



(Photo by Sgt. Michael J. MacLeod, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division PAO)

Sgt. Jeremiah Walden, an infantry trainer assigned to 2nd Battalion, 34th Armor Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, adjusts an Iraqi trainee's weapon 7 January 2015 to ensure he's covering the correct sector of fire during infantry squad tactical training lanes at Camp Taji, Iraq.

The Ignorant Counterinsurgent Rethinking the Traditional Teacher-Student Relationship in Conflicts

Maj. Ben Zweibelson, U.S. Army

He had only given them the order to pass through a forest whose openings and clearings he himself had not discovered.

—Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*

More than anything else, professional knowledge and competence win the respect of [host-nation] troops. Effective advisors develop a healthy rapport with [host-nation] personnel but avoid the temptation to adopt [host-nation] positions contrary to the U.S. or multinational values or policy.

—U.S. Army Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (2006)

Over the past thirteen years, no greater debate has raged among military circles than that of which counterinsurgency methods to apply in difficult environments such as Libya, Afghanistan, Egypt, and elsewhere. While those discussions are worthwhile, this article aspires to offer, instead, a critical and creative philosophical perspective on why and how the U.S. Army teaches counterinsurgency. This discussion explores counterinsurgency from an epistemological perspective, examining why and how we teach. The focus is on the teaching relationships we establish when acting as military advisors and trainers. We determine the nature of these relationships before we even meet our students, including local nationals being trained in counterinsurgency and security.¹

This topic lies between strategy and tactics as well as between philosophy and theory. Therefore, it requires some constructs not typically used in counterinsurgency discussions. The focus is epistemological rather than methodological. If we limit ourselves to comparing competing training methods, we may never realize what faults lie beyond or above them that stem from misunderstanding what learning, in a given context, is. We need to examine core tenets and beliefs broadly accepted by our military that might be hindering us from accomplishing our objectives. We need to move the usual debate beyond the relative merits of rival methodologies entirely.

Different Ways of Knowing and Understanding

To illustrate different ways forces know and understand military tasks, using an epistemological perspective, let us consider an infantry platoon conducting land navigation while tracking enemy forces in dense terrain, with many options for navigation. Critical reflection of that platoon's navigation methodology would relate to the type of route and the navigation

methods they select. Methodological arguments might revolve around whether terrain association is a better method than pace counts and straight azimuths with a compass. In contrast, an epistemological discussion would set aside the navigation methods and focus on how the platoon understands land navigation, and how it does not. Perhaps the platoon understands land



(Photo courtesy of Olivier d'Ythurbide et Associé)

Portrait of French teacher and philosopher Joseph Jacotot (1770-1840) by Benjamin Delapierre, oil on canvas, circa 1798.

navigation as based on a compass that always points north, in relation to a map. Therefore, the platoon likely would disregard such things as divining rods, tobacco-induced visions, the sudden presence of a deer indicating an animal spirit guide, or the scent of crisp leaves. The platoon does not believe those approaches to be of value for land navigation. Yet, illiterate Native American hunters who lacked maps navigated and tracked just as effectively while using these types of tools.² Native American trackers were effective navigators who accomplished tasks similar to those of a modern infantry platoon without the methods of map reading and

compasses. Their methods were derived from social and cultural concepts of an attuned spirit world.

Thus, owing to differences between their frames of reference, both groups likely would reject the others' methods and tools in favor of their own, approaching similar tasks differently but achieving similar results. This example illustrates that an organization's methodology shows how it prefers to approach problems. Studying the organization through an epistemological perspective shows how it understands the idea of what constitutes the problem. Technology or spirituality might be viewed as critical, or as irrelevant, to conducting land navigation. To understand these kinds of philosophical perspectives, we would need to think about how we think about things, how we know and understand.³ When applying this kind of thinking to counterinsurgency, methodological and epistemological concerns would be like those shown in the table on page 96.

Methodological Concerns	Epistemological Concerns
Population-centric approach versus territory- or fixed-objective-centric	How an army understands time, relationships, and how to influence them
Police-oriented approach, versus military-oriented, versus information-oriented	How an army views ways to gain support of the population over time
Winning hearts and minds approach versus ends-justifies-the-means	How victory is framed—as the destruction of something tangible, or as the intangible actions of the population at risk (Do we understand a difference?)
Attacking a network, a system-of-systems nodal approach	How to measure success—as tied to metrics and tangible items or actions, or as associated with conceptual processes
Securing territory in a clear, hold, and build approach to capitalize on population stability	How governance supports counterinsurgency, the form of government best suited for this environment, and the forms not suitable
National government and centralized authority tied to rule of law, enforced by security forces for entire population	How to teach security forces, in what manner, and what tasks and functions to teach
Train, advise, and assist security forces to operate and eventually replace all occupying forces	

Table. Methodological Versus Epistemological Concerns for Counterinsurgency

The U.S. Army’s generally accepted counterinsurgency methodology places primacy on securing the population while empowering a governmental form (democratic) we favor, supported by some sort of viable security element that moves the society toward stability and viability.⁴ To achieve this, we generally regard as essential having to establish, train, and support security forces so they can counter any insurgency within their nation, hence the name counterinsurgency.⁵

Methodological debates on counterinsurgency tend to address competing techniques, socioeconomic theories, and military strategy. An epistemological discussion goes further to address the abstract notion of counterinsurgency knowledge—and how U.S. forces exchange ideas with the host-nation forces that mold their empowered security element. This article examines the perspectives of teachers and students, and how the U.S. Army tends to understand the exchange of knowledge through one form of pedagogy. The Army’s epistemological perspective “acts as both a gatekeeper and bouncer for methodology in that it determines and regulates what is to be known and how it can be known.”⁶ The pedagogy of the Army—the

essence of teaching—forms the invisible foundation for any counterinsurgency concept or method.

The Old Master Explication Model

To address weaknesses in the Army’s pedagogical approach, this article draws inspiration from modern French philosopher Jacques Rancière’s *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. This book is about the unusual teaching techniques of French schoolmaster Joseph Jacotot, who was employed by the king of the Netherlands in 1818. Jacotot, speaking no Flemish, was directed to teach French to a class of students who only spoke Flemish. Jacotot’s approach, based on what he called intellectual emancipation, challenged the entire Western model of classical education on epistemological, philosophical, and sociological levels. He taught topics he did not know, without learning Flemish, and he helped liberate his students to learn French by finding their own path. Rancière further developed Jacotot’s ideas.

Why would a story about someone branded a mad schoolteacher by the mainstream educators of his time provide any value to a discussion about counterinsurgency?⁷ Although teaching the application of organized



(Photo by Spc. Zachary Burke, AFN BENELUX)

Lt. Col. Darrin C. Ricketts, deputy commander of 4th Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, along with Lt. Col. Donn H. Hill, commander of Task Force White Currahee, 2nd Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment, 4th BCT, 101st Abn. Div., and U.S. Army Brig. Gen. John Uberti, deputy commanding general of Afghan Development, 101st Abn. Div., speaks with an Afghan National Army commander for Naka District, Afghanistan, during Operation Overlord, 14 April 2011.

violence for societal, economic, and political ends is hardly comparable to teaching French to a class of Flemish students, teaching counterinsurgency (through security force assistance) from the Western perspective currently revolves around the classical teacher-student relationship. We see ourselves as the teachers, and when we go to any country in the world that we believe requires counterinsurgency assistance, we teach their forces how we believe they should conduct security, military, and paramilitary operations to meet our foreign policy goals.⁸ This foundational concept of pedagogy is so ingrained into our profession that it takes some effort to even recognize it and reflect on it. This makes an epistemological discussion of counterinsurgency rather awkward. We tend to think about concrete teaching and counterinsurgency methods instead of the bigger picture—the values we hold as a group, especially those related to how we conceive of teaching.⁹

Rancière argues that nearly all Western approaches to conveying or discovering knowledge are shackled to a strict and unequal partnership between the teacher and the student, which he terms the *old master*

relationship.¹⁰ In this model, knowledge is administered hierarchically. The master does more than simply giving the information (such as a book) to the students and telling them to learn it. The master attempts to control the learning process, by measuring progress, evaluating students, explaining information at times, and withholding information at other times if the students are not ready for a given level of advancement. Jacotot called this explication, which reduces the independence of students by forcing them into complete dependence upon the master.¹¹

The military education system extensively employs this very way of teaching from cadet training and university through a military career up to the senior levels of war colleges. No surprise, it also is how U.S. forces seek to transfer knowledge when advising host-nation forces, in a manner that presumes a relationship of nonequals.¹²

One practical consequence of this old master relationship, in terms of pedagogy, is that it erects and maintains a distance between teachers and the students, “a distance discursively invented and reinvented

so that it may never be abolished.”¹³ In all military schooling, grades are controlled by instructors and tied to performance reports and promotion. This creates a constant tension in all aspects of professional education as learners’ careers can succeed or fail based on their grades. Moreover, the methodology establishes a learning hierarchy, not so subtly reinforced by the fear of punishment or failure. Within this framework, teachers use “the art of distance” to control and measure the rate of student progress. Teachers establish hierarchical learning distances. As their students progress through careful and controlled explication, they close each gap, only to have a new distance applied as a new lesson begins.¹⁴ Granted, the *U.S. Army Learning Concept for 2015* (U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command pamphlet 525-8-2) does offer recognition of multiple learning models. However, close examination of the concept reveals it remains largely shackled to explication methodology, substituting the innocuous term *facilitator* for teacher or instructor while placing the power in that individual. The concept states that “facilitators are responsible for enabling group discovery,” which implies that only the teacher can guide the group, and without the instructor the class cannot discover anything of significant merit.¹⁵

The only way students might become equal to their teachers would be to master the topics as well as their teachers have mastered them. However, in the overarching military career path, graduating from one level opens up yet another winding path with yet another master waiting at the next plateau, using controlled distance to maintain a constant hierarchy of knowledge control. Students, whether in the Officer Basic Course or the U.S. Army War College, are shackled to the old master structure, where without the master leading the way, the students might get lost and never complete the journey.¹⁶ Per Rancière, the old master teaching model rests on the idea that students lack the will or ability to learn on their own, and only with the master’s will can they make the intellectual journey to the next level.¹⁷ Therefore, a class of armor lieutenants alone, even with piles of military manuals and courseware, could never properly learn how to maneuver tanks on the battlefield without an instructor there to guide them or to facilitate group discovery. Classes of War College colonels are as dependent on the academic to lead them on strategic lessons as a class of first graders learning their alphabet.

This notion of explication is a core principle of how the military conceives of and manages learning (its values about learning, the epistemological level) and how it approaches pedagogy (its values about teaching, the methodological level). This is true even if we claim to embrace decentralized learning concepts such as self-structured or peer-based learning in our instructor-centric programs.¹⁸

The Army’s approach to counterinsurgency, and especially to security force assistance, reflects this approach. We maintain the two tenets of the old master model with all foreign security forces—they are the students, and we are the masters. Without our teaching, foreign trainees cannot progress to mastery. In this way, we establish the distance, measure their progress, and guide them on the proper path to becoming a functional military force that only we can actualize as masters of explication. We lock them in a tautological loop from which they cannot escape.

Emancipation From the Old Master Model

Rancière describes Jacotot’s intellectual emancipation approach to teaching as the *ignorant schoolmaster method*. The premise is that teachers can be, even must be, partially ignorant of what and how students will learn. The teaching method to be adopted in any situation is purely under control of the students, and there is no hierarchical relationship in that “the route the student will take is unknown [to the teacher].”¹⁹ Instead of teaching based on a relationship of inequality, distance, and the implied requirement that the teacher be a master of all the knowledge students would gain, Jacotot experimented with teaching French through topics of which he was completely ignorant. He gave his students control of their exploration of knowledge.²⁰

In nineteenth century France, news of Jacotot’s unconventional educational philosophy created quite a stir. His intellectual emancipation method remains worthy of debate. His approach, and Rancière’s twentieth-century interpretation, could apply to any discipline, military or otherwise. To apply Rancière’s ignorant schoolmaster method to security force assistance, soldiers would need to accept his assertions that teachers and students must free their minds of the old master framework; soldiers would need to reject the idea that students are dependent on masters to help them learn. In addition, according to Rancière, teachers



(Photo by Sgt. Margaret Taylor, 129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

A soldier from 5th Battalion, 25th Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, observes the firing of a D-30 122 mm howitzer by Afghan National Army soldiers from 4th Kandak, 3rd Brigade, 201st Corps, as an Afghan soldier covers his ears during certification exercises at Forward Operating Base Tagab, Kapisa Province, Afghanistan, 5 September 2013.

of counterinsurgency and their students would need to assume that all normal individuals are of equal intelligence—that anyone can learn anything with the will and desire to do so. Teachers of counterinsurgency would need to reject the hierarchical teacher-student structure and consider how to intellectually emancipate their students.²¹ What is perhaps most important is that the students, and especially the teachers, would have to acknowledge that a certain amount of ignorance is not only acceptable but also necessary. Teachers should not think they have to know everything students will learn or every way they will learn.

The Value of Admitting Ignorance

Let us imagine that Jacotot had been tasked to teach his students a slang street-French, which would have been constantly changing in lexicon and structure faster than he or his students might be able to learn it. The language to be taught would have been transforming even as they were learning it. How would he teach it? This metaphor illustrates a significant reason why teaching counterinsurgency is so difficult. The ill-structured environments characteristic of counterinsurgencies are unique and evolving. No counterinsurgency is likely to be identical to another.

As such, each demands a tailored approach that cannot necessarily be cataloged, templated, and used as a model for training.

Recognizing the certainty of such uncertainty, ignorant counterinsurgents must self-emancipate intellectually by appreciating that the future condition of the counterinsurgent force will likely be something they could not teach—even if they could predict it. In this manner, “we progress toward even greater knowledge of our own ignorance.”²² At times, our doctrine on military advising seems to imply this very thing, although typically it is cast in the overarching context of a dominant old master approach.²³

The U.S. Army and the coalition forces approached teaching and training the Afghan police force by trying to cleanse them of several key values the Army found undesirable in law enforcement, such as illiteracy, corruption, nepotism, and sexism. Instead, the Army and the coalition emphasized values they favored. For example, the Afghan National Security Forces (Army, Air Force, and police) were instructed on the values of integrity, honor, duty, country, courage, service, loyalty, respect, and God (Allah) that closely mirrored the U.S. Army values.²⁴ The coalition attempted to build them into a security force similar to coalition member

forces, although U.S. Army doctrine warned against this tendency.²⁵ Yet, we neglected to ask a fundamental question: Can a police force be considered to function effectively while most of its members remain illiterate and it routinely capitalizes on culturally acceptable levels of corruption, nepotism, and sex discrimination?²⁶

Even if we might entertain such a contentious question, a more important question remains: Would our police teachers even recognize such a police force? If not, could they become intellectually emancipated ignorant schoolmasters who would encourage the emergence of some security force that worked differently but better than what their students currently had?

In the old master model, one cannot teach what one does not already know, let alone imagine learning outcomes beyond one's knowledge and ways of knowing. The practical result is that in teaching counterinsurgency, the U.S. Army has attempted to impose on Afghan Security Forces the Western security values and knowledge it assumes are universal. From an epistemological perspective, U.S. forces teaching counterinsurgency have not considered aiming for learning objectives that would fall outside Western society's boundaries for knowledge of law enforcement; they have taught what they as teachers could explicate to their students.

This tendency is, unfortunately, supported by Army counterinsurgency doctrine that goes so far as to recommend that advisors essentially manipulate host-nation forces into assuming some of the U.S. Army's ideas are really their own.²⁷ This is the old master structure of teaching with explication and distance, and the students are expected to obey in order to progress.

The Army's approach might be significantly improved if its doctrine encouraged advisors to incorporate host-nation ideas in the design of education and training, to learn as teachers, and to reverse the prevailing old master dynamic. From the Afghan perspective—where their resources, traditions, and current capabilities generate different conditions for, say, policing requirements—could they move toward a novel outcome for Afghan security forces, one that the emancipated students might discover?²⁸

In such a recast role, soldier-teachers would need to shed their roles as explicators who could only teach what they already knew, and the students would need to explore and discover a more effective Afghan policing and securing form that would function best in the Afghan

counterinsurgent environment. Neither the students nor the teachers would know at first precisely how such a security force would develop; thus, they would become ignorant counterinsurgents, moving along different paths of self-discovery and education.

How Illiterate Mountain Villagers Might Teach Us

Defenders of the old master teaching model might protest some of its points are overstated. One notable objection is that all teachers learn from their students, as many guides and studies for advisors often mention in their introduction.²⁹ However, there is a difference between saying “this Yemeni policeman taught me so much about friendship,” and “this African warlord turned what I thought I knew about counterinsurgency upside down, and I now question our original approach entirely.”

Most teachers learn from their students when they use the explication method, just as teachers in an elementary school or a war college gain life experiences with class after class of students. However, the master-student structure remains rigid, and only the teacher controls how knowledge is discovered, interpreted, measured, and processed.³⁰ While a particularly difficult student often forces the teacher to discover new teaching techniques, the student never wrests control of the old master model and so remains on the receiving end of the knowledge transfer. The way of teaching and the knowledge to be explicated remain controlled by the teacher.

What could an illiterate native of a mountain village with no modern technology possibly teach the modern counterinsurgent trainer? Could the villager teach beyond the sharing of experiences during training? Could the foreign counterinsurgent teacher learn from him? Success would require a shared willingness to adopt an intellectually emancipated approach. Both the counterinsurgent and the villager would need to recognize their dependence on the traditional teacher-student structure. However, this is no easy task from either perspective.

Ignorant Counterinsurgency and Security Force Assistance

If ignorant counterinsurgents would approach teaching by acknowledging that teachers and students are equals, that knowledge needs to be discovered before it can be learned, and that students can learn on their own as well as with a teacher, the counterinsurgents



(Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Kenneth Foss, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division PAO)

Members of the Afghan Uniform Police and the Afghan local police stand ready with their AK-47 assault rifles as they conduct urban operations training with U.S. soldiers assigned to Security Force Assistance Team 6, Cross Functional Team Warrior, 10th Mountain Division in Ghazni Province, Afghanistan, 11 April 2013.

would be able to unlock new opportunities for emergent processes and results. Instead of driving a security force to mimic the occupying force, or projecting the values of the counterinsurgents' society (for instance, values of literacy, gender roles, violence, justice, beauty, or truth), the ignorant counterinsurgents would encourage students to explore with them in a partnership of equals.

Further, ignorant teachers would not impede their students' exploration because of their own ignorance on the topics. Nor would they attempt to teach in the old, stultifying model on topics of which they knew nothing. In Afghanistan, for instance, "the very concept of the non-Muslim American trying to lecture such village crowds about proper Islamic teachings or moral behavior is ironic, but unfortunately [was] a common occurrence."³¹

In the emancipated model, teachers could not resurrect an old master relationship because an old master could not teach a topic in ignorance; this might seem like hypocrisy to the traditional student. Instead, ignorant teachers would acknowledge their ignorance

of a topic—Islamic teachings on morality, for example, and how they affected security operations—and appreciate that as students advanced in developing a viable security force that would incorporate Islamic morality in action, the teacher probably would remain ignorant to some extent. The teachers would have some trouble recognizing when the students had learned what they really needed to know.

Perhaps literacy would not be necessary for the security force members if a majority in the host nation functioned at extremely low literacy. Perhaps male-only policing, nepotism, and a degree of what U.S. forces regarded as corruption would be considered part of the learning outcome. Teachers would not impose knowledge derived from their society's web of values upon the local students.

Perhaps the students would explore learning how to conduct security by capitalizing upon the very illiteracy, lack of automation, unequal gender roles, and patterns of apparent corruption and nepotism that the outsiders found unacceptable. The students would explore and

learn at their own rate and following their own course. However, after the security force, operating in a largely alien way to the outside counterinsurgent teachers, had proven to be successful over time, the students might be able to articulate to the teachers why they became successful. Now the teachers truly would reduce their ignorance and learn from their students.³²

Of Myths and Men: Tensions Between Teaching Epistemologies

An Army unit's overall approach to understanding and teaching counterinsurgency to foreign security forces will have profound effects on the subordinate methodologies they subsequently apply. Requiring soldiers to use the traditional explication approach drives soldiers toward teaching only what they know, thus producing imitations of U.S. forces in the host-nation force. This approach will become counterproductive if the cultural, economic, societal, and other interacting tensions demand a novel security force that is nothing like our own.

In Afghanistan, U.S. military advisors have struggled with one significant example of this: the pull logistics system that is technological, user-based, and highly decentralized. In contrast, the Afghans have a long familiarity with, and strongly embrace, the old Soviet-style push logistics system that is centralized, hierarchical, and conducted in a completely different manner than the U.S. system. To add further friction, the extremely low literacy rate of the Afghan logistics forces, along with very limited automation technology, means that the explication approach to teaching logistics by coalition logisticians has been fraught with problems.

In this environment, Army teachers (who are masters of a technological, decentralized methodology that demands high literacy) were directed to instruct students who were in many ways their opposite. Nevertheless, instead of appreciating the lack of literacy and experience with technological culture among Afghan students, and switching to an emancipatory method to allow them to move on a different path towards a logistics structure the teachers might not recognize at first, Army teachers instead attempted to force the Afghan students toward what the Army teachers knew.

With every cycle of new logistics units arriving in Afghanistan, there have been repeated failed efforts to push computers and automation onto the Afghan security forces, and to change their paperwork processes to make

them use a decentralized pull model. The ineffectiveness of this teaching process has been worsened by frequent interference from advising teams that circumvented the Afghan process by moving paperwork within coalition lines to get it done.³³

This illustrates the tension between applying an explication approach where the teacher does not have a mastery of the topic, or the students are not interested in the knowledge the master has to offer. Students soon learn that old master judo instructors only can teach judo, and even if the class shows up to learn yoga, they will be forced to learn judo.

At the epistemological level, whether one uses a stultifying or emancipatory teaching approach, there still is a key relationship between ignorance and knowledge. We want to know exactly when we have solved a problem, with something definitive, like accomplishing a checkmate in a game of chess.³⁴ Yet, complex situations immerse us more in our own ignorance as we progress, with few if any authoritative end states. We have a fear of ignorance and the application of ignorance for action. To put the tensions of ignorance-knowledge and stultifying-emancipatory teaching approaches into a quadrant chart for further discussion, the figure on page 103 provides some insight into how these four elements interact.

Interaction Among Teacher-Student Paradigms

The predominant military approach appears in quadrant 3 (labeled Q3), in which U.S. military teachers have a mastery of counterinsurgency knowledge based on the organizing methodologies of our military, and they can disperse that knowledge to any foreign military student population to train them to secure their own nation. This may work with a security force assistance mission in a similar society or with a nation that has comparable security capabilities, but it may not work with the diverse, non-Western, hybrid environments where different variables drive the emergence of a novel counterinsurgency solution. This is where quadrant 2 (Q2) of the figure, the emancipatory approach, allows teachers ignorant of certain counterinsurgency disciplines to teach on the topics they do not know, to students who might need to learn in a direction the teachers might be unable to fully imagine or recognize.

In quadrant 1 (Q1), the emancipatory approach also features cases in which the teacher has mastered the

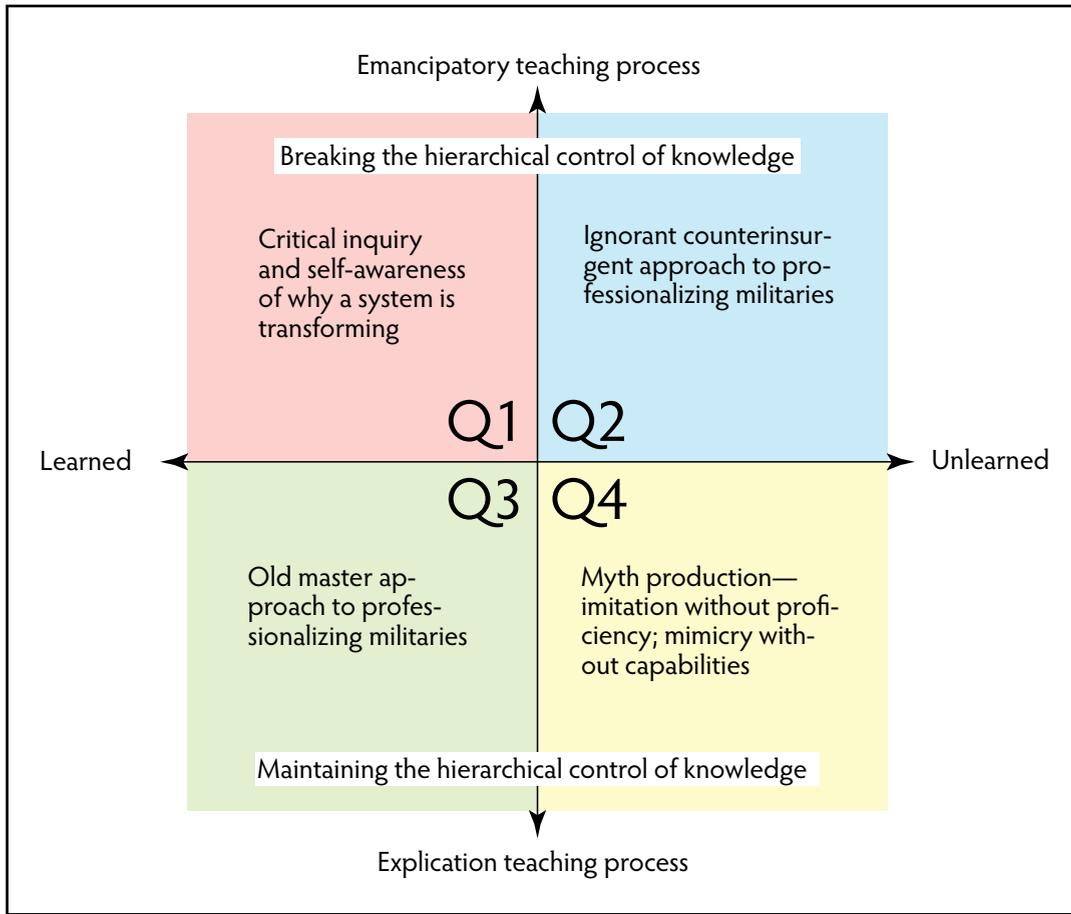


Figure. Explaining Multiple Teacher-Student Paradigms

knowledge that the students are learning. However, with the emancipatory approach the teacher does not apply the old master elements of distance and inequality. Instead, in quadrant 1, the teacher encourages exploration and even critical introspection of the knowledge, where the students can question and even violate the discipline in the emergent process of discovering novel solutions.

In quadrants 1 and 2, the students actually teach the teacher, whereas in quadrant 3, the old master merely humors that sentiment while evaluating their progress.

When ignorant teachers use the stultifying traditional approach, they tend to teach and enforce faulty knowledge to students, who subsequently imitate and repeat the process. This can generate a powerful, self-perpetuating discipline comprised of myths and falsehoods. Quadrant 4 (Q4) represents the perpetration of myths that create friction, inefficiencies, and contradictions in an organization, and at times become entrenched in ritualization, indoctrination, or cultural association.

Therefore, preparing a counterinsurgency strategy requires critical reflection, to go beyond the methodological arguments and to consider—from an epistemological perspective—what will be learned, how to teach it, and what approaches will be valid versus invalid.

Conclusions: Ignorant Teachers and Ignorant Students of Counterinsurgency

Could military advisors teach what they do not know? Could U.S. logistics advisors teach Afghans about things the advisors do not know? Could the Afghans teach the Americans about how logistics might function with a nonautomated, non-text-based, and culturally appropriate way that would be, perhaps, entirely foreign to the American logistics discipline? Could the American and the Afghan logisticians explore a novel, previously undiscovered logistics approach, one that both could learn about and develop together? Although the example here is logistics, the principle easily transforms to intelligence,

policing, information operations, governance, and nearly every other aspect of counterinsurgency and security force assistance in a host nation.

In Jeffrey Bordin's 2011 survey of Afghan and American forces within their respective advisor and operator roles, he found that more than half of Afghan soldiers surveyed complained that coalition forces "exhibit[ed] extreme arrogance and refuse[d] to take advice" and "yell[ed] at ... [or demonstrated] a lack of respect to Afghan National Security Forces."³⁵ On the other hand, the surveyed coalition soldiers in advisory or partnered roles responded overwhelmingly that the Afghans were "incompetent," were "lazy and refuse[d] to work very hard," could "not be trusted," and were "traitors" or "unstable," with "poor Afghan leadership" who were "useless."³⁶ The coalition and Afghan negative perspectives correlated closely with the traditional master-student teaching model.

Emancipating U.S. military teachers from the old master model would require significant direction, creativity, and radical change at the highest levels of military leadership; nothing short of a focused and systemic effort would break our military free of the grip of exploitation in how it views the professionalization of U.S. and foreign military forces.

Even if we could shift our overall counterinsurgency approach away from the old master model toward the intellectually emancipated ignorant counterinsurgent approach, we would need to inspire a similar breakthrough in our counterparts.³⁷ The host-nation security force, likely tied to a similar mindset, would need the same kind of liberation in changing their framing of the relationship between the coalition soldier and the local counterinsurgent. Members of the host-nation forces are not unequal to the coalition's members, and the coalition's members are not the masters of the professional knowledge. The local counterinsurgents can learn on their own initiative, in novel directions, and develop their forces into an end state that is even unknown to the coalition professional.³⁸

Both forces could operate in an ignorant counterinsurgent manner and develop a viable, durable counterinsurgency security force that would match the unique needs of that fledgling society. The result should come in a different and unusual form that is foreign to the military professional. Yet, we should not fear our ignorance of this. Instead, we need to embrace uncertainty as a useful perspective to better understand how we perceive counterinsurgency, and why this is. ■

Maj. Ben Zweibelson is an infantry officer with more than two decades of combined service and a veteran of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. A graduate of the U.S. Army School of Advanced Military Studies, he is currently an exercise planner with Mission Command Training Program, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.

Notes

Epigraph. Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 9.

Epigraph. Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], December 2006), 6-17 (now obsolete). After this article was written, a new FM 3-24, *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies*, was published (May 2014). The principles of rapport building remain in Army doctrine.

1. Shirley-Ann Hazlett, Rodney McAdam, and Seamus Gallagher, "Theory-Building in Knowledge Management: In Search of Paradigms," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 14, no. 1 (March 2005): 32.

2. Philip Georg Friedrich Von Reck, *Von Reck's Voyage: Drawings and Journal of Philip Georg Friedrich von Reck*, ed. Kristian Hvidt Von Reck (Savannah, GA: The Beehive Press, 1980), cited in

"National Humanities Center, Toolbox Library" (website) "Becoming American: The British Atlantic Colonies, 1690-1763," <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/becomingamer/peoples/text3/indianscolonists.pdf> (accessed 15 January 2015).

3. Hazlett, McAdam, and Gallagher, 32. The authors offer a telling explanation of epistemology and critical thinking.

4. Karl Weick, "Drop Your Tools: an Allegory for Organizational Studies," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41 (1996): 308. The author states, "People have multiple, interdependent, socially coherent reasons for doing what they do."

5. FM 3-24. See also FM 3-07.1, *Security Force Assistance* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, May 2009) [now obsolete]; and Joint Publication (JP) 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 12 July 2010) on counterinsurgency general objectives and strategic goals. Although retired in 2013, FM 3-07.1 provides necessary historical context for the doctrine used in the formative

Afghan and Iraqi Security Force developmental period of 2009-2013; the principles it described remain in use.

6. Michael Reed, "Reflections on the 'Realist Turn' in Organization and Management Studies," *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 42, Issue 8, December 2005, 1623.

7. Rancière, 18.

8. FM 3-07.1.

9. Eric B. Dent, "Complexity Science: A Worldview Shift," *Emergence*, 1, no. 4 (1999): 12. The author explores multiple mental models and how people take them for reality while chasing after details within them.

10. Rancière, 21.

11. Rancière, xix-xx, 4-7.

12. Anna Simons, "The Military Advisor as Warrior-King, and Other 'Going Native' Temptations," in *Anthropology and the United States Military: Coming of Age in the Twenty-first Century*, eds. Pamela Freese and Margaret Harrell (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 115. Simons explains the colonial origins of inequality in imperial versus colonial (or post-colonial) military relationships as founded on a paradox. If originally inferior to the parent land, how can locals later be equals in an advisory relationship?

13. Rancière, xix.

14. Rancière, 5.

15. United States Army Training Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet 525-8-2, *The U.S. Army Learning Concept for 2015* (Fort Monroe, VA: TRADOC, 20 January 2011), 19, 21. To turn this concept upside-down, could a group discover something that the facilitator did not enable, nor could recognize?

16. Rancière, 4-5, 21. See FM 3-07.1, "As [foreign security forces] master one skill, the advisor can move on to other skills and initiate the process for the new skills;" and JP 3-22, "The advisory team presents the instruction. Trainers/advisors ... Stress the execution of the task as a step-by-step process, when possible. ... Monitor the HN [host-nation] students' progress during practice and correct mistakes as they are observed;" and TRADOC Pam 525-8-2, 22.

17. Rancière, 20 to 22.

18. TRADOC Pam 525-8-2, 22.

19. Rancière, 23.

20. Rancière, 14-15, "Joseph Jacotot applied himself to varying the experiment ... he began to teach two subjects at which he was notably incompetent: painting and the piano."

21. Chris Argyris, "Teaching Smart People How to Learn," *Harvard Business Review* (May-June 1991): 99-109.

22. Martin Kilduff and Ajay Mehra, "Postmodernism and Organizational Research," *Academy of Management Review* 22, no. 2 (1997): 466.

23. FM 3-07.1, 2-1, "Local forces have advantages over outsiders. They inherently understand the local culture and behavior that outsiders simply lack. To tap into those advantages, advisors must resist blatant military solutions. To overcome the temptation to do what they know and do best, whether relevant to not to the situation, advisors must accept that they are bound by *unique situations* [emphasis added]."

24. Salahuddin Osmani, Noorullah Sultani, Nasir Ahmed Barez, and Jeremy Burnan, *Afghan National Police Training Handbook* [Draft translated into English] (Kabul, Afghanistan: NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan [NTM-A], 2011), 3. (Document in author's possession.)

25. FM 3-24, A-7, "The natural tendency is to create forces in a U.S. image. This is a mistake. Instead, local [host-nation]

forces need to mirror the enemy's capabilities and seek to supplant the insurgent's role ... they should move, equip, and organize like insurgents."

26. FM 3-07.1, 2-3 to 2-4, "Objective evaluations ensure promotion is by merit and not through influence or family ties. ... Appropriate compensation precludes a culture of corruption in the [foreign security forces]."

27. FM 3-24, 6-18, table 6-5, "Be subtle. In guiding host-nation counterparts, explain the benefits of an action and convince them to accept the idea as their own."

28. Simons, 116. The author addresses the potential rejection of advisor values from the host nation, when social or inter-personal elements drive the acceptance of some assistance, and the rejection of some others. Simons mentions that tangible aid is usually readily accepted, while conceptual changes may not be.

29. Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute and Strategic Studies Institute, *The American Military Advisor: Dealing With Senior Foreign Officials in the Islamic World*, by Michael J. Metrinko, report for the Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, August 2008, 2, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub869.pdf> (accessed 15 January 2015).

30. Rancière, 21, "At each stage the abyss of ignorance is dug again; the professor fills it in before digging another."

31. Metrinko, 38.

32. Kilduff and Mehra, 468.

33. These observations are based on this author's deployments to Afghanistan as battalion executive officer and security force advisor team leader for an Afghan National Army battalion (2013), and a national-level and operational-level planner for NATO Training Mission (Afghanistan) from 2011-2012.

34. Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," *Policy Sciences* 4 (1973): 162.

35. Jeffrey Bordin, "A Crisis of Trust and Cultural Incompatibility: A Red Team Study of Mutual Perceptions of Afghan National Security Force Personnel and U.S. Soldiers in Understanding and Mitigating the Phenomena of ANSF [Afghan National Security Force]-Committed Fratricide Murders," U.S. Army Central Command 'Red Team' Study, 12 May 2011, 12-21, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB370/docs/Document%2011.pdf> (accessed 15 January 2015). Although in June 2011 the *Wall Street Journal* reported that a coalition official spokesperson disputed the findings, they were later used in the 12-01 Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) handbook, *Inside the Wire Threats—Afghanistan: Green on Blue*, CALL, February 2012, 20-22. See also, Dion Nissenbaum, "Report Sees Danger in Local Allies," *Wall Street Journal*, 17 June 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303499204576389763385348524.html> (accessed 15 January 2015).

36. Bordin, 20-25.

37. Margo Paterson, Susan Wilcox, and Joy Higgs, "Exploring Dimensions of Artistry in Reflective Practice," *Reflective Practice* 7, no. 4 (November 2006): 455-468. The authors discuss the reflective concept of judgment artistry that leads into how professionals and clients might interact in a reflective learning environment.

38. Simons, 126. "Instead, advisors always want to be treated as at least slightly better than the natives—or, at the very least, as a first among equals [emphasis added]." Simons discusses the notion of going native and how misleading the concept is in advisor applications.