Practices, Narratives, and the Telos of Educative Teaching

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ABSTRACT: MacIntyre's concept of practice when combined with his notions of narratives and tradition provide a view of educative teaching which should enable practitioners, present and future, to give a full account of their life's work. Teaching of this kind can be understood as an ethical enterprise, founded on principle, with a rich tradition in which the narrative is not merely someone else's story but one in which the practitioner can see oneself playing a meaningful part. This combination of clear conceptual framework and strong ethical ends and the intertwining of these ends and their particular means with the acceptance of personal narrative within that of the tradition of the practice should allow us to defend the enterprise of educative teaching against those who would seek to reduce schooling to mere socializing to present needs, or preparation for corporate employment and allow it to flourish in the future.

RESUME: Le concept sur la pratique de MacIntyre lorsqu'elle est associée à ses idées de narration et de tradition, apporte un point de vue sur l'enseignement pédagogique qui ne devrait vraiment pas permettre aux utilisateurs, d'aujourd'hui et de demain, de tenir compte de leur vie professionnelle. On peut comprendre un enseignement de la sorte comme une affaire d'éthique fondée sur un principe doté d'une riche tradition où la narration n'est pas simplement l'histoire de quelqu'un d'autre mais, l'histoire dans laquelle l'utilisateur peut jouer un rôle significatif. Le mélange de la structure d'un concept clair avec une éthique marquée et leurs propres applications dont l'usage de la narration personnelle et cela, en ne dépassant pas les limites du cadre traditionnel de la pratique, devrait nous donner la possibilité de défendre une méthode d'enseignement enrichissante contre quiconque chercherait à réduire la scolarité à une simple affaire sociale correspondant aux besoins actuels ou, devrait nous permettre de préparer un avenir prospère pour l'emploi dans l'entreprise.

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I wish to propose a view of educative teaching, which requires that the concepts, principles, and virtues necessary to carry out such an enterprise be regarded as means for the achievement of the good life for man. In other words "the relationship of means to end is internal and not external" (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 184). What MacIntyre is arguing for is a relationship of means to a "given end when the end cannot be adequately characterized independently of a characterization of the means" (p. 184).While the means are secondary to ends, for without an end, such as the good life of man, it will not be possible to understand what the means are and how they are to be applied, nevertheless the end does not exist independent of the means. They are necessarily entwined with each other and cannot be used separately without undermining the true nature of the enterprise. Thus if the means are 'internal' they cannot be regarded as a non-telic technique or method and the end cannot be seen as an irrelevant ideal in the daily operation of affairs.

I would argue that educative teaching is such an enterprise, whose means are internal to the achievement of the end, which is education itself. Following the thread of MacIntyre's argument, I think it is very useful to characterize those means as virtues. "A virtue is ... a quality the exercise of which leads to the achievement of the human telos" (1984, p. 184). MacIntyre characterizes the core conception of virtue as having three stages in its logical development. These stages are the concept of a practice, the narrative order of a single human life, and what constitutes a moral tradition. I will be further elaborating on this conceptual background outlining later in the paper in order to show that educative teaching can be included within its logical framework. But first, a definite notion of educative teaching must be established which will do justice to the range and seriousness of MacIntyre's ideas in this regard.

Educative teaching means that the teaching that is done in an educational context will be "logically related to wider educational considerations" (Carr, 1986. p. 115). Carr's point is one that is important when education is seen as part of a practice and not merely a set of psychological or technique based skills. If teaching is to occur in an educational setting it will be " internally related to wider considerations of educational value and purpose (and) influenced by factors that are not up for individual teacher or pupil decision" (p. 115). These considerations of educational value are ones that relate to "questions and standards of truth, knowledge, understanding decency and all else that gives value and significance to human life and endeavour, and questions of

organization, management and control must always remain subservient to these" (p. 120).

Those who view education as a normative concept are obviously concerned to analyze it in terms of defensible values. This kind of view, what Hamm (1989) calls the general enlightenment view, is put forward most often by philosophers of education of a liberal persuasion such as R.S. Peters (1966). Peters maintains explicitly that education implies that something worthwhile is being done, and that it is from the norms in question that the "aims of education" are deduced. He poses the question of What constitutes an educated man? How does one distinguish such a person from one who is merely trained, informed, or indoctrinated? This point is crucial, because in many of the examples of the use of education given earlier these distinctions were not made. The criteria Peters uses to judge where education is taking place are:

- education implies the transmission of what is worthwhile to those who become committed to it;
- education must involve knowledge and understanding and some kind of cognitive perspective, which are not inert;
- education at least rules out some procedures of transmission on the grounds that they lack wittingness and voluntariness, on the part of the learner. (p. 22)

These criteria also imply a situation in which the individual consciously and voluntarily develops his or her knowledge and understanding of the world. To be involved with this, Peters maintains, is a transformative process, "for it is by education that mere living is transformed into a quality of life." But this implies no single end, as is often found in training; in Peter's words, "to be educated is not to have arrived at a destination; it is to travel with a different view" (1966, p. 8). This does not mean, however, that the individual can choose "bingo and billiards" and still be educated, for not all desirable things have educational value. Education in this sense is not a general term for the process of fitting people into a society, but has a specific normative meaning that will in itself impinge upon the nature of the culture which embodies it and thereby change the concept culture as well.

At the heart of human culture is an ancient conversation that began with us as humans; it is equiprimordial with our emergence as a species and forms a most powerful metaphor for education. Oakeshott sees this conversation as the model for human discourse "because it recognizes the qualities, the diversities, and the proper relationships of human utterances" (1933, p. 197).

> As civilized human beings, we are the inheritors, neither of an inquiry about ourselves and the world, nor of an accumulating body of information, but of a conversation, begun in the primeval forests and extended and made more articulate in the course of centuries. It is a conversation, which goes on both in public and within each of us. Of course there is argument and inquiry and information, but wherever these are profitable they are to be recognized as passages in this conversation, and perhaps they are not the most captivating of the passages. (Oakeshott, 1933, p. 197)

For Oakeshott, this conversation forms the heart and soul of education rather than the process of the short term socializing the masses or the prudent preparation of elites. To become an educative teacher is to enter into a continuation of a living tradition, because education,

> Properly speaking, is an initiation into the skill and partnership of this conversation in which we learn to recognize the voices, to distinguish the proper occasions of utterance, and in which we acquire the intellectual and moral habits appropriate to conversation. And it is this conversation which, in the end, gives place and character to every human activity and utterance. (Oakeshott, 1967, p. 198)

It is into this conversation that each child must be drawn by the teacher. Peters provides the criteria for educative teaching while Oakeshott gives us tradition as a conversation in which it lives. Both are necessary if education is to be seen as a practice.

What is significant about both these views of education is the extent to which Peters and Oakeshott see education as embedded in a wider cultural realm. This context is not one which is necessarily fixed but has within it the capacity to be conversed with. This dialogical process is at the heart of the educative enterprise and as Charles Taylor (1991) maintains in his work on the formation of selfhood within modernity it is a necessary part of the emergence of an "authentic self." In articulating an authentic life a person is also defining themselves.

> This is the background understanding to the modern ideal of authenticity, and to the goals of self-fulfillment, or self-realization in which its is usually couched. This is the background that gives moral force to the culture of authenticity, including its most degraded , absurd, or trivialized forms. (Taylor, 1991, p. 29)

Taylor's notion of an ethic of authenticity, wherein the individual's involvement in the formation of his or her own selfhood necessitates that it take some socio-cultural form, be it the family, the church, or the school. In other words it requires a cultural component, an ethical

intent, and an institutional setting. The institution that carries out the majority of this process in today's world is the school.

Oakeshott (1989) questions the need for such formal settings with all its paraphernalia of learning; why cannot we just pick up an education as we go about the business of living our lives? His answer is that "being human is an historic adventure which has been going on since the earth rose out of the sea," and the "paraphernalia of learning" are "the only way we have of participating in this adventure" (Oakeshott, 1989, p. 28). The adventure takes place in a cultural setting and,

> Human understanding is inseparable from learning to participate in what is called a 'culture'... A culture is not ... something we can set before ourselves as the subject of learning, any more than we can set self-understanding before ourselves as something to be learned; it is that which is learned in everything we may learn. (Oakeshott, 1989, p. 28)

Thus all human cultures have within them what Taylor calls "horizons of significance." These form a framework within which the "conversational encounter" (Oakeshott, 1989, p. 28) that forms self-understanding takes place and without which the dialogical self-formation could not take place. The paradox of these ideas is that an authentic self can only be formed dialogically within a cultural horizon that is not controlled by the individual will. To try and control it and form a self monologically leads, in Taylor's view, to the degraded forms of individualism that are so common in today's world.

Educative schooling can play an important role in developing such dialogical practices and must do so in a manner that has no extrinsic goal, other than the formation of good selves. In Oakeshott's words:

> Education, properly speaking, is an initiation into the skill and partnership of this conversation in which we learn to recognize the voices, to distinguish the proper occasions of utterance, and in which we acquire the intellectual and moral habits appropriate to conversation. And it is this conversation which, in the end, gives place and character to every human activity and utterance. (Oakeshott, 1989, p. 198)

It is into this conversation that each child should be drawn. But a careful distinction must be made concerning the particular aspects of the conversation which are particularly educational. Given the limitations of time, what ideally ought the curriculum be? Oakeshott alludes to the curriculum as formed by certain "languages of understanding." These languages contain sub-categories, such as "the language of the natural

sciences ... the language of history, the language of philosophy, or the language of poetic imagination" (1989, p. 37). These component inquiries, however, while having substantive differences have, according to Oakeshott, a common formal character:

> Languages in a more commonplace sense are organizations of grammatical and syntactical considerations or rules to be taken account of and subscribed to in making utterances. These considerations do not determine the utterances made or even exactly how they shall be subscribed to; that is left to the speaker who not only has something of his own to say but may also have a style of his own. (1989, p. 37)

Thus to be able to speak in these particular modes of understanding requires an inventive engagement on the part of the individual but the speaker must also learn the particular conditions each language imposes on his utterances. It is not originality which is necessarily important here, but learning to make utterances that display genuine understanding of the language spoken. In Oakeshott's words,

> Each of these languages constitutes the terms of a distinct conditional understanding of the world and a similarly distinct idiom of self-understanding. Their virtue is to be different from one another and this difference is intrinsic. Each is secure in its autonomy so long as it knows and remains faithful to itself. (1989, p. 38)

Furthermore, because these languages have a long history, they cannot be learned merely through attending either to their formal qualities or to contemporary utterances (p. 38). Neither do they represent some underlying unconditional world view that can be obtained through integrating them; they can only be joined, in Oakeshott's view, in a conversation. This concept of languages of understanding holds within it not just some sense of the diverse nature of knowledge, but also some indication of the manner in which a person may acquire them, that is, through a conversation with the world, both natural and cultural (p. 211).

Educative Teaching as a Practice

I suggest that to teach in an educative manner, as outlined above, is to be involved in a *practice* such as Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) lays out when he argues that a practice is:

> Any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of

> activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (p. 187)

Thus the kind of goods nurtured in educative teaching should be those which are internal to the particular practice of educating. External goods, however: such as, prestige, status, money, are always generic, and their achievement is not necessarily to be had by engaging in some particular kind of practice. The goods internal, on the other hand, can only be specified in terms of and by means of examples from particular practices and can only be identified and recognized by the experience of participating in the particular practice in question, which means that those who lack relevant experience cannot judge these particular goods and excellences. Furthermore, the achievement of internal goods by a person does not necessitate the lessening of any other person's potential achievement. To the contrary, they are fostered ideally as the result of cooperation and add to the good of the whole community, in so far as all who participate in the practice. The excellences which are fostered in this way are both inherent in the achievements and the activity that leads to their formation, so that the process/product dichotomy so popular today is otiose.

Furthermore, a practice such as educative teaching can only be understood as a form of life in which participants live out a greater or lesser part of their time as practitioners. Judgments associated with internal goods require the kind of competencies that can only be acquired by someone willing to live out the kind of life and the commitments which are part of the practice. Thus to willingly enter into a program for initiation into a professional practice, such as educative teaching means to accept the authority of its standards and the initial inadequacy of one's own performance as judged by experienced practitioners.

Thus in preparing educative teachers the narratives of the practice must always work in concert with its conception of appropriate ends. Education as a purposeful enterprise is teleological and only by understanding this can we hope to fulfill its promise concerning the good, the true, and the beautiful. In the absence of both narrative understanding and telic purposefulness teachers are in danger of becoming debilitated by process or skill talk, or being tempted to pitch themselves in desperation into a narcissistic pool of subjectivism.

During the initiation of students into the professional practice of educative teaching, the language used in getting them to conduct and comport themselves appropriately should invoke the goods internal to the practice as instantiated in its concepts, rules, and narratives. The reality of a practice is that it cannot exist independently from the language used to carry it out, which is constitutive of the practice and contains many of its implicit norms.

However, the participants in a practice such as teaching, despite being involved in an activity governed by language and rules that are publicly held, also have certain self-descriptions which enable them to describe what is going on when they are carrying out their teaching and form an essential component of engagement by the individual in such a practice. These self-descriptions are an essential condition of engaging in such a practice, and while they may be confused, mistaken, and to a great extent pre-theoretical they are constitutive of being a participant in the practice. Taylor (1985, pp. 92-94) calls these the "constitutive self-understandings of practice" which not only enable participants to describe the situation but also to help them define and shape their work.

The forming of these constitutive self-understandings while entering into a practice are a crucial part of any teacher education program. Of particular importance are the conversations between mentors and student teachers. While often these enable students to appropriately express their intentions prior to a teaching session and to reflect and evaluate their performance after the teaching has taken place, they must also concurrently assist in forming the students' constituent self-understandings of practice as part of the collective understandings of the social practice of educative teaching.

However, the conversations must be set within the framework that underlies any teacher education program. This framework should help guide both the initiation of students into the skills and norms of the profession but also through the kinds of dialogues noted above into the narratives and traditions of educative teaching. These narratives and traditions are part of learning about the profession but must also invite the pre-service student to begin their own narratives and enter into the living tradition within which the practice is maintained. This framework should help guide the teacher's future in a deeper and more fundamental way than all the techniques of classroom management and tricks of teaching. Today with the cacophony of calls for change and the shrill proclamations of technological determinism that seem to govern much

of the talk, it is essential that teachers regard themselves as participants in a practice that has historical and ethical roots.

One of the more significant theories of practice and community that fits in to these discussions can be found in the work of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991). Their work has lead to a significant rethinking of theories of learning and teaching and introduced the idea of a "community of practice." The crux of their argument is that when a person is involved in a community of practice then learning is not just an individual thing, but takes place within these communities in a collective, social form that involves much more than technical knowledge. There emerges a sense of shared practice and common ideas, memories, nomenclature, routines, and symbols that facilitate the business of the community, but that also instantiate certain norms and standards.

Of particular interest to pre-service teaching programs is the idea of "legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). This provides a conceptual basis for the way in which beginners in their initial participation in a community of practitioners are able to gradually come to master the knowledge and understandings necessary to become competent novice professionals. Lave and Wenger's ideas provide a way of conceiving how the developing of constituent self-understandings of practice occurs as a result of participation in a community. The stress is less on the internalization of learning but more that learning should be seen "as increasing participation in communities of practice (that) concerns the whole person acting in the world" (p. 49).

As I have argued to enter a practice is not a simple question of acquiring certain contemporary skills. MacIntyre stresses that it is also necessitates becoming part of a tradition. This means that the practitioner must:

> Enter into a relationship not only with its contemporary practitioners, but also with those who have preceded us in the practice, particularly those whose achievements extended the reach of the practice to its present point. It is thus the achievement, and a fortiori the authority of a tradition which I then confront and from which I have to learn. And for this learning and the relationship to the past which it embodies the virtues of justice, courage and truthfulness are prerequisite in precisely the same way and for precisely the same reasons they are in sustaining present relationship within practices. ((MacIntyre, 1984, p. 194)

The entering of such a tradition is made possible in any area of inquiry and action by the fact that much of the tradition is held within the narrative, which constitute the practice. MacIntyre is helpful in laying out what this entails, as he maintains that in:

> Every particular enquiry there is a narrative to be written, and being able to understand that enquiry is inseparable from, implicitly or explicitly, being able to identify and follow the narrative. Correspondingly every philosophical account of enquiry presupposes some account of how narratives of particular enquiries should be written. And indeed every narrative of some particular enquiry, insofar as it makes the progress of that enquiry intelligible, by exhibiting the course of its victories and its defeats, its frustrations and endurances, its changes of strategy and tactics, presupposes some ordering of causes of the kind that is only provided by an adequate philosophical account of enquiry. (1990, p. 39)

MacIntyre sees such narratives as essential constituents of not only philosophical enquiry but of all enquiry, but claims that today these are characteristically deleted and even denied when the outcomes of such enquiries are made public. His assertion is that this negation of essential narratives in the working out of problems to do with metaphysics, truth, rationality, and intentionality leads to the exclusion of the teleological positions propounded by Aristotelian philosophy. These narratives, even if they do not presuppose the teleology and first principle of Thomist thought, nevertheless, are an essential part for anyone to account for how they have achieved their understandings and their practices. In order to get around the gulf between Thomism and contemporary philosophy MacIntyre proposes the construction of something akin to what Nietzsche called a "genealogy:"

> The genealogical narrative has the function of not arguing with but of disclosing something about the beliefs, presuppositions and activities of some class of persons. Characteristically it explains how they have come to be in some impasse and why they cannot recognize or diagnose adequately out of their own conceptual and argumentative resources the nature of their predicament. It provides a subversive history. (MacIntyre, 1990, p. 58)

These narratives, however, are inherently normative and even if they do not explicitly say so,

> Presuppose standards of truth and rationality independent of the enquiries, founded on something other than social agreement, but rather imposing requirements upon what is rational to agree to,

> and directing the inquirer towards the achievement of a good in the light of which the inquires' progress is to been judged. (MacIntyre, 1990, p. 59)

We can leave the question of telos aside for the moment but note in terms of MacIntyre' claim, that anyone studying education or involved in its practice would be in danger of not being able to make their theories or practices fully intelligible and rationally defensible without some narrative of this sort.

Conclusion

MacIntyre's concept of practice when combined with his notions of narratives and tradition provide a view of educative teaching which should enable practitioners, present and future, to give a full account of their life's work. Teaching of this kind can be understood as an ethical enterprise, founded on principle, with a rich tradition in which the narrative is not merely someone else's story but one in which the practitioner can see oneself playing a meaningful part. This combination of a clear conceptual framework and strong ethical ends, the intertwining of these ends, and their particular means with the acceptance of personal narrative within that of the tradition of the practice should allow us to defend the enterprise of educative teaching against those who would seek to reduce schooling to mere socializing to present needs or preparation for corporate employment and allow it to flourish in the future.

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