ARTICLE

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The Evaluation of Empathy

1. INTRODUCTION

Many methods for the teaching of history have been suggested and used. Among those methods, are the following: the text book narrative: the project; sources; question and answer, and many others. the empathic method of teaching is less well-known. In spite of this fact, it is one of the methods that can be used to improve the teaching of history, and also uplift the interest of pupils in the subject.

2. DEFINITION OF EMPATHY

Empathy can be defined as an affective sensitivity or ability to discover and describe the feelings of others (Carlozzi et. al, 1983: 113-116). What this explanation implies is that one should have the ability to put oneself in someone else's shoes, or have the ability to reciprocrate positions. (Dickinson et al; 1984:39). Such a reciprocration of positions means to view the world from the situation of another person; and to conceive how he would see things were he in your shoes. This definition is closely allied to the dictum of Collingwood that all history is the history of thought (Collingwood; 1946:5). Empathy is therefore the experiencing of another's emotional state which involves imaginative reconstruction.

Can emphatic teaching be objective? Zweig (1962:269) aptly answered as follows: "Thus he was activity entering into an alien personality while simultaneously contemplating it from without with the dispassionate gaze of the psychological diagnostician." An empathic response in a history lesson would thus reasonably objective, and it would be possible to measure it. This is especially so because empathy requires thought and reflection to be of any value.

3. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EMPATHY

Empathy can be useful in teaching history for the following reasons: it is the means by which the historian tries to get inside the minds of those who lived in the past in order to understand events: by the use of evidence and reflection, we try to achieve a knowledge of what someone (or some group) believed, valued, felt and tried to achieve; and; we link these beliefs, emotions and actions to the situations in which the person, or persons lived and acted (Cairns: 1989:15). Given that these are the characteristics of empathy, it can be useful in the teaching of history.

4. TEACHING EMPATHY

It is easier to say that empathy can be taught than to actually teach it. (Natale; 1972:46). The teacher should attempt to do the following: make information available about the historical personality at the specific time at which he lived: have a perception of the modes of thought prevailing in the past situation have knowledge of the individual historical characters experience and outlook; and a genuine willingness to attempt to enter into the past and engage with the issues and problems present at that time (Cairns; 1989: 15).

5. EMPATHIC QUESTIONS

Empathic questions differ from everyday questions. By "everyday questions" is meant those that require the regurgitation of factual information.

Empathic questions in most cases make explicit reference to feeling e.g.:

"Try to put yourself in the place of an ordinary South African citizen. What do you think your feelings would have been on hearing..." or

"Explain how the German people would have reacted to... Shemilt and Scott (in Fines (ed): 1983:1983-185) give various types of questioning modes, among them empathic questions. The examples they give clearly show that empathic questions differ from those that are not empathic. Compare for example:

"Discuss the causes of the Second World War" with

"Write about the causes of the Second World War as if you were a German" .

6. ADVANTAGES OF EMPATHIC QUESTIONS

Empathic questions have the following advantages: they develop the historical imagination that is so necessary for pupils to cope with history as a school subject; they are thought-provoking and stimulating This in contrast to the drab every day question that requires the regurgitation of knowledge. Empathic questions require a proper comprehension and critical thinking based on proper understanding. Lastly empathic questions encourage pupils to participate in discussion, debate and creative history writing.

The Evaluation of Empathy

7. EVALUATING EMPATHIC QUESTIONS

Evaluating empathic questions is a difficult undertaking. This is because one is dealing with feelings, and to evaluate feelings one cannot be exact. Therefore the evaluation of empathic responses is bound to be controversial.

7.1 Types of mark schemes for evaluating empathy

There are at present three known mark schemes for evaluating empathy. They are the following: the criteria-related mark scheme; the logical levels of hierarchy and the moderating criteria for depth study empathy.

Employing the mark schemes in evaluation

7.1.1 The criteria-related mark scheme, Shemilt (Dickinson et al; 1984:67-81) can be illustrated by the following:
Pupils were given a number of sources:

a. picture from a 19th century engraving showing children carrying clay in a brickyard.
b. a personal statement by a 9 year old child in 1840 explaining the hardships of working in a clay brickyard.
c. a census report detailing the meagre budget of a widow with 3 children.

Pupils were requested to use that information from the sources as well as their knowledge of the period to answer the following question:

What do you think Elizabeth Whiting would have felt about sending her daughter, aged 10, to work in a brickyard like the one depicted in the first source?

7.1.1.1 **Level 1 response**
pupil response: the mother of the child would be upset in seeing the child carrying clay.

* the response has no valid application of historical empathy or empathic understanding. it is a common-sense response.

7.1.1.2 **Level 2 response**
pupil response: a mother cannot send her child where a lot of work is done. But because the mother needed the money badly, the child made a necessary contribution.
* the response has valid historical analysis but from outside there is no evidence of empathetic understanding.

7.1.1.3 **Level 3 response**
pupil response: some people like it that their children should work.
from inside.

7.1.1.4 **Level 4 response**
Pupil response: the mother of the child would have send the child even if she did not like it. It was common for children to work at that time and the child made money for the family.

* this is genuine historical empathy. The pupil shows perception of empathy

7.1.2 **Logical levels of hierarchy**
This mark scheme can be used in the same manner as the criteria-related mark scheme. The levels of evaluation are the following:

Level 1 - The Divi-Past
At this level pupils see the past as unintelligible. The pupils see the people of the past as mentally defective and stupid. Pupils do not consider that people of the past viewed life in a different to them, and also had different values (Portal (ed.); 1987: 67-68).

Level 2 - Generalized stereotypes
At this level pupils project their own personalities to explain the past. Such explanations are not supported by the evidence of the particular situation. Differences between the past and the presented are intended to show how stupid the people of the past were. This is akin to everyday empathy (Portal (ed.) 1987: 72-74)

Level 3 - Everyday empathy
Pupils understand the past from the evidence presented, but judge it by their own standards. There is no distinction as to how the people of the past might have viewed the situation. At this level pupils respond without appreciating the differences between their own beliefs and values and those of another society (Portal (ed.) 1987:74-80).

Level 4 - Restricted historical empathy.
The actions, institutions and people of the past are understand by specific reference to the situations in which they found themselves. An attempt will be made to reconstruct some kind of rationale in terms of goals directly connected with those institutions of the past. Peoples of the past are understood in terms of the situations of the past (Portal (ed. 1987: 78-81).

Level 5 - Contextual historical empathy
Pupils attempt to fit what is to be understood into a wider picture at this level. The strategies that are employed and the grasp understanding determine that the pupils are at level five. Pupils at this level will also attempt to stand back and criticize in terms of their own standards. However, this is done with the clear knowledge that their own standards are likely to be different from those of the past (Portal (ed.) 1987: 81-85).

8. THE MODERATING CRITERIA FOR DEPTH STUDY EMPATHY

In this type of assessment, pupils are given a topic on which they are requested to write an essay. The pupils would be expected to approach the writing of the essay empathically. When marking such an essay the teacher would then make use of the moderating criteria for depth study empathy.

This type of mark scheme is, in general, properly applicable to essay type questions.

A moderating memorandum can then be drawn up. (See below Mcintosh: 1985: 2).

The moderating criteria may not necessarily be nine as shown in the memorandum. Their number will depend on the objectives of what is being assessed.

MODERATING CRITERIA FOR DEPTH STUDY EMPATHY EXERCISE

	A	B	C	D
1. Make use of accurate and relevant historical events				
2. Makes effective use of source material for detailed illustration				
3. Synthesises events or ideas into an effective unity				
4. Identifies in more than a mechanical way with viewpoint of historical character				
5. Identifies with historical without anachronism or inconsistency				
6. Shows understanding of the reasons underlying the adoption of the viewpoint				
7. Shows understanding where appropriate of varying viewpoints				
8. Sees and makes use if links with other historical events which place the set events in a wider place the set events in a wider context				
9. Builds up an effective logical argument				

9. THE MULTIPLE CHOICE OPEN-ENDED CRITERIA-RELATED MARK SCHEME

For purposes of experimentation the author hereof devised a "new" mark scheme that can also be used in the assessment of pupil exercises or examinations. It is referred to as "new" but it is not really "new" because it is a combination of very well know assessment techniques in use today. For the purposes of the research the first assessment scheme referred to above as the "criteria-related mark scheme" used by Dickinson and Lee (Dickinson et al, 1984: 73) has been selected. To it was added a number of empathic responses as one would find in a multiple choice test. Then at the end of the multiple responses (four in number) a fifth was added, in which pupils had the opportunity to present their own responses. Thus the name "multiple choice open-ended criteria-related mark scheme"

The advantage of the scheme is that it makes assessment easy for the teacher, while at the same time still giving the pupil the opportunity to articulate his own response. It also tests the understanding and comprehension of the pupils when selecting what they consider to be the right answer.

The following is an example of the scheme: the questions posed here are taken from the Mfecane, a section in the history of South Africa:

1. Do you think Shaka was a great leader?

1.1 He was not Great a leader. He was a barbarian who forced people to obey his. He had no respect for the rights of other people. ☐

1.2 Shaka was not a great leader but a bloodthirsty tyrant who was determined to destroy the Black nation. ☐

1.3 Judged by modern standards. Shaka made his people suffer unnecessarily. Therefore it cannot be said that he was a great leader. ☐

1.4 Shaka was a great leader who used the accepted methods of the time to build the nation and unite his people. ☐

1 . 5 _____

_____

_____

In this scheme the pupil selects the answer he/she thinks is suitable, and marks this in the box on the right hand side. If the pupil does not agree with any of the answers given, then he/she can give his/her own answer in the space allocated for this purpose in 1 . 5 .

The responses of the pupils to the above question in the research that was conducted at a few schools on the Rand were as follows: there were significant percentages of pupils who selected 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 as their answer to the question. Clearly, however, these responses were not empathic. Response 1.1 is a judgmental statement which is also emotional. Response 1.2 bases its pronouncements on what happened during the Mfecane without trying to analyse why and

how these things happened. The two responses can be classified as divi-past and generalized stereotypes. Response 1.4, which was selected by the majority of the pupils in the research is empathic. It can be classified under contextual historical empathy.

It can also be explained as genuine historical empathy at level four.

In 1.5, where pupils were given the opportunity of giving their own response, the following two responses quoted verbatim, were received:

1.5 Yes, because he tried all his best to unify the black that is referred as Black Napoleon.

and

1.5 Shaka was a great leader for he wanted to unite all black people into one solid government. He wanted to errays group areas act.

There is clearly very little empathic about the above responses. What we have is what can be called everyday empathy (Portal (ed.), 1987: 74-80). The unification of the Black people in South Africa is reiterated with monotony. The pupils, therefore, projected themselves into the activities of Shaka and then projected themselves into the South Africa of today. That is why this kind of everyday empathy goes hand-in-hand with a general awareness of the ways in which people would react.

It can thus be seen that the above mark scheme is a deviation from those that have been used previously. It is, of course, possible that other and better mark schemes could be developed.

11. CONCLUSION

Contrary to popular belief it is possible to evaluate empathic responses. It may not be easy, and perhaps there may be no unanimity on such assessments. The fact is, however, that it is possible to assess empathic responses, even though the present evaluation schemes are imperfect.

Such schemes would in many cases remain flawed, because what is being assessed are not regurgitated historical facts and dates. What is being assessed is the ability of the pupils to conceptualize historical events in their archaic settings. The success of the pupils in understanding and comprehending them in this manner certainly makes history more challenging as a school subject. History could once again become a popular subject enjoyed by both teachers and pupils. However, of much greater importance than this, is the fact that the teaching and learning of history properly meaningfully to the past. Instead of having people indoctrinated; imbued with preconceived ideas, prejudices and subjectivities, we may now have people who are prepared to accept and understand each other's point of view. In short it is possible that history may lead to much better person to person relationships. This in its turn may lead to much better relations among communities in a country like South Africa.

The assessment schemes discussed herein are not perfect. These assessment schemes are also not the only viable ones that can be used in assessing emphatic responses. In South Africa generally, and Black education in particular, the concept of "empathy" is still uncharted territory. Once it is explored and expounded in greater detail and experimentation, it is possible that efficient and near-perfect assessment schemes may be devised to facilitate the marking of empathic responses. This is a pressing need in which academics, who are concerned with Black education, should involve themselves.

Evaluation techniques are never perfect. Neither are they self-sufficient. The search for better evaluation techniques which would make evaluation near-perfect is therefore an on-going concern. This is also the case in as far as the evaluation of empathic responses is concerned.

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