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Educational Experience, Pedagogical Research and the State's Interest

Doświadczenie edukacyjne, badania pedagogiczne oraz interes państwa

Abstract: This contribution makes the case that education has inherent purposes which distinguish it as a human practice; purposes that are distinct from those of the state. The philosophical and historical ancestry of these purposes is explored. This exploration reveals that educational experience is more properly understood as a live encounter with inheritances of learning than as a matter of transmission. The teaching of religion is taken as a concrete example to highlight this key difference. Where the state fails to recognise the inherent purposes of education, these purposes can become compromised. Accordingly, educational practice may fall victim to different kinds of domination. Some historical and more recent examples of such domination are identified and considered, as is an example of a healthy relationship between the state and educational practice. The consequences of the investigation for pedagogical research and practice, and for the proper relationship of the state to education, are then reviewed.

Keywords: experience; practice; intrinsic goals; encounter; inheritances of learning.

Abstrakt: Artykuł rozwija argumentację na rzecz edukacji, mającej nieodłączne (sobie właściwe) cele, które ją wyróżniają jako ludzką praktykę i które są odmienne od celów państwa. Badanie filozoficznego i historycznego pochodzenia tych celów ukazuje,

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że doświadczenie edukacyjne jest nie tyle kwestią transmisji (przekazu), ile żywym spotkaniem z dziedzictwem uczenia się. Aby naświetlić tę różnicę, odwołano się do przykładu nauczania religii. Tam, gdzie państwo nie rozpoznaje celów własnych edukacji, owe cele są wystawione na szwank, a praktyka edukacyjna może paść ofiarą różnych form dominacji/panowania. Kilka historycznych i bardziej współczesnych przykładów takiej dominacji zostało rozpoznanych i wziętych pod uwagę, łącznie z przykładem zdrowej relacji między państwem a praktyką edukacyjną. Pozwala to na koniec sformułować wnioski dla badań pedagogicznych i praktyki, ale także na temat właściwej relacji między państwem a edukacją.

Słowa kluczowe: doświadczenie; praktyka; cele wewnętrzne; spotkanie; dziedzictwo (praktyk) uczenia się.

1. Introduction: abundant aims and possessive relations

There has rarely been any shortage of aims proposed as the most worthy ones for educational effort. The more common historical reality, at least in Western civilisations, has been an abundance of educational aims. These were often mutually contradictory or diametrically opposite aims. Far from being a blessing, this abundance often provoked recurring conflicts. Different parties sought to achieve supremacy for their own preferred 'philosophy.' Consequently, the work of schools and colleges routinely received its tenor from a set of beliefs and values that had gained dominance in a particular society. This dominant mindset was often a tradition of religious teachings hostile to other traditions. Or it might be a political ideology, ranging from royalist to nationalist, to fascist, to communist or whatever. It might be a racist, gendered or otherwise exclusionary creed. It might be a mercantile outlook that sought to harness the abilities of youth to the requirements of economic progress. In any case, it invariably involved a hierarchical and possessive relationship between the state (or the church as an institutional force) on the one hand and schools on the other. Schools were regarded as a subservient arm of the state, church or other parties that won the upper hand in struggles for power and influence (Boyd & King, 1994, Chs. 3, 4, 7 and 9).

In democratic societies today, the contest between rival outlooks is still highly prevalent in influencing the purposes and policies pursued in educational institutions. Here, three different patterns can be broadly identified.

First, the proprietary attitude (presuming ownership of the minds and hearts of students) that prevailed in the past remains the norm in authoritarian states. It is also evident still in some democracies. It seeks to make schools and colleges conform to an orthodox set of values proclaimed by the government. Equally, it seeks to shut out or downgrade competing influences. Most newly independent democracies in the 20th century shared some version of this pattern, at least in their early decades of post-imperial rule. Currently, Poland and Hungary are the most notable examples of this phenomenon in Europe (Jaskulowski & Majewski, 2022; Reuters in Warsaw, 2022; Neumann, 2022).

Second, a more common pattern can be identified where such a forceful stance is tempered by a declared commitment to pluralism by democratically elected governments. Such pluralism usually means that the state recognises, and often funds, a plurality of school types. The range includes state schools and private schools, religious schools of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim and other denominations, single-sex and co-educational schools, academic and vocational schools and schools that might include combinations of the above types. In such pluralism, the state funds, fully or partly, schools that promote diverse values and beliefs, provided they remain within the confines of the state's laws (Meany, 2019). For the most part, however, the relationship here between the state and the education system remains a hierarchical one, to a greater or lesser degree. In some cases, moreover, elected governments still intervene extensively to make the different kinds of schools conform to the government's designs. Law-based funding policies are employed as the most effective instruments for rewarding such conformity and for punishing non-compliance.

The neo-liberal educational reforms arising from the Thatcher administration in the UK and the Reagan administration in the US from the later 1980s onwards are a case in point. They provide striking examples of how pluralism – in this event a variety of school types – can go hand-in-hand with increased state control of schooling in a democracy. The apparent pluralism of such systems at the level of policy commitment enables something else, usually something exclusionary, to prevail at the level of practice. So, while a proprietary stance is still evident in some democracies, the second pattern is more prevalent. It requires a name that calls attention to its paradoxical character. The phrase 'centralist pluralism' may serve to do this. Centralist forms

of pluralism are not proprietary in the historical sense described above. Yet, they maintain a possessive attitude towards public education.

Third, there is another understanding of pluralism that seeks to have a plurality not of school types, but of humankind *within each school*, as far as possible. This was the original idea of the public school system in the United States in the 19th century. However, Catholic authorities shunned them and established their own schools. This was because of ‘Protestant’ practices in the public schools, such as Bible-reading without an accompanying approved interpretation. Similar stories can be recounted from the experience of other countries in the 19th and 20th centuries. Finland is probably the most prominent and successful contemporary example of the idea of plurality *within each school*. But it is a new kind of example, affirming in the first instance *purposes that are themselves intrinsically educational*, that are educational before they are anything else. Such an example discloses new possibilities for the relationship between the state, on the one hand, and the educational enterprise, on the other, as carried on by its practitioners, including school leaders.

Taking Finland as an instance of the intrinsic educational pattern, we will conduct a brief survey of these forms of newness, contrasting them with more traditional patterns. This should provide more incisive insights into the nature and scope of the state’s interest in education. It may also prepare the way for a more inclusive and more fruitful consideration of that interest.

2. Outgrowing Historical Confinements

During the last three decades of the 20th century, Finland achieved something of an educational revolution. Its educational system changed from the kind described in the second pattern above to that described in the third. A probing report on these historical developments was published by the World Bank in 2006 (Aho, Pitkänen & Sahlberg, 2006). In addition, the consequences and significance of the Finnish changes were reviewed in detail in Sahlberg’s book, *Finnish Lessons: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?* first published in 2011 (Sahlberg, 2021). The single most noticeable change, which also stimulated other far-reaching changes, was that the country developed a unique system of common schools. The newly established local common school (*Perouskoulu*) became the natural place for all students in a town or

district to attend, while also removing the distinction between primary and secondary schools. Other changes included the following, summarised here from the opening pages of the report by Aho and colleagues:

- (a) 'focusing on holistic development of personality that included knowledge, skills, values, creativity and interpersonal characteristics' (Aho et al., 2006, p. 3);
- (b) devolving educational leadership from the central to local hands and ensuring that such leadership embodied not merely managerial tasks, but more importantly, 'the responsibility and right to lead the continuous development of the education system' (ibid);
- (c) achieving equality of educational opportunity by maintaining a nationwide network of equally good schools;
- (d) advancing justice and inclusive education by promoting diversity within schools, while ensuring that achievement gaps between the highest and lowest were kept as narrow as possible;
- (e) inculcating innovation and resourcefulness among teachers and school leaders and providing them the scope to take initiatives arising from their sense of collaborative professionalism;
- (f) building an educational consensus in Finnish society around priorities like the above and committing to long-term educational goals, thus avoiding pendulum swings in educational policy that frequently follow a change of government after a general election.

Explicit changes like these recorded by Aho and colleagues also brought about developments that were gradual and inconspicuous at the start but had transforming effects on education in Finland in the long run. In cultivating new and sophisticated attitudes to education among the public, moreover, such background developments changed the nature of the relationship between the state and educational practitioners. In doing so, they accomplished a truly historic shift that yielded a fresh understanding of the state's interest in education. There are four key points to note relating to this fresh understanding. To begin with, the conventional notion of plurality as a rivalry of educational philosophies, each fighting for a premier position for itself, waned. Long-entrenched attitudes that were largely possessive towards the work of schools and colleges yielded to more inclusive views of the country's welfare. These showed a fresh appreciation of the original nature of the contribution to be made by education to that welfare. Without these shifts in attitude, the consensus that the report

considers crucial to the success of the Finnish educational transformation would have been unlikely. Second, the recognition of the central importance of leadership by the teachers and school principals reversed a traditional view that largely regarded teachers as infantry, as foot soldiers and minor officers who carry out policies and rules decided by a body of superiors elsewhere. Instead, educational practitioners were now acknowledged as members of a profession with its own sub-domains and specialties. It had its own informed ideas on how equality and justice, as well as high achievements, could be promoted in school settings. Third, the *perouskoula* idea eliminated the often disruptive transfer from primary to secondary school. It replaced it with the notion of each school as a pluralistic community of learners who remain in regular contact with each other from their first days in school until they reach sixteen. This also enabled ongoing contact between school and home to be much stronger and more reciprocally productive than otherwise. Fourth, the long-prevalent view of education as a transmission – of values, beliefs, theories, concepts, skills, etc. – yielded to a conception of teaching and learning more as a joint endeavour, one with different kinds of responsibilities for teachers and students.

Taken together, points like these bear witness to an unforced maturing of a country's educational thinking. Where the state's interest in education is concerned, that maturity manifests itself from the state's side in its readiness to accord education the standing of independent practice. This might more accurately be called a practice in its own right, to distinguish it from practices essentially subservient to a corps of higher powers. However, the term 'a practice in its own right' does not imply independence in any absolute sense. The practice remains accountable to the public – through the state – for the public resources that are allocated to it; but it remains answerable for genuinely educational purposes, as distinct from other purposes that might be loaded on it. In this sense, parallels can be drawn with practices like medicine and nursing, which are allowed to pursue their intrinsic goals in a county's public health service. Of course, conflict between practitioners in any practice and the state may occur periodically or more often, for instance, over resources or the ranking of strategic priorities. But it would be highly inappropriate for the state to intervene to dictate the goals intrinsic to the practice itself. However, governments have more than occasionally intervened in just such ways in the past. Examples include forcing doctors to certify political dissidents as insane

or to run compulsory sterilisation or abortion programmes as part of a state's birth control policy (Reilly, 2015; Green, 2018; Halliday, 2020).

As a practice in its own right, education carries some core responsibilities. These need to be identified and distinguished from responsibilities that do not belong to educational practice, or more precisely, to education *as a practice*. The core responsibilities include the following: (a) responsibilities to students, (b) responsibilities to the subjects being taught, (c) responsibilities to colleague practitioners, including the school leadership, (d) responsibilities to parents or guardians and (e) responsibilities to the state, as the representative of the public. In all cases, such responsibilities are properly connected to the intrinsic purposes of educational practice. They do not extend to policy goals or other priorities not educational in character – goals that arise mainly from the desire of a state or other dominant body to propagate its own notions of what is desirable. Yet, such goals have frequently been imposed on schools and teachers by authorities who maintain possessive educational philosophies, as described in the first two of the three patterns set out in the Introduction. Our next task is to examine closely the key goals intrinsic to educational practice that define it as a practice in its own right and that distinguish it from other practices. This should enable us to establish with greater clarity the nature and scope of the state's interest in education. It should also furnish fresh insights into the field of pedagogy and the integrity that properly belongs to it.

3. Educational Practice: intrinsic goals and extrinsic pressures

Every practice recognised as such seeks, through its practitioners, to offer something particular to human welfare. This includes personal well-being and, more widely, the welfare of a society or country. Someone might promptly object that practices like law and accountancy have in recent decades become known more for helping their corporate clients avoid their obligations than for contributing anything to human welfare. Another objector might add that the historical record of the legal profession is no better: it has repeatedly sought to protect the interests of the 'haves' and to frame laws perpetuating the exclusion of the 'have-nots.' There is ample historical evidence to support such claims. But such objections, by highlighting the kinds of actions that bring a practice

into disrepute among the public also help, by means of contrast, to highlight the purposes intrinsic to the practice, and the worthiness of such purposes. In the case of law, for instance, these purposes are perennially concerned with human desires for justice and equity. Much more could be said about this, but it is time to explore the purposes intrinsic to *education* as a practice.

Three broad purposes can be identified that define education as a practice making its own distinct contributions to human welfare, contributions that can be set out and defended in universal terms. Many other purposes could be added of course, but the following three are intrinsic. They provide at least a minimum for an orientation that can be properly regarded as educational but can also be brought to advanced levels. The first of these purposes is to uncover the potentialities and aptitudes particular to each newcomer to the human race. The second is to cultivate these potentialities and aptitudes through recurrent practices of study and learning that enable each student to flourish as a human being. The third is to build and sustain communal learning environments conducive to such cultivation while seeking to ensure that one student's gain is not at the cost of another's.

Thus, stated summarily, the purposes might seem a bit abstract or general, but a few words about each of them will highlight their specific and practical nature. This will also help to keep the focus of inquiry on what inescapably happens in educational experience, as distinct from accepting commonplace assumptions about 'values' in teaching and learning. Concerning the first purpose, a few revealing points can be made about uncovering potentialities. To emphasise, while the word 'newcomer' refers to each newborn child, it can also refer to each member of a newly-formed class of students, from a kindergarten to a graduate seminar. Two seminal concepts elaborated by Hannah Arendt in her book *The Human Condition* are central here: *natality* and *plurality* (Arendt, 2018, Ch.1). Being born, Arendt stresses, always carries the possibility of bringing something new into the world or making new beginnings. Natality can be understood then in both a literal and figurative sense. The hope perennially nourished by this possibility, even where previous experience has proved disappointing, is what gives education – more specifically teaching – the essential moral energy that sustains it as a practice. Plurality is a reminder that every human being is different in some respect from every other, so that while all share a common humanity, each has a uniqueness or 'mineness' (*Jemeinigkeit*) as Heidegger memorably put it (Heidegger, 1927/1973, p. 68). Educational practice, in seeking

to elicit the potentialities particular to each, seeks in that action to do justice to both natality and plurality. It also prepares the ground in the best way for meaningful career choices later. As for philosophical precedents, a concern for new beginnings and the ethical importance of the personal can be gathered in the work of Socrates, as described in the early dialogues of Plato. Unfortunately, this concern is all but eclipsed in Plato's major writings on education (*Republic* and *Laws*). There, 'Socrates' is increasingly cast as a mouthpiece for Plato and the central priority is that of shaping the young to a grand pattern decided in advance by the state's philosopher rulers. Whatever Plato may have meant by the notion of a body of philosopher rulers (and scholars are divided on this), it is a notion quite foreign to anything Socratic.

Concerning the second purpose, cultivating potentials through recurrent practices of learning so that each student can flourish, the following can be said: teaching and learning are to be properly regarded as a joint undertaking, rather than as a matter of transmission or propagation. Students *will invariably take some attitude* towards what is addressed to them by their teachers, e.g. enthusiasm, curiosity, boredom, puzzlement, aversion, resentment and so on. Teaching is essentially an interplay, overt or otherwise, as distinct from an event of transmission. This inescapable point, especially its crucial significance for the richness or poverty of further educational experience, has been stressed by Dewey in his remarks on collateral learning (Dewey, 1938/1998, p. 48). Yet, it is routinely overlooked wherever a transmission mentality allows educational practice to become preoccupied with grades, marks and exam success. The subjects they teach – science, history, music, religion, business studies and so on – are teachers' enduring point of contact with students. The educational effort is properly that of opening up the fresh imaginative landscapes that the different fields of study represent – landscapes in which students will hopefully become more at home as their understanding advances and their fluency improves. Whether the effort is successful or not, it must be stressed once again that it is far from being a one-way transmission. Some *response* is always evoked by whatever a subject says, or fails to say, through the presentations of the teacher or through the experiments or other educational activities the teacher brings before the students. That response, or more precisely, the *range* of responses, may vary. A response may be keen, quietly dismissive, frankly hostile, etc., but in any case, what takes place here is an interpersonal venturing: something inherently risky, continually attended by breakthroughs and setbacks, successes

and failures, standoffs and compromises. Customary notions like transmission, or propagation, for all their currency in educational discourse, fail to capture the intricacies involved here. They miss the more important half of the story. Such notions yield a distorted, even impoverished understanding of educational practice. They are most serious, however, when they are subscribed to by the teachers themselves, either consciously or unwittingly. This happens largely when teachers become habituated over time to external pressures and demands that may have an educational element but are not primarily educational.

The third intrinsic purpose heightens our awareness of the social nature of learning environments, including the rivalries, jealousies, and aspirations (voiced and unvoiced) that come and go continually wherever students are gathered together with a teacher. There are frequent risks here of favouritism, discrimination and other invidious actions by the teacher – even the most well-meaning of teachers – unless the teacher has an incisive understanding of the subtle and intricate forces at play. Such an understanding provides the key insight that it is through the *relationships* of teaching and learning that issues like justice, equality, and their opposites, get experienced by students and become significant for them. A learning environment that contains a greater plurality of humankind has special importance here. It provides a better opportunity than any kind of ‘exclusive’ school to encounter daily the range of differences and prejudices that students are likely to face in adult life. Accordingly, it provides more realistic and wider opportunities for negotiating such challenges and *doing so through the daily work* of teaching and learning the subjects on the school curriculum.

This third point, and its relationship to the two previous ones, can perhaps be more fully explained by taking a concrete example, say from the teaching of religion. Where conceptions of education have been guided by the notion of transmission, there has been a widespread tendency to overlook the difference between how religious tradition is to be experienced in a church on the one hand and in a school on the other. That is, the main emphasis falls on nurturing the faith of one or other religion or denomination, and also on promoting the growth of denominational schools. From an inherently educational perspective, by contrast, religious traditions are seen as inheritances of learning, with their own internal riches and conflicts. So, the main focus falls on *bringing about progressively more fluent encounters* between a diversity of students on the one hand and religious traditions on the other. The main goal is that students become

more accomplished in appreciating – as receptive and critical communities of learners – what religious traditions seek to say to human experience.

Notwithstanding its summary form, this survey of purposes intrinsic to educational practice raises fresh questions about pedagogy. Pedagogy comprises a range of studies – the insightful ways of thinking and acting – in which teachers need to become fluent for their work as practitioners to be successful. Being successful in pursuing purposes like those just outlined is quite different, however, from being successful in pursuing purposes of a state or other body that is keen to extend its own influence through the work of schools. This difference, too often overlooked, has had effects in the field of pedagogy. Pedagogy, including its contents and how it is studied, looks quite different, depending on whether it is concerned with intrinsically educational purposes or purposes given to it externally. In fact, it might frequently find itself dealing with some unclear mixture of both. There are some key issues to be disentangled here.

4. Understanding Pedagogy Afresh

Recalling the three broad patterns sketched out in the Introduction – a proprietary orientation, an orientation of centralist pluralism and an intrinsically educational orientation – we can review here three characterisations of pedagogy, each corresponding to one of the three patterns. Some concrete examples will help to illustrate each instance.

(a) Pedagogy under a proprietary system

Where paternalistic forms of rule prevail, the consequences for pedagogy are invariably decisive. It becomes understood as the field that provides teachers with ethical-political orientations and occupational capabilities aligned to the professed outlooks of the dominant powers. In medieval times, for instance, pedagogical endeavour was almost universally called on to serve the church. The Reformation and Counter-Reformation reinforced this pattern, but in doing so, they replaced a paternalistic unity with mutually antagonistic and rigidly orthodox doctrines. More recent history supplies more diverse examples – from Argentina to China, from Cambodia to South Africa. But the

more prominent European instances in the 20th century include Italy under Mussolini, Spain under Franco and eastern European countries under Soviet Communism. Here, we shall focus on the former satellite states of the USSR, taking Poland as a particular example.

The regime the USSR enforced in these satellite states renewed a totalitarian machinery shortly after the victorious Allies declared that totalitarianism had been defeated. The tensions in the relationship between pedagogy and state orthodoxy can be illustrated by the case of Poland during Soviet domination. Among the prominent pedagogical scholars during that era were Zygmunt Myślakowski (1890–1971), Karol Kotłowski (1910–1988) and Bogdan Suchodolski (1903–1992), each of whom had to struggle in negotiating a path between the demands of research integrity and those of the state's ideological orthodoxy.

Maintaining the argument that pedagogy needed to find its foundations in philosophy, Kotłowski, like others before and after him (e.g. Gramsci and Freire), drew on key themes in Marxist philosophy. But this involved serious risks where the state authorities were already avowedly Communist and had an orthodox and authoritarian character. In tackling this challenge, Kotłowski presented his theories as an 'overcoming' of the diverse forms of 'cultural pedagogy' that had been a lively development in Poland in the inter-war period (Wrońska, 2021, pp. 211–212). The notion of overcoming retains a special significance in philosophy, being widely associated with Hegel's dialectical concept of *Aufhebung*, i.e. creating something higher and more vibrant from a searching critique of shortcomings and inconsistencies in inherited traditions of learning. Such overcoming might be plausibly portrayed as the mark of an intricate philosophical advance, as distinct from something that might be more critically viewed as conformist or subservient.

Suchodolski, whose long-term work with UNESCO made him widely known internationally as well as in Poland, lent an air of urbanity to pedagogical studies. His conversational style of writing engaged confidently with an extensive range of philosophical works, many of which ran contrary to Communist orthodoxy, including works by Dewey, Sartre, Heidegger, Maritain, *et al.* (Suchodolski, 1961, 1979). His adroitness thus helped to widen the sources of pedagogical research within the Eastern Bloc. Yet, at least in writings by or on Suchodolski available in English, there seems to be little that is critical of the plentiful state restrictions on such research in the countries of that Bloc. There

is little focus, for instance, on educational experience, either of the students or teachers, a focus that could hardly avoid exposing the arresting effects of conformist pedagogy upon educational practice.

Strategies adopted by Kołowski and Suchodolski, though different, largely succeeded in avoiding direct confrontation with the state, but at the cost of distorting or curtailing pedagogical research itself. Mysłakowski, after enjoying approval for some years, eventually fell from official favour. Although leaning towards the left, he was not a socialist by conviction before World War II but became one through his experiences during the war. After the war, he sought earnestly to cooperate with the orthodox authorities of the People's Republic of Poland (Baścik, 1971, p. 14). Though in many respects his theories were in harmony with the deterministic character of the state doctrines, the enduring original elements in his thinking eventually placed him at odds with the state's control of research and scholarship. After the apparent end of Stalinist influences in Poland in 1956, Mysłakowski had new hopes for pedagogical research but was to be ultimately disappointed. On 30 September 1960, the Ministry of Higher Education decided that he should retire (Torowska, 2020, p. 139).

Forms of pedagogical research with non-Marxist inspirations, e.g. phenomenology, personalism, Christianity, continued to exist in Poland and other satellite states of the Soviet Union. Fr. Józef Tischner, for instance, combined phenomenological and Catholic perspectives in his work. He had already criticised 'totalism' in pedagogy in 1966 (Wrońska, 2019, p. 59), and his courageous work with the Solidarity movement in the 1980s continued to yield keen pedagogical insights (Tischner, 1984, pp. 66–71). Yet, it was difficult for such non-Marxist efforts to flourish widely in pedagogical research itself, particularly before the last two decades of the twentieth century. The conditions necessary for such flourishing, e.g. encouragement of originality in scholarship, guarantees of intellectual freedom, and freedom of association and communication with fellow-researchers nationally and internationally, were largely absent.

The instances from Poland reveal not only that original initiatives in creative research can rarely be fully exterminated, but also that an oppressive intellectual climate brings lasting negative consequences. In the pedagogies that prevail in such a climate, educational experience – more particularly the possibilities lying in the plurality of such experience – becomes largely obscured.

(b) Pedagogy under centralist pluralism

The 1980s – the decade of Reagan and Thatcher – brought about a dramatic shift, indeed a historic shift, in the political climate in Western democracies. A confident neo-liberalism became a major driving force of political discourse and policymaking while causing much disarray among the traditional forces of the left. Even when the left recovered, as through the ‘Third Way’ politics of Blair in the UK, Clinton in the US, Schröder in Germany, and others elsewhere, it was a *centre-left* that embodied many elements of neo-liberal thinking and that was unequal to tackling inequality issues (Wade, 2014, p. 1082). The consequences of the shift towards neo-liberalism became deeper as the 21st century succeeded the 20th, and pervaded all spheres of public life. One of the key ideas informing the policies arising from this shift was that of giving schools greater freedom from local or municipal education authorities. This apparent decentralising of control was invariably linked, however, to funding and resourcing provisions based on a school’s results in state-approved tests and examinations. Failure to meet performance targets in these or other specific tests could lead to punitive consequences for individual schools, including increased inspections, cuts in funding, loss of staff members or even school closure. Although performance indicator systems were incrementally refined over the years, a concern with league tables and comparative rankings has become a preoccupation, both internationally and within individual countries, concerning the evaluation of quality in education. The rise of the OECD’s PISA system to global prominence is a good example of this.

For the field of pedagogy, the consequences of the shift have been no less decisive than elsewhere. Unlike the decades before the turn of the century, securing research funding has become centrally important to the success of one’s career as a researcher. As such funding now comes mainly from government agencies, nationally or internationally (e.g. Horizon Europe) researchers are devoting ever-increasing energies to the strategies likely to succeed in the contest for funds. Aligning one’s priorities in pedagogical research to those approved by the funding bodies is a widespread consequence of this. Similar is the formation of alliances and collaborations with colleagues in other countries to strengthen one’s position in tendering for funds. Where the officially advertised research priorities embody intrinsically educational purposes, the fruits of the bidding efforts and collaborations may of course be highly salutary. But where such

priorities reflect possessive or proprietary attitudes that seek to influence the tenor of educational research, an invidious hierarchy is established between the funders and the researchers. Centralising forces thus work decisively behind an apparent diversity of research projects.

Virtually, all such funded research projects are now evidence-based. This is an obviously good idea if the notion of evidence is adequately understood. But evidence-based approaches can lead research blindly astray if the concept of evidence being employed is restrictive or otherwise inappropriate. For instance, evidence of students' achievements is characteristically confined to 'learning outcomes' as measured by examination and test results. But the heart of the matter is missed unless evidence-gathering reaches into the *experience* of the students and illuminates changes in their *practices* of learning and their *attitudes towards* their learning. Only then is an adequate picture of achievement presented. A research design that enables the students, teachers, parents and others to interrogate *how* such attitudes and practices develop and change, and *why* they do so, brings the most important forms of evidence to the foreground. It encourages the participants, particularly students, to think and analyse on their own, to find their own voice and to use it to promote genuine engagement and inclusion.

(c) Intrinsically educational pedagogy

Any intrinsically educational pedagogy derives its bearings from defining purposes like the three we outlined earlier: the uncovering of potentialities native to each, the renewed and sustained cultivation of these through fertile learning environments and the effort to ensure that the gain of one is not at the expense of another, i.e. to pursue justice *through* the daily learning activities pursued in the classroom. In such pedagogy research, efforts remain focused on educational experience in its fullness, including the kinds of relationships that impart a high quality to that experience. Such pedagogy is careful, however, not to be distracted by funding possibilities that embody inadequate conceptions of evidence or those that offer pride of place to priorities that are not primarily educational.

Wherever pedagogy retains its roots in intrinsic educational purposes, a range of core research themes can be discerned, elucidated and refined. Such

themes can be explored not only by the social science approaches normally associated with educational research but also by those from the humanities and arts. The relationships and capabilities that make learning environments properly productive and inclusive are such core themes, including the teacher's relationships (a) with his/her teaching subjects, (b) with his/her students, (c) with colleagues, including the school leadership, (d) with parents/guardians and the wider public and (e) with him/herself. Where there is a failure to retain a focus on these, educational practice can become re-purposed in ways that disfigure relationships in one or more of the areas listed. The disfigured order can, moreover, become a routine feature of the professional culture, with research becoming a partner in these changes. Prominent examples include the No Child Left Behind provisions in the United States (2001–2015) and, at an international level, the World Bank's SABER-Teachers project. The former had to be modified in 2015 due to persistent complaints that it was unfairly penalising the less well-off and minorities. But its successor, the Every Student Succeeds Act (signed by Obama in 2015) still links public funding for schools to a school's annual results in tests approved by individual states. The World Bank's SABER-Teachers project collects data on a wide range of 'teacher characteristics' and 'student learning outcomes,' thus creating a vast and centralised body of data for policymakers. But it gathers little information on the experience of teaching and learning itself and leaves the views of teachers and students out of its data gathering (Robertson, 2012, p. 599).

Pedagogical research, as well as the actions it informs, can best flourish when there is public recognition that education is a practice in its own right. Historical record shows, as we suggested at the outset, that state authorities, whether autocratic or democratic, are not often disposed to grant this recognition, but rather to take a possessive or proprietary attitude to educational practice. In this, they mistake the nature of their own best interests in education. They contribute to postponing continually the kind of educational maturity achieved by countries where such recognition has been substantially, or even partially, achieved.

5. Education and the State's Interest

A keen and memorable insight into the nature of the state's interest in education was offered by Wilhelm von Humboldt in 1810, in connection with the foundation of a new kind of university in Berlin:

The state should not look to the universities for anything that directly concerns its own interest. It should rather cherish a conviction that in fulfilling their real function the universities will not only serve the state's purposes but serve them on an infinitely higher plane. On this higher plane, more is comprehended and forces and means (*Kräfte und Hebel*) are brought into action which are quite different from those that the state can command (Humboldt, 1810/1970, § 20).

What is striking about this declaration is not only its boldness in distinguishing between the proper interests of the state and those of the university. A further important fact is that the declaration is neither that of a libertarian nor a theorist. Humboldt prepared his thoughts on this and other educational questions while serving as Prussia's Minister for Education. The University of Berlin was unquestionably established by the state, and precisely on the recognition that education was a practice with responsibilities and possibilities of its own. It was to serve as an inspiration for other universities founded later in the 19th century, thus advancing the twin notions of teaching as an independent practice and free inquiry in research. In sections 2 and 3 above, we have reviewed the purposes and responsibilities that are intrinsic to such practice. Here, therefore, we shall avail of Humboldt's insight to highlight a few concluding points about the educational interest of the state. In the process, we shall also comment on how that interest might be pursued to enhance, rather than inhibit, the quality of experience in educational institutions.

Taking educational practice more widely rather than just university education as the context, we can pose the following questions that Humboldt's observations prompt. How might the state's purposes be served 'on an infinitely higher plane' by allowing substantial autonomy to educational practice and educational institutions? Further, what are the 'forces and means' that might be brought into play, and how are they different from those forces that the state can command? As the questions are interwoven, we shall take them together.

Humboldt writes – tersely but suggestively – that ‘more is comprehended’ on the higher plane on which educational practice can be pursued without hindrance. This obviously needs elucidation, but because it touches centrally on the points already explored, the elucidation can be largely by way of recap. We have seen that the venturesome nature of educational action calls for incisive and self-critical reflection. Otherwise, the work of practitioners can readily fall prey to everyday routines of forgetfulness, reproducing conventional wisdom, or worse. Original pedagogical ideas, approaches and energies are examples of the ‘forces and means’ that are yielded by such critical reflection. In other words, where there is lively traffic in educational ideas, it allows practitioners to become progressively more capable, while also shaping a professional culture that encourages cooperative efforts. These very efforts, moreover, make it possible for practitioners to be their own most discerning and constructive critics. Educational experience is thereby enabled to become fuller and richer, and progressively so.

We can thus rightly speak here of practitioners and their students as ‘comprehending more’ – of themselves and each other. We can also speak of the practice itself being conducted on a higher plane, viz. of the practice being enhanced and advanced by an ever-renewed fund of creative initiatives. Such initiatives – their range and their diversity – lie beyond what could be accomplished, or perhaps even imagined, by state-mandated measures.

The corollary of this can be stated in straightforward terms. Achieving such benefits is hindered, if not frustrated, to the extent that educational practice is constrained to conform to policies not primarily educational, which might sometimes be educationally harmful. Yet, such policies have been frequently imposed by elected governments and their agencies. For its part, educational research has more than occasionally played its own undistinguished part in such an inverted order of things.

We have referred earlier to the notion of a country’s educational maturity and cited Finland as a prominent current example. Such maturity is not an irreversible achievement, however. It is continually faced with setbacks and new challenges. If it is to be sustained and developed, it needs continual engagement from various parties, viz. educational practitioners, including school leadership and researchers as well as teachers, students, parents and guardians, and the voices of civic and cultural life, of religious traditions, of industry and commerce. On the part of all parties, however, it requires a twofold

commitment: a disavowal of possessive intent and a clear recognition of the responsibilities intrinsic to education itself. Where an abundance of competing educational ‘philosophies’ prevails, it is almost impossible to be clear about of such responsibilities. But relating these responsibilities to the intrinsic purposes of education and elucidating the latter, as we have done in this essay, removes such ambiguity. It makes clear to all what responsibilities the practice must properly answer to the public for, and how educational practice might make its own best contributions to societal well-being and personal flourishing.

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