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Bring Back Teaching

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BRING BACK TEACHING

A Research Paper by

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Introduction: a little conceptual analysis

What does it mean to teach? Or, to be asked another way, what is a teacher rather than a trainer or instructor?

This question is rarely asked because the answer seems so obvious. We all use the words 'teach' and 'teacher' without difficulty and we can all point out 'teachers' when we visit schools, colleges or universities. Although 'to teach' does not entail 'to instruct', 'to instruct' would seem to entail 'to teach' – or does it? Can one instruct but not teach?

Just in case there is any ambiguity, the meaning of these words has been analysed by philosophers in a way that provides greater clarity in usage. Only philosophers, you might think, could find such analysis of the obvious a worthwhile form of employment. But, for the record, there is a well-rehearsed answer to those who (in the ever decreasing courses in the philosophy of education) ask these questions. It goes roughly along these lines:

The first step, invoking the authority of Gilbert Ryle, is to distinguish teaching as a 'task word' from teaching as an 'achievement word'. Thus, to say that someone is teaching (a task word) is to describe a particular sort of activity – namely, that of someone trying to get another person to learn something. As an achievement word, it is to claim that someone has successfully learnt that which the teacher was trying to get them to learn. If the intended learner never learns

anything as intended (that is, there is no teaching in the sense of achievement), then one might question whether teaching is an appropriate description of the task – and in so doing, eliminate many so-called teaching activities from what we mean by ‘teaching’.

Teaching, therefore, involves someone – the teacher – intending someone else to learn something (e.g. long division, the concept of ‘osmosis’) by performing an activity which is:

- both logically related to learning ‘long division’ or ‘osmosis’
- and psychologically within the grasp of the learner

University teachers, for instance, may be called ‘lecturers’, as though lecturing is a kind of teaching. But is it necessarily so? Take for example the lecturer who year after year reads her lecture notes to obedient audiences of undergraduates. Is she teaching? No account is taken of the learners, of their readiness to understand, of their previous experience with which to connect her words of wisdom. She is lecturing, but not teaching. Or take the teacher who is given a class in biology even though he understands nothing of the subject. Teaching notes are downloaded from the Internet and followed, but without any understanding. Key ideas are to him mere words. Queries from the learners are responded to with the encouraging request to find out for themselves. No doubt, in so doing, the teacher demonstrates praiseworthy skills. But he surely is not teaching.

There needs to be a connection between what the teacher does and says (intentionally) and the learning (the coming to understand) of ‘long division’ or ‘osmosis’ achieved by the pupil.

But does our understanding of what we mean by teaching stop there? Much that does go on in schools, colleges and universities would seem to meet these simple linguistic criteria. And yet I still want to urge the subject of this paper, ‘Bring back teaching’. Why?

The impoverishment of 'teaching'

Currently, in England, teaching is frequently referred to in government documents as 'delivering the curriculum' – a curriculum devised elsewhere (not part of the teacher's job).

The tone was set in England by the Labour Government's White Paper, 21st Century Schools: *Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system*. As Beverley Hughes, the Children's Minister, declared: 'It is fundamentally a deep cultural change. It is about changing boundaries of professional behaviour and thinking in a completely different way.' (DCSF, 2008).

So, what are the clues to the 'deep cultural change' which create new 'boundaries of professional behaviour'? This 'deep cultural change' said nothing about education, and little or nothing on teaching.

The language, however, gives the clue. 'Performance' and 'performing' were mentioned 121 times, 'outcomes' 55 times, 'delivery' 57 times. Libraries get no mention in the *21st century schools*, and books only once – in the section on information technology (IT). The following statement sums it up perfectly: 'It is only the workforce who can deliver our ambition of improved outcomes.'

So, the teacher (or 'the workforce') is a 'deliverer of improved outcomes' or a trainer of those who have to hit targets – not the thinker of what those outcomes might be. As Peter Abbs so well describes the situation we are in: '...teachers become the technicians of subjects, not the critical guardians of a long culture; nor the midwives of the creative potentialities of living children.' (Abbs, 2004, p.4)

Indeed, teachers become increasingly redundant, as Information Technology systems can 'deliver the product' more cheaply and

effectively. Here we see the parallels and connections between what is happening in the USA and England. Mr. Murdoch's NewsCorp has bought Wireless Generation. This computer company produces the software which, it is claimed, can replace textbooks and indeed aid teachers. It also provides ARIS (Achievement Reporting and Innovation Systems), which can track student attendance, grades and progress, and which has been bought by New York schools. Rupert Murdoch has hired Joel Klein, once superintendent of New York schools, to help him expand into education and to now superintend Wireless Generation. It is perhaps not coincidental that the meetings between Mr. Murdoch and Mr Gove, Secretary of State for Education (reinforced, I am told, by meetings between Gove and Klein) were said to be mainly about education rather than the problems of phone hacking. According to Rupert Murdoch's recent interview in the Times newspaper; 'You can get by with half as many teachers by using his computers.' (Murdoch, 2011)

The 'new proletariat' referred to by Peter Abbs is the modernized teaching profession, has been reshaped to deliver the curriculum and to assess in terms of productivity, where the product is a measurable output. A local school recently lost a brilliant teacher of physics (she had been awarded the prize for the best physics teacher of the year by the Institute of Physics) because she refused to comply with the exercise of mapping each child in terms of predicted grades. (This was so that the borderline learners might be the focus of teaching and so that weaker students might be transferred to courses deemed easier for obtaining the requisite grades).

That description of teaching has to be understood within a broader linguistic framework of 'performance indicators' and 'audits', 'inputs' related to 'outputs', 'target-setting' and 'efficiency gains'. Schools are increasingly run by 'Chief Executives' (the title of 'head teacher' is not grand enough or does not convey the essentially management role), working through 'line managers', with teachers being the operatives, 'delivering' goods to the 'consumers' according to agreed 'targets'. Teaching therefore comes to be understood in the light of a particular

'form of life'. And that 'form of life' profoundly affects the role, training and continuing professional development of teachers.

Within such a 'form of life', an industry has been created, exposed in detail by Warwick Mansell in his book *Education by Numbers: the Tyranny of Testing*. Testing has swollen out of all proportion. So much hangs on the results of tests as they appear in the public league tables (for example, parental choice, head teachers' pay, teachers' promotion, school closure, designation as Specialist Schools, and even the occasional knighthood) that increasingly much time and effort is spent preparing students for them.

For example, the Government introduced a 'National Strategy' for secondary schools, a main task of which was to improve the 'outputs' as measured on tests. Advisors were appointed from Capita to oversee the Government's drive to improve standards. The Invitation to Negotiate (the contract which Capita won and which was part of the Public Service Agreement targets) stated the purpose of the National Strategies was:

'The ultimate objective of the National Strategy is to make improvements in the practice of teaching and learning in the classroom, and through these improvements to raise pupils' attainments as measured by National Curriculum tests. The central purpose of the contract [is] increasing the [test] attainment of pupils.' (Mansell, 2007 p. 11)

To this end, the National Strategy provided a 328 page pamphlet giving teachers (my definition of 'teachers' here is purely ostensive) 'booster classes' aimed at those at age 14 who were seeking to reach Level 5 in English. This showed 'exactly how teachers should gear their teaching to the precise requirements of the tests'. It provided 14 areas of competence central to the marking scheme, the characteristics looked for at Level 5, the things to memorize crucial to the assessment – and this refers to but one particular group within one Key Stage in one subject.

The consequence has been a devotion to test practice. Typical of the many teachers interviewed by Mansell was the following:

'I don't feel my Year 9 have learnt anything of value this term. I have done practice reading papers, writing papers, targeted writing for writing papers, and put immense pressure on them.' (Mansell, 2007)

But is this teaching?

A London school curriculum 14 to 18 coordinator, with reference to Year 9, said 'Most schools seem to be doing two to three mock tests per child before the real thing. Year 9 is totally dominated by test preparation.' (Mansell, 2007)

It is not surprising therefore that the Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Schools said, with regard to Key Stage 3 in English: 'Many teachers spend too much time preparing pupils for the tests in most schools. The whole of the Spring Term, and often time before and after, is devoted to explicit test preparation, especially as to the set Shakespeare tests.' (Mansell, 2007)

But should not this be expected? As the Report of American National Research Council declared:

'...programmes which impose sanctions and offer rewards on the basis of test results encourages teachers to teach to the test - originated in the debate started by *No Child Left Behind* which required students to pass a state-wide standardized test.' (Hout, and Elliot, 2011)

But in what sense can this be called 'teaching'?

The consequences of 'teaching to the test' have been noted in major reports on mathematics (Smith Report *Make Mathematics Count*) and on the sciences (The Royal Society) and from chief inspectors. Exams might be passed, high scores on tests attained, progression up league tables ensured. But have the students learnt anything of value? Have

they got a grasp of the key ideas and concepts upon which they can build further and deeper understanding?

The Times Educational Supplement's online discussion forum every spring gives examples from teachers worried about the pressure to abandon teaching as they understand it. For example:

'I'm busy marking GCSE course work at the moment. I know full well that vast amount of it is cut-and-paste (some had even left hyperlinks) but I am going to have to pretend I have not noticed. If I failed this whole cohort, I would be in trouble, so I won't make waves, I'll go along with cheating.'¹

Second, 'assignment frames'² set out the structures within which answers should be given. Detailed 'frames' of what to write often appear on school and local authority websites related to the exam board's detailed specifications for the different grades. Effectively they are told what to write by their teachers. The Examination Boards are aware of the problem, but not its solutions.

How far can one go before this becomes cheating, especially where the specifications for getting good grades are so explicit and where textbooks are published, by people connected with the examination boards, setting out in detail what needs to be said and done for a good grade? For example, in 2006, Edexcel produced, a new GCSE mathematics course. This, however, was accompanied by a textbook written by Edexcel for teachers 'so that you can be sure of a complete match to the new...specifications' (Moran, 2008, p. 130). But this is now universal. Each examination board produces or sponsors textbooks for each GCSE and A Level subject—teachers, thereby knowing exactly what the examinees need to write to meet the specifications of the examination and to meet the demands of the marking scheme. And there is profit to be made by Pearsons, the private owner of Edexcel,

¹ Mansell, op.cit., p.76

² See Mansell, chapter 5, pp.67-82

which sells textbooks seen to be essential reading for getting grades in the public examinations which it administers.

Third, focus of attention on the borderline C/D grades is rife, as is shown in evidence to the Parliamentary Select Committee, and elsewhere.³ The victims of this are, of course, those in the bottom percentiles of unlikely 'passes'. Not really education for all, then.

Why was this allowed to happen? How can intelligent people see that such a use of tests, such detailed specification of grade criteria, such high-stakes testing, far from improving quality of learning, narrows the curriculum to 'what counts', impoverishes learning experience, atrophies the intelligence, and turns young people off further learning? How can that be called teaching?

A broader meaning of teaching

Many of the great philosophers have had something interesting to say about teaching and teachers which go beyond the purely conceptual points made above – Aristotle, Plato, Augustine, Aquinas, Rousseau, Dewey, Wittgenstein and, of course, Oakeshott. Each offers insight into the ways in which 'teaching' has been and could be conceived, given quite different philosophical presuppositions about the nature of knowledge, about what is worth learning, about the development of understanding, about the centrality of experience, and, above all, about what it means to be human – and to become more so they see a moral dimension to what it means to be a teacher.

One cannot get an adequate understanding of a concept such as teaching (and thus of the activities supposedly captured by that concept) where that understanding is supposedly revealed simply by attending to the grammar or dictionary definition of the word. Conceptual analysis is important and does much to get rid of the

³ House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee (HofC), 2008; Gillborn and Youdell, 1999; Schagen (NFER), 2008.

'mush' which characterizes much educational policy and not a little educational theory. But, as Gabriel Moran (2008) reminds us, with reference to Nietzsche:

'Any word that has a history cannot be defined. That is, no definition can cover the historical shifts in the meaning of the term. The result of those shifts is often sharply divergent meanings within a single term. (Moran, 2008, p.130).

And his penultimate chapter on Wittgenstein reinforces this message:

'Words are like tools in a box. One has to see the tool acting within what [Wittgenstein] calls a form of life' The word 'teacher', as with any other word that has a history, is learnt and understood within 'a form of life'. The simple definition does not reflect that. And the benefit of an historical perspective lies in the way in which 'teacher in use' reflects deeper questions about different forms of life than can be captured in a bit of conceptual analysis.'

From a different social and philosophical perspective, 'teaching' partakes in a wider understanding:

- of what it means to help young people flourish as human beings
- of access to cultures which shape that humanity
- of what is worth learning

The insights gained from such philosophical deliberations challenge the impoverished understandings of 'teaching' and 'teachers' that increasingly prevail and that I illustrated above and which too often (as Dewey so persuasively argued) reduces 'teaching' to a mere 'transmission of knowledge' – itself often little more than facts and formulae – rather than to transforming that practical understanding, that social capability and that significant experiences already gained from home and community.

To understand teaching within the broader ethical and social context in which we come to use the word provides the basis for challenging current practice – as did such 'radical reformers' as Ivan Illich, Carl

Rogers and John Dewey. Dewey, for example, pointed to the consequences for our understanding of teaching where continuity of experience (between the teaching community of home and village and that of formal schooling) gets broken. Teaching for Dewey lies in the transformation of these experiences, the provision of further enriching experiences and critical reflection upon them. It is understood that to help the educational journey, the 'teacher' introduces aspects of the inherited 'wisdom of the race' at appropriate moments which may help transform those experiences. But teaching this way did not endear Dewey to his many detractors – then or now – who saw teaching as essentially a matter of 'transmitting knowledge' on the assumption that what leaves the mouth of the teacher will enter unscathed the ear and brain of the learner.

The philosophers are referred to as having their own conception of teaching – arising from their understanding of what it means to learn – of what is worth learning and of the logical characterisation of that which is to be learnt. For any conception of teaching reflects, (usually unthinkingly and uncritically) the underlying questions in the philosophy of mind, in ethics and in epistemology. The importance of seeing teaching through the eyes of these philosophers makes one aware of this, and challenges the often 'taken-for-granted' assumptions about teaching and the teacher's role within society, whether that be the Socratic method of Socrates, the emphasis by Plato on rational knowledge provided by a guardian class (Coleridge's 'clerisy' – think of the influence of Plato on the Public School and the formation of the Imperial class), the inward journey exemplified in the teacher's life in St. Augustine, the nurturing of natural development (from seed to fully grown plant) as in Rousseau and Froebel, the conversation between the generations of mankind as in Oakeshott. All embody different understandings of human nature and of learning to be human. In articulating these respective understandings, metaphors abound – those of midwife, physician, gardener, facilitator and conversationalist. There is no freedom from metaphor as we come to understand teaching as part of a social form of life which itself embodies deeper

understandings of being a person and of the relationship of personhood to an inherited tradition and the wider community.

Therefore, how we teach and what we think is worth teaching embodies deeper assumptions about the value of what is learnt, about the logical nature of that which is to be learnt, and about the relation of what is learnt to the wider culture we have inherited.

Let me illustrate this through three very different (though not in all cases mutually exclusive) ways in which teaching depends on quite different assumptions about the nature of knowledge and learning.

Teachers as guardians of a culture

I want to contrast this narrow 'technician' understanding of teaching with a very different one, articulated by Allen Bloom (1987) in his influential book, *The Closing of the American Mind*:

'The teacher, particularly the teacher dedicated to liberal education, must constantly try to look toward the goal of human completeness and back at the natures of his students here and now, ever seeking to understand the former and to assess the capacities of the latter to approach it ... The teacher's standpoint is not arbitrary. It is neither simply dependent on what students think they want ... nor is it imposed on him by the demands of a particular society or the vagaries of the market ... [the teacher] is, willy-nilly, guided by the awareness, or the divination, that there is a human nature, and that assisting its fulfilment is his task.' (Bloom, 1987, p. 19)

In the same spirit, Michael Oakeshott speaks of human beings as what they learn to become, and education is that learning enhanced through their initiation into the 'conversation between the generations of mankind' in which they have come to understand their human possibilities and their social conditions, through the voice of the arts, the voice of history, the voice of the sciences, the voice of philosophy.

This distinctive moral perspective of teaching is illustrated in the work of a teacher, Fiedl Brandejs. Visitors to Prague should enter the ancient synagogue, now a museum to the victims of the holocaust. They will see some remarkable poetry and paintings of children aged 10 to 16, very few of whom were to survive. The children had been deported to Terezina, a garrison town about fifty kilometres from Prague. The conditions were appalling, and there was a daily coming and going of prisoners – to destinations which could only be guessed at. Fiedl Brandejs managed to keep the children together in a makeshift schoolroom. A brilliant art teacher, she insisted upon high standards of technique, perspective, use of colour. Art had standards, and these had to be rigidly applied. These children saw what the adults did not see – butterflies outside the windows, rainbows in the sky, green fields beyond the gates, merry-go-rounds on which children played, dinner tables for family and friends, autumn leaves blown by the wind.

Contrast, however, these paintings with their poetry. This gave a different picture – fear, sadness, unbelief at the inhumanity of their conditions:

For seven weeks I've lived in here
Penned up inside this ghetto
But I have found my people here.
The dandelions call to me
And the white chestnut candles in the court.
Only I never saw another butterfly.
That butterfly was the last one.
Butterflies don't live in here,
In the ghetto. (Friedmann, 1942)

The human spirit grew through their poetry and painting. These embodied the struggle to make sense of their situation and their lives. That was made possible by a teacher who did not see herself to be doing anything other than being a teacher. She was, through the medium of the arts, enabling those young people to make sense, to refine their feelings, to embody the human emotions of hope and

sadness, love and fear. She remained an educator to the very end, and this educative achievement was extended to all. There were no grades for the best poem or painting. There no student was rejected as ineducable. Each person's work was a struggle to understand, helped by a teacher who was able to draw upon the resources of art and poetry.

Few in England have now heard of the Bullock Report, 'Language for Life.' Much of it was influenced by the work of James Britton and his colleagues at the London Institute of Education. It was a call to teachers of English to see the indispensable role of language for young people as they came to understand their own humanity and the society in which they were growing up. The emphasis on speaking and listening (where 'the pupils' own exploratory talk was central and where their narratives and poetry found a vice in journals they produced) stands out starkly in the world where academic prowess is assessed almost entirely in success in the proliferating tests. The National Association of Teachers of English became missionary in the promotion of social understanding through the medium of English – spoken as well as written, listening as well as speaking, There was a deep commitment to education for all, to 'pupil talk as a valuable means of learning' and to the teacher as the key agent in that mission.

The teacher within this tradition is not the 'deliverer' of government or business directives, but is the custodian (often in opposition to such directives) of the values, embedded in the culture we have inherited, through which we have a vision of 'human completeness'. The teacher is there to preserve and pass on that vision of human achievement in knowledge, understanding, aesthetic appreciation, and practical creativity. In the words of Michael Oakeshott (1975, p. 17), 'man [sic] is what he learns to become: this is the human condition'.

Similarly, Bruner's three questions which, he argued, should shape social studies curriculum put it well. What makes us human? How did

we become so? How might we become more so? This distinctively moral role of the teacher is crucial in a liberal society supporting a critical tradition based on evidence and argument, drawing on 'the best that has been thought and said' whereby young learners might be liberated from those powerful forces (politicians, snake-oil sellers, profiteers). Yet one sees this role gradually eroded in an impoverished concept of teaching, even in a Government White Paper entitled *The Importance of Teaching*.

The teacher is the key person in this, the custodian of that which is worth learning and the agent of social reform through the distinctive values of the school. When Dr. Marjorie Reeve was appointed to the Central Advisory Council for Education (England) in 1947, she was told by the Permanent Secretary, Reginald Maude, that her first duty was to be prepared to die at the first ditch, as soon as politicians get their hands on education. Politicians or their civil servants are not the experts on what and how to teach.

Teachers as curriculum thinkers

Not long ago, though no longer in the bureaucratic memory, this vision of teachers as actively thinking about the curriculum in terms of the human development of young people seemed to prevail. The raising of the school-leaving age in England from 15 to 16 in 1971 with a view to a 'general education for all' required radical rethinking of what education was for. That rethinking required a partnership between teachers and the wider community. For that purpose there was established the Schools Council. As the civil servant, Derek Morrell, the first Secretary of the Schools Council, argued in his Joseph Payne Memorial Lecture reflecting upon the need for such a Council:

'Education has become much more than a system for maintaining an elite from one generation to another, or for conferring status on those who seek, or are lucky enough, to be educated beyond basic literacy and numeracy. We now consider that our educational purposes include the development of individuals to their full potential: increasing the amount of talent available within the

community: the development of intelligence, quality in personal relationships, and indeed in the whole life of our society.' (Morrell, 1976, p. 7)

To this end, Morrell argued for links between what the school offers and the communities of experience (home, neighbourhood, local occupational groups) from which the learners come. This should meet the 'urgent demand for help in thinking about the nature of the human condition, and the purpose of life itself'. That, for Morrell, meant shifting the curriculum emphasis from the impersonal to the personal (the learner making sense of his or her experience in the light of what the wisdom of the past has to offer). The classroom thus becomes a place where this dialogue takes place between the learner (trying to make sense of experience) and the teachers (facilitating that growth of understanding through providing access to the wisdom of the past) – indeed, where the classroom becomes a place where, in the light of that inherited wisdom (through literature, the arts and so on) the teacher 'shares his humanity' with the pupils.

A new and distinctive role of the teacher in this response to social change and to the pursuit of 'education for all', was the central concern of the Schools Council. Teachers should no longer be seen as 'deliverers of the curriculum' or 'the transmitters of knowledge', but the mediators of the best of what we have inherited in our understanding of the human condition (through the arts and humanities, though sciences and mathematics, through moral and religious traditions). School teachers need not only to have a deep understanding of those different traditions but also the pedagogical skills to relate them to the modes of understanding, experiences and concerns of the learners themselves. To that end, it was seen necessary to: '...consider the role of the teacher in relation to the actual conduct of research ... problem solving research, shading into development work.' (Morell, 1976, p.22)

Morrell's vision required of the teachers an active role in curriculum development (not 'delivery'). This in turn required knowledge of the

subject or practice to be taught, respect for the experiences and concerns of the learners, shared exploration with other teachers of pedagogy and shared systematic enquiry into problems faced. There flourished for a decade or so, mainly in the many Teachers' Centres sponsored by the Schools Council, shared and research-based curriculum development in the humanities, the arts, sciences, technology and mathematics.

It requires, also, a research approach to teaching. Laurence Stenhouse referred to teachers as researchers, formulating the grounds on which they made curriculum decisions, testing these grounds in practice, reformulating them in the light of experience, sharing them with other teachers in the light of evidence gathered. So began a tradition of action research, well accounted for by John Elliott, one of Stenhouse's team.

Teacher as creators of a democratic social order

Much of what is said above would have John Dewey nodding in agreement. But there was something distinctive about Dewey's understanding of educational aims which translated into a distinctive concept of teaching. Being a member of a community, and learning how to contribute usefully to it, was the essence of being human – and thus the criticism of schooling, far from contributing to community cohesion, militated against it. Dewey's most comprehensive educational writing was called, significantly, 'Democracy and Education'. There he refers to 'education' as: '...a social function, securing direction and development in the immature through their participation in the life of the group to which they belong.'

It was an essential task, therefore, of teachers to create a community within the school where teachers and students grow through working with others and through learning to take account of the beliefs of other people. Segregation from people of different backgrounds was the very antithesis of education. And the development of a sense of community

within the school would gradually extend beyond the school and into a sense of citizenship.

This emphasis on teaching as an essential component in the development of a democratic order is reflected the social and economic conditions of the time. Thousands of immigrants from all over the world were arriving in the United States from different economic, ethnic and social backgrounds. The common school had a key part to play in developing from such disparate communities a common culture and mode of understanding. For Dewey, education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform and indeed in one extravagant moment he described the teacher as 'the true prophet and usherer in of the kingdom of God.' (Dewey, 1897, 77-80)

Laurence Kohlberg saw that no amount of exercises in moral reasoning (whereby the learners would reach a cognitively higher level of moral judgement) would lead to better or changed behaviour. That integration of thinking and doing required the appropriate moral ethos. 'Just behaviour' is nurtured in a 'just community'. Personal virtues are supported in virtuous communities. It was in Dewey's democratically run community school that Kohlberg found inspiration for his own 'Just Community Schools'.

In summary, the current demand for moral education is a demand that our society becomes more of a just society. If our society is to become a more just community, it needs democratic schools. This was the demand and dream of John Dewey.

This particular understanding of teaching – its essential duty in preparing young people for a democratic social order – stands in stark contrast with one in which the teacher focuses mainly or exclusively on the personal good, individual achievement or government dictated targets. It should treat with abhorrence the current managerial practice

of concentrating on borderline cases in national tests in order to raise the profile of the school.

As Melissa Benn (2012), in her recently launched book *School Wars*, argues, this pursuit of the personal good through social segregation is contrasted with a very different educational ideal as she observes the young people at her own daughter's inner-city comprehensive school:

'Watching regular class performances and special assemblies in which children from an extraordinary spread of social, ethnic and religious backgrounds lined up shoulder to shoulder, it felt as if we had stumbled across – or held the key to, at least – some kind of practical utopia. I was moved by a profound sense of possibility, the honest belief that all our children could be educated together, successfully, the common good confirmed and extended by a mix of state resources, staff commitment, and parental and community engagement.'

Where, however, education is seen as making accessible to all young people the cultural resources through which they can acquire the knowledge and practical capabilities for a more distinctively human life, then the systematically developed evidence base for teaching becomes important. The expertise of the teacher lies in the practical knowledge gained from experience and critical reflection on that experience in the light of relevant research. Such critical reflection is necessarily permeated by values concerning the aims of education, the relation of education to human fulfilment and to social progress. It requires, in secondary education for all, the philosophical spirit – the constant questioning of 'what counts as an educated person in this day and age?'

Preparation of teachers

Preparation for teaching cannot be adequately covered in the initial training. Experience and the systematic reflection on experience are crucial. Therefore, the reclamation of teaching from being mere trainers and deliverers requires systematic professional development, organized by teachers themselves through their professional associations. Once such mutually supportive professional development

was assisted in England by a network of Teachers Centres. Now, no longer.

And the role of higher education in all this? There has long been a suspicion amongst politicians that education departments in higher education have been part of the perceived problem – promoting child-centred views in the 1960s and 1970s, teaching theory disconnected from practice, engaged in research which had little or no impact. Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Education under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, told me when I was newly appointed in Oxford, that I, in introducing teachers to John Dewey, was the cause of all the problems in our schools. This sentiment was repeated 20 years later over lunch by the present Minister of Higher Education, David Willetts. We are presently seeing a shift away from Higher Education in the initial training of teachers. In England, there will be 100 designated 'teaching schools'. Eventually there will be 500. Teaching schools will work in partnership both for initial training and for continuing professional development.

Although these teaching schools will have university partners, they are now in the driving seat, and courses in universities are closing down. Is this a good thing? Is not a partnership between schools, colleges and universities necessary in the joint custodianship of the knowledge, appreciation and values which we all need to preserve and transmit? These are too important to hand over to politicians and their agencies.

Bring back teaching: conclusion

If there is to be education for all, there must be a profound respect for teachers and their expertise. That expertise lies in, first, the knowledge of the subject matter to be taught (for example, reading and numeracy skills, craft skills or subject content); second, an understanding of and care for all learners whatever their background or ability; third, the pedagogical skills to link subject matter to the concerns and learning

abilities of different pupils; fourth, the philosophical questioning of the aims of education both to inform their practice and to criticize those (politicians and civil servants, and leaders within the profession) who seek to reduce them to mere 'deliverers of outcomes'. Teachers are essential to the preservation of what is vital to civilized living and to our understanding of what it means to be human – in a world which too often is inhuman and diminishes the dignity of the most vulnerable.

This might seem a tall order. Do all teachers have that depth of knowledge and skill? Perhaps not. But that is why continuing professional development is so crucial – where teachers work together in supportive teams, identifying problems to be faced, building on the subject and craft knowledge they bring with them into teaching, engaged in a research based approach to their teaching, constantly prompted to ask deeper ethical questions about educational aims and the relation of educational practice to questions of social cohesion and social justice. If they are not the experts, then no one else is.

Surely, those deeper ethical considerations, in response to the ultimate questions about the aims of education (namely, 'What counts as an educated person in this day and age?' and 'What are the qualities, the virtues, the knowledge, the skills, we should be developing in such a person?') must focus on what it means to be human. It was that question that inspired Morrell in the establishment of the Schools Council ('the urgent demand for help in thinking about the nature of the human condition and the purpose of life itself' and where 'the classroom becomes the place where the teacher shares his or her humanity with the pupils'). It was that question which, in response to the impoverished idea of the standards prevailing in American schools, made Bloom urge the teacher 'to look to the goal of human completeness'. It was that question which (though within a different pragmatist philosophical tradition) inspired John Dewey to see the school and its teachers as the foundation of social progress and reform.

Perhaps all this is most eloquently put by the head teacher of the American High School whom I met when visiting Kohlberg's Centre for

Moral Development at Harvard. Each year she sent this letter to her new teachers.

'Dear Teacher,

I am the survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness: Gas chambers built by learned engineers, children poisoned by educated physicians and infants killed by trained nurses. Women and children [were] shot and burned by high school and college graduates. So, I am suspicious of education.

My request is: Help your students become human.

Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmans. Reading, writing, arithmetic are important, but only if they serve to make our children more human.'

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