suspicion? *This is an aspect of good, considerate behaviour that young people tend not to consider, for their concern tends to be with avoiding trouble for themselves. Here a teacher can help them to develop an appreciation of good behaviour and a concern for others lest those others fall under suspicion.*

Establishing and restoring discipline is as much an art as a science.

5. A disciplined school community—elements that I would expect to find

When I taught in an international school in Switzerland I had to say farewell to two English colleagues who had been lured into Swiss state schools, not to teach English but to teach maths and geography, in English. Swiss children had suggested *to their schools* that they would learn English more readily were other subjects taught through the medium of English.

Swiss parents tend not to use fee-paying schools, they simply regard their children's state-funded schools as fee-paying parents in the UK would regard the schools to which they send their children and expect good value for money.¹⁸ My colleagues had been recruited by Swiss schools not to bring discipline into Swiss classrooms but to respond to a seriousness amongst Swiss children, which represented a discipline in the wider community there.

In any school I would expect to find evidence of that discipline in various forms, for example in an unforced rapport between parents, staff and students: simple good manners. When interviewing prospective members of staff I would arrange for each individual to spend

¹⁸ In the UK most people pay tax through the system of pay-as-you-earn, meaning that their taxes are deducted from income at source, which tends to disguise the fact that it is their money that is spent on schools. In Switzerland income tax is collected directly from citizens, usually once a year.

fifteen minutes or so in the company of a small group of pupils to see how well the candidate would strike up a rapport with young people *whom they did not know*.

Good behaviour was taken for granted; it was the readiness to engage with young people, a readiness to lead them into the business of learning that mattered. Then there would be the ability of colleagues to think beyond and around immediate concerns and problems, to see these matters in context.

Having earned the trust of young people, having been accepted by them, there is then the matter of engagement with learning.

Christopher Winch has considered how this might be achieved.¹⁹ In a section entitled “Teaching and agency” Winch considers the possibility that, in simple conformity with a teacher’s instructions, a pupil acts so as to learn something. For Winch this is not teaching and I would see this as a kind of training; that is, the achievement of a certain action or understanding on the part of the agent or pupil without any appreciation of how or why this was to be brought about; training in this sense is for dogs and other creatures. Winch continues:

Maybe it is part of the job of teachers to make their pupils interested in what is to be learned even if they are not inclined to be interested.

There are echoes here of Richard Peters—the matter of what he calls initiation where control or influence of some kind over the pupil enables the teacher to guide the pupil to a situation where the pupil *has come to see things, perhaps as the teacher sees them or would like them to see things, so that they will appreciate and understand them for themselves, independently of the teacher*. Think of a child riding a two-wheeled bicycle for the first time. The adult, seeing that the child has sufficient momentum, gives the bicycle a firm push and, despite the child’s protests, lets go. So long as the child continues to pedal it will discover that it has learnt to ride, despite its apparent belief, just moments beforehand, that such a thing was impossible.

But how are teachers to do this faced with unwilling students who manifest the same strong and reasoned determination as Charlie? Discipline that is manifest as an instruction or an order is likely to work against an attempt to initiate a young person into our adult world of knowledge and understanding. Those who achieve this, insisting first on suitable behaviour and then taking advantage of it to engage with students have an answer, but it is not easy and not without risks.

I would hope to find among teachers a repertoire of approaches to young people, an understanding and sensitivity about leading and following conversations with young people, especially regarding matters of importance to them.

A local newspaper warned pensioners of the dangers of an area where teenagers gathered after school. I arrived on my bike and asked one of the youngsters if he could help me. He looked puzzled but listened as I explained that I was looking for some dangerous teenagers. He hesitated then caught my eye and we both laughed.

Among parents I would hope to find an awareness that schools not only have responsibilities to parents and families as individuals but also have to function as organizations to serve the needs of other individuals. It is only a school that can act as arbiter concerning contentious matters and then often without revealing what it may know of other families as it does so.

¹⁹ C. Winch, *Teachers’ Know-How. A Philosophical Investigation*. Wiley Blackwell (2017).

I would expect to find professionalism amongst teachers, such that they respect and support one another, learn from one another, challenge one another and allow their peers to pursue ideas and enthusiasms in accordance with the school's learning culture; the sort of professional confidence and expectation of one another revealed by the inspectors of independent schools: "we believe that teachers and school leaders are the experts in education who understand how schools function".²⁰

Trust must be present, that glue that binds up good relationships, certainly between all the adults involved, and growing between students and teachers. And so that trust can grow, allowances should be made for youthful skepticism, mistakes and misunderstanding.

And, finally, there must be an eagerness on the part of teachers to engage, to share their enthusiasm with a younger generation.

²⁰ Independent Schools Inspection Service, *Our Point of Difference* (August 2020) <https://www.isi.net/>
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