

# Relevance and the Romantic Imagination

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It is a widespread belief that students will more readily learn and understand material if it is made relevant to their everyday experience. This truism is commonly interpreted to exclude students' imaginative life as an element of everyday experience. This article explores students' imaginative lives and considers implications for attempts to make material 'relevant.' It further explores implications for the planning of teaching to engage students' imaginations.

On entend souvent dire que la matière est plus facile à apprendre et à comprendre si elle a un lien avec la vie quotidienne des élèves, mais quand on énonce cette évidence, on exclut souvent l'imaginaire du vécu des élèves. Cet article explore certaines des caractéristiques de l'imaginaire des élèves et tire des conclusions, d'une part, sur les efforts qui sont faits en vue de rendre la matière 'pertinente' et, d'autre part, sur la planification d'un enseignement visant à faire travailler l'imagination des élèves.

## INTRODUCTION

It is a truism, if rather a stale one, that students will learn more effectively if what is taught is made relevant to their experience. I fear that 'relevance,' like the word 'culture,' impels people to reach for their guns. The over-use of the term in the sixties has made people somewhat wary of using it these days. Nonetheless, the notion that successful teaching comes about by making what is to be learned relevant to students' experience now has the status of a truism. This truism is, however, less problematic than is its most common interpretation. It is interpreted as meaning that new knowledge or experience will be more effectively learned if it is made relevant to the student's everyday experience. In this paper I argue that we can also interpret 'relevance' in terms of the experience of students' imaginative lives. Such an interpretation could have a liberating effect both for teaching and for the curriculum.

Why have we come to accept that children require connections with what Dewey (1916) called the 'material of ordinary acquaintance' (p. 258), when

we routinely observe them generating or eagerly accepting a menagerie of creatures that do not and cannot exist, engaging in amazing adventures in never-never worlds? The most evident feature of the fantasy games invented by my children and their friends just outside my study window is a wild imaginativeness, as they transform the garden, its playhouse, compost heap, shed, and fruit trees into a strange kingdom full of monsters, castles, dungeons and dragons, and wizards. They imbue what to my dull eyes is a place for leisure into an enchanted place whose pragmatic reality is of only the slightest concern.

Partly because of John Dewey's enormous influence and the influence of widely agreed interpretations of his work, educational practitioners generally accept that children are concrete thinkers whose intellectual activity is tied to here-and-now everyday experience. There is, of course, endless dispute about Dewey's work and the ways it has been interpreted or misinterpreted and the degrees to which it has been implemented or perverted (see, for example, Cuban, 1984; Kliebard, 1986). It is perhaps easier to measure influence on curriculum documents than on teaching practices and teachers' beliefs, but it does seem fair to conclude, as Cremin (1961, 1976) has argued in some detail, "that by the 1950s the more fundamental tenets of the progressives had become the conventional wisdom of American education" (1976, p. 19). It seems true also that "whether or not we like Dewey and the progressives, we are heirs to their formulations, and the irony is that an age that has all but forgotten Dewey is still governed by his analytical categories" (1976, p. 8).

Among the most pervasive themes of Dewey's writing is insistence on the child's meaningful everyday experience as the paradigm of appropriate learning. "Anything which can be called a study, whether arithmetic, history, geography, or one of the natural sciences, must be derived from materials which at the outset fall within the scope of ordinary life-experience" (Dewey, 1938, p. 86). To avoid the class divisions he so hated and to bring about the kind of democracy he saw as liberating to the human spirit, Dewey wanted to ensure that all learning for all children was tied to democratic social experience. His social commitments and his related ideas about how scientific knowledge was generated and established led to a strong insistence on particular procedures in teaching and the curriculum. Dewey (1916) insists upon "the necessity of an actual empirical situation as the initiating phase of thought" (p. 153) and argues, "Even for older students, the social sciences would be less abstract and formal, if they were dealt with less as sciences . . . and more in their direct subject-matter as that is found in the daily life of the social groups in which the student shares" (p. 201). In general, he argues that`

'The subject matter of education consists primarily of the meanings which supply content to existing social life' (p. 192), and that 'Before teaching can safely enter upon conveying facts and ideas through the media of signs, schooling must provide genuine situations in which personal participation brings home the import of the material and the problems which it conveys' (p. 233). In his pamphlet, 'My Pedagogic Creed,' he emphasizes that 'The school life should grow gradually out of the home life; . . . it should take up and continue the activities with which the child is already familiar in the home' (Dewey, in Archambault, 1964, p. 431).

Even its strongest proponents find problematic the idea that teaching in any area will be more effective if it connects with students' everyday experience. Dewey also wanted widespread understanding of disciplinary knowledge, some of which seems not easily accessible without significant breaks from the underlying assumptions given by everyday experience—a point argued strongly by Floden, Buchmann and Schwille (1987). The starting point in education for Dewey, however, remains the child's daily social experience, and he notes that 'The child lives in a somewhat narrow world of personal contacts' (1902, p. 5). This is generally true as long as we do not interpret it exclusively: exclusively, that is, of the fact that the child also lives in a vivid and expansive world of imaginative activity.

Dewey's concern with a kind of education appropriate to a developing industrial democratic society led him to try to undercut those features of schooling that seemed most responsible for dividing people from one another. He was especially concerned to discredit what he saw as the artificial, 'ornamental,' effete 'culture' of European upper-middle classes. He was moved towards intemperate language whenever he discussed the kind of 'inner' cultural life whose development someone like, say, Matthew Arnold, saw as the point of education:

And the idea of perfecting an 'inner' personality is a sure sign of social divisions. What is called inner is simply that which does not connect with others—which is not capable of free and full communication. What is termed spiritual culture has usually been futile, with something rotten about it, just because it has been conceived as a thing which a man might have internally—and therefore exclusively. What one is as a person is what one is as associated with others. (Dewey, 1916, p. 122)

Our imaginative lives are indeed not capable of 'free and full communication,' and are indeed something 'inner.' They can include futile, mind-wandering fantasizing, but also important constructive activity. The kind of statements

quoted above have led European educationalists in particular to see a significant totalitarian element in Dewey's theories (see, for instance, Bantock, 1984, pp. 315–322).

It would be absurd to suggest that the author of *Art as Experience* was conducting a campaign against the use of imagination. But Dewey's insistence on the pragmatic, on the child's everyday social experience, has generated sets of pedagogical principles which have in turn stressed concrete activity to the neglect of imaginative activity. (I have elsewhere discussed the way in which interpretations of Piaget's work in education have reinforced this tendency [Egan, 1983].) We are, as Cremin notes, the heirs to Dewey's and his various progressivist interpreters' formulations, whether we like it or not. The inheritance in theory can be endlessly disputed, but in practice it is constantly evident. Just a couple of weeks ago, for example, I was talking with a recently graduated, bright, and conscientious teacher in the interior of British Columbia. The curriculum required that she teach her grade 8 class about the Middle Ages. With increasing desperation she had sought for weeks "relevant" material, and had only come up with the fact that this was the period during which women's high-heel shoes were invented. She had been taught, and accepted as reasonable, that to make something new meaningful and engaging to students she had to find in it elements relevant to students' everyday experience.

Imagination in education is perhaps like the weather: everyone talks about it but nobody does anything. Beyond encouragement, the professional educationalist's job should be to offer some clarification about what imagination is and perhaps more usefully to offer some technical help to enable teachers to plan in such a way as to more routinely evoke imaginative activity in their students. I mean to consider briefly some incidents in the history of the imagination, then turn to common characteristics of adolescents' imaginative lives, and finally derive from these a technique for planning teaching.

#### TWO INCIDENTS IN THE HISTORY OF IMAGINATION

The human mind is complicated. We don't know what a natural mind might be like; we know minds only within particular cultures that evoke, stimulate, and develop particular potentials. One potential evoked, stimulated, and developed long ago, and very early in each of our lives, is what we rather vaguely call the imagination. The first historical incident I would like to touch on concerns its role in the survival of oral cultures. In oral cultures, people know only what they can remember. Without writing, what is forgotten is lost forever: a very

high social value is thus placed on techniques that aid memorization. It was very early discovered that rhyme, rhythm, and meter made oral messages more reliably memorable. But perhaps the greatest social invention was the story. People discovered that the lore that determined social structures and relationships, technical skills, economic activities, and so on, could be made more memorable by encoding it into stories. All known oral cultures throughout the world use stories for this purpose. These stories, usually called myths, provided an important cohesion and relative stability to oral cultures. It was discovered also that the messages to be encoded in myths were more memorable if they were put in the form of vivid and dramatic events involving very strange creatures in weird circumstances. To be most memorable the events had to engage and to shape the emotions of their audience (Goody, 1977; Havelock, 1963, 1986; Lévi-Strauss, 1966; Ong, 1982). These techniques have been found throughout history to be reliable aids to memory, in literate but book-poor cultures as well as in oral cultures (Spence, 1984; Yates, 1966). What is crucial is evoking in the listener's mind vivid and strange images.

In rituals, particularly initiation ceremonies, and more casually as parts of social life, myths in oral cultures evoked, stimulated, and developed the mind's potential for imaginative activity. We tend, ironically, to think of memorization and imagination as somewhat antithetical in early schooling. We might transcend this rather simplistic binary opposition by bearing in mind that the birth of the imagination and its early stimulation are a product of the need to remember. To most members of oral cultures the natural world is not made up of objective phenomena, but is rather imbued with vivid dramas in which gods and spirits of various kinds are ever-active, and the individual's behaviour must be coordinated with those great dramas. Classification schemes of natural phenomena are also tied to them (Lévi- Bruhl, 1910/1985).

The second incident I would like briefly to touch on is the conflict in European culture about the role of the imagination once writing became commonplace. This conflict, like so many others, was set rolling by Plato's characteristically vigorous and intricately argued solution. Like everyone who, on his mother's knees, fought beside Achilles on the windy plains of Troy or sailed with Odysseus across the wine-dark sea, Plato had some difficulty reaching the conclusion to which his new conception of how to think and how to educate people to become rational drove him: "he struggled within himself and proclaimed one part of himself the enemy of the other. He knew his inner war had to end with the victory of reason and the grudging surrender of passion, the victory of philosophy over poetry" (Simon, 1978, p. 157). His solution was to ban poets from his ideal Republic, because poets seduced the

emotions and created in the soul falsehoods and illusions about reality.

Some time after Plato's influential contribution this conflict reached another kind of resolution, perhaps best expressed in the work of one of the most underrated contributors to educational thought, William Wordsworth. His major insight is summed up in the observation that "The child is father of the Man," and is elaborated on in many of his poetical works. He saw and expressed with greater clarity than anyone before him that the young child's perception of the world is not adequately described, as Plato described it, primarily in terms of confusion and illusion, as irrational or a-rational. This Platonic view led to a sense that education was the process of gradually leading the child from its initial confusion about reality to adult, mature rationality: from Plato's stage of *eikasia* or *doxa* to *noiesis* or *episteme*. This view is still prominent among traditionalist educational theorists. Oakeshott (1971), for example, characterizes young children as "postulants to the human condition" who require initiation into the inheritance of human understandings to become human beings with minds. Before this deliberate initiation, "in the morning twilight of childhood, where there is nothing that, at a given moment, a clever child may be said exactly to know or not to know" there is only "inclination . . . casual encounters provoked by the contingencies of moods . . . fleeting wants and sudden enthusiasms tied to circumstances . . . current wants and interests" (pp. 47, 48). Even Peters (1964), seeking an almost poetic summary of his image of education, says: "It is education that provides that touch of eternity under the aspect of which endurance can pass into dignified, wry acceptance, and animal enjoyment into a quality of living" (p. 48). Education turns the animal enjoyment, presumably what is available to the uneducated child, gradually into a "quality of living."

In Wordsworth's view, childhood perception is quite the opposite of Oakeshott's "morning twilight." Rather, the world of early childhood appears "Apparelled in celestial light," with the glory and freshness that at length as we mature dies away and fades "into the light of common day." This sense of childhood perception being bright and vivid, and childhood intellectual life being equivalently vivid and dramatic, is now a commonplace recognition in autobiographers of childhood (Coe, 1984). The educational problem for Wordsworth is to ensure that in the initiation of the child into the inheritance of human understandings, the imaginative freshness and vividness of childhood is not lost. If it is, if that is the price of admission to our accumulated knowledge, then that initiation carries with it "Shades of the prison-house." Wordsworth's optimistic conclusion is that while we must indeed lose that vivid immediacy of childhood perception, "the radiance which was once so bright," we can nevertheless carry it forward in our

memories into "the years that bring the philosophic mind." (All quotations from "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood.") Wordsworth "kept till the end of his life a sense that the ordinary can be transformed by the imagination and that the poet's task is to show this" (Sturrock, 1988, p. 62).

One may describe Wordsworth's achievement as recognizing a way in which the great intellectual achievements of oral cultures, and in particular their stimulation of the imagination and fluency with metaphor—used to encode social information into vivid stories—are not antithetical to the achievement of rationality—as Plato represented them. One can preserve the great intellectual achievements from the oral culture of childhood into the high literacy of modern educated adulthood. This insight of Wordsworth's is the key that can enable educational theory and practice to transcend the disabling conflict between progressivism and traditionalism, which continues today in a variety of forms.

Wordsworth was not alone, of course, in radical reconception of the imagination's role in education. The Romantic movement was in part a reaction against what the Romantics considered an excessive dessicating rationality in eighteenth-century neo-classicism. Coleridge refers disparagingly to those "who have been rationally educated, as it is styled. They were marked by a microscopic acuteness, but when they looked at great things, all became a blank and they saw nothing, and denied (very illogically) that anything could be seen. . . ." Rather he advocates the importance of imaginative stories for the young: "For from my early reading of fairy tales and genii, etc. etc. my mind had been habituated to *the vast*, and I never regarded *my senses* in any way as the criteria of my belief. I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions, not by my *sight*, even at that age" (Coleridge, in Potter, 1933, p. 355). It is clear how far Coleridge's views are from today's commonly asserted principles about children's ability to learn.

For the particular purposes of this paper, let me highlight very briefly just three characteristic features of distinctive imaginative activity in the Romantic movement. First is the new focus on reality. The excitement of Romanticism was not simply a sense of imagination being freed, but of its freedom to explore afresh the reality of human experience and of the world, uncluttered by artificial conventions imposed during eighteenth-century neo-classicism. Blake expressed it in terms of the need to cleanse the gates of perception; Shelley saw the poet's proper task as lifting the veil from the hidden beauty of the world and showing the familiar in all its strange wonder. It is the everyday detail of the world, often at a purely descriptive level, that fills much of the most distinctively Romanticist art and literature: "Romantic art . . . is not

'romantic' in the vulgar sense, but 'realistic' in the sense of concrete, full of particulars' (Barzun, 1961, p. 26).

A second characteristic of Romanticism is the ambivalence caught in the figure of the hero. "The writers who achieved the greatest popular success in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were those who created simpler, more colourful imaginative worlds, dominated by heroes of super-human effectiveness' (Butler, 1981, p. 2). The ambivalence stems from recognition of the constraints of reality along with desire to transcend them. The hero is constrained by reality like the rest of us, but manages somehow to overcome the constraints. The career of Napoleon fascinated most Romantics because his force of will transcended what seemed politically and militarily possible. The Byronic hero is another example of the cult of heroism that grew up during the period.

As in the earlier outburst of romantic energy during the Renaissance, which included revolt against the ossified scholasticism of the late Middle Ages, so the movers of Romanticism looked back to the earlier liberation of spirit they saw in, or projected into, myth and popular fantasy. Resistance to "classical" reason led many to a fascination with the exotic and mysterious, to fantasy and the "irrational" myths of the ancient world and contemporary "savages." This attraction to extremes of experience and reality, then, is a third commonly observed feature of Romanticism on which I will draw. Clearly, the characteristics I have chosen are related, indeed they overlap considerably. My purpose is to consider some implications for education today of such observations about the imagination.

#### SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS' IMAGINATIVE LIVES

If one considers the kinds of films or reading material most engaging to early adolescents, there is evident a significant difference from the fantasy or fairy-tales that commonly engage younger children. Crucial is the concern with reality. Even the wilder super-heroes, like the Hulk or Spiderman, or even Superman, require an aetiology that links them with some possible, however implausible, reality. Superman is not accepted, as is Cinderella's fairy-godmother, without our knowing about his birth on the dying planet Krypton and his being launched into space by his father, Marlon Brando, and about his arrival in Kansas where he was cared for by Mr. and Mrs. Kent, and so on.

Students in early adolescence seem most readily engaged by equivalents of *People* magazine, often having to do with pop-stars or sports-heroes, or by material such as that compiled in the *Guinness Book of Records*. That is, they



are attracted not to reality in its everyday aspects, but rather to its extremes, to exotica and the bizarre. The student's imaginative grappling with reality emphasizes who or what is the biggest, the smallest, the fastest, the slowest, the fattest, the thinnest, the hairiest, etc. It is the mysterious, the strange, the weird, the wonderful, and emphatically not the everyday that engages the student's imagination.

Another common feature of students' imaginative engagements during this time of life is their development of obsessive interests in something in particular, or in a hobby. Typically students are drawn to collect exhaustively or to master something in detail, or to find out everything about something. It may be a pop-music group, cathedrals, castles, a football team, the kings and queens of England, costume through the ages, steam trains, shells, spiders, or anything whatever. With the discovery of an autonomous real world comes the need to explore its extent and scale. Studying something exhaustively gives one some security and also some sense of the scale of things in general. Simply as a strategy for exploration, these are perfectly sensible procedures. They also partake of prominent features of imaginative exploration in Romanticism: intense interest in details of the world and in exotic and extreme features of the world and of experience.

The third characteristic also echoes a common aspect of the Romantic imagination: what I shall call the association with transcendent human qualities. The everyday autonomous world is somewhat threatening to the immature ego; students are very much immersed in their everyday world but are relatively powerless to affect it, being subject to routines and activities decided on by others—parents, teachers, and so on. Students commonly respond by identifying with those human qualities best able to transcend the threats of the everyday world, qualities frequently embodied by a hero or heroine. As in Romanticism, the association with an heroic figure—whether Superman, pop-stars, sports heroes or teams, Rambo, Crocodile Dundee, Mad Max, Harriet the Spy, Alfred E. Neuman, or Alfred Einstein—allows the imagination both to acknowledge constraints of the real world and to associate with some means of transcending those constraints. Whether the association is merely passive, or whether the student tries more actively to follow the transcendent path laid out by the heroic figure by adopting, or trying on, a role, the result is some taste of power or control or security or confidence—if things go well. (This point begins to overlap with Erikson's [1963] developmental task of integrating ego identity.) Another internalizing of the heroic figure commonly finds expression in diary-keeping. The secret diary, with elaborate locks, enables one to gain some power over the everyday world. The diary is often associated with spying—the possession of secret knowledge. This can be

culled—parents often discover to their dismay—from overheard family conversations, telephone calls, chats with neighbours, captured and transformed into scarlet dramas in the pages of (most commonly daughters') diaries. It is not, I think, coincidental that the Romantic period saw the virtual birth and very rapid proliferation of the autobiography (S. Egan, 1984).

#### RELEVANCE TO THE IMAGINATIVE LIFE: A PLANNING FRAMEWORK

If we consider just these few characteristics of typical early adolescents' imaginative lives, how can we devise a technique for planning teaching that draws on them? At present we are in the odd position of having a restricted repertoire of planning devices for teaching. Virtually all available techniques are derived from Tyler's (1949) model, in which one must first establish objectives then determine content, select appropriate methods, and evaluate the product. This model, and its derivatives—which tend to vary little from their source—have been important technical aids to planning. What is odd is the virtual absence of alternative models from conceptions of teaching and education other than the rather mechanistic, assembly-line derivatives (Callaghan, 1962) currently dominant. (I have tried elsewhere to construct an alternative based on characteristics of primary school children's imaginative lives [Egan, 1986].)

Here I construct another planning framework derived from the above observations, then show how it might be used.

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### **The Romantic Planning Framework**

#### *1. Taking a Romantic Perspective*

- 1.1 Identify Romantic qualities—What characteristics are brought to mind by looking at a particular topic in a Romantic way? What transcendent human qualities are most prominently embodied in the topic?
- 1.2 Identifying Romantic associations—What aspects of the topic can most engagingly attract students' Romantic associations? What transcendent human qualities are most accessible?

#### *2. Organizing the Content into a Story Form*

- 2.1 Providing access—What content, distant from students everyday experience, most vividly exemplifies the romantic qualities of the topic with which the students can associate?

2.2 Organizing the unit/lesson—What content best articulates the topic into a developing story-form, drawing on the principles of Romance?

2.3 Pursuing details—What content can best allow students to pursue some aspect of the topic in exhaustive detail?

### 3. *Conclusion*

What is the best way of resolving the dramatic conflict on which the unit/lesson is articulated? How does one tie together a satisfactory ending to the Romantically important features of the topic?

### 4. *Evaluation*

How can one know whether the topic has been understood and the appropriate Romantic capacities have been stimulated and developed?

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Earlier I implied a criticism of starting a unit on the Middle Ages that tried to begin with whatever could be found that seemed relevant to students' present-day experience. I should show how my model might make the Middle Ages accessible through something other than high heels. How can we use this model to make the Middle Ages engaging to students using the characteristics of their imaginative lives touched on above? Let us follow the Romantic model step by step and see how it might shape our unit. I will not work out such a unit in detail; my intention is to show, however schematically, that the model can be used in planning teaching.

First, we are to take a Romantic perspective. This invites us to consider the Middle Ages romantically—not in the vulgar sense, but in the sense of highlighting the characteristics sketched earlier. The first step is to focus on whatever transcendent human qualities are most prominent in the topic. What, in Romantic human terms, were the Middle Ages all about? We might sensibly emphasize the Renaissance of the twelfth century and its aftermath—the High Middle Ages. This period succeeded centuries of political chaos, social disruption, and large-scale migrations of people, relieved briefly by Pepin's and Charlemagne's empire, which fell apart after Charlemagne's death. The main, although unstable, order came from the varied forms of the elaborate protection racket vaguely referred to as Feudalism. Gradually from this varied system there came a remarkable civilizing force that created and held together civilized life in Europe for more than a century. During this period, feudal protection rackets gave way to written-law-regulated political units, and over them developed one of the strangest organizations Europe has ever seen. The engines of this civilization were monasteries, the leading power

was the papacy, and among the most influential characters who caught the popular imagination was Francis of Assisi. The transcendent human quality we can identify as central to the Middle Ages is the ideal of a spiritual life, whose appeal is more powerful and important than the secular powers that have control over our bodies. The papacy's authority was based on its claim to represent this spiritual power, and on its near monopoly on literacy and the powers of organization it allowed. The Middle Ages, then, can be seen for our unit in terms of the rise and dominance of this spiritual power and its conflicts with the physical, worldly power of kings, princes, and emperors. It was a curious period of history when the powers of church and of states were very distinct, in a way not known before or since in Europe. We might emphasize the transcendent vision and courage of popes like Gregory VII and Innocent III and their attempts to keep alive the spiritual ideal and its authority in the face of the warring secular powers, and their resultant civilizing of those secular powers.

The model directs us to organize the topic's content by selecting content distant from students' everyday experience which will nevertheless be accessible because it allows students to associate with the transcendent qualities central to our theme. We might begin with three vivid stories: first, emperor Henry IV's refusal to acknowledge Gregory VII as pope and Henry's being eventually forced to cross the Alps and stand waiting in the snow until Gregory pardoned him and lifted his excommunication; second, Henry II at the tomb of Thomas à Becket doing penance for his part in Thomas's death, while being whipped by monks (no doubt fairly gently); and third, how the tough and wily emperor Barbarossa was brought to heel by the pope—almost literally—being forced to kiss the pope's feet in repentance for encroaching on the church's property and prerogatives. These stories can be told, shown, or enacted in whatever way seems best to individual teachers. They are vivid and powerful when fleshed out in their dramatic detail, and they make clear to students how a spiritual organization with, at that time, virtually no armed resources could exert its power across Europe against the mightiest of kings and emperors.

In organizing the unit, we are directed to select the content brought to the fore by our Romantic theme. The High Middle Ages are about, for example, the energy and sweetness of St. Francis of Assisi, who within a few short years immensely influenced Europe by renouncing all wealth and material goods and trying instead to help those in greatest need. Every time you see a crib at Christmas, you see something invented by St. Francis. He was helped by Innocent III to found an order of priests and brothers who were to put into practice his vision of how best to live. A century later papal authorities would

likely have burned St. Francis at the stake as a heretic, as they did his `spiritual' followers, but during the expansive years of the High Middle Ages the Franciscan spirit was part of the great Renaissance of civilized life. It also added new flavor to civilization, helping even to civilize barbarian knights with ideals of chivalry. By examining the careers of individuals like Peter Abelard, we can see old dogma attacked (and the schools of Paris emptying as the students followed the expelled Peter across France), and clerical skills in literacy helping to bring law and order to the kingdoms of Europe. We would also fill out such a unit, perhaps with a two-minute session at the beginning or end of each lesson, with a kind of *Guinness Book of Records* of the most strange, exotic, and wonderful events, characters, and inventions of the period.

The options for pursuing some element of the Middle Ages in exhaustive detail seem endless: castles or cathedrals (perhaps beginning with David Macaulay's superb books [1973, 1977])—and here we could indeed bring in high heels and costume in general, the simple rule St. Francis wrote for his followers, eating utensils and typical foods eaten by lords or peasants during a typical day, and so on.

The conclusion might bring together all the elements of the unit to show how people could think of themselves first and foremost as members of Christendom and less significantly as members of a particular state. Our conclusion might also focus on the waning of this spiritual ideal and the narrowing vision, on the corruption of the papacy as the power-hungry struggled for it or to control it, the schisms, the effects of the Plague, the Inquisition, and the fading of an institution and set of bright ideas that for a while seemed to work and that had a remarkable civilizing effect on Europe. Our conclusion might stress that for a while something strange and wonderful happened in Europe, that brought art, literature, and architecture to new levels of achievement and made the likes of Francis of Assisi the pop-heroes of the age.

Now clearly this is not the whole truth; it is a simplification. But it is not false: it catches something important and true about the Middle Ages, and it organizes it in a Romantic way that can catch the imagination of the typical early adolescent.

Evaluation of such a unit might use informal observation and traditional kinds of assessment techniques, but something additional is clearly required to ensure that the students' Romantic capacities have been stimulated and developed. One might test this with assignments that elicit from the students evidence of enthusiastic engagement and a sense of wonder. Such assignments might include a project on some aspect of the Middle Ages that stimulates students' interest, or some model construction of a castle or cathedral, or

recreation of the dress or games available at the time, or the reenactment of some crucial event, or whatever. The important point is to provide for some kind of activity that allows the students' Romantic engagement to be exhibited, to find an outlet, and to be further developed at the same time.

#### CONCLUSION

These days many students, even those successful in the school's terms, leave school feeling cheated. So many assignments, so many tests, and somehow the richness of the world and experience beyond their everyday experience, which they sense is there, has eluded them. The sheer knowledge of the dimensions of the world, the range of human experience, are not a part of what they understand. What I am arguing for here as at least a partial solution to this problem is a sense of romance. Its agent is the imagination. In this I am echoing Whitehead (1929): "Romantic emotion is essentially the excitement consequent on the transition from the bare facts to the first realizations of the import of their unexplored relationships" (p. 18). It is the imagination that can carry us beyond bare facts and can hint at the wonder of their unexplored relationships.

One shouldn't, of course, make too sharp a distinction between everyday experience and imaginative life, as each must continually feed the other. But we can forget that "experience isn't necessarily a window on to meaning" (Wills, 1988, p. 254), or as T.S. Eliot put it compactly in the Four Quartets, "We had the experience/But missed the meaning." The current half-hearted sense in which so many teachers feel they cannot bring much of the students' cultural heritage to vivid life but rather are responsible only to "expose" them to it, perhaps provides the experience, but, without imaginatively engaging students, misses the meaning. I fear that one of our main concerns with schooling at present ought to be that despite the heroic efforts of so many teachers, there is so little for the imagination.

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