

R. Scott Webster · John D. Whelen  
*Editors*

# Rethinking Reflection and Ethics for Teachers

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*Scott wishes to dedicate this book to Ross,  
Isaac, Brice, Clairissa, Tim and Katya, and  
John wishes to dedicate this book to James,  
Eliza, Patrick, Finn, Edward and Penny.*

*That through education they may experience  
and contribute to a better world.*

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# Chapter 1

## The Importance of Rethinking Reflection and Ethics for Education



R. Scott Webster and John D. Whelen

**Abstract** In this introductory chapter, the authors express their unease about teaching in general and explain why the idea of reflection, in the context of education, needs to be rethought. It is identified that education is primarily a moral and political endeavour which aspires to enhance the quality of life both for individuals and for society in general. Consequently, it is emphasised that there is the necessity for increasing teachers' awareness of ethical issues both in their work and in their lives as teachers. This chapter identifies that one of the main obstacles to the raising of such an awareness is that government departments of education actively work against allowing teachers to access ideas that may challenge their policies, claiming that teachers are too sensitive to be able to handle controversial ideas. Despite these obstacles, the authors argue that contributing towards raising such awareness better enables teachers to pursue their hopes, expectations, desires, commitment and indeed their sense of self.

### Introduction

This book has its origins in a profound disquiet with contemporary teacher pre-service education (generally referred to as Initial Teacher Education, or ITE) and with the world of work into which newly graduated teachers find employment. It is directed, therefore, to teacher trainees in their final years of preparation before becoming teachers as well as to those who are already working as teachers. We hope that it will find a willing readership in Western countries, but its concerns may well be recognised more widely wherever pre-service teacher education courses are offered, especially in the post-industrial world.

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In this introduction, we will outline reasons for our unease about contemporary teacher education/training and about teaching in general, explain why the idea of reflection in the context of education needs to be rethought and highlight the necessity for vastly increasing teachers' awareness of ethical issues not only in their work but in their lives as teachers. One of the obstacles to the raising of such an awareness is that government departments of education actively work against allowing teachers to access ideas that may challenge their policies, claiming that teachers are too sensitive to be able to handle controversial ideas (Gulsen, 2012). For example, Professor Michael Apple, one of the 50 most prominent scholars in the field of education, was invited by Melbourne University as part of a seminar series to speak to principals and teachers in the state of Victoria (Preiss, 2012). However, the Victorian Education Department of Education cancelled Professor Apple's lecture claiming that his ideas, which did not align with their pursuit of performance related pay, were too controversial for their employees. Professor Apple's response to this cancellation was to express a concern for the state of democracy in Melbourne because he had experienced greater academic freedom in Serbia (Gulsen, 2012).

Hopefully, it will become clear that practising teachers in Australia, the UK and North America are already developing such an awareness in response to increasing demands on their performance and working conditions within the neoliberal policy environment in which they work, but this is not easy to achieve. Despite these pressures, we trust that the chapters in this book will contribute towards raising such an awareness in order to enable teachers to better pursue their hopes, expectations, desires, commitment and indeed their sense of self. Therefore, we consider that the contents of this book, while not shying away from the controversial nature of teachers' work, offer some encouraging and positive opportunities for teachers to reflect, individually and collectively, on how they might rediscover teaching (Biesta, 2017) and to reclaim it for education.

In this book, we take the view that *education* is primarily a moral and political endeavour which aspires to enhance the quality of life both for individuals and for society in general. In recent years, however, ITE programs and professional in-service workshops have been increasingly characterised by the pervasive, yet highly reductive notion that teaching consists of strategies which, if mastered and implemented well—even clinically, are presumed to impact students' learning. At the same time, 'reflection' and 'ethics' have too often been presented uncritically and been simplified as a result of the priority given to the acquisition of technique, for example, by urging teachers to reflect on the performance of particular strategies and their impact. As a result, both reflection and ethics have tended to be understood in limited, attenuated ways. In making this claim, we are aware of the multiplicity of ITE courses throughout the world, but are nevertheless confident in the generality of our claim due to the growing literature recognising the persistence of a number of regrettable trends, e.g. the fragmentation of learning from education, of thinking from doing and of ethics from teaching (Apple, 2000, 2004; Biesta, 2006, 2017; Blake, Smeyers, Smith, & Standish, 2000; Furlong, 2013; Lagemann, 2000; Postman, 1995; Taubman, 2009). This book is presented as a reproach to such a view, which we argue has offered teachers a limited, partial and caricatured vision of what teaching and

learning might be. Without the teacher being urged to reflect on this turn towards the meaning of their work, and perhaps in the absence of having sufficient tools with which to do so, the task of confronting a constantly demanding policy environment is made all the more difficult. In order to maintain or even regain a sense of one's authenticity while at the same time working towards a more reflectively and ethically nuanced understanding of teaching is a challenge being faced daily, frequently with very little, if any support.

In the chapters throughout this book, we seek to rethink this dominant paradigm by reinvigorating a more holistic understanding with *education* being placed front and centre of teachers' work. This means that because teachers exist as human persons in a holistic sense, with their emotive and aspirational dispositions, they share an existence (sometimes 'online') with other persons; therefore, an inescapable ethical context arises in which we must be continuously mindful of—reflect on—our relationships with and influence on others. Teaching and education, thus understood, are primarily moral endeavours because they offer experiences considered 'good' and worthwhile for the lives of students and their communities, but the value inhering in such endeavours and experiences can only be maintained as a result of constant critical reflection. Such reflection is *critical* because it goes beyond assessing merely 'what works' in terms of mechanical strategies, in order to engage thoughtfully and even meditatively on how 'good' one's teaching practices are and indeed how 'good' the overall system might be in which one finds oneself. Ethics, in such a view, can never be an 'add on' to teaching and learning because it permeates all activities involving the teacher's interactions and especially all aspects of the experience of being a teacher. In this sense, ethics, understood as the 'good' manner of interacting with other persons, is indistinguishable from critical reflection on whatever one does, and thinks, as a teacher. Consequently, we might therefore view the teacher as ethicist.

## Why *Rethinking* Is Needed

Education is a highly contested practice involving different perspectives regarding what is most desirable to do. In order to conduct oneself professionally in such a contested environment, we argue that teachers ought to be able to transcend the often perceived fragmentations of experience that characterise contemporary teaching and learning as they grapple with high-stakes testing and a national panic over students' achievements relative to achievements in other countries. In order to teach in this environment, demands from educational bureaucracies that teachers meet standards defined by technical competence have led inexorably to compliance and performative anxieties as the capacity for professional, critical decision-making has been stripped away from teachers. Small wonder, then, that teacher *training*, which devotes so much time to psychological theories of learning, is emphasised over teacher *education* in order for teachers to be 'classroom ready'. In this environment, understandings of reflection tend to be dominated by three models, viz. Kolb's (1984) reflective

cycle (i.e. encounter a new first-hand experience, reflect on discrepancies between one's understanding and the experience, conceptualise a new idea and lastly plan to experiment with this idea); Korthagen's cycle of reflection (Korthagen et al., 2001) which involves similar steps (i.e. describe a problematic experience, reflect on its characteristics, analyse why it is a problem, plan for alternative approaches and lastly experiment); and superficial presentations of Schön's 'Reflective Practitioner' (Schön, 1983, 1987) involving reflecting *in* action and *on* action. While each of these approaches is widely considered to be useful, they have also had their fair share of criticism in recent years (e.g. Erlandson, 2005).

Regardless of how useful such approaches to reflective practice are thought to be, however, we argue that their applications generally fail to recognise the *humane* context in which education should take place and so contribute to the same problematic paradigm, viz. the fragmentation of experience. Kolb's reflective cycle involving concrete experiences, reflective observation, conceptualisation and experimentation, and Korthagen's reflective cycle, both make rational sense if the events of teaching and learning, as well as learners themselves, operate as self-contained closed systems in the sense of being sufficient for learning, without involving other environmental or intrinsic aspects. Educational activities and contexts, however, are not closed systems, and students are not simply motivated to learn whatever teachers conscientiously teach them. It has long been accepted as a truism that students bring with them their interests, fears and concerns regarding their life circumstances and therefore come to lessons already deeply embedded in experience. The idea that a lesson, or discrete 'learning experience' with a teacher commences only when the bell rings at the beginning of a lesson ignores both the sense of being-in-the-world that enables students to come to education with those ideas, fears, concerns and so on, but it also ignores (in the concept of 'the student', or 'pupil') the selves that students understand themselves to be.

The implications of this are far-reaching. On the one hand, curricula are routinely constructed in such a way as to develop student interests in order ultimately to fit pedagogic outcomes into a social and economic contract, or narrative, of what is characteristically deemed desirable or useful. That tends to be what parents, politicians and representatives of commerce and industry, as well as students, expect. In lock-step with this view of what is real and appropriate in the contemporary world, students are understood as growing and developing (through stages?) and to an alarming extent at the mercy of hormones and a more or less developing brain, a view widely supported by psychological understandings of physical and cognitive development. On the other hand, what appears to be little understood is that these same students in all aspects of their lives—that is to say, in the full flux of their experiences of life—are at the same time being called into existence by the regimes of the school as persons by name, by expectation and by reputation. Small wonder, then, that so many students contest the persons they are expected to become and develop discursive regimes of their own to assert and protect subjectivities that mean so much to them (Whelen, 2011). To ignore (not merely to overlook) the fundamentally humane encounter in which teacher and student subjectivities meet and which is at the heart of teaching for education as distinct from teaching for learning is to

deny both teachers and students the necessary autonomy with which to meet in a truly educative encounter.

We argue that in order for the kinds of thinking and judging, or critical decision-making, that should characterise the work of teachers and that should be returned to them as professionals (rather than merely as employees), initial teacher education needs to offer student teachers a chance to ‘rethink’ the nature of reflection and ethics in the context of *education* and to do this it is essential that educators draw once again on the works of educators such as John Dewey (1859–1952) rather than on a limited range of psychologists and scientific approaches to learning. In the next section, we outline the historical tendencies that have contributed to the contemporary epistemological framework dominating ITE courses while also drawing attention to its conceptual inadequacies in so far as it fails to give an adequate account of who teachers and students are, as well as how to understand the student–teacher relationship.

## Rethinking Outside the Square

Dewey (1989, p. 80) argued that for education, all thinking ‘involves a moral outlook’ as teachers are in important relationships with their students who are not merely ‘learners’ but are human persons understood in a holistic sense, and who are intimately connected with life beyond the classroom. Dewey enthusiastically embraced life with all its complexities and challenges and envisioned its betterment for all humanity through becoming more democratic and more educated. For Dewey, what mattered most was the educating of children—not merely teaching so that they might learn. While he became influential in the first half of the twentieth century, his emphasis on moral and philosophical aspirations for democratising society ran counter to the beliefs and aspirations of others. Chief among those who saw in education a fertile ground for reappraisal of its methods and goals was the psychologist, Edward Thorndike (1874–1949), who developed a stimulus–response theory of *learning* (as distinct from *education*). Using statistical methods for collating quantitative studies, he aspired to understand and control human persons in the same manner that physical scientists at the time understood and controlled inanimate objects, such as chemical elements (Thorndike, 1910). Dewey (1981, p. 24), however, argued that such an approach was entirely inadequate for understanding humans and human relationships in their entirety. In his view, ‘psychology became ... ‘malicious’ ... (because) mental attitudes, *ways* of experiencing, were treated as self-sufficient and complete in themselves, (treated as) indubitable data’. As a psychologist in the early twentieth century, Thorndike had ambitions to conquer pedagogical practices through what he regarded as evidence-based strategies so that, as Lagemann (2000, p. 60) observes, ‘teachers should come to understand their subordinate place in the educational hierarchy’, subordinate, that is, to the insights of the relatively new ‘psychosciences and disciplines’ which were beginning to be taken up in countless contexts as the man-

agement and government of an unruly, newly industrialised world demanded ‘new ways in which human beings (could) understand themselves ...’ (Rose, 1996, p. 2).

Thorndike’s assertions aligned well with school administrators and bureaucrats of his time in both the USA and Australia where they favoured the scientism (i.e. a form of positivism which attempts to push science beyond its boundaries) of Thorndike over the philosophical approach of Dewey. Even when confronted with Dewey’s works, they stripped away the holistic nature of education and democratic living to focus solely on discovering teaching strategies that ‘worked’. Dunt (1993, p. 66) reports that ‘Australian educators ... reduced Dewey’s complex philosophy to residual pedagogic psychology and methodology’ and largely ignored Dewey’s emphasis on moral and philosophical aspirations for democratising society. Instead, Australian educators sought ‘after general psychological laws and objective facts of a particular psychological situation’ so that emerging ‘factual scientific’ knowledge ‘superseded value judgement’ because it was thought to hold ‘the key to ethics and the transformation of society’ (Dunt, *ibid.*, pp. 104, 114).

Alarming, we can see some of this same trend initiated by Thorndike is still evident today in the work of scholars such as (Hattie, 2009) who also uses statistical methods to promote and rank the efficacy of strategies which, it is argued, will assist with, if not guarantee, learning. Hattie (Hattie, 2009; Hattie and Zierer, 2018) focusses exclusively on *learning* and avoids engaging with *education* with its intrinsic moral and political concerns. He adopts this narrower position by assuming that teaching and learning activities can be closed off from the rest of life which exists outside of classrooms—although he does acknowledge that such issues external to the school ‘may be more important than many of the influences’ which he focusses on inside classrooms (Hattie, 2009, pp. vii–ix). This narrower approach to teaching—or perhaps more accurately, a particular kind of teaching—leads to popular understandings that it actually causes students to learn, and, in this context, therefore, only consists of thinking about selecting, applying and evaluating strategies from an armoury of (a particular sort of) evidence-based ‘best practice’ to determine whether they are working effectively to help students to learn. The link between evidence and assertion in such work clearly illustrates the primacy of theories rooted in psychology (such as constructivism), in the development of theories of learning, rather than taking seriously the task of devising and promoting theories of education drawn from an alternative archive of ideas, thinking and writing (Biesta, 2013; Webster, 2017).

## Education: The Context of Reflection

We are making the case that the context in which teachers reflect ought to be understood as an educational context. If the activities of teaching and learning become fragmented from *education*, they become narrow and technical and lose any significant sense of direction, purpose and value. Being dislocated from education, teaching and learning might become *effective*, but effectiveness is a hollow, self-referential

concept which lacks any purpose beyond itself (Biesta, 2009; Blake et al., 2000). It begs the question, effective for what? Consequently, effective teaching and effective learning are equally applicable for undesirable activities such as brainwashing and indoctrination. Education, on the other hand, is holistic, incorporating transparent moral and political purposes. Consequently, education tends to be highly contested. In order to better appreciate the contested nature of education, it can be helpful to explore the various ideological agendas which operate through policies and practices, especially ‘best practices’.

Each ideological approach in education aspires towards a certain sort of society and each makes assumptions regarding human nature and how best to educate younger generations (Apple, 2004; Webster & Ryan, 2019). Therefore, reflective teachers ought to be able to navigate their way thoughtfully and critically through a myriad of competing understandings of human nature and political views of society which are present at various political levels in order to avoid becoming an unsuspecting casualty of the ideological manipulation of others. Apple (2013, p. 25) recounts challenging conversations with Paulo Freire<sup>1</sup> who ‘fully understood that *not* dealing with the hard questions was an excuse to let the voices of the powerful work through you [our emphasis]’. It is our intention that this book will encourage you to ask some ‘hard questions’ regarding your teaching practice such as whose purpose and which ideological agenda might be benefited through your work (Postman, 1995). This is not a new activity for teachers as almost sixty years ago Hullfish and Smith (1961, p. 15) reported that ‘education is a front-line activity in the warfare of competing ideologies’. This point was also acknowledged by Dewey (1985, p. 103) who understood that education ‘has no definite meaning until we define the kind of society we have in mind’.

A holistic appreciation of *education* does provide direction for the sort of society we aspire towards in general, and the sort of mini-society, or culture, that we establish within our own classrooms and school communities. Through ideologies, political aspirations are also made evident morally in what sort of persons individuals ought to become. For example, ideologies which promote authoritarian societies expect students to be obedient conformists who are respectful to all forms of authority. Democratic aspirations, on the other hand, will encourage students to become critical inquirers who habitually test the legitimacy of various claims to knowledge.

By placing education at the core of what we do, Biesta (2017) suggests we might need to *recover* teaching from the dominant paradigm of mere ‘teaching and learning’ and then *rediscover* it in light of education. He argues that while education is inevitably associated with some training and initiation into existing social practices, its major emphasis is to enable people to exist in the world in a grown up, or mature way. This involves enabling students to conduct themselves with appropriate desires and intentions as well as behaviours. By centring teaching within the paradigm of *educational* experience, we can better appreciate the inescapable moral nature of this

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<sup>1</sup>Paulo Freire (1921–1997) was a Brazilian educator and philosopher, who wrote several books on pedagogy. His most well known book is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968). He was one of the early pioneers of critical pedagogy.

work where teachers provide a potentially significant influence regarding the sorts of human beings which students might become and thus what sort of society might be worked towards.

## Fragmentation of Knowledge and Knowers

In addition to teaching and learning being fragmented from education, other schisms are found between the knowledge disciplines and also within students as the 'knowers'. Content knowledge is fragmented into different disciplines, and these have often remained separate from one another although some attempts to integrate the curriculum and do cross-curricular projects and investigations can sometimes challenge such discipline separations. Interestingly, such disciplinary division of knowledge within the curriculum has been referenced to Hirst's (1965) 'forms of knowledge'. These basically consisted of mathematics, physical science, religion, ethics, philosophy, social science, history and the arts, which he claimed were logically distinct from one another. Hirst (1974, p. 89) explained that such 'forms' of knowledge were not to be regarded as being 'totally independent of each other, sharing no concepts of logical rules. That the forms are inter-related has been stressed from the start'. Similarly, Mackenzie (1998) has clarified that while forms of knowledge can be partitioned from one another for particular uses, many are intrinsically dependent on each other (e.g. mathematics is found within the physical sciences).

In addition to content knowledge being fragmented into disciplines, or key learning areas, students themselves have been fragmented on the grounds of having psychological faculties such as motivations, personalities, intelligences, memories and minds. This has led to assertions by the likes of Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) who represent learning primarily as memory processes, and Hattie and Yates (2014, p. 7) who similarly promote the value of memory over and above thinking, aligning themselves with Willingham who has claimed that the human 'mind is not designed for thinking'. In addition to reducing the mind to 'an archival library', they also reduce knowledge to mere 'information' (Hattie & Yates, 2014, p. 122). Such theorists rely on psychological constructs, e.g. short-term and long-term memories, storage, recall, motivation and concentration, rather than conceptualising people as complex beings having social, emotional, physical and cultural dimensions to their being.

When content knowledge or 'information' becomes privileged, experiences are reduced to teaching and learning activities for which the role of the teacher is to disseminate the content via strategies such as direct instruction, explicit explanation or 'facilitation', while the role of the students is simply to learn or construct the content through such strategies as chunking, rehearsal and mnemonics (Bransford et al., 2000; Hattie & Yates, 2014). By conceptualising teaching and learning as mutually dependent activities which exist together in a closed system, both become reduced to technical input and output factors of processing information fragmented from education. Teaching strategies, as *means* for causing learning, are fragmented



from their *ends*—the overall aims and purposes of why particular experiences should be offered in the first place. Teachers then have their reflections deflected from the overarching and purposeful *why* issues to instead narrowly focus on the *how to* matters related to learning and the acquisition of content. That is, attention is given to doing things the right way rather than upon what the right and most valuable things to consider and do might be.

## The Experience of Being Reflective

The experience of being reflective is a key aspect for any educational experience. It involves the continuous educational growth of professional educators as well as the growth of students. Our sense of self, our identities regarding who we are as individuals, is something that has been achieved through previous experiences. What we believe, know and value have emerged from the various situations we have encountered. The task of personal identity formation remains ongoing for those who embody an educated-way-of-being. We are arguing that reflective thinking offers this potential for continual transformation or growth through educational experiences because as our thinking changes so do our identities. As an attribute for educational growth, reflective thinking is valuable for both teachers and students alike.

Lawrence Stenhouse (1926–1982) was a strong advocate for teachers exercising their identities and agency through actively researching their own practices. He claimed that mainstream culture can ‘prejudice us rather than liberate us’ but a thinking culture can liberate and so he contended that schools should exemplify thoughtful cultures (Stenhouse, 1967, p. 50). Elliot and Norris (2012) continue to argue for the significance of the work of Stenhouse, particularly due to his emphasis on liberating students from popular and consumerist culture, as well as for enabling teachers to grow through ethical inquiry. Stenhouse identified that what teachers value most underpins their aims in education. By understanding teaching as ‘ethically committed action (*praxis*)’, Stenhouse argued that teachers ought to actively investigate their own practices through reflection and action research (Elliot and Norris, *ibid.*, p. 146).

Through adopting a holistic understanding of experience, such a thoughtful culture which Stenhouse recommends should involve the growth and transformation of people, and thinking plays a crucial role in this process. Such thinking might be perceived from a conservative perspective to be dangerous because new—even radically new—possibilities are created and explored, whereas uncritical conformity to existing practices and norms can all too often be stifling. By regarding ideas, values and identities as dynamic, the value of reflective thinking is affirmed.



## Putting It All Together

In order to educate, teachers must frequently make value judgements and act upon them. Value judgements engage with the what, how and why of one's valuing. They tend to be existential in nature, that is, they are integral to one's very core of existence and reflect how one understands the meaning and purpose of one's life. The values that each individual teacher brings to teaching lack universal consensus as individuals share a variety of understandings regarding how 'good' teaching is understood and how it ought to be conducted. Value judgements draw upon personally significant meanings and purposes that we have for education and for life generally. As such, our values and ethical considerations are unable to be reduced to rational choices among strategies that 'work'. Values and ethics are understood to emerge from our personal moral *concerns* which move us and contribute towards our ultimate aspirations for living a good and meaningful life. This makes teaching a keenly *felt* profession, often experienced as challenging, confronting and full of uncertainty that what one is doing is actually in the best interests of society at large as well as for each individual student.

Understanding teaching as an existential experience acknowledges that life is fraught with uncertainties. We find ourselves 'thrown' into an existence we did not plan for or choose, and we are without a guide book which can offer any absolute guarantees. Even the religious require faith and hope as their foundation for adhering to doctrines with their promises. This existential aspect both to life generally and to teaching more specifically is recognised by Britzman (2003, p. 3) who reports that:

Teachers are confronted with a difficult existential truth about education ... (T)rying to teach is deeply unsettling and conflictive because experience itself – what is called in this study, 'practice' – is a paradox, an unanticipated social relation, and a problem of interpretation.

Britzman argues that while this personally felt existential struggle for educators is inescapable, she suggests that one of the main contributing problems that tends to exacerbate these feelings of uncertainty is the perceived fragmentation of experience. As discussed throughout this chapter, these include the fragmentation of teaching and learning from education, of ethics from politics, of knowledge into disciplines and of students into psychological faculties. Above all, teachers are increasingly contesting the demands placed on them to adopt strategies which seem only to involve the application of particular sorts of evidence-based strategies for purposes they deem to be at least questionable, if not downright damaging. She argues that fragmentation 'is so pervasive that we come to expect personal exclusion' and that this therefore 'shuts out the agency of the teacher and students' (Britzman, 2003, pp. 51, 54). Her recommendation is that the examined life of teachers 'is educative' in the sense that it enables our values, beliefs and convictions to be re-evaluated through reflection. Such reflection involves interrogating one's lived experience through a range of philosophical, sociological and cultural theories to help identify important insights that are not only often beyond common-sense assumptions, but which deeply challenge the claims of those advocating the primacy of 'evidence' in the service of teaching for questionable purposes, such as high-stakes testing. This is the ever-present ethical

challenge that enables teachers to understand their own educational practice more insightfully and lead them to be better teachers. We consider that this book might offer an important contribution towards such professional renewals.

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**Part I**  
**Professional Standards, Codes,  
Ethics and Values**

# Chapter 2

## Understanding and Interrogating Professional Standards



R. Scott Webster and John D. Whelen

**Abstract** This chapter critically evaluates the nature of and the use made of professional standards in teaching. Focussing on the Australian context, the authors highlight the tension between the expectations of agencies outside of the teaching profession, such as government and bureaucracies, ‘to control teachers and how they teach, or whether the standards should assist in empowering’ teachers to define what constitutes ‘good teaching’. The question is raised ‘whether teachers should allow the standards to define ‘good teaching’ at all. This has important consequences, as the authors point out, in the case of teacher assessments where competence depends on being able to demonstrate how standards are achieved. As they stand, many teaching standards are based on a particular kind of ‘evidence-based research’ which is inherently problematic and which allows them to be used in a reductive, narrow way (achieving basic competence) in teacher assessment. Such standards tend to frame teachers as ‘solely accountable for the success or failures of their students’ learning’ and to ignore highly significant qualities characteristic of excellent teaching. The authors argue for far more emphasis to be placed on research in education to determine ‘standards’ if they are to be used at all, and for increased teacher agency and respect for teachers’ professional judgements in their use and evaluation. Such a move would mean a welcome turn towards concern for being a teacher as distinct from merely teaching.

### Introduction

Teaching is not synonymous with education. Some teaching can be considered as educative that involves worthwhile experiences which enable people to improve and become liberated by growing in understandings, cares and concerns regarding matters

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of significance. But there are other sorts of teaching which are clearly recognised as being *miseducative* of which indoctrination, propaganda and brain-washing serve as extreme examples. In this connection, one only needs to think of schooling in Stalin's Soviet Union or in ISIS training camps where the activities of teaching and learning have occurred, but not education. Hence, there is some interest in many countries for having a set of professional standards for teachers to enable their public to have some level of confidence that the teaching which is occurring in schools is acceptable to the community at large, and best serves the needs of young people and the future of the country. This chapter will explore the teaching standards in Australia and through emphasising the role of reflection, will explore whether teachers ought to submit to the standards in order to define 'good teaching' or instead read them as a resource with the potential to enable them to be the best teachers they can be.

Currently in Australia, teaching qualifications are undergoing significant changes which are largely being driven by political interventions rather than by professional educators themselves on the basis of *educational* research (Whitty, 2016). Consequently, a tension has emerged regarding whether the standards should enable external agencies (such as the government) to control teachers and how they teach, or if the standards should assist in empowering individuals within the profession? Different countries emphasise different sides of this tension and this chapter aims to highlight the importance of reflecting upon the role of the Australian standards and others like them, to consider whether individual teachers are being defined by such standards in a restrictive sense or whether they allow teachers to flourish in a more emancipatory manner.

## Why the Standards Exist

As a federal system, Australian teaching standards are currently being monitored by state-based authorities, such as the New South Wales Education Standards Authority, Victorian Institute of Teaching and the Teachers Registration Board of South Australia. Each of these authorities, as independent bodies, is guided by federal agencies who are becoming increasingly dominant. The particular federal organisations which have been instrumental in developing the teaching standards are the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA), the National Standards Sub-group of the Australian Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs Senior Officials Committee (AEEYSOC) and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL).<sup>1</sup> As with so much policy development by governments, their policies tend to only reference other government departments and think-tanks which support their ideological agenda, rather than reference academic and professional research (Whitty, 2016). One major consequence of this trend for education is that such officials and bureaucrats are drawing

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<sup>1</sup>At the time of writing, Laureate Professor John Hattie of the University of Melbourne is the appointed chair of AITSL and has been since July 2014.

upon a particular kind of ‘evidence-based’ research, almost exclusively based on large-scale quantitative studies, which are being selectively used to support their views. This trend, which is common to educational decision-making in Australia, North America and England, is clearly designed to reduce the decision-making role of educational practitioners and give control to outside agencies such as government departments and the Australian Council of educational Research (ACER) (Thomas & Pring, 2004).

In AITSL’s (2011) publication, *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*, the claim is made that the largest ‘in-school factor’ to impact on students and their learning is the ‘quality of teaching’. This document does not mention the influence that out-of-school factors can have, such as poverty, health, nutrition and values of home life, although Hattie (2009, pp. viii–ix) does acknowledge that these out-of-school factors may have even more impact than the teachers but large-scale studies showing evidence of out-of-school factors have not been included. By focussing exclusively on teaching and the expected standards, attention is thus deflected from the government and its responsibilities to communities for distributing resources more equitably (Campbell & Proctor, 2014; Teese & Polesel, 2003). Consequently, by solely emphasising the in-school ‘factor’ of ‘quality of teaching’ to determine successful educational outcomes, teachers may eventually come to believe that they—*alone*—are solely accountable for the success or failure of their students’ learning. Therefore, it needs to be recognised that success or failure of learning may be attributed to many factors other than teaching.

This same AITSL document states that the key elements of ‘quality teaching’ are represented by their standards. Therefore, one of the purposes of AITSL’s standards is to define ‘quality teaching’. In addition, there are other purposes which the standards have, such as guiding professional learning, facilitating how teacher quality can be improved and contributing positively to how the profession is represented to the public while it also outlines the expectations of what teachers should know and do throughout their careers. So in addition to the standards being used to determine whether individuals become registered and maintain their registration, AITSL also asserts that these same standards are able to provide the necessary data to justify a pathway through a teacher’s career.

The notion of ‘quality teaching’ is of particular interest not only because of the prominence given to it in teacher training courses, but more importantly because it does not necessarily equate to ‘good teaching,’ nor does it necessarily equate to ‘educative teaching’. In England in 1983, the government’s *Teaching Quality* was published and *A Nation at Risk* was published in the USA, both of which emphasised quality of teaching as a central concern. In 1999, quality in teaching was adopted by the Australian Government’s *Quality Teacher Programme* to represent the means considered necessary to improve the learning outcomes of students. The term ‘quality’ is relatively new to education theory and academic literature regarding pedagogy. As a term, ‘quality’ arguably has more relevance within the fields of business and advertising (Mertova, Webster, & Nair, 2010); for example, quality control in manufacturing. However, in recent years, ‘quality’ along with other expressions such as ‘world class’ and ‘excellence’ has come to have a greater presence in marketing

and policy literature relating to educational institutions, primarily because, as Readings (1996, p. 22) has identified, these terms ‘have the singular advantage of being entirely meaningless’ because they are ‘non-referential’. In other words, terms such as quality and excellence do not actually refer to particular characteristics beyond themselves and so however they are described it is difficult to challenge or refute because there are no universal criteria which are available to use for a critique. As such, leading administrators are at liberty to provide their own definitions of these terms outside the actual expertise of the profession. The use of these terminologies is strategic because it allows ruling authorities, such as those mentioned above, to claim legitimisation of their position as regulator, quality controller and inspector (Biesta, 2010, p. 101) of practices. The way ‘quality teaching’ is being defined and monitored through the current teaching standards is therefore something the teaching profession in Australia ought to critically reflect on because it illustrates a distinct absence of educational theory in the way AITSL has constructed the concept (Webster, 2017a). Most references to quality teaching are provided from government publications and a judicious selection of psychological theories and studies which are legitimised through appeals to their narrowly defined ‘evidence-base’. AITSL claims that their standards are able to determine what constitutes ‘quality teaching’, but as educators, we need to seek criteria beyond these standards provided by AITSL to reflect on how else *good* teaching might be understood.

## Critiquing the Standards

Three general domains are outlined in the current *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*, which are divided into seven standards as outlined in Table 1. The seven standards are also divided into a total of 37 focus areas. Each focus area is further divided into four levels pertaining to levels of expertise, viz. graduate; proficient; highly accomplished and lead, providing a total of 148 individual descriptions of standards that teachers are expected to demonstrate as evidence of their progress throughout their careers. Each of the 148 descriptions within these standards is written

**Table 1** Domains of teaching and professional standards

| Domains of teaching     | Standards  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Professional knowledge  | 1. Know students and how they learn  |
|                         | 2. Know the content and how to teach it                                    |
| Professional practice   | 3. Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning                  |
|                         | 4. Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments           |
|                         | 5. Assess, provide feedback and report of student learning                 |
| Professional engagement | 6. Engage in Professional learning   |
|                         | 7. Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community |



in terms of competence and thus refers to particular behaviours which are able to be demonstrated and observed. As teachers progress through all four levels, they are considered as having greater competence—which is presumably akin to having, or demonstrating, more ‘quality’ in their teaching.

The standards are listed as follows in Table 1.

It is not within the scope of this chapter to discuss each of these seven key standards in detail. It is instructive, however, to consider the first of these as this particular standard does seem to be the most important for how AITSL defines its own particular version of ‘quality teaching’. The standard—‘Know students and how they learn’—is, to say the least, very ambitious. To actually ‘know’ how students learn seems to transcend many of the actual findings reported in the research literature on this matter. The late emeritus Professor Phillip Hughes,<sup>2</sup> for example, had stated that teaching is a mysterious process and ‘[w]e know less about learning than we do about the ills of the human body or organising tax returns’ (cited by Caldwell, 2013, p. 58). While this may sound somewhat heretical in teacher education, it goes some way to explaining why teaching can be considered a ‘risk’ because as Biesta (2013, pp. 1, 31, 93) identifies, it involves ‘an encounter between human beings’, not robots, and so rather than simplistically transporting ‘information from point A to point B’ it involves participating in experiences where there are ‘relationship[s] of will to will’. As Rancière (1991) reports, where meanings, understandings, purposes and desires are constantly in flux, the outcome is radically uncertain. But such a ‘mystery’ that is full of ‘risk’ does not provide assessors and bureaucrats with criteria to help them judge whether a teacher’s teaching illustrates ‘quality’ or not. Not surprisingly, therefore, AITSL has turned to the work of Hattie and others who engage with the ‘science of learning’ (e.g. Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Hattie & Yates, 2014) to provide an understanding of ‘learning’ understood as an observable process leading to pre-defined, or narrowly defined, outcomes.

The science of learning movement can be considered to have begun with Edward Thorndike.<sup>3</sup> Ever since his behaviourist approach gained traction in North America, researchers have added some cognitive theory and psychometrics (i.e. attempts to measure mental attributes) in their attempts to ‘know’ how learners learn. In an effort to be ‘scientific’ some researchers’ work can be understood as ‘scientism’ (i.e. the attempt to employ natural science beyond its intrinsic limitations) rather than as ‘science’ as it is conventionally understood within scientific communities. For example, Bransford et al. (2000) and Hattie and Yates (2014) have adopted a rather atrophied view of the phenomenon of ‘learning’ in order to limit it to something ‘visible’ and tangible that is able to be observed and measured. For example, Hattie (2009, p. 249) reports that the majority of the studies which he uses define learning as primarily of a surface/superficial sort such as the memorisation of ‘facts’ even though

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<sup>2</sup>Phillip Hughes was Professor of Teacher Education and later Vice Chancellor of the University of Tasmania.

<sup>3</sup>Edward L. Thorndike (1874–1949) was a major pioneer in the field of educational psychology. He mainly worked in laboratories rather than schools, and focused on behavioural approaches and statistical methods. He was not an educator but published various books on teaching such as (1906) *The Principles of Teaching*.

he appreciates that the more valuable kinds of learning tends to be ‘deeper’ and involve greater degrees of conceptual understandings. However, this more important sort of learning does not lend itself to being readily observable or ‘visible’ and so is not promoted through his recommended impact strategies for improving teaching and learning, or in his works more generally. This distinction and its consequences have disturbing implications for the sorts of *learning* valued by governments, industry and the general public, because ultimately what is being overlooked is education’s inherent concern regarding what it means to be educated human persons (Webster & Pring, 2018).

Many teachers tend to value *thinking* as an important activity that their students ought to experience, on the assumption that thinking is intimately related to their learning. However, Hattie and Yates (2014, p. 9) do not appear to make such a link and instead emphasise that memory is more important than thinking. They acknowledge that thinking involves ‘considering different perspectives. It means withholding impulses and avoiding making judgements in the absence of data ... It means an openness of mind to ideas...’ and yet they have chosen to adopt a statement—perhaps out of context—from Daniel Willingham stating that ‘The mind is not designed for thinking’ (Hattie & Yates, 2014, p. 7). On the basis of this assertion, they argue that human brains involve two systems—a ‘fast-operating’ one which doesn’t ‘think’ in any complex or conscious manner, and a ‘slow-operating’ system which represents the more complex and deeper sort of ‘thinking’ which we are more conscious of because it requires so much effort. From this, they assert that teachers ought to avoid the slow-operating system because for students it takes more effort, is difficult, involves discomfort, is tiring and is even threatening (ibid., pp. 8–9). In contrast, the ‘fast-operating system’, which they claim to have theorised from the work of William James,<sup>4</sup> is our ‘inner friendly robot ... [which] in any familiar situation ... can respond quickly, efficiently, and without thinking’ (ibid., p. 297). Hence, they argue that teachers should invest time getting students to memorise information using strategies such as repetition, chunking and mnemonics because the goal is to invest in long-term memory which they describe in the following terms:

The other way to retain information is to transfer it to long-term memory. ... Metaphorically, the long-term memory is the archival library store where data are filed for retrieval. It is held that this system holds information in permanent storage form (Hattie & Yates, 2014, pp. 121–2).

Even though Hattie and Yates claim to base their work on Willingham, we can see that Willingham himself has a significantly different approach. Willingham (2008, p. 18) argues against trying to memorise information and instead claims that memories are ‘the residue of thought, meaning that the more you think about something the more likely it is that you’ll remember it later’. So in direct contrast to Hattie and Yates, Willingham indicates that for the development of memory there is value in thinking, even though this can be difficult for students. He does make the claim that ‘[t]he mind is not designed for thinking’ but as with Hattie and Yates, he appears to

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<sup>4</sup>See James (1918).

be drawing upon William James's notion of *sameness* which James (1950, pp. 272, 459) himself describes as a 'belief' and something which we 'intend' in order to give constancy, predictability and sense to the incredibly large amounts of stimuli we are exposed to. Similarly, Dewey (1989, p. 240), who was a contemporary of James, wrote about what he described as 'an attitude of anticipation' regarding our everyday living. However, both James and Dewey had very different views regarding learning compared with Hattie and Yates. For example, Dewey (1989, p. 234) wrote:

It is assumed too frequently that subject matter is understood when it has been stored in memory and can be reproduced upon demand. The net outcome of our discussion is that nothing is really known except in so far as it is understood.

With regard to the first teaching standard—know students and how they learn—critically reflective teachers ought to be clear regarding what they mean by 'learning'. Does learning equate to acquiring, memorising, knowing or understanding? Does the 'what' of learning (what is learned) equate to information, knowledge, understanding, skills or wisdom? Might it be possible to engage in educational experiences and yet (strange as this may sound), consciously avoid the phenomenon of learning altogether, as Biesta (2017) has explored? This first teaching standard of *knowing* how students learn can, on reflection, be surprisingly difficult for teachers to demonstrate that they have evidence to indicate they can achieve this. What is so alarming about the sense in which both Hattie and Yates and AITSL documents refer to as 'learning' is their insistence on a behavioural understanding of the phenomenon together with so little concern for the nuances that critical reflection reveals. When understood in such vague and superficial ways by a key credentialing institution (AITSL), this is clearly the approach that teachers are expected to adopt too.

## Standards as Competencies

The articulation of standards for any profession offers an indication of differentiation between the activities which are specifically associated with the profession, and are distinctively different from non-professional activities. The Australian standards are listed as competencies which are important from the point of view of assessment, where the assessor, in the role of observer, must 'see' evidence that particular individuals are demonstrating what is required to meet the standard as described. While we generally have few qualms about competency-based assessments being appropriate for certain qualifications such as becoming qualified to receive a driving licence, not all countries adopt this practice of competencies for their teachers. Table 2 illustrates examples of professional teaching standards found in some other countries which differ significantly from those in Australia.

A striking difference to note is that the Australian standards are all based on behaviours (i.e. demonstration of knowledge, planning, assessment, engagement, etc.) while those of Ontario and Scotland emphasise personal dispositions to care and be committed to public goods such as social justice. Interestingly, Britzman

**Table 2** Teaching standards in three other countries

1. In Ontario, Canada, The Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession<sup>a</sup> appear to be for the purpose of providing aspirational goals for the profession rather than competency-based criteria for observable assessments. They identify a shared vision and values in addition to knowledge and skills, and they acknowledge the key role that professional judgment-making has for the profession. Interestingly they divide their standards into two distinct sections as follows:

| The ethical standards for the teaching profession | The standards of practice for the teaching profession |
|---|---|
| Care  | Commitment to students and student learning           |
| Respect   | Professional knowledge                                |
| Trust   | Professional practice                                 |
| Integrity   | Leadership in learning communities                    |
|   | Ongoing professional learning                         |

Some countries, such as Australia, do not include references to care, trust and the intrinsic ethical nature of teaching in their statement of professional standards

2. **Scotland** has three main standards listed with eight associated elements as follows:

| Standards                                   | Elements  |
|---|---|
| Professional values and personal commitment | Social justice, integrity, trust and respect, professional commitment |
| Professional knowledge and understanding    | Curriculum  |
|   | Education systems and professional responsibilities                   |
|   | Pedagogical theories and practice                                     |
| Professional skills and abilities           | Teaching and learning   |
|   | classroom organisation and management                                 |
|   | Pupil assessment  |
|   | Professional reflection and communication                             |

The first standard is described as being at the ‘heart’ of what and which clearly acknowledges the political and moral nature of teaching in that it is specifically for improving social justice at both the local and global levels. The other two standards have further details regarding their elements which are further divided into two categories—the first is for provisional registration and the second for full registration. These elements within the standards are described as what teachers ought to know and understand and so are quite different to the competence-based descriptions in the Australian standards which focus on what needs to be demonstrated. Interestingly, teachers are expected to understand and be able to draw upon a variety of pedagogical theories and how these are informed not only by learning theories of a psychological nature but also how social, cultural, political and economic systems play a role in pedagogical work

3. **Finland** has no national professional standards. Teachers are not monitored or held accountable to criteria set by government agencies, but they are trusted as professionals to do just that: work professionally and ethically. School leadership, including curriculum development and teaching practices, is controlled by teachers as educational professionals rather than by government departments (Sahlberg 2011)

<sup>a</sup>Ontario College of Teachers, <http://www.oct.ca/public/professional-standards/standards-of-practice>

(2003, p. 46) observes that when pacification is sought, authorities reduce knowledge 'to rigid directions that demand little else from the knower than acquiescence, knowers are bereft of their capacity to intervene in the world'. Specifically for the preparation of teachers, if pacification is sought then the notion of 'teacher training' rather than 'teacher education' encapsulates the emphasis of 'practices of conformity' and 'mechanistic training' which reflect behaviours rather than actions. This is because actions are typically associated with interventions in the world which involve agency, judgement and initiative.

While the Australian standards for the teaching profession are stated as competencies, there are debates regarding whether this constrains and reduces the complex work of teaching (e.g. Bahr & Mellor, 2016). It is not within the scope of this chapter to review these debates, but it is sufficient to highlight that the role of competencies for professions can be understood differently and as such can either be objected to because they are perceived as representing a diminution in how the profession of teaching is actually understood, or as only a necessary requirement for registration and qualification (Yinger & Hendricks-Lee, 2000). The consequences of such a widely held understanding should be cause for alarm in the teaching profession as perceptions of teachers' professionalism is at stake. Crucially, what such a limited notion of teaching ignores, as Biesta (2017) discusses in detail, is that professional teachers are expected to go beyond the 'limits' of competence. As was stated at the beginning of this chapter, much depends upon the purposes for which the standards are designed, viz. whether they are primarily to enable outside authorities to control teachers, or whether these standards are meant to contribute to the empowerment of individual professionals.

Competency standards need not necessarily be reductive and narrowing for a profession. Hagar (1994) acknowledges that a fragmenting and behaviouristic approach has been used for teaching standards in the past (such as in the competency-based teacher education (CBTE) approach in the 1980s) which was found to be problematic. However, he argues the case that competencies need not be seen in this light, as merely fragmented behaviours. They can instead be considered as actions with *specific intentions* operating behind them. That is, there can be a very clear acknowledgement and appreciation of how thought is related to the actual actions which are described in the competencies. He includes intentions such as having a strong commitment to social justice (which, e.g., is the case with the teaching standards in Scotland). Hagar (1994, p. 11) argues that '[c]ompetency standards make no claim to exhaust all facets of a profession' especially when the profession owns the competency standards and makes clear what the overall holistic intentions of the profession entail. This enables the practitioners to strive for far greater excellence than is required by the competencies which he indicates appear to be more useful for entry requirements into the profession than as a means for career advancement. Currently, the teaching profession in Australia does not 'own' the standards which arguably lack a clearly articulated holistic goal which is able to offer guidance regarding overall intent—such as can be offered through valuing social justice while incorporating the aims of education as examples.

Similarly, Ronald Barnett argues that competencies can certainly have a valuable place in the professions and in education, especially when the actions described in the competencies are clearly connected to the thinking and intentions which are involved in their accomplishment. However, he warns that competency standards become problematic when they become the ‘dominant aim ...diminishing other worthwhile aims; or ...when construed over-narrowly’ (Barnett, 1994, p. 159), because this produces four main deficiencies. These include:

1. Intentions and conceptual understandings behind the actions are not made evident;
2. Assumptions of what it means to be a human being are often lacking, especially with regards to persons who are ‘thinking, thoughtful, discriminating’;
3. The relation the individual has to her work in a holistic sense is often not included, and thus, there is a lack of personal ownership of the *aims* and *purposes* of the competencies; and
4. The relationship between thought and action is often omitted (Barnett, 1994, pp. 75–76).

It is interesting to reflect on the Australian standards for teaching using these four potential deficiencies as a means for determining whether these particular standards, as competencies, ought to define quality teaching, or whether something more must be included. It is interesting, therefore, to consider whether Australian professional standards offer emancipatory competencies to enable teachers to be empowered to continue growing into expert educators or whether wisdom and insight are undervalued compared with compliance to implementing particular behaviours and techniques.

## Are Professional Standards Professional?

The concept of ‘teacher professionalism’ is a contested concept (Demirkasimoğlu, 2010) and so can lend itself to mean what various authoritative bodies want it to mean. Without universal agreement regarding what makes teaching a ‘profession’ (or not) depends upon what is valued about teaching and its potential. Carr (2003, pp. 24, 32) offers a useful philosophical exploration of teacher professionalism claiming that it is more of a moral activity than a technical one because ‘good teachers are not those who apply off-the-peg strategies of pedagogy and management ... but those whose approach is ...sensitive to interpersonal engagement ...grounded in genuine care and concern’. In addition to this, he gives consideration to what makes any profession, such as medicine, law or teaching ‘professional’ status rather than simply being vocational, and argues that they involve personal initiative, autonomy, judgement-making and decision-making which are all ‘implicated in *theoretical* complexities’. Biesta (2010, pp. 37, 37) similarly recognises that for *educational* practice, while these professional judgments ‘are moral rather than technical’, teachers should nevertheless be conversant with the theory and technical issues of their craft so that they

can exercise ‘the right not to act according to evidence about ‘what works’ if they judge that such a line of action would be educationally undesirable’. That is no more or less than what professional judgement demands.

An important point to consider when reflecting upon how professional the standards set out by AITSL might be, is to determine whether the standards are sufficient, or even necessary, for the sorts of teaching which are appropriate for educational experiences. That is, is good, educative teaching defined completely, partially, or perhaps not at all, by such standards? Quite clearly a philosophical understanding of ‘teaching’ is required before this can be answered. If teaching is understood to be a form of instruction or training in competence-based skills to deliver information to learners as receivers, then perhaps such standards could be regarded as both necessary and sufficient. If, however, teaching especially involves developing caring, working and respectful relationships with (sometimes recalcitrant) young people in such a way that they come to have an expanding array of interests, curiosities and carefully formed habits which lead them, within their communities, to live cooperative and meaningful lives, then the standards set out by AITSL are clearly not sufficient. The point is that of the two ways of understanding teaching mentioned here, only one has the political, bureaucratic and even academic patronage to guarantee its pre-eminent role in contemporary educational discourse. The other is relegated to the realm of teacher ‘giftedness’ and the corridors of counsellors and educational psychologists. Perhaps if teachers were professionally expected to have an influence like this, we might conclude that it is possible, and even likely, that current professional standards for teachers are not even necessary for good teaching.

The issue of whether or not imposed standards are necessary or not for good teaching has long been recognised. For example, Dewey (1977, p. 265) commented:

the explanation of the success of some teachers who violate every law known to and laid down by pedagogical science. They are themselves so full of the spirit of inquiry, so sensitive to every sign of its presence and absence, that ...they succeed is awakening and inspiring like alert and intense mental activity in those with whom they come in contact.

Furthermore, as noted above, the Finland education system considers that a list of standards is unnecessary for teachers to be able to teach well. Finland has received a lot of international attention in recent years because in the 1980s, it was ranked as only a mediocre performer in international testing instruments such as International Education Assessment (IEA) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). In recent years, however, it has accelerated to being ranked at the very top or near top of such assessments. Teaching is valued by Finland quite differently compared with Australia. In Finland, teaching is considered above all as a ‘moral obligation’ where ethics is not an ‘add on’ but forms the foundation of the teaching service to the young and to society ‘as a public good’ (Sahlberg, 2011, pp. 1, 10).

Given long-standing debate about the worth of the National Assessment Programme—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) assessments in Australia, to take only one example of the measurement of outcomes of teaching as the transmission of knowledge, it is worth reflecting on the criticism that Pasi Sahlberg of Finland has made against the Global Educational Reform Movement (which he refers



to as GERM) in which many countries are involved, including Australia, Canada, UK and the USA. He reports that GERM is characterised both by market-based competition and choice, and frequent high-stakes testing which has demonstrably failed to have any significant impact on students' achievements over several years of implementation in many countries (Sahlberg, 2011, 2017) of which NAPLAN in Australia is one prime example (Lingard, Thompson, & Sellar, 2016). This reform agenda, which is largely inspired by a corporate agenda, could arguably be threatening democracy itself—especially democracy within the teaching profession (Ravitch, 2014; Webster, 2017b). In contrast to this reform movement, Finnish teachers are encouraged to embrace a philosophy which holds 'that schools should function as small-scale democracies, just as John Dewey had insisted', and to appreciate that 'the role of public education must be to educate critical and independent-thinking citizens' (Sahlberg, 2011, pp. 23, 33). This is somewhat different to the Australian approach, where teaching standards, according to AITSL (2012, p. 2) are based on the 'ambitious goals' of 'promoting equity and excellence and of all young Australians becoming successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens'. This list of descriptors could be understood to be mainly focussing on uncritically learning information, and omitting attributes typical of *education* such as having reflective and thoughtful understandings of *why*, valuing, caring and being committed to the public good, participating democratically, and having a morally sensitive, critical and sceptical disposition to various claims to knowledge and social practices (see Dewey, 1985; Oakeshott, 1996; Peters, 1970).

To take this discussion of the relevance and usefulness of AITSL's teaching standards further, it is worth reflecting on what good teaching is and what makes a 'good teacher'. What does it mean to say that a teacher is a good teacher? If a teacher is recognised as 'good', does this mean that such a teacher is 'good' for *every* student that she teaches, for *all* the parents she may work with, for *every* one of her colleagues and for her employer, *all* of the time? However, these questions might be answered, the conception of 'good teaching', as with 'good education' is contestable. What is valuable in a particular context for particular individuals may not be equally valuable for other individuals in other contexts. This does not mean, however, that good teaching is completely relative because some sorts of teaching and ways of relating to students are clearly undesirable, especially if teaching experiences are unethical, disrespectful, neglectful, uncaring or *miseducative*, as has sadly been demonstrated in Chap. 6 of this book, regarding what the Royal Commission into child sexual abuse has uncovered in some schools. We seriously doubt that the current teaching standards in Australia are able to substantially challenge the roots of this problem due to the clear absence of ethical care.

According to Caldwell (2013), there is a 'standards movement' globally which is having an impact in various countries such as Australia through such schemes as NAPLAN, the My School website, as well as the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*. His concern is that this set of standards for teachers may well 'de-professionalise' teachers because high-quality teaching is unable to be reduced to standards which operate more effectively as a minimum requirement rather than as an aspiration. To support his claim, he makes reference to the work of Diane



Ravitch (cited by Caldwell, *ibid.*, p. 60) regarding how ‘the standards movement’ has become ‘the testing movement’ in the USA. Ravitch asks ‘How did testing and accountability become the main levers of school reform? How did our elected officials become convinced that measurement and data would fix the schools? Somehow our nation got off the track in its efforts to improve education. What once was the standards movement was replaced by the accountability movement’. In contrast to these concerns, we might reflect on the assertion made by Hattie (2016, p. 10) that ‘[t]here needs to be rigorous emphasis on teachers *demonstrating* their conceptions of *challenge* and *impact* through exemplars of students’ progress’ (our emphasis), in light of these particular standards, rather than trusting that teachers can teach well. The justification for this emphasis on demonstrating measurable outcomes derives both from behavioural psychology and from the authority it enjoys in the political and bureaucratic domains of educational decision-making. It is on the basis of such measurements that data can be used by governments and bureaucracies to decide whether teachers are to be promoted or even registered. Gottlieb (2015, pp. 220–1) challenges this process of relying upon student achievement data to determine teacher quality by arguing that it ‘is an abdication of responsibility both for recognising examples of good teaching and bad teaching and for entering judgements thereof, judgments that will carry weight in terms of ...personal decisions’.

The purposes and locus of control regarding standards are clearly important matters to address when considering whether these standards are actually suitable for teaching if teaching is to be considered to be a profession at all. As Pring (2004, p. 75) reminds us, if teaching is to be regarded as a profession then teachers are expected to play the role of ‘a defender of the learner against the encroachment of government or business, as the protector of values’ precisely because of their expertise and autonomy, both of which are threatened by the standards movement. The relations between professional bodies, professional standards and authority clearly indicate that there is nothing inherently problematic about standards. What is at stake is not merely how teaching is understood but how, in a high-stakes teaching and learning environment teachers respond to the performative demands placed upon them.

## ‘Quality Teaching’ or ‘Good Teaching’?

The sorts of teaching that can be considered as appropriate for education might be described as ‘good teaching’ or ‘educative teaching’ compared with merely ‘training’, ‘conditioning’, ‘instructing’ or ‘indoctrinatory teaching’. It would be an interesting exercise to consider how AITSL’s ‘quality teaching’ fits into this array of differing conceptions. ‘Quality teaching’, as defined by the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*, does not necessarily equate with ‘good teaching’ if we understand ‘good teaching’ as making *education* possible. Pring (2004, pp. 23, 123) has observed that ‘[n]ot all teaching is ...necessarily educational’ and argues that this becomes particularly important to appreciate when the purposes of teaching ‘are formally removed from the professional group of educators and placed in the hands of

politicians.’ This is echoed by Apple (2013, p. 21) who is concerned that our Western governments are so closely related to capitalist and neoliberal interests that they no longer value the emancipatory potential of *education* and even find this ‘threatening’. Governmental encroachment into curriculum and the work of teachers has become so prevalent that teaching is often reduced to being merely one factor in the process of learning against which Biesta (2017) makes the case that teaching ought to be returned to teachers and to *education*. He clearly makes the case that competence for teachers ‘is in itself never enough’ mainly because educative teaching involves judgement-making and ‘[j]udgements about what needs to be done always need to be made with reference to the purposes of education’ (Biesta, 2013, p. 130). It is considered valuable, therefore, that reflecting upon *education* be seen as an important source when critically reflecting on teaching standards and how teachers ought to relate to such standards.

Educational theory is distinctively different to psychological theories which, if primarily based in behaviourism or psychometrics, tend to reduce the focus on to technical matters related to the training of a neutral sort of *learning*. In contrast, educational theory focusses on what might be most valuable, desirable or ‘good’ for individuals and for society in broad terms. For example, Biesta (2017, p. 96) claims that *education*, unlike the more ubiquitous yet technical concerns of ‘teaching and learning’, ‘has an interest in the freedom of the student’ as a human person and not merely as ‘a learner’ who is usually reduced to the role of consuming information. This is reflected in the works of many educators such as Paulo Freire who warned teachers about the ‘banking concept’ of traditional teaching approaches. His ‘banking’ concept basically involves depositing information into each student ‘as pure recipients’ whose only function is uncritically ‘receiving, filing and storing the deposits’ (Freire, 1998, p. 108; 2000, p. 72). Freire argues that this is a form of oppression because students are denied the respect which ought to be given to human persons, and are treated instead as slaves to someone else’s agenda in terms of which the students have no voice. It is interesting in this respect to reflect upon the work of Hattie, who, as was mentioned earlier, recommends that teachers focus on depositing information into the long-term memories of students. We might well consider whether the Australian professional standards are more suited to teaching and learning understood as depositing, or ‘banking’ information, than to promoting a more educationally liberating ethic of freedom and democracy.

In order to promote a greater sense of freedom, Freire argued that teachers ought to teach *with* students as human persons rather than teach *at* them or *to* them. As such, teachers are to share their thinking, concerns and curiosities with their students in order to better help students to ‘read the world’ which we share together and not just ‘read the word’ of official texts. This sort of educational teaching enables students to come to appreciate the *why* of the matters which are studied; in other words, how content and its accompanying values skills and knowledge become the content, values, skills and knowledge they are presented with.

This sort of educative teaching focusses on the growth of students as people. This sort of growth does not mean an accumulation of greater amounts of information such as is often suggested by those who draw upon cognitive psychology. Being educated

is significantly different from merely being informed. Educative growth refers to the increase of interests, intentions and desires of students. Pring (2004, p. 87) identifies the *interests* of students as ‘the very ‘things’ which ought to be educated’ in contrast to teachers trying to make the *things* they are teaching appear interesting, or merely teaching through the *existing interests* of students. In contrast to being likened to an archival library of knowledge and skills, as Peters (1970) argued, students who are becoming educated ought to *be*, and *become*, more interested, curious and caring about the things they are learning about. That is, they actually change as people. Biesta (2017) further argues that this change should enable students to become educated in such a way that they develop ‘a relationship with their desires’ that is reflective, considerate and mature, and in doing so they self-regulate the sorts of desires and interests which, in an increasingly mature way, they might be expected to have.

Obviously, these aspirations for educative growth are not limited to students because they also include teachers. We, as teachers, ought to be growing in an educative sense through our continued engagement with educative experiences which include reflective thinking. Being educated involves our becoming more interested and curious regarding the many challenges and encounters we experience in our work which again require us to reassess what we are trying to achieve and why we are trying to achieve these things. As a consequence, what we desire and aspire to will be adjusted and with these we ourselves change. As Hullfish and Smith (1961, p. 59) conclude, ‘[e]ducation is, in fact, a remaking of individuals’ and so in a sense, teachers also are constantly being renewed through this process.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have argued that it is important to reflect upon and interrogate how we relate to professional standards. Through examining the standards for Australian teachers, we have identified that these are largely competency-based, and in light of Hagar (1994) and Barnett’s (1994) critique we need to give attention to the overall purposes for such standards; that is, what are the utmost aspirations for them and what is their value for us personally? Are they to enhance the freedom of teachers, students and society, for example? What intentions and thinking are teachers required to embody as they demonstrate and conform to such standards? What is being assumed regarding the nature of human persons—both as teachers and as students? Are students simply ‘learners’ whose role is to uncritically ‘receive’ as portrayed through Freire’s banking model, or are they co-participants in reading the world in which we find ourselves together?

A major point which has been made in this chapter is to consider whether we, as teachers, will be defined by these standards or whether we will relate to them in such a way that we may come to regard them as at best necessary but insufficient in order for us to be good teachers, or even whether they are unnecessary to teaching well at all? In order to engage with such reflection, we need to interrogate how ‘quality teaching’ is being presented through these standards and evaluate this in light of

‘educative teaching’. Much will depend on whether the purpose of the standards is to enable outside authorities to control the work of teachers or whether teachers themselves ought to control their own profession with or without standards of their own making.

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# Chapter 3

## Teaching Through Ethical Tensions: Between Social Justice, Authority and Professional Codes



Daniella J. Forster

**Abstract** This chapter focusses on how preservice teachers in particular can develop an ethical sensitivity to situations they find themselves in while at the same time responding critically to their unexamined assumptions and intuitions to ensure that their responses may be socially just. As the author argues, making moral decisions is not easy at the best of times and ethical dilemmas are strange things, not amenable to easy description or formulaic construction or resolution. The pedagogical value of a dilemma for teacher professional development is not necessarily to be found in sensational confrontation. Instead, every day and often very subtle or complex tensions and situations that can be easily overlooked, may provide instructive ethical stimuli. This chapter identifies key tensions that occur between teachers' sense of moral agency and values with a focus on questions of justice. Teachers struggle with questions of distributive justice and educational disadvantage including deficit thinking, resource allocation, streaming, stereotyping, dehumanising 'behaviour management' of student bodies, and encounters with power inequities and school hierarchies. Examples and analysis of preservice teachers are presented in order to explore different ways of understanding justice and modes of ethical authority. Forster argues that social justice is the 'bottom line' for teacher education and this chapter raises questions about justice and who is most deserving to explore different conceptualisations arising in preservice teacher ethical reflections.

Making moral decisions is not easy at the best of times, and ethical dilemmas themselves are strange things; not amenable to easy description or formulaic construction. The pedagogical value of a dilemma for teacher professional development is not necessarily a measure of sensational confrontation; rather, mundane, every day and often very subtle or complex tensions and situations that can be easily overlooked as 'ethical' provide instructive stimuli (Lyons, 1990; Levinson & Fay, 2016). This chapter identifies key tensions that occur between teachers' sense of moral agency and values, the moral authority of the regulatory instrument and implementation

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with a focus on questions of justice. Teachers struggle with dilemmas of distributive justice and educational disadvantage including deficit thinking, resource allocation, streaming, stereotyping, dehumanising ‘behaviour management’ of student bodies, and encounters with power inequities and school hierarchy. Examples and analysis of the experiences of preservice teachers are presented in order to explore different ways to understand justice and modes of ethical authority. Social a justice is the bottom line for teacher education, and this chapter raises questions about justice and who is most deserving to explore different conceptualisations arising in preservice teacher ethical reflections.

## Introduction

The technical knowledge cramming teacher education programmes today is about ‘what works’, a focus which risks closing off an essentially open and recursive system of meaningful human interaction (Osberg, Biesta, & Cilliers, 2008). Schooling is more prescribed and yet fragmented than ever before; infected by a virus known as GERM, the Global Education Reform Movement metaphor (Sahlberg, 2016). For instance, the Australian Curriculum ([www.australiancurriculum.edu.au](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au)) determines student progressions at each stage, where teachers expect to embed cross-curriculum priorities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, Engagement with Asia and Sustainability inside Learning Areas of English, Mathematics, Science, Humanities and Social Sciences, The Arts, Technologies, Health and Physical Education and Languages whilst also preparing General Capabilities in Literacy, Numeracy, Information and Communication Technology, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Understanding and Intercultural Understanding, with some Learning Areas and Stages more or less emphasising each. Some teaching practices are driven by the National Assessment of Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing regime, and to ensure this, there are preservice hurdles for initial teacher education students in the form of a Literacy and Numeracy Test (LANTITE) and competency-based assessment via the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership’s (AITSL) Australian Professional Standards of Teaching (APST). Arguably, this full composite of mandates present teachers and school leaders with a mind boggling myriad of learning outcomes and a squeeze of priorities. And yet Australian education is not, by a long way, an equitable system of schooling despite the progress made with Gonski’s recommendations to redistribute schooling resources to the most in need (Gonski et al., 2018).

Some of the more specialised knowledge and perhaps more difficult aspects to determine progression and measurably assess, such as Ethical Understanding might be given a less than comprehensive and holistic approach. But a General Capability such as Ethical Understanding is not new to Australian education. Historically, teachers have been expected to be moral exemplars engaged in the improvement of society and individual character alongside their role as knowledge providers, often with missionary zeal (Glegg, 2003; Lovat, 2005). Lovat (2005) report that the



nineteenth century saw the Australian teacher's role established as a fundamentally moral one. These expectations have since expanded towards multiculturalism and social justice as can be seen by the cross-curriculum priorities and the latter General Capabilities. Professional authorities expect 'specific attitudes to issues of gender, race, the environment, and human rights' (Glegg, 2003, p. 18).

However, it is widely agreed that teachers' ethical knowledge fades over time (Campbell, 2003), they become desensitised (Colnerud, 1997), and educational institutions may operate to anaesthetise moral agency (Biesta, 2010). Teachers often lack knowledge of, and specialised language to speak about ethics (Cigman, 2000; Thornberg & Oğuz, 2013), despite the range of significant ethical dilemmas they regularly face (Aultman, Williams-Johnson, & Schutz, 2009; Colnerud, 1997; Lyons, 1990; Pope, Green, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2009).

But where are the teacher education programmes and policies supporting *teachers'* ethical understandings? The conversation about 'good' teaching in Australia has arguably been hijacked by a deceptively 'common sense' standardisation discourse (Connell, 2009). Enabling standardisation of teacher performance in Australia the governing body, AITSL provides 'materials and evidence guides' that 'support the principles, policy and processes of accreditation, registration and certification'. The emphasis on 'evidence-based practice' and managerial accreditation processes has meant the development of a national 'Teacher Toolkit', 'Classroom Observation Strategies' and a 'My Standards App' amongst other structured guides and templates that bring the APST to every teacher's smart phone (<http://www.toolkit.aitsl.edu.au>). The standardisation rhetoric emerges from manufacturing 'quality assurance' that guarantees the reliability and usefulness of a product and scraps defective products. Yet becoming a good teacher does not share many characteristics with industrialised product fabrication and will not rely on the appropriate use of an App to demonstrate competency. The continued dominance of instrumentalism in education ought to make any educator think more carefully about their own purposes of education and educative value.

Recent work has demonstrated that on the whole Australian teacher educators, both administrators and instructors believe that ethics education is important to pre-service teacher learning and can have a positive effect on their ethical behaviour (Boon & Maxwell, 2016). However Boon and Maxwell's findings show standalone ethics courses in teacher education programmes are rare in Australian undergraduate programmes and non-existent in Masters programmes with the major institutional obstacle being lack of time, as teacher education programmes become crammed with preparation for the mandates described above. Internationally, the story is similar, educational ethics is an under-developed area of teacher preparation (Maxwell et al., 2016), and some call for the establishment of a sub-discipline which can provide consultation for school communities as educational ethicists, akin to the bioethicists' recommendations in public health (Levinson, 2017).

Embedding ethics in preservice teacher programmes, particularly foundations, appears to be the route most travelled in Australian initial teacher education (ITE). Boon and Maxwell (2016) defend ethics in ITE as an imperative largely based on policy grounds drawn from the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Lead-



ership (AITSL)'s standards of professional practice, and the perspectives of those in the teacher education field. Boon and Maxwell's work is a significant contribution which raises awareness that ethics is an institutional requirement, top-down, for professional competency. There is much more work to be done, however, to address the systematic contradictions teachers are faced with, in light of the prevailing audit culture of teacher professionalisation and the myriad of expectations placed upon those in educational institutions.

### *Ethics, Authority and the Moral Self*

Professional ethics are different to broad-based morality or personal values because of the functions and purposes of specific professional roles (Oakley & Cocking, 2006). School teachers have a moral and legal obligation protect the least powerful, particularly students, over whom they have a measure of pedagogical control and a mandate of forced attention until leaving age. They are often required to provide moral surveillance for the school community to prevent and report harm to those vulnerable to the misuses of power and authority, whether by peers, supervisors, colleagues, guardians, visitors, preservice teachers or casual staff. A code of ethics or conduct in teaching is the 'conscience of the profession' (van Nuland, 2009, p. 6). There are systematic resources available for the development of codes of ethics and conduct in teaching worldwide (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2009). Codes of ethics and conduct are essential but not perfect artefacts, providing moral legitimacy to the profession. These codes can be highly structured and detailed artefacts that shape action around difficult or morally concerning situations, developed by governing bodies such as the Department of Education or the College of Teachers (Forster, 2012). Codes of ethics and conduct work in conjunction with professional standards by seeking to clarify the profession's obligations to society and fairness of procedure, prevent conflicts of interest, and perhaps above all, protect the reputation of the Government of the day (Forster, 2012). These sometimes competing aims have brought many otherwise good teachers unstuck, whilst also relieving predatory teachers of their positions.

The Australian Professional Standards for Teaching touches on moral or ethical competency in Standard 4 and 7 (AITSL, 2011). Reading generously, these standards only require regulatory adherence and the ability to recognise the diversity inherent in a school's community. A healthy scepticism of the current political mechanisms in teaching can be balanced by accepting that the codes of conduct and ethics specific to each state and territory in Australia *are* necessary instruments of regulation and of guidance; designed to engender the community's trust and confidence in teachers as respected persons of integrity as well as a shared sense of professional identity and values.

There are some differences between documents titled 'codes of ethics' and 'code of conduct' found across States and Territories in Australian schooling (Forster, 2012). Codes of conduct are largely regulatory instruments whilst codes of ethics

tend towards aspirational ideals. These two categories, ‘aspirational’ and ‘regulatory’, may have implications for teachers’ ethical subjectivities; that is, the ways in which educational policy discourses generate, maintain and discipline teachers’ professionalism. Both aspirational and regulatory codes are instruments of discipline; the former wields power of the expectations of heightened vocational commitment and unreachable ideals and the latter wields the power of the potential for fear, humiliation and ostracism by the profession’s hierarchies.

Each of these instruments of discipline creates likelihood of inauthentic ethical agency, in the sense that the agent feels untrue to her highest moral ideals. This may arise from damage to the possibility for moral relationships resulting from a numbing of moral sensitivity and erosion of agency (Biesta, 2004). Drawing on Bauman, he argues that in a structured society, people feel they are part of a chain of command whereby their capacity to have moral effect on the suffering of others might be limited and overreached by the abdication of moral responsibility to others above and below them in a bureaucratic hierarchy. Further, some people are exempted from moral subjectivity (dehumanised); for instance, through deficit thinking around cultural groupings, of students, colleagues, families and so on. Finally, the receiving ‘object’ of moral action is reconstituted as a set of traits without a recognisable moral self, i.e. as a skill set or combination of competencies. This potential can be seen in the competency standards discourse that surrounds teachers in the neoliberal age.

Codes are simultaneously part of teachers’ performance management techniques; and these neoliberal logics can be internalised such that individual teachers may not be able or willing to question the ways these instruments separate and reduce the caring and educative labour of teaching to sets of seemingly common sense competencies. Key tensions here lie between the individual’s sense of moral agency, purpose and values, the question of the good, the authority of the regulatory instrument and its implementation.

## Developing Ethical Sensitivity

Many subtle but pervasive moral problems suffer an unreflective intuitive response (Maxwell et al., 2016). Teachers often articulate a lack of self-confidence as to how they should respond to ethical issues (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2016). But in many ways, this sense of uncertainty is a positive force, one which underlies the very possibility of ethico-political decisions. They face complex problems at work which can present them with conflicting goods. Their ‘dilemmas come out of working relationships between people... that are fed by the everyday interactions between them, that happen over time, and that have no real guarantee of success even though they require daily response and action’ (Lyons, 1990, p. 165). Teachers live with moral conflict. Some believe that this ‘requires a less confident and yet more particular wisdom’ (Lyons, 1990, p. 178). The development of ethical sensitivity is a first step.

This chapter provides excerpts from the experiences of preservice teachers who are beginning to grapple with moral problems, particularly those illustrating different

dimensions of justice in schooling. Whilst the preservice teachers' problems featured here are not 'resolved' in any way, they demonstrate that moral sensitivity to injustice comes in many forms and is the beginning of any reflective process about ethical dilemmas. It is especially important when the dominant discourse of professionalism in education presents some real challenges to authentic ethical subjectivity. Executing the fullness of one's moral obligations is often not satisfied by only following procedures; the procedures are a professional minimum, not a personal ideal. When presented with a difficult moral problem during a final-year practicum, one preservice teacher reflected:

Finally Mr [teacher-supervisor] explained to me, 'welcome to teaching, these things happen all the time' I left thinking that it must be inevitable that dilemmas arise in school but as long as we follow policy we are 'out of trouble'. (Susanne, 4th year)

*Susanne* then questions whether it is morally sufficient to follow policy, given her concern to stay 'out of trouble'. Since teachers meet students in large groups (unlike other professions such as lawyers or doctors), they are in a position where the needs of many individuals raise particular questions of fairness and justice (Colnerud, 1997). Teachers perceive tensions of distributive justice, for example, in assessment; between appropriately rewarding students for their efforts or rewarding measurable school standards which follow clear criteria (Shapira-Lishchinsky, p. 653). Just as in bioethics, where life-saving resources, such as transplant organs, are limited, educational resources vital to student learning and well-being, such as teacher time and genuine attentiveness, are also at a premium. However, it is arguably as difficult to evaluate what counts as relevant factors for additional educational resources as it is for life-saving resources. Who deserves special educational treatment when giving it to one will deny it to another?

Some students are excluded from full participation in school life or are otherwise prevented from making the most of the opportunities provided in an educational institution, thus reproducing and entrenching social inequities that result in future lives of impoverished choice and limited participation in society, particularly for those part of non-dominant, marginalised or minority groups. The hardships and disadvantages experienced by some students are injustices, which would not occur in an ideal society and a somewhat more just one would do better to prevent. Structural social transformation, collective and individual action all contribute to greater justice. To make a contribution to greater justice in schooling, teachers do need to be sensitive to different forms of injustices which allow them to perceive the conditions and justifications under which they ought to respond and act. As well, ways of envisioning the goals or ideal of a just society are a necessary part of trying to work out if what we are headed towards is worthwhile.

## Lenses of Justice: Distributive, Recognitive and Capabilities

To understand a fuller range of injustices, political philosophers such as John Rawls, Nancy Fraser and Martha Nussbaum have characterised justice differently. There are significant contrasting views in political philosophy about the nature of justice and what is required for the just society, or in other words, how one might best describe what it means to be fair as a society. Equitable distribution of resources and opportunities is a different goal from parity of social participation, and different again from being capable of enjoying a flourishing life.

Rawls (1971) argues that justice ought to always be considered with respect to needs, regardless of other features. The ‘worst off’ are those whose needs are gravest in respect of income, inheritance and other goods. He asserted that how individuals or groups came to be in grave need is irrelevant. For Rawls, justice is a matter of present patterns of distribution, not past entitlements. Rawls defends a set of principles based on the fair redistribution of opportunities and the use of positive discrimination using the ‘veil of ignorance’ as a sorting tool for the rational, impartial person. The principles Rawls argues a rational agent ought to use are briefly stated here:

- (1) Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all
- (2) Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both
  - (a) To the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the joint savings principle [fair investment for future generations]
  - (b) Attached to offices open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity

The veil of ignorance asks us to imagine a future in which societal roles and advantages are completely re-fashioned and redistributed. In this future, you do not know what role or position you will be reassigned. Using this ‘veil of ignorance’ Rawls argues, only then can you truly consider how best to distribute opportunities.

Nancy Fraser challenged and extended theories of justice beyond redistributive measures to heal the harms of hierarchical social values, towards full cultural recognition. Her initial ‘bivalent’ conception of recognitive and redistributive justice argued that the recognition of different cultural values and the redistribution of economic opportunity are not oppositional;

far from occupying two airtight separate spheres, economic injustice and cultural injustice are usually interimbricated so as to reinforce each other dialectically. Cultural norms that are unfairly biased against some are institutionalised in the state and the economy. Meanwhile, economic disadvantage impedes equal participation in the making of culture, in public spheres and in everyday life. The result is often a vicious circle of cultural and economic subordination. (Fraser, 1997, p. 15)

In response to critics regarding a lack of political voice and representation, she adapted to a three dimensional model which attempts to present a comprehensive articulation of the ‘interimbrication’ of socio-economic, cultural and political injustices with the aim towards participatory parity, which she describes as:

...social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life. On the view of justice as participatory parity, overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalised obstacles that prevent some people from participating on par with others, as full partners in social interaction. (Fraser, 1996, p. 27, cited in Keddie, 2012, p. 263)

Applying Fraser's work to education has led to pedagogical aims which do not simply acknowledge student difference, as this is 'to miss the paternalism often embedded in teacher-student relations.... recognitive justice must begin from the standpoint of the least advantaged' (Mills & Gale, 2001, p. 69) and requires dispositions to actively take part in socially democratic processes and a capability for taking a standpoint (Gale & Densmore, 2000). These are defined in terms of

three interrelated conditions: (1) fostering respect for different social groups through their self-identification; (2) opportunities for groups' self-development and self-expression; and (3) the participation of groups in making decisions that directly affect them, through their representation on determining bodies (Gale & Densmore, 2000, p. 260).

To flesh out the idea of capabilities in a way which reject the skills set common to the dominant and hollow competencies approaches of professional performance discussed earlier, Martha Nussbaum presents a teleological framework describing what it means to have a complete, holistic, suffused, dignified life which is most fully human. As a view of education for social justice, Nussbaum's work argues that educators ought to emphasise the development of a set of ten morally rich and thick descriptive and normative capabilities. These, she argues, enable the flourishing of each and every individual to lead their life, participating economically, but also as a citizen, interpersonally in ways which enhance the dignity of individuals and collectives. Practical reason and affiliation are two capabilities of the framework of ten capabilities with multiple realisability which have particular importance to education for social justice in this theory (Walker, 2003). A person with a capability for practical reason is 'able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life' (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 79). A person with the capability for affiliation is

able to live with and toward other human beings, to engage in various social interactions; to be able to imagine the situation of another and to have compassion for that situation; to have the capability for both justice and friendship... having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliations; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others (Nussbaum, 2000, 79–80)

Whilst exceedingly brief, it should be apparent how these three distinct approaches to social justice identify significant dimensions and contribute useful lenses to working towards a highly complex goal in education. Material redistribution can be a priority when economic disadvantage is primary; whilst the recognition of standpoint and enhancement of a group's representation is crucial in challenging hegemonic values and creating collective solidarity; and yet these are not the same as educating for an individual's capabilities to advocate for one's own sense of flourishing and a dignified life which is particularly significant for displacing deeply internalised disadvantage. As Keddie (2012) explains, working towards social justice in education often requires enhancing one's 'toolkit' (an unfortunate metaphor in today's reified

schooling climate) with ‘a multilayered theoretical approach’ in order to ‘comprehend the complex manifestations of injustice that characterise current equity and schooling landscapes’ (p. 276).

## Identifying Ethical Dilemmas as Research

Evidence brought to bear in this chapter arises from a qualitative study using critical ethical incidents as its method, situated in a final-year initial teacher education course about ethical teaching. The critical ethical incident as a search method involves the need to express underlying ethical meanings of what is usually taken for granted, and entail interpretation of what events constituted turning points in ethical experiences (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011). ‘Ethical incidents in school become critical because they present the teacher with a dilemma in which there may be at least two mutually exclusive courses of action. They provide an opportunity for reflective processes by questioning the way things in school operate’ (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2016, p. 246).

There are different kinds of dilemmas. For instance, even in ideal situations a teacher cannot know everything and has to base her decisions on incomplete information. Other dilemmas she faces might arise from the broad range of *sources of conflicting obligations*, whilst others arise from a broad range of *different conflicting obligations* (McConnell, 2014). Moral dilemmas form a crucial part of teaching about the theory and practice of ethics in many contexts, but in the teacher education tutorial room they can feel somewhat contrived and overly constructed and due to their hypothetical nature fail to generate any compelling sense of moral obligation. There are classical dilemmas, such as the trolley<sup>1</sup> problem, used to illustrate differences of principle and emphasis amongst key meta-ethical positions, and there are predeveloped dilemmas and problematic situations used to illustrate the special characteristics of and moral complexities common to professional roles. A dilemma can be a useful pedagogical tool, but one that has been argued as insufficient on its own (Warnick & Silverman, 2011).

The experience of identifying, describing and intellectually wrestling with morally laden problems brings educational value to learning professional ethics that sensitises participants to the ethical dimensions of school-based human relations (Chapman, Forster, & Buchanan, 2013). Today’s ‘teachers are parts of systems and caught in complicated structures, which may be morally desensitising’ (Colnerud, 2003, p. 560). Preservice teachers are not yet desensitised but may not yet be sensitised either. Having said this, preservice teachers express vigorous perceptions, of the use and abuse of power and of personal obligation to the needs of others, some of which

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<sup>1</sup>The trolley problem is neatly described in the following excerpt from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/doing-allowing/> and the thought experiment has propagated a multitude of memes which attempt to outdo each other in terms of philosophical complexity see: <http://nymag.com/selectall/2016/08/trolley-problem-meme-tumblr-philosophy.html>.

may be full blown dilemmas whilst others challenge personally held beliefs or moral intuitions, as illustrated in the following reflection:

I wonder if as a new teacher, I have felt more strongly about the situation because I have not yet been exposed ... to such experiences. I have a genuine concern for a lot of the students I taught as their day-to-day life may often seem like something out of a book or movie. This particular situation may not sit perfectly within the context of an ethical dilemma, ...but it does not sit well within my ethical beliefs, therefore I felt it worthy to discuss. (Matthew, 4th year preservice teacher)

Drawn from a collection of emerging teachers' writings about ethical experiences from a regional Australian university, the excerpts illustrate different situations and perceptions that can be understood as questions of justice in schooling. The larger study consists of a set of 10 transcribed group dialogues with a total of 136 participants discussing open-ended ethical dilemma scenarios; 123 individual, standalone responses to an open-ended task about an ethically significant first-hand experience and 50 sets of online dialogues to the same open-ended task. Human research ethics approval was obtained in each case of variation to the original approval with participation solicited via email and being entirely voluntary. Given the scope of this chapter, only a small portion of empirical material can be discussed, which is sourced from a cohort of final-year Initial Teacher Education students.

The following discussion therefore focusses on critical ethical incidents where a sense of justice features in preservice teacher reflections. Having an intuitive sense of justice often involves experiencing feelings of outrage against perceptions of injustice or a sense of unfairness about the choices of action on offer, and of who deserves certain kinds of action as recompense, restoration, recognition or perhaps, retribution. What I attempt to illustrate, therefore, are different ways in which questions of justice arise for the preservice teacher, in their own voice.

## Questions of Justice in School

This chapter is partly prompted by the call for more focus and greater understanding about the links between preservice teachers' understandings of and attitudes towards social justice, and their practise in the classroom, since these areas can be in conflict (Mills & Ballantyne, 2016). Standardised teaching mechanisms can make it difficult to justify taking a different approach for the 'exceptions' to the rule, those students or situations that can't easily be categorised. Further, the principle of practicality can trump or overshadow ideals of moral and educational goodness. For instance, despite overwhelming findings demonstrating that social and academic inequities become entrenched long term in student's lives with the practice of 'streaming'—separating students into 'like' groups for targeted differentiated teaching—this practice has become the norm in Australian schooling (Johnston & Wildy, 2016). The responsibility of systemic bias arising from the fundamental inequities in the Australian educational sector in terms of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, indigeneity, and



social class can be difficult to attribute in a moral way to a particular agent, and individual teachers can find themselves taking on much of the day-to-day moral burden of these inequities. This can be a difficult burden to carry over the length of a career in teaching, and everyday behaviour management issues can be challenging for preservice teachers during their early practicums. The following excerpt briefly illustrates one preservice teacher's struggle with a particular problem of fairness which arose from a practice of separating secondary students in Year 7 whose parents purchased a Department of Education laptop under the Federal Government scheme of the time from those who didn't.

In year seven, before being issued a DER<sup>2</sup> laptop, parents of students were able to elect whether they would like their child in a laptop or non-laptop streamed class. If they decided to be in a laptop stream, a laptop/tablet was purchased from the school for \$4200 and used throughout year seven and eight. Within both grades three of the five classes were laptop classes. This meant that inevitably two classes in both years had less access to a computer, and were streamed as a result. The non-laptop classes had access to a computer lab twice a term, and all students had access to student email and the virtual classroom. However, throughout the term, it became evident...[in] teaching both streams the same program, the students with laptops were able to get through more work during class time, achieving their learning outcomes faster, and ultimately affecting their final and summative assessment tasks.

[In] the final assessment task all students had the same expectations, in regards to work being uploaded and handed in on time. However, it was evident that no exceptions were being made for their lack of computer access. In other words, they had all of the same responsibilities but none of the privileges. The students needed more access to computers in the term, however the labs were booked a term in advance. ..., I also did not want to 'spoon-feed' the class the information that the other (laptop) streams had researched themselves, which is what I observed many of the other teachers doing... The issue at large was creating an equitable assessment task for both streams of students. (Amanda, 4th Year)

This excerpt raises some interesting questions, and, perhaps, some exasperation from readers. *Amanda* recognises the injustice occurring at her internship school which immediately reduces the capacity of students, who for whatever reason, could not purchase the advantages of learning technology so ubiquitous in society. It seems that the students' disadvantages were well recognised by the other teachers of Year 7; however, *Amanda* questioned the ways in which the teachers chose to 'level the field' so to speak. She was particularly concerned about the practice she termed 'spoon-feeding' which the teachers used to make some assurances the technologically disadvantaged Year 7 students could produce the expected standards within the time frame provided, in their outcomes. These questions, presumably, rest on educational grounds and bring sharply into focus the ways in which teaching shortcuts in practice unintentionally prevent potentially more educationally worthwhile experiences. As Amanda notes, these more worthwhile experiences at least partially

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<sup>2</sup>DER: Digital Education Revolution scheme- a federally funded scheme between 2009 and 2013 which provided laptops to school students. See: <http://www.dec.nsw.gov.au/detresources/about-us/how-we-operate/national-partnerships/digital-education-revolution/news/bulletins/clbulletin10.pdf>. It has been largely overcome by BYOD policies- Bring Your Own Device, which allows students to bring their own, sometimes more cutting-edge technology to school (depending on wealth).



consist of students being more autonomous in their learning, and researching for themselves rather than copying out predigested information.

If we were to apply the briefly described lenses on social justice to educational problems such as Amanda's ethical reflection, it would require us to consider what measures the school, its teachers and students, might apply to ensure that a form of educational justice prevails. Initially, I suggest, one ought to consider what the aim is. Educational justice is not necessarily equivalent to the production by any means of an equal 'outcome' of assessable outputs, but owes a lot to a rich and process-oriented understanding of education. That is, students ought to be afforded engagement with *educationally worthwhile* activities throughout their schooling experiences. In the case of *Amanda* and her Year 7 students, the question remains: what choices could she and her fellow colleagues make for those least (technologically) advantaged students to provide them with the greatest *educational* benefit, which fairly invested in this group of students' opportunities to develop their independence and intellectual capabilities, just like their fellow students who have access to the school laptop scheme? If we were behind the veil of ignorance in regards to the group in which each the Year 7 child was placed what wishes should we have for the fair teaching and assessment of every child? If streaming the disadvantaged children into a separate group for special intervention were the best method for addressing their needs, how should these needs be interpreted in terms of educational emancipation from this disadvantage?

Assessment raises some of the trickiest questions about the fairness of educational aims and design (Pope et al., 2009). Testing and measurement of learning is fraught. Again, the practice of streaming is evident in the following excerpt. Here *Connor* is teaching in a school that separates junior students not on economic grounds, like *Amanda's* school, but on perceived 'learning potential', capacity or previous achievements in the school environment. He is concerned, like other preservice teachers, in the authenticity of the education being provided to students, and particularly worried about what he calls 'teaching for the test', another way of describing 'spoon-feeding'.

At the core of this practice of 'teaching to the test', in the case of my experience, is the understanding by the school's administration, conveyed to me directly by the department head teacher that, 'parents pay a lot of money to send their kids here, and they want good marks on their tests'. This has resulted in tests being designed around information contained in the core text and units subsequently being designed to conform to, and primarily utilise, that text. For many subject areas this may be appropriate, I cannot say as I have no experience with them, but for my subject area the enforced over reliance on one text, as simple as it may be to test on, is inappropriate and ultimately delivers lower levels of authentic achievement and does not promote the critical literacy of students. Consultation with my cooperating teachers often resulted in the suggestion that lessons should be 'kept simpler', that I should 'lower my expectations' and that 'the kids need to copy things down so that they have something in their books covering what is in the test'. While understanding that these were junior students I was trying to teach, they were not the bottom classes and I felt that any challenges posed were well within their reach. (Connor, 4th year)

*Connor* seems concerned that he should not assume the limits of his students' potential and maintain high expectations of them as individuals. I suspect that he has an optimism and belief in his students that delegate to each of them the dignity of

human potential for critical literacy (Shor, 1999). Perhaps though, *Connor* overestimates the intellectual stage of his junior students whilst his colleagues try to help him recalibrate so that the assessment enables every child to demonstrate their learning. But something remains of Connor's point, however, about the significance of the relationship between assessment and the educational experience.

*Connor's* experience at the exclusive private school raises questions for us about the potential role of deficit thinking in the judgement of student ability (Ladwig & McPherson, 2017), whether assessment should feel simple or uncomfortable, and may be useful as a prompt for discussions about assumptions of limits and educational aims. Since teachers need to differentiate between students by grading and assessing, they are placed in situations where they may doubt the assessment's reliability or that their judgement causes harm to students (Colnerud, 1997). Further, teachers' responsibilities to students extend long term, as they are preparing young people for future life. The immediate and long-term needs of students can be in conflict; and institutional requirements can create tensions with student needs, teachers' needs and basic values about the role of education. With the proliferation worldwide of national testing schemes, teachers face common ethical conflicts regarding the potential for 'score pollution' (Pope et al., 2009). This is where test outcomes misrepresent the students' mastery of the assessed material, for example, by testing memorisation of familiar items rather than generalised mastery, such as critical literacy, leading teachers to believe that institutional demands trump the genuine educational needs of students. One can then ask whether justice, which includes an individuals' capabilities, has been undermined.

But what if the culture of assessment goes horribly wrong, and it is the students whose integrity is in question? In the following example, one quarter of a cohort of students plagiarise a task. We don't know why they plagiarised, we know only that some misused web content and others copied peer work; two different forms of action arguably morally different too. In this example, *Genevieve* expresses ambivalence that 'justice is blind' to the individual circumstances of each student, and worries that teachers have lumped the whole group of students into the same bag, riding roughshod over underlying conditions.

Out of the two hundred students in the year fifty of them plagiarised from a website [of interactive educational content]. Some students had also had plagiarised some of their classmates responses. In response to this all the students that plagiarised were given a zero but were given another task to complete so they would not get a non-attempt on their report. This may not be fair based on the principles of taking each individual child's circumstance into account. It was believed that as a large proportion of students had plagiarised that an example needed to be set so that in future tasks that this would not happen. Students who had individual circumstances were disadvantaged but this was thought to be best answer to the ethical dilemma. (*Genevieve*, 4th Year)

Ought the teachers have differentiated punishments on other foundations? Was there, perhaps, a culture of antagonistic misunderstanding between students and teachers? *Genevieve* questions the blanket punishment, conceding the possibility of another, different task to mitigate impact.

The intersections between class, ethnicity, gender and school success are complex, and longstanding sociological research indicates hierarchical forms of knowledge which feed into expectations about student agency, social reproduction and inequality (Luke, 2010). For some groups of students, school culture positions them with a lack of voice which undermines parity of participation in school life. This may lead to opting-out behaviour, such as cheating. Justice in terms of recognition, then challenges that ‘teachers to create real opportunities to get to know their students and for their students to get to know them and themselves, including whom they are and what they believe’ (Mills & Gale, 2001, p. 69). Dismantling taken-for-granted norms where those dominant forms of culture held in highest esteem by, for example, white, western, heteronormative society gives way to the power of self-recognition and revaluing of difference. The aim is to support conditions where students can self-identify differently and gain equal participatory voice in the community. *Genevieve’s* reflection prompts questions about how teachers and students can work together to recognise and value each other and to embark on a more genuinely shared vision of their schooling.

Reflections from other final-year preservice teachers, such as *Abby* and *Leah* indicate that a willingness to make connections with individual students, and to care for them, dominate their perceptions of ethical experiences during practicums. Relatively mundane experiences which require balancing the needs of one student amongst the needs of many can be morally puzzling. For instance, one preservice teacher was struggling to manage the poor in-class behaviour of one student, whose behaviour was affecting the learning outcomes of the whole class. She quickly found herself deep in questionable territory relating to the extent and style of response she ought to make;

After some time, I brought up the issue that I felt her behaviour in the previous day’s lesson was inappropriate and seemed ‘out of character’. I wasn’t prepared with what [happened]... next. The student’s eyes began to well up with tears, and she proceeded to explain to me that she was experiencing personal issues at home. I found myself uncertain about the right response to this situation. As an intern I didn’t feel equipped nor qualified enough to deal with this situation, yet here in front of me, was a student who was obviously seeking help. (Leah, 4th year)

Striking a balance of impartiality and relationship building when each student is part of a larger group might be considered an intuitive task. An experienced teacher might respond to the emotional needs of a distressed student as a matter of care rather than justice, but to those for whom classroom teaching has been a largely University-based experience up to a point, the reality of the care demands can be unsteady, with some withdrawing from it and others over-extending, *leaning into* the individual or perhaps even losing sight of impartiality altogether.

Relationship boundaries in teaching can be difficult to ascertain (Aultman et al., 2009) but philosophers have long considered the delicate balance of emotional labour embedded in the network of relations between the cared-for and the carer (Noddings, 2010). Executing moral obligations of the one and the many is a question of the very basis of justice as a form of impartiality challenged by the singularity of the individual’s need for recognition, as a unique individual and as a being connected to others

in a network of relations. Human beings are constituted by the relations in which we are embedded. The caring relation is complex, and central to the reciprocal nature of teachers' educational work with students. The one-caring for others steps 'outside' of oneself, learns to be empathic so as to build trustful relationships; and the cared-for must learn to allow and accept caring. Again, considering justice as a set of capabilities, including that of affiliation, there is educational significance in forming and maintaining relationships for life, sustainable and genuinely connected, not simply instrumental for the convenience of smooth classroom management. Understanding one another is reflected in the ways in which teachers report on student progress. Take this last preservice teacher reflection on her report writing experience:

While there was not set comments for the reports I was writing you were restricted in the language and comments you could use. I feel this structure somewhat prevent you from giving a true and accurate representation of the student's progress. The DET code of conduct (2009) outlines the need for fairness, respect, integrity and responsibility throughout the teaching profession and while the highly structured report writing progress does cover teachers for accountability, it somewhat fails the students and their efforts for the semester. (Abby, 4th year)

Finally, Abby is cognisant of what it might take to do justice to each and every individual; to represent them in their uniqueness and honour their singular educational journey. She can't shed her own standpoint with which she will perceive her students though; and we may well suspect her to be overly ambitious to attempt a 'true and accurate representation' of another human being. Yet again, however, we also must accept there are pragmatic and institutional limitations preventing her from fulfilling the obligation she senses she ought to fulfil. Each of the three lenses of justice presented earlier provide insightful perspectives drawing on economic, cultural, political and personal dimensions which together give us means to ask questions about how to do justice better.

## Conclusion

In the face of ethical problems, tensions and more puzzling dilemmas, research indicates that professionals draw on a range of different moral principles, approaches and meta-ethical positions and rarely is any pure theory consistently applied (Bartels et al., 2015). We consider a mixture of ethically relevant factors, including irrational factors such as emotion and individual preferences. What is needed is not the absence of professional ethics, but an understanding that moral thinking is not simply the result of applying a set of policies and procedures, augmented by the process of considering ethically relevant features when faced with a unique and often personally significant professional situation that requires careful consideration in relation to the question of educational value.

Just as any person, preservice teachers demonstrate a range of uncertainties and perceptions about doing justice in school and it is possible these differences arise

from base assumptions and intuitions, some of which are about the nature of justice itself, whilst others rely on developing professional knowledge, experience and sense of self. In presenting preservice teachers' critical ethical incidents, I have appealed to different lenses within the contemporary political context of schooling as a means to explore and challenge assumptions and intuitions. In some cases from the study described above, it was clear that we needed to reconsider problematic ideas about meritocracy, equity, entitlement, and disadvantage such that economic, cultural, political, relational and individual dimensions can be more acutely considered and honoured.

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# Chapter 4

## Teacher Responsibility



Alex Kostogriz

**Abstract** In contrast to the representation of teachers as free agents whose professional knowledge, skills and ability to demonstrate a sense of mandated moral duty signify their professional identity, Kostogriz argues for an alternative understanding of professional ethics ‘as an ability to respond to others—that is, ethics as responsibility’, or, as he later puts it, ethics as ‘responsibility’. Kostogriz draws attention to an increasingly important tension between, on the one hand, the externally mandated expectation that teachers comply with performance indicators (standards) which conceive of professional ethics as ‘a moral add-on to knowledge, skills and behaviour’, and on the other, the question of whether this captures well enough just what constitutes the professional ethics of teachers. Significantly, the argument draws on the experiences of beginning teachers as they work to establish relations with students, revealing the situated nature of teachers’ work from which it is clear that a sense of ‘relational practice’ emerges grounded in an ethics or responsibility. What these experiences reveal is, in a sense, the poverty of externally mandated performance indicators emphasising accountability in relation to high-stakes testing (a relatively recent policy demand), while putting to one side codes of conduct drawing on broadly agreed moral principles. In Kostogriz’s view, this illustrates a turn away from the moral nature of education and the ethical in human relations such that teachers’ ‘only motivation is to enact externally mandated performance indicators and moral principles’, a situation not helped by initial teacher education programmes which defer so readily to an externally imposed representation of the professional teacher. In response, Kostogriz urges an awareness of the human subject (teacher, student), as always in the process of becoming, interconnected with each other in the same ongoing experience of being. In this relational process of self to self and self with self, we develop an ethic of responsibility to and for one another.

Professional ethics of teachers has acquired increased attention in the context of standards-based reforms, indicating broader concerns about raising teacher account-

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ability and public trust. The interest in the problematic of ethics, however, has been largely secondary to standards that function as a means of monitoring teachers' performance and compliance. In most cases, educational jurisdictions and regulators perceive professional ethics as a moral add-on to knowledge, skills and behaviour that teachers are required to demonstrate. What follows from this is a universalised and seemingly empowering representation of teachers as a 'free' subject who can make a difference on the basis of their professional knowledge and skills, and also on the basis of a moral duty attached to such a view of the subject. This perception raises a set of questions about what counts as professional ethics for teachers and, more specifically, about the origin of ethics in teaching, beyond teacher compliance to codes of practice.

This chapter, therefore, questions the representation of teachers as a self-directed and rational collective subject who is motivated to act professionally by externally mandated performance indicators and moral principles. It offers an alternative view of professional ethics as an ability to respond to others—that is, ethics as responsibility. Given the pervasiveness of standards-based reforms in countries around the world, research into the professional ethics of teachers is both timely and significant. The chapter draws on Australian research into experiences of beginning teachers as example that has implications for other jurisdictions. The study focussed on the teachers' perceptions of preparedness for work in diverse Australian schools. Establishing relations with students emerged as a key challenge and achievement of the teachers. In telling stories about their experiences, they situated their responsibility for teaching in proximal relations with students. In doing so, beginning teachers articulated their sense of professional ethics as a relational practice of responding to the student's sense of vulnerability, misrecognition, affective state or a creative idea. Responsibility in this sense is not just a matter of drawing on codes of professional practice, but rather of deciding how to respond to a demand placed on the teacher.

## **Introduction**

What is the professional ethics of teachers? Why do we need to turn to this question today? And, whose turn is it to turn to ethics in and for education? These questions are timely in conditions when professional ethics has been absorbed by the managerial culture of schooling in which ethics becomes tantamount to the moral criteria of standards-based accountability. Indeed, the reign of accountability has led to a growing distinction between ethics and performativity, subject and object and, in turn, between what ought to be and what is. This is because standards-based accountability is increasingly mediating teacher judgements and actions. It is seen by policy-makers and regulators as a means to impose normativity that would enable teachers to judge the validity and effectiveness of their practice. The reign of accountability threatens to dissolve their sense of ethics as responsibility for the actual and concrete student(s) into a permanent anxiety about meeting performance indicators and delivering test scores. How have we arrived at the situation that delegitimises

the ethical in teaching practice? I would argue that the answer to this question can be found in an increasing tension between the professionalisation of teaching and ethics as a form of self-regulation and the regulation of teachers' work by the state.

A brief account of the history of teacher preparation and schooling in Australia (Aspland, 2006) shows the intimate connection of professionalism and ethics. From the inception of public school systems in the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a steady shift away from the apprenticeship model of teacher training imported from England towards the college based teacher preparation model. This shift towards the professionalisation of teaching was characterised by the introduction of teacher associations that laid claims to occupational knowledge and practice related to the 'craft of teaching' (Aspland, 2006). What was notable about the very idea of the professionalisation of teaching is that the profession entered in a social contract with the state to serve the society in exchange for professional autonomy. The state gave to the profession an undertaking to provide public service and the profession formulated its ideals in delivering public goods. Teaching was claimed to be a 'calling', and teachers were given certain autonomy to develop regulations concerning conduct and ethics, but not over teacher education and registration. As a result, this project involved the bureaucratisation of the profession to control a body of knowledge and skills, division of labour, training credentials and training programmes, and to impose rules (cf. Weber, 1978).

During the last century, the professionalisation of teachers in Australia was marked by further bureaucratisation of professional and institutional practices. Teachers' work was closely monitored by state education departments responsible for its staff and overall performance. Teachers were subject to supervision and control by inspectors who established rules and procedures to improve efficiency and deployment of the right people in the right positions. The inspection system functioned to ensure that teaching practices were reflective of the latest developments in discipline specific knowledge and pedagogy, as well as responsive to ever changing policies and directions. This form of controlling teachers' work assumed a commitment of all the teachers to open up their practices to criticism, accepting responsibility for teaching so that excellent teachers could be rewarded with promotion and incompetent teachers were dealt with. In the late nineteen sixties, the system of inspection was disbanded for its often unfair and reductive treatment of teacher's work (Kleinhenz & Ingvarson, 2004).

As Lortie (1975) once argued, teachers' professional knowledge, roles and responsibilities have always been different from those of educational bureaucracy. Underlying this difference is the ethical base of teacher professionalism that teachers attempt for formulate, albeit with a different level of success and agreement (Martin, 2013). Nonetheless, an ideal of serving some transcendental values and asserting greater devotion to doing good work than to economic rewards is central to a profession (Freidson, 2001). For example, the professional ideal—the moral essence of teacher professionalism—mobilises a sense of collective responsibility for educating young people, as well as for developing professional knowledge and capabilities of the profession. In this regard, the realisation of the ideal is linked to its recognition by the

public and the state, ideally through trust, and depends on the level of professional autonomy and control over specialised knowledge and practices (Freidson, 2001).

Hence, the nineteen sixties and seventies saw the rise of discipline specific professional associations. They have provided a platform for discipline areas to represent their professional knowledge through teachers' voices and collaboration, conferences and publications, as well as offering rich opportunities for professional learning. Through this kind of work, teachers have established the mechanism of professional self-regulation and horizontal responsibility that functions to ensure high level of expertise and a sense of professional duties. While self-regulation and accountability to colleagues is one of the central features of teacher professionalism, professional associations have led the work of teachers so that their practices are reflective and responsive to changing classroom contexts and to the socio-cultural dynamics in the broader society. Not long ago, some professional associations were involved in a collective action of developing professional standards in the light of growing public concerns about the quality and effectiveness of teaching in Australian schools (e.g. STELLA, 2002). This type of self-regulation has been relatively successful in counteracting several 'waves' of governmental interventions into the regulation of Australian teachers' work (Brennan, 2009).

However, new (and mutating) forms of political reason and discourse have emerged in the last two decades. They have acquired a form of standards-based reforms, aiming to dramatically change the face and function of public education, social relations between the state and the profession, including those that are characterised by the audited technologies of accountability. The reforms have been triggered by mistrust towards the professional claims and ability of the profession to ensure teaching quality. For example, a recent report of an Australian Council for Educational Research (Thompson, De Bortoli, & Underwood, 2017) on the performance of Australian students in scientific, reading and mathematical literacies (OECD, 2016) has shown that Australia is slipping backwards relative to high-performing OECD countries. Although the reasons for this trend are multiple, the media singled out teaching quality as a key problem.

Drawing on the results of a principals' questionnaire in the PISA report (Thompson et al., 2017), *The Australian* argued for strengthening education reforms to increase both teacher quality and accountability:

Most parents have long known that teaching quality is what makes or breaks their children's success at school... Students' learning is being hindered by teachers failing to meet individual students' needs. Teacher absenteeism, teachers resisting change and not being well prepared for classes emerged as more serious impediments to learning than student behaviour problems... The report confirms what *The Australian* has argued for years: that improving teaching quality should be the focus of efforts by governments and education authorities to lift results. ('Quality teaching must be the focus of school reform', 2017).

This is not to say that both Commonwealth and State governments in Australia have not listened to the *vox populi* articulated by the media pundits. Educational reforms—their justification and implementation—have relied on the strong alliance between the rightist policy-makers and the media, both blaming teachers for failing to deliver quality learning outcomes and teacher educators for failing to recruit motivated and

high-achieving school-leavers and to provide quality teacher ‘training’ courses. This strategy of creating ‘moral panics’ is not new, of course, and has been widely used in Australia and elsewhere to represent teaching as a low trust profession, thereby intensifying regulatory and accountability regimes as a way of displacing the claims of professionalism. What is new, however, is the impact of this governing rationality on the teacher’s sense of responsibility for education—transcendental values in teachers’ work that still can be found in some codes of professional ethics, in discourses about choosing the profession and in teacher narratives.

This chapter, therefore, questions the representation of teachers as a self-directed and rational collective subject who is motivated to act professionally by externally mandated performance indicators and moral principles. It offers an alternative view of teacher ethics as an ability to respond to others—that is, ethics as responsibility. The chapter draws on research into experiences of beginning teachers, narrating about their successes and challenges in their first year out. Establishing relations with students has emerged as a key challenge and achievement of the teachers. In telling stories about their experiences, they have situated their responsibility for teaching in proximal relations with students. In doing so, beginning teachers have articulated their sense of ethics as a relational practice of responding to the student’s sense of vulnerability, misrecognition, affective state or a creative idea. Responsibility in this sense is not just a matter of drawing on codes of professional practice, but rather of deciding how to respond to a demand placed on the teacher.

## **The Political Architecture of Accountability**

As a result of mistrust of the professional claims of teachers, professional ethics has been displaced by new educational management. The rationale of turning from ethics to educational management is predominantly a political one—that is, the turn to the political is the turn away from the ethical. Policy-makers are no longer interested in how the teaching profession can reinforce public trust by setting forth and/or reviewing its ethical standards. Rather, they are interested in increasing demands for accountability of school systems, teachers and teacher educators. Making teachers and schools accountable through high-stakes testing has become a hallmark of standards-based reforms in Australian states since the early 1990s. In 2008, the National Assessment Project—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) was introduced on a national scale to assess all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in reading, writing, language conventions and numeracy. This test, the proponents believe, should clarify expectations, lead to improvements in student learning, and motivate greater effort on the part of teachers and students. They also believe that reporting students’ test results on the *My School* website is a key way of ensuring accountability on the part of the Australian school systems. The website represents a new level of transparency that enables parents to locate statistical and contextual information about schools, see how they perform, compare them and supposedly make informed choices.

In addition to this, teachers have been subjected to performance accountability measures by the introduction of professional standards that refer to the three domains of teachers' work—professional knowledge, practice and engagement (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2011). The standards are used to make judgements about their ability to teach, work collegially, reflect on their work, develop their professional capabilities and so on. The mapping of teachers' performance against the standards becomes therefore a proxy for their effectiveness. This supposedly enables teachers to reflect on their work. In addition to mediating their professional self-reflexivity, standards claim to provide a framework for others to judge their performance. According to AITSL (2011, p. 2), professional standards 'present a common understanding and language' for the profession, teacher educators, bureaucrats and the public to evaluate teaching practices in order to ensure their quality. Therefore, standards play a dual role as a representation of teacher effectiveness and a mechanism of teacher accountability.

Equally, numerous accountability measures have been implemented to improve the quality of initial teacher education (Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group [TEMAG], 2015), ranging from new selection requirements to the assessment of literacy and numeracy standards of preservice teachers and their classroom readiness. These TEMAG-informed reforms have been implemented swiftly. Indeed, there is a sense of competition between State Governments in managing the perceived initial teacher education (ITE) quality risks in their jurisdictions—that is, who is more effective, expeditious and harsher in reforming their teacher education landscapes. In such a competitive managerial environment, the implementation of neoliberal accountability policies and standards-based reforms depends not only on the top-down enforcement of policy measures (such as accreditation standards and reporting) but also and increasingly on the collaboration between governments, ITE providers and schools in preparing future teachers. This accountability model implies an ideal environment in which all the partners share a sense of collective responsibility for ITE, have a common understanding of aims and goals for the professional education of future teachers and hence collaborate in a formally organised and yet collegial way.

There is a sustained critique of standards-based accountability in the literature, which highlights its detrimental effects on teachers' work and students' learning (Evans, 2015; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Kostogriz & Doecke, 2011; Ladd, 2011; Taubman, 2009). Although a lot could be said about them in the Australian context of educational reforms, I would like to focus here on the implications of accountability for the ethics of teaching. Moreover, I argue, the turn to standards-based accountability, at the present moment, is a turn away from ethics and towards the spectacle of performance. Accountability has produced a culture of auditing in which authentic education has been replaced with its representations—the spectacle of standards, numbers (test scores), performance indicators and other forms of evidence—that express the value and quality of labour to be 'consumed' by those who manage educators (see Debord, 1967, on 'spectacle'). Standards as the spectacle of performance acquire the meaning of an absolute truth about what counts as effective teaching, knowledge and engagement. This truth is composed of universal moments

that are constant and repeatable in teachers' work and hence are fundamental and essential. In this way, the spectacle of standards come to represent the *ought*, and, as a result, one's duty as well as liability to be called to account for meeting the standards.

This understanding of accountability assumes 'the position of a subject-cause, an agent or an author who can be displayed as a subjectum for its actions' (Raffoul, 2010, p. 5). Increasing calls for teachers to be more accountable for learning outcomes are based on such understanding of agency, positioning teachers as being the direct cause of their students' learning. This is particularly visible in discourses of quality teaching that identify teachers as one of the most important factors influencing student achievement (e.g. Darling-Hammond, 2006). Based on reviews of studies of student achievement in the USA, Darling-Hammond, LaFors, and Snyder (2001, p. 10) concluded that teachers' knowledge, expertise, education and experience 'account for a larger share of the variance in students' achievement than any other single factor, including poverty, race, and parent education'. In Australia, a number of studies have similarly concluded that the quality of teaching is an important factor accounting for variations in school students' achievements (e.g. Rowe, 2007). Hattie's work (2009, 2011) is cited regularly to reinforce this position. In the policy-making space, this research is interpreted narrowly as a single biggest variable affecting school outcomes in order to justify wide-ranging reforms (TEMAG, 2015). The insistence on such positioning of teachers and their accountability deserves more attention, particularly with regard to any possibility of ethics in conditions of the increasing alienation of teachers (Kostogriz, 2012).

Although the externally imposed, standards-based accountability opens some space for considering agency, it is too sterile and removed from the unique being of the teacher and hence is unable to address concrete ethical events and the singularity of the context in which the teacher finds herself. Standards-based accountability provides the political architecture of a generalised subjectum of teachers—a normative structure of actions in terms of what good teachers ought to know and be able to do to perform their duty. However, such architecture for a concrete individual, as Bakhtin (1993, p. 47) once put it, is nothing more than abstraction or generalisation:

As disembodied spirit, I lose my compelling, ought-to-be relationship to the world, I lose the actuality of the world. Man-in-general does not exist; I exist and a particular concrete other exists—my intimate, my contemporary (social mankind), the past and future of actual human beings (of actual historical mankind).

Critical of an abstract system of values as a starting point for decisions and actions in any concrete situation, such as Kantian deontology, Bakhtin focusses on the human subject as active, embodied, uniquely situated, and always in the process of becoming. In doing so, his intention is not to juxtapose the abstract system of values or pure concepts with the actually experienced world. Rather, he seeks to provide a different architecture of 'value-governed experiencing of the world'—a temporal and spatial location from which 'valuations, assertions, and deeds come forth' and where 'the constituent members are real objects, interconnected by concrete event-relations in the once-occurrent event of Being' (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 61). In this way, Bakhtin offers

a conception of responsibility that has its origin in the experience of the concrete and uniquely situated subject that can be and must be active in the ongoing event of being. Responsibility emerges from the acknowledgement of our active participation in the world, from our non-alibi in it.

It is important to acknowledge the architecture of the responsible subject as a relational process to our self and to others. ‘I-for-myself’, for Bakhtin (1993, p. 60), ‘constitute the center from which my performed act and my self-activity of affirming and acknowledging any value come forth’. However, this does not mean that I live and act from within myself and for my own sake. Rather, our consciousness and actions are always oriented to the other. We are historical and social beings who become selves only by revealing our self to others. We are in an absolute need for others who play a decisive role in creating our selves through a surplus of vision that they provide to us and who complete our always partial ‘internal’ perspectives through an external vantage point (Bakhtin, 1981). For Bakhtin, therefore, ‘only the other is in possession of the values of the being of a given person’ (Todorov, 1984, p. 98).

In this regard, the relational architecture of the subject provides an alternative perspective on understanding teacher responsibility as ethical obligations that inhere within relations between teachers and students. One can argue the primacy of responsibility in teaching simply because education, among other things, has to do centrally with the relationships between people (teachers, students and others). All other aspects of education, such as its quality and effectiveness with respect to learning, can be productively addressed only if teaching is responsive to others and if the other is acknowledged. This perspective on teacher responsibility is supported by findings from the *Studying the Effectiveness of Teacher Education* (SETE) project (Mayer et al., 2017) in which we explored Australian graduate teachers’ perceptions of what counts by them as effective teacher preparation and teaching in the early stage of their career. In addition to four rounds of large-scale surveys, we conducted case studies in 30 selected schools in Victoria and Queensland, Australia. The narratives of case study participants revealed relational complexities of ‘learning to teach’ as teachers transitioned across professional spaces between universities and schools. In doing so, they problematised the value of accountability discourses and the abstract representations of ‘effectiveness’ in understanding their everyday work. Rather, their stories represented the figured world of professional becoming in which they were constantly ‘addressed’ by their students, colleagues and parents. Good teaching, for the majority of beginning teachers, was therefore precisely about their becoming more responsive to their students and establishing relations with them.

## **Becoming a Response-Able Teacher**

An inquiry into teacher responsibility should probably start with one’s decision of becoming a teacher. We know a number of studies arguing that such a decision is usually assigned to a person—a wilful subject—to the extent that such a deci-

sion becomes only about such a person. For instance, educational research usually focusses on who decides and, albeit with some variations, on the horizon of the decision-maker. Interestingly enough, when asked about their decisions to become a teacher, most beginning teachers talked about a process or an activity that is oriented towards others. That is, their answers were embedded within the architecture of being of a concrete subject, facing a moment of ethical choice and responsibility. The most frequent responses of graduate teachers were: ‘wanted to make a difference’ and ‘always wanted to teach/work with children’. These answers were not about decisions originating in the heads of participating teachers. Rather, they were related to an ideal of being a teacher associated with the impact of teaching as a social profession on people’s lives, as well as with the professional fulfilment that teaching can provide. This included affective aspects of being a teacher such as the enjoyment of teaching and love of knowledge that were inspired by previous teachers and past experiences of working with children. This is noteworthy in current conditions when teaching as a profession ‘suffers a status anomaly’ (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012, p. 18) due to the misrecognition of teachers’ work by the public and mistrust from politicians. Hence, this kind of decision represents a truth of being a teacher that drives a commitment to both professional learning and work—it represents the ethicality of the teaching profession.

When asked about their preparedness for teaching, most graduate teachers felt generally well prepared by their teacher education programme in the area of professional ethics. However, they identified classroom management, engagement with parents/carers and the community, and teaching culturally, linguistically and socio-economically diverse learners as the areas in which they felt least well prepared as well as least effective. This is despite a majority of teacher education providers nominating ‘social justice’ as a key feature of their programmes when asked as part of the mapping of Australian teacher education programmes. This contradiction was explored further through case studies (Mayer et al., 2017).

Beginning teachers differentiated professional ethics and relational issues in their preparation. They associated ‘professional ethics’ with the codes of conduct and standards of practice and hence with the accountability aspect of their work. This aspect, in their view, was covered well throughout their teacher education programmes and, in particular, during their professional experience in schools. However, the relational aspect of teaching was addressed predominantly through the ‘classroom management’ units or topics across various units. Similarly, teaching diverse students and building relations with students were addressed in their ITE programmes, but mostly as a matter of awareness raising. Beginning teachers recognised, therefore, some challenges in developing their relational capabilities:

[We were] least prepared, it’s hard. I guess, classroom management and relationships with students, it’s sort of hard for uni to prepare for that... only when you’re on practicum because it’s not like when you’re sitting in a lecture and you can’t... It’s hard to explain how to build a relationship with students, it just sort of comes natural, I think, or it should come natural.  
(Jacob)

This point of view was shared by many beginning teachers, indicating the limitations of theoretical knowledge and concepts in addressing the concrete contexts of teach-



ing practice and the unique character of ethical events in them. When the teachers talked about being ‘natural’ in establishing relations with students they meant their subconsciously developed outward and other-oriented personalities. However, these personalities could not be developed without someone else’s word and gaze that gave them the self-perception of being ‘natural’. The other-oriented personality is a social product or, rather, an outcome of social-communicative relations that are primordial and hence primary for one’s becoming a person.

Although the experiences of being-with-others is a domain of ordinary life and ethics, beginning teachers saw these experiences as a basis of professional life and ethics. They found it difficult to separate their personal and professional experiences in developing relations with students for several reasons. First, as one of the teachers said, ‘I actually look quite young, because it’s my first year out, I thought that I wouldn’t have, neither the respect or the relationship or the age bracket that other teachers might have’ (Vivia). Building relations with students, therefore, involved becoming ‘friends’ with them. Yet, as Vivia continued, ‘that definitely played a big part in it but I think because they knew that I’m not just their friend, I’m also their teacher and I think that kind of hit home’. Similarly, Jesse acknowledged that resolving the tension between the personal and the professional was one of her major achievements: ‘I can see that they [students] respect me now which is based on human relationships we’ve got. So it makes it a lot easier and I actually look forward to going to my classes’.

The relational nature of teaching cannot be captured by the language of ‘classroom management’ and ‘knowing your learners’—statements that are used in standards. This language represents teachers as self-sufficient and authoritative beings and is a projection of an individualistic view of teacher professional identity. What the stories of our teachers demonstrate is that the very process of acquiring a sense of identity—a self-consciousness of being a teacher—is utterly dependent on their interactions and relations with students. As one of the beginning teachers interviewed by us argues in relation to her sense of ‘effectiveness’:

I believe that I definitely am [making a difference] because, I guess, I’ve heard a lot of feedback from students and building those relationships because we are a lot younger and we can relate to them, I guess, in a lot more depth than what others can. That’s purely from what they tell us ... Yeah. [laughter] So that’s a real positive, I guess, when you hear that, and that you can reflect on experiences and things like that and sort of build those relationships. (Nicki)

From a relational perspective, beginning teachers realise themselves and how they teach through others. As Bakhtin (1986, p. 138) argues, it is from others that ‘I receive words, forms, and tonalities for the formation of the initial idea of myself’. A separation from students and an aspiration to ‘manage’ them do not lead to effective teaching, our beginning teachers assert. The presence of the other in oneself must be recognised in visualising the process of becoming a teacher. Only then can we understand why teachers become *responsible* for their students and learning. The relational work of teachers is locked into the world of students through the ebb and flow of responsive acts. It renounces the imposition of abstract language about effectiveness onto particular situations of pedagogical work.

Intersubjective relations were perceived by beginning teachers as a primary condition for teaching. As one of the teachers, Jess, argued, ‘in terms of then further education for [students], it has been great because... being here for three years I’ve seen Year 10s and then I’ve had them in Year 11 and then in Year 12, and so building those relationships from the beginning has definitely helped getting into new things with them in the later years’. The relational aspect of teaching helped Jess to take a more reflexive stance on her work. She described her everyday work by appropriating the word ‘effective’ only to discount it as a way of naming the relational complexity of her professional practice:

So, I’ll go in and I’ll do something with one class and I have that same content but deliver it entirely different to another class because of those relationships and getting to know the students... I can definitely look at how I’ve delivered it, and then reflect on that and realise ‘well, maybe I haven’t really done much for them here.’ But then I can always go back and try and do better in that sense. And I feel, I don’t know, like I haven’t really thought about whether I am an effective teacher or not, but I definitely think that I can, like I’m constantly trying to better myself...

It is not surprising, therefore, that many beginning teachers saw the detrimental effect of large-scale interventions such as standards-based reforms, mandated assessment and accountability on their sense of professional self and the relational world of their work. Case studies showed that there have been instances of a clash between the professional discourse they bring with them as graduates of teacher education programmes and the ways in which schools are increasingly expecting them to account for themselves. Beginning teachers were mentored by some teachers who were outcome-oriented and achieved good results but did not necessarily have positive relationships with the students. In such situations, graduate teachers were faced with ethical dilemmas in deciding what they would like to become. For example, resisting emulating her mentor-teacher, Katie said ‘I had to find what I might want to focus on... I just think you need to watch other people and watching other people, to me, is the best way of finding out what you want to do’.

The stories of beginning teachers provided a relational perspective on teacher *professional becoming* in schools. These stories were profoundly ethical because the teachers’ professional practice always occurred in and through everyday events in which they were in a constant state of being ‘addressed’ by their students and hence were obliged to ‘answer’ to the call of others. As one of the teachers put it, ‘building relationships with the kids that really, really need you and want you so bad in their lives’ made a difference in her culturally and socially diverse school. The teachers were also ‘addressed’ by the discourses of teacher standards, quality, accountability and effectiveness that are by their very nature abstract and decontextualised. These discourses were appropriated by schools and provided the ideological codes of expected teacher performance or served as evaluation tools. Yet, while talking about their concrete relational experiences, the teachers could not draw on these discourses because they rendered these experiences as insignificant in terms of teacher effectiveness.

The quotes from their stories demonstrate precisely this heteroglossic struggle of resistance to the unitary language of normative practice (e.g. the language of

what they need to know and what they need to demonstrate to be perceived as both prepared and effective teachers). According to Bakhtin (1981, p. 288), ‘actual social life and historical becoming create within an abstract unitary... language a multitude of concrete worlds, a multitude of bounded verbal-ideological and social belief systems; within these various systems are elements of language filled with various semantic and axiological content and each with its own different sound’. It is within these concrete worlds that the vantage point rests within the selves of beginning teachers as they narrate about their experiences of professional becoming in both schools (here and now) and universities (there and then).

By telling the stories of professional becoming, the graduate teachers engaged in dialogical conversations with us that took them, as it were, outside themselves. These dialogues provided a point of exiting from their self and putting themselves in the place of their students and then returning to their positions by visualising, re-living and explaining events that occurred within schools, and specifically with respect to their relations with others. Dialogues emanated from the eventness of teachers’ professional lives—the events that were deeply relational. As Holquist (1990, p. 47) once put it, ‘dialogism begins by visualising existence as an event, the event of being responsible for (and to) the particular situation existence assumes as it unfolds in the unique (and constantly changing) place I occupy in it’. In making sense (meaning) of their relational experiences in schools, the beginning teachers ‘authored’ themselves as responsible—that is, as able to respond to the words and the worlds of others who addressed them.

## Concluding Remarks

So, what can then the stories of beginning teachers tell us about professional ethics of teachers? While broader concerns about raising teacher effectiveness and quality have triggered interest in the problematic of professional ethics, *the ought* of teachers is represented as one’s accountability for outcomes. In most cases, educational jurisdictions and regulators perceive professional ethics as a moral add-on to knowledge, skills and behaviour that teachers are required to demonstrate. What follows from this is a universalised and seemingly empowering representation of teachers as ‘free’ subjects who can make a difference on the basis of their professional knowledge and skills, and also on the basis of a moral duty attached to such a view of the subject. This perception raises a set of questions about what counts as the professional ethics of teachers and, more specifically, about the origin of ethics in teaching, beyond teacher compliance to codes of practice.

The stories of beginning teachers enable us to see how educational accountability has impoverished the relational complexity of teachers’ work by rendering it as largely technical and contractual in its nature. However, responsibility appears to be a key theme in the narratives of beginning teachers. In the process of professional becoming, their sense of responsibility emerges from an other-orientated pedagogical act. Teachers narrate about their lived experiences as a mode of becoming an ‘I-for-

myself' and, at the same, time as a mode of becoming an 'I-for-the-other'. They cannot produce an autonomous representation of their self (and their 'effectiveness') because they have a perspectival limitation to do so. Teaching, by its very nature, requires the other, and it is through the relations with students that teachers can remember and unify their self-activity. Students transgress, as it were, the boundaries of the teacher's self, both configuring and rendering her professional becoming. The relational experience of being a teacher, therefore, is a unity of the 'I-for-myself', 'I-for-the other' and 'the other-for-me'. This is not a mechanical connection but, rather, is a dialogical authoring of responsibility in and for education.

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# Chapter 5

## Teacher Reflexivity: An Important Dimension of a Teacher's Growth



Ann Ryan and R. Scott Webster

**Abstract** Reflective practice is often linked in teacher education courses with the expectation of reflection on moments of teaching which typically favour writing about personal experiences which tend to be limited in terms of critical reflective practice. Such limited introspection on lesson plans and ‘what happened’ then leads to a focus on success or otherwise. Such uncritical reflection on the implementation of technical tasks framed by ‘standards’ inevitably limits the potential of reflection. What is missing is theoretically guided reflection. A solution to this very limited sense of reflection by drawing on Paulo Freire’s practice of doing education in terms of his more critical awareness of his—and hence teachers’—being both in and with (or among) others. To be so engaged opens an awareness of both the constraints which keep people in their place—ideologies—and the possibilities of confronting those ideologies in ways that open visions of new ways of being in the world and new pedagogies for achieving these new freedoms. Teachers are to go beyond technical goals in teaching to concern themselves with their own attitudes, values and aspirations.

### Introduction

In this chapter, we argue that in addition to reflection teachers ought to also engage in reflexivity if they are to grow as professionals. Reflexivity differs from reflection in the sense that the person herself who is doing the reflection is included in thinking and evaluation of her own practice in such a way that her own beliefs, understandings and habits are being examined. Consequently, in addition to improving practices to make *them* better, we also are giving consideration to ourselves in order that *we* ourselves, as the persons who teach, might become better through further professional growth.

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We are writing this chapter from the perspective of Paulo Freire's notion of conscientisation (*conscientização* in the original Portuguese), which means developing 'critical consciousness' that enables people to both read the world as well as act upon it. Reflection in this context therefore means critical thinking about the world in terms of one's presence, as well as having the potential to take some actions for making the world better, even in some small way. Such a perspective understands that the work of education is inherently political—not in the sense that teachers necessarily becoming involved in 'politics' but rather that teachers come to an awareness that they, as a collective of individuals, are part of the community at large and are not just participants in a school life separated from communities at large. As Giroux (1988) has argued this responsibility of teachers to engage with the broader community can be understood as a challenge to become a public intellectual.

## Reflection: An Overused and Limited Term?

As the authors of this chapter, we both completed our PhDs and commenced working in teacher education at about the same time, after having careers teaching and administrating in high schools. Working together we quickly found that we shared many common interests and aspirations regarding helping our students to be good teachers. As we began teaching in the teacher education programme, we identified a common concern regarding how students were expected to reflect on their practice. As new academics, we were being asked to administer summative assessment tasks which consisted in students constructing a scrap book exercise complete with coloured paper, glitter and photographs. The majority of students provided decorated text composed of quotes from readings regarding what they 'liked' along with unexplained descriptions, some personal opinions, and vague assertions and generalisations. In other assessments, students were required to gather artefacts that would support the narrative of their growing understanding and skills in becoming a teacher. The portfolios that were constructed in their final year offered a statement of teaching philosophy and some discussion on beliefs about curriculum and assessment. Each of these portfolios, as a scrap book, was like a *Curriculum Vitae*. We understand that having a *Curriculum Vitae* has value, particularly when presenting oneself in a job interview. However, we were concerned that this item had been adopted as a summative task because the very idea of *education* was insufficiently developed both in the experience of putting it together and in the product itself.

As we were exposed to more teacher education programmes, we found that 'reflective practice' was incorporated as a central aspect of most units. The purposes of reflective tasks ranged from being a punitive/class management tool to writing in a personal journal purely for personal use with few assessment requirements attached. We were informed that the idea of using a reflective professional journal (and/or portfolio) in teacher education programmes was derived from Donald Schön's (1983) notion of the reflective practitioner. Educational institutions the world over have been implementing 'reflective' journals for more than three decades and alongside

these have emerged the notions of action research as a way of understanding social subjectivity and of making social change evident in teacher education and teacher classroom practice (Carr & Kemis, 1986). Research endorsed the value of reflection with pre-service students (Woodward, 1998, 2000; Orland-Barak, 2005) and education courses developed approaches to reflective practices that seemed to favour writing (diaries, journal writing and portfolio writing).

While there are useful strategies for students to curate artefacts that represent personal experiences and responses to various activities, we were concerned that these tended to be limited in terms of critical reflective practice. Specifically, few connections between theory and practice were offered which informed and provided a rationale for ongoing practice and professional growth. Our concerns seemed to echo other studies. For example, Delandshere and Arens (2003) investigated the use of portfolios as a method for generating the evidence necessary to make judgements about how pre-service teachers understood what it means to be a teacher. In their research, they found that personal philosophies were problematic because they were simply stated as declarative statements, often 'as restatements of the standards' lacking 'foundational ideas relating to, for example, the purpose of education, its importance in society, the meaning of knowing and learning, or the social and political implications of teaching' (Delandshere & Arens, 2003, p. 63). They found an overall sense of ideas being uncritically presented with a taken-for-grantedness that what was happening in classrooms was a given.

Another common task that pre-service teachers were expected to reflect on was their lesson plans while on fieldwork at schools. Such reflections focussed on the enactment of lessons and incorporated feedback from mentor-teachers as well as the perceptions of the pre-service teachers themselves. These reflections often focussed on the 'success' of the lesson and how well 'it' worked. We fully appreciate that as pre-service teachers are developing competency skills related to aspects of teaching that such reflection does have a place. However, similarly to portfolios, we found that much of what was written in reflective journals focussed on anecdotes of events during a lesson and whether or not the class was 'positive' or 'fun'; procedural issues ('I'll get them to clean up earlier next time'); or how much the students liked them (perhaps with a cute thank you card pasted into the journal). None of this is irrelevant or unimportant in exemplifying the 'dailyness' of a teachers' work. However, selection of these artefacts was rarely guided by thoughtful theoretical reflection. Consideration of aims and values were reported as being too difficult for many to attempt and at times were even actively resisted.

Brookfield (1995, p. 75) once noted that through various reflective activities, 'many teachers tell me that they're not learning anything in their work and that things stay pretty much the same year in and year out'. This almost passive resignation to the uncritical implementation of the technical tasks at hand is also seen in Delandshere and Arens (2003, p. 68) who report that student-teachers 'rarely seemed to question their work, their action, or the events that they describe. For the most part they seem to have few doubts about the value of what they do, and appear almost exclusively focussed on proving they have met the criteria'. Similarly, Ecclestone (1996, p. 146) has warned that '[i]f reflective practice is appropriated by competence approaches it



will be forced into a technical—rational framework’ and thus be limited and unable to address some of the important concerns related to the value of how the overall school system itself is operating and for what purposes.

Reflection seemed to be regarded as an isolated skill in response to ‘what works’ within a narrow context, ignoring any other external criteria. Consequently, there was an absence of any concerns for or interrogation of values, ethical frameworks and broader cultural, social and political concerns within which teaching occurs.

It is difficult to imagine a day or a week in the work of a teacher when there is not some kind of dilemma to be engaged with, some ethical considerations to be grappled with. Inevitably, in addition to competence in technical abilities, these considerations necessarily involve educational aims, which are largely philosophical in nature, along with ethical and political dimensions as well as a sense of personal investment of oneself.

For us, the practice of a reflective approach to teaching implies the possibility of challenging and even changing existing practices, beliefs and aspirations, thinking of other ways of doing things and other ways of *being*, in the particular school context. That is, an approach to reflection that involves *all* of *oneself* as well as one’s skills. This seen in Orland-Barak (2005, p. 26) who argued that reflective practice requires ‘a stance towards practices that is both affective and intellectual, integrating practical, ethical, critical and transformational dimensions and leading the practitioners to a more informed understanding of their practice’. Critical reflective practice requires continuous reflection about what we are doing and why we are doing it and a conscious engagement with the effects of our actions in the classroom and the implications of the choices we make for the students we teach. This was our aspiration for our pre-service teachers and it was being challenged as we embarked on our work in higher education by noticing that students were not in the habit of checking the assumptions behind their practice. So we addressed this through Freire’s notion of critical consciousness.

## **Towards a Critical Consciousness**

We have been trying to enable pre-service teachers to grow towards being more critically conscious both of themselves and also of the impact they are having in the lives of others. Our understanding of critical consciousness is largely based on Paulo Freire’s concept of conscientisation. To understand what Freire (1921–1997) meant by conscientisation, it is helpful to review his overall endeavours as an educator. He is primarily known for his contributions to critical pedagogy and for his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in which he argued against the ‘banking concept’. This involves the depositing or transference of knowledge from teacher to student. Such an activity requires the nature of knowledge to be inert, unchangeable and objective, so that it can be neatly packaged, sent and deposited into the memories of students where it can be stored and retrieved when necessary. Freire (2000, p. 72) lamented

that through this banking concept, knowledge becomes separated from being a part of 'a process of inquiry' and is treated as 'a gift bestowed' upon the ignorant.

What Freire was most concerned about regarding this process of the banking practice was not the actual truthfulness of knowledge claims that were being deposited but rather, through habitually receiving inert knowledge as gifts, students come to 'accept the passive role imposed on them' and consequently they 'adapt to the world as it is' failing to recognise and appreciate that it could be otherwise (Freire, 2000, p. 73). It is through focussing on literacy (and perhaps numeracy too) that children and their teachers are limited to 'reading the word' as if the world were some objective place that people are *in* and are thus more easily manipulated by being exposed to various sorts of authoritative texts and policies. Freire was not against literacy per se but clearly argued for a critical form of literacy that enables a 'reading of the *world*' as well as a 'reading of the *word*' where people come to see themselves as *with* the world rather than merely *in* it, and therefore can understand how the 'word' is often contextualised in the power relations that exist in the 'world'.

Freire's main concern was that students and teachers tended to accept that knowledge belonged to authorities and that therefore they had no rightful input, and as such knowledge was assumed to have an absolute unchangeable and 'objective' nature. Very interestingly he recognised that the passive role of accepting 'deposits' or gifts of knowledge is established through our consciousness so that we literally cannot think otherwise than to accept our status as that of being oppressed. He explained that 'the interests of the oppressors lie in 'changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them'' (Freire, 2000, p. 74). Therefore in addition to treating knowledge as if it were objective, authoritative and inert, those who receive knowledge passively develop an inner-consciousness that expressed itself as a belief that they literally cannot even imagine that emancipation—a breaking free to understand alternative views—could be possible. Therefore, the status quo of society with its existing inequities is accepted because these inequities are assumed to be unchangeable.

Freire developed his notion of conscientisation to represent three aspects of his educational work which we shall now review. The first aspect of conscientisation involves raising an awareness of the ideological forces which are influencing our world—and specifically for teachers, influencing the curriculum and school cultures with which we work. Despite some disparaging comments made by politicians regarding ideologies and ideologues as if these were somehow to be actively avoided, ideologies are not all 'bad' but they are simply systems of ideas and values which relate to how society ought to be organised and run in particular ways. For example, in the mainstream culture of the West it is largely assumed (naïvely) that we are governed by the ideals and values which are inherent to the freedoms of democracy and capitalism. However, public discussions of ideologies are intentionally avoided by our leaders and so as Chomsky (2017, p. 50) ironically observes, so-called responsible politicians and experts who appear in our media busy themselves by giving 'advice on tactical questions' while 'irresponsible, 'ideological types' will 'harangue' about principal and trouble themselves over moral issues and human rights'. This is because engaging with the 'bigger picture' regarding what ought to be the purposes of edu-

cation and schooling requires people to actively question and give consideration to ideologies and the values upon which they would prefer their society to be based. This of course is potentially troubling to those whose interest is to maintain the current *status quo*—hence they tend to shun any interest to discuss ideologies and prefer not to expose their own ideological values to public scrutiny.

The second aspect of Freire's conscientisation is to encourage people to create visions of a future which involve greater freedoms and improvements for everyone—especially for the most vulnerable members of communities such as children. Freire (2007, pp. 3–4) even suggests that '*it is impossible to live without dreams*' [original emphasis]. Hence, schooling is often understood as potentially empowering for students from this perspective because it is sometimes thought that students might be able to improve their visions for themselves regarding the quality of their life chances through gaining skills, knowledge and certain dispositions. They don't just have to accept their current socio-economic class if it disadvantages them, but through education they can seriously consider better possibilities for themselves and for others. Such imaginations which lie outside the most influential ideologies can be inspired through being exposed to materials which offer ideas and ideals which differ from the dominant ways that society currently functions. Such exposure to ideas is often understood to be the emancipatory nature of becoming educated. People can think differently to the way that corporations, bureaucracies, governments often encourage people/the masses to understand themselves and society. Even for first-world democracies, Chomsky (1989) warns that thought control is being exercised by our governments—not in a brutal, authoritarian or dictatorial manner but through manipulating our consent to uncritically trust the established institutions of power such as churches, the military, banks and nationalised schooling.

Hence, the third aspect of Freire's conscientisation closely follows from this second one where people become so convinced of the value of their alternative vision that they can articulate a justification for it and due to their commitment to it they also develop an intention and desire to *act* in order to make such possibility a reality. This is summed up in Freire's (2000, p. 77) statement that knowledge and thinking cannot just be abstract, but rather 'thought has meaning only when generated by action upon the world'. This active consciousness is in stark contrast to the mind-set encouraged by oppressors mentioned above which Freire (2000, p. 139) describes as follows:

In order to prevent for the consideration of the oppressed and subjugated a world of deceit designed to increase their alienation and passivity, the oppressors develop a series of methods precluding any presentation of the world as a problem and showing it rather as a fixed entity, as something given – something to which people, as mere spectators, must adapt.

He therefore labels his preferred approach as 'problem-posing education'. Through this, the world with which we are all *with* is presented as problematic in some way and in need of betterment.

In order to identify problems worth posing, Freire's critical consciousness first requires an emerging awareness of the ideologies which influence one's culture. In his book *Ideology and the Curriculum*, Apple (2004) describes the dominant ideology of

a society as being hegemonic in the sense that its values and beliefs are so thoroughly ingrained into daily life that they actually contribute to the way that citizens 'see' their world and formulate their common sense understandings of what is proper, right and good. Therefore, it is significantly important for the development of critical consciousness that one come to understand the dominant ideologies which are present in one's immediate environment as these are often hidden from deliberate conscious consideration. It is our assertion that the most influential ideologies affecting practices in schools almost globally are neoliberalism, conservatism and social efficiency. We shall therefore review each of these three most dominating ideologies in order to help raise awareness of their existence and influence.

The first ideology is neoliberalism which basically recommends that the economic market should be 'free' from controls and regulations, in order to determine the 'right' and proper costs for various items and practices and where individuals can freely compete with everyone else to attain materialistic success. In theory, this leads to smaller governmental interventions and with it, greater privatisation of services such as transport, energy production, medical care and education. In practice, however, we see a greater amount of government regulations through policies which require regular standardised testing in order to promote competition and accountability, and these policies also extend to the standards which regulate the teaching profession itself. Of great concern is that news media outlets, as businesses, are more concerned with 'what sells' rather than educating the public with accurate and important news. Hence, the 'news' which is broadcast is really the illusions of the influential rather than the 'truths' which individual journalists might uncover. Chomsky (2016, p. 53) argues that 'teachers are a particularly good target' for consenting to illusions promoted by ruling elites because this ensures that the new generation of young people become conditioned to passively comply to existing practices so that they do not interrupt the work of governments. This is why he considers that teachers, as intellectuals, ought 'to expose the lies of governments, to analyse actions according to their causes and motives and often hidden intensions'—i.e. their ideologies (Chomsky, 2017, p. 16).

The next ideology is conservatism which promotes traditional or essential academic studies, and tends to become more prominent through the catch-call phrase 'back to basics'. This ideological approach aligns well with Freire's banking concept because it supports notions of core knowledge which ought to be memorised. This is thought to be especially important by some in order to forge a sense of national identity where all citizens are expected to know the asserted dominant 'cultural literacy' of the country. This has been argued in the American context by Hirsch's (1988) influential book *Cultural Literacy* and by the various works of Kevin Donnelly in Australia. Conservatism focusses on identifying what bodies of knowledge are most important and do not give serious consideration to what sorts of people students and teachers become. Hence, the child-centred progressive movement has emerged in direct opposition to this ideological approach (see, e.g., John Holt, Maria Montessori and A.S. Neill).

The third most dominant ideology we consider to be present globally is social efficiency. This has its origins in the economic efficiency studies conducted by Frederick

Taylor (1856–1915) who mainly examined the management practices of factories. We now have the term ‘Taylorism’ derived from this which refers to the scientific management of practices—such as those in which teachers are regulated with ever-increasing accountability. Consequently, this ideological approach becomes evident in phrases such as ‘effective teaching’ and ‘effective learning’ and is behind much of the evidence-based approaches which supposedly promote ‘best practices’. Teaching is reduced to what might be understood as an applied science (e.g. Hattie & Yates, 2014), where the most effective strategies which have evidence of impact are expected to be uncritically adopted and implemented.

All three of these dominating ideologies of neoliberalism, conservatism and social efficiency require people—especially teachers—to conform to the required practices of elevating the importance of the economy, to work with traditional academic knowledge as if it were inert and objective, and to implement policies of evidence-based ‘best practices’. Raising the awareness of these ideological influences for pre-service teachers to become consciously aware, to discourage their passive acceptance, is one way that teachers can be better enabled to ‘read the *world*’ and thus become more critically conscious of the sort of system in which schooling operates.

Critical education is focussed on changing the world in some way for the better for which individuals take a responsible role for enacting. Hence, Freire describes this education as a form of authentic liberation. He goes on to explain that ‘[a]uthentic reflection considers... people in their relations with the world... [to] develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves’ (Freire, 2000, pp. 81–83). This critical way of engaging with the world therefore is involved in changing and growing ourselves so that we are able to act with the world in order that it might become better. Therefore, reflection which raises critical consciousness, along with identifying ideologies, must include evaluating ourselves, which is a process often referred to as reflexivity.

## Reflexivity

As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, the concerns that the two of us shared when we first encountered the ubiquitous approaches to ‘reflective practices’ early in our academic work, was that so many pre-service teachers appeared to only focus their reflective thinking on goals, outcomes, planning, observations and assessments in a very technical manner, pushing aside important educational and ethical considerations. Technical concerns have some value of course, but we were worried that such reflections excluded ideological influences and also who they were as persons who have attitudes, values and aspirations—and that these might be recognised as being in need of evaluation and perhaps change. As Lichtman (2010, p. 121) has so eloquently explained,

We are not static human beings who maintain an aloof posture as we pursue our thoughts, dreams and desires and the thoughts dreams and desires of those from whom we learn. Rather our work is an expression of who we are and who we are becoming.

Therefore, to assist in this process of teachers constantly 'becoming', we have come to understand that an educational growth for critical consciousness—or conscientisation—depends upon reflexivity and not only on reflection.

'Reflexivity' differs from 'reflection' in that it includes oneself—how we understand ourselves *with* the environment and how we relate to it and how we have desires and expectations regarding our role as teachers. Therefore, rather than just reflect on events such as learning activities and whole lessons as if these were closed systems which can be observed and evaluated from a neutral position, reflexivity also gives consideration to how we are personally involved in these experiences. Consequently, in addition to the activities being reflected on, we wanted to extend the reflective thinking to include the teachers themselves in order that they can come to appreciate that their personal presence is implicated in the very events themselves. Such an inclusion increases the possibility that their personal growth—as professionals—might be a part of what is thought about and evaluated. Not just in the sense of skills and techniques but in very personal ways such as beliefs, attitudes and intentions.

Freire's (2000) problem-posing education includes a focus on the *intentionality* of both students and teachers. Intentionality can sometimes be represented by terms such as interest, will and desire and so Freire (2007, p. 5) includes the importance of a 'pedagogy of desire' in the sense that people ought to be encouraged to develop desires—or intentions—which are in their best interests and the best interests for society at large. This was to counteract tendencies of fatalistic compliance to the norms of society, an institution or an organisation. Biesta (2017, p. 16) recognises that it is challenging to give consideration to 'whether what we desire is actually desirable' and yet argues that it ought to be 'a living question' which remains with us throughout our lives. This is because it is not only a means of becoming more existentially authentic but it is also a means for interrogating the ideologies which tend to dominate our lives personally and professionally.

The purpose of identifying our desires and intentions as teachers is to evaluate whether they have simply been absorbed unconsciously or fatalistically from the dominating ideologies of society or whether they are authentically chosen by us because we have critically judged them to be of value due to the consequential actions they encourage us to enact. This is especially important when it comes to our own philosophy and aims we have for education. Do we simply accept that we ought to play a role in an already 'good' system and therefore only need to just 'apply' the appropriate techniques and strategies which might lead to successful learning? Or alternatively, do we see that teaching depends upon a genuine commitment to other human beings based on a desire to enable them to be the best people they can be and can help make society as good as it might be? Our aspirations for society and for the lives of our students constitute the aims and purposes that we have for education.

Dewey considered that our aims of education are so important that he identified three important attitudes to assist us in ensuring that we have valuable aims. These

attitudes consist of firstly, being open-minded in the sense of having ‘an active desire to listen to more sides than one’ and an ‘alert curiosity’ in order to improve what we know and value; secondly being whole-hearted, sincere or ‘thoroughly interested’ in our primary task of educating, and not to reduce our desire to teach into multiple and divided interests such as job security, pay and frequent holidays; and the third attitude is being personally responsible for the long-term consequences and results of our activities (Dewey, 1989, pp. 136–138). He argued that these three attitudes, which are necessary for developing appropriate desires as a teacher, are primarily dependent on our willingness to be curious in contrast to being indifferent, careless or assuming that our conduct must be governed by routines.

Similarly Freire (2004, p. 87) also argued for the importance of curiosity, claiming that ‘curiosity is the engine for the process of knowing’. He claimed that, ‘[a] critical reading of the world implies the exercise of curiosity and its ability to challenge in order to know how to defend oneself from the traps ideologies... will play along the way’ (Freire, 2004, p. 91). Here we see that being curious requires us to question the various practices we are involved with, and that are too easily taken for granted. It means asking ‘why are things such as the curriculum, classroom furniture and assessment practices, the way that they are?’ and importantly ‘who seems to be benefitting the most from these existing practices?’ It also means being willing to explore how practices might be changed—even radically changed—but only, as Freire argued, if we can *justify* and defend our actions to change such practices for the better.

As part of this process of becoming educated by becoming critically conscious, Freire (2000, p. 55 and 111) explains that people must overcome the assumption that they are beings who *have* things like knowledge, language, membership to families and communities. He described this as dehumanising because such an assumption doesn’t acknowledge the presence of the person who might well act upon and change knowledge, language and community membership even in small but meaningful ways. He argued that people ought to see themselves as beings who *are* present and as such they might be empowered to view *themselves* and their *relations* to knowledge and language for example, as being potential sources of change and growth—not merely of unchanging acceptance.

Consequently, one of the first things he taught was that we should appreciate that our culture is not something static or ‘objective’ but rather is ‘anthropological’ (Freire, 1974, p. 41), and as such it is dynamically able to change if we act upon it collaboratively with a shared vision and determination.

We see this as having parallels with the cultures of the classrooms, schools and even the teaching profession itself. These are anthropological cultures and do undergo change usually by small communities who are moved by alternative visions of what might be possible. As such, individuals can become empowered by becoming actors in their environments rather than as simply accepting traditional ways of doing things, perhaps assuming certain practices to be unable or perhaps ‘too big’ to try to change. Therefore, becoming aware of how we *relate* to the environment around us and all the elements within it is a crucially important dimension.

The practice of reflexivity involves character development and an openness to confront the particularities of a given situation. Inevitably this requires engaging



with issues beyond the classroom such as moral, social and political aspects of one's culture, giving consideration to issues such as equity and emancipation and how these might influence our classroom practice. Brookfield (1995, p. 8) suggests that reflection cannot be considered critical unless it serves two distinctive purposes: the first begins to understand the power relationships in teaching contexts; and the second is to question the assumptions and practices that 'seem to make our lives easier but that actually end up working against our long term interests'. He helpfully recognises that 'for many teachers, the path to critical consciousness will result in an unhappy new awareness of unacknowledged and unearned privilege. It may also reveal equally unfair biases and roadblocks' (Brookfield, 1995, p. 26) which may continue to be emphasised via one's current practices. This is why Brookfield (1995, p. 239) suggests that there is 'the thread running through many stories of critical reflection is that of lost innocence. Lost innocence is the gradual realisation that the dilemmas of teaching have no ultimate solution. It dawns on us that becoming a skilful teacher will always be an unformed unfinished project'.

Reflective teachers do not seek solutions nor do they do things unaware of the sources of impact of their actions. Rather they pursue connections and relationships between solutions so that his/her practical theory might grow. It is therefore important to recognise that a developing critical consciousness includes accepting that ideas about what is normal, right or good, is the result of the products of life experience rather than universal laws. Critical reflection engages the practitioner in examining his/her actions and reasons about decisions and events by taking account of the broader historical, social, ethical and political contexts with which the practice takes place. It is therefore inescapably geared to the moral growth and emancipation of teachers as well as students.

## **Reflexive Dialogue: Showing Ourselves to Ourselves**

One of the major attributes of Freire's approach to education is dialogue. This can be understood to occur in various ways such as between students, teacher and students, student and texts, teacher with students and texts, teachers with other educators, and of course with oneself through thinking. It is important to note that Freire's notion of dialogue 'is not mere idle conversation; rather it is purposeful and rigorous, with a clear sense of structure and direction... addressing problems rather than giving answers' (Roberts, 2010, p. 127). Consequently, it is not only engaged on a cognitive level of rationality but it involves ethical and political concerns which are central to human living, and because these issues are keenly *felt*, this dialogue also involves emotions, desires and commitments—in short, our whole conscious being is involved in critical reflexivity.

One of the most significant ways that people make sense of themselves is to show themselves to themselves—but we have come to appreciate that this is often an elusive practice. Often we employ representations and artefacts (e.g. poetry, illustrations, music, performances, objectifications, stories) to express and encapsulate some



of the sense we have given to ourselves and that we want to present to the world (or assessors). However, importantly, this sharing should not simply be a one-way narrative if it is to involve critical consciousness. It should involve dialogue. This is the crux of our own findings in enabling reflexive activities to enable a greater engagement with Freire's conscientisation. There ought to be a sharing of one's problems that one is currently grappling with, through identifying some of the challenges or uncertainties regarding one's *praxis*—i.e. how one is trying to theorise, give sense to and justify one's practice as a teacher. In contrast to the sorts of presentations that we encountered early in our academic careers which reduced reflective activities to mere descriptions of what happened, we have come to appreciate that Freire (2000, p. 125) has explained that our praxis 'requires theory to illuminate it' and so we consider that teachers must necessarily be continuously involved with theoretical literature.

Through our own experiences as undergraduates and reinforced through our regular work with pre-service and in-service teachers, reading theory and thinking with theory are challenging and often difficult. However, we argue that these are essential habits for the work of teachers if education itself is understood as a process of *growth* for teachers. As explained by Freire (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 98),

Reading is one of the ways I can get the theoretical illumination of practice in a certain moment. If I don't get that, do you know what can happen? We as popular educators begin to walk in a circle, without the possibility of going beyond that circle.

Here we see that Freire understood the value of reading and thinking about theory as a way of allowing us to see things differently. Without it, we are captive of our own experiences, trapped with our current understandings and hence are likened to walking in a circle. To take a trajectory that allows us to break free from such a circular rut of repeating the same practice, some new insights must be achieved and this is often gained through the reading of new theoretical ideas.

Through our work with teachers, we are continuously reminded that such engagement with theoretical ideas is not easy—but nevertheless we believe that it is worth pursuing because of the immense value that it is capable of. This has been appreciated by many pre-service teachers such as is shared by one of them as follows;

I realise that I have not made a lot of references to a lot of literature to support my thinking. I would like to state that it is partly due to a lot of readings that did not make sense to me. At first this both worried and frustrated me as it became evident that other people in the class were not having any problems at all ... Then I read Freire (2005) in week 1 semester 2 and he says 'there is no reason to feel ashamed of not understanding what is read' (ah, relief!) but then he says 'If however the text I cannot understand is part of a body of readings seen as essential I must overcome my difficulties in understanding it.' (Freire 2005 Teachers as Cultural Workers) I waited in a line to get into see Ann to discuss some of the issues I was facing.

'Donna' self-assessment (2010)

To be a critically reflective teacher means that we regard both our personal and collective experience and our reading of formal theory and research or philosophy as important elements in our critical journey.

Reading theory should be a dialogical experience just like when two or more persons meet together. This is encapsulated by Freire who explained that '[w]hen I meet

some books—I say ‘meet’ because some books are like persons, when I meet some books I remake my practice theoretically. I become better able to understand the theory inside my action’ (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 36). When we read, think and theorise we should not just be interested to affirm our own views and assumptions. Words and ideas from someone else can illuminate, confirm or challenge private insights and this often is experienced as a dialogical encounter involving what Vygotsky refers to as ‘inner-speech’ as we think in a dialogical manner. A conversation with a book can involve highlighting passages and writing notes in the margins where comments can be scrawled throughout, the pages turned down and peppered with yellow marking slips. These often are artefacts of books that we have ‘talked’ with. As academics we consider that such artefacts are far more valuable for demonstrating critical reflection compared with scrap books and reflective passages at the end of lesson plans.

This is why we have come to value separating reflective activities from assessment. Reflexive dialogues ought to be occurring regularly when pre-service teachers read and grapple with their weekly readings. In tutorials, they share their artefacts as the books/articles they have ‘talked’ with, via. notes in margins, highlighting, etc. These are then shared in extended dialogues with others. In order to make one’s own personal growth a possibility the culture of the tutorials is one in which we have endeavoured to make both inviting and challenging in a reflective sense, as class members share how their own praxis may have been illuminated in some way through theoretical insights.

Theoretical literature helps us remember that our problems are not just procedural kinks or pedagogical tangles to be unravelled but politically sculpted situations illustrating the internal contradictions of the systems in which we work. Becoming conscious of the beliefs and theories implicit in our own personal practices are inescapably involved—either to conform to existing political interests or to challenge and possibly change them. This is why we ask political questions about a text whenever we ask whose interests a piece of work serves and how it may stifle or animate efforts to create a more compassionate and just society. Being serious about examining our own theoretical assumptions and practices is understood by us to be crucial if our reflective activities are to contribute towards the growth of Freire’s conscientisation and our overall growth as professional teachers.

## Conclusion

Freire’s (2000, p. 85) ‘methodology of conscientisation’, is an intellectually active engagement that raises critical awareness and critical thinking about our world. Teachers ought to generate their own themes around their questions and concerns in a dialectical movement between their own practice and their theoretical interpretations and understandings. Initially, teachers can feel concerned when they try different approaches that may depart from the ‘banking concept of education’, without the conventional comfort and certainty of ‘gifts of knowledge’ into empty heads (Freire, 2000, p. 53). This should not produce an either/or in the extreme sense of

avoiding any semblance of depositing by immersing oneself in child-centred progressivism that is completely laissez faire in its approach. As recognised by Roberts (2010, p. 136), Freire ‘does not want teachers to assume they have a right or a responsibility to clear away clouds of student ignorance; on the other hand he also does not want teachers to pretend that they have nothing of value to offer students in assisting them to learn’. Teachers illuminate their praxis through theory to carefully provide varieties of experiences to enable their students to grow and develop their own critical consciousness.

Conscientisation opens up possibilities for considering other ways in which teachers’ work can be understood. The uncertainty generated in critical reflection provides impetus for ongoing curiosity and questioning on the political significance of the educational situation in which teachers find themselves. Freire’s notion of uncertainty is similar to what Biesta calls emancipatory ignorance; and both offer the possibility of students fostering in themselves a sense of incompleteness, and a need to continually and critically question matters of political significance in their world. According to Biesta (2010, p. 544),

What is at the heart of emancipatory education, therefore, is the act of revealing an intelligence to itself ... what the student cannot escape ... is the exercise of his [sic] liberty and this is summoned in a three-part question: what do you see? What do you think about it? What do you make of it?

Asking these questions can demystify theoretical texts and bring them closer to our professional lives. It reduces the distance between what we regard as legitimate academic codifications of what teachers are or should be and what we dismiss as our own irrelevant or inadequate personal histories as teachers. In so doing, it re-illuminates the wider social, political and ethical relationships that inform the professional work of teachers. To revitalise the lived experiences of our work that involves engaging with our own uncertainties, uniqueness and values, and as we ‘live the questions’ of what we see, think and enact in order to grow as professional teachers.

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# Chapter 6

## Teachers, Clergy, Schools and Paedophilia: Making a Mockery of the Duty of Care



John D. Whelen

**Abstract** This chapter moves between recent historical attempts to characterise teachers' work in terms of codes of conduct and ethics and the litany of the sexual abuse of children by teachers, principals, counsellors and others in schools revealed in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse over the past sixty years or so in Australia. The question of how any of the abuse revealed was possible is raised and several causes are discussed. The emphasis of the chapter, however, is on the ethical expectations that come with being a teacher as seen in the aspirational nature of the codes of conduct and ethics and the teacher's duty of care, among other forms of care. Given some of the Royal Commission's recommendations, in particular regarding initial teacher education, it is argued that teachers and students of education should be required to take a semester-long course on ethical conduct with particular focus on what is implied in the teacher's duty of care.

In one of the last acts of the Gillard Labor government of Australia, a Royal Commission was established in January, 2013, to inquire into institutional responses to child sexual abuse.<sup>1</sup> The terms of reference of the Royal Commission began: 'WHEREAS all children deserve a safe and happy childhood' and go on, among other tasks, to detail the contexts in which various abuses, including the sexual abuse of children, were alleged to have taken place. Among these places were schools, and among

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<sup>1</sup>The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, hereafter 'the Royal Commission,' or RCIRCSA in citations. A royal commission is established by a head of state to inquire into a matter of great importance. It has considerable powers but is confined to its terms of reference and cannot be terminated by government.

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the abusers were teachers and others in relations of authority over children.<sup>2</sup> Over a period of more than four years, the Royal Commission has gathered evidence not only of sexual abuse of children, but of the predatory behaviour of a number of teachers, principals, counsellors, and clergy, in some cases over more than fifty years ago. My task in this chapter, therefore, is twofold. In part it is necessarily a reflection on events and behaviours that happened throughout this period and particularly within the lifetime of those who gave evidence of having been sexually abused as children to the Royal Commission, without its becoming a history of the experience of schooling over this period. In part also my task is to reflect on changes made to the world of teachers' work that were designed to anticipate or deal with the sexual abuse of children in schools throughout this period and into the present. Within this task, the challenge has been to balance what is appropriate to ask of history against what one may reasonably ask of the recent past and present. This is a discursive tension that has characterised the work of the Royal Commission which was set up, as I have said, to investigate allegations of and responses to child sexual abuse in a range of institutions (excluding the family). Yet what is perhaps too easily forgotten but is abundantly clear from the evidence given before the commissioners is that institutions, no matter how they are structured and regardless of their policies and processes, are composed of persons—people such as teachers who, one may assume, are and always have been morally and ethically responsible for their own thoughts and behaviour in spite of whatever demands are made of them in the public domain.

To start with, I will examine some of the more important legal and policy frameworks that have been put in place over recent decades to address student welfare and professional ethics within which teachers were and are expected to work. The first part of this chapter will give some indication of the network of legal and policy obligations that have come to characterise teachers' work in relation to student care and welfare. In the second part I will ask how it is and was possible, in light of these changing obligations, that some children were and have been so devastatingly traumatised in the course of their education by teachers and others they should have been able to trust, and briefly address some implications for teacher education, for school administrators and for teachers that are suggested by the work of the Royal Commission. It will be clear that not only has the sexual abuse of children been per-

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<sup>2</sup>Terms defined in the Letters Patent of the Royal Commission include: '**child** means a child within the meaning of the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 20 November 1989'; '**institution** means any public or private body ... that provides, or has at any time provided ... the means through which adults have come into contact with children ...'; '**institutional context** includes 'the premises of an institution', and 'activities ... engaged in by an official of an institution' which may have 'created, facilitated, increased, or in any way contributed to ... the risk of child sexual abuse or the circumstances or conditions giving rise to that risk' or 'any other circumstances where ... an institution is, or should be treated as being, responsible for adults having contact with children.' *Terms of Reference. Letters Patent*, <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/about-us/terms-of-reference>. Accessed 24 November, 2016. For the purposes of this chapter, **teacher** may be defined as any person registered to teach under the appropriate Act of each state or territory of Australia, e.g., the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*, Victoria. See, for example, Victorian Institute of Teaching, (nd), 'The Victorian Teaching Profession Code of Conduct.' Catholic and Independent schools have employed persons to teach (such as priests) at their discretion.

petrated in and around schools, and been allowed to be perpetrated, in the absence of sufficient statutory and policy oversight, but the very absence of what one might call an ethics of care—a will to care by some responsible for children’s welfare—has characterised the lived experience of those who have been abused. Furthermore, I will suggest that the very notion of care, far from being self-evidently good, is tragically and dangerously ambiguous in light of the actions of those whose intentions, while being deeply covert, are at the very least criminal, if not evil.

## Ethics, Duty and Care

Any teacher, but especially a beginning teacher, has a number of professional duties apart from formal classroom teaching and needs to be cognisant of what those duties entail. In general, there are three broad sources of duty, two of which are legal, viz. legislation, made by parliament, and common law, made by courts. The other source of duty, and the one that will be most visible to a beginning teacher from day to day, is policy made and administered by schools and school authorities (Mathews, Cronan, Walsh, Farrell, & Butler, 2008, 33). While legislation and common law provide a pervasive context of duty within a state or territory, and will be discussed below, the relation between local or system policy, and duty, will be examined first. By way of simplification within the constraints of space I will focus on the case of the state of Victoria while noting that policy content and responsibilities may differ between state, Catholic and independent schools and their administrative bodies.

All teachers in the state of Victoria are required to be registered with the Victorian institute of Teaching. *The Victorian Teaching Profession Code of Conduct* (n.d.) specifies the principles which it claims ‘describe the professional conduct, personal conduct and professional competence expected of a teacher by their colleagues and the community (VIT, *Code of Conduct*, 1). This code is based on values set out in *The Victorian Teaching Profession Code of Ethics* (n.d.), viz. integrity, respect and responsibility, which are said to be values or ‘ideals to which we aspire’ (VIT, *Code of Ethics*). Integrity is to be demonstrated partly by ‘acting in the best interests of learners’ and maintaining a professional relationship with learners, parents/carers, colleagues and the community.’ Respect is to be demonstrated partly by ‘acting with care and compassion (and) treating learners fairly and impartially and responsibility is to be demonstrated partly by ‘working cooperatively with colleagues in the best interest of our learners’ (ibid.). All three ideals are framed by the observation that as teachers ‘We hold a unique position of trust and influence, which we recognise in our relationships with learners ...’ (ibid.).

It is clear from the outline above that the Codes of Conduct and Ethics are intended to guide actions, behaviour (and no doubt thought and reflection), by constructing a framework within which a professional (if not personal) identity will both emerge and, crucially, be observable. They are, in all respects, as Forster (2012, p. 14) notes, aspirational codes relying on individuals to ‘have an intrinsic motivation towards moral action’ rather than requiring ‘surveillance and discipline’ to ensure right action.

Just what sorts of action are intended may be found within the *Code of Conduct*. While stating that the *Code* does not claim to cover every situation a teacher may find him or herself in, it is nevertheless comprehensive. Among its principles relating to relationships with students are:

‘1.2: Teachers Treat Their Learners With Courtesy And Dignity.’ Included in this principle is the statement that teachers ‘protect learners from intimidation, embarrassment, humiliation or harm.’

1.4: ‘Teachers Maintain Objectivity In Their Relationships With Learners.’ This requires that in their professional roles ‘teachers do not behave as a friend ...’ and that they ‘make decisions in learners’ best interests’ and ‘do not draw learners into their personal agendas.’

1.5: ‘Teachers Are Always In A Professional Relationship With Their Learners Whether At The Education Setting Where They Teach Or Not.’ This principle affirms that ‘Teachers hold a unique position of influence and trust that should not be violated or compromised (and should) recognise there are limits or boundaries to their relationship with learners.’ It is further pointed out that the professional relationship ‘**will** be violated if a teacher ... has a sexual relationship with a learner’ and so on through a range of interactions involving ‘sexual innuendo, inappropriate language and/or material,’ touching a learner ‘without a valid reason’ and contacting a student in any way ‘without a valid context.’ Furthermore, a professional relationship ‘**may** be compromised’ if a teacher ‘attends parties or socialises with learners’ or ‘invites a learner or learners back to their home, particularly if no-one else is present’ (VIT, *Code of Conduct*, 2–3).<sup>3</sup>

In respect of personal conduct, the *Code* claims that while the boundary between professional and personal conduct is unclear, ‘it is expected that teachers will ... be positive role models ... respect the rule of law ... (and) not exploit their position for personal ... gain’ (VIT, *Code of Conduct*, 4). Finally, in respect of professional competence, teachers are expected to be aware of their legal responsibilities in relation to (among other things), negligence, mandatory reporting and privacy. Nowhere in the *Code of Conduct* is there any reference to duties outside the scope of the Institute of Teaching’s remit, other than what is implied in the terms ‘negligence’ and ‘mandatory reporting,’ while the word ‘care’ only appears once in the *Code of Ethics* and not at all in the *Code of Conduct*. No matter what each code states explicitly, it is in the nature of such codes that an ethical contract is implied, the details of which only become clear in the lived experience of all to whom they are addressed. In this case, there is a clear and unambiguous expectation that teachers’ professional and personal conduct in the course of their teaching will meet community standards as well as those set out by their profession’s peak bodies. Contravening the terms of such codes may invite censure and more or less severe professional and even personal consequences, but their relation to legally binding duties depends very much on the

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<sup>3</sup>While the Codes of Ethics and Conduct are undated, the introduction of ‘learner/s’ started from 2017. Previous iterations referred to ‘student/s.’ The conceptual difference between the terms may seem startling, ‘student’ seeming to denote a whole person rather than one performing a particular function. See Chap. 9 for more on the ‘learnification’ of education.



nature of, and the degree to which, their contravention breaches legally mandated duties. I will turn now to one such legally binding duty which, in one form or another, is common to all jurisdictions throughout Australia: a teacher's 'duty of care.'

Most, if not all teacher education courses in Australia give some time to the legal aspects of a teacher's duty of care.<sup>4</sup> In the case of the state of Victoria, as in all other jurisdictions, the duty of care is an element of the common law of negligence which not only 'requires principals and teachers to take all reasonable steps to reduce risk,' but also stresses that '(w)henever a teacher–student relationship exists, teachers have a special duty of care (meaning that) 'a teacher is to take such measures as are reasonable in the circumstances to protect a student under the teacher's charge from risks or injury that the teacher should reasonably have foreseen'' (DET, 2015). The sense of care addressed here as a legal responsibility is conceived of as a demand, or non-negotiable expectation requiring one to act—as the policy stipulates—out of a sense of duty. The reach of this duty is exceptional, especially in so far as the duties of a principal are concerned: it covers the provision of suitable and safe premises, adequate supervision of students, having a working anti-bullying policy, the provision of medical assistance to sick or injured students and the careful management of 'employee recruitment, conduct and performance' (ibid). Importantly, the duty of care is '*non-delegable*' which means that 'it cannot be assigned to another party' (ibid) so that it rests professionally with each and every teacher. It further extends in the case of Victoria to such matters as photographing and filming students, requests for information about students, the use of mobile phones by students, visitors in schools, riding and walking to and from school and student collection, transporting students and even students running away from school. Added to these contexts, schools enrolling international students under the age of 18 are required to 'have a comprehensive home stay policy and procedures in place to assess and monitor the suitability of accommodation arrangements' if such students 'are not being cared for by a parent or suitable relative' (ibid). To be negligent in relation to any of these contexts or domains of behaviour is to open oneself as a teacher, or to open the school, to a claim in negligence for compensation for any injury suffered as a result of a 'negligent act or omission' (ibid) that could reasonably have been foreseen.

Teachers' duties, however, should not be thought of as merely confined by professional and organisational policies, and the common law relating to negligence. Throughout Australia in recent decades, states and territories have enacted legislation to protect children from abuse and neglect as society has become ever more aware of the incidence of and especially the damage caused by child abuse and neglect (Butler, Mathews, Farrell, & Walsh, 2009). This legislation imposes a statutory duty on teachers and others whose work brings them into contact with children 'to report in good faith suspicions that a child has been or is likely to be subjected to abuse, where that suspicion arises in the course of their work' (ibid., 1). Commonly known as mandatory reporting laws, their aim is 'to enable early interventions by appropri-

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<sup>4</sup>See in particular Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, especially Standard 4 (Professional Practice) dealing with student safety and Standard 7 dealing with professional ethics and responsibilities and compliance with legislative and other requirements (AITSL, 2011).

ate government authorities' (ibid.) so that various child protection measures can be put in place. Failure to comply with a mandatory reporting duty may open one to legislative penalty as well as disciplinary proceedings within one's profession on the basis that 'professional codes of conduct and policy commonly require teachers to comply with the legislative requirement where it exists' (ibid. 1). One can readily see that there may be a fine line between reporting in good faith and making an erroneous report on the one hand, and failure to report, on the other. In Victoria, the obligation to report is placed on teachers and principals if the suspected victim of abuse is a child under 16 and there is a 'reasonable *belief* that a child is 'in need of protection' on the ground that the child *has* suffered or *is likely to suffer* significant harm as a result of physical injury or sexual abuse' (ibid. 2). While there are significant differences in the legislation in the various jurisdictions throughout Australia, the intent is much the same: 'to protect a vulnerable group by imposing a duty on teachers to ... report suspected harm being suffered, or at risk of being suffered, by a member of that group' (ibid., 3; RCIRCSA *Interim Report*, vol. 1, 162–165).<sup>5</sup> Importantly, 'the absolute obligation imposed under the mandatory reporting legislation represents a higher standard than a duty to exercise reasonable care' (ibid. 5) but in any event, all Australian teachers, as employees, 'have a duty to be aware of, and comply with, policy directions' (ibid. 7). In most schools, a teacher's responsibility will be discharged by making such a report in good faith to a senior member of school staff (such as one of the principal class, usually the principal), who must then forward the report to the appropriate agency. In the event that the report is found to be erroneous, the identity of the one making a report will remain confidential and he or she will have statutory immunity from being sued or held liable for defamation by anyone who might have been suspected of causing abuse (ibid. 9).<sup>6</sup>

This outline of teachers' duties as they exist in Victoria will be clearly recognisable in every jurisdiction, state and territory of Australia. The duties I have mentioned, while perhaps not exhaustive in detail, are common to state, Catholic and independent school contexts, but there is one further duty that all teachers will recognise, viz. the duty to exercise pastoral care. To frame pastoral care as a duty rather than as merely a responsibility (of, e.g., form teachers and welfare and level co-ordinators), may seem strange at first sight, but it is at least implied as a duty in terms of codes of conduct and ethics, and in school policies as well. It survives as the practical outcome of broad vision statements such as those found in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008) and the National Safe Schools Framework (SCSEEC, 2013). From the former, we read that 'Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and

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<sup>5</sup>For further detail regarding when mandatory reporting was introduced in each state or territory, reporter groups, definitions of 'child' and 'young person' and the major focus of the legislation, see Mathews (2014).

<sup>6</sup>I will pass over such issues as whether or not a report is passed on at all to the appropriate agency; whether a report is made maliciously; whether a report is made expeditiously; whether damage could have been reasonably foreseen; the extent of actual knowledge or suspicion that a teacher must have before reporting, and whether in fact a relationship of care existed at all in any particular case. For discussion relating to the states and territories in Australia, see Mathews et al. (2008).

aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians ...’ while from the latter its guiding vision is clear:

All Australian schools are safe, supportive and respectful teaching and learning communities that promote student wellbeing (original emphasis p. 3).

Clearly, this amounts to a declaration of the significance of pastoral care. The Safe Schools Framework goes on to affirm that ‘the rights of all members of the school community to feel *safe* and *be safe* at school’ (original emphasis), and that schools will commit to developing policies and procedures to ensure safe, supportive and protective school environments (ibid.). What this means for teachers is that they ‘are encouraged to be both proactive in building safe and supportive learning communities as well as reactive in responding effectively to situations involving child maltreatment, harassment, aggression, violence and bullying’ (ibid., 4). This vision and its elaboration clearly anticipate the opening words of the Royal Commission’s terms of reference quoted in the opening paragraph above.

Furthermore, it has been claimed that the idea of pastoral care ‘(underpins) the ethos of Australian Catholic Schools’ and that ‘One of the most important roles of a teacher in a Catholic school is to care for students pastorally’ (Catholic Education Commission, NSW, 2003, 3; also Cahill, Wyn, & Smith, 2004, iii). The idea of pastoral care has increasingly become the focus of sustained inquiry and study in the last forty years. During this time, it has become identified with ‘four core components ...: the promotion of *health and wellbeing, resilience, academic care, and social capital*’ (Hearn, Campbell-Pope, House, & Cross, 2006, I, original emphasis; see also 13–21). It is not my intention to critique these aspects here, or to reflect on historical changes from earlier emphasis on moral and character development. Rather, I want to emphasise the fact of pastoral care’s increasingly embedded link with the academic curriculum and organisation of schools so that:

(it) can assist adolescents to develop positive self-esteem, healthy risk taking, goal setting and negotiating, enhancing protective factors contributing to their resiliency as well as developing a sense of social cohesion that together can improve their overall health and wellbeing (ibid., ii).

Not surprisingly, this has become identified with a focus on student behaviour and emotional development in a safe, supportive and caring school environment as revealed in a school’s programs and educational practices. Thus, while it might have been argued in the past that the primary function of a teacher, particularly a secondary school teacher, is to teach subject disciplines, it is now indisputable that far from being a ‘complementary practice,’ pastoral care ‘is an inclusive function, integrated into the curriculum and structural organisation of the school so that the students’ personal, social and academic needs are met’ (ibid., 9). For example, recent widespread attention to developing anti-bullying policies conveys this sense of duty beyond responsibility, particularly in relation to issues experienced by students identifying as LGBTQI (DET, 2018). Research shows, and as all teachers need to be aware, it is beyond dispute that the nature of learning experiences and the personal qualities of teachers have considerable impact on student wellbeing, resilience and success. As Hearn et al., argue, reflecting on pastoral care:

... while not all teachers have formal training in counselling (nor should they ...), they do clearly need a basic understanding of how their own actions, their relationships with students, and the learning environment which they create, can enhance or harm the wellbeing of students ... (ibid.19).<sup>7</sup>

In summary, then, teachers are enjoined to treat students with courtesy and dignity, protect them from intimidation, embarrassment and harm, retain a professional distance in the sense of not drawing students into their personal lives, respect the trust put in them by society and not abuse the unique influence they potentially have over all their students. They are expected to behave appropriately and be positive role models in a relationship that has come to entail a duty of care with wide-ranging implications, in particular the duty to report any well-founded suspicion that a child in their care is being, or might be, abused. Put this way, this summary encapsulates what sounds like an ethic of care aimed at protecting the young from abuse and providing an educational context within which student wellbeing is actively promoted so that schools may be supportive, protective and safe. In other words, the institutions within which students and teachers come together must be so designed and managed as to achieve these outcomes, but what is further assumed is that all those involved will be internally motivated 'towards the good' (Forster, ibid. p. 14).

## Discussion

Given the foregoing outline of policies and legislatively mandated duties that characterise the world of teachers' work, and which are designed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, we might well ask how it came about that over the past half century (if not longer), while many of these initiatives were being introduced, so many children in so many settings were so tragically abused by adults whose job it clearly was to care for them. The work of the Royal Commission was to a large extent focussed on this question, and its final report deals in detail with the many causes that must be addressed. One part of the answer to this question, however, as Harber (2004) argues and as the Royal commission accepts in relation to how schools can harm students and society, is that it was 'the authoritarian, closed nature of much schooling meshed with patriarchal values and behaviours (that provided) a context within which (child sexual abuse could) happen' (ibid, p. 98; RCIRCSA, *Final Report*, vol. 13, p. 11). So much of the work of the Royal Commission was indeed concerned with evidence of sexual abuse within the confines of faith and independent schools, especially parish and single-sex boarding schools. A further part of the answer concerns the fragmented jurisdictions within which legal and policy frameworks have arisen and the historically hesitant pace of legislative initiative in the area of child welfare. For example, the date of introduction of mandatory reporting duty varies over a forty year period from November, 1969 (South Australia) to January, 2009 (Western Australia). Even within the various jurisdictions' legisla-

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<sup>7</sup>On the failure of pastoral care, see RCIRCSA, *Final Report*, vol. 13, p. 161.

tion, however, some among teachers, clergy, principals and other school staff were not always included as persons mandated to report in the initial legislation and were added subsequently, if at all, making any imputation of child sexual abuse difficult to establish. In fact, even the term ‘child sexual abuse’ is open to a variety of definitions depending on definitions of ‘child’ (which can vary in different jurisdictions) and ‘sexual abuse’ in the context of what constitutes legal consent (RCIRCSA, *Interim Report*, vol. 1, Chap. 3 passim; Goldsworthy, 2015; Parkinson & Cashmore, 2017, 35). Not surprisingly, therefore, the importance attached by the Royal Commission to including any connotation of such abuse is reflected in the breadth of its definition of child sexual abuse as:

any act which exposes a child to, or involves a child in, sexual processes beyond his or her understanding or contrary to accepted community standards. Sexually abusive behaviours can include the fondling of genitals, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or any other object, fondling of breasts, voyeurism, exhibitionism, and exposing the child to or involving the child in pornography. It includes child grooming, which refers to actions deliberately undertaken with the aim of befriending and establishing an emotional connection with a child, to lower the child’s inhibitions in preparation for sexual activity with the child (RCIRCSA, *Final Report*, vol. 1, p. 320).

But the testimony of those who have been abused leaves no doubt of the nature and long-lasting effects of that abuse, not only for themselves, but also for their families and those nearest to them. Some idea of the extent of the sexual abuse of children in schools may be given in the following statistics. By the time the Royal Commission had finished taking submissions, the commissioners had heard from 2186 survivors of whom nearly one-third (31.8%) said they had been sexually abused in school settings. Of these, 75.9% said they had been abused in non-government schools, and of those, 73.8% named a Catholic school and 26.4% named an independent school. Of all survivors, 24.9% said they had been sexually abused in a government school. Among all survivors, 30.4% said they had been sexually abused in boarding school settings almost all of which (96.8%) were non-government. Of these, 57% were Catholic schools and 43.2% were independent schools. In total, sexual abuse occurred in 1069 schools (55.8% non-government, 44.2% government). The vast majority of abusers were male teachers (although a small proportion was female). 58.4% of survivors reported being abused by teachers while 39.9% reported being abused by people in religious ministry. Nearly 90% of survivors said they had been sexually abused by a single adult while 11.1% said they had been abused by multiple perpetrators. While sexual abuse could first occur at any age from 0–4 years to 17 years, the age of first incident was most commonly 10–14 years for both males and females. However, among survivors first abused between the ages of 5–9 far more were girls than boys, especially before 1990 when more than three-quarters of those abused were boys. After 1990, the proportion of girls abused increased. Of all survivors of sexual abuse in school contexts, 82.0% said their abuse involved

multiple incidents with one or more perpetrators. Most abuse lasted less than a year, but some reported it went on for more than five years.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, in discussing the types of abuse experienced, over three-quarters said they had experienced non-penetrative contact abuse (e.g. being touched or touching a perpetrator's body) whereas more than four in ten (803 survivors) said they had experienced penetrative abuse such as 'penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth with a penis, another body part or an object' (RCIRCSA, *Final Report*, vol. 13, p. 82). Quite apart from types of non-sexual abuse which were commonly experienced by survivors, more than one in five reported having been exposed to sexual acts or, e.g. pornography in school settings while a small percentage reported having been manipulated or coerced into participating in sexual activity in exchange for an incentive (*ibid.*).

In light of these statistics, one must ask again: how was it possible that children in our schools were sexually abused by those whom they had every right to expect would care for them? How is it that the social and ethical contract between children and parents on the one hand, and school administrators, teachers, counsellors and clergy on the other, could be so blatantly, so defiantly and so criminally ignored? While a good deal of the abuse revealed to the Royal Commission occurred over many years, it is also true and deeply troubling that much of it has occurred far more recently. In spite of legislative attempts to ensure that teachers are bound by a duty of care, and regardless of pre-employment working with children checks,<sup>9</sup> regardless of codes of conduct and ethics and regardless of injunctions to ensure the pastoral care of pupils and students, how was any of this possible?

The subtlety and complexity of issues raised in these questions constitute major challenges to the ways they might be answered. Psychologists, psychiatrists and criminologists may offer insights, but it is clear that the teaching profession as much as governments, bureaucracies and private bodies responsible for the management of schools, especially those in which sexual abuse has been perpetrated, must also seek out causes and do whatever is necessary to prevent the sexual abuse of children from ever happening again. Wide-ranging and far-reaching recommendations *to institutions* made by the Royal Commission in terms of how they need to respond to allegations of child sexual abuse have set out a framework for this task, but, as I have suggested above and will argue further below, real change of the kind so clearly expected depends ultimately on what is in the hearts and minds of individual persons.

Some preliminary comments, however, can be made. As the Royal Commission makes clear, the sexual abuse of children has taken place in a matrix of behaviours, some of which appear benign or ambiguous, some of which are clearly not. This has made it difficult in some instances to detect and report grooming behaviour even when its existence was suspected, while in other instances, colleagues of the one

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<sup>8</sup>Statistics quoted are from RCIRCSA, *Final Report*, Vol. 13, *Schools*, pp. 10–11, 83, 91, 93–94. Sexual abuse by children constituted a further concern not addressed here. Some perpetrators were both teachers and in religious ministry.

<sup>9</sup>These reports and checks, without which a person may not be eligible to be registered as a practising teacher, were introduced by states and territories from 2006 to 2014. Their currency varies from two to five years.

grooming a student, or students, report a sense of disbelief when the behaviour is revealed. Furthermore, as students have often found to their cost, their stories of abuse have not only been denied, but they have been punished and made to bear the brunt of guilt for their efforts as principals and religious leaders have sought to save the reputation of schools, cover up the transgressions of clergy and teachers and deny responsibility. Given the history of child sexual abuse in schools revealed by the Royal Commission, it is not surprising that there should be calls for more thorough government oversight, improved school management and the development of more, and more refined policies—all useful and even necessary as such recommendations might be—but such ‘solutions’ simply rely on external sanctions and the regulation of institutional decision-making via ‘policy as usual.’ Arguably a more promising place to start—and one that relies on the will of those who are responsible for managing schools and school systems—may well be to open up the experiential world of the school not only to scholarly investigation but also to the teachers and students who inhabit any particular school by asking: what does go on in schools—in this school—and who knows?

Pupils and students who have been sexually abused, as well as their abusers, know full well what can go on in schools. The testimony of those who know what they have experienced and have survived for years after having been abused reveal not only how difficult it is to talk about and live with the details of their experience, but how important it is to remove the power imbalances that have permitted the criminally devious intentions of abusers to remain hidden as the following examples will show. For example, in her evidence to the Royal Commission, Felicity recalled that in 1968 when she was in Year 6 at a state school, her teacher ‘made me his pet (and) asked me to baby sit while he and his wife were at home. Every time she left the room he’d kiss me and touch me.’ This continued both at school and a drive-in theatre. Felicity kept these things to herself for 44 years. Erin, aged 11 in 1996 revealed that her teacher touched her bottom. While it was revealed that the Education Department had knowingly moved the teacher around the state, he was eventually convicted of 100 sex offences against thirteen girls over 25 years. Jacqueline, in the late 1960s, recalled that her state school teacher, in order to have ongoing sex with her, promised to marry her, buy a farm and buy her horses. Noel, when he was 13 in the late 1960s, recalled that he was targeted for sex abuse by a teacher whose rages intimidated him and who used the cane regularly. The teacher was eventually charged with 67 counts of child abuse of ten boys over a 30-year period. But stories such as these are the merest outlines of what has been repressed and suffered as lives have been destroyed by what has happened while hesitant attempts to create legal and policy frameworks to prevent abuse have been too late or inadequate to the task.

It is not my intention here to dwell on the effects of sexual abuse, both short and long terms, harrowing and even tragic as they are. Rather, I want to draw attention to the obvious point that the grooming and sexual abuse of school children by teachers or others in a position of trust, when it takes place in school settings frequently takes place in the presence of other teachers and adults and in spite of whatever



policies invoking protection are in place. How is this possible?<sup>10</sup> The distinction commonly made in relation to this is between the grooming of potential victims, and the actual perpetration of abuse. This is in part due, as I have suggested above, to the difficulty of defining child sexual abuse but also to the deviousness of perpetrators, the ambiguity with which behaviour may be interpreted and the organisational and cultural rationality within which perpetrators and their colleagues work (Munro & Fish, 2015; O’Leary, Koh, & Dare, 2016). This point can be made with reference to one example dealt with by the Royal Commission relating to the Sydney YMCA. In one case, an employee “did sometimes have children on his lap (which) wasn’t a good look as it made it look to the other children that he had favourites” (ibid.). Leaving aside for the moment the possibility that for a range of reasons this and similar behaviours may not have been reported to an authority figure, or reported and not acted on, what matters here—and this is also the case for schools—is the failure to construct and implement workable policy directives that might actually help in the circumstances. As Munro and Fish (2015) report in relation to the Sydney YMCA, their Code of Conduct stated:

DO NOT: hold, kiss, cuddle or touch children in an inappropriate and/or culturally insensitive way (ibid. 29, original emphasis).

In spite of what at first glance might seem to be clear and adequate policy, grooming and sexual abuse still occurred. The ambiguity inherent in words such as ‘appropriate’ and ‘inappropriate’ leave, and will always leave, too much to the judgment of individuals (ibid, pp. 12, 29, 35). Even when clearer rules are drafted, however, a lax organisational environment in which policies are virtually ignored may confuse teachers and related staff about what the policies actually are and how to enforce them. In such an environment, benign and grooming behaviours may be virtually impossible to distinguish because, as Munro and Fish (2015, 12) observe, ‘benign and grooming behaviours can have some of the very same goals, and go to the very heart of what the institution is trying to achieve, such as cultivating trusting adult-child relationships’ which, one might argue in relation to schools, lie at the very heart of the educative endeavour (see Parkinson & Cashmore, 2017, pp. 23, 27, 35).<sup>11</sup>

But what are we to think of schools where arguably this is clearly not the case? What are we to think of schools where child sexual abuse has taken place and which have been characterised by those who have been abused as having a culture not of trust and respect but of violence, intimidation and a sense of entitlement?<sup>12</sup> For example, when Charlie, aged 11 in 1963, told the school chaplain at his Christian Brothers

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<sup>10</sup>Munro and Fish (2015) and O’Leary et al. (2016) comment on the difficulty of seeing and recognising what later is identified as grooming behaviour. I touch on this later in the chapter.

<sup>11</sup>On types and the extent of grooming, including by teachers, see RCIRCSA, *Final Report*, vol. 2, pp. 40–41.

<sup>12</sup>In the case of Geelong Grammar School, for example, the Commissioners found that ‘There was a culture ... that was authoritarian, disciplined and ‘devoid of pastoral care’.’ RCIRCSA, *Report of Case Study No. 32. The response of Geelong Grammar School to allegations of child sexual abuse of former students*. December, 2016, p. 10. See also Case Study 34 and Parkinson and Cashmore (2017, 47) on Knox Grammar (Case Study 23).



school in Melbourne he was being sexually assaulted by two Christian Brothers, he was told “Some of us have a cross to bear boy, and that’s yours”.<sup>13</sup> Charlie described how he would be kissed by a Brother, called ‘one of his ‘little darlings’ and fondled. “Sometimes he’d take you out to a room and make you perform oral sex on him or do it to you. He’d masturbate you, make you masturbate him” (RCIRCSA, *Interim Report*, vol. 2, p. 110). When Charlie reported this to the principal he was told “that couldn’t happen, you’re lying.” Charlie endured this abuse for five years. In 1972, aged 12, Greg was sexually abused by his class teacher who was also the principal at a NSW Christian Brothers school. Having been accused of talking during school assembly, Greg was made to go to the principal’s office where he was grabbed from behind as the Principal ‘put his hand down my pants and fondled my penis ... I could feel his erection at my back.’ Following this and after telling his mother, Greg reported he was subject to ‘a high level of physical punishment.’ “He had a two inch wide strap, three pieces of leather sewn together. I got the record for the most straps, a hundred in a year. He belted me with such malice. I can’t describe the look in his eyes. I was petrified of him” (ibid. 123). Jack, after 65 years, recalled the first day at a Catholic school where a Sister of Mercy hit him with a crucifix for wetting himself. He was led to a room where a priest undressed him and sexually played with him. Jack was 4 years old. Subsequently, as he was being molested by a priest ‘reading passages from a red book’ he was made to repeat “‘pretty boys are for God’s pleasure’ and insert a finger into my anus or masturbate himself while feeling my penis. The nuns started referring to me as ‘pretty boy’” (ibid, 124). Such stories are not unique as recent disclosures at a range of Anglican, Presbyterian, Jewish and other Catholic schools make clear implicating classroom teachers, principals and their deputies, school counsellors and priests. Sadly, as the Royal Commission has shown, attempts to deal with these issues have trailed well behind the ethical crises they were expected to curtail, if not prevent. The hoped for outcomes of mandatory reporting, awareness of the duty of care, pastoral care, working with children checks and local school policies in too many instances have failed to materialise. In such cases, one may reasonably ask whatever was it that passed then, and has passed even more recently, for a sense of personal moral responsibility among the adults concerned.

## Conclusion

The Final Report of the Royal Commission (comprising 17 volumes) made 189 recommendations, the vast majority of which were aimed at making institutions safer for children.<sup>14</sup> In particular, eight recommendations were made in relation to schools

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<sup>13</sup>A student sexually abused at a Melbourne Catholic school before 1990 reported a conversation between the principal and vice-principal in which the former told the latter to resist the temptation to assault boys, to which the vice-principal replied: “God made us this way and it’s his fault. You’re one to talk, you’re the same as me.” (*The Age*, 29 August, 2015, p. 10).

<sup>14</sup>A further 220 recommendations cover criminal justice, redress and civil litigation and working with children checks.

(*ibid.*, pp. 28–29). Of these, recommendation 13.8 deals with ‘teacher registration requirements to better protect children from sexual abuse in schools (by reviewing) minimum national requirements for assessing the *suitability of teachers ...*’ (*ibid.*, p. 29, my emphasis). What is of interest here is that while the recommendation is addressed to government institutions responsible for administering such policies, the ultimate destination of the policy is individual persons, or more precisely their hearts and minds which, as I have alluded to throughout this chapter, are in a sense beyond the reach of the royal commission. In relation to pre-service education for teachers, the commissioners argued for greater national emphasis to be placed on efforts to ‘increase teachers’ awareness and understanding of the prevention of child sexual abuse and potentially harmful sexual behaviours of young people (so that they might better) recognise indicators of abuse in schoolchildren, intervene where there are children with problematic or harmful sexual behaviours, and report adult perpetrators who groom and exploit children’ (RCIRCSEA, *Final Report*, vol. 13, p. 253). Here the Report reaches rhetorically for ‘appropriate people ... to work as teachers,’ (*ibid.*, p. 252) noting that efforts to locate such people have already begun in relation to applicants for teacher registration in both New South Wales and Victoria. After decades of legislative and policy developments attempting to ensure that schools are safe places, the focus of the Royal Commission has begun to settle on issues of character and morality as well as on institutional process and compliance, and by implication, away from basic teaching adequacy in the classroom.<sup>15</sup>

In the comments that follow I want to reflect on this turn towards the teacher as ethically rather than as merely technically competent. There already exists a considerable literature addressing this issue, and the point is perhaps made most clearly by O’Neill and Bourke (2010, p. 166): ‘It does not necessarily matter in material terms to students and their parents whether teachers are ‘professional’; but it certainly matters that they are ‘ethical.’’ If this turn to the ethical is to be reflected in ITE courses and ongoing teacher accreditation, a major change in emphasis on what is considered to be professionally significant will need to be undertaken. For a start, the issue of a teacher’s duty of care needs to be re-examined and broadened from a duty essentially focussed on preventing obvious, short-term physical harm, such as injury in a playground to one emphasising the need to identify and respond in an ethically justifiable way to the countless moments, let alone dilemmas, that characterise teachers’ work. In fact, the term ‘duty of care’ is often rendered as if it were one word—‘duty-of-care’—as if conflating both ‘duty’ and ‘care.’ The issue should be less ‘what is (a) duty/what is care?’ than ‘how do you do duty?’ and ‘under what circumstances, if any, might there be no duty implied in being a teacher?’

In the current context, particular emphasis must be directed towards recognising the apparently inconsequential, but possibly devious, covert behaviour that could so

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<sup>15</sup>Note that in relation to the obligation to report known or suspected child sexual abuse, the Commissioners state that reports should be made ‘not necessarily as a legal obligation enforced by a criminal offence but because it is moral and ethical to do so.’ RCIRCSEA, *Final Report*, vol. 13, p. 243.

easily amount to grooming.<sup>16</sup> This could go hand in hand with a serious re-evaluation of teachers' codes of conduct and how they are implemented, exposing the role of teacher ethics and moral commitment to penetrating inquiry (e.g. Colnerud, 2006; Chapman, 2015). A public debate on the social contract between families, children and schools and teachers in which any attempt to foreground an ethics of care would be useful, as would debate about not only who *can* be a teacher, but who *should* be a teacher. As Francis and Mills (2012) argue, schools and schooling are not necessarily benign places or processes, a view the Royal Commission has confirmed, as the damage revealed in the name of schooling, or education, must now be accounted for.

Second, and closely linked to the comments above, teacher training courses must take the issue of actually being a teacher as distinct from doing teaching far more seriously. I suggest that all teachers in training should have to work through a semester-long course on ethical conduct (see, e.g., Nash, 1991; O'Neill & Bourke, 2010; Schussler & Knarr, 2013; Klaassen, Osguthorpe, & Sanger, 2016)<sup>17</sup> and perhaps even make a public affirmation upon employment of their commitment to the ethical conduct expected of them, just as some other professions require their acolytes to do.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, and staying within the context of the Royal Commission, there is an obvious opportunity to extend in-service training for all teachers to learn why it is so difficult to see and believe what is, or might be, happening around them. The challenge to see colleagues they have come to trust in a critical light will be difficult, especially in schools that have fostered a collegial culture, but the challenge is to become aware of how to identify the pretence of care before damage is done. But more than this, as Morris (2015, p. 378) argues, while 'Teacher education programs currently provide little guidance or instruction on creating, navigating, and maintaining relationships' with students, it is hardly surprising that 'educational research has seldom considered the slippery-slope effect in the context of teacher misconduct' (ibid. p. 375). Clearly, there are considerable benefits to be gained from both pre-service and ongoing teacher training focussed on such questions as 'how much teacher care is too much and can a teacher relate too intensely with students?' (ibid. 378; see also Parkinson & Cashmore, 2017, *passim*, on dimensions and degrees of risk of professional misconduct).

Third, all schools, but especially Catholic and independent schools, should be prepared to open themselves to public and academic scrutiny so that stories other than academic 'results' can be told (Whelen, 2016). The preciousness with which some schools in Australia have preserved their insularity under the guise of independence and not encouraged inquiry into their values and cultures has much to do

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<sup>16</sup>While many of the Royal Commission's recommendations could, when taken together, be interpreted as a detailed critique of institutions' duty of care, the Commissioners have not seen it as part of their remit to inquire into and comment specifically on the teacher's duty of care. Personal communication with the Chief Executive Officer of the Royal Commission, 29 March, 2016.

<sup>17</sup>The issue of pre-service education and ongoing teacher training is raised in Standard 7 of the proposed Child Safe Standards recommended by the Royal Commission, e.g., recommendations 6.19, 6.21.

<sup>18</sup>Such affirmations may in a sense also be gained through Value Based Interviewing of potential employees. See O'Leary et al. (2016, 20) and Cleary (2012), Chap. 7.

with what has transpired in them. This is especially the case with boarding schools, as the recommendations of the Royal Commission indicate, where staff often live on site and where numerous cases of the sexual abuse of students have been reported. Such reports have all too often been ignored or covered up while perpetrators have sometimes been given glowing references when and if they were dismissed at all.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, as I mentioned at the start, the sheer ambiguity of what it means to care needs to be clarified in any attempt to deal with child sexual abuse in schools. The one who takes care not to be found out must be found out. The care that goes into grooming must be exposed for what it is. The betrayal of trust that underlies the teacher/child relationship must be prevented and that can only be done when the necessary caring relationship in all its subtlety is uppermost in the minds of all (Noddings, 1984, 1992; Whelen, 2015). The argument for surveillance and regulation could hardly be clearer, but neither could the expectation of ethical behaviour be greater. It must never be possible again for an adult, reflecting on his or her school days, to say, as so many have in their own words, that a teacher or school ‘stole my childhood and innocence’ (*The Age*, 29 August, 2015, p. 10).<sup>20</sup> Contemporary interest in student wellbeing remains situated within the equally contemporary historical era we are still part of and which has been revealed to have hidden within it not only the most grotesque ethical inertia and moral duplicity, but also their consequence: the devastating experiences not only of those who have survived their schooling over the past half century or more, but of those who have not.

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<sup>19</sup>For example, the Royal Commission found in the case of Geelong Grammar School, that both before and after the introduction of mandatory reporting obligations in Victoria in 1994, numerous reports of sexual abuse made by students, parents or ex-students were treated by school authorities by essentially protecting the interests of the school at the expense of the truth of the matter and the existential consequences for the student claiming to have been abused. RCIRCSA, December 2016, *Report of Case Study No. 32. The response of Geelong Grammar School to allegations of child sexual abuse of former students*, pp. 10, 20ff. See also Parkinson and Cashmore (2017, pp. 26–27, 59ff).

<sup>20</sup>Whether literally or indirectly, this is the tragic tenor of so many, if not all, of those who gave evidence of having been sexually abused—in particular in schools—to the Royal Commission.

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# Chapter 7

## Reflecting Together on Spiritual Possibility



Audrey Statham and R. Scott Webster

**Abstract** The importance of spirituality for teachers' reflection is explained in this chapter. Specifically, spirituality represents the process by which one's life is given a greater sense of ultimate meaning and purpose and can occur initially in an existential sense but can be extended through a shared sense of community. By examining literature from the UN and from Dewey, democracy itself can be understood to depend on a particular spirit animating citizens to embody a democratic life, which enables people to learn 'to live together' and 'with others' in order that global peace might be possible. This is considered so important that the neglecting of the spiritual by teachers impoverishes experience in all its manifestations. Dewey's notion of 'the religious attitude' is understood to involve reflections which 'go over again', 'consider carefully' and 'pay attention to things' to enable what the authors refer to as a three-stage process of growth. This involves first feeling isolated or even lost, then secondly attaining existential responsibility and thirdly understanding ourselves as social beings who ought to enable classrooms and communities to grow together spiritually, as this is what contributes to a worthwhile life which is shared throughout communities.

### Introduction

According to Britzman (2003, p. 36), reflecting and theorising can be broadly understood as ways to uncover either 'mechanisms or... meanings'. This chapter focusses specifically on reflecting for meanings and in particular, ultimate meanings which give significance and purpose to one's life especially in times of personally felt crises as a teacher. We acknowledge that about 40–50% of early career teachers resign from their job in the first five years (Gallant & Riley, 2014; Mason & Matas, 2015). There are various reasons for ceasing one's employment as a teacher, but we

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cannot ignore the cases of those for whom teaching is no longer personally meaningful. This chapter is dedicated to teachers who feel they may be undergoing such an experience by exploring a three-stage journey starting from the ‘lost’ individual, then to existential spirituality and finally to being spiritually engaged with others through Dewey’s religious attitude.

Engaging with spirituality contributes to the task of achieving an educated and democratic secular society. While we embrace that the character of democratic societies must necessarily be secular in nature, secularity does not demand or even imply an exclusion of the spiritual or of the religious. We therefore contend that the people who live in democratic secular societies ought to be embracing spirituality as a dimension of their holistic flourishing.

In addition to enabling one’s chosen career of teaching to be made more personally meaningful, it is argued in this chapter that if teachers reflect on the spiritual they may be better able to educate for a healthy democracy. This is because in order to properly *educate* and not just simply to instruct or train, teachers need to aspire to various ideals such as a meaningful life, the public good, democratic freedom and a greater sense of autonomy, caring curiosity and self-motivation. Reflecting on the spiritual can enhance our work as teachers to make lives more meaningful and actualise democracy as a way of life within society. In order to make our case, we shall draw largely from the works of the humanist John Dewey and especially from his notion of the religious attitude, to offer some guidance for navigating through personal crises when teaching may no longer be felt to be meaningful. We also add that if teaching fails to reflect on the spiritual then not only does it neglect the possibility of a role for the spiritual in grounding the very purpose of education, but it impoverishes experience in all its manifestations.

## **When Teaching Is no Longer Meaningful: The Lonely, Isolated Individual**

There is clear evidence that ‘education’ as an aspiration for emancipating individuals and society is no longer prioritised or is even present in many schools and universities, primarily due to the ubiquitous practices of testing and accountability (Giroux, 2014; Manifesto; Postman; Ravitch, 2010; Sahlberg, 2011). Emerging from this loss, many teachers are being confronted on a very personal level with the prospect that a career in teaching is no longer for them. Being a teacher no longer holds the same sense of accomplishment and meaningfulness which it once had when they first embarked enthusiastically into the role. This is often experienced as an existential crisis when an individual perhaps no longer considers that he/she has anything worthwhile to offer or that the job provides very little in the way of satisfaction perhaps because he/she perceives the obstacles to actualising her/his aspirations and/or educational purposes for teaching to be insurmountable. Whether the ‘fault’ is thought to be found within oneself (Britzman, 2003), with other people or with the system in general (Clark,



2016; Gatto, 2010; Illich, 1971), it is inevitably felt as an isolating experience when one can no longer eagerly join others in the daily rituals of institutional education. Such a crisis can make one feel very alone and isolated.

What may come to mind when reflecting on existential aloneness is Edvard Munch's portrait of the existential scream. This represents the feeling of falling into an abyss of meaninglessness where one is eternally alone, and indeed many teachers often confront such a feeling in some challenging circumstances involving, as Britzman (2003, p. 26) observes, crises which are lived by teachers 'as individual dilemmas'. It might appear that standing upon the precipice of the abyss of a meaningless existence is quite morbid. However, the good news of existentialism is that one can about-face from this position and face a multitude of possibilities. That is, the individual has a freedom to *make* her/his own life purposeful, even in the face of some events considered to be unbearable (Webster, 2017). However, in order to forge a life and career that have a more sustainable sense of meaningfulness it is necessary, as we shall see, to move beyond existential spirituality to immerse oneself within a community of like-minded companions through engaging what Dewey termed the religious attitude.

Living an authentic life requires one to acknowledge that the question of whether life is meaningful or meaningless is one that we all must grapple with since there is no manual that accompanies us when we are born, explaining what the ultimate meaning and purpose of life is. Rather, it is up to each individual to make her/his existence meaningful. Such a meaning-making endeavour can be referred to as spirituality which will now be discussed in the following section.

## Spirit and Spirituality

Spirituality pertains to people actively searching for understandings and meanings which give sense and purpose to their lives. Spirituality can be understood to pertain to the 'big picture' existential questions we may encounter such as 'who am I?' 'why am I here?' 'what is the meaning of life?' 'how can I live a good life?' and especially 'what is the meaning and purpose of *my* life?' As can be appreciated from these questions which foreground ultimate concerns, spirituality involves reflecting on significant issues in such a way as to give coherence to one's beliefs and the way one commits oneself to particular causes, acts and dispositions.

Often, once experiencing a sense of feeling lost or 'lacking roots' in life, individuals can find a sense of purpose through transition to this second stage of spirituality. Searching for spiritual meaningfulness for one's life can lead people to inquire into various sorts of religions, philosophies and even professions like law, medicine or teaching. However, rather than an externally imposed submission to an authority like a church or a Department of Education, spirituality can be understood as a voluntary individual quest characterised by the freedom and choice which each individual person exercises according to her or his own authentic conviction. Therefore, spirituality is largely found in the manner, or way, that an individual *relates* to her/his world,

including particular religions and philosophies. He/she does not become a docile and obedient ‘follower’ but rather an active and responsible meaning-maker of purposes upon which he/she can base her life. Spirituality can certainly involve religion but the key is the manner that the individual chooses to relate to a particular religion.

The term ‘spirit’ is derived from the Latin *spīritus* meaning breath, courage and vigour of life, based on the Greek *pnēuma* meaning a current of air or breeze. As it blows it acts as a force to *motivate* and animate people. Hence, there is a relationship between spirituality and motivation. It constitutes our intentionality, motives and desires in terms of coherence, direction and ultimate concerns. Spirituality does not refer to an object-like substance such as ‘soul’ (which originates from Plato’s idealism), but it refers to the life-energy, manner and purposefulness by which *all* people live their lives. Hence, the expression ‘that horse is full of spirit’ can be used to describe the energetic and enthusiastic manner of a particular horse. Similarly, the expression ‘she is spiritless’ can be used to describe someone experiencing ennui, lacking in energy and interest for life. Therefore, through spirituality, teachers can reflect upon their ultimate purposes and aspirations which *motivate* them to teach in the way that they choose.

Spirituality is not to be considered as belonging exclusively to discourses of religion as it offers value to atheists such as Comte-Sponville (2007, p. 135) who understands it to be ‘a function, a capacity, an act (the act of thinking, willing, imagining...)’. Similarly, the atheist Harris (2014) likens spirituality to a search that ought to be aligned to clear rational thinking and yet it can be a means to assist people to attain happiness and wisdom. Therefore, we argue that spirituality is relevant for *all* people, not just those affiliated with a religion. This has been recognised by the National Curriculum Council (1993, p. 2) in England who state that spirituality applies,

to something fundamental in the human condition ...It has to do with relationships with other people and, for believers, with God. It has to do with the universal search for individual identity – with our responses to challenging experiences, such as death, suffering, beauty, and encounters with good and evil. It is to do with the search for meaning and purpose in life and for values by which to live.

Here it is claimed that in the human condition, spirituality consists of the manner that individuals *relate* to and care for entities and respond to experiences encountered in life. It also involves a sense of purpose upon which the direction and manner of one’s life might be guided. England’s School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) has even gone so far as to claim that the development of one’s spirituality is the basis of learning through inquiry. They state that,

A spiritual sense can be seen as a prerequisite for learning since it is the human spirit which motivates us to reach beyond ourselves and existing knowledge to search for explanations of existence. The human spirit engaged in a search for truth could be a definition of education, challenging young people to explore and develop their own spirituality and helping them in their own search for truth (cited by Ofsted, 2004, p. 11)

From this perspective, we can appreciate how closely aligned spirituality is to human agency which is clearly a significant aspect for individuals coming to be curious and

to care about the world they exist within. It could be argued that due to its potential significance for learning, the spiritual dimension should *not* be withheld from students but instead ought to be made freely available to *all* persons, and from a young age. This is recognised in such publications as Australia's *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (2008) and England's SCAA's discussion paper, *Education for Adult Life: The Spiritual and Moral Development of Young People* (1996). Spirituality is an activity involving individuals reflecting and making decisions for themselves regarding their ultimate concerns and so plays an important role for determining their disposition towards how they choose to engage in curriculum work.

## **A Spiritual Quest: Beyond Nihilism Towards a Democratic Life Through Education**

After being confronted with a felt sense of lacking roots in life, perhaps feeling adrift in a consumerist, materialist culture as is characteristic of the first stage of spirituality of the lost individual, the second stage, involving existential spirituality, can lead to a quest to seek how meaning and purpose might be created. Driven by an inner curiosity seeking some cause through which the bewildering array of options that characterise modern life might be given sense requires giving consideration to the big picture and ultimate concerns regarding what makes life itself worthwhile. As the authors of this chapter, we'd like to share such a quest that we ourselves have needed to embark upon when faced with the loss of meaning and even despair which can arise due to the challenges and set-backs of working in education, with a particular focus on the later stage of transition from existential spirituality to being spiritually engaged with others, and for which we offer some theorisation to assist with the readers' own reflections and, hopefully, to support your own quests.

In primitive times, communities were held together by myths and grand narratives which provided meaningfulness and coherence to all of one's activities. Since the postmodern turn and the demise of the grand narratives such as religions, the plurality and perceived relativism of views have sometimes been experienced as meaningless which have led some to conclude that life itself is nihilistic. Reconciling the secular-spiritual split by demonstrating that both are grounded in the one realm of experience allowed Dewey (1997, 2013) to rethink the meaning of the secular and the spiritual, which remain distinct but are no longer conceived as mutually exclusive or as opposed to each other. For Dewey (2013, p. 57) observed in his time of Western societies that the growth of secularity meant the decline of religion which once offered a 'social centre of gravity' that organised communities and gave direction to the lives of individuals belonging to those communities, the loss of which could be felt by some as a state of meaninglessness. This change in modern society in comparison with previous societies had already been noted by Nietzsche (1974, p. 181) who observed 'God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him'. By this he

meant that religion and grand narratives had become largely irrelevant to cultural life and yet most people—including members of the world religions—had not noticed this unprecedented shift, or grasped its implications for their lives and society. Both Nietzsche and Dewey identified that this shift opened a way for a nihilistic character of life to be revealed, and that one possible response to this was nihilism. William Butler Yeats's famous line—'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold'—expresses the view that the shift of the social centre of gravity of religion might lead to chaos. Dewey (1999, p. 26) observed that this uprooted state of affairs whereby 'the loyalties which once held [individuals], which gave them support, direction and unity of outlook on life have well-nigh disappeared' had given rise to 'the lost individual', and feared that as a consequence individuals would be left feeling alone and isolated and therefore without protection from 'despair' (2013, p. 49). However, he did not hold nihilism to be an inevitable consequence of this shift. Rather, realisation that life might be nihilistic or meaningless can clear the way for an individual to break free from the extreme dualisms of supernaturalism and what Dewey referred to as militant atheism, which both bifurcate the secular from the spiritual. While the old dualisms of supernaturalism promulgate the belief that the secular derives its meaningfulness from ultimate values that already exist in a separate spiritual realm, militant atheism's reaction against supernaturalism leads to a rejection of the spiritual *in* secular life (Alexander, 2013, p. 371). Against both forms of dualism which inhibit us from understanding that our environment is not fixed or static, Dewey (1996, p. 67) argued that this world 'is not finished ... and has not consistently made up its mind where it is going and what it is going to do' and thus made a case for the retrieval of the spiritual in secular life. What the quest to recover the spiritual hinges on, then, for Dewey, are the decisions made by *each* individual to intervene—or not—in order to influence the meaningfulness of experience or reality possibly towards becoming a more liberating kind of social milieu for all. In order to contribute to this, Dewey claimed that there is a pressing need to unlock a new spirit of inclusive democracy in secular life which the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) also identifies is now necessary for attaining world peace, and in light of which we are arguing that it is through recognising this 'need' for both humankind and all other life forms that educators might recover a sense of shared purpose when faced with a loss of meaningfulness in the profession of teaching. Educating the world to live meaningful and good lives has been a stated concern of the United Nations since it was formed at the close of World War 2. Its aspiration was to pursue world peace by valuing human rights and self-determination for all people. Its agency UNESCO was then formed in 1946, and it published its first symposium titled *Human Rights: Comments and Interpretations* (UNESCO) in 1949. Two years later, it published its second symposium titled *Democracy in a World of Tensions* (McKeon & Rokkan, 1951) because by that time it was largely recognised that the most favourable sort of environment to enable the pursuit of peace, human rights and self-determination was a democratic one, and John Dewey was a contributor to this important symposium.

Both UNESCO (Delors, 1998) and Dewey refer to a 'democratic spirit' which is able to animate an inclusive kind of democracy enabling all groups globally to collaborate with each other—not only the powerful and the wealthy but also the vulnerable

and the poor. Whereas a minimalist form of democracy only provides a tolerance of difference, consisting of an attitude of putting up with others, UNESCO (Delors, 1998) argued that unlocking the ‘new spirit’ of inclusive democracy offers a way to actualise its aspiration to enable an active engagement and mutual appreciation on the part of the increasingly heterogeneous, multi-cultural and multi-faith populations of nation-states by reorienting them towards seeking to peacefully co-exist with each other.

Since this spirit is not naturally occurring but depends for its existence on attitudes and qualities which have to be developed in individuals, UNESCO identified the need for an education that would contribute to the creation of this new spirit and offered its vision of an ‘education for pluralism’ (Delors, 1998, p. 60). The Commission recommended that the project of pursuing world peace by creating conditions whereby all groups can harmoniously participate—people affiliated with atheistic philosophies together with those who identify with world religions—called for all countries to promote, through systems of mass schooling, an education for pluralism based on four pillars: learning to know; learning to do; learning to live together, learning to live with others; and learning to be. While traditional education offered in schooling has primarily focussed on only the first two pillars, ‘learning to know’ and ‘learning to do’, UNESCO claimed that the most important pillar for attaining its aspiration to ‘contribute to a culture of peace’ (1998, p. 35) must be its third pillar—‘learning to live together, learning to live with others’.

Significantly, what is identified in UNESCO’s report (Delors, 1998, pp. 22, 97) is that in order to attain the third pillar as the basis for ‘creating a new spirit’ of ‘respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding and peace’, the fourth pillar, learning to be, must be actualised through ‘the development of the complete person’ (1998, p. 86) which is pertinent for both teachers and students. In other words, developing the holistic wellbeing of each individual as represented by the aim of the fourth pillar identifies that ‘education must contribute to the all-round development of each individual—mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic sense, personal responsibility and spiritual values’ (p. 94), which cannot be considered in isolation from the third pillar’s aim of developing the wellbeing of society. What this holds out is the possibility that a good education for each individual will contribute to the good of society as all members are enabled to enact inclusive democracy which UNESCO interprets as the ‘manifestation of the spirit of concord, stemming from the will to live together’ (1998, p. 35). This new spirit powers the process of participation of diverse perspectives in deliberating over ‘the question as to *what for and why we live together* [original emphasis]’ (1998, p. 61). We offer this as a potential source of inspiration in order to grow from feeling isolated as an individual through a spiritual quest that can lead one beyond existential spirituality to recognise an affinity with many other individuals on a similar journey. It is to this third stage of opening up to a more meaningful engagement with our relation and purpose to education through connection with others which shall now be explored through Dewey’s religious attitude.

## Dewey's Religious Attitude as Being Reflective, Spiritual and Socially Connected

For this third stage of a journeying existence, we argue that what Dewey referred to as the 'religious attitude' is able to extend our understanding of spirituality from primarily a solitary existential phenomenon to one which is largely community based. This is because Dewey understood the individual to be primarily a social being and that a good life for individuals is inescapably also a good life for all. However, the adjective 'religious' which describes this attitude or disposition, may detract from the all-inclusive sense for which Dewey intended. Therefore, it is thought helpful to start by distinguishing the adjective 'religious' from the noun 'religion'.

According to an etymology of the Latin term from which both words religion and religious derive, 'religio' can be understood to derive from *religare* ('to bind') and so we could understand this to refer to beliefs being bound together as doctrine and possibly it might also refer to adherents being bound, willingly or not, to a religion with its associated practices. In addition, 'religio' can be understood to also be derived from *religere* meaning 'to care', 'heed', 'to go over again', 'consider carefully', 'recollect', 'reflect' (Hoyt, 1912, p. 128). Therefore, we can appreciate that the adjective 'religious' can be interpreted to mean the disposition of 'paying careful attention to things' (its opposite would be 'neglect' or 'inattentiveness'). It is this latter meaning which underpins Dewey's concept of the religious attitude.

In order to clarify his concept of the religious attitude further, Dewey (2013, p. 23) contrasted it with the 'unreligious attitude'. A mark of the unreligious attitude is that it lacks 'natural piety' in the sense of neglecting to pay careful attention to the things of this world which Dewey argued is owed them, a neglectfulness which he claimed issues from an underlying attitude of inattentiveness towards life—this one realm of nature or existence—itself. We argue that while the spirituality of the existentialist individual<sup>1</sup> is necessary, it is not sufficient, because according to Dewey (pp. 49, 23), the force animating a search for meaning shapes a type of individual teacher who may too narrowly conceive her/his quest as taking place in the context of an inhospitable environment which is relegated to a mere backdrop for the 'hero of the quest's' activity, and in isolation from community which is perceived either as an obstacle or as irrelevant for the quest of spirituality:

Militant atheism is also affected by a lack of natural piety. The ties binding man to nature that poets have always celebrated are passed over lightly. The attitude taken is often that of man living in an indifferent and hostile world and issuing blasts of defiance ... The essentially unreligious attitude is that which attributes human achievement and purpose to man in isolation from the world of physical nature and his fellows.

Dewey (1999, pp. 26, 30) did consider existentialist individuality to represent an advance on the 'lost individual' caught up in 'the aimless drift' of the uprooted

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<sup>1</sup>Dewey identified that both supernaturalism and militant atheism share an unreligious attitude of inattentiveness towards life. Discussion will be limited here to Dewey's critique of existential, militant atheist spirituality due to space constraints.

'mass'. For such spirituality which informs existentialist individuality does liberate a person from her/his prior state of 'submergence' in the crowd—often through a process of individually reflecting on and articulating her/his own purposes for life. However, Dewey (1999, 2013) held that it fails to adequately contribute to create conditions for integrating selves which he argued is necessary for counteracting at a profound level modern society's lack of roots. Similarly, Perry (1999) in his 3-stage scheme<sup>2</sup> for intellectual and ethical development identified that the spirituality which commences the final stage of development, is consistent with the existentialist individual's experience of the quest of 'man [sic] in isolation' who nevertheless must grow *together* with others towards a more expansive and inclusive understanding of purpose characteristic of 'the new individual' who, as fundamentally a social being, is animated by the religious attitude which is necessarily *common* and shared amongst other community members.

Spirituality which is connected with the quests of others in a caring and concerned manner, characterised as the religious attitude, liberates teachers from the limits of existential solitariness. When we open up to share how our personally felt frustrations, disappointments and failures can sometimes cause us to doubt the worthwhileness of the quest we embarked on when we first became preservice teachers to actualise purposefulness for ourselves and for the profession of teaching more generally, we can grow in an appreciation that as individuals we are wholly inter-dependent with others. Such an appreciation can help us 'rediscover' the value of being more authentically connected with our colleagues, students, the community at large, and even the theorists whose works we read and study:

A religious attitude, however, needs the sense of a connection of man [sic], in the way of both dependence and support, with the enveloping world that the imagination feels is a universe. (Dewey, 2013, p. 49)

This entails a reorientation in how we are personally animated or motivated, to perceive and pay attention to reality, including our own self, other people and ideas. Turning from the unreligious attitude towards the religious orientation can be understood in terms of a contrast between the 'spirituality of the actual' and the 'spirituality of the possible':

[T]he first [fundamental orientation in life] faces a universe in which ideals are fundamentally already *actual* in the heart of reality, secure and incontestable, and the second faces a universe in which the ideal as *possibility* is a genuine and pervasive feature, an invitation to risk and creativity [original emphases]. (Alexander, p. 356).

Consequently, a spirituality of possibility shifts a teacher's confrontation with meaninglessness and/or quest for meaning from being individualistic to one in which he/she emerges as an integral part of a community in which the unique freedom of 'the new individual' consists of concern and openness to others such that one is

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<sup>2</sup>Perry (1970) developed a general 3-stage scheme, which was subdivided into 9 stages altogether. The general scheme consisted of Dualistic Thinking (assumption of absolute and objective knowledge); Multiplicity or Relativist (acceptance of a variety of legitimate views); and Commitment (moral and valid claims).



disposed to pay careful attention to the diversity of persons with whom one engages and interacts (Alexander, pp. 359–360).<sup>3</sup> A crucial site of ‘breakthrough’<sup>4</sup> into our existence of this spirituality of possibility which is defined by the religious attitude, according to Dewey (2008, p. 234), is ‘the spiritual individuality of the teacher’ whereby we newly rely with a ‘sense of dependence’ (2013, p. 23) upon a centre of energy shared amongst *all* community members to help us care, and from which source issues a force or motivation to initiate our desires which in turn guide all of our activities.

By ‘spiritual individuality’ Dewey did *not*, therefore, mean that spirituality is an attribute or possession of the lone teacher in isolation from her/his environment. Rather, the spiritual incorporates the very *being* of the teachers, students, school community and the wider society into a communal activity whose ever widening and expanding scope is also embracing of the nonhuman world of nature. The actualisation of the spiritual individuality of the teacher is, therefore, not a given but depends largely on whether he/she exercises choice to participate and commit to and to accept personal responsibility for intervening to influence the meaningfulness of experience towards, for example, creating a more liberating kind of classroom environment for all through creating opportunities for participating alongside her/his students in ‘intellectual initiative, discussion and decision’ about educational purposes and aims (2008, p. 232). Such conditions, according to Dewey (p. 233), constitute the true meaning of democracy:

What does democracy mean save that the individual is to have a share in determining the conditions and the aims of his [sic] own work; and that, upon the whole, through the free and mutual harmonising of different individuals, the work of the world is better done than when planned arranged, and directed by a few, no matter how wise or of how good intent that few?

Where the participation of multiple perspectives in critical dialogue about purposes is lacking, opportunities for the spiritual growth of the possible to animate a classroom community—centred on the religious attitude—towards gaining a voice (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997), tend to be silenced:

The spiritual factor of our tradition,<sup>5</sup> equal opportunity and free association and intercommunication, is obscured and crowded out. Instead of the development of individualities which it prophetically set forth, there is a perversion of the whole ideal of individualism to conform to the practices of pecuniary culture. (Dewey, 1999, p. 9)

Clearly, what teachers understand ourselves to be doing in the classroom—our willingness to open up our educational purposes (our ‘whys’ for teaching) *and* to honestly

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<sup>3</sup>From a religious orientation of openness to the experiential continuum, the natural world is no longer perceived as ‘indifferent and hostile’ or as a mere backdrop or resource for the pursuit of one’s private purposes, and other people are no longer perceived or related to primarily as obstacles, rivals or as superfluous to achieving one’s goals.

<sup>4</sup>‘Breakthrough’ here does not mean the influx of an other-worldly force into this realm of nature but, rather, simply has the mundane meanings of ‘an important, sudden event that helps to improve a situation’ and ‘an act or instance of moving beyond or through a problem’.

<sup>5</sup>Dewey means the American tradition.



share our doubts regarding our ability to attain those purposes—for colleagues and our students' consideration so as to initiate participation of multiple perspectives in critical dialogue about aims towards gaining a voice, is influenced by the nature of the spirituality that animates a teacher's curriculum work. It makes a difference for whether or not teachers heed the call when we are confronted with a sense of the potential meaninglessness of the reality of teaching, to nonetheless commit ourselves to the task before us all of creating a truly democratic secular community which makes life more meaningful. Crucially, acknowledging with Dewey (2013, p. 22) that there are no guarantees in life that our most cherished plans and projects will succeed ('[t]he outcome, given our best endeavor is not with us') entails acceptance of our lack of control and vulnerability, which can re-orientate us towards being open in a way that moves us from a state of despair characteristic of the unreligious orientation towards hope which is distinctive of the religious attitude.

We are arguing, in short, that teachers encountering a crisis of loss of personal meaning in our work do *not* necessarily indicate the 'end of the story' of being a teacher. Rather, crisis marks the potential beginning of what we are describing as a new, third stage of the spiritual journey of teaching and learning where, as Britzman (2003, p. 9) identifies: 'learning and crises become interminable and the work of the teacher... is to help students enter from the ruins of crisis, a renewed sense of and tolerance for significance and meaning'. Growth of the spirituality of the possible which motivates the new individuality depends on teachers exercising choice *neither* to evade the experience of despair which arises when we are unable to actualise our aspirations for teaching, for example, by leaving teaching, *nor* to respond passively to it, for example, by remaining in teaching but acquiescing to practices of testing and accountability and giving up the attempt to actualise our educational purposes for the sake of 'getting on' in an oppressive system. Breakthrough of the new individuality animated by the spirituality of possibility can occur when teachers elect to *undergo* despair by responding actively to it through seeking together with others to make sense of the felt loss of meaning, the effect of which can liberate us from the confines of the solitary quest of existentialist spirituality and transition teachers into the third stage of pursuing our educational purposes for teaching as a community-based search for meaning. On the other side of despair, we awaken to a deepened sense 'of the dignity of human nature' which Dewey (2013, p. 23) described as being 'as religious as is the sense of awe and reverence when it rests upon a sense of human nature as a cooperating part of a larger whole'. If creating such a truly democratic secular community is considered to be a worthwhile undertaking, then teachers ought to be enabled to move from being silent about our sense of meaninglessness towards speaking out and asking for—and carefully attending to—the considered responses of students, colleagues and parents. Therefore, rather than becoming overwhelmed by feelings of our own individual struggles, involving ourselves more diligently into caring for the lives of other community members, can create a commonly shared quest that is itself meaningful as a spirituality of the possible upon which teachers can depend—and through teachers this sense of dependence that characterises the religious attitude can then extend to include our students, colleagues, parents and the wider community—as a source of personal liberation and inspiration in dark times.

## Conclusion

If the new spirit of inclusive democracy that UNESCO argues is now needed for pursuing harmonious global relations between diverse groups—the atheistic and world religions together—is considered a worthwhile aspiration, then there is now a pressing need to unlock and grow the spiritual individuality of teachers. One way to go about this is through facilitating the progression of teachers through the three stages discussed in this chapter of reflecting together on spiritual possibility in secular life, as characterised by the lost individual, the spiritually existential individual, and the spiritually social individual<sup>6</sup> as one who is necessarily connected with others in the community. The growth associated with progressing through these three stages enables one's spirituality to become educated and not just articulated (Webster, 2018). While some teachers may be spared the crisis of being 'lost' as per the first stage most are likely to operate at the second stage of existential spirituality through having been given opportunities for reflecting on and articulating their educational purposes for teaching, especially through their initial training and ongoing registration requirements. The challenge, therefore, is to encourage growth as a community of teachers whose curriculum work is animated by a shared sense of the spirituality of the possible which characterises the third stage defined by the religious attitude.

This calls for teachers to problematise our common understandings of reflection on educational purposes together as communities, rather than leave this as only an individualistic activity that is undertaken in isolation from colleagues, students and the wider community. Reflections on purposes and ultimate meanings both of life itself and of education, ought to include the whole classroom and community at large in a dynamic process of interaction that necessarily feeds into an ongoing dialectical sense of inquiry. Such inquiries are dependent upon the willingness of each individual member to take a degree of existential risk in order to open up to the ultimate concerns to contribute towards creating common aspirations which the community can commit towards. Transition to the third stage of spiritual individuality ought not therefore to be left to chance but, rather, necessitates that teachers receive targeted support and professional development at all phases of our teaching career – preservice and in service—to attain it. Otherwise, it seems unlikely that many teachers will be enabled when confronted by a sense of meaningless or nihilism in teaching to actively respond by taking up the religious stance of commitment to making meaning as a social process. Therefore, we believe all sites of education including schools, initial teacher training and ongoing teacher registration ought to explicitly promote spirituality and actively seek to become 'spiritual ecologies' (Alexander, 2013, p. 14) characterised by their educators who are better equipped for this task of creating a truly democratic, secular classroom by being animated by significantly meaningful purposes and giving careful attention to, and genuinely valuing difference. While this could contribute to mitigate against some teachers choosing to abandon teaching due to despair at being unable to actualise educational purposes, or choosing to remain in teaching but abandoning as futile the pursuit of

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<sup>6</sup>'Spiritual individuality' was also referred to by Dewey (1999) as the 'new individuality'.

educational purposes, the ultimate purpose for cultivating on the part of teachers the will defined by the religious attitude to participate in such an inclusively reflective inquiry into educational purposes, a purpose that is foundational to what it means to educate, is to actualise UNESCO's aspiration to enable *all* people to be able to live well with each other.

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**Part II**  
**Reflection for Teaching and Learning**

# Chapter 8

## How Have You Been? On Existential Reflection and Thoughtful Teaching



Gert Biesta

**Abstract** In this chapter, Gert Biesta returns to the seminal work of Donald Schön on the nature and purpose of reflection amongst the professions. He argues that when asked to reflect on their practice, students of teaching too often simply report on what they already know about what they do rather than be open to reflection as a means of ‘shifting their perceptions and understandings’. In order to effect this change towards what he regards as the goal of more thoughtful teaching, he argues that instead of being asked ‘What have you learned?’ students should be asked to look more closely at the situations within which they find themselves. In order to achieve that, however, Biesta suggests that students be asked why they are asked to reflect, what will they reflect with and what will they reflect about? These questions situate the student teacher deeply within ‘the real situations of education’ so that the distinction between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action can be developed. Such a focus on practice, he argues, will enable students to develop an awareness of their embeddedness in what they are doing in the sense of being ‘in conversation with the situation’, an important step towards developing the “feel” for the practice’ that such ‘existential reflection’ enables. The significance of the student’s adopting or being aware of appropriate overarching theories which can shed light on purpose and the perspective one is adopting (or might adopt alternatively), as well as providing conceptual resources for the task of becoming a more thoughtful, more aware practitioner, is stressed.

### Introduction: Is Reflection Making Teachers Less Thoughtful?

This chapter has its origins in a sense of frustration. While it is obvious that teachers should be reflective about their work and in this regard should indeed aspire to become reflective practitioners, the idea of reflective teaching has, in practice, become so formulaic that it often seems to prevent teachers and teacher-students from thoughtful

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engagement with their practice. In my own work as a teacher educator, I have been wading through numerous reflective essays from students where I felt that very little was happening. Quite often I got the impression that the essays were just reporting on what the students already knew about their practice, rather than that their experience of writing helped with shifting their perceptions and understandings. Also, particularly when such essays were submitted as coursework for marking, I had the impression that students were often writing in socially desirable ways, that is, writing what they thought was expected from them, rather than writing about what they really had encountered. The essays often felt a little too smooth and a little too predictable.

Were my students to blame for this? Was there something lacking in their ability to reflect? That is not the conclusion I want to draw—and it is hardly ever the conclusion I tend to draw about my students. Rather than to raise questions about their abilities, intellectual or otherwise, the first question that always needs to be asked is how we have equipped our students for the tasks we set them, which starts, of course, with the framing of the task itself. One thing I realised over time is that the question that is often posed for reflective writing—the question ‘What have you learned?’—is actually a very unhelpful question. One reason for this is that the question about what someone has learned is, in a sense, a meta-question. It asks for reflection on reflection, so to speak, as it is focussed on drawing conclusions from the reflective process itself. In this regard the question ‘What you have learned?’ draws students *away* from their practice, rather than bringing them closer to it. This is why, as I will discuss in more detail below, I have started to work with a rather different question—the question ‘How have you been?’—in order to turn the attention back to the practice, of which students, in their role as student teachers, are a crucial ‘component.’

The other thing I realised over time is that reflection is not a *formal* process but that in order to reflect, we need something to reflect *with*. Just asking students to reflect on their practice and write reflectively about this without giving them any resources to work with, is actually educationally rather unhelpful. It is, to put it bluntly, as unhelpful as asking someone to draw a picture without giving them paper and pencil. The question of the intellectual, theoretical, discursive and normative resources for reflection is therefore a crucial one, but often one that is overlooked as long as reflection is seen as a formal capacity or ability. The third thing I realised over time is that if we just ask students to reflect, but do not explicitly engage with the question what they should reflect *for*—that is, how such reflection is supposed to connect back to their practice and practising—we make reflection into an artificial task, not something that may contribute to what, following Dewey, we could refer to as making the work of teachers more intelligent or, as I wish to suggest in this chapter, making the work of teachers more *thoughtful*.

In this chapter, I will explore these three questions—What to reflect for? What to reflect with? and ‘What to reflect about?’—in more detail in order to overcome the formulaic and formal approaches to reflection in teaching and teacher education that, I think, have become part of the contemporary ‘dogma’ of reflective teaching. The chapter is organised in the following way. I will begin with a discussion of the work of Donald Schön, whose book *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think*



*in Action*, originally published in 1983, still provides an important reference point for the discussion about reflective practice.<sup>1</sup> While Schön's book has been praised and criticised, rereading the book 35 years later has been a worthwhile experience, not just because of the elegant way in which Schön puts forward his ideas, but also because some of his observations have actually become more urgent in our times than they probably were back then.

I will then devote three sections to the three questions mentioned above: What to reflect for? What to reflect with? and What to reflect about? In doing this, I will put forward the idea of *existential reflection* and will explain why I think that it is important that we see reflection as a substantial process rather than a formal operation, which highlights the need to link reflection to educational theory as an important resource for reflection, and to normative questions about what education is for. In order to give the discussion a fresh impetus, I will summarise my thoughts under the heading of 'thoughtful teaching', at least in order to have a different phrase from the now perhaps rather stale phrases of 'reflective teaching' and 'reflective practice.'

## From Technical Rationality to Reflection-in-Action

Donald Schön's 1983 book *The Reflective Practitioner* may have become so popular that rather than engaging with the detail of the content, many people may just refer to it as an indicator of the term 'reflective practitioner' and the wider idea of reflective practice. Rereading the book, I actually found much that is still of value for current discussions, and some of it, as mentioned, that is actually quite timely. In an age in which the idea of evidence-based teaching, that is, teaching based on the outcomes of large-scale randomised controlled trials, is being pushed as the future for education (see Biesta, 2007, 2016), Schön's case for an understanding of knowledge that takes professional practice as its frame of reference rather than an idealised idea of 'real' scientific knowledge, is still very relevant, also because he connects this philosophical discussion to political questions about the status of professions, professionals and professional expertise in modern societies (see particular Schön, 1983, Chaps. 1 and 10).

His is a search for an 'epistemology of practice' (p. viii) that is very different from 'the kinds of knowledge honoured in academia' (p. vii), and the phrase he uses for this epistemology of practice is 'reflection-in-action'. Schön distinguishes reflection-in-action from what he calls 'technical rationality', and what is key here is that these are not (just) two different forms of knowledge but first and foremost two very different ways to understand what the work of professionals such as teachers actually entails. His main message is that the idea of 'technical rationality' is actually a *distortion* of most of what such work is about. Why is that so?

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<sup>1</sup>In May 2018 Google Scholar listed close to 60,000 citations to the book.

Schön explains that technical rationality sees professional activity basically as ‘instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique’ (ibid., p. 21). One issue he has with this understanding of professional activity is that it depicts the work of professionals as that of *problem solving*. The point he makes here is that professionals, such as teachers, do not simply solve problems that are given to them, but are crucially involved in figuring out what the problem in the situations they encounter actually *is*. Professionals are not just involved in problem solving, therefore, but also in what Schön calls *problem setting* (ibid., p. 40). The other issue Schön has with the idea of technical rationality concerns the assumption that the work of professionals would simply consist of the *application* of (scientific) knowledge handed down to them by scientists. Against this view, Schön emphasises that professionals possess highly complex *practical* knowledge and are constantly generating such knowledge in the context of their professional practice or, with the nice phrase Schön introduces: in the reflective conversation with the situation (see Schön, 1983, Chap. 3).

Schön also emphasises that whereas problem solving is a technical or instrumental matter—finding the most appropriate means for addressing the problem—problem setting it precisely not an instrumental or technical matter, because it is not about the means but about the ends, that is, about finding out what the issue *is* and what it would *mean* to address or resolve it. Schön highlights that problem setting involves two related dimensions, that of *naming* the things to which we will attend, and that of *framing* the context within which we will attend to them (see ibid., p. 40). Once a problem has been ‘constructed’, there is, however, still no guarantee that available knowledge will be sufficient to solve the problem. As Schön explains: ‘Even when a problem has been constructed, it may escape the categories of applied science because it presents itself as unique or unstable.’ (ibid., p. 41). After all, ‘in order to solve a problem by the application of existing theory or technique’ the problem, as constructed or defined or identified, must ‘fit’ the existing knowledge, and quite often the fit between the problems we encounter and the available knowledge is far from perfect. Put simply: ‘A physician cannot apply standard techniques to a case that is not in the books.’ (ibid., p. 41). And similarly, available evidence from research may have little to do with this student, in this classroom, at this point in their educational career, on a Monday morning, with storm in the air, and so on.

Schön refers to the tension we encounter here as the dilemma of ‘rigor or relevance’ (ibid., p. 42), highlighting that we can either stick with rigorous (scientific) knowledge that is of limited use to the concrete situation we find ourselves in, or go for relevant (practical) knowledge that, because it is intertwined with the complexities of practice, may be messy but useful. Schön also indicates that one way to deal with this dilemma is actually to change the practice so that the available knowledge can ‘work’. The irony here is that the knowledge available is actually not addressing the problems as they play out in the concrete situations of the practice, because the problems become redefined and reshaped so that they ‘fit’ the knowledge available. This is akin to what, in education, is known as ‘teaching to the test’, where what the test or exam is measuring becomes the focus for the teaching and often the one-and-only focus. We can also see it in situations where scientific evidence doesn’t work, because in those

cases it is often not the evidence that is seen as lacking but teachers being blamed for not using the evidence in the ‘right’ way or, even more problematic, students being blamed for not behaving in such a way that the knowledge can ‘work’.

The real situations of education and similar professions are not stable situations that obey the assumptions of scientific knowledge. Rather such situations are characterised by ‘uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict’ (ibid., p. 50), which is precisely why the work of professionals cannot be about the application of ‘pre-cooked’ (scientific) knowledge but requires reflective engagement with the specifics of the situation, that is, reflection-in-action. It is worth quoting Schön at length in order to get a sense of what reflection-in-action is about. He writes:

When someone reflects-in-action, he [sic] becomes a researcher in the practice context. He is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case. His inquiry is not limited to deliberation about means which depend on a prior agreement about ends. He does not keep means and ends separate, but defines them interactively as he frames a problematic situation. He does not separate thinking from doing, ratiocinating his way to a decision which he must later convert to action. Because his experimenting is a kind of action, implementation is built into his inquiry. Thus reflection-in-action can proceed, even in situations of uncertainty and uniqueness, because it is not bound by the dichotomies of Technical Rationality. (ibid., pp. 68–69)

Finding one’s way, not through blind trial-and-error, but through careful consideration of steps to take, possible and actual consequences, resulting in a readjustment of initial action, are all part of what reflection-in-action is about—indeed as a ‘reflective conversation *with* the situation’ (ibid., p. 268, *emph. added*), not an intervention *upon* it.

Although reflective practice is thoroughly experimental, this does not mean that it is an entirely open process that constantly would start from scratch. On the contrary, professionals bring quite a lot to the reflective conversation with the situation, partly in order to be able to ‘see’ particular issues as instances of something more general so that they become addressable issues, and partly in order to be able to mobilise knowledge and experience in order to try to address the problems once they have been set—yet always remaining ‘open to the discovery of phenomena, incongruent with the initial problem setting, on the basis of which [the professional] reframes the problem’ (ibid., p. 268) and so on.

## The Constants of Professional Practice

The naming and the framing that are needed in the process of problem setting are closely connected to a number of ‘constants’ that practitioners bring to their reflection-in-action. Schön discusses four of these constants: (1) the media, languages and repertoires that practitioners use to describe reality and conduct experiments; (2) the appreciative systems they bring to the problem setting, to the evaluation of inquiry, and to the reflective conversation; (3) the overarching theories by which they make sense of phenomena; and (4) the role frames within which they set their tasks and

through which they bound their institutional settings (see *ibid.*, p. 270). This may sound quite abstract, so let me briefly elucidate what this means more concretely with reference to teaching and the work of the teacher.

Schön mentions a number of different media of reflection-in-action, including ‘the architect’s sketchpad, the relation between patient and therapist (...), the dialogue of planner and developer, [and] the interactive relations between managers in a corporation’ (*ibid.*, p. 271). In terms of teaching, we can therefore add that the main ‘medium’ of teaching is the relationship between teachers and students. Language and repertoire play a role here too, and Schön emphasises that these cannot really be separated from the media in and through which professionals act as together ‘they make up the ‘stuff’ of inquiry, in terms of which practitioners move, experiment, and explore’ (*ibid.*). Being skilful in the manipulation of media, language and repertoire is essential for the reflective conversation with the situation. What is interesting about Schön’s discussion here is that he highlights the significance of having a ‘feel’ for the media and language of one’s practice, which indicates that this is not about the clinical application of instrumental knowledge but much more about what we might term ‘knowing one’s way around’ in the practice. The idea of ‘feel’ comes close to what the German educationalist Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841), long ago, referred to as the ‘tact of teaching’, an idea reintroduced in the educational discussion by Max van Manen in the 1990s (see Van Manen, 1991).

Knowing one’s way around and having a feel for the situation is one way in which the work of the teacher becomes the work of the teacher, so to speak, and is not just any practice or any way of doing. But the second ‘constant’—the ‘constancy of appreciative systems’ (*ibid.*, p. 272)—is important here too, because one might say that this gives the practice a sense of purpose and a sense of direction. Appreciative systems are ideas about what education is *for*, and thus play an important role in problem setting and in providing orientation to teachers’ action more generally. If one assumes, for example, that the purpose of education is to make pupils think and act in very specific ways, the way one directs one’s actions and the way in which one constructs problems will be very different from when one starts from the assumption that the purpose of education is to help children and young people to think for themselves and to take responsibility for their own thoughts and actions. If under the first assumption a student who says ‘no’ is seen as a problem, under the second assumption it’s an important sign that students see themselves as independent actors rather than obedient pupils. Schön also mentions that different professions have their own appreciative systems, which explains why working across different professions can be difficult, particularly if one is not aware of these differences. Whereas a psychologist may approach children from a therapeutic mindset—looking for problems that need to be solved—teachers may approach children from an educational mindset, where the child is not a problem that needs a solution but a human being who is trying to find his or her place in the world and needs support, challenge and trust, rather than therapy.

The third constant that makes professional action possible is that of the ‘overarching theory’. Schön explains that overarching theories ‘do not give rules that can be applied to predict and control a particular event’, but that they supply language

‘from which to construct particular descriptions’ (ibid., p. 273). In teaching such theories contain accounts of what it means to teach—for example whether we see teaching as an intervention upon students that is supposed to generate ‘effects’ or whether we see teaching as a dialogic encounter between human beings that is aimed to encourage children and young people to find their own voice—and thus provide important frames of reference for how we understand teaching and how we go about it in the reflective conversations with the situation. What is important here, just as with the role of appreciative systems, is that there is not one theory about teaching just as there is not one appreciative system for education. Some find this onerous and think that the ideal situation is one where everyone would agree on what teaching is and what it is for; others may see it as a sign of the health of the profession that there are ongoing discussions about what the profession is ‘about’ and what it is ‘for’.

Closely connected to these three constants is the fourth constant which concerns the ways in which ‘practitioners frame their roles’ (ibid., p. 274). Highlighting this is first of all important in order to bring into view that how we see ourselves as teachers does make a difference. But it is also important in order to appreciate that just as there are different appreciative systems and overarching theories, there are also different role perceptions about what it means to be a teacher (on this see also Biesta & Stengel, 2016). Schön emphasises that ‘because role-frame remains relatively constant from situation to situation, it bounds the scope of practice and provides a reference which allows a practitioner to build a cumulative repertoire of exemplars, facts, and descriptions’ (ibid., p. 274). But differences in role-frame also ‘help to determine what knowledge is seen as useful in practice and what kinds of reflection are undertaken in action’ (ibid., p. 274). After all, if a teacher sees herself as a manager of learning opportunities, the knowledge they need and the issues they seek to address are very different from the situation where a teacher sees herself as a guide, or a coach, or an instructor, and so on.

## **A Theory of Teaching, Not a Theory of Reflection**

There are a number of observations I would like to make before I turn to the three questions about reflection. The first thing I wish to emphasise is that Schön’s account of the reflective practitioner is not a theory of reflection but a theory of practice. More specifically for the focus of this chapter we could say that Schön’s account provides us with the structure of a theory of teaching, although we have to bear in mind that this structure needs content in order to get to the specifics of teaching. But the idea of teaching as a reflective conversation with the situation in such a way that the situation is not ‘outside’ of the teacher but that the teacher is (also) part of the situation, and of this situation being structured by the four constants discussed above, provides quite a nuanced and also quite a helpful account of the practice of teaching.

I use the word ‘helpful’ here because Schön’s account contrasts sharply, as I have already indicated above, with the idea that has been pushed strongly both from the side of research and the side of policy—but also, ironically in my view, by some in

the teaching profession—namely that teaching should be(come) an evidence-based profession in which the application of scientific research about what (apparently) ‘works’ is the central mode of action. Such a view may sound attractive, but actually doesn’t make sense when we begin to look at the specifics, particularly with regard to the application of insights from an abstract research context to a concrete teaching situation (see Davis, 2017a, 2017b). And this is also where Schön’s warning that one way to make technical rationality work is not by refining and improving the knowledge, but by changing the practice so that the knowledge can begin to work in that situation, remains really important. In my view this is a real danger in contemporary education, not just in terms of how some people think teachers ought to conduct themselves, but also increasingly as a pressure upon students and the ways they should behave *so that* the educational ‘machine’ can work (on this see also Biesta, 2018).

The final point to mention is Schön’s idea of ‘constants’. This is not only a helpful way to characterise how a practice gains its identity over time, but actually is a result of the work of the practitioners who ‘do’ the practice, so to speak. I also wish to suggest that the four constants provide a really interesting ‘frame’ for teacher education and perhaps we could even say that they provide a really interesting curriculum for teacher education. After all, student teachers do need to engage with the medium of teaching, including its language and repertoires, in order to develop a ‘feel’ for the practice. They do need to engage with the question what the practice is for—the appreciative systems. They need to have a sense of what the practice is ‘about’—the overarching theories. And they need to get a sense of their own role in the practice—the role frames. And this brings me back to where I started this chapter, namely what all this might mean for reflection in teaching and teacher education.

## **What to Reflect for? What to Reflect with? What to Reflect About?**

I started this chapter recounting my frustration with the many well-intended reflective essays I have read over the years, focussing on the fact that many of those essays seem to be about what students already knew about themselves and their practice, rather than that the task of writing had helped them to gain new insights and new understandings. I hasten to add, however, that this is not a judgement on their ability or lack thereof, but first of all raises the question of the resources—what have they been given to reflect *with*—and this may also say something about the way in which the task for such essays is often framed, namely as the question ‘What have you learned?’. In response to these issues, I suggested that we should raise three more precise questions about reflection in teaching: the question what to reflect for, the question what to reflect with and the question what to reflect about. I will now discuss these three questions in reverse order, using insights from Schön to deepen and sharpen the discussion.

### ***What to Reflect About? Existential Reflection***

As I have already indicated, I not only think that the question ‘What have you learned?’ is a tremendously difficult question to answer; I also think that it is not a very helpful question if we want to get closer to our practice and practising. This is because the question about what one has learned, is a question that asks for conclusions—which is the reason why I have called it a ‘meta-question’—rather than a question that focusses the attention on the practise and the practising itself. If the practice of teaching can be characterised as a reflective conversation with the situation—and I wish to emphasise once more that the situation is not outside of the teacher, but that the teacher is part of the situation and to a large extent makes the situation what it is—then a much better question to get the practise and the practising into focus is the question ‘How have you been?’ This question asks teachers to pay careful attention to the situation and to themselves in the situation, particularly in order to note how they have been *in conversation with the situation*.

By trying to document how one has been in a situation—and the situation can be more ‘micro’, such as a brief event, or can be much more ‘macro’, such as trying to capture a week, or a month, or a semester or even longer—one begins to get a sense of what one has noticed in and of the situation, how one has responded (or has decided not to respond, which can be important as well), how one’s attention has been focussed, how one has encountered issues, how one has ‘constructed’ problems out of these issues, how one has acted upon such constructions, how one has perceived what this did with students, how they have responded, and so on. The question ‘How have you been?’ not only brings all these dimensions into focus, but in doing so begins to reveal the complexity and the dynamics of the reflective conversation with the situation—and one could argue that gaining a better understanding of this is a major aspect of enhancing one’s practice and practising.

What is also interesting about the question how one has been, is that it does not immediately ask for reflections—that is for thoughts and description of thoughts—but makes room for the tacit, embodied and bodily dimensions of the conversation with the situation, including feelings and emotions, but also the ‘repertoires’ as Schön calls them, that is the embodied knowledge that, over time, becomes an important part of the professionalism of the teacher as well. We can refer to this as intuition—and intuition is an important source and resource in any practice—as long as we acknowledge that our intuitions are not natural but are themselves formed through experience and experiment. To the extent to which the question ‘How have you been?’ can be characterised as a reflective question, I am inclined to say that the reflection that is triggered by this question is not ‘mental’ but first and foremost *existential*, as the question forces us to focus on how we have been, that is, how we have existed in a situation, and not only on what we were thinking during or after the event. If we want to have a name for this kind of reflection, I would therefore suggest calling it *existential reflection*.

### *What to Reflect with? The Question of Resources*

While the question ‘How have you been?’ can be asked about many different practices, existential reflection in teaching in a sense asks a more precise question, which we can formulate as ‘How have you been *as a teacher*?’ Engagement with this question, brings us to the question of resources, that is, the question ‘What to reflect *with*?’. The question of resources is an important one, because if we just ‘are’ in a situation but have no language, concepts and theories to perceive the situation in a particular way—to see the situation *as*, for example, an instance of education or as an instance of indoctrination—we are in a sense not seeing anything at all, or we are relying solely upon unexamined assumptions, but not necessarily on assumptions and ideas that matter for our work as teachers. One way to grasp why resources are needed can be found in the very idea of reflection itself, because reflections—for example, of a face in a mirror, the sky in a window, or the sun in the surface of a lake—are in a sense identical images of the original. They just give us back what we put in. In order to see something different and to see differently we need to look from an angle, which is not a matter of reflection but of refraction in the way in which a bundle of white light when going through a prism shows a whole spectrum of colours. This is why we need resources to think and see with—in a sense they allow us to see from a different angle than when we ‘just’ generate reflections of the situation.

Schön is again helpful here, because he not only identifies the resources we need in order to see a situation from an angle, but also because he distinguishes between two kinds of resources: overarching theories and appreciative systems. Overarching theories, as I have already briefly indicated above, provide possible descriptions and accounts of the specific ‘nature’ of the situation. They make it possible to see the situation in a particular way or, to put it differently, to focus our attention on particular dimensions, aspects and manifestations of the situation. The key question is, of course, what kind of overarching theories we should bring to the educational situation. This is not a matter that can easily be resolved, partly because there are quite a number of different overarching theories about education, but also because there is disagreement amongst teachers, amongst researchers, amongst educational theorists and historians, about which overarching theories are relevant, important or true. This in itself is not a worrying situation, as it not only can make teachers aware that the educational situation is multi-faceted, but can also encourage them to think through the situations they are in from a number of differing overarching theories.

One example of an overarching theory has to do with the understanding of the dynamics of the interactions between teachers and students. As I have already alluded to, one way to understand these dynamics—one that, in some circles is quite popular—is to see teaching as an intervention and what happens on the side of the student as an effect of the teaching intervention. There is quite a lot of research that takes this as the basic assumption—such research tends to look for causal connections between interventions and effects which, as a way of looking at the dynamics of teaching is not entirely without reason. There is, however, another overarching the-



ory that conceives the dynamics of the interaction between teachers and students not in terms of intervention-effect-relationships, but as relatively open processes of communication and interpretation. If the overarching theory that sees teaching dynamics in terms of interventions and effects is relatively uni-directional—from the teacher to the student—the theory that tries to grasp the dynamics of teaching in terms of communication and interpretation sees it much more as a two-way process.

One interesting issue is whether, at some point, we might be in a position to say which of these overarching theories is true. I am inclined to say that these are two possible ways in which we can approach the teaching situation—and each will give us a different ‘access’ to the situation. Although there are further discussions to be had about how adequate each overarching theory is—what its potential and its limitations are—this brief example shows that it is only when we have overarching theories that we can begin to see things which, in turn, will have an impact on the kind of reflective conversations we will be having with the situation in which we act as teachers.<sup>2</sup> And my main point here is that it is only when we bring overarching theories to the situation, that we are able to gain a perspective *on* the situation, and not just have to ‘accept’ the situation as it ‘is’, if that were ever possible in the first place.

In addition to theories that help us to describe and ‘see’ educational situations in a range of differing ways, the conversation with the educational situation also needs something else in order to be possible and have direction, namely ideas about what the work of teachers is *for*. This is the question of the purpose or purposes of education, and this question is not a factual or descriptive question but is a value-laden or normative question, because here we encounter ideas about what teaching should bring about. I have already alluded to one of the ‘biggest’ distinctions with regard to the purpose of teaching and education more generally, which is the question whether teaching is a process that is aimed at controlling students, their thoughts and their behaviours, or whether teaching is a process aimed at helping students to think, judge and act for themselves.

If the first can be characterised as a matter of indoctrination—at least at the extreme end of the spectrum—the second can be characterised as ‘proper’ education or, if one wishes to use ‘education’ as a more neutral and descriptive term, as a form of emancipatory education aimed at the (responsible) freedom of students. Views about what education is *for* provide the work of teachers with orientation and direction. One could even say, following Schön, that appreciative systems, that is, views about what education is *for*, are essential for problem setting, because problem setting is never just a ‘technical’ matter but always requires an orientation on what one seeks to achieve. Put differently—as I have already briefly indicated before—whether we see a student who resists our efforts as teachers as a student who lacks obedience or as a student who is showing agency and self-determination, depends crucially on

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<sup>2</sup>There are, of course, many more examples possible—think of the difference between approaching an educational situation from the perspective of Piaget or Vygotsky, from the perspective of critical race theory or feminism, from the perspective of social reproduction theory or social capital theory, from the perspective of direct instruction or the perspective of Freirean pedagogy—which all have an impact on the reflective conversation with the situation.

whether we see our work as teachers in terms of control or in terms of emancipation. So it is only from within such frameworks, that it becomes possible to define—or with Schön's word: construct—a problem. And it is only when we have constructed a problem, that we have a starting point for further action, that is, for engaging in the conversation with the situation in a meaningful way.

Just as there are quite a large number of possibly relevant overarching theories in the field of education, I wish to argue against the idea that when it comes to the purpose of education everything is clear and easy. The question of what education is *for* is actually a highly contested matter, and a topic of much debate amongst policy makers, educators, educational researchers and the general public. My modest contribution to this discussion (see particularly Biesta, 2009, 2010) has been to highlight that in education there are (at least) three different domains of purpose that need to be taken into consideration when asking the question what education is *for*.<sup>3</sup> The first is the domain of qualification, which has to do with the transmission and acquisition of knowledge and skills, both in the more narrow sense of the knowledge and skills needed to perform a specific task or do a specific job, and in the wider sense of the knowledge and skills needed, for example, to live in complex modern societies.

Next to qualification—which many would see as a key purpose of education and some, unfortunately, see as the only purpose of education—I have argued that education has a role to play in socialisation, that is, in providing orientation in traditions and practices, again both in the narrow sense of, say, the practice of a particular job, and in the wider sense of the cultural, social, political, religious and so on traditions and practices that make up modern societies. In addition to these two domains, I have suggested that education also has a task with regard to what I have termed 'subjectification,' which has to do with supporting and encouraging children and young people to become (responsible) subjects of their own lives, rather than letting their lives (and themselves) be determined by others. Here we can find the ambition for education to work towards the emancipation of children and young people. By referring to qualification, socialisation and subjectification as three domains of educational purpose, I am highlighting that with respect to each domain further judgements and decisions are needed—for example, about which knowledge and skills are worth acquiring, or which traditions are worth being introduced to.

Taken together, the overarching educational theories that help teachers to make sense of the situations they are in and the appreciative systems that articulate potential domains of purpose, provide key resources for teachers in their conversations with the situations they encounter and find themselves in, both in terms of what these situations are (overarching theories) and in terms of what they might be(come) (appreciative systems). Because, as I have emphasised, teachers are not acting upon situations but are actually an important part of what constitutes a situation, these resources are also important for the 'role frames' that teachers use to make sense of their work and themselves.

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<sup>3</sup>See Chap. 9.

### ***What to Reflect for? Developing a 'Feel'***

The blunt way of answering the question what to reflect for, is to say that reflection is not meant in order to write essays about one's practice, and also not to improve the writing of such essays. If reflection *is* the way in which teachers are 'in conversation' with the situation, then the main purpose of reflection is to get closer to the situation and develop a 'feel,' as Schön calls it, for the practice and the practising in the practice. The notion of 'feel' is interesting, because it puts the emphasis on action, on being-in-conversation-*with*, rather than on thinking *about* action. This is not to suggest that teachers should not be allowed to think about their actions, but it is important to see that even such thinking about should ultimately 'land' in the 'feel' for the situation, that is, the ways in which teachers, guided by resources, navigate the situation. The aim is to make action more thoughtful, not to replace action with thinking. Developing a 'feel'—developing an educational 'feel,' developing a teacher's 'feel'—takes time, and takes practising, that is, active engagement in the practice, active conversations with the situation. That is the slow work not just of teacher education, but in a sense the life-long challenge for every educational practitioner who understands that teaching is not a matter of the application of knowledge from elsewhere, and even less a matter of following scripts, but that teaching is a practical art that requires ongoing practising in order to keep one's educational artistry alive.

### **Concluding Comments: Towards Thoughtful Teaching**

In order to become a thoughtful educational practitioner, one needs to engage fully with the practice of teaching as it is ultimately there, in the thoughtful conversation with the situation, that teaching happens. This doesn't mean however, that there would be no point in stepping back from time to time, which can even be in the form of a writing task. What I have tried to argue in this chapter is that it is important for such tasks that they try to keep students focussed on the practice—which is why I have suggested that reflection should be existential, focussing on the question how someone has been in and 'with' a particular situation, and not on the question what one has learned from having been there. The ideas presented in this chapter give further depth to the idea of existential reflection, by highlighting (1) that teachers are a constitutive part of the situations they are in conversation with, rather than that they act upon those situations from the outside, and (2) that the theoretical assumptions they bring to the teaching situation play a key role in framing the situation in a particular way, so that it is important to become aware of the many different ways in which situations can be described and understood and how this may make a difference for the conversations we have with the situation, and (3) that in all this we need to keep the question of purpose, the question what education is or might be for, in focus as well, as it is only with regard to this that it becomes possible to begin to 'construct' problems, that is, to get a sense of what the situation needs from teachers.

Any work in teacher education and the further development of teachers that takes these dimensions into consideration and that keeps the focus strongly on the teacher's professional 'feel', is likely to make a contribution to the artistry of teaching. This is not in order to make teaching more effective with regard to the production of learning outcomes—to use a popular policy phrase—but to make teaching more attuned to what is encountered in the always new situations in and through which teaching takes place.

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# Chapter 9

## What Are We Doing? Reflecting on the Purpose of Education—And Where Such Reflection Might Lead



John D. Whelen

**Abstract** The question of purpose, or the point of education, has a long history in writing on education and continues to be a site of controversy and debate. Whelen critiques the approaches taken by two authors, Nel Noddings and Gert Biesta, to the question: what is education for? The very idea of purpose in education is so often taken for granted in contemporary discourses focussing on its instrumental value in terms of national identity, or positioning, whereas for those involved in doing it, or more importantly, experiencing it, the question of purpose is framed very differently. Noddings in particular argues for a revival of what she calls ‘aims-talk’ in order to clarify the fundamental ends of education and in doing so argues that an ethics of care is indispensable to the educational enterprise. Whereas Noddings argues the case for the primacy of an ethic of care in education, Biesta, while deeply concerned to clarify ‘ultimate values’ underlying the aims and purposes of education, asks ‘what is good education *for*?’ By refining the question with the adjective ‘good’, or ‘effective’, he is able to interrogate a range of arrangements and endeavours in education in terms of what he refers to as domains of educational purpose. These two positions then form the basis of a discussion in which the author, further drawing on performative crises experienced by teachers, brings them together to suggest pedagogical and curricular consequences that might be expected if (new, often young) teachers, together with their students, can find a way to understand and to challenge the situations they find themselves in.

The question of the purpose, or point, of education, has a long history in writing on education and continues to be a site of controversy and debate. In this chapter I critiques the approaches taken by two authors, Nel Noddings and Gert Biesta, to the question: what is education for? Noddings in particular argues for a revival of what she calls ‘aims-talk’ in order to clarify the fundamental ends of education and in doing so argues that an ethics of care is indispensable to the educational enterprise (Noddings, 1984, 1988, 1992, 2002a, 2003). Such an ethics leads her to answer that

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the aim of education ‘should be to produce competent, caring, loving and lovable people’ (Noddings, 1992, 2002a, 94). Whereas Noddings argues the case for the primacy of an ethic of care in education, Biesta, while deeply concerned to clarify ‘ultimate values ... about the aims and purposes of education’ (Biesta, 2009, 35) asks: ‘what is good education *for*?’ (Biesta, 2010, 289). The distinction he makes by refining the question with the adjective ‘good’ (or ‘effective’) enables him to interrogate a range of educational ‘arrangements and endeavours’ in terms of what he refers to as ‘domains of educational purpose’ (Biesta, 2015, 77). In doing so, he develops a coruscating critique of the contemporary fixation on learning and the emphasis on ‘what works’ at the expense of a more emancipatory ethic and purpose that might lead to both a redefinition of teaching and the ‘event’ of being taught, and the emergence of those who are taught as subjects in the world. These two positions then form the basis of a discussion in which I attempt to bring the two arguments together, suggesting pedagogical and curricular consequences that might be expected if (new, often young) teachers, together with their students, can draw on Noddings and Biesta to find a way to understand and to challenge the situations they find themselves in.

The question of the very purpose, or point, of education—and indeed of what education is—has long been the explicit focus of those who want to understand its relation to society and its place in culture at any particular time, but for many writers the question of purpose in education remains more or less implicit.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I want to draw attention to how this fundamental question has been raised in separate ways by Nel Noddings and Gert Biesta who, each in their own way, is concerned to ask: what is education for? In asking this, Noddings is calling for a reinvigoration of ‘aims-talk’, or discussion of the purpose of education (1984, 1988, 1992, 2002a, 2003). By drawing attention to what she saw as a relentless emphasis on academic achievement in American secondary education she argues for a reordering of educational priorities such that education might reflect the ‘fundamental human needs’ to care and be cared for (Noddings, 1992, xi, 1984, 173), on the grounds, principally, that education cannot—should not—be separated from personal experience. This leads her to mount a case against liberal education as practised in American secondary schooling, a case that has echoes elsewhere (Noddings, 1992). Biesta, similarly, in responding to the increasingly pervasive trend to measure the outcomes of education in high-stakes testing, such as the OECD’s Programme for International Assessment (PISA), or Australia’s NAPLAN testing,<sup>2</sup> observes with dismay how this culture of measurement has impacted on educational policy and practice (Biesta, 2010). In critiquing and questioning its impact, Biesta seeks to clarify ‘ultimate values ... about the aims and purposes of education ...’. But whereas Noddings argues the case for the primacy of an ethic of care in education, Biesta

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<sup>1</sup>Among the former, for example, are Dewey (1966) [1916], Neill (1961) [1926], Freire (1968) [1970], (1994), Illich (1971), Goodman (1971) [1962], Apple (2004) [1979], Harber (2004), Darling-Hammond (2010). For a useful contemporary discussion, see Moore (2015).

<sup>2</sup>National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy. Tests are undertaken every second year from Year 3 to Year 9 nationwide.

asks not what education is for, but what is ‘good’ education for? (Biesta, 2010). In this chapter, I will review the work of each writer and draw attention to similar preoccupations they share which raise important questions both for teacher education and for the development of a discourse of confrontation with what each author argues is a depleted and inadequate view of educational practice.

## Noddings on Care

Noddings’ signal contribution to education is to be found in her development of care ethics and its relation to the practices that constitute education. The fundamental significance of caring to education, in her view, can hardly be overstated. ‘The primary aim of every educational institution and of every educational effort (she writes), must be the maintenance and enhancement of caring’, just as it should be, she argues, in life (Noddings, 1984, 172). Noddings developed her ethics of care as a feminist response to a broader debate in which the development in children of moral reasoning in response to ethical issues seemed to favour an overly cognitivist and masculinist model of moral development. Following Gilligan (1982) and arising from her experience as both a mother and teacher, Noddings proposes that morality is an “active virtue” (Noddings 1984, 79ff, 1992, 22) arising from two feelings: a foundational ‘sentiment of natural caring’—the ‘initial, enabling sentiment’ when confronted with the needs of another, which she calls natural caring—followed by a sense of obligation to respond, a feeling of “I must” (ibid.) which characterises ethical caring. In recognising this sense of obligation Noddings argues that one draws on one’s vision of one’s ‘best self,’ an ‘ideal developed in congruence with one’s best remembrance of caring and being cared for’ (Noddings 1984, 86, 94, 1992, 52). In this way one’s concerns with one’s own interests are displaced by the concerns of another. The paradigm example of natural caring to which Noddings draws attention is of a mother responding to the needs of a baby. Noddings’ idea of ethical caring, however, requires an effort to maintain the natural caring attitude with a further act of commitment to and with another. For Noddings, such caring is essentially and inherently relational, not something romantic and not dependent on an assumption of innate human goodness. It is an ethic of care in which the initial arousal of a caring response is motivated not by any principle, rule or sense of duty, or from a desire to be virtuous, but by feelings, or passions (Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2002a).<sup>3</sup>

In order to care in the sense in which Noddings employs the term, the one caring—the carer—does so, by displacing personal interests in order to be engrossed in the needs or project of the other. Crucially, however, care given in this way is incomplete without the other recognising it and showing that it has been received. This is the defining characteristic of the ethic of relational care as Noddings describes it. Thus,

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<sup>3</sup>Noddings has not had it all her own way. For feminist responses, see the Review Symposium on Noddings (1984) in *Hypatia* 5 (1) 101–126. For a response from virtue ethics, see M. Slote, ‘Caring versus the philosophers,’ in Slote (2010).

in caring the carer receives and so confirms the other in her/his need, and the other, in her/his response, acknowledges and so confirms the efforts of the carer (Noddings, 1984, 176, 193–197, 1992, 16). Without this relational response, any attempt to care in this ethical sense remains incomplete (Quay, Bleazby, Stolz, Toscano, & Webster, 2018, 105).

By locating her ethics of care in the work of teachers and students, Noddings argues that the teacher's position is essentially that of one who cares. It entails awareness on the part of the teacher of her/his power and responsibilities in an unequal relationship, and of teaching's being essentially a matter of 'working together' (Noddings, 1984, 177). Furthermore, the ethical dimensions of the teacher-student relationship require that the teacher acknowledge that the student is ultimately more important than the subject matter and that each should 'respect ... the projects of the other' (ibid., 176). Thus, it is incumbent upon the teacher to accept the students' feelings towards subject matter and the teacher her/himself. By receiving the student sympathetically and encouraging an appropriate response, this ethic of care is enacted relationally and students' moral sensibilities are being enhanced. As Noddings observes, even as the student learns disciplines, such as mathematics or history, in this relationship she/he is also learning how to care. 'By conducting education morally (she writes), the teacher hopes to induce an enhanced moral sense in the student' (ibid., 179). In such an environment, the teacher should know her/his students and develop a pedagogy of care in which students, for their part, may be encouraged to respond in appropriately caring ways, such as with 'questions, effort, comment and cooperation' (ibid., 181, 1992, 68–69), or what she came to call 'sustained receptive attention' (Quay et al., 2018, 107).

What is given initially as a dyadic relationship, however, becomes more difficult with the addition of one more. Teachers, who customarily interact with 25 or more students at a time, are faced with the task of caring for each and every student in the way outlined above: by being present to one and all in each and every interaction in such a way as to confirm students' participation and have their own efforts confirmed in return. In such a situation, it may be that teachers are asked to give more than they are able to give by way of care, and while Noddings has little to say about this, she concedes 'that an ethic of caring implies a limit on our obligation' (Noddings, 1984, 86). Teachers may care for, and care about, their students, just as one may care about child exploitation or the prevalence of malaria, but what one might call the 'reach' of ethical care in relation to the latter is challenged, if not defied, by the scale of such a problem.

Caring for Noddings, then, and especially in an educational setting, should be 'a way of being in relation, not a set of specific behaviours' (Noddings, 1992, 17), and as such is foundational in developing one's moral sensibility. As a teacher, therefore, to be concerned to behave ethically one should '(strive) always to preserve or convert a given relationship into a caring relation' (Noddings 1988, 218–219). As she notes in critiquing the focus on academic achievement in liberal education, '(r)elation, except in very rare cases, precedes any engagement with subject matter' (1992, 36). The significance of this to Noddings is that any relational ethic should '(remain) tightly tied to experience' (Noddings 1988, 218) in the sense in which Dewey (1938) uses the



term, emphasising the essentially indivisible continuity of experience. Thus, while it may be argued that socialising institutions such as families and religions alone ought to develop in children/students a moral sensibility, Noddings argues that schooling should not be excluded from playing such a role, given the principle of the continuity of experience and the nature of ethical care in the teaching-learning encounter. In fact, she goes so far as to assert that '(t)he best schools should resemble the best homes' (2003, 260) in which caring relations, far from being based on strategies or particular behaviours, are essentially and simply 'a way of being in the world' (Noddings, 2002a, 44).<sup>4</sup>

Having set out the nature of ethical care as distinct from both rule-bound precepts to care and care as a virtue to be sought and cultivated, and having linked her understanding of care to the question of the purpose of education, Noddings takes aim at the real object of her concern: the assumptions sustaining the sort of liberal education offered in north American high schools at the time of her writing, and the privilege that high academic achievement gives one in being described as an 'educated person'. The assumption that "all children can learn" and that if taught well, and if they try, children can learn anything she finds especially pernicious. It leads, in her account, not only to a narrowly conceived and questionably relevant curriculum that all must study, but also to a regrettable overemphasis on academic achievement in a very small part of that curriculum. Her concern is not that language, literature, mathematics, science and so on have no place in a school curriculum, but that their presence is so often justified more on political grounds than on any educational rationale (Noddings, 1992, 2002a). What most offends her is that the 'capacities that have traditionally been most highly valued (by society) in schools are linguistic and logico-mathematical' (Noddings, 1992, 31) and that success in them favours those best endowed with these capacities and with the necessary interest to develop them. Must schooling, reflecting the broader society's values, also accept this hierarchy of importance and privilege? Why should such a curriculum be so blatantly avocational? Must some (perhaps most) students be left to realise that their capacities and interests relate only to less highly regarded skills and knowledge?<sup>5</sup> Not only are students with such capacities likely to 'feel inferior, rejected, out of place, bored, and perhaps hostile' (Noddings, 1992, 31), but in a blow to any sense of social equality, those who do succeed in areas of 'privileged knowledge', she argues, 'might very well learn contempt for people who work with their hands ...' (ibid., 34). It is little wonder that throughout Noddings' critique of American education she refers so frequently to students' claim that 'nobody cares' (2002a, 88).

In addressing the question of the purpose of education, Noddings observes that in America until at least the mid-twentieth century, 'most Americans seemed to have assumed that a fundamental aim of schooling should be the production of a moral

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<sup>4</sup>Noddings further develops what appears initially to be a naive assumption about 'the best homes' and who might inhabit them in Noddings (2002a).

<sup>5</sup>For a critique of this hierarchical theory of curriculum, especially as it relates to Australia, see Bleazby (2015). On this issue and the vexed relationship of the liberal humanist curriculum to vocational educational and training (VET), see Teese and Polesel (2003).

citizenry' (1998, 215), but that since then, educational discourse, in so far as it has addressed aims at all, has been characterised by 'the detachment of schools from explicitly moral aims' (ibid.). In a further development of her concern to encourage aims talk, Noddings notes that since the 'desire (to be happy) is well-nigh universal, we should expect to find happiness included as an aim of education' (2003, 74) in any list or discussion of such aims. Instead, she finds that by asking why a topic is being taught (say, the Russian revolution of 1905), we may be told that it fits with an historical sequence and explanatory structure leading to the 1917 revolution. Such answers invariably involve responses in terms of learning objectives (such as explaining actions) and goals (such as fulfilling examination criteria) rather than foundational statements about aims. Why is it thought appropriate, she asks, to teach, e.g. algebra (or history, or chemistry and so on), at all? Even if such a course of study is approved by experts, why is *this content* taught at *this* level, and why to *these* students? (Noddings, 2003, 75) and, one might add, in *this way*? As Noddings says, any discussion of aims, as distinct from objectives and goals, must focus on 'the deepest questions in education' (ibid.) but it is clear in her view that education that has as its aim the sort of academic achievement expected by a traditional liberal humanist education such as she describes and that Australia has in its National Curriculum, is deeply flawed. If all students are to be included in a system of education, then the narrow conception of 'the educated person' that has prevailed must change so that all students' interests, talents and capacities may be catered for and this means valuing a diverse range of knowledge and skills at least as much as achievement in traditional disciplines (1992, 173, 2002a, 95). It also means acknowledging 'the fundamental needs of students for continuity and care' (1992, 64), two needs which underscore what is most important and most essential to full human life. Noddings' solution is to propose that the school curriculum should be arranged in terms of studies that reflect student interests as well as the 'various capacities for caring' (1992, 18) that people have, e.g., caring for ideas, objects, places and non-human life, so that students are offered a range of 'centres of care' from which to choose various themes. Thus, she envisages reorganising schooling so that '(a)ll students should be engaged in a general education that guides them in caring for self, intimate others, global others, plants, animals, and the environment, the human-made world, and ideas. Moral life so defined should frankly be embraced as the main goal of education' (1984, 1992, 173, 70, 2002a).

Thus, in arguing against what she describes as an 'ideology of control that forces all students to study a particular, narrowly prescribed curriculum devoid of content they might really care about' (1992, xii), Noddings presents a case for a reimagined curriculum that respects 'a wonderful range of human capacities ... largely ignored in schools' (ibid., xiii), and in so doing argues 'against the persistent undervaluing of skills, attitudes, and capacities traditionally associated with women' (ibid.). In such a curriculum, she writes, 'lamps and toasters (would be) as important as quadratic equations and complex sentences' as foci of study (ibid., 148). Her argument, based on the contention 'that the first job of the school is to care for our children' (ibid., xiv), leads her inevitably to the view that instruction is not the first task of teachers or the school: 'if the school has one main goal (she writes), a goal that guides the

establishment and priority of all others, it should be to promote the growth of students as healthy, competent, moral people' (ibid., 10, also 173ff).<sup>6</sup> In putting the case for the primacy of ethical care, Noddings is addressing the fundamental inequity in the way students' abilities, interests and achievements have been valued in the traditional liberal, humanist school curriculum, and in so doing seeks to challenge the imposition of those values that have sustained its hegemonic position in public education.

## Biesta on Values

Another writer who has raised the issue of the purpose of education is Gert Biesta. In what follows I will draw on those of his ideas which I think can be usefully read in tandem with Noddings' ideas. Biesta comes to the question of the purpose of education by affirming that as a teleological pursuit, educators have, and must have, a purpose or purposes, and that it is essential if education is to occur that those involved are aware not only of what they are doing, but in a deep sense why they are doing it. In Biesta's view, however, this has become increasingly and regrettably unlikely as the discourse of education has given way to a discourse of learning. Sustained by a policy and research nexus which favours an empiricist search for 'evidence' of 'what works', this discourse is embedded in a social and political environment that rewards a narrow sense of academic achievement, valorising research that might aid such achievement in order to raise national 'standards' and improve a nation's ranking in competitive international high-stakes testing (Biesta, 2006, 2010, 2013a).

Responding to increasingly pervasive examples of the measurement of outcomes in education in a variety of high-stakes testing, such as the OECD'S Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and, e.g. Australia's NAPLAN testing, Biesta observes that the 'rise of the measurement culture in education has had a profound impact on educational practice' (Biesta, 2010) from the level of national policy right through to the practice of principals/managers and teachers in local schools. As a result, he points to the increasing tendency to use information gained from educational measurement to ground educational policy, in particular in relation to educational practice, as if such factual data were alone sufficient to formulate decisions about what ought to be done.<sup>7</sup> The problem he identifies with this trend is that, philosophically, statements about what ought to be done can never logically follow from what is the case. To decide what ought to be done we need to engage also with normative values, especially values which he calls 'ultimate values: values about the aims and purposes of education ...'. To do this, however, one must evaluate the desirability of what the factual data are measuring in the first place. The central issue here is 'the question whether we are ... measuring what we value, or whether we are just measuring what we can easily measure and thus end up valuing what we (can)

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<sup>6</sup>Or, alternatively, 'The fundamental aim of education is to help children grow in desirable ways' (Noddings, 2002a, 287).

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, Hattie (2012).

measure' (ibid.).<sup>8</sup> In other words, the technical validity of the measurements used to inform the effectiveness of learning should not outweigh the normative validity of the measurements, and this can only be justified on the basis of 'whether the outcomes themselves are desirable' (ibid.), and this requires clarification of ultimate values. Strategies that are merely more or less effective in promoting learning, in his view, are inadequate to carry the philosophical burden of educational desirability. Furthermore, to conceive of education as essentially the transmission of knowledge, skills, techniques and so on, as the transmission model of learning does, is to open the way to thinking of education as a process which invites 'clinical' interventions such as allegedly evidence-based techniques to improve the 'effectiveness' of teaching and learning in order to reach pre-determined outcomes (Biesta, 2007, 2010).<sup>9</sup> For Biesta, this view of education, in which the question 'Effective for what?' is never seriously asked, is utterly opposed to the view of education he holds: that 'education is not a process of physical interaction but a process of *symbolic* or *symbolically mediated* interaction' (Biesta, 2010, original emphasis). In this understanding of what education should be and can be, Biesta argues that it is at least as important to ask 'Effective for whom?' (ibid., 14), before even beginning to approach the question of purpose in terms of ultimate normative values.

The fundamental issue for Biesta is not simply the question of the purpose of education but, as already noted, the question of what constitutes *good* education. This, he believes, has become increasingly difficult to discuss in the context of widespread emphasis on learning as distinct from education, e.g. pupils/students have become learners, schools have become learning environments, teachers have become facilitators, and so on. As the discourse of learning has flourished, Biesta has drawn attention to what he calls the 'learnification' of education, or 'the translation of everything there is to say about education in terms of learning and learners'. What is particularly significant to Biesta in this world of learning (which he argues is a consequence of the widespread acceptance of constructivism as a theory of learning), is how it focusses on learning as essentially individualistic (as if the learner alone has a particular responsibility to learn), while at the same time the teacher *as teacher* (and teaching too) fades from view (Biesta, 2012). Thus, given the contemporary emphasis so uncritically directed towards the effectiveness of learning, especially in a high-stakes testing environment, the widely held view 'that what matters most is academic achievement in a small number of curricular domains, particularly language, science and mathematics' (Biesta, 2010) remains immune from critique.<sup>10</sup>

In order to confront the 'learnification' of education with questions of purpose and of what constitutes good education, Biesta outlines three 'actual functions' (or 'domains of educational purpose'), to develop a framework for discussion about

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<sup>8</sup>Biesta is far from alone in making this observation. See, e.g., Lingard (2010, 135) and Nikel and Lowe (2010, 596).

<sup>9</sup>Hattie (2009) perfectly exemplifies this view.

<sup>10</sup>This may be true in terms of political and bureaucratic discourses of education, and even in some parts of the academy, but more generally this issue is widely contested. See, e.g., contributors to Scott and Hargreaves (2015) for a variety of responses.

aims and ends (Biesta, 2010, 19–22, 2015, 77). The first is the ‘*qualification*’ function which provides children and others with knowledge, skills, dispositions and ‘forms of judgment that allow them to ‘do something’” (Biesta, 2010, 19–20) such as plumbing, or teaching. The qualification function is most often linked to preparation for the workforce and is used to illustrate education’s contribution to economic development and the demands of the state, but it can also provide the basis of political and cultural literacy and citizenship. Second, education performs a ‘*socialization*’ function which ‘has to do with the many ways in which ... we become part of particular social, cultural and political ‘orders’” (ibid., 20). This may be seen, for example, in the ways various norms and values are pursued in relation to cultural or religious traditions, often through the hidden curriculum: think, for example, of the functions of school uniforms and school assemblies. Such functions are largely responsible for the persistence of culture and tradition although they may be disrupted as students exercise a previously latent autonomy (Whelen, 2011). The third and final function (which can be seen, as hinted above, in relation to the socialisation function) is what Biesta refers to as ‘*subjectification*’, by which he means ‘the process of becoming a subject’ as distinct from being socialised into existing ways of being (ibid., 21). Whether education always performs this function or not, Biesta argues that ‘What matters more ... is the ‘quality’ of subjectification, i.e. the kind (or kinds) of subjectivity that are made possible as a result of particular educational arrangements and configurations (and that) any education worthy of its name should *always* contribute to processes of subjectification that allow those educated to become more autonomous and independent in their thinking and acting’ (ibid., 21, original emphasis). Any discussion of what constitutes good education, therefore, needs to take these three functions into account and acknowledge that it is a ‘composite question’. Each function requires its own rationale and while separate, they effectively overlap in practice: to do one is to do one or more of the other two, but for Biesta there is one further, major hurdle in challenging the ‘learnification’ of education, viz. the place and function of the teacher in the act, or event, of teaching.

Learning, writes Biesta, is simply not ‘the point of education’ (Biesta, 2012, 2013a, 63), or as he says, ‘learning is not an outcome or production’ (Quay et al., 2018, 62). The language of learning that he opposes ‘tends to obscure crucial dimensions of educational processes and practices – that is, aspects of content, purpose, and relationships’ (ibid., 64) to the extent that he argues that the school is not a place for learning but a place for teaching, and without there being someone who has ‘something to teach ... the very idea of education’ is at stake (ibid., 46). For there to be good education, then, it is essential ‘to give teaching ‘back’ to education’ (ibid. 44, 46, 2012, 2017) and here Biesta draws a distinction between ‘learning from’ and ‘being taught by’ (Biesta, 2013b). In his view, constructivism has so captured the pedagogical imagination that teachers have become mere facilitators of students’ learning so that students ‘learn (more or less effectively) from’ the facilitator. His point is rather that ‘for a teacher to be a teacher he or she needs to teach something, that is, needs to bring something new to the situation’ (ibid., 451, fn2). This ‘something new’, he argues, ‘transcends the one who is being taught’ (ibid., 451) but at the same time ‘the experience of being taught ... is not an experience that

can be *produced* by the teacher' (ibid., 457). In being taught, the student receives 'the gift of teaching' in moments of revelation when she/he knows that she/he has been taught something radically unexpected. In these moments a new voice is found, subjectivity and freedom are affirmed and a democratic tendency and temper have been enacted. In many ways we have now come to what is for Biesta the point of (good) education.<sup>11</sup>

## Discussion

This review of the work of Noddings and Biesta raises a number of questions and provokes several observations. In attempting to specify the purpose of education, or to delineate the ultimate values which might sustain education, it is interesting to see the extent to which each writer proposes a vision of education so different from what is commonly and publicly experienced in this 'age of measurement'. If the primary function of the teacher is not to instruct (Noddings) and the role of the student is not to learn (Biesta), what is left? To start with, Noddings' work raises the question of whether it is possible to teach, and be a teacher, without caring in some sense. Clearly it is possible to want to be virtuous in the sense of being a good person in the classroom, and therefore to intend to care, but the question I pose is whether it is possible to teach and not to care ethically in Noddings' sense of the term. The teacher may indeed 'care for' the students she/he works with, and may 'care about' the work being done and the health and welfare of distant others, but the relational nature of ethical caring may still be absent, or only fleetingly present. It depends also on the student: it is not entirely in the hands of the teacher. This echoes Biesta's assertion that teaching, in his relational sense, should be understood not as an experience produced solely by the teacher but as 'sporadic' in the sense of being dependent upon being recognised and received by the student. These are the moments when, in Biesta's account, the one notionally learning in the experience of being taught awakens to a recognition of what now matters to her/him; awakens to an emancipatory potential that interrupts mundane learning for pre-determined outcomes; awakens to a sense of liberated existence as a subject (Biesta, 2017, 83, 2013b, 459). To conceive of teaching in such a way as this is surely to teach with more than an intention, more than a plan and more than a set of skills. To describe such teaching as teaching 'against the grain', for example, is to miss the point entirely. Rather it is to teach with something like an ethics of care to ensure what Noddings would recognise as healthy, competent, loving and moral people, or with a will to call forth the 'grown-up subject-ness' of the student (Biesta, 2017, 83) by interrupting, questioning and confronting the educational relationship required by prioritising learning.

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<sup>11</sup>In asking 'What is the educational task? Biesta writes: 'The answer I propose is that the task of the educator is to make the grown-up existence of another human being possible or, (more precisely) it is about arousing the desire in another human being for wanting to exist in the world in a grown-up way' (2017, 4). For Biesta, subjectivity is immanent in teaching which opens 'possibilities for students to exist in and with the world—other ... than in terms of learning' (ibid., 5).

As a matter of interest, one might ask at this point, is this how each of us learned and learns to care? Can care ever be mere technique—a behaviour to be learned - so as to make learning more effective? Or is an ethics of care ultimately no more than a discretionary add-on to accompany a ‘clinical’ intervention to improve learning? Furthermore, is it ever even remotely likely, or appropriate, that in the context of the contemporary ‘measurement culture’ in educational research that it might be deemed necessary to research care empirically in any of its manifestations before advising of its relevance to teaching and learning? The point that Noddings makes is that the will to care arises from a disposition to be a caring teacher in a moral endeavour that draws the student into an educative encounter that respects a child’s capacities and interests and enables the child to ‘grow in desirable ways’ (Noddings, 2002b, 287). While Biesta has less to say about the will to teach in terms of an emancipatory ethic, it is nevertheless clearly implied that what matters most in an ultimate sense is that the teacher cares that she or he helps enable ‘the desire in another human being for wanting to exist in and with the world in a grown-up way ...’ (Biesta, 2017, 82).

A second issue that both authors respond to, whether in North America from the 1980s onwards or in contemporary Europe, Britain or Australia, is the societal and political emphasis on academic achievement in a narrow range of subjects, or disciplines (Biesta, 2010, 15–16, Noddings, 1992, 31–32). Coming at the issue from quite different starting points, each argues that such intellectual and cognitive primacy granted to studies in mathematics, science and languages ‘serves the interest of a particular group much better than the interests of other groups’ (Biesta, 2010, 15), or in Noddings’ words, ‘Only if education is organized around centers of care are we likely to avoid the domination of groups in power’ (1992, 169). For Noddings, the consequence is clear: rearrange the curriculum so that the aptitudes and interests of all students are catered for ‘in the service of equality’ (1992, 31; see also 2003, 258). Without such change, those who achieve well in the confines of a traditional liberal humanist education will do so at the expense of ‘adequately intelligent students (who are forced to study) things that they do not want to learn’ (ibid., 42).<sup>12</sup> As Noddings argues, quoting Lingis (1994), ‘Caring ... recognizes the ‘community of those who have nothing in common’ (Noddings, 2002a, 10), a source Biesta also draws on in reference to that ‘interruption’ in mundane, unreflective teaching and learning when ‘being taught’ erupts; ‘when one speaks with one’s own voice, with the voice that is unique, singular and unprecedented’ (Biesta, 2006, 66, 2010, 87ff). For Biesta, the question of the possibility of ‘being taught’ in this sense raises ‘the question (of) whether democratic subjectivity is actually possible in schools’ at all (ibid., 138); that is, whether unreflective teaching for whatever purpose in a liberal humanist curriculum can meet the challenges of equity and justice on the one hand, and of becoming a subject existing in the world, on the other. Again, for each author what matters most is the purpose and nature of the relational contract inherent in

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<sup>12</sup>Here one might note the emphasis currently being given to STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects in secondary education in Australia. In 2015 the Australian Government allocated \$81.6 million to increase and improve participation in STEM fields of study.



education which should hold out the possibility, if not the promise, of the emergence and growth of the self.

The core of Noddings' argument is that the desire to be cared for expresses a universal need to experience care (Noddings, 1984, 2002b, 11). The fundamental aim of school education, therefore, should be to ensure that experiences that are educative in the moral sense that Noddings extols are so *because* they are characterised and defined by the ethical care shown to one another both by teachers and by students. But whereas the primary significance to Noddings of a disposition to care ethically is what clarifies the question of the ultimate aim of education, such an ethic is more implied than explicit in Biesta's framing of what constitutes good education. For Biesta, the teaching that frees the student from merely learning is what is paramount. This is the teaching that enables authentic subjectivity to be experienced both in and with the wider world. If teachers are to be responsible for making this possible, then, the challenge for teachers, he suggests, is at least initially to know what they are doing in the sense of knowing the extent to which their work has been captured by the demands arising from the pact with political convenience and bureaucratic compliance. To know what you are doing as a teacher, then, requires one to confront the 'actual', or widely accepted and unquestioned functions of (mass) education so as to avoid serving the demands of the merely mundane learning of pre-determined, measurable outcomes and all that they are grounded in socially, economically, historically and so on. As many teachers have found (particularly in Britain and Australia), the awareness of their subjection to such professional demands has led them to confront their role in maintaining such purposes. For many, teaching has become a pretence of teaching. The emotional distance between what is expected of them and what they think of as teaching has become a crisis of purpose and subjectivity (Ball, 2003, 2004, 2016; Ball and Olmedo 2013). In Biesta's view, it is up to teachers to return teaching to schools in order 'to (re)connect the project of schooling with the wider democratic transformation of individual 'wants' into collectively agreed upon 'needs' (Biesta, 2013a, 57), but what these 'needs' are in any particular case awaits resolution. What is certain, however, is that regardless of how this resolution is 'collectively' achieved, it will not be resolved into educationally caring and liberating experiences unless and until teachers and students together jointly disrupt whatever debilitating learning and teaching situations they find themselves in. Perhaps what has long been understood as the disruption posed by (at least some) disaffected students, now potentially allied to increasingly disaffected teachers, may be understood differently as a way of reclaiming and asserting what is essential in experiencing education.

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# Chapter 10

## Reflection, Contemplation and Teacher Problem Solving in the World(s) of the Classroom



John Quay and Christopher T. McCaw

**Abstract** Thinking is at the heart of teaching and learning. In this chapter, we explore how two connected modes of thinking—contemplative and reflective—may inform the practice of teachers, and highlight the importance of this for beginning teachers especially. More than a century ago, philosopher John Dewey published the first edition of *How We Think*. A key feature of Dewey’s work is that reflection is only one mode of thinking, the more obvious and visible mode, as made clear in Donald Schön’s characterisations of *The Reflective Practitioner*. There is another mode of thinking, one to which Dewey gives different names—affektive, qualitative—a mode central to John P. Miller’s views in *The Contemplative Practitioner*. Contemplative thinking embraces what Dewey called aesthetic experience, experience that is immediate rather than mediating. Reflection, as reflective experience, is noteworthy for its mediating capacity; contemplation is significant because it is immediate, occurring in the present. Yet reflection and contemplation are not set apart; rather they can be understood as two sides of the same coin, contributing to practice more generally, as forms of practice. In this chapter, we elucidate how the beginning teacher, as practitioner, engages in both contemplative and reflective thinking and practice in order to achieve what Van Manen describes as pedagogical tact.

### Professional Education and Reflection

It is not always easy being a teacher. An Internet search for ‘being a teacher’ returns numerous hits, many of which contain words of advice for those considering becoming a teacher. Such advice points to the many challenges that beset teachers. You might think that these challenges are more of a recent phenomenon because teaching was easier in days gone by. But no such luck. Way back in 1937, John Dewey and Goodwin Watson (p. 343) noticed the ‘many hindrances to proper professional

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performance' that beset being a school teacher. Many if not most of these hindrances remain relevant.

Teachers today [in 1937] are worried by financial burdens, anxious lest they lose their positions because of disagreement with some overseer, fettered to curricula often remote from the immediate concerns of child and community, and forced to participate in administrative routines of attendance-taking, marking, classification, testing, reporting, etc., which may be not merely irrelevant but actually injurious to the best educative relationships. (Dewey and Watson, 1937, p. 343)

Fifty years or so later, Donald Schön raised similar concerns when he pointed out that 'teachers are faced with pressures for increased efficiency in the context of contracting budgets, demands that they rigorously 'teach the basics,' exhortations to encourage creativity, build citizenship, help students to examine their values' (Schön, 1983, p. 17). It would be fairly safe to say that being a teacher has never been straightforward, with teachers, like practitioners in other professions, 'frequently embroiled in conflicts of values, goals, purposes, and interests' (p. 17). More recently, Van Manen (2015) has described 'the classroom life of teachers' as 'difficult especially because it is inherently ethical and improvisational, and tact constantly hinges on the significance of what happens in the moment' (p. 78). So how do teachers navigate these competing demands that they confront on a regular basis and must respond to immediately?

When pondering what one needs to know in order to survive as a teacher, beginning teachers often focus on tips and tricks—techniques that they see teachers using to contend with the myriad situations they face every day. These may include such time-worn tips as 'three strikes and you're out—with strikes recorded on the board'; 'never speak over the students—wait until they're all paying attention before you speak'; or 'don't smile until Easter'. Such an approach may seem to make sense, especially in meeting the short-term need to cope, but it has drawbacks in relation to comprehending the underlying principles that inform why certain actions should be taken and when.

Over a hundred years ago, Dewey argued that feedback from supervisors to beginning teachers 'should be directed to making the professional student[-teacher] thoughtful about his [*sic*] work in the light of principles, rather than to induce in him a recognition that certain special methods are good, and certain other special methods bad' (1904, p. 28). This is because a focus on special methods, or teaching techniques, 'may be adapted to giving a training-teacher command of some of the knacks and tools of the trade,' yet such feedback is 'not calculated to develop a thoughtful and independent teacher' (p. 28).

For example, an emphasis on technique might recommend waiting for at least three seconds after asking students a question (in the normal run of classroom discourse) before suggesting or accepting a response (known as 'wait time'). However, underlying this technique, an educative principle can be identified that suggests *why* it is a worthwhile technique and provides a better understanding of when and where it is appropriately applied. Here the principle may be that it takes time to formulate a response to a question, especially for some students, and allowing more time means that more students will have seriously considered the question, thus enabling them

to formulate a higher quality response and also to more critically grasp possible responses suggested by other students; the extra time improves understanding and engagement. According to Dewey (1904), such principles were made available 'in the psychology, logic and history of education' (p. 14); principles which could inform the practice of the thoughtful and independent teacher. Practice without consideration of principles places an overemphasis on techniques, suggesting to beginning teachers that their goal should be mastering good techniques over bad, positioning teaching as a technique-driven technical form of practice you just have to get right—as if there is one best way of doing it.

Dewey acknowledged that 'there is a technique of teaching', but such technique was 'dependent upon principles' in order to be 'educationally effective' (1904, p. 13). Without this, 'it is possible for a student [teacher] to acquire outward form of method without capacity to put it to genuinely educative use' (p. 13): a good description of a teacher guided more by imitation than by thoughtful awareness of the educative function of methods or techniques—an awareness informed by principles. Van Manen (2015) summarises this well when he asserts that 'teaching does not consist of a determinate system of rules or values that would be applied by any single person in the same manner to particular situations' (p. 78).

Staying with Dewey for the moment (mainly because his perspectives, while chronologically old, still reveal significant insights about education today), it is clear that he considered development of the thoughtful teacher to be best achieved via the learning of principles in connection with practice, which he called the 'laboratory point of view' (1904, p. 9) because it emulated the processes of science. This was a reaction against pure 'apprenticeship' in professional training, which at the time was concerned primarily with reproduction of the methods of teaching: 'control of the technique of class instruction and management,' focussed on 'skill and proficiency in the work of teaching' (p. 9). A laboratory orientation used 'practice work as an instrument in making real and vital [the] theoretical instruction' deemed necessary, which stressed 'the knowledge of subject-matter and of principles of education' (p. 9).

Reflecting on this aspect of Dewey's work, Shulman (1998) pointed out that 'the central feature of all professional education is indeed the tense relationship between theory and practice' (p. 521), and that Dewey had a particular perspective as to the nature of this relationship. Shulman recognised that, for Dewey, 'theory had a certain priority for the education of teachers' (p. 522) and yet this priority did not elevate theory above practice. Indeed 'it would be deadly if the theory were taught absent [from] immersion in contexts and conditions of practice' (pp. 522–523). In Shulman's words, Dewey 'advocated a special kind of professional education,' at the heart of which was 'a curriculum of theory-in-practice dedicated to the understanding of theory-for-practice' (p. 523).

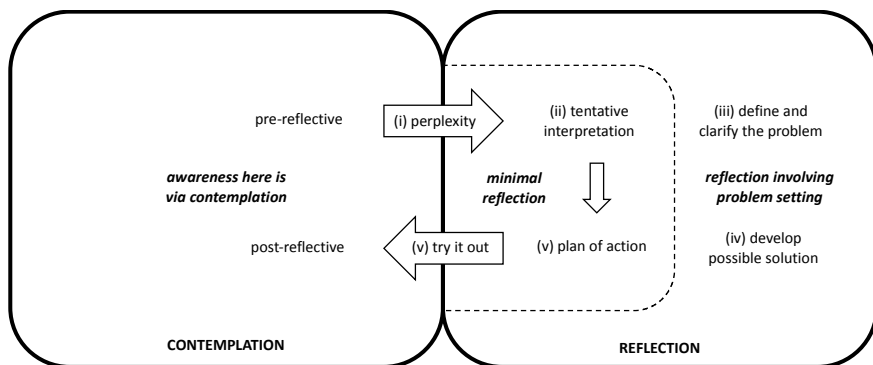
## Reflecting on Reflection

All of this talk about professional education is important because it not only suggests ways in which the education of teachers can be organised at universities and colleges, but more significant here, it also refers to how teachers may experience and think through their own teaching; their own expression of theory-in-practice. This connection with experience and thinking comes from the roots of Dewey's ideas about the relationship between theory and practice. Understanding these roots requires looking inside Dewey's accounts of thinking and experience, of which he provides various summaries. This one refers to 'the general features of reflective experience' (1916, p. 176).

They are (i) perplexity, confusion, doubt, due to the fact that one is implicated in an incomplete situation whose full character is not yet determined; (ii) a conjectural anticipation – a tentative interpretation of the given elements, attributing to them a tendency to effect certain consequences; (iii) a careful survey (examination, inspection, exploration, analysis) of all attainable consideration which will define and clarify the problem in hand; (iv) a consequent elaboration of the tentative hypothesis to make it more precise and more consistent, because squaring with a wider range of facts; (v) taking one stand upon the projected hypothesis as a plan of action which is applied to the existing state of affairs: doing something overtly to bring about the anticipated result, and thereby testing the hypothesis. (Dewey, 1916, p. 176)

It may help to bring these general features to life through an example. Consider a mathematics teacher who finds that a student is struggling with the challenge of comparing the magnitude of two fractions. This teacher provides a range of worked examples to support the student, but to no avail, the student continues to experience the same difficulty. Here the teacher (as well as the student) is feeling perplexed (step i). The teacher begins to speculate that this student holds some misconception about the meanings of numerator and denominator (step ii). But the teacher delves further than this, taking a closer look at the work the student has completed in this area while also exploring common misconceptions in interpreting fractions. The teacher locates a set of mathematics activities which can be used to identify specific misconceptions in this area and asks the student to complete them so that a better understanding of the student's particular issues can be ascertained (step iii). Looking at the pattern of the student's responses, the teacher forms the view that this student holds the misconception that, when comparing fractions, the larger the number expressed as the denominator, the larger is the fraction (step iv). The teacher then develops a special set of activities, worked examples and explanations designed to highlight this misconception and build a clearer understanding of fractions, which the student then undertakes with the teacher's support (step v).

This account of reflective experience shows how reflective thinking works: from the perception of a problem (a '*pre*-reflective' situation) to its hopeful resolution (a '*post*-reflective' situation) (Dewey, 1933, pp. 106–107). Between these two situations, reflective thinking is engaged (see Fig. 1). However, while this account proceeds through a series of steps, Dewey recognised that reflection is more intricate than this, making sure to state that these steps 'do not follow one another in set order' (p. 115).



**Fig. 1** A diagram showing Dewey’s general features of reflective experience, highlighting Schön’s emphasis on problem setting. Contemplation is included here to show relative positioning, but is not introduced until later in the text

In conveying further layers within this summary, Dewey spoke of ‘two types’ (1916, p. 169) of reflective experience which perhaps express two extremes along a continuum: one was ‘trial and error,’ whereas the other was ‘distinctive reflective experience’ (p. 176) marked by having to ‘stop and think’ (1910, p. 108). He pointed out that ‘it is the extent and accuracy of steps three and four which mark off a distinctive reflective experience from one on the trial and error plane’ (p. 176). In other words, if and when steps three and four are ignored, then reflective thinking is diminished, moving from step two straight to step five. This is made clear in the example above. So why might one ignore steps three and four and not engage in more extensive reflective thinking? There could be many specific reasons, but behind these is a tendency to approach thinking-through issues in a minimalist way: to keep doing what one has been doing without having to stop. Such a practice is learned and repeated because familiar, and is supported by the urge to arrive at a solution. Our habitual ways of responding to a situation often seem to work well enough and it takes significant effort to slow down, examine our assumptions anew and consider alternatives more thoroughly.

The nature of reflection was also an issue for Schön, who similarly connected it with professional education. However, where Dewey had drawn something of a line between two types of reflective experience while retaining their connection, Schön blurred this line by referring to ‘reflection-in-action’ (1983, p. 21). So, rather than positioning reflection which takes place while acting as mere trial and error thinking, then contrasting it with distinctive reflection which requires bringing other actions to a complete stop in order to think, Schön recognised that stopping and thinking could occur in smaller moments that may not interfere significantly with the flow of action. In this way, reflection-in-action could make significant contributions to working through a problematic situation.

While Schön (1987) acknowledged that ‘we may reflect *on* action, thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have con-

tributed to an unexpected outcome,' he was aware that this usually occurs 'after the fact, in tranquillity, or we may pause in the midst of action' (p. 26). But then, 'alternatively, we may reflect in the midst of action without interrupting it' (p. 26). Here 'our thinking serves to reshape what we are doing while we are doing it' (p. 26). 'In cases like this,' he noted that 'we reflect-*in-action*' (p. 26). Hence, 'what distinguishes reflection-in-action from other kinds of reflection is its immediate significance for action' (p. 28). And, as Van Manen notes, reflection-in-action is employed regularly by teachers.

A teacher who pauses and deliberates at some length about alternatives and about what action to take with respect to [say] a difficult student's rude comment may already be interpreted [by students] as hesitant, wishy washy, or spineless. As a teacher, you simply have to do something, even if your action consists of ignoring or pretending that you did not notice the rude remark. (Van Manen, 2015, pp. 81-82)

Referring to his own specific example of reflection-in-action, Schön (1987) granted that 'we might call such a process "trial and error"' (p. 27), as Dewey did. However, he observed that 'the trials' in such a process 'are not randomly related to one another; reflection on each trial and its results sets the stage for the next trial' (p. 27). Schön differed from Dewey in acknowledging that reasonable reflection could occur outside of the need to specifically stop and think. Rather than trial and error, 'such a pattern of inquiry is better described as a sequence of "moments" in a process of reflection-in-action' (p. 27).

Reflecting-on-action and reflecting-in-action are two ways a teacher can respond to experiences that do not conform with familiar routines, where their knowledge (or knowing-in-action) does not meet the needs of the situation. The distinction between them is the flow of activity, where reflection-in-action remains within an *'action-present'*—a period of time, variable with the context, during which we can still make a difference to the situation at hand' (Schön, 1987, p. 26). In contrast, reflection-on-action would more usually occur after a class or lesson is complete, 'in the relative tranquillity of a post-mortem' (1983, p. 61), when the action in question has ceased, for the time being at least.

## **From Problem Solving to Problem Setting: Technical Rationality to Worldmaking**

Like Dewey, Schön understood the relevance of reflection-on-action to the ongoing improvement of practice. However, his chief pronouncement was on the importance of reflection-in-action; that 'reflection-in-action ... is central to the art through which practitioners sometimes cope with the troublesome "divergent" situations of practice' (1983, p. 62). And as suggested above, Schön's insight suggests that Dewey's steps three and four of reflective experience can be engaged in-action, rather than being confined to opportunities when one can specifically stop and think.



Dewey's steps three and four offer a crucial advance to reflective experience not achievable if thinking moves from step two straight to step five (see Fig. 1). Schön also noted this improvement, which he specifically aligned with an emphasis on *problem setting*, Dewey's step three: '(iii) a careful survey (examination, inspection, exploration, analysis) of all attainable consideration which will define and clarify the problem in hand' (1916, p. 176). Problem setting is important because it entails gaining a better understanding of the problem to be solved before settling on a solution. Without this, one may perhaps jump to conclusions (step two to step five) which are not sufficiently thought through. In Schön's words, if we place the 'emphasis on problem solving, we ignore problem *setting*, the process by which we define the decision to be made, the ends to be achieved, the means which may be chosen' (1983, p. 40). Problem setting is particularly important for teachers who, as mentioned earlier, are 'frequently embroiled in conflicts of values, goals, purposes, and interests' (Schön, 1983, p. 17).

In real-world practice, problems do not present themselves to the practitioner as givens. They must be constructed from the materials of problematic situations which are puzzling, troubling, and uncertain. In order to convert a problematic situation to a problem, a practitioner must do a certain kind of work. He [*sic*] must make sense of an uncertain situation that initially makes no sense. (Schön, 1983, p. 40)

The uncertain character of many of the problems confronting teachers means that problem solving is not simply a matter of matching a technique to achieving the end required. Conflicts of values, goals, purposes and interests raise various possible ends, calling the existence of one particular end into question, and suggesting that the problem is not merely one of selecting techniques to meet this one end. Thus 'when ends are fixed and clear, then the decision to act can present itself as an instrumental problem. But when ends are confused and conflicting, there is as yet no 'problem' to solve' (Schön, 1983, p. 41).

In his focus on *The Reflective Practitioner*, Schön (1983, 1987) drew attention to what he considered an oversimplification in the conduct of professional education, especially concerning the relation of means (techniques) to ends. In a concrete sense, this was revealed in 'the technical expert's disposition to deploy his [*sic*] techniques, whatever the consequences' (1983, p. 12), resulting in 'professional ineffectiveness.' Schön believed this form of practice was grounded in a sense of 'Technical Rationality' which positioned 'professional practice' as 'a process of problem *solving*,' where solving required merely matching means to settled ends: 'problems of choice or decision are solved through the selection, from available means, of the one best suited to established ends' (pp. 39–40). Hence, 'Technical Rationality depends on agreement about ends' (p. 41).

Yet this agreement is often assumed, commonly when it does not actually exist. This lack of agreement (or discussion that may facilitate agreement) leads to confusion in the application of technique, hindering problem solving initiatives aimed at simply applying technique. 'When there are conflicting paradigms of professional practice ... there is no clearly established context for the use of technique' (Schön, 1983, p. 41). This leads to 'contention over multiple ways of framing the practice

role, each of which entrains a distinctive approach to problem setting and solving' (p. 41). In short, the 'indeterminate zones of practice – uncertainty, uniqueness, and value conflict – escape the canons of technical rationality' (1987, p. 6). So, 'although problem setting is a necessary condition for technical problem solving, it is not itself a technical problem' (1983, p. 40), as problem setting does not entail simply relating means to established ends: it involves contention over the ends themselves, a choice which has ramifications for all aspects of how the situation is understood and experienced.

When we set the problem, we select what we will treat as the 'things' of the situation, we set the boundaries of our attention to it, and we impose upon it a coherence which allows us to say what is wrong and in what directions the situation needs to be changed. Problem setting is a process in which, interactively, we *name* the things to which we will attend and *frame* the context in which we will attend to them. (Schön, 1983, p. 40)

Schön recognised that it is through this 'non-technical process of framing the problematic situation that we may organize and clarify both the ends to be achieved and the possible means of achieving them' (1983, p. 41). And understood in this way, 'problem setting' may be more clearly seen for what it is: 'an ontological process ... a form of worldmaking' (1987, p. 4). Worldmaking points to how framing the scene, the context, the world, is a process of producing the meanings things will have within that scene, context, world: what things are, how they are related; which is a significant capability when attempting to solve a problem.

Ontology and worldmaking are not simple concepts, so an example may assist here. Consider the example of a male beginning teacher responding to a female student who persistently refuses to complete daily class activities, participate in class discussion and neglects to bring basic materials to class. At this early stage, the teacher might experience a classroom world which includes a resistant student, lazy student or setting-a-bad-example-for-the-class student. The problem for the teacher, therefore, could be framed in terms of the following questions: 'How do I break through the frustrating resistance of this student?', 'How do I motivate this lazy student?' or 'How do I stop the rest of the class from following this student's example?' Imagine, then, that the teacher meets with the school welfare coordinator during a lunch break, and starts discussing his frustrations concerning this student. The teacher learns that this student's stepfather has been violent at home, and that her mother is in the process of seeking emergency accommodation. The student is prone to anxiety in the presence of adult males as a result. Walking into the next class, with this new understanding, the teacher's classroom world is now made up quite differently: instead of a resistant student, the teacher now sees an in-need-of-nurturing student, or an overwhelmed-and-just-trying-to-hold-it-together student. With this different worldmaking, the problem has now undergone a new problem setting, and might now be framed differently, in terms of the questions: 'How can I make this student know that I care?', 'How should I speak to and approach this student so that she doesn't feel threatened?', 'How can I adapt the class tasks in a way that she feels confident to attempt them?'

Worldmaking accentuates the cultural and hence political nature of problem setting and problem solving, belying the notion that reflection is a purely individual act.

If comprehended primarily through a cognitive psychological lens, reflection may be considered to occur solely in the mind or brain of an individual actor, constraining a broader understanding through ‘an over-reliance on the individual as ‘reflector’’ (Noffke & Brennan, 2005, p. 61). Dewey was well aware of this issue, pointing out that the ‘problems which induce inquiry grow out of the relations of fellow beings to one another’ (1938, p. 42). Hence, ‘dealing with these relations’ involved engagement with ‘the meanings which have developed in the course of living, together with the ways of forming and transmitting culture with all its constituents of tools, arts, institutions, traditions and customary beliefs’ p. 42). In other words, while an individual is reflecting they engage with various meanings—what things, including concepts, are—that have been developed culturally via worldmaking.

Cultural differences are significant when it comes to problem solving and setting. This comes through strongly in a statement from Dewey addressing shared understanding of problems. ‘To see the problem another sees, in the same perspective and at the same angle – that amounts to something. Agreement in solutions is in comparison perfunctory’ (1906, p. 129). Teachers expend considerable time and effort in problem solving in order to achieve their ends, yet it could be argued, drawing on Dewey’s work (e.g. 1900, 1902a), that many of the problems faced by teachers today are similar in nature to those teachers dealt with a century ago. Why have they not been resolved? Dewey pointed to ‘the confusion and contention which are such marked features of the educational situation’ (1902b, p. 18). ‘There is confusion due to the smoke of battle obscuring the scene from the onlooker,’ he asserted, ‘and there is a different confusion due to combatants losing sight of what they are doing and where they are going, a chaos of uncoordinated movements and actions’ (1931, p. 2). Perhaps heeding with an increased sense of urgency Schön’s call for a focus on problem setting would be a step in the right direction: ‘the process by which we define the decision to be made, the ends to be achieved, the means which may be chosen’ (1983, p. 40).

Both Dewey and Schön viewed a technical-rational perspective on problem solving—matching techniques to established ends—as neglectful of problem setting and thus of a serious debate about ends. But, as Kelchtermans (2009, p. 268) acknowledges, ‘technical issues are neither irrelevant nor illegitimate.’ Not every problem can be reflected on or in (reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action) within a timely manner, and life in school must go on in the interim. ‘Teachers live and work under the pressure of day-to-day practice. They must maintain the smooth functioning of the classroom and the school’ (p. 268).

However, if the deeper problems of education are not engaged with seriously at some point, then teaching remains in this technical mode. This way of being a teacher is supported by what Noffke and Brennan, referring to the late 1980s, identified as the ‘main paradigm for teacher education’ at the time: “teacher-as-technician.” (2005, p. 61). A question remains as to whether this continues to be the dominant paradigm today. Teaching orientated in this way becomes, according to Schön, professionally ineffective, and as Dewey remarked, perfunctory or superficial: feigning a professional attitude while shrugging off the uncertainty, uniqueness and value conflict that pervade teaching. Here there is a tendency to overlook much of

what is going on, to deliberately not see it. So, while a teacher cannot hope to be aware of everything happening in the class, from every perspective, some may make the decision to ignore significant happenings that fall outside their technical expertise. Schön argued that ‘many practitioners, locked into a view of themselves as technical experts, find nothing in the world of practice to occasion reflection’ (1983, p. 69). This is because ‘they have become too skilful at techniques of selective inattention, junk categories, and situational control,’ driven by a belief that ‘uncertainty is a threat; its admission ... a sign of weakness’ (p. 69). Accepting this uncertainty while engaging in attempts to better understand it are both key aspects of reflective teaching.

Lawrence-Wilkes and Ashmore (2014) suggest that ‘Schön (1983) was influential in changing understanding when he described the ‘reflective practitioner’ in professional practice as a way of developing teaching beyond a technical-rational model’ (p. 12). However, as with any such change, there has been misunderstanding and misappropriation in the process, with some adopting the notion of a reflective practitioner as a way to reinforce the paradigm of teacher-as-technician. Ravitch (2010) reports on teachers dealing with ‘reforms as a regime of thought control’ where teachers ‘learned to say over and over: ‘I am a reflective practitioner, I am a reflective practitioner’” (p. 62) in order to comply with performance expectations. Noffke and Brennan (2005) note this occurrence, where ‘the term is also used by those whose aim seems to be the further development of those technical or instrumental means, in the interests of further ‘professionalization’” (p. 59). Clearly, reflective teaching can be perceived in a range of ways. Simply using the term does not guarantee shared understanding. Schön’s point is that ends, purposes and assumptions must be brought into question through problem setting.

## Contemplating Contemplation

Again, an ontological understanding is relevant here: an awareness that problem setting is a form of framing, of contextualising, of worldmaking. And further, it is important to recognise that worldmaking (what things are) and worldmakers (who people are) cannot be separated in any particular situation. As Schön has pointed out, ‘depending on our disciplinary backgrounds, organisational roles, past histories, interests, and political/economic perspectives, we frame problematic situations in different ways’ (1987, p. 4). This entwinement is about meaning. What things are (what things are interpreted as) cannot be dissociated from who we are (those doing the interpreting), and vice versa: who we are cannot be dissociated from what things are. Heidegger’s notion of ‘being-in-the-world’ is an attempt to convey this entwinement. It is hyphenated because it is meant to be read as one word, perhaps also captured in the one word ‘who-world’ (Quay, 2013, p. 185).

This has significant ramifications for reflection, because framing a situation is actually re-framing a situation, involving consideration of how the situation is *already* framed (before we engaged in reflection) and what alternative framing may be more suitable. In addition to the possibility of wilful or self-protective ignorance, such as

the ‘selective inattention’ (Schön, 1983, p. 69) mentioned in the previous section, there is an in-built tendency to miss much or most of what is really going on in classrooms because of the fact that much of the worldmaking is already done—by the histories, cultures and social roles at play in the circumstances. Some aspects of worlds will be foregrounded, and others hidden; ‘students,’ ‘lessons,’ ‘rules,’ are terms which all come with some form of ready-made interpretation. As a matter of habit, these interpretations, or meanings, are worked with unthinkingly, as it takes awareness and effort to step back from these interpretations and allow worlds to be re-made differently. Thus, as Dewey has argued via his general features of reflective experience, the way problems are initially or tentatively interpreted is also already set in train (step ii) requiring further work and thinking to break through (step iii). This breaking through, as a focus on problem setting, is a re-framing, as worldmaking, highlighting how framing involves being-in-the-world.

The difficulty with being-in-the-world is that it is not something one reflects on directly. What this means will become apparent via introduction of another way of thinking and experiencing that complements reflection. Here the work of John P. Miller is relevant and helpful. Miller agreed that ‘Schön’s work is extremely valuable,’ however he believed that ‘there is yet another level beyond the reflective practitioner where the person can ‘live’ her or his practice,’ requiring acknowledgement of ‘the contemplative practitioner’ (2014, p. 19). Contemplation is a somewhat slippery term. It could be thought of as a form of reflection, but Miller distinguishes it from this. Often, it is considered a form of meditation, which Miller suggests ‘is one form of contemplation, which involves concentrated practice’ (2014, p. 6). Meditation practices (e.g. Buddhist meditation or secular mindfulness practices) can be understood as practical methods that support the building of familiarity with contemplation, in order to engage contemplation more deliberately and reliably. We use contemplation to indicate a particular mode of experience, or way of experiencing experience, which differs from reflection as Schön positioned it.

Just as reflection involves two broad types—reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action—contemplation can also be thought as having two broad types: a more formal type that involves focussed, disciplined practice, and an informal type which is more spontaneous, occurring within everyday activity. As Miller points out, ‘contemplation can also include spontaneous and unstructured moments where we experience being fully present’ (p. 6). Formal meditation often involves extended periods of silent, seated practice where the practitioner works to keep their attention trained on a selected focus such as the breath, or bodily sensations, drawing back to this focus if distracted. Informal meditation involves extending these practices of attention and awareness to daily activities such as preparing food, walking, social interactions and professional activities such as classroom teaching. The implications of both formal and informal practices of contemplation for teaching are an emerging focus for thinking and research, leading Ergas (2018) to recently announce a ‘contemplative turn’ in education. Tremmel (1993) has explored some of the common ground between mindfulness and Schön’s reflection-in-action. More recent examples include Solloway’s (2000) work on teacher presence, Orr’s (2012) articulation of the applications of

mindfulness in education, and Todd's (2015) exploration of how renewed ethical relations between student and teacher may be grounded in contemplative practices.

For Miller, what distinguishes contemplation from reflection is the quality of being fully present, which he refers to as Presence: 'I would argue that there is an element that is necessary to good practice that is not included in the notion of reflection. This is the quality of Presence' (2014, p. 23). Contemplation is concerned with this quality of Presence, a thinking awareness of *this* present moment, as a whole, in an unmediated way. However it is crucial that this present moment is not understood as merely a particular point on a timeline; rather it is the living sense of now, which is why Miller refers to it as Presence and not *the* present. In a similar vein philosopher Martin Heidegger referred to 'presencing' (1998, p. 206).

It may be helpful to recall how Heidegger (2000, p. 99) referred to this contemplative way of thinking, accessing presencing, as 'experiencing experienced,' or 'experienced experiencing.' Contemplation gains awareness of the living moment (presencing), while reflection, in contrast, is more engaged with what *has* happened (past) and what *will* happen (future). There is an instrumental outlook to reflection: trying to resolve or understand some aspect of experience. Reflection is concerned with dissecting what is going on to achieve purposes relating past and future. In contrast, contemplative presence demands or expects nothing in particular of a situation (Miller, 2014, p.3). Contemplation involves being fully aware and accepting of the situation as a whole, and not seeing it as deficient in relation to some future time when a problem is resolved.

Presence in teaching opens awareness to many aspects of being-in-the-world as teacher-in-teaching-situation: feeling and sensing beliefs, desires, prejudices, habits of perceiving, judging and responding. In Presence all of these aspects, of self, others and context, are not separate but felt as a whole. Presence, thus, has important implications for how teachers are connected with students. 'Teaching demands connecting with students and their learning, and the health of that connection is nurtured or jeopardized by the teacher's relationship to herself' (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006, p. 271). Contemplation raises living now, being-in-the-world, to contemplative awareness.

To differentiate this contemplative way of thinking from reflection, Dewey called it synonymously 'affective thought' (1926, p. 3) and 'qualitative thought' (1930, p. 18). And just as reflective thinking is one with reflective experience, so affective (contemplative) thinking is one with '[a]esthetic experience' (1934, p. 19), which in this sense highlights not beauty per se, but perception. At the heart of the difference between them is that one (reflection) is concerned with non-acceptance of the situation—something needs attention which requires focussing on specific parts or aspects—while the other (contemplation) is accepting of the situation and is instead focussed on awareness of the situation as it is perceived. This affective awareness is contemplative of the situation as a whole, staying with it as a whole and not detaching parts.

But how do you *think* a whole that is apparently made up of parts without thinking about the parts? We are so used to regarding thinking as synonymous with reflection that we overlook affective contemplative thinking and stay with reflection—which

shows us parts: that student, that table, that behaviour. In aesthetic experience this whole is this whole, there are no separate parts. Bringing this to awareness in thinking requires an emphasis on feeling (as a verb not noun), but not feeling as distinct from thinking—this is affective thinking; feeling-thinking. Dewey's work on affective thinking broadens what we consider thinking to be. Thus 'it is desirable that the teacher should [be] rid ... of the notion that 'thinking' is a single, unalterable faculty' and 'recognize that it is a term denoting the various ways in which things acquire significance' (Dewey, 1910, pp. 38–39).

Dewey (1934) pointed out that aesthetic 'experience is emotional but there are no separate things called emotions in it' (p. 42). Separate things called emotions may be comprehended in reflective experience but not aesthetic experience. Affective thinking does not dissect like reflection; instead it embraces feeling-awareness of the present moment as a whole: the quality of Presence. Here there is awareness of emotion as colouring of the whole, but not as a separate part. This means that 'all the elements of our being that are displayed in special emphases and partial realizations in other [reflective] experiences are merged in aesthetic experience' (p. 274). 'And they are so completely merged in the immediate wholeness of the experience that each is submerged: it does not present itself in consciousness as a distinct element' (p. 274).

There are innumerable examples of when teachers engage with informal contemplation, as affective thinking, suggesting that this is not a special way of thinking, only relevant to forms of religious practice. Every time a teacher senses or feels and pays attention to the atmosphere of the classroom situation in a holistic manner, it is this quality of Presence which is coming to the fore. In fact, it is very simple to invite contemplation, and therefore Presence, into the flow of teaching: simply slow down, take a deep breath and embrace the wonder of this situation, here, now. In contemplation there is thus an accepting awareness of the situation as it is. Hence, many teachers are regularly involved in contemplative ways of thinking. The practices of formal contemplation (e.g. meditation) may work to cultivate a teacher's capacity to think and experience in this way, in a more deliberate manner. The teacher as contemplative practitioner engages with affective thinking, informal contemplation, as awareness of aesthetic experience. Here we are not introducing something new, but rather drawing attention to a way of thinking and experiencing that is central to teaching, but often overlooked.

## **The Contemplative and Reflective Practitioner**

But when the emotional character of the present moment is one of 'perplexity, confusion, doubt'—which is that step one, which Dewey (1916, p. 176) says initiates reflection—or some other emotional character that draws attention to particular aspects of a situation (such as wonder), then reflection may be engaged because there is a feeling-awareness that the situation has come apart in some way. There is something not quite right or there is something worth specifically focussing on. This occurrence



reveals the conjoint movement of reflective and aesthetic experience, of reflective and contemplative practice. Reflection emerges from within a particular aesthetic experience that can be brought to feeling-awareness through contemplation. Hence, the contemplative and reflective practitioner engages with *more* of experience, *more* of thinking, than the practitioner who is reflective alone.

If one engages with reflective practice alone, one may lose sight of the living present moment, one's own as well as that of the young people one is teaching. It is here in this living moment that knowledge-skill (curriculum), teaching-learning (pedagogy) and who-world (ontology) are merged together to the extent that they are *submerged* in the living moment, as Dewey described. As Miller (2014) expresses it, 'from the perspective of Presence, there is a synthesis of theory/practice and duality disappears. Theory and practice are experienced as a unity' (p. 25). Contemplation enables feeling-awareness of this holistic unified living moment wherein knowledge-skill (curriculum), teaching-learning (pedagogy) and who-world (ontology) are in play but not thought separately. For a teacher, this is awareness of how things *feel* in the living moment of teaching.

This feeling-awareness, often as informal contemplation, informs action. Here there is a deliberate awareness of the living moment, an acceptance of it. This is in contrast to the deliberate ignoring of uncertain aspects of what might be going on, as practised by the teacher-as-technician who prefers to only address familiar issues through choice of technique. This awareness of the living moment via informal contemplation goes hand in hand with reflection-in-action, which can surface aspects of knowledge-skill (curriculum), teaching-learning (pedagogy) and who-world (ontology) by focussing specifically on them during dissection of issues that may be occurring, perhaps to be re-framed via attempts at problem setting.

The importance of this broader contemplative *and* reflective practice can be seen when we engage with ontological issues of who-world. Teachers work with a contemplative *and* reflective awareness of the lives of the people they are teaching. Van Manen (2015) calls this '*people-sense*' or more specifically for a school teacher (or parent, etc.) it is '*child-sense*' (p. 77). 'Child-sense means sensing or knowing how young people experience things, what they think about, how they think, how they look at the world, how they act, and, most importantly, how each child is a unique person' (p. 77). Child-sense is informed both contemplatively and reflectively.

This combination of contemplation and reflection is visible in the resolution of other issues. By way of reflection-in-action, a teacher can respond in a specific teaching situation, perhaps re-framing it. But such reflection-in-action is reliant upon a feeling-awareness of the living moment that is the teaching situation, as contemplation-in-action, informal contemplation. There is a toing-and-froing occurring between reflection-in-action and contemplation-in-action. This broader thinking movement enables what Van Manen has called 'pedagogical tact' (2015, p. 78).

We can say that pedagogical tact (1) manifests itself in everyday life as instant action; (2) forms a way of acting that is first of all dependent on an intuitive sensibility and sensitivity – in other words, a feeling-understanding; (3) is sensitive to the uniqueness of the child or young person; (4) is sensitive to the particularities and context of the situation; and (5) is unique also to the personal character of the teacher. (Van Manen, 2015, pp. 78–79)



The importance of informal contemplation to pedagogical tact can be clearly seen. As a form of ‘pedagogical perceptiveness,’ pedagogical tact ‘relies in part on a kind of tacit or intuitive knowledge that the teacher may learn from personal experience or through apprenticeship from a more experienced teacher’ (Van Manen, 2015, p. 81). And as Schön so strongly argued, such learning must include reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action to enable effective professional practice to be developed, an expression of what Dewey (1933) described as ‘a process of *intellectualizing* what at first is merely an *emotional* quality of the whole situation’ (p. 109). But this intellectualising then informs the emotional quality of the whole situation, contributing to intuition. Schön (1987) was not ignorant of the importance of this return to the quality of Presence, insisting that ‘outstanding practitioners are not said to have more professional knowledge than others but more ‘wisdom,’ ‘talent,’ ‘intuition,’ or ‘artistry’” (p. 13).

### **Achieving Pedagogical Tact: Contemplation *with* Reflection**

Responding to the myriad problems and challenges of daily classroom practice is an eminently ethical activity for teachers—beginning or experienced—as this is where educational values, goals, purposes and interests are lived out and made real in the lives of students. When faced with problematic situations, teachers have a number of resources they can draw on. These include various techniques; however, it is important that the principles guiding the educative function of these methods are well understood; otherwise, these techniques remain mere tips and tricks. Dedicated reflection—whether reflection-on-action or reflection-in-action—enables engagement with these principles. Without this, teaching gets lost amidst adherence to plans, basic application of techniques and shallow thoughts plagued by the thousand other things a teacher has to do to cope in the moment. This is that very minimalist form of reflection (step ii direct to step v, ignoring steps iii and iv) that bypasses serious engagement with problems.

Alongside dedicated reflection, contemplation, too, plays an important role in drawing a teacher out of this relatively ineffective form of practice. Contemplation is not some special state only relevant to practitioners of formal meditation, although it may be more readily accessible to them. Effort and practice heighten the awareness achievable. Contemplation is appreciation of the affectively coloured, wholeness of a living moment; a thinking-feeling-awareness of this meaningful world, of being-in-the-world. In this way, it provides access to the living moment of teaching and learning. Through this access, contemplation potentially opens up different worldmaking and problem setting, which expresses different educational ends and purposes, leading to different responses to the problems of classroom practice. Yet teachers often overlook or disregard this intimate contemplative contact with the living moment of teaching, to their own disadvantage. Habituation in shallow ways of reflecting, that enable basic coping to continue, pushes contemplation into the background.

Reflection and contemplation are both required in teaching. Contemplation works hand in hand with reflection, providing a teacher with the means to effectively and authentically embrace the situation at hand. As teachers navigate the many competing demands that they confront on a regular basis, and must respond to immediately, informal contemplation *with* reflection-in-action—functioning in partnership—offers a combination of thinking techniques that enables problem setting, re-framing, world-making, to be a more regular element of everyday teaching practice. Formal contemplation *with* reflection-on-action is a more dedicated version of such practice that may be engaged with when time permits. One enables awareness of the world, while the other offers the possibility to remake it. This is the way to achieve pedagogical tact.

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# Chapter 11

## Renegotiating Reflective and Ethical Practice in a Liquid Education System



Andrew Skourdoumbis and Sue Bennett

**Abstract** Skourdoumbis and Bennett draw attention to the constantly changing global environment in which education systems are embedded and to which they have been required to respond. Drawing on Zygmunt Bauman's characterisation of the apparently 'liquid' economic, social and political environments that characterise late modernity in which it seems nothing is solid, irreplaceable, permanent or in a sense deeply trustworthy and dependable, they discuss the consequences for education. The global response has been widely described as a neo-liberal response with its characteristic demands for accountability, efficiency and compliance with standards monitored through management and policy strategies that require measurable outcomes. The consequences for teachers' work in this environment of increasingly routine procedures and decreasing professional autonomy are deeply troubling. Teachers are increasingly drawn away from the personal, humane and community relations that they still know are the fundamental characteristics of their daily work and are confronted with ethical issues, if not crises, arising from the apparently contradictory discourses of audit, accountability and compliance that constrain them. The authors illustrate these moments of ethical confrontation with reference to typical challenges faced daily by teachers as they strive to retain a sense of authentic endeavour.

### Introduction

In this chapter, we engage with some of the tensions that we see for educators in a world increasingly marked by disengagement and discontinuity. In education, the effects are overt, where a focus on rapid learning and the tangibles of what is needed now in a world gripped by global economic competitiveness are clearly apparent. The professional educator forced to engage, must grapple with these tensions, including committing to notions of reflective and ethical practice in an education system dominated by mechanisms of accountability and audit.

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Our argument develops in the first and second parts of this chapter by considering the notion of reflective and ethical practice in an era that demands more of teachers. In the interests of the students they teach and the responsibility they hold teachers' reactions to the pressures they encounter require an ethical dimension. We pay heed to the challenging work of teaching in contemporary times making the case that the work of teachers is complex. The complexities faced by teachers are compounded by the instabilities they now encounter as a consequence of widespread economic change. In the third part of the chapter, we turn to a more detailed description of the instabilities connected to the current economic-political scene. The discussion here canvasses some of the reasons for the uncertainties faced by all including teachers in a world of seemingly constant change. The added administrative demands of intrusive accountability and audit regimes have only added to this complexity. We explore this aspect in part four of the chapter before finishing with our concluding comments.

## Reflective and Ethical Practice

Reflective practice is about engaging in reflection as a response to something in order to bring about a desired outcome (see Moon, 2005). Teachers amongst other things demonstrate key principles of pedagogical knowledge, high-order communication skills including a capacity to be critical and analytical, an ability to be innovative as curriculum designers and workers, and their profession demands that they regularly reflect on their daily practice and act ethically. Their position in society necessitates an ability to develop and bring to their work with students a level of care and justice. This means that teachers must act in the best interests of their students at all times. The work of teaching is significant '...not only because it may be a source of growth and enjoyment for both the students and the teachers...but also because it serves the interests of society as a whole by enabling students to become independent and responsible adults who can contribute to the well-being of society' (de Ruyter & Kole, 2010: 207–208). This means that teaching encompasses a moral and ethical component of practice.

The difficulty we assert now for teachers in a world of constant change and complexity is of corrupted loyalties. Education system and institutional demands are such that the moral and ethical potential of teaching, as a practice devoted to the democratic development of students as human beings is at risk. The moral and ethical teacher views '...each student in as full and complete a way as possible' (Ayers, 1995: 5). This takes time and can only occur when strong connections between teacher and student are made. Even so teaching as Ayers claims is '...risky because—all the curriculum guidelines, layers of supervision, and connect-the-dots school improvement packages notwithstanding—there are no guarantees in teaching' (1995: 2–3). Teachers, in what they teach and how they act, display moral and ethical practice. The ethical and moral bases of teaching in a world now of performance criteria or of what Lyotard calls the '...performativity of procedures' (1984: 46) are under duress. We are thinking here of the basic daily commitments of teaching (the

norms and routines that have an affect on student behaviour, curriculum choices and use of available resources, pedagogy and assessment)—all of which contain ethical elements—and how they align with broader qualities such as trust, fairness, kindness, equity, tolerance.

How students develop and learn is complex and has profound implications for teaching. We know that every learner is different. We also know that good (effective) ethical teaching is educative in nature meaning that the process of education involves an interaction between the student as ‘...immature, undeveloped being’ and the teacher in which the considered ‘...social aims, meanings, values incarnate in the matured experience of the adult’ (Dewey, 1902, 236) represents the centre-point of exchange. Good teaching acknowledges this perhaps messy aspect of the educative process rejecting reductive notions of pedagogy which reinforce a relationship between learner and teaching practice composed of ‘basic components, root causes, and fundamental laws’ (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008: 76)—which incidentally is what we assert the current measurement and audit fetish in education seeks to accomplish.

In a world of flux, in transition, often in chaos, teaching is the least certain of professions. Every day in every classroom, a teacher’s personality, preferences, capacities, judgment, and values are on display. When things are going well, it can feel personally rewarding; when things go badly, the cut is painful and deeply felt as well. Teaching, then, is highly personal. (Ayers, 1995: 3)

We can never fully avoid the daily flux and uncertainty of life. This we believe is all the more reason why ethics for teachers is needed. Ethical decision-making is difficult, and teaching is work that requires the capacity for ethical decision-making. Indeed, all of what Ayers is saying in the above quote reflects some ethical component as there is the added effort of thought needed by teachers in composing a ‘theory of experience’ (Dewey, 1997: 33) that is worthy of sufficiently extending learning so that it truly serves transformational aims.

## **A Scenario: School-Wide Student Management Policy**

Chris is a maths teacher at Wide Plains Secondary College. Like many schools, Wide Plains SC has developed a school-wide student behaviour policy, which is designed to support both teachers and students by making clear the types of student behaviour which are not acceptable in the school and the consequences that teachers will apply if students behave in unacceptable ways; it covers a wide range of school life both in and outside the classroom. The policy was developed in response to concerns about the poor behaviour of some students, which was interfering with learning in classrooms and beginning to impact on the school’s reputation. The teachers have been involved in the development of the policy, but it has inevitably involved some compromises and not all staff agree with every element of the policy. Nevertheless, the principal and leadership team have impressed upon the staff that now that the

policy is finalised, it is imperative that the policy is implemented consistently and everyone follows it without making exceptions. One of the students in Chris's year 9 maths class has not completed the set homework for the third time this month, and the consequence according to the policy is an after-school detention. Chris is aware that the student's home situation is complex and that this most likely has contributed to the student not completing the set homework; and furthermore, the after-school detention will be a greater imposition on this student than on most students. If it were not for the policy Chris might have started with a conversation, but, in accordance with the policy, tells the student that they have a detention. The student is clearly angry and upset, turning away muttering 'That is so unfair' and 'School is \*&#!'. Chris wants to call the student back and offer to make an exception ... What would you do if you were Chris? Why?

## Teachers and Their Work

The work of teachers is never done. Constant change in the needs of students, our education systems, the demands of relevant stakeholders and in curriculum coupled with the plethora of innovations that abound in education more generally drive the perpetual pressure for reform. The responsibilities of teachers have increased as their work and role has diversified, and the need for communication involving parents and colleagues has increased, 'facilitated by information and communication technologies that render it possible to be 'always on' (Gregg, 2009)' (Gill, 2013: 237). The continued change in teachers' work is reflected by two broad explanations, *professionalization* and *intensification* (see Hargreaves, 1994). Professionalisation recognises the enlarged scope of a teacher's work in the late modern world as curriculum worker, leader and school change agent. Teaching well is difficult and complex work requiring a high level of skill and expertise that often goes unrecognised. The intensification argument suggests that while more is expected of teachers the work that they do is '...becoming routinized and deskilled; more like the degraded work of manual workers and less like that of autonomous professionals trusted to exercise the power and expertise of discretionary judgment in the classrooms they understand best' (Hargreaves, 1994: 117–118). These seemingly contradictory positions reflect the proliferation of contemporary management and administrative controls placed on teachers. The control of teacher work through mandated and prescribed curricula, standardised testing, routinised teaching practice/s and more intrusive audit mechanisms has intensified the need for teacher compliance in all these activities.

There are consequences in this as the intensification of teachers' work increases. These are often encountered as externally imposed administrative pressures such as the setting of performance standards/benchmarks in student achievement scores that drive the work that teachers do through heightened accountability measures, something which this chapter returns to in later sections. Economic/political trends and specific reform strategies based on a change and improvement rationale (Hursh, 2015) have over time refashioned how we think about education and the work of

teachers. Time for more creative curriculum work, while expected, is often sidelined as is the quality and care shown to students that usually endows teaching work with meaning. Teaching work within classrooms is now quite often shaped by the demands of national curricula and ‘teach to the test’ testing regimes. As intensification increases de-professionalisation rises. The work of a teacher is then no ‘...longer conceived of as holistic but rather as a sequence of separated tasks and assignments’ (Ballet, Kelchtermans, & Loughran, 2006: 211).

The work that teachers do centres on the development of school–community relations. This rests upon understanding and improving the school experiences of students. Relationship building in the form of particular actions and discussions assists in the making of community as a social network. The bonding and bridging capacities found in the social capital of community affects schooling outcomes. Teachers need to think about the relationships between family, students and school especially in circumstances of large-scale political, economic and social change. A case in point is in the present era of high-stakes accountability ‘...in which notions of ‘scaling up’ educational reform serve to downplay the importance of understanding the specificity of practice in context’ (Hardy & Grootenboer, 2016: 25). This has the effect of diminishing the recognition of the work of schools and teachers in communities where local action has brought about positive change.

The broader circumstances characterising relationship building in education centre on evolving contextual practices. Our thinking about contextual practices and relationship building depends upon making sense of how people learn. The work of Lave and Wenger has made the case for ‘communities of practice’ where individuals learn and build relationships by collaborating with others. This represents the ‘...individualistic, psychological approach to understanding practices’ (Hardy & Grootenboer, 2016: 26) and learning. The sociological approach to understanding contextual practices and relationship building in learning on the other hand argues ‘...that practices comprise clusters of activities characterised by particular actions—‘doings’—and language—‘sayings’—which hang together in comprehensible projects’ (Hardy & Grootenboer, 2016: 26). This approach in learning reflects the dialectical nature of relationship building inherent in any social structure involving human activity. The school and classroom is a case in point. The work of Theodore Schatzki aligns with this definition of learning and relationship building reinforcing the notion that ‘...social life occurs at specific sites which are characterised by their own particular conditions of existence’ (Hardy & Grootenboer, 2016: 26). The key point being made here about education, learning and its connection to relationships is twofold. First that learning depends upon inter-relationships between people. Secondly that there is an ethical component involved in learning and the development of relationships. In fostering quality relationships that are mindful of context, teachers hold open the possibility of making a difference to the lives of their students.



## A Scenario: Mandatory Reporting

Sarah is a year 2 teacher at Inner South Primary School. Inner South is located in a council area with a low SES demographic profile. There are many families living on government payments, who struggle financially. It seems to Sarah that there are often tensions within many of these families that are reflected in the things the children say at school. Some children report that they get whacked by their parents when they are naughty. When Sarah started teaching at Inner South, she observed that some of the parents lacked confidence in talking to her and other school staff and seemed quite reluctant to participate in classroom activities. She has worked hard to build relationships with all the families that she has contact with and has been feeling that her approach has led to more parents initiating conversations with her about their children and their progress at school. However, over the last couple of weeks, the behaviour of one of the children, Courtney, has changed. Courtney has become quieter and lashed out uncharacteristically on a couple of occasions. This morning Courtney arrived at school with bruises, and when asked about them mumbled something about falling over. Sarah is becoming increasingly concerned that Courtney may be the victim of physical abuse at home, but worries that if she reports the family to Child Protection, she will put at risk not only the relationship with that family, but the relationships across the community that she has been carefully building ... What would you do if you were Sarah? Why?

## The Current Scene—A World of Instability

Bauman (2009: 185) in his treatise on the late modern world claims that

Nothing is believed to stay here forever, nothing seems to be irreplaceable. Everything is born with a brand of imminent death and emerges from the production line with a use-by date printed or presumed....All things, born or made, human or not, are until-further-notice and dispensable.

Economic globalisation constituted by the transnational flow of capital, goods, knowledge and people (Thrift, 2005) reinforces the de-stabilisations of a constantly changing economy. In the face of these changes, governments across the globe have instituted equally radical neo-liberal policies framed upon market-based accountability and performance-oriented systems (see Connell, 2013). The politics of neo-liberalism asserts the ‘...diverse ideas and practices that presume the ascendancy of privatisation, marketisation, corporatisation and competition’ (Gerrard, 2017: 59) all of which induce a sense of disengagement and discontinuity. Bauman (2009: 203) argues that this move to neo-liberalism has meant that people are cast ‘into a state of diffuse uncertainty, *précarité*, and a continuous though haphazard disruption of routine’ allowing the powerful to maintain their domination.

These shifts are mirrored in educational landscapes. Neo-liberalism has sought to make ‘...existing markets wider, and to create new markets where they did not

exist before' (Connell, 2013: 100) and it has lessened notions of what may constitute the 'public good' (see Baltodano, 2012). The neo-liberal political orthodoxy espouses reductions in expenditure on public schools and universities, reducing educator autonomy, centralising curriculum and enforcing a standardised testing regime, the latter most evident in school education systems (Giroux, 2004). The drive for efficiency measures based on an intrusive 'audit culture' which requires everything to be "auditable", rendered knowable and calculable in terms of 'quantifiable outputs' (Gill, 2013: 231) is the aim. Biesta (2010) has identified this focus on what can be measured, and the 'simplicity' of measured outcomes and the 'seduction of numbers' (Biesta, 2015: 350, 351). He argues that this has led to a shift from measuring what we value to valuing what we can measure (2010: 12). As Lock and Martins (cited in Burrows, 2012: 356) have noted 'in our brave new world, it seems that a single final criterion of value is recognized: a quantitative, economic criterion'. This is especially the case in public education. The common good of public education is found in how we think about basic freedoms as active and engaged citizens in a vibrant democracy. It is the ethical work of teachers that should prepare students to think critically about the contemporary state of the world.

In education more broadly the neo-liberal reformist ascendancy has brought with it commoditisation and as Connell says '...educational institutions have been forced to conduct themselves more and more like profit-seeking firms' (2013: 102). Gill (2013: 230–231) argues that this has led to education now being understood in 'instrumental terms connected to business and the economy [and] the transformation of students into 'consumers''. Central to the neo-liberal political and economic ethic is a heightened instability alongside an anti-statist outlook. The theoretical outline of neo-liberalism in education is about co-opting the idealisations of free market economics where the assumed 'self-interest' of individuals and the facets of new public management (NPM) involving 'flexibility, clearly defined objectives, and a results orientation' (Olssen & Peters, 2005: 324) has re-defined the contemporary social, political and economic reality. Connected to the NPM is an interlaced governance and network structure vivifying '...contemporary governmentalities' via the 'policy as numbers' (Lingard, Martino, Rezai-Rashti, & Sellar, 2016: 1–2) accountability techniques of a pure positivism. The consequences for public education are stark and multi-layered and include an emphasis on high-stakes testing and a back to basics approach, perpetual surveillance particularly of teaching practice/s and connections to enhanced student achievement, accountability and audit, and an intrusive managerialist 'perform or else' approach which translates into a relentless drive towards prescribed 'standards' and the re-direction of the behaviour of school-based personnel (teachers and school leaders).

This new dynamic is also about a re-orientation towards how all of us are to conceive ourselves. We all are to harness our individual powers and make projects of ourselves constantly re-fashioning and re-shaping who we are and how we engage with the world. The new autonomous self-interested individual is to develop his/her self-capitalising capacities and put them to use and into action serving their own particular needs and wants. Skill sets of a particular type are at a premium and education is central to their formation as is their development, tracking and evaluation. This also

means that ‘...the focus of education is shifting to a concern with the development of aptitudes and attitudes that will equip young people to function well under conditions of complexity, uncertainty and individual responsibility: to help them become, in other words, good real-life learners’ (Carr & Claxton, 2002: 9). A transition of this kind has consequences for education systems and for the work that teachers engage in. We can see this in the ‘...new technologies of governance’ (Lingard, Martino, & Rezai-Rashti, 2013: 540) where intrusive forms of management and performance techniques envelop education and the work of teachers in national and international ‘...infrastructures of accountability’ (Lingard et al., 2013: 541) reporting on teaching outcomes.

## **Professional Teaching Standards**

### **The Case of Scotland**

Scotland has teaching standards as we do in Australia. There are significant noticeable differences though between them. Compare the Scottish standards for registration with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. Discuss the differences. What do you make of them?

The General Teaching Council of Scotland (GTC) Professional Standards can be found at <http://www.gtc.org.uk/professional-standards/explore-the-standards.aspx> and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers can be found at <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/standards>.

## **Holding Things Together—Accountability**

This shift to neo-liberalism has been happening over many decades. O’Neill and Bourke (2010: 159) report that since the 1970s there has been a ‘worldwide rise in ‘new public management’ (NPM) forms within the state sector’, as government discourses have shifted to arguments about efficiency. Accountability is central to the NPM and according to O’Neill and Bourke (2010: 159) is linked to ‘a diminution of trust in the agency of public servants’. Strathern (2000: 3) argues that as a result audits are ‘a taken-for-granted process in neo-liberal government and contributing substantially to its ethos’.

Schools and educators across the globe are increasingly being held accountable. Smith (2014) links this to the shift, driven by neo-liberalism, from an emphasis on access to education to an emphasis on efficiency and equity in outcomes. As a consequence, there has been a sharp increase in the use of standardised tests internationally, which are used alongside a range of other measures to hold teachers, schools and educational authorities accountable. In an analysis of the keywords in the World Bank Education Sector Strategy documents from 1999, 2010 and 2011, Joshi and Smith (2012: 192) report that accountability was only referred to twice in the 1999 document, but 32 times in the 2011 document, a rise Smith (2014: 11) described as ‘astonishing’, while references to international standardised testing (such as PISA and PIRLS) had similarly increased from only 1 in 1999 to 25 in 2011.

This is only one way in which schools and educators are held to account, there are a plethora of other ways. There are the well-known business models of accountability emphasising productivity and efficiency. This involves measuring and reducing the work of teachers down to simplistic input/output models where a productive/efficient school and teacher is easily identified as enhancing standardised test results in the form of ‘adding value’. But there is also the accountability that comes with the position and authority teachers occupy in respect of duty of care and other juridico/administrative responsibilities (e.g. as the qualified practitioner that society has entrusted to carefully nurture and guide the young).

The accountability educators encounter links to defined standards that govern their action(s)/practices and behaviour/s. Data generation as evidence of performance is central since an ‘aura has come to surround numbers’ which we ‘tend to sanctify’ (Strathern, 2000: 8). There is student examination data, local authority data, teacher performance data, school resource data and so on, all of which contributes towards judgement and ultimately some form of control. Assessment and the verification accompanying it is an obvious example of how accountability operates in the education system. The high stakes connected to assessment that ties student achievement to externally mandated tests is an example of an ‘accountability mechanism’ with the power to re-orient ‘...teacher evaluation processes toward more exacting criteria’ (Coburn, Hill, & Spillane, 2016: 243). There are also the associated flow on effects in terms of a narrowing of curriculum and the pressure to ‘...raise student achievement by influencing how teachers teach and how students learn’ (Coburn et al., 2016: 243). This emphasis on measureable outcomes reflects a ‘profound indifference to the (social) complexity’ of the educational enterprise ‘in favour of the devising and implementing of management and policy strategies which can be measured by performance indicators’ (Strathern, 2000: 15).

The accountability described here is readily familiar to most teachers and is relatively easy to gather. Nonetheless, O’Neill (2013) cautions against the seemingly straightforward acceptance of its generation and recommendations. It is worth quoting O’Neill at length on this.

Systems of accountability are second order ways of using evidence of the standard to which first order tasks are carried out for a great variety of purposes. However, more accountability is not always better, and processes of holding to account can impose high costs without securing substantial benefits. At their worst, they may damage performance of the very first order tasks for which they supposedly improve accountability. In education this may happen if the assessment tail starts to wag the education dog. Teachers and learners, like others, need to be held to account, but this requires intelligent systems of accountability that do not distort primary activities. Intelligent accountability in education, as elsewhere, also needs to communicate, not merely to disseminate, relevant evidence that can be assessed by those to whom professionals and institutions are accountable. (2013: 4)

In other words, we should take note of accountability and it is only right to hold schools and teachers to account although we should proceed with caution and be sceptical about the pervasiveness of accountability in education.

## A Scenario: NAPLAN Testing

Mark is a year 5 teacher at Rolling Hills Primary School. The children in his grade come from a range of home backgrounds, including some whose families have arrived in Australia recently. On the MySchool website, the school has tended to score lower on the NAPLAN tests than the group of similar schools it is compared to. This has become a cause for concern amongst staff at the school, with many teachers arguing that the lower scores meant that fewer parents were choosing to send their children to Rolling Hills PS. Furthermore, it was feared that parents who valued education and had the resources to make a choice were enrolling their children at other schools, changing the profile of the student population. The school leadership argued that they were determined to turn this around. Consequently, in the months and weeks leading up to the NAPLAN tests in May, there were many discussions at staff meetings about how the school could improve the NAPLAN results. It was decided that improving the NAPLAN results was a priority and teachers were encouraged to develop their curriculum to address the skills tested by NAPLAN and to focus on those areas needed to perform well on the test. It was also decided to run several practice tests at Year 3 and 5 to ensure that students were familiar with the test format. Despite being uneasy about this focus on improving the test scores, Mark has changed the way he has been organising the curriculum for his students and has run the practice tests. When the decision is made to ask the parents of low-performing students to apply to have their children withdrawn from the NAPLAN testing, he has to decide whether he will contact the parents of the three students in his grade, whose names are on the list ... What would you do if you were Mark? Why?

Education accountability is often portrayed 'as a mechanism of coercive neoliberal governance' (Lipman, 2013: 550). Many have documented its negative effects on in particular, teaching and learning, teacher morale and the broader teaching profession (Hursh, 2008; McNeil, 2000; Valli & Buese, 2007). High-stakes testing regimes discipline and modulate. Surveillance of school systems through 'international comparative performance data' (Lingard & Sellar, 2013: 917) is a given. The effect of such accountability mechanisms is stark. In the USA for instance, Lipman suggests that systems of accountability have made:

...education legible for the market and private appropriation, mark schools and school districts as pathological and in need of authoritarian governance, and justify minimalist schools in areas of urban disposability. (2013: 558)

Lingard and Sellar (2013) illustrate how in Australia high-stakes accountability testing regimes influence government decision-making regarding school resourcing. School performance targets centred on literacy and numeracy are usually now negotiated between the various individual states and territories and the national Australian government. School systems can be either financially rewarded or not depending on their outcomes. A key issue is transparency about the processes involved in the setting of targets including determinations about student progress. The study that Lingard and Sellar document highlights many of the issues involved in high-stakes

accountability testing regimes including the major political concern about perceived system under-performance.

In contrast to talk about evidence-based policy, the pressure and nervousness felt by policy-makers and politicians in response to NAPLAN<sup>1</sup> outcomes are more immediately motivated by concerns to improve or maintain the reputation of schools and systems and to secure funding, rather than the intended objective of improving literacy and numeracy outcomes in schools. (Lingard & Sellar, 2013: 652)

This points to a broader problem with regimes of system accountability and surveillance, the intensification of a crisis rhetoric in public education that positions schools, teachers and students as somehow flawed and in need of fixing (see Slater, 2015).

The specialised management of education through policy implementation is primarily the aim of accountability. Education policy often works across two levels; the macro-system level which includes education/school organisations and the micro-individual level involving enhanced scrutiny of the self. In this sense, accountability in education is about replicating ‘...neo-liberal political rationality’ facilitating the ‘...production of new subjectivities that are steeped in business ethics’ (Suspitsyna, 2010: 578). The problems of education systems including schools revert to private concerns solvable by application of market-based principles. This means that gaps in educational attainment are not readily attributable to political/economic social inequalities and become ‘...a personal issue of low expectations on the part of teachers’ (Suspitsyna, 2010: 578). Accountability is not about ending inequality. It manages inequality by using a logic of audit and espousing the merits of transparency.

**Does the accountability movement in schools force teachers to spend more time teaching to the test? Consider some of the ethical implications involved in a question such as this.**

## Final Comments

Our aim in this chapter has been to highlight some of the defining aspects of our contemporary unstable society which we argue connects to an educational framework which responds to the neo-liberal demands for efficiency and productive outcomes; that does not aspire to the education of the person, but instead reduces the preparation of students for the sole ‘goal of global economic competitiveness’ (Lupton

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<sup>1</sup>NAPLAN (The National Assessment Programme in Literacy and Numeracy is a standardised testing regime implemented by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority—ACARA. Australian students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 are expected to sit for the tests each May. Students are tested in literacy, numeracy and ICT literacy). The MySchool website is administered by ACARA and hosts a variety of information on Australian schools including NAPLAN results.

& Hempel-Jorgensen, 2012: 616). This has a concomitant effect on how we all are to conceptualise the ethical work that teachers must engage in. Classroom activity we suggest is now increasingly confined towards a predilection for learning outcomes of a profitable nature. In other words, classroom learning strongly aligns with behaviours deemed essential for a new century of heightened economic competition and accountability.

The consequences then for the ethical work of teachers are many. We will simply focus on one by way of closing off this chapter. Griffiths draws upon the work of Arendt (1958) to argue that teachers need to ‘think what we are doing’ (Griffiths, 2014: 126). She notes the importance of encouraging creativity and imagination in teachers geared towards the contemplative, reflective and considered reconceptualisation of actions. These traits are especially important for experienced teachers and for those that wish to work in an ethical manner ‘because it is only when teachers have a basic proficiency (where proficiency is understood in a wide sense to include moral and ethical as well as their technical aspects) that they will have the capacity to re-think their positions’ (Griffiths, 2014: 136). In other words, Griffiths argues teachers must ‘develop a position before they can question it’ (2014: 126). The danger then of a pedagogy for purely vocational/employable ends coupled with heightened accountability and audit schemes as a response to the instabilities and flux of modern living renders teaching practice devoid of a contemplative ethical component. An education is then only as good as the openly serviceable economic rewards it eventually bestows on school students. It is here we argue where the courage and practice of ethical decision-making is needed most, in the space between the ‘anything goes’ of world economic markets and an all pervasive consumerist world view.

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**Part III**  
**Transitioning to Professional Practice**

# Chapter 12

## A Socially Critical Approach to Community and Parental Engagement: A Matter of Professional Ethics



**John Smyth**

**Abstract** This chapter explores what the idea of community engagement might mean with regard to schools, or more particularly to teachers, parents, students and the wider community. Specifically, Smyth engages with the question of ‘Whose interests are being served in schooling?’ which leads him to suggest how ‘a more expansive, deeper, more socially just, and activist view of community engagement’ might develop if parental involvement in education beyond concerns for their own children were to come about. For this to happen, Smyth argues, parents would have to be considered in public discourse less as ‘consumers’ of education and more as ‘citizens’ acting for the collective betterment of society. Smyth explores this private/public distinction in some detail in order to establish that the broader collective and participatory ethic he espouses could, through an expanded notion of parental involvement, bring qualities he locates in working class culture into educational discourse and local experience. This chapter challenges readers to draw on working class values to confront the disturbing ‘blindness’ within the institutional structuring of schooling which fails to engage with the differential experiences of privilege and alienation accompanying social class.

### Introduction

This chapter explores what the notion of community engagement means with regard to schools. Community engagement is a term that generally refers to the process of bringing together individuals and groups, often in partnership, with a view to trying to achieve some kind of social change.

I want to take a particular, and partial, view of what community engagement might mean for schools, by looking at how parents are being urged to become involved in

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schools in various ways. My larger purpose in looking at community engagement through the lens of parental involvement is to begin to envisage what a more expansive, deeper, more socially just, and activist view of community engagement might mean for teachers, parents, students, other community members and groups. My opening-orienting question is therefore: what form does parental involvement in schools take?

At one level, this might sound like a fairly unexceptional question, and the answer is obvious—parents act in ways that advance the interests of their children! At the level of individual parents, this sounds perfectly reasonable, but what happens when we go beyond regarding parental involvement as possibly involving acting in ways that involve more than self-interest—for example, in pursuing the education of what Delpit (1995) called ‘other people’s children’?

The question, to put it another way, is: should parents have a responsibility in respect of schooling for anything beyond the ‘concerted cultivation’ (Irwin & Elley, 2011; Lareau, 2003; Vincent & Maxwell, 2016) of their own children? Hughes (1995) suggests we might want to step back from the view of parents as consumers of the education of their children, and ask if this is *really* what parents want for their children, or whether parents are being pushed into this relationship with schools by politicians and educational policy makers.

The difference here is one that was nicely highlighted by Mills (1971[1959]) in his *Sociological imagination* as constituting the difference between ‘personal or private troubles’ and ‘public issues or concerns’ (pp. 14–15).

‘Private troubles’, for Mills (1971[1959]), referred to those matters that reside in individuals—for example, ensuring that our children receive an adequate education to equip them to make their way in the world. This is essentially a ‘private matter’ (p. 14) that is resolved on a case-by-case basis in the way individual parents make decisions about which school to send their progeny to, based, for instance, on what they see as being the ‘best deal’ they are likely to get. Furthermore, this would also extend to include how parents navigate and negotiate the way their children access and interact with the school, and the benefits that flow from that.

‘Public issues’, on the other hand, have quite a different hue, in the sense that they ‘transcend the... local environments of the individual and the range of his [sic] inner life’ (Mills, 1971[1959], p. 15). Public issues, in the context of education, have a wider purview, in that they look to the way in which the institutional arrangements are structured in education, in ways that impact differentially on young people depending upon their social backgrounds. For example, who is positioned because of their family or experiential background to take advantage of opportunities, and who is excluded because they don’t have access to the necessary social conduits, or ways of thinking, to enable them to participate? Public issues, therefore, have the potential to cast some light on a crisis or dysfunctional situation that goes considerably beyond the character of an individual, or even a group of individuals.

These quite different inflections in the way we choose to cast education are not simply matters of idiosyncratic preference or choice—they have deep and quite profound effects and consequences.

When parents are regarded primarily as ‘consumers’ acting in some kind of marketplace, in seeking to act to advance the betterment of their children, then their relationship with the school will be largely an extractive one—that is to say, what has to be ‘invested’ emotionally, psychically, and fiscally in order to garner the most cost-effective benefit or return for their children? The relationship is essentially a commercial or exchange one, and it brings with it notions of who is best able to position themselves in this economic relationship, so as to compete for the scarce benefits.

On the other hand, when parents are cast as ‘citizens’, then the focus is qualitatively very different. The agenda becomes one of the collective betterment of the society of which schools are a part, and how everybody stands to benefit from having the focus placed upon ensuring that regardless of background or attributes, everyone is able to actively and fully participate and partake based upon their potential. According to this view, the qualities that are foregrounded are empathy, reciprocity, inclusion and collaboration.

### **Brief Excursion into the Educational Policy Trajectory Within Which Parental Involvement in Schooling Is Situated**

The ‘citizen-consumer bifurcation’ (Wilkins, 2010, p. 185) I have just described has been given higher prominence as a result of the operation of educational policy. In recent educational policy reforms, parents have become crucial players—in many respects placed at the very centre of the educational policy reform process. While Vincent (1996) noted that in the past schools metaphorically prided themselves in the way they proudly proclaimed ‘No parents beyond this point’ (p. 1), this idea is now very unfashionable. Governments, especially throughout the Anglo-world, have come to realise that parents can be harnessed as a potent force with which to remake schools in a certain image.

Wilkins (2010) very nicely summarised the nature and direction of the reforms that have been underway, especially in Anglo countries (including the UK, USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia), since the mid-1980s, and that is still continuing:

...[T]he idea [has been] that schools are more responsive, flexible and better managed when parents are engaged with them as consumers—discriminating, autonomous and self-directing. This reflects attempts by governments to impose pressures on schools to improve their services through competing with other schools for pupils and government funds...Specifically, it marks the shift in government rhetoric from a view of users as passive recipients to active choosers (p. 171).

The policy logic behind this move went like this. If parents could be constructed as ‘consumers’ of education, in the sense of having an ‘investment’ in the education of their children, then they will act to protect and enhance that investment by seeking to get the ‘best deal’ for their children. Schools were, therefore, presented as places in which parents engaged in choosing a school that they perceived would best advance

their children's future life chances. The business model behind this thinking, was that schools would compete against one another for students—both in seeking to get the largest 'market share' they could, particularly of the best quality students—and so-called underperforming schools would either be forced to 'lift their game' and improve, or risk going out of business.

Edward and Gillies (2011) argue that what lay behind this policy move was the attempt to move the 'boundary between 'private families' and 'public concerns' (p. 141). The shift was really from one of parents as 'passive' clients unable to 'diagnose their needs [or] discriminate amongst...possibilities' (pp. 146–147), to parents as 'active' consumers 'who know their own needs, shop around...to satisfy them, and feel confident in judging the value of the 'merchandise' on offer' (p. 147). The attempt was to move from a model of dependency on government, to one of independence—bringing with it not only possible benefits, but also responsibilities, most notably for funding their children's education.

This occurred in slightly different ways in different parts of the world. In England, the initiative was known as 'local management of schools' (LMS), and it involved 'a funding formula whereby the money followed the pupil' (Deem, 1994, p. 26). In the USA, it occurred through Charter schools, whereby any group could form a charter school, that operated according to an agreement with a funding authority, but was otherwise freed from any centralised control. Similar entities emerged later in England and are known as 'academies'. In Australia, the local variant was known generically as 'self-managing schools', and while they are still part of a state funded system, they have considerable autonomy in terms of how they use resources, select staff, and market themselves as stand-alone entities.

In a sense, therefore, schools have been released from what was formerly perceived to be the bureaucratic strictures of a centralised system, and allowed to operate in more autonomous ways—and parents and their power of 'choice', have been the key social actors in this mechanism. Almost four decades later, this single-minded reform process of constructing parents as 'consumers' and schools operating in a 'marketplace' show no signs of slowing down. Indeed, as Crozier (2000) comments, if anything it has intensified, 'As the inexorable juggernaut of educational policy continues, the focus on parents remains unabated' (p. ix).

While the notion of parental involvement has a high level of seemingly common sense appeal, what I want to show now, is that it also brings with it a lot of hidden problems that are extremely damaging.

## **Complications as a Result of Social Class**

The very notion of 'parental involvement' can often conceal more than it reveals. As Crozier (2000) argues, the current educational policy discourse 'asserts unproblematically that parental involvement is 'a good thing' (p. x). The difficulty with such an omnibus presumption is that it presumes, quite incorrectly, that we all understand and agree on what is meant by parental involvement, that all parents constitute 'a

homogenous group', and all parents embrace and experience parental involvement with schools in the same way.

Parental involvement can mean many things—from the relatively hands-off process of choice of school, in which parents in a fairly benign fashion, exit the process fairly early on, to more hands-on involvement in classrooms in improving the 'literacy and numeracy' of their children and 'disciplining and improving children's school attendance', to reaching into the decision making processes surrounding their children through participation in school governance—the latter bringing with it suggestions of parents 'calling teachers to account' (Crozier, 2000, p. ix).

The problem with the treatment of parents as if they all constitute a homogeneous group, is that this is a false reading—what it foregrounds is one kind of parent, while rendering others invisible or powerless, because of their circumstances. Again from Crozier (2000):

The model of parental involvement most often propounded is that of the white middle-class mother who has unlimited time to support her primary-aged child's reading, number work or other 'homework' activity (p. x).

If we take the notion of school 'choice', which is really the centre-piece in this re-worked relationship between schools and parents and from which all else follows, then there is a very deft sleight of hand occurring here, as Edwards and Gilles (2011) note:

Choice in this consumerist model is presented as an equally distributed right exercised by individuals and families who have been liberated to make decisions that best suited to them. Political rhetoric emphasizing self-determination and empowerment deflects attention from the starkly contrasting and deeply uneven territory from which these decisions are made. In other words, the relational position of the consumer is not equally and unproblematically available to all (p. 147).

Where the slippage occurs is between the policy rhetoric of parental choice of school, and the pragmatic reality of who is actually doing the choosing. Because of the popularity of supposedly 'good' schools, which rapidly become overwhelmed and over-subscribed as a result of canny middle-class parents who know how to do the choosing, it becomes a situation in which the choosing is done by the schools according to which students fit the profile of the school, rather than it being a case of choice of school parents (see evidence of this in Australia in Smyth, 2008, p. 226, and in Chile, in the work of Carrasco, et al., as noted in Brooks, 2017, p. 758).

Those parents who are unable to compete and succeed within this re-configured landscape of schooling, are regarded as 'flawed consumers' (Bauman, 2007, p. 25)—which is to say, they are 'lacking [the] resources that socially approved consumer activity requires' (p. 25)—and to that extent, they are hapless victims of their own inadequacies and thus 'collateral casualties' (p. 25) of a system that has nothing inherently wrong with it. This is to adopt a deficit view.

Working class families have a number of characteristics, traits or qualities that are very positive, but also some that make it difficult for them to relate productively to the middle-class institution of schooling. I first want to turn my attention to those *working class dispositions that make schools alienating, unwelcome or hostile places*

for non-middle-class parents, families, and children. In the section that follows this one, I will then use this analysis as a basis upon which to begin to build a more positive way of framing how working class parents might be inducted into a more socially critical and activist engagement with schooling—one that is much more on their terms.

First, to name a few of the dispositions that deter working class engagement with schooling.

*Schools are quintessentially middle-class institutions*: sociologically speaking, schools are places that are founded on the notion of delayed gratification—that is to say, they require that students desist from questioning the immediate relevance of schooling, accepting instead as an article of faith, that schooling will deliver future benefits in the form of pathways to an economically rewarding and fulfilling life. In the increasingly risky and turbulent times we live in, this is a ‘big ask’, especially for working class lives that are characterised by making ends meet and the precariousness that comes with daily survival—with the result that long timelines that involve waiting for rewards are often not part of the working class persona. Often what accompanies and emerges from the school requirement to desist from questioning this middle-class article of faith, is the acceptance of norms that include ‘punctuality, [attendance], passivity, obedience to rules, deference to authority, [and] application to abstract academic [ideas]’ (Smyth, 2010, p. 747) that are quite foreign (even alien) to working class students and their families.

An ‘*intergenerational family educational script*’ (Ball, Davies, David & Reay, 2002, p. 57) that has been less than satisfying and rewarding, is a common working class trait. What I am referring to here are the many working class parents who have had shortened experiences of schooling in which they left school early, or if they remained, then they experienced fractious relationships of one kind or another while at school (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett, 1985, chap. 2). The effect of these histories is often one in which parental interactions with schools are against their own negative personal experiences—often further exacerbated by the fact that contact with the school is over behavioural or other infractions by their own children. Such negative interactions place these parents in an adversarial relationship with the school that is not that different to the authoritarian relationships they experience with other institutions of the state like health care, child welfare and the judicial system—all of which see them through a particular deficit prism.

*Acting out roles as ‘clients’*: closely related to the above is the way in which schools position themselves as ‘experts’ providing information to supposedly ‘passive’ working class parents about the needs and performances of their children. This is in marked contrast to middle-class parents who are credited with knowing what the needs of their children are, and who are deft at being able to use their navigational skills in ensuring that the school delivers on meeting these needs. The lesson in both cases is one of teaching each group their respective place in the institution of the school. Edwards and Gillies (2011) provide contrasting examples that illustrate how this works in parental intervention in schooling. In both cases, the children had learning difficulties, but they were dealt with very differently. The middle-class mother who was a lawyer, member of the school governing board, and had a relationship



with the teacher was able to secure the outcome she wanted with her daughter. The working class mother, on the other hand, who had no such advantages, was forced to accept what she was given, which was a less than satisfying outcome for her child (p. 150).

What I have been pointing to here is the way in which the institution of schooling is ‘blind to working class students’ and their families (MacKenzie, 1998, p. 96; Smyth, 2006, p. 28). The way this works, Langston (1993) says, it that ‘when working class people enter a middle-class environment ... [like schooling] they are defined out of existence’ (p. 70). What Langston is saying is that when working class people succeed in any way in educational institutions—whether as students, teachers or parents—then they are regarded as having ‘made it’—they have had a successful makeover and have shrugged off their working-classness. They have taken on a new successful image, which by definition, they could not have done if they had remained true to their working class origins. Their working-classness is made invisible, to disappear as it were—they have successfully transformed themselves.

## **Towards an Activist Working Class Parental Involvement in Schooling**

What I have been describing amounts to a victim blaming way of portraying both working class parents and their children. When they are not successful in schools, then they are seen to be this way because they have not jettisoned their deficient working class values—not working hard enough; transmitting an intergenerational absence of aspirations; suffer from a lack of long term visioning; and, refuse to comply with conventional institutional norms. In a word, they have failed to take on a new garb. This is a view that continues to strongly underpin much government policy-making in all realms as it applies to working class people.

Much of this is not only grossly demeaning and insulting, but also a one-sided and very inaccurate portrayal. What I want to set out now is a more positive and optimistic set of dispositions that need to underpin the way schools (and by implication, educational policy), ought to embrace working class parents. In other words, it is not working class parents who need to change so as to fit the middle-class institution of schooling, but the school and its attendant educational policies that need to better understand and fit with working class culture—and change as a consequence.

I want to expand and build upon what I have called elsewhere ‘an ensemble of affective working class dispositions’ (Smyth, 2019; Smyth & Simmons, 2018). A word of explanation is in order. I have drawn from an extensive reading of biographical/autobiographical accounts from the ‘inside’, of what it means to live a working class life or identity. I have taken a good deal of licence in the interests of brevity, accessibility and crispness of presentation in compiling this brief ensemble, by not engaging in heavy referencing or citation—in order to provide a starting point for discussion.

The starting point needs to be moving beyond pathological or deficit explanations of what does not work for working class children and what needs to be ‘fixed’, or what is wrong with the way their parents fail to connect with schools. As Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) put it in her *The good high school: portraits of character and culture*, we need a broader and more hopeful and generous spirit that emphasises ‘goodness’ (p. 23).

*Honesty*: This is a quality that comes through repeatedly in my reading of stories about working class lives, as well as in my own research. To put it in its most direct form—there is an endearing quality about the way working class people represent themselves, often in self-deprecating ways, that is devoid of what is often seen as middle-class affliction.

*Directness*: There is a tendency not to dance around an issue, but instead step out in voicing their opinions about something. There is a refreshing unpretentiousness about not going through some kind of charade in circling round what they truly think. This is sometimes described as ‘straight talking’.

*Authenticity*: Related to this, there is a pronounced sense that with working class people ‘what you see is what you get’, or to put it another way, ‘they wear their values on their sleeves’. What this means is that they are, therefore, authentic to their true selves, and see little purpose in hiding behind some kind of synthetic mask.

*Dignity*: This is a quality that has its genesis in the way working people come to disproportionately wear the brunt of globalisation. They have suffered the most as a result of austerity measures, and the ‘uncertain world of itinerant, low-waged, low-skill, atomised work and the ever-present threat of unemployment’ (Charlesworth, 2000, p. 159). Despite these, Charlesworth (2000) says that what still comes through with this group, is ‘a sense of personal value beyond the fight for distinction through consumption’—the notion of ‘dignity’ (p. 159).

*Practicality*: This is expressed through the idea that no matter what, life is to be ‘gotten on with and not dwelt upon’ (Charlesworth, 2000, p. 152). In other words, ‘doing’ things, rather than reflecting on what might have been or could be.

*Immediacy*: A concern with handling the ‘here and now’ with whatever resources are to hand, conveys the working class quality given expression in the form of ‘getting by’ (McKenzie, 2015) or ‘making do’.

*Attachment*: This takes the form of strong bonds of belonging around an affiliation to immediate locality, rather than more distant connections—for example, family, friendship groups and neighbourhoods. What are sometimes used as derogatory labels such as ‘chavs’, ‘bogans’ and ‘westies’ are worn by working people as badges of honour.

*Solidarity*: This refers to the common bonds forged through shared adversity that often provide the glue in working class communities, and often around which social life is organised.

*Self-blaming*: When things are not working out, working class people tend to see this more as a result of some personal failing than being caused by a distant social condition. While this can result in them wearing too much blame for matters that have a more distant ‘causation’, there is, at the same time, something humbling about this.

*History:* Because much of working class culture is transmitted orally through narratives and stories, this gives the culture a sense of history, with events being embedded in and having come from somewhere, rather than being mere accidents.

Now, my purpose for this brief excursion into working class culture has been to highlight what might need to be embraced and seen as virtues rather than pathologies or deficiencies, if we are to begin to include what have hitherto been treated as ‘peripheral voices’ (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002) in parental involvement in schools. It has been far too easy for the middle class to seamlessly embrace the neoliberalisation of schooling, to their manifest advantage. That is to say, educational policy has licensed schools so they can reconstitute themselves as market places and sites of consumption, that have been highly advantageous to middle-class parents—through attributes like celebrating individualism, competition, meritocracy, and image/impression management. But these are not qualities, as I have pointed out above, that are indigenous to working class parents, who have been either deliberately or unwittingly excluded, or made to feel unwelcome.

This leads into my final move... around what I have called elsewhere *Activist and socially critical school and community renewal* (Smyth, Angus, Down & McInerney, 2009) or the *Socially just school* (Smyth, Down & McInerney, 2014).

## **A Manifesto for a Socially Critical Approach to Community and Parental Engagement**

The animating question now becomes: how do we *reconfigure* schools so they become less enamoured of middle-class qualities, and more amenable to working class values? Notice my emphasis here on ‘reconfiguring’ schools so they fit around the voices that have been excluded—rather than making parents fit the school. My approach here, therefore, as it should be, will not be to proffer ‘solutions’, but rather to pose ‘questions’—to be debated by schools and their communities. In the language of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, my strategy will involve the pursuit of a ‘pedagogy of the question’, rather than the ‘pedagogy of the answer’ (Bruss & Macedo, 1985). In doing this, I will be deliberately provocative and playful in my approach, and in doing that, my questions may be somewhat uncomfortable—which is what being socially critical is about, and where genuine parental involvement and community engagement begins. What is needed are a number of probing questions that provide the basis for dialogue.

- (i) The real elephant in the educational room that bedevils us at the moment is the question of: *whose interests are being served by schooling?* This is a question that schools and their communities need to urgently address, because honesty and transparency around this will reveal an extremely worrying degree of slippage. By that I mean, *the economy* has in recent years rapidly overtaken and supplanted the interests of children and their families in respect of

- schooling. The question is: *where is the evidence for this?* (and I will desist from answering my own question).
- (ii) An associated question is: *who is being advantaged by the way schools are currently being structured and organised, and who is being excluded or left behind?*
  - (iii) To put this question in a more positive way: *how might this school be organised in a way to ensure that those who are **the least welcome** (which generally equates to the most ‘disadvantaged’), are made to feel **the most welcome**? What would have to occur for that to happen? What would be the obstacles and impediments? What would be the benefits?*
  - (iv) Genuine change, for the better, involves identifying silences. That is to say, asking the question: *who gets to speak in this school and whose voices are silenced? Whose voices are dominant, and whose are drowned out?*
  - (v) One of the most crucial dimensions in any school is leadership—which is not to be confused with management or administration. The question here is: *who exercises leadership in this school? When, and in respect of what? Is leadership solely invested in those who have status and high office in the school, or can it genuinely come from anywhere? Is this important, why and under what conditions?*
  - (vi) Schools are not islands—they are anchored and located in communities and have relationships with them. The question is: *how meaningful are community relationships in this school? Are they mutually beneficial? How does the school regard its community as a resource? What does the community in turn gain from this relationship?*
  - (vii) Creating a school that is genuinely part of its community, in the increasingly austere times we live in, means making schools that are less dominated by self-centredness, acquisitiveness, individualism and competition. The question, therefore, is: *how is this school positively fostering qualities like—honesty, directness, authenticity, dignity, practicality, immediacy, attachment, solidarity, and sense of history, while seeking to minimise the amount of self-blaming?*
  - (viii) Schools are also part of a global community. The question to be asked is: *How is this school connecting its students, teachers and parents with global issues? How are these global issues being worked out locally?*
  - (ix) Democracy is under serious threat at the moment on all kinds of fronts. A question for this school is: *How are democratic ideals being worked out and lived in an exemplary way in this school?*
  - (x) One of the defining hallmarks of genuine democratic intent is the courage to stand up and speak against injustices, both as these impact individuals as well as society collectively: *How does this school take a courageous stand? On what? With what effect?*

Asking difficult and uncomfortable questions like these, and having the courage to imagine a different alternative conceptualisation of schooling, is what is meant by adopting a ‘socially critical’ or activist imagination.

## Closing Comments

What I have tried to do in this chapter is show how an apparently common sense and innocuous term like parental involvement in schools might be more complicated than it appears at first sight and need to be revisited through a different set of lenses. By peering beneath the surface, it was possible to see that there were indeed some more complicated explanations. By way of example, I showed that some parents have histories and backgrounds that make engagement with schools difficult, if not impossible—and I explained how working class culture celebrated and exalted a set of values that were at variance with the acquisitive, individualistic, self-seeking and competitive values of the middle-class institution of schooling.

What I was interrogating was the question posed by Crozier (1998) when she asked: ‘parents and schools: partnership or surveillance?’. As I pointed out, when schools are constructed as markets then they ‘fragment...and promote individualism’, in a situation in which ‘involvement, commitment and responsibility [become] based on individual vested interest’ (Crozier, 1998, p. 125), and parents are ‘disciplined’ to act in particular ways.

The antidote I offered—I called it a ‘manifesto’—was really a process of reversal, in which the school through dialogue with its parents (and teachers and students)—might pursue a process of re-inventing itself against the dominant neoliberal set of views within which it has become trapped. My point was the same as the one made by Mills (1971[1959]) almost 60 years ago, that when we adopt habituated ways of thinking, including the neoliberal role and purpose of schools as instrumental ‘training’ institutions, then we become trapped. What I have been at pains to do here is to make more explicit the way technicist neoliberal consumerist ways of organising schools is manifestly advantageous to middle-class parents, while being exclusionary of working class parents.

The way out of this entrapment, Mills (1971[1959]) said, was to develop ‘a quality of mind that will help [us] use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid explanations of what is going on in the world...’ (p. 11). What I brought to the fore, was a ‘quality of mind’ that has the potential to enable us to see that parents do not have to be portrayed in their engagement with schools as compliant and passive ‘consumers’, but rather as activist ‘citizens’ in changing not only the way their children are educated in more just ways, but also changing the way the school exists and interacts with the wider world.

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# Chapter 13

## Postscript: To Fabricate or Authenticate Our Self as Teacher?



John D. Whelen and R. Scott Webster

**Abstract** In this final chapter, Whelen and Webster invite the reader to reflect upon teachers as ethicists through the personal stories of three early career teachers—James, Helen and Derryn. Each of these teachers share their personal struggles as they attempt to pursue a sense of an authentic self who teaches rather than fabricating another identity who conforms to what the particular system and context seems to require of them. Through engaging with these raw accounts, the reader is invited to reflect on how the material offered throughout this book might be drawn upon and engaged with in order to help guide these teachers—and themselves—towards being a teacher in an authentic sense where, in addition to working with pedagogical strategies, one understands oneself as educator and ethicist.

In Chap. 1, we argued that both pre-service and practising teachers need a chance to ‘rethink’ the nature of reflection and ethics in the context of *education* and that in order to do this—to, in effect, become less students of conventional teaching and learning and more students of what we might call educative endeavour—far more emphasis than is commonly the case in ITE needs to be placed on encountering the ideas of writers other than, for example, theorists of learning and technique. This may sound to some like a plea for more study of philosophers of education, and if it does that can be no bad thing: at least they might throw some light on what ‘the context of education’ might mean, and without some understanding of this concept, as we and others here argue, students might continue to be pointed merely in the direction of ‘the activities of teaching and learning’. If there is one hope sustaining the life of this book, it is that teachers are better able to discern what is educative from what is not; that they become aware of what education is and can be as distinct from what teaching and learning are from day to day so long as standards are met and methods are honed. The disappointing fact is that while the distinction implied here

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need not be understood as binary, it is hard to believe it is not so, given the experience of so many among those, both the teachers and the taught, who have wrestled with the experience of being a teacher and being taught.

What is needed in our view, if reflection is to mean something more than the narrow connotation it has in many contemporary practises, is that the idea of the context and purposes of education—which we argue should be the proper focus of reflective practice—should become far more prominent than is commonly the case. But the question arises: how does ‘the context of education’ come into view? How does this notion of context come into view for students in contemporary ITE courses? Such a conceptual turn, e.g., to the social, economic, political, ideological and ethical worlds within which teaching and learning take place entails both a redefinition of purpose and a turn to a new foundational ethic in the preparation and in-servicing of those who work in schools to teach, and hopefully to educate. As is clear from the preceding chapters, we are far from the first to advocate such a renewal, or revision, of purpose. To reflect professionally in such a context would be to reflect on far more than one’s practice in relation to a class, a student or an assessment in relation to ‘standards’. As many teachers have found, being called on to implement exotically imposed policies such as preparing students for high-stakes testing, or being expected to submit to questionable regimes of appraisal, ideas of context, purpose and ethics come starkly into view. At some point, one’s sense of self as one is called into existence as *this* teacher in *this* context erupts and questions of purpose, value, agency and autonomy intervene. These are defining moments in which the presence of the teacher him or herself becomes indispensable to the very idea of context. Initial teacher education that fails to introduce students to these moments of authenticity in teachers’ lives fails to adequately prepare teachers for what is customarily expected of them in their professional lives. In the pages that follow, we want to briefly review two approaches to the way reflection and reflexivity have come together in teachers’ lives as they have come to confront the ethical crisis they experience following the demands made on them in the long neoliberal moment by reform and policy agendas originating far from the classroom and the school. The purpose of this is to reflect upon the material offered in the preceding chapters and how it might offer substance and guidance for rethinking and renewing the authenticity of the teachers in each of these contexts.

For the past twenty years or so, the sociologist of education, Stephen Ball, has been writing about public education reforms, mostly, but not exclusively, in the UK. In his work, he addresses the reasons for changes, the nature of policy formulations made as a consequence of such change, and in particular the impact that the demands made by policy requirements and those who manage their implementation have on those who are expected to put policy into practice. Ball’s writings on reforms in education have laid the foundation for what he has to say about the ways these reforms have set up profound ethical dilemmas for teachers. His particular focus, one could argue, has been the effects these reforms, couched in neoliberal managerial discourses favouring competitive enterprise among teachers, have had on them. In response to his concern to understand what it means to teachers to be expected to work—to plan, to teach to assess—in ways and for reasons that have caused them to question the very nature of what they are doing, some teachers have written to Ball, revealing what teaching

in the wake of education reform in the UK means to them. To put it simply, he has shown what it means for teachers to be subjected to policy and to have to perform in certain ways, often starkly at odds with what teachers thought was the very point of their being a teacher; or, to put it another way, Ball has shown how, by having to make up, or fabricate, a new sense of self in response to the performative demands of this new educational environment, teachers have come to question what it means to them to go on doing the work of teaching.

We hope that in bringing readers' attention to Ball's work, they might come to see that he has very subtly made it possible to reconstitute contemporary educational discourse as resistance to the formal policy demands of the state. To put it bluntly, Ball speaks to the person in the teacher in an existential manner, somewhat reminiscent of Deborah Britzman and others mentioned in earlier chapters of this book. In pursuing this work, Ball has gained theoretical insight and impetus from Jean-Francois Lyotard and Michel Foucault, among others, including feminist writers such as Teresa de Lauretis and Judith Butler. It is not our intention to provide a detailed analysis of their distinctive insights here, but rather to signal their importance to Ball's research. He has begun to show what a study of a discourse of expectation within an overbearingly panoptic corporate culture reveals as it is experienced by those who are expected to put it into practice. Importantly, he recognises that the personal lives of teachers do not remain untouched by the dominant culture in which they work, arguing that 'neoliberalism gets into our minds and our souls, into the ways in which we think about what we do' (Ball, 2012, p. 18). Others have shown the difficulty of putting policy demands into practice: Ball has shown how the typically neoliberal discourse embedded in policy demanding commitment to a narrowly prescribed curriculum overburdened with outcomes based on measurable performance indicators can have such a dispiriting, alienating effect on the minds of teachers and principals. In revealing how what was solid and secure in teachers' minds has in some cases now become a site of repudiation, challenge and resistance, Ball has shown how teachers respond to being made to feel they are merely functionaries in some larger purpose and how they contest the very purpose of what is proposed in the way they speak up for more humane, liberal educative encounters in what they have come to understand teaching to be, and, it must be said, in the way they want to lead their lives.

Teachers who find themselves being positioned in discursive formations over which they feel they have little or no room for agency have developed fertile responses of their own. In response to being constituted as a particular kind of subject and having to adapt to the performative demands required by particular policies, such as, for example, having to prepare students for high-stakes testing, many teachers find ways of objecting to what is required of them. Letters to the editors of major news outlets have for many years now provided evidence of this, and Ball has found that in response to his work, teachers in the UK in particular have written to him with their concerns, and in response he has encouraged further communication with him. The sources of instability and resentment these teachers reveal lie principally in their being aware of becoming subjects whose experiences arouse at the very least a sense of fractured purpose and discomfort. Having to adapt to requirements such

as achieving targets, being evaluated in terms of meeting ‘standards’, and working within managerial contexts lauding instrumental outcomes appropriate to economic imperatives, teachers who do not see opportunities for fulfilment and advancement have begun to resist all that they are expected to do and be, and especially to repudiate the selves they know they are fabricating in order to meet performative objectives. As Ball observes:

Teachers are inscribed in these exercises in performativity, through the diligence with which they attempt to fulfil competing imperatives and inhabit irreconcilable subjectivities (Ball, 1998, 190).

No wonder, then, that teachers who feel this dislocation take a stand. Elsewhere, Ball describes this crisis in the following terms;

The ground of such struggles is often highly personal. Expressed in the lexicons of belief and commitment, service and even love, and of mental health and emotional well-being. The struggles are often internalized and set the care of the self against duty to others ... What it means to teach and what it means to be a teacher ... are subtly but decisively changed in the process of reform (Ball, 2003, 216, 218).

Teachers who find themselves in this position—of having to fabricate selves appropriate to these new demands—not infrequently experience a crisis of self-worth which is typically internalised; they become, as Ball says, ‘ontologically insecure’ (Ball, 2003, p. 220). They find that, quoting Smyth (in this volume) and colleagues, ‘the ‘primacy of caring relations in work with pupils and colleagues’ has no place in the hard world of performativity ... performance has no room for caring’ (ibid., pp. 222, 224). The following examples given to Ball of what these teachers feel are salutary:

What happened to my creativity? What happened to my professional integrity? What happened to the fun in teaching and learning? What happened?

I find myself thinking that the only way I can save my sanity, my health and my relations with my future husband is to leave the profession. I don’t know what else I can do, having wanted to teach all my life, but I feel I am being forced out, forced to choose between a life and teaching (Ball, 2003, p. 216).

Another correspondent, reflecting on ‘the credibility of external metrics and judgements that tell the teacher what he or she is’, illustrates how teachers assert ‘the right to define ourselves according to our own judgements,’ or as Foucault might say, to develop a technology of the self ‘according to our own principles ... which are focused on the question of *who we are* and *who we might become* ...’ as the following excerpt illustrates:

I have known staff to engage with the most challenging and disaffected children, and gain their interest, respect and productive engagement (some of the time). Walk into the room and nothing leaps out as ‘excellent’. But get to know these pupils, and those staff, and you will find they have genuinely excelled themselves in what they have achieved, over time (Ball & Olmedo, 2013, p. 92).

Of course it is entirely probable that some teachers, perhaps even many, find opportunities for fulfilment and advancement in the ways public education continues to be reformed in what Lingard and Sellar (2013, p. 637) refer to as ‘a globalised policy

discourse that argues that standards can only be driven by (high-stakes) testing', but in focussing on teachers' subjectivities in this environment of constant audit and judgement, research such as Ball's has found disturbing evidence of disaffection. Teachers new to the profession, as they seek to 'fit in' to a school and prove their worth, unwittingly enter this maze of conflicting affect in which the expectation of satisfaction and fulfilment, so often found in collegial relationships with peers, teaching relationships with students and intellectual immersion in tasks, is met instead with non-negotiable performative demands and the gaze of administrative evaluation. How do teachers new to the profession negotiate the early years of their professional lives and why is it that so many leave after only five years of teaching?

Coming from an entirely different research paradigm, and it must be said for quite different reasons, educational psychologists concerned to argue that 'the goals of education should extend beyond situation to include long-term self-processes' have focussed attention on the twin concepts of motivation and identity in relation to students' 'motivation for engagement in school' (Kaplan & Flum, 2009, p. 73). As the following brief comments indicate, the same concern could equally be addressed to teachers' motivation and sense of identity in relation to moments of reflection on purpose and practice.

In discussing the concept of 'identity,' Eccles (2009, p. 78) writes that questions such as 'Who am I? What am I about? ... What do I value? ... are all questions related to ... identity', and that whether identity is conceived of as either individual or collective, such questions arise from issues that, whether for students or teachers, in one sense or another are intricately linked to motivation. To have one's identity severely challenged, or to have to adopt an inauthentic identity, e.g. in relation to gender, therefore, has been found to have deleterious consequences for one's commitment to doing and being whatever one is or was committed to doing and being. In this context, as La Guardia (2009, p. 98) writes, 'the health of any identity relies on the extent to which it is authentic ... Authentic engagement is associated with greater personal and relational health, whereas embodying a false self in the service of pleasing or appeasing others results in costs to well-being'. While focussing on the motivation of school students, La Guardia nevertheless comments on how a regime of high-stakes testing and a pervasive 'higher standards movement' in schools across the USA has undermined 'classroom practices and processes that enhance student interest ...' and caused teachers to reflect that teaching to the test to gain high test scores 'goes against their philosophies of good teaching' (ibid., pp. 98, 99), which is surely putting it mildly. When read against the experiences quoted by Ball, for example, Craig (2013, p. 114) notes (quoting DeSalvo, 1999, p. 24) that when teachers 'tell (their) stories and describe (their) feelings and integrate them into (their) sense of self, (they) no longer ... actively work at inhibition'. They do what Ball's correspondents have done and 'answer back'. In such ways as imposing and mandating 'higher standards' and high-stakes testing regimes, many teachers' motivations are adversely affected as their established sense of purpose and identity is displaced (Zembylas & Chubbuck, 2015, p. 186). Whether identity, as understood by these educational psychologists, or subjectivity, as understood by Ball and others are thought to offer useful insights into the experience of being a teacher, what is clear is that

teachers reflecting on their work do so from very personal viewpoints and, furthermore, when the pressing issue for them is to affirm some sense of authentic purpose, such reflection immediately problematises the educational context in which it arises.

The key issue arising from the works cited above in relation to teaching emphasises the importance of providing opportunities for individuals to explore the variety of discursive formations within which they are produced as teachers. To Zembylas and Chubbuck (2015, p. 185), for example, it needs to be understood that:

The important process of developing an identity as a teacher, intersecting with beliefs, emotions, and values, is ongoing and spreads throughout one's professional career. This implies that teacher education and teacher professional programs need to provide intentional, structured opportunities for pre-service and inservice teachers to explore their identities.

Furthermore, they go on to note (not surprisingly), that 'the common distinguishing boundaries drawn between 'personal' and 'professional' identity ... may not be as clear as sometimes portrayed; rather, they may imply deeper identity politics, discourses, and practices ...' (ibid) which would presumably be no surprise to Ball and a vast range of other critical educational thinkers (Apple, 2013; Apple, Au, & Gandin, 2011; Apple, Ball, & Gandin, 2010). Indeed, whether drawing on and developing the notions of subjectivity or identity—which are in no way equivalent<sup>1</sup>—or in critiquing the political, economic and social discourses framing educational purposes, or again by challenging the justification for standards that frame and arguably constrain teachers' work, pre-service teachers will be touching on that wider context, knowledge of which contributes so much to teachers' understanding of what they are doing, why and for whom.

How do teachers actually reflect on what they do, and to what extent do they bring an understanding of ethics into this reflective process? Such a question could easily lead to a research project but equally it could provoke a way into a conversation or discussion, as it has done in this case. Three teachers who had graduated from Victorian universities in Australia over the last five years agreed to answer some preliminary questions designed to do no more than start such a discussion. They were asked what reflection meant to them in their professional lives, what they reflected on and how they undertook reflection. Somewhat in the manner of ethnographic inquiry, initial answers were probed as further detail was sought. It was not research; it was a brief discussion carried on by email. The three secondary school teachers were James, who had been teaching at a small alternative type of school; Helen, who was teaching at a state school and Derryn, a replacement teacher.<sup>2</sup> We envisage the readers to this book to primarily consist of practising teachers and final-year pre-service teachers. Therefore, we invite you to enter into discussion with James, Helen and Derryn. Can you relate to and perhaps empathise with their concerns? What advice can you offer them? What other chapters from this book might you want to refer them in order to engage with issues and ideas that are most pertinent to their specific struggles? How do their reflective and reflexive experiences compare with

<sup>1</sup>On subjectivity, see Henriques et al. (1984), Davies (2006), Walkerdine, Lucy, and Melody (2002) and Youdell (2010) for a start. On identity, see e.g., La Guardia (2009) above.

<sup>2</sup>All names are pseudonyms.

your own habits and how might your habitual approaches to reflection enable your own sense of self to become more authentic?

## James

In the case of James, one of the editors of this book, Scott, was already engaged in a discussion, or series of commentaries, on James' thoughts on the question of how ethics and teaching come together. Reflecting on his experiences over three years, it is clear that for James, what mattered was how to confront and understand what he called the 'messiness' of teaching. By this he meant the business of being 'in the service of children; individuals with differences and needs and fears and insecurities and passions and challenges' in the face of what he felt was 'the ever-present pressure to be 'in control'; to be effective and efficient'. And what school teacher has not felt this challenge? On reflection, James doubted that he had been sufficiently prepared by his tertiary studies to confront this experience, and perhaps it is precisely this sense of lack that led to his questioning of that professional preparation. To James, it seemed that he was well enough prepared to draw on 'chalk-face operational matters' like 'academic interventions such as differentiation or multi-modal instruction', for example, but the challenges he knew he was really responding to were never simply 'a matter of effective application'. Instead, James thought of himself as responding to human beings—children—who were themselves 'struggling to conform' and bringing with them all the problems of 'a turbulent home life; or medical complications; or ... negative school experiences; or the lack of a sense of belonging and trust'. This, for James, was what he meant by the messiness of teaching, and confronted with the ongoing challenge of responding to it, he wrote that '(he) could never plan (his) way out of the messiness'. Here one is reading more than merely a first-person account of reflection, to which it might be objected that professional reflection might and should occur more constructively in the company of others, if such collegiality were available. Rather, as James goes on to say, this inability to plan his way out of messiness was derived from the challenge he experienced to 'the interrogation of (his) beliefs (and) deep thoughts' regarding the purpose of education. To confront the many issues that reflection might enable him to arrive at necessary and sufficient solutions to the issues he faced, James confessed to precisely what Ball's correspondents admitted to feeling—to self-doubt, or what is far more threatening, to a self-defining challenge. Crucially, James was not being merely introspective: he was refusing what he was becoming aware of through reflection on his being a teacher, as a challenge to his subjectivity. James was refusing his role as a technician who might apply strategies to what he was by training expected to recognise as problems, issues or moments of certain kinds, the solutions to which such strategies were designed to alleviate, or solve: classes might be managed; students might learn. Rather, to James, 'within that mess lies ... the heart and beauty of our profession. We can, we must, make personal, ethically based decisions which push beyond pragmatism and effectiveness, and demand us to look at the bigger picture', and for James that bigger

picture came into view from his reading of Friere, Foucault, Kierkegaard, Dewey, Noddings and Kohn. For James, reflection on what he was doing was inescapably ethical: as he wrote, recalling his student reading, ‘Isn’t it the case that ethics are at once deeply personal, philosophical and political ...’.

As one new to teaching, James had found himself uncomfortable not only with the uncertainty and what he calls the messiness of teaching but with taken-for-granted responses to expectations that teachers will professionally manage behaviours as much as learning: as he wrote subsequently, ‘the taken-for-granted is the very *first* thing that should be in the cross-hairs’. In other words, James seems to be suggesting that the very idea of ‘behaviour’ might be coming between his deeply held commitment to caring for each student and his professional responsibilities as they were presented to him in terms of teaching standards and as he understood them. This he explained in the following way: ‘... there is no simple binary relationship between control (order) and chaos. Indeed, it is precisely in the valley between these two that the glorious messiness lies; uncertain, dialogic, negotiated.’ Faced with a student positioned by others as ‘exceptionally disruptive, aggressive and disrespectful’, and drawing on his reading of Noddings and Kohn’s approach to an ethic of care, James developed a relationship with the student that ultimately led to trust and a degree of transformation in the student’s ‘behaviour’. On the basis of this endeavour, James was able to write that ‘We don’t impose our care ‘on’ the other, care is a dialogue requiring acknowledgement and mutual trust. Would you make yourself vulnerable to someone who you knew was simply going through the motions?’ The sense of authentic relational trust James is referring to here—of being present to, or responsible for the student—signifies a nuanced sense of teaching hardly recognisable in the paradigm of teaching located in Australia’s teaching standards.

## Helen

As a mature-age graduate teacher with more than ten years as a research scientist in the biochemical sciences, Helen was keen to throw herself into teaching in her state school. Expecting to teach Biology and Science, Helen found herself in her first year with a teaching load in Technology as a result of showing interest in STEM subjects. As she wrote, ‘I’ve been pegged as a technology teacher and teaching so far out of my field I may as well be teaching French,’ going on to say ‘once I’m through this ‘initiation’ phase, they might let me settle into something less diverse. I don’t think the teacher training gave me the tools to spread myself, it’s more a product of (wanting) to get your foot in the door.’ This has entailed a massive workload after hours with detrimental consequences for work-life balance with her family and friends. Having been advised to ‘Say yes to everything’ she reflects on the toll it takes and on the apparent ability of others to balance work demands with life beyond the school. In her initial year, given the challenge of teaching outside her chosen areas, Helen has found that she ‘made a lot of mistakes ... and reflecting and observing with my peers and mentors has been an important part of my learning ... Team teaching has

allowed me to regularly observe the practice of others and reflect with them on how to make my lessons better.’ From such ‘accountability and reflection,’ she believed, her teaching had benefitted considerably. In particular, Helen found satisfaction in giving students opportunities ‘they will remember vividly as a challenging but rewarding experience, with positive outcomes for their self-esteem and future pathways ...’ Quite apart from the satisfaction she reported from ‘(creating) an opportunity for my students to scaffold a skill and develop confidence in their own abilities,’ Helen ‘(tried) to create a fun atmosphere and be relatable’ but with mixed results. On the one hand, Helen focussed on the way she taught and prepared for her lessons, but she also reflected on how to achieve enviable rapport with her students. For example, she wrote: ‘Every lesson I ask myself ‘how could I have done better.’ Sometimes I’ll rewrite a PowerPoint after a lesson ready for next time, although this has proved pointless given my subjects are different next year. After every team taught maths lesson we’d have a quick chat and sometimes a long one about how it went and how we’ll do it next year. I’ve felt really annoyed I didn’t get maths next year as I’ve set up a lot of changes ...’ Such investment in her teaching practice was central to her hopes for advancement and to her sense of achievement. ‘I feel immense pride (she wrote) when a student produces a piece of work that they have invested a lot of time and interest in and really disappointed when they do not, as I feel it is a reflection that I have not created (a) learning environment that has inspired them to do so.’ It was this sense of ‘environment’ that became a focus of her reflection from time to time as she observed a younger colleague who appeared to manage the demands of teaching easily and who had the admiration of her students. ‘My students like me (she wrote), but they don’t run to hug me like they do to her and I’d feel uncomfortable if they did ... I try to create a fun atmosphere and be relatable, but when a couple of students described me as ‘chill’ I realised I probably wasn’t creating an environment where they were working to their full potential.’

Clearly, Helen’s approach to reflection is shared by colleagues and therefore takes place in a supportive and constructive environment. In so far as an effective relationship between teaching and learning is regarded as fundamental to one’s sense of achievement and purpose, Helen and her colleagues focus on the pedagogic transaction that customarily defines their professional identity. For Helen, however, reflection can be far more personal and private when she considers the tone and nature of interpersonal relationships with her students. In such moments, she negotiates the distinction between the teacher she is happy to be, working within conventional parameters, and the person she knows herself to be. Her subjectivity is secure and her new identity as teacher is being carefully crafted, but the two suggest a potentially uneasy relationship.

## **Derryn**

Derryn has been teaching for three years. He has taught in a number of schools around Melbourne. Like many recently graduated teachers seeking permanent employment,



Derryn is a CRT, or casual relief teacher. In this role, he can be offered work as a teacher relieving permanently employed teachers with virtually no regard for the subjects he has been trained to teach and at whatever distance he is prepared to travel to a school. He has chosen to reply to my inquiry by writing under the title 'Empathy, Reciprocity and Sincerity: Reflecting on Teacher/Student Relationships and Feedback as a CRT'. Unlike the previous two correspondents who were permanently located within schools, Derryn's is a voice from the ranks of itinerant teachers who daily take up this challenge.

Derryn begins by using an incident in NSW in 2017 in which racial and personal abuse were directed at an indigenous poet by a Facebook group with over 70,000 members to frame the larger point he will go on to make. When a friend of the poet was asked by a student why any of the abuse was her business, it seemed to Derryn that the context in which he worked daily came more starkly into focus. 'This example is analogous to how social relations (within) the institutional structure of the school can be artificially divorced from what we would consider normal social relations outside of this context (he wrote). This incident is perhaps a reflection of this condition ... of how context skews social relations ...' Teaching in a world in which social media operate as 'a proxy for face to face relationships' offers challenges Derryn faces every day as a relief teacher; challenges that constitute a virtual context from which both teacher and students come and go, and which begs the question of which, if either, is a/the 'real world.' He asks: '(H)ow more or less real is the social media environment these abusive comments were aired in? Are they just not one of but many contexts we are all of us required to act within on any given day? Institutional, interpersonal or public?'

Derryn's reflection on relationships, context and what is appropriate behaviour in any context, it becomes clear, has a particular point. He writes:

In my classroom recently, a student told me I reminded her of a sock puppet character on a TV show ... She showed me a screen shot – it wasn't flattering. In what other context can a relative stranger make a pejorative comment about your appearance without repercussion? While this at once makes a great ice breaker and an enlivening springboard for discussion (imagine ... what type of conversation would ensue if you approached a random stranger on the street to kindly compare them to a sock puppet), and is admittedly one of the pleasures of teaching (that is – dealing with the myriad, pure, unfiltered opinions and ramblings of teenagers), on the other hand sometimes it is mildly disconcerting and sometimes downright rude and disrespectful.

Being well aware of the subtleties that attend the notion of respect in relations between teachers and students, Derryn reflects on the appropriateness of any response he might make in the situation he has described:

... the language around respectful behaviour is tricky as it doesn't adequately reflect the power imbalance ... between teachers and students in schools. In the example of disrespectful behaviour (above) I need to mentally walk a line between taking it personally and seeing it as an artefact of the power imbalance between students and teachers, one which – in this case – is being gently subverted through this behaviour.

As a replacement teacher, Derryn knows he has entered a school—one of many he might enter in a school term—in which a variety of rules and expectations have been set without his contribution. Reflecting on the breadth of his experience, he writes:

As a CRT, every day can seem like another day in the film ‘Groundhog Day’: you arrive, you teach and you leave without ever knowing if what you did was good or bad, or had any effect at all. Yet the next day you get up and do it all again at a different school. Sometimes you can work at a school and the only adults you have a conversation with are the receptionist and the Daily Organiser: the rest of your interactions are with students. It’s not surprising in this daily experience then that you would take as your primary source of feedback the reactions, comments and behaviour of your students. However, this feedback is often nebulous and impressionistic, and ultimately devolves into the interpersonal ...

In this context reflection, for Derryn, is deeply and unavoidably personal. He writes; ‘When I reflect on my relationships with my students in my own practice as a teacher, I always prefer to emphasise the interpersonal dynamic of mutual respect between us as individuals rather than respect as obedience. When I do this the words I more commonly use to define this sentiment are empathy, reciprocity and sincerity. This devolution to the interpersonal and reciprocal in many ways reflects my isolation from regular institutional professional reflective practices of permanent teaching staff.’ What ultimately matters to Derryn is that ‘(he strives) to make (his) interactions with students reflect a relationship that could just as easily exist outside the school, without the interference of bestowed authority’. After all, he may not be there tomorrow to follow up.

On those occasions when an appointment extends beyond a day or two to perhaps a term, Derryn may find himself teaching outside his subject area. For example, on one occasion he was required to teach Wood Technology. On another, when he was asked to teach Year 11 Business Management for two weeks it stretched out to a full term. In this case, he was able to reflect on what he was doing as a result of ‘staff room chatter and resource sharing, and regular staff and subject meetings.’ As term stretched on, he was able to integrate his approach from ‘tactical behaviour management ... into school wide behaviour management, discipline and well-being procedures (and he) came to rely more upon the skills, advice and resources of more experienced teachers (and seek) feedback from staff as to how (he) was doing in (his) role and what the expectations of that role were,’ but the dominant experience and the one that shapes Derryn’s expectations, is that of isolation. Feedback, whether given in a so-called ‘professional’ context by teachers or by students in their own vernacular way—even in the ‘professional’ context of the classroom—is, by itself, not reflection, regardless of whether or not it contributes to it. Perhaps, to a CRT seeking to assert his or her identity as a teacher, and whose subjectivity is constantly in the balance, feedback is enough. As Derryn confides: ‘Feedback for teachers is an essential element needed to achieve positive outcomes for students and teachers alike, because we don’t know where we need to go and what we need to change if we don’t know where we are, and we can’t know where we are if we exist in a vacuum.’

## Finally

Three teachers, three discussions and three stories are being shared with you as readers and as colleagues. One can hardly ignore the impression gained of three teachers, each in his or her own way, trying to reflect professionally in ways they have been taught in relation to a discourse of professionalism established in the language of professional standards. Nor can one ignore the impression of three teachers for whom reflection has become a way of understanding themselves as they are being drawn into and defined by the dominant discourse of teaching and learning. Reflection for them has at the same time become a parallel discourse of interiority and selfhood; a way of asserting a sense of self and of challenging sources of instability to the selves they take themselves to be. Of course, in one sense one should not read too much into what after all are presented as anecdotes, but what can such anecdotes tell us? The issue is not whether some sample of a hundred or a thousand early career teachers might reveal other trends—and they might. The issue here is that these stories and others like them tell us about individual persons: to read them, even abbreviated as they are, is to enter into their worlds, into their experiences. All three are reaching out as persons, irrespective of role or position or office, to be present to colleagues and students, whom they see in varying degrees as persons too. The contexts in which and on which they reflect illustrate their struggles to reconcile the demands of the professional world they have entered as either fabricated or authentic ‘teachers’ with the sense and extent of ethical engagement they call upon within themselves to adopt. In the slippage between reflecting on technique, standards and the demands of the local on the one hand and reflecting on the civil, the good and the true on the other, what these stories reveal is the emergence of the teacher as ethicist—the teacher as one who, at this time more than ever, speaks to know and care for themselves as they seek to know and care for others. This, we would argue, cannot and should never be a passing phase in the career of a teacher: it is too deeply embedded in what educative encounters are and should be. The question for teachers, then, is to what extent has their pre-service and in-service education adequately prepared them for this transformative experience? Might it be enhanced further by pursuing an authentic sense of self by engaging with the issues raised through the chapters of this book?

But there is still more to be distilled from this experience. Loss of the anticipated ‘ontological security’ of being a teacher, or fear of such loss, is often confronted as ‘existential anxiety’ and has been recognised by Giddens (1991, p.9) who claims that it heightens our awareness when experienced as ‘an encounter with specific moral dilemmas.’ As can be seen, each of these early career responses as a personal and existential felt need to ‘rediscover teaching’, as Biesta (2017) has claimed ought to be done. The ‘loss of teaching’ tends to occur due to the neoliberal performative culture teachers find themselves in, which is exacerbated by what Biesta identifies as the ‘politics of learning’. Once such a rediscovery is made, we argue that teachers, preferably in their communities rather than in isolation, ought to then ‘reclaim’ teaching that is authentic, *educational* and embodies a greater sense of freedom and

meaningfulness that is more appropriate for a democratic society. We trust that these chapters might contribute towards such a reclamation as teachers continue to enhance their professionalism and (re)claim the career which is theirs.

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