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Chris Woodhead: Teachers must be allowed to teach

From the Institute of Ideas talk given by the former Chief Inspector of Schools at the Hay-on-Wye Literary Festival

- 1 Carol Adams, in an introduction of an IPPR pamphlet about information technology in teaching, dismisses “didactic exponents of information that stifle her students’ learning”. I wanted to seize upon that quotation because it illustrates the two fallacies we need to expose if education as it once was is to have any chance of surviving.
- 2 Now the first of these fallacies is the confusion of knowledge and information; these are two very different things. The second is that didactic teaching is boring, that it stifles learning. The caricature here is the teacher standing in front of the class dictating notes, pursuing his own agenda and failing to engage with his students.
- 3 Think back to your own days at school. The teachers I can remember who made a difference were people who had three characteristics, which I would put to you as the characteristics of good teaching in the 20th century, the 21st century, the 22nd century, or the 19th century for that matter.
- 4 Firstly the good teachers that I experienced, the good didactic teachers, were teachers who had a real love for their subject. Because they were personally engaged themselves, they could communicate that personal engagement to us, their pupils, and because of that we were inspired.
- 5 Second, high expectations, and the longer that I did the job of Chief Inspector, the more important the issue of expectations became to me. If the teacher had high expectations then the pupils learned, they made progress. If the expectation was, for whatever reason, that these particular children were not able to achieve, then, predictably, they didn’t achieve.
- 6 The third characteristic was that they could teach, which means they could engage with a class; they could explain complicated ideas in a way that was simple and straightforward; they had the skill of asking questions in a way that involved every single pupil in the class. Towards the end of my term as Chief Inspector I watched a lesson of eight-year-old primary school pupils, and the teacher was brilliant, because she knew every child in her class, she was able to ask the right question to the right child at the right time and, through that skill, orchestrate the whole lesson.
- 7 It was a didactic lesson in the sense that she was at the front of the lesson, she was in charge, she was the authority that knew, but she involved every child through her skill as a teacher. So my point is that didactic teaching can stifle. Of course it does if somebody just recites notes. However, good teaching is by definition didactic and it is not stifling; it is liberating.
- 8 Wandering around Hay-on-Wye I came across Tom Paulin’s recent biography of William Hazlitt. Hazlitt described himself as a damned inarticulate, helpless person, like a worm by the wayside, and it struck me that that is a wonderful description of our children if they are not exposed to teachers who are allowed to teach.
- 9 The notion that there is no point in teaching knowledge because the pace of scientific discovery is such that everything is immediately out of date before it’s been discovered and because all knowledge can be found on the web is deeply dangerous.
- 10 So too is the idea that children should be encouraged, and I quote from the new national curriculum, “to generate and extend ideas, to suggest hypotheses, to apply imagination, and to look for alternative outcomes”.
- 11 Of course, eventually, they should, but first they must be taught. They must be introduced to the forms of thought and experience that constitute our civilisation. They have to learn to think in concrete terms in specific subject areas. But the fashionable orthodoxy of the 21st century that we move beyond traditional concepts of teaching is a cruel deception designed to inflate the self-esteem of pupils and their learning managers by keeping them in ignorance of what already has been known and thought.

■ Tekst 7 Chris Woodhead: Teachers must be allowed to teach

- 1p **27** ■ Which of the following constitutes the subject of Chris Woodhead's talk, judging from paragraph 1?
- A Notions about teaching that he sees as erroneous.
 - B Students' lack of commitment to their learning process.
 - C The shortcomings he has observed in traditional education.
 - D The underestimation of the role of information technology in education.
- 1p **28** ■ Which of the following could be added after "with his students." to conclude paragraph 2?
- A But this, too, is a misconception.
 - B Education as opposed to entertainment.
 - C This is usually the case.
- "the characteristics of good teaching in the 20th century, the 21st century, the 22nd century, or the 19th century for that matter" (alinea 3)
- 1p **29** □ Wat wil Chris Woodhead duidelijk maken door middel van deze opsomming?
- 1p **30** □ Vat de hoofdgedachte van alinea 5 samen.
- 1p **31** □ Hoe kan een docent een "didactic lesson" waardevol maken volgens alinea 7?
- 1p **32** ■ On which of the following words in "So my ... stifle." (paragraph 7) must Chris Woodhead have put the main stress when giving his talk?
- A didactic
 - B teaching
 - C can
 - D stifle
- 2p **33** □ Welke twee argumenten liggen ten grondslag aan "The notion that there is no point in teaching knowledge" (paragraph 9)?
- Hieronder staat een aantal citaten uit alinea 11.
- 2p **34** □ Geef van elk van de citaten aan of dit in het licht van de opvattingen van Chris Woodhead een positieve of een negatieve lading heeft.
- 1 specific subject areas
 - 2 fashionable orthodoxy
 - 3 traditional concepts
 - 4 inflate the self-esteem
- Noteer het nummer van elk citaat, gevolgd door "positief" of "negatief".