The Immorality of Education: A position paper for Educational Psychologists
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Abstract

Aim In this paper I start with the premise that democratic education (as a service to the future) is under threat. For educational psychologists to consider where they might stand in relation to their professional future, therefore, I set out to provide indications of psychological factors implicated in answering the question ‘Can education in a troubled world help us become human and more inclusive?’

Context In the current socio-economic and political climate and the increasing commercialisation of schools, educationalists can find it hard to sustain a positive role and purpose. As teachers’ identities and sense of efficacy are eroded, the recruitment of teachers is becoming increasingly problematic and attrition rates are rising. Simultaneously the rate of exclusion of young people from main stream education is not decreasing and several subgroups are over-represented amongst those excluded. I argue that this has major implications for educational psychologists.

Method To provide a basis for a reformulation of psychologists’ work I examine the philosophical and psychological basis of the professional identity of teachers and the effects of misunderstanding and mistreating teachers’ beliefs in themselves. This requires consideration of inter- and intra-personal dialogues and, particularly for psychologists in their work with teachers, the nature of relationships with others.

Findings I argue that only by reaffirming teachers’ sense of creativity, autonomy and agency can education cease to be a mechanistic exercise in social engineering with no fixed goals and rediscover the simpler and more profound purpose of helping people to be human. I conclude that there are ways that educational psychologists might seek to change in order to challenge the dehumanisation of education.

Key Words: Morality; Educational Psychology; Humanity; Inclusion

Introduction

‘The ethical task is to extend a welcome.’ (Shildrick, 2005, p. 43)

In this paper I will attempt to analyse my understanding of what has become of education in England over the past few decades. My concerns about what has been done to education are that in England for sure (but almost certainly in the rest of the UK and in many other countries as well) education in schools is now no longer a democratic and humanizing journey of discovery. Instead, it has become a process in which arbitrary facts have to be ‘deposited’ in students (Freire, 2005); teachers are required to demonstrate objectively that sufficient facts have been ‘learned’; schools are ranked on the basis of students’ test scores; and that schools are being turned into commercial enterprises accountable to shareholders – not the local community. Under such performative regimes, teachers are disabled from being human and unable to help others (students and colleagues) become human. As a result, I suggest, too many teachers, children and young people are being denigrated. I seek to

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reveal some of the major factors that, if addressed, might help avoid the further dehumanisation of education and the exodus of teachers and young people from the mainstream of education. As Margrit Shildrick illustrated (in the quote above), in becoming human, we have to be able to extend a welcome to others, including others that challenge our ways of being.

These others include ‘the rebellious Other’ that Shildrick identified in Derrida’s work, and the ‘unregenerate Adam’ that Dewey posited as emerging whenever the prevailing method of obtaining results are by force rather than communication and enlightenment (Dewey, 1954, p. 154). In order to become human it is necessary to both welcome and include others and allow ourselves to change. This is not an invocation to overturn the orthodoxy of the moment but to recognise, welcome and critically befriend the problematic.

Some Contextual Problems

England has one of the most unequal income distributions amongst the most affluent countries of the world (Dorling, 2017). International evidence shows that income inequality is associated with a range of adverse social outcomes (Dorling, 2015, 2017; Pickett & Wilkinson, 2009). In relation to educational factors, recent data (DfE, 2017a; 2017b, table 7a) show that, for instance, in 2016 in England:

- although 47,490 qualified teachers entered the profession, 50,110 left, continuing a high rate of attrition;
- 6,685 children and young people were permanently excluded from schools in 2015/6; of these
  - Boys 3 times more often than girls;
  - Pupils of Black Caribbean heritage over 3 times more likely to be excluded than all others;
  - Children eligible for FSM, 4 times more likely than those not eligible;
  - Children with recognised and supported ‘Special’ Educational Needs were 7 times more likely to be excluded than children without identified SEN.

The Task

In any event, but as exemplified by this data, I propose there are sufficient grounds for wanting to develop educational systems and processes that are wholly inclusive of all members of society and to help us co-exist peaceably with our neighbours, everywhere. We learn from our interactions with others and, therefore, need to be able to interact with each other and gain in understandings of each other. On those grounds alone education should have as its purpose that which John Macmurray (1958 / 2012) proposed: to help us learn to be human.

We only become human through interactions that have respect for the other as part of humanity. I don’t think the local (English) task is insuperable; the international task may take longer. However, we can take heart from the evidence that it is possible to conceptualise, implement and sustain more enlightened educational practices (such as exist in Finland)². Although I have not attempted to examine those alternatives in any detail here (I hope to do that in the future), in order to change the ethos for education in England (and, I suspect, elsewhere), I suggest we will benefit from a better understanding of psychological factors that affect what teachers do and how they do it (Gibbs, 2018).

It is pertinent to ask if the task of ‘becoming human’ has changed over time. I do not think that it has changed, although technological, political and economic circumstances have changed. In a 2016 paper by an American Professor of nurse education, Beverley Whelton, she said that whilst robots
can and do provide ‘care’ in the sense that in hospitals they dispense medicines, food, heating, lighting etc,

‘While culture and technology are powerful, dynamic, and perspective altering, they [robots] change what it is to live life as a human, but ... they do not change what it is to be human.’ (Whelton, 2016, p34)

But the task of becoming human starts from the beginning of time. The radical psychiatrist of the 1960s RD Laing commented that ‘At birth the stone age child meets the 20th century mother;’ and John Dewey said something similar (in the vernacular of his day) about the recurrent need for us to help humans become human beings from the beginning:

‘Each human is born an infant... immature, helpless, dependent upon the activities of others.’ (Dewey, 1954, p. 24)

Thus, I suggest, the essential task of becoming human has not changed. Further, while I am not suggesting that the evolution of the human species has ended (I hope it has not), I fear that the environment in which our socialising genotype and our phenotypes develop, the environment for our development and education, is corrupt. That could, in due course, signal the end of humanity. Education and social developments may (and arguably should) be in a reciprocal relationship. Educators have a role in communicating cultural standards fit for the future. Reciprocally, society determines the standards for transmission. If, as is probable, social standards have been hijacked by the tyranny of a political ‘philosophy’ (neoliberalism) of dubious heritage, we are right to be concerned for the future and for the reciprocity that exists and is integral to human development.

By taking this critical stance, we may see how various factors operate and what alternatives may be provided by philosophical and psychological enquiry. In order to be able to do this and respond creatively, in the words of David Hansen,

‘the first word must be given to people who in their everyday lives create space for their impulse toward openness and hold in check the temptation to shut doors.’ (Hansen, 2016, p. 122)

I suggest that one of the principal roles for teachers, as enablers of learning, is to hold open doors through which others may venture and explore wider horizons. Perhaps we might also consider if applied psychologists could have a greater part to play in encouraging and facilitating such exploratory behaviours. However, while I may be able to describe some of the flaws that I see, it is not for me to direct what needs to happen.

**What I see as harmful and immoral about education in 2017**

A few years ago I held a seminar for academic educationalists. The group included teacher educators, educational researchers, and educational psychologists. I asked them to form small mixed groups and discuss what they thought the purpose of education was. I knew I was being naïve but was curious about what measure of agreement might emerge. The variety of views was enlightening but I was surprised by the lack of consensus. I think I now understand a little better why a greater consensus was not apparent.

When I considered my own views of the purposes and practices of education, I wondered about the moral imperative for education: how should we treat other people? My simple conclusion is that the treatment of teachers as both human beings and ‘educators’ could currently be described as ‘immoral’. But while I wondered if I should be more provisional and describe it as ‘amoral’, the more I read of Dewey and Macmurray’s work, and the work of philosophers such as Kwame Anthony Appiah and Derek Parfit, the more I have been persuaded that education should be grounded with a
moral purpose – and, critically, that at the moment it isn’t. On that basis and a review of what I have presented here, my conclusion is still that in our society the position most teachers find themselves in is unethical, and that the way they are treated is immoral. I say this with some caution. Much of my earlier education was based in a positivist paradigm of scientific enquiry (and I still hold, as a scientist, that we should not be doing things in education, with young people, for which we do not have good theoretical and empirical warrants. I remind students that I would be loathe to take medicines that had not undergone rigorous trials.) However, I now also agree with Gert Biesta (and others) that

‘if we wish to say something about the direction of education we always need to complement factual information with views about what is considered desirable. We need, in other words, ... to [also] engage with values.’ (Biesta, 2015, pp. 12-13)

I am also now much more wary of seeking the generalisations that positivism can seduce us to believe are appropriate, since such aspirations are deeply problematic in learning how to relate to people with other faiths and cultures (Appiah, 2007a).

Thus, while not all that I can conclude and suggest is objectively warranted, we need also to engage in philosophical enquiry. Enquiry that will carefully examine the ethical and moral aspects of what is happening and what could, as far as it is possible to foretell, happen in the future. In that spirit, of course, I would be happy to debate with others my conclusions and consider alternative perspectives. But I am clear in my mind that there are ethical and moral implications for education. Policy makers, practitioners and researchers need to talk with each other about these.

What I am trying to illustrate are the dangers of uncritical (and, quite possibly, barely conscious) seduction by neoliberal economic and political policies. As Biesta and others have argued, education (from early years’ settings to universities) is now in thrall to an a-philosophical and dehumanising performativity, and the emphasis is on individual effort and success8. It is obvious that there is now ample proof that, as Einstein said, ‘Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.’ In education the countability fallacy is manifest, for example, in the crude systems universities employ to gather and quantify feedback on teaching; and in schools: the priority given to the use of ‘correct’ punctuation by 16-year old students (never mind what they are trying to say, just let it be correctly spelled and punctuated.4) Commenting from the viewpoint of a different conceptualisation of school-based education (in Finland), Pasi Sahlberg has said of the market-driven educational systems that we in England, USA and other countries experience,

‘The current climate of accountability in the public sector often threatens school and community social capital and damages trust, rather than supports it. As a consequence, teachers and school leaders are no longer trusted; this decline of trust is a crisis of suspicion... Although the pursuit of accountability provides parents and politicians with more information, it also builds suspicion, low morale, and professional cynicism.’ (Sahlberg, 2010, p. 57)

Although economic policies and political (rather than educational) decisions have affected the management and ethos of schools, and inevitably teachers’ practices, some of what ails education has a much longer history and more persistent discourse. Much of this has to do with the various methods of, and rationales for, segregating and labelling groups of children and others (parents, for instance). These practices are mainly grounded in a range of notions of disability and educability, and the spurious notions of ability; but they also reveal other unpalatable constructs about culture, race and ethnicity. Likewise the legally endorsed practices of labelling children with ‘special’ or
‘additional’ educational needs and excluding many of these (and others) from the mainstream of education.

As the neoliberal mantra extols the virtue of competition and competitiveness, so schools are implicitly encouraged to shed those students who might otherwise prevent their school from being the ‘best’. (This embodies a paradox that neoliberal practices cannot resolve: choice versus competition. Parents are, in principle, given the right to choose the school they would like their child to attend. Schools, in order to succeed in the competition stakes, are also given the power to choose which pupils they will admit or exclude. The cost to a school of being more inclusive is often too great when weighed against the prize of measured ‘success’. [5]

In such a culture, in which political and economic directives from on high trump intra- and interpersonal dialogue - meaningful dialogue between learners (teacher and taught), it is hard to see how the professional and creative autonomy of teachers, their sense of agency, can thrive. Indeed, as Mark Priestly, Gert Biesta and Sarah Robinson have suggested

‘the combined influence of at least two decades of intrusive input and output regulation may well have to a large extent eroded teachers’ capacity for agency and have taken away important resources and opportunities for the achievement of agency from their practice.’

(Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015, p. 125)

The philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah has written similarly to say ‘Developing the capacity for autonomy is necessary for human well-being...’ (Appiah, 2007b; emphasis in original)

The ‘capacity for autonomy’ is for me, as Bandura also implied, intimately related to the development of beliefs in efficacy and knowing that one is able do what is needed to achieve certain outcomes. But, as Appiah also stressed, this cannot be autonomy at any cost. It cannot be the perceived autonomy of a tyrant. One would hope education was not a form of tyranny; but then many will argue that the undemocratic supplanting of state (local or central government) responsibility for education by commercial interest is a form of tyranny. To remain a democratic and human society we remain indebted to each other for our identity and existence. We cannot survive without each other and, therefore, must respect each other. Autonomy, carries ethical responsibilities, and these are at the heart of education. The work of Tajfel, Lacan, Levinas and others, based as it was in the extremes of ethnic and religious hatred, has provided understanding of how we can too easily mistreat others. Henri Tajfel’s work, and the more recent work of Nick Haslam and his colleagues, has shown that by categorising and grouping people, by essentialising difference, we legitimate exclusion, and build in suspicion and the grounds for hostility. If, in educational systems we continue to treat teachers, students or communities as members of objectified categories and exclude (disenfranchise) those who don’t ‘fit’, we cannot be surprised by interpersonal and intercultural hostility. We must, I urge, extend a welcome to others.

What do I mean by ‘others’ and my self?

Jacques Lacan said

‘The point is not to know whether I speak of myself in a way that conforms to what I am, but rather to know whether, when I speak of myself, I am the same as the self of whom I speak.’(Lacan & Fink, 2006, p. 430)

One of the consequences that I think follows from taking an essentialist and reductionist view of identity (aside from categorisation and stereotyping) is that it suggests there lies an ultimate causal origin behind the identity. Some sort of homunculus, perhaps. It seems to me that such an approach is both theoretically and practically problematic. Jacques Derrida sought to challenge this by posing
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the conundrum ‘Must not the structure have a genesis, and must not the origin, the point of genesis, be already structured, in order to be the genesis of something?’ (Roy, 2010, p. 176; emphasis in the original.) The solution for Derrida (and others drawing from the well of phenomenology first tapped by Hegel (1977)⁶), was to construct identity in terms of differences. Just as we notice something when it moves (for instance, a bird that flies up from the camouflage of the leaves in a hedge), so we distinguish identities by comparison with what they are not. Ultimately this is a relationship with ‘otherness’. Edward Sampson used this deconstruction of essentialism as a cornerstone of his relational view of identity. Sampson also drew on Derrida in saying:

‘The essential reality of a given object can appear only by virtue of the unstated other that is necessary for the object’s identity to appear as such. In short, otherness is the basis for all identity, thereby undoing the essentialist view of identity and requiring that each identity be understood in terms of differences.’ (Sampson, 2008, p. 90)

With reference to the work of Lacan and Levinas, I suggest we can see that we are, primarily, defined by our difference from the Other but refract different differences from each other (including ourselves) that we encounter day by day.

For now let us note that the preceding also spells out that I do not think we can conceive ourselves to be isolated, entirely self-sufficient beings (autarchs). We exist in interaction with others (pace Margaret Thatcher, society does, necessarily, exist⁷), and, in turn, others cumulatively contribute to our view of ourselves. Others affirm that we exist. Whether or not it is necessary to label each other as members of a particular social group (or tribe) is another matter. Whether or not we choose to accept our given labels is also a matter for discussion (elsewhere).

A radically different envisioning of the self (‘I’), others, continuity and identity can be found in the work of Levinas who recognised the tension between identity (sameness), and the re-discovery and re-creation that follows interaction with others:

‘To be I is, over and beyond any individuation that can be derived from a system of references, to have identity as one’s content. The I is not a being that always remains the same, but is the being whose existing consists in identifying itself, in recovering its identity throughout all that happens to it.’ (Levinas, 1969, p. 36)

Drawing on phenomenological and psychoanalytic theories, Levinas’ philosophical perspectives on humanity provide a view of the experience of identity development and survival in the face of threat and change. It is also important in the way it provides for a deeper understanding of interrelationships (in terms of ‘intersubjectivity’) with others. Levinas gave us a language and concepts that enable us to interrogate the power dynamics within our beliefs about, and corresponding existential encounters and interactions with, others. His theoretical view of subjectivity and intersubjectivity shows how developmentally we distinguish our selves from others, while being bound by an abiding, over-riding ethical responsibility for others:

‘The irreducible and ultimate experience of relationship appears to me to be… not in synthesis, but in the face to face of humans, in sociality, in its moral signification. But it must be understood that morality comes not as a secondary layer, above an abstract reflection… morality has an independent and preliminary range. First philosophy is an ethics.’ (Levinas, 1985, p. 77)

Hubert Hermans suggested a similar, but more clearly dialogic, construction of self, that I find appealing, granting the notional self greater autonomy in being able to adopt a multiplicity of positions:
‘The self is not only “here” but also “there,” and because of the power of imagination the person can act as if he or she were the other... If one insists that an individual creates an imaginal other, it can equally be maintained that an individual experiences the imaginal other as creating himself or herself.’ (Hermans, Kempen, & Van Loon, 1992, p. 29)]

Thus, I think we may come to recognise the opportunity in each and every encounter with an other to respect the encounter as bestowed with meaning, responsibility for care, and creativity. Levinas held that morality and justice derived from the ethical requirements of individual interactions - and the mediation of these in the context of the host of competing interactions in which we each engage throughout life:

‘How is it that there is justice? I can answer that it is the fact of the presence of someone else next to the Other, from whence comes justice. Justice, exercised through institutions, which are inevitable, must always be held in check by the initial interpersonal relation.’ (Levinas, 1985, pp. 89-90; emphasis added)

Or, as John Macmurray (1957/1991, p12) said

‘Against the assumption that the Self is an isolated individual, I have set the view that the Self is a person, and that personal existence is constituted by the relation of persons.’

What I propose as alternatives

‘Thus, our challenge is pedagogical and curricular, that is, to reconstruct a more inclusive notion of ‘the other’ locally. In my view, this is the socially just response on behalf of public education for which we are responsible. The challenge is to shift our intellectual and dispositional activities taking into account values and beliefs held by ‘the other,’ be they religions, ineffable ideas, and different common sense reasonings on experiences.’ (Bogotch, 2017, p. 234)

In saying this Ira Bogotch was very clear that he was not calling for an end to critiques of neo-liberalism, rather seeking ways of challenging neo-liberalism and reconstructing alternatives. To do this we (educational psychologists, for example) need to be open to possibilities and critical of orthodoxies. Broadly speaking our strategies might either be political and pragmatic in order to find a modus vivendi with neoliberalism; or to work within the educational and empirical traditions and reconstruct viable radical alternatives. Either way we need to be working and communicating with each other and with those who have the greater investment in education: teachers, parents and students. The statement (above) of the need to ‘reconstruct a more inclusive notion of ‘the other’ locally’ clearly emphasises the importance of schools working with their local communities; of the importance of positive reciprocal relationships and dialogue between school staff and the community.

For education to have a valid moral purpose, as Pasi Sahlberg (2010, 2015) has argued, we need to replace suspicion and anxiety with greater trust, and strengthen collective responsibilities. But Bogotch has also warned that if educational researchers (and, I suggest, this includes educational psychologists) do not communicate and advocate views that advance and support reconstruction we risk ourselves becoming elite marginalised others. In this respect and in all others it is crucial that interpersonal interactions are respectful and enabling. We are, as I have stressed, dependent on each other for our well-being. In order for us to be human and humanising we must require education to be built on, embody, model and develop such inter-relationships. This might start by reconsidering how teachers as educators are treated. (And as we do this we might meditate on how
as Educational Psychologists we are an Other for the teachers we meet in the course of our professional work. We also need to reflect on our heritage as part of the SEN ‘Industry’ as Sally Tomlinson (2017) has called it. I agree with Tomlinson that educational psychologists have not always done enough to oppose segregation or argue for inclusion.)

Dewey (1954) recognised that learning to be human is experimental and never complete. But it will never be realisable without moral principles as well as systematic and continuous curiosity and research. Becoming human and the development of understanding and interrelationships should be a fascinating process. It should enthral psychologists. This seems to be (inevitably?) much harder when society, education and educationalists are dehumanised. The ethical way of being and becoming is, therefore, optimistic, educational, communicative and interpersonal. Bogotch underlined the important role for school leaders in creating opportunities and a culture of ‘change’. But school leaders are, I think, sadly too often isolated and berated for the failure of schools. (It is possible for applied psychologists to play a very helpful role as critical friends for schools leaders, managers and teachers (see, for instance Gibbs & Miller, 2013; Miller, 2003)). However, to leave it at that (and I don’t think Bogotch intended to) is to risk ‘othering’ teachers, schools’ constituents, and their communities. Education can be, as David Hansen, has said, a route to being cosmopolitan, to have ‘the capacity to be open reflectively to the larger world, while remaining loyal reflectively to local concerns, commitments and values.’ (Hansen, 2016, p. xiii)10. Teachers enter the profession ‘wanting to make a difference’. The enthusiasm and vision they can bring is integral to enacting change and enabling the collective beliefs and practices of the entire staff in schools. To embrace the difference that new teachers can create is to simultaneously welcome the other and the diversity of others. Although my language here fails me, in saying what I have just said I do not intend to categorise or label anyone. Through such recognition comes learning. The role of teacher entails the acceptance of others as different and as individually different. Accepting this is part of the process through which we each become who we are, becoming individual persons in our different circumstances, discovering our different motivations and interests. However, as Parfit, Appiah and others have recognised, selfishly seeking our own self-interests may not be either ethical or moral, nor, ultimately, in one’s own best interests. In his book ‘Reasons and Persons’ Parfit proposed that

‘Even if I never do what, of the acts that are possible for me, will be worse for me, it may be worse for me if I am purely self-interested. It may be better for me if I have some other disposition’ (Parfit, 1984, p. 5)

Parfit argued that pursuing a purely selfish aim is, ultimately, self-defeating and suggested that therefore ‘It may not be irrational to act, knowingly, against one’s own self-interest’ (Parfit, 1984, p. 317). The logic here is that autonomous acts can be better if other directed. So, Parfit concluded,

‘It is rational to do what one knows will best achieve what, after ideal deliberation, one most wants or values, even when one knows this is against one’s own self-interest.’ (Parfit, 1984, p. 461)

I think that for those of us involved in education (and I include here, in principle, all educational psychologists), this implies that when reviewing what value we have said we might also need to out-think short-term and politically selfish interests by reasserting moral and ethical imperatives and long-term social goals. However, as Kahneman and others have shown us, we do not always think (or react) rationally, particularly under pressure (Kahneman, 2011). Thus Partfit’s ‘ideal deliberation’ may not truly reflect everyday reality. But we are not automatons merely reacting to external stimuli that, aside from physical phenomena (such as gravity, the weather etc), come from a host of other people who are, likewise, not ‘automatons’. Thus, because we can articulate these beliefs (because we say so) and convince ourselves this is true, we have, as Appiah paraphrased Kant, ‘to act as if
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freedom is possible even though we can’t provide any theoretical justification for it.’ (Appiah, 2007b, p. 56)

We are, as Appiah emphasised, none-the-less responsible for each other. To derogate another, for instance positioning her / him in the ‘outgroup’, to separate, categorise, segregate her / him, is itself immoral. In this disrespect for others lies the immorality of education and the assault on teachers, children and young people that currently dehumanises education. To overcome these difficulties we need to reinvent language and the conventions of communication so that we do not innocently other or position others where their voice is not allowed or heard.

Thus to supplant the immoral and divisive cultures that corrupt education by constraining and alienating educators, my practical suggestions for applied, educational, psychologists are as follows:

- Respect teachers as autonomous, creative professionals and members of learning communities;
- Encourage collaboration, within schools (teachers working with teachers, co-teaching), within schools and communities (teachers working with parents and children), across schools and schools (learning together);
- Enhance the status of teachers, their initial education and further opportunities for learning;
- Abandon the ‘inspection’ of schools; support school development;
- Abandon standardised testing of children;
- Take a stand against colluding in othering others. Classification need have no place in our vocabularies. EPs should disinherit themselves of at least this aspect of the ‘Burt legacy’.

While these might seem grand aims at some remove from the every-day practice of many EPs caught up in the web of entrepreneurship, traded services and performativity, these could form the context and agenda for the discussions and interactions we need to have with individual teachers, head-teachers and, on occasion, no doubt, school governors.

Returning to where I started, by asking ‘Can education in a troubled world help us in becoming human?’ but taking the more pragmatic question posed for schools (and all educationalists) by Sahlberg: ‘How [can we] deal with external productivity demands on the one hand, while simultaneously teaching with a moral purpose?’ we might conclude (and agree as part of an operational functions for EPs) by asserting, as Sahlberg did:

‘Schools will not be able to educate their students, unless they have:

a) Internal conditions that respect their professional intuition, knowledge and skills to craft best learning environments for their students;

b) A social context and necessary social capital in their community that provide encouraging and supportive conditions of and will to learning for their students; and

c) Adequate external norms and expectations that rely on responsibility and internal accountability to reach good learning for all students.’ (Sahlberg, 2010, p. 48)

However, I will conclude more metaphysically. Derek Parfit’s book ‘Reasons and Persons’ is an intensely logical (reasoned) account (story) of what is entailed in being an ethically and morally aware ‘person’. In this paper I have attempted to weave together philosophical and psychological narratives about teaching and teachers, their moral and ethical positioning and how these affect their identities and efficacy. About half-way through his book Parfit arrived at a conclusion about himself, his identity and his view of himself in interaction with others. He had already concluded that his ‘identity’ as a person was not a ‘fact’ separate from his physical and psychological existence. Arriving at that conclusion was for him a liberating experience:
‘When I believed that my existence was such a further fact, I seemed imprisoned in myself. My life seemed like a glass tunnel, through which I was moving faster every year, and at the end of which there was darkness. When I changed my view, the walls of the glass tunnel disappeared. I now live in the open air. There is still a difference between my life and the lives of other people. But the difference is less. Other people are closer. I am less concerned about the rest of my own life, and more concerned about the lives of others.’ (Parfit, 1984, p. 281)

References


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Notes

1 By focussing on England I do not want to suggest that I advocate a narrow nationalistic stance. Since the data are, I think, only strictly applicable to England, I am merely being careful not to suggest that other parts of the UK are necessarily in a similar predicament.

2 The Finnish educational system being a prime example of education in which teachers are well trained and held in high esteem, performativity is spurned, and inclusion is encouraged (for a full account see Sahlberg, 2015).

3 This central issue is neatly summarised by Pasi Sahlberg (2010, p. 48) who noted the ‘emerging educational dilemma: How to deal with external productivity demands one the one hand, while simultaneously teaching for a knowledge society with moral purpose?... Competitive pressures for higher productivity, better efficiency and system-wide excellence are affecting schools and teachers. Competition over students and financial resources are shifting schools’ modi operandi from those based on moral purpose towards those that emphasise productivity and efficiency, i.e. measurable outcomes, higher test scores, better positions in school league tables, and thereby greater individualism.’

4 A detailed critique of the problems associated with use of test scores to evaluate teaching performance has been provided by Baker et al. (2010)

5 It has been noted that ‘Excluding weaker students from tests, student and administrator cheating, and systemic corruption are already found in many schools and districts, as ‘survival responses’ to increased testing and the race for resources and fame’ Sahlberg (2010, p. 52). However, lest anyone think that the most impoverished environments would be most likely to host cheating, in past few days (August 2017), teachers at two of the most ‘prestigious’ independent schools in England (Eton and Winchester College) have been reported to have given their students advance warning of questions in forthcoming public exams. On 30th...
August 2017 The Guardian’s headline read ‘Weaker pupils ‘dumped’ by top grammar.’ It is reported in the accompanying article that ‘Parents and teachers have criticised the school for behaving like an “exam factory”, focussing purely on results and school league tables at the expense of students’ education and welfare.’ It is interesting to note that it seems that both parents and teachers are concerned.

6 See also Ferro (2013) for a detailed and accessible gloss on Hegel’s work.

7 Margaret Thatcher: “And, you know, there’s no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look after themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then, also, to look after our neighbours.” – *in an interview in Women’s Own in 1987*

8 As I noted earlier, we (Gibbs & Powell, 2012) found, for instance, that when school staff felt they and parents worked well together the rate of pupil exclusion was significantly lower than from schools in otherwise similar situations.

9 Bogotch was highly critical of researchers ‘contradictory complicity’. ‘Our communicative incompetencies – with respect to practitioners and the public – is at least, on the surface, a contradiction to the school reforms we describe and advocate and the coalitions we help and hope to build around the world’ (2017, p. 240).

10 I have not had space to give adequate attention to concepts of cosmopolitanism. For Hansen, however, cosmopolitanism brings together opportunities for cultural and educational creativity (Hansen, 2005, 2014, 2016). See also what Kwame Anthony Appiah said in his book ‘Cosmopolitansim: Ethics in a world of strangers’ (Appiah, 2007a).