

Brooke Workman (Editor).
TEACHING THE SIXTIES:
An in-depth, interactive, interdisciplinary approach.
Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1992
221 pp.

This handbook is intended for teachers of Grade 11 and 12 students. It contains ninety detailed lesson plans for an intensive course of study in the humanities. By examining, analyzing, and discussing artifacts of the 1960s it is claimed that students will become more aware of American culture and values. These artifacts include television, films, best sellers, architecture and painting, literature, music, and dance. In addition to the lesson plans, the teacher is also provided with class handouts, articles, suggestions for projects, term papers, tests, and student evaluation. The main characteristic of the handbook, however, is a discussion of the way in which learning will occur. The author enthusiastically advocates the interactive component of teaching and learning and, in the introduction, he briefly defines his understanding of "in-depth, interactive and interdisciplinary learning."

First impressions indicate that this handbook might be a practical resource for novice teachers or for veterans wishing to experiment with less traditional teaching strategies. However, on closer examination, the handbook has a number of flaws which invite criticism. The main ones are the intensity of the course, methods for student evaluation, and less obvious, but still serious, intimations of prejudice and patronage, which are presumably unintended, yet need to be addressed given modern sensitivity to such issues.

The course is very concentrated and consists of 90 lessons for one semester. There is a wide array of very interesting topics, however, because of the intensity of the course, and students' experiences are likely to be quite superficial, and this would contravene the author's goal for an "in-depth" study. Opportunities for reading best sellers or watching movies of the sixties would be quite limited given the number of other requirements of the course, such as projects, position papers, and tests, as well as contributions to small-group and activity-committee work.

The topic of student evaluation is another issue which seems to lack consistency. At the beginning of the course it is suggested that students arrive at a consensus for evaluation and yet the instructor is later required to make decisions concerning evaluation. For example, students have to write a defence paper, which is evaluated by the instructor for "defence day" and the two students are evaluated by peer roll grading. The instructor is advised to inform his students that "your readers are your classmates.

They read the book, too. They are your friends" (p. 97). In my experience, students tend to dislike evaluating one another and evaluation is a much more complex problem than the author gives it credit.

The author appears to be out of touch with today's multicultural classroom when he advises the teacher to "invite one or more foreign students or visitors to the class. If none are available, find people who have recently travelled to another country. Or invite multicultural students from your own school" (p. 29). Also, he is discriminating when male and not female students are asked, after having read a selected book, to describe the "rites of passage" for becoming a man in America (p. 35).

Another concern is the hint of patronage that one senses when reading, for example, "Stress that people in various parts of the world, and even in the United States are different. . . ." (p. 10), and in reference to social class, "A ranking system exists in most cultures, even in American society, where much lip service is paid to democracy" (p. 13). One can also question the validity of the list of fifteen dominant American values — achievement and success, activity and work, moral orientation, humanitarianism, efficiency and practicality, progress, material comfort, equality, freedom, external conformity, science, national patriotism, democracy, individual personality, racism and group conformity — presented to students early in the course.

In spite of these flaws, the main problem I see is the author's attitude towards the "in-depth, interactive, interdisciplinary approach" to teaching and learning. He is naively enthusiastic about this method and talks about interactive teaching as though it has only recently been discovered. He does not allude to the educational trends and the masses of research literature of the seventies and eighties, when group processes, individualized instruction, integrated learning, peer teaching, teacher-pupil planning, interactive and collaborative learning, cognitive and affective learning, accountability, multiculturalism, and so forth, were terms on the lips of most educators, if not in evidence in the classroom.

Nevertheless, in spite of its many shortcomings the handbook does contain a number of good ideas. Some of the handouts are useful and the bibliography is exceptional, with its lists of books, slides, records, audio/video cassettes, and films. A discerning teacher could adopt many interesting activities which would certainly whet the appetites of students wishing to learn more about the sixties.

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