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Welcome to **ATTACK!** a two-page occasional publication. Most of **ATTACK!** will be concerned with the holistic curriculum which, if acted on, is a fundamental way to undermine the present undemocratic education system. Don't be discouraged if opportunities to teach holistically are limited, do your best, be a guardian, and act as a witness to this culturally significant and inspiring way of teaching and learning. **ATTACK!** is a partner to <https://networkonnet.wordpress.com>

An encounter demonstrating the main aim and holistic in practice

I was in the classroom observing the student teacher of a y. 6 class. Both the student teacher and the associate teacher were delightfully as one, and what I was observing was admirable but predictable. I looked forward to the post-lesson discussion (as I always do).

The discussion went well and, as it developed, I did what I always do, asked the student teacher the main aim of the curriculum areas she had taken – on this occasion, written expression and reading. Very rarely can student teachers answer anywhere satisfactorily these main aim questions, and never for written expression. This is largely the fault of WALTs, a classroom practice imposed by the review office based on a view that learning should be measurable and immediately observable. Lacking the organisation of a main aim, WALTs take learning in strange directions, often contrary to the true nature of the curriculum area concerned.

The discussion with the student continued. I asked the student teacher what she considered the main aim of written expression. After a number of questions and a ruling out of answers we eventually got there. ('Expressing themselves is not satisfactory', I said. 'How well did they express themselves?')

We agreed that 'Writing with sincerity' fitted the bill nicely. We then went over the appropriateness of the objectives set for the lesson and the activities undertaken.

We agreed that writing with sincerity is writing that communicates to the reader that the writer has thought deeply and truthfully about his or her writing. Also that the writer has attended to finding just the right words to express that truthfulness.

We also agreed that sincerity in writing is mostly writing with nouns and verbs, with adverbs and adjectives used sparingly. Also that there are no 'interesting words' separate from context; that the use of the expression in lessons is just a euphemism for adjectives and adverbs.

We also agreed that metaphors and similes should come naturally and not be artificially encouraged (even mandated heaven forbid) as if something to be picked from the shelves of a literary supermarket.

I pointed out that main aims are usually omitted from planning because, with their attention to the affective and the immeasurable, they put the lie to WALTs.

The effect on the student brought me close to tears (as it often does). These are very tender moments.

The look in the student's eyes was magic. I could see her clicking over much of what she had seen and heard about written expression and was now excited at the implications and possibilities for her teaching as a whole.

I pushed on.

I said I had observed what she called the written experience, and that I had seen the writing, but where was the experience?

The student agreed that in light of the now recognised main aim, she should have done more to heighten the prior experience, to touch the emotions, to focus the gaze.

Once again, I could see she was getting it.

The discussion that followed was powerful, by now it was the student doing the talking and asking the questions.

I ended by giving the student teacher two starters, not necessarily for the second visit, that would have been crass, but for her consideration at leisure.

Even transactional writing, I said, needed the affective, needed heart.

We now moved to reading. With her newly found appreciation of the power of main idea teaching, she was quickly on to it.

What is the main aim of reading?

Getting children to read books, she said.

Stronger than that?

Getting children to love reading books, to be independent readers of books.

Well then, why are you fiddling around with school journals and a boring form of comprehension?



When I returned to the classroom a week or so later, I saw a reading lesson that was a celebration and exploration of books – books that had been carefully chosen by the children in association with other children or the student or teacher.

And I saw a transactional writing lesson on a matter that had the children deeply involved: 'What are your views on cross-grouping for mathematics?'

This was no writing on one of those deadening templates with a few tailed-off, grudging sentences; this was deep affective involvement. (The children, on the whole, while they respected the reasons for the cross-grouping, didn't like it.) This was a lively written discourse about something that was real and felt.

A few months later I received the following e-mail: *Hello Kelvin*

I hope all is well? I'm not sure if you will remember me but I was one of the ... students that you evaluated at ... this year in June.

I have been meaning to e-mail you for some time now to thank you for pointing out the posting 'Albert and the Discovery Thieves' for me to have a look at.

Reading it made me think again about everything I had learned about teaching. The insight and thinking behind it makes so much sense, in fact it seems incredibly obvious now that I have read it! I now question the reasoning behind schools pushing the WALTs approach and wonder why it has become such a fad throughout the schooling system.

There have been times where I have observed teachers and found that the WALTs set out for children are only surface deep and, as a result of this, the learning is the same. Once the students feel they have achieved the WALTs, many see their task as complete and don't take the risk to delve further.

Perhaps this is due to lack of motivation or guidance? And in many cases time constraints? Either way the opportunity still needs to be there so the students can explore, expand on, and discover the topics within topics rather than be limited and influenced by a set of narrow, largely discrete objectives.

Part of what I wrote back: You have broken through to inspired teaching. Other people could read 'Albert' and agree, but it wouldn't resonate with them as it has with you. I know the implications seem straightforward to you, but some people never get it.

[As it happened, because of changed regulations, this was my last visit to a student, with my first being as a lecturer at North Shore Teachers College, 45 years before.]
