

## The Teacher's Vocation: Students, Clients, Customers

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### Introduction

The terms we use to describe learners also implicitly describe teachers. But today, the conversation of education is becoming a Babel. Teachers find it increasingly difficult to choose a tongue in which to speak themselves as educators. Some still stoutly defend the traditional vocabulary of 'student' and 'teacher' but have few defences against its various deconstructions. Others, perhaps recently a majority, speak the language of education as an equalitarian instrument of social justice, but in doing so have opened the gates to admit a 'Trojan horse' of great dimensions. Today, the Achaeans of the 'market' have begun pouring forth from it to ravage Education's fair city.

The traditionalists speak of students and of teaching them, the equalitarians do not always speak of clients and therapy but these are the apt, if usually missing, members of a linguistic register which has to do with educational equality for the purpose of equality in life-chances. The plunderers, who are the real modernists, speak of customers quite often, but still somewhat sheepishly (as in the West review). There exists also a small, but growing fourth group, many of whom can be found outside professional educational circles. These will be discussed in the second part of this essay. (For the sake of sustaining the Iliadic metaphor, which is fast becoming wearisome, these postmodern critics would have to be identified with the Achaean's horse, if not with a certain part of its anatomy.)

### Three views of education

By now we are all familiar with a variety of competing understandings of education, although characterisations vary. The traditional view was one in which the cultivation of the person in the largely liberal arts, often supplemented by practical arts, such as science, was the key focus of curriculum. In its turn, the equalitarian view, in which education was an instrument, among others, for offsetting the effects of and eventually overturning, capitalist society, effectively reduced itself, with the abandonment of talk about capitalism and class conflict, to a list of engineering projects directed at providing therapy for student racism or sexism and for enhancing the life chances and cultural assertion of minorities and 'marginalised' groups, *within* a tacit acceptance of capitalism (for example, almost any sociological analysis of schooling since 1970). But this opens the door for a watered-down version—egalitarianism. In this view, equality of opportunity to compete for unequal outcomes is an acceptable compromise. But this is indistinguishable from the market view, which is able to express itself in a new administrative culture and in the commercialisation of the curriculum, while forging an apparent rapprochement with a coalition of jostling interest groups (for example, the Dawkins 'reforms' in Australian higher education followed by the West review's further embrace of competition). After all, the exclusion from competition of any group on the basis of educationally and functionally irrelevant criteria such as race, gender, ethnicity, sexual preference or disability is a source of inefficiency. And as for postmodernists, their appropriate strategy, as Ian Hunter (1994) tells us, is also to ally themselves with the management, while demolishing the last vestiges of 'modern' theory or traditional morality, thus preserving a role for intellectuals in the new market dispensation—for a time.

Spare a thought for teachers and their education in all this. What may seem an arid terminological dispute is really a dispute about how teachers will be able to think and feel about what they do. Will it be an expression of their humanity or a denial of it? In their traditional role, at its best, teachers could and did have a sense of vocation or 'calling'. Of course, the 'tradition' I am talking about is only, itself, a recent transformation of earlier traditions. It prevailed perhaps from the late nineteenth century until World War II. In this culture, 'vocation' gradually became secularised. It is the self which calls the future self, rather than God calling the soul. As Weber pointed out in 1919, the difference between a career and a vocation is that 'career' has to do with aptitude, financial reward, location and the like, while 'vocation' has to do with finding a disciplined practice which expresses and extends one's freely chosen values. It may be useful when there is an overlap between the two, but there is no necessary unity. For instance, in the vocation of 'scientist', institutional conditions may be such that there is little internal unity between one's development (career) as a scientist and the contribution one makes to the development of science (vocation). Thus, the scientist-bureaucrat or scientific 'entrepreneur' was created. We will explore the idea of a vocation to teach more fully below.

The problem facing traditional educators today, apart from those created by the attacks of postmodernists, is that many of the institutional conditions of the career of the teacher are inimical to the development of the teacher in his or her vocation. This is also true of the university 'teacher-scientist', since the institutional conditions of both teaching and research have deteriorated relative to the values of the vocation of the teacher-researcher.

An important source of this deterioration has been the modernisation of educational institutions. There are many competing definitions of modernity and modernisation and, indeed, dispute as to whether a culture complex which saw itself as 'modern' ever existed. For reasons too complex to go into here, I accept the views of Toulmin (1990) in large part. In his view, modernity may be divided into early modernity, which was humane, sceptical and particularistic, and high modernity, which imposed state sponsored universalism. Finally, I would argue that this is at present giving way to late modernity. I take the view that what is truly distinctive about late modernity, relative to earlier versions, is best enunciated by Habermas. As Habermas (1987) tells us, what is distinctive about (late) cultural modernity is that it requires moral self-sufficiency at the individual level. Each person must decide on his or her own norms and values. The problem this creates for *public* institutions and agreements is clear: they must cope with the diversity of values which inevitably arises when individualism and moral self-sufficiency are culturally supreme. It is this development which is responsible, in part, for the prevailing sense of the loss of (universal) morality in the last decade or so which is sometimes equated with 'postmodernity'. It may be worth entering a caveat here. This 'late modernity' may be confined to the European culture complex and its sphere of external influence. What is crucial for educators is the fact of moral individualism and its implications.

As Hayek (1989) tells us, the market is itself a public institution which copes with value diversity by allowing the buying and selling of almost all values, so that everything—ideas, values ways of life, services and goods—can find its own level and constituency. For Hayek, market individualism, protected by a minimal state, is the only means for dealing with value diversity while sustaining democracy. The legitimate sphere of action for government is the support of institutional conditions for the market. This represents a retreat from state sponsorship of cultural formation characteristic of the high modern period and might reasonably be regarded as an ideological accompaniment of late modernity. Postmodernism is merely the cultural reflection of this state of affairs. When there is cultural anarchy, democracy is reduced to either the tyranny of the majority in

matters of value or a referee overseeing a universalist set of rules for competition in every sphere of life.

Against this, the fideistic commitment to justice characteristic of democratic socialist thought can be seen as high modern—a secularised version of an older kind of universalist morality, but one which gives primacy to material equalitarianism. Both traditionalism and high modernity operate within a notion of moral community: the formation of socially useful subjects rather than of active appropriators of identity. The truly modern (late) or contemporary cultural form of educational institutions is only now emerging, and the only common ground between education as human capital or market commodity and education as a source of justice is that both require intervention of the state, even if the kind and degree of intervention is very different. In the case of the market, that intervention is in the service of market access, fulfilling the conditions for intervention by the minimal state and, to an extent, in the service of cultural linkage of education with the wider market—with the culture of industry and commerce through the creation of a ‘productive culture’. But in equalitarianism, which still dominates the culture of higher education, the state must intervene to shape the culture of sexuality, ethnicity, gender and class in every way. Current education systems bear the water marks of the recent high tide of maximal cultural manipulation characteristic of equalitarianism even as that tide has begun to run out.

However, Hayek’s vision provides no alternative. It is a crippled one. He has forgotten that the market place—the Agora—can serve two functions. One is a dense exchange of information, goods and values through a complex process of interchange—the market proper—which itself must have cultural and institutional support in the form of law, contract, money and ethical business conduct. But the other is the process whereby the former, among other things, is made possible. It is the process whereby an agreement upon laws and ethics can be produced and sustained. It is also the process whereby non-market matters can be dealt with—foreign relations, domestic conduct, religion and the like. For there is always an ‘outside’ to the market, always ‘externalities’ to market conduct, and always matters beyond the market, and the market itself is dependent on these. Some of these are dealt with in the *public domain* of democratic argumentation which issues in compromise, consensus or majoritarian imposition. It is only in a limited, metaphorical sense that we talk about ‘the marketplace of ideas’, since ideas and arguments can *convince* and the force of arguments and evidence is not one of exchange. The ‘marketplace’ of ideas is one of those metaphors which distorts more than it enlightens. The same is true of the description of students as ‘customers’, simply because they may be paying for their education. Indulge me as I engage in a little old-fashioned conceptual analysis of these issues, prior to locating the concepts concerned in their social and political setting.

### **Customers, clients and the ritually deceived**

A customer is someone who enters into a relationship of exchange with a seller, merchant or service provider. This relationship may be long-term or short-term, friendly or formal, but none of these things matters much as far as the core of the relationship is concerned. Whatever other value they may have, they are not necessary conditions of the merchant–customer relationship.

In common law, which in this respect is in broad agreement with much law in non-common-law jurisdictions, the relationship is voluntarily entered into but binding once it passes a certain point, but only in respect of particular exchanges, which, once completed are irreversible. For a contract of sale to exist, there must be a buyer, a seller, a ‘good’, and

'consideration', often in the form of a medium of exchange (money), but possibly in the form of service or contra-goods. The contract is fulfilled when there is an offer, acceptance of the offer, and exchange of goods for consideration. The goods must be as represented and be of 'merchantable quality'—that is, good for the function they are ordinarily supposed to perform. How appropriate is this for the teaching–learning relationship?

It could be said that there is at least an element of the customer–merchant relationship when the good of education is paid for by a student and the student receives the goods in exchange. However, there are obvious differences between this educational relationship and the general run of buying and selling. First, students may pay their fees but fail. Second, the degree of good actually obtained is dependent on the students' continuing efforts, not just on the seller's provision of the service. Third, the nature of the good involved may be such that it cannot be exchanged—the students may have to create that good within themselves. Consequently, what the customer buys is credible certification of inner change. Of these objections, it is the last that is decisive, because credibility is ultimately based on participation in sufficiently large spheres of inquiry as to be beyond manipulation and control by governments or corporations and so, beyond price.

The first and second objections are easily dealt with. When you go to a fairground you pay for a chance to win on the Laughing Clowns or the shooting gallery. Students may buy a chance to obtain qualifications but whether they do so or not depends on their own efforts. Much the same applies when you go to an orchard and pay for 'as many apples as you can pick in an hour'. Of course, there are many practical problems remaining. What constitutes a fair chance? What efforts should a student make and what efforts are required of the seller? and so on. No, the decisive objection is that these issues, while important, are peripheral. Just as the length or friendliness of the buyer–seller relationship was peripheral to the relationship (that is, not constitutive of it as the kind of relationship that it was), so the customer/merchant relationship is peripheral to the teaching/learning relationship. For it to be central, the good being purchased would have to be *something that can be exchanged*. As Paolo Freire (1970) tells us, it is only if education is like putting money in the bank, or like filling up an empty vessel by pouring a liquid in, that education can be bought and sold; as will become clear, education is *not* like that, and treating it as such creates a fundamental distortion in the educational relationship, a distortion which is specifically ideological in character. The certification of learners' attempts to participate in inquiry can only credibly come from existing participants. To the extent that employers of such participants believe that they have some sort of ownership of the accreditation process, which they can sell, the process itself is undermined, because in the final analysis it is individual inquirers in their communities of inquiry—scientists, scholars—who are the source of that credibility. Credibility flows from individual inquiry participants' mutual recognition through the engagement of the critical scholarly process, and cannot be merely declared, or legislated into existence. The credibility of employing institutions is a secondary product of the credibility of the scholars in them. Even the credibility of government-controlled school certifications, such as the HSC (Higher School Certificate) in New South Wales, rests ultimately on academic recognition. If the certification was subject to unrelenting criticism from research associations and scholarly organisations, its credibility would be fatally eroded over a short time. Schooling cannot remain credible if it is decoupled from wider inquiry.

Just as the critical debates of an inquiring community demonstrate the credibility of individual scholars through the evidence of their engagement with each other (citations, publications etc), so too, the process of certification of those who are learning by inquiring depends for its ultimate credibility on the demonstrable engagement of learners with the

discourse of inquiry (at appropriate levels). Clearly, this cannot be bought and sold. It is not dependent on the amount of money you are willing to pay. It exists or it does not exist. To a considerable degree it will not respond to increased effort (beyond a reasonable level of engagement). It is something anchored in and articulated with the current state of discourse in inquiry communities and ultimately depends on the judgments of that community—judgments which lie outside the market and which cannot collectively be bought. You may buy a chance to learn. You may be a customer of an organisation. But you are a learner, a student, before your teachers.

The essential idea of the market, that anyone with the money can buy the service or good, is not characteristic of education. It may be the case that anyone with the money can buy a chance at some level of education or other, but prior certification will often determine the right to be in the market for a particular educational opportunity. The opportunity to engage with existing and prior participants in inquiry may be bought, but not the education of it. An education cannot be bought, nor can credible certification. They can only be had by becoming. Money can get you into the room but not into the conversation.

But the educational relationship isn't primarily a relationship than can be characterised as one between a professional and a client, either. Professionals provide expertise on a client's behalf or for a client's welfare. The professional relationship is characterised by an ethical requirement to act for the client's rather than the professional's good. The service provided is generally one which, in principle, the client could provide for themselves, but in the absence of knowledge, skill or inclination, are purchasing from the professional. In this sense, there is little difference between most 'professionals' and 'tradespeople', except that many common professionals work on the client's body, or relationships rather than their motor car or their plumbing.

In an educational relationship, the student must work on themselves. The changes which are the goal of education occur *within* and are attested to by performances of various kinds—in defending a thesis, writing an essay, sitting an exam. Generally speaking, the lawyer has no interest in the client being educated so that in future he or she may defend themselves in a courtroom. Similarly, a doctor is not generally concerned that a patient should acquire skills of diagnosis. An architect does not seek to train clients in home design, and so on. Nor do these professionals feel any call to certify or attest to the acquisition by the clients of the professionals' own skills. But it has always been recognised (in the traditional view) that successful teachers are people who aim to make themselves redundant (for example, Luke 6:40).

There *are* some groups of professionals who do seek to enhance the development of knowledge and skills in their clients—the therapeutic professionals. To an extent it is appropriate to say that these professionals seek to educate their clients, and, indeed, the overlap between psychiatry, social work and the like, and education has been duly noted. However, even here, the goals of therapy are usually of lesser scope than the goals of education. Therapeutic professionals do not seek to make themselves redundant—they merely seek to make themselves *unnecessary*. There is a difference. For instance, a psychiatrist does not seek to teach a client/patient how to deal psychiatrically with others, nor does a counsellor in the usual run of therapy seek to train counsellors. A psychoanalyst may help a patient psychoanalyse themselves, and being psychoanalysed is a prerequisite for psychoanalytic practice, but attaining self-insight and resolution is not the same as learning to be able to resolve any and every future crisis, let alone being able to psychoanalyse others. Foucault's pastoral intellectuals fall into this category. They seek to form the subjectivity of their clients. We will discuss this further below.

The ideal goal of education is that the learner becomes able to participate in lifelong learning not simply individually, but in the communal process of continuing inquiry. Properly understood, this is more than passing on a set of skills or items of knowledge. It is not only making the teacher unnecessary, because what they can teach is eventually taught and so finished with, and it goes beyond making the teacher redundant because the learner has learnt how to learn without a teacher. It makes the teacher redundant in a second, more important way. However, to explain just what is meant by this, it is necessary to say something about what (educative) teaching is and is not. Teaching is not instructing, although teachers may instruct. Teaching is a form of doing what inquiry peers do to and for each other in team research and among communities of inquiry. If one member of such a community makes a discovery, develops a new concept or notation, he/she explains it, instructs others or conveys it and the like to other members—indeed, if necessary, runs formal classes in it, called typically ‘workshops’. Members of inquiry communities also teach by critique or appraisal (positive *and* negative), asking awkward questions, making additions, identifying limitations, anomalies and so on. Members also engage in discourse that provide either a ‘back channel’ to the main inquiry topic or a meta-discourse about the nature of the inquiry—its desirability, direction, scope and the like. School teachers also do all these things or should, *as should their students*, to the degree they can, at a given biographical and subject matter developmental level. The crucial distinction is not the presence or absence at certain moments of any and all forms of information/inquiry-related talk, such as instructional talk but the location of these *within* an overall relationship of co-inquiry. Teaching may be defined as a social role or part of a social role, in which someone takes responsibility for furthering others in inquiry. Inquiry peers *sometimes* have to induct new colleagues into research practices, findings and relationships as a part of their role. Of necessity, all inquirers must do this some of the time or their discoveries will not be disseminated. The school teacher’s task is much more asymmetrical than that of most inquiry peers, but over time it has the *same* dynamic—that of drawing others into inquiry, a coming together which is necessary to the inquiry process. If we also recognise that inquiry extends to the deliberations of parliaments and publics, as well as research institutes and universities, the nature of teaching—its ubiquity—becomes clearer. Teaching is a certain part of the responsibility of inquirers to each other in the fostering of the social process of inquiry. The difference between teaching and learning is one of degree and is temporary—that is, in *educational* teaching, not the one-dimensional instructional role common in schools. This is, of course, a thoroughly *traditional* conception of teaching and learning. You can find it in Plato’s account of Socrates’ teaching. It is, if you like, the ‘high’ tradition of teaching and learning, because there has always been a debased version of this, in which education was reduced to training, instruction and passive learning—precisely a distortion of the educative relationship through the misuse of power.

Training, considered as a teaching/learning relationship, differs from education in one simple way and it is not the way usually discussed. The training relationship is not to be distinguished from education by its accidental features. Sometimes education proceeds in a narrow and focussed, practical way. Sometimes education is not particularly theoretical or general. Sometimes training is ‘moral’. The crucial difference is that training is a learning relationship, the content and form of which is directed to the purpose and the good of someone *other than the trainee*, even if the trainee is expected to get some personal benefit, such as a job, from *the fact of having been trained*. Training is a potentially educational relationship distorted by power and forms of social necessity that flow from power. Training can indeed be the subject of exchange (of a kind) because in it, trainees

give up their own judgment and choice, in exchange for an experience which, properly attested, in the exigencies of the context of inequality, qualifies them for benefits or enables them to be permitted to perform particular tasks. Of course, there is nothing wrong with training provided it does not dominate the form of teaching and learning in an educational process and providing the trust it implies is not misplaced—that is, providing it does not dominate the relationship. And, of course, in this view of things, it is possible to have a practical *education* for the kind of ‘manual’ crafts usually associated with training.

However, it is the traditional, ‘high’ idea of education that has been most subject to attacks from a postmodern direction, despite the fact that postmodernists have claimed that it has been modernist conceptions of education that they were attacking. Indeed, if that were true, postmodernists would have attacked training not ‘education’. We will come to this in a moment, but first, let us return to the issue of what effect a relationship of exchange can have on the process of learning to become a teacher (or indeed anything else).

### Choosing to Teach

I began this article with the statement that the terms we use to describe learners imply a set of contrastive or functionally related terms which describe teachers. I pointed out that there was a difference between teaching as a career and teaching as a vocation and that it was only in the traditional terminology that it made sense to talk of teaching as a vocation. I think it is now clear that teaching and learning are roles which are *identical* in the array of role functions involved but unequal as to the degree to which each role function is operative at a given time or level of inculcation of newcomers into inquiries. But what is a vocation for the teaching role?

Weber (1919) distinguished between the bodies of knowledge which characterised possible ‘vocations’ and more general processes of public will-formation which had a political character (even if processes of argumentation or inquiry were employed within them). The former, such as the bodies of knowledge that form much of the curriculum of professional education in medicine, law, or teaching, are based on communities of inquiry that share some institutional identity and discourse—‘academic disciplines’. The latter, even if it proceeds by argumentation (as in a parliament) is ultimately decided by the numbers, in a political, if democratic fashion.

You choose a vocation because the body of knowledge, and the methods, problems, ethics and values intrinsic to it, seem an appropriate expression of your own values and because you believe that the institutional and other accidental conditions of the vocation are acceptable, possibly even desirable. For example, you choose to be a surgeon because you want to heal people, but you must also have the manual dexterity required, and you are attracted by the status and possible financial rewards, extrinsic to being a surgeon, but contingent upon it.

Learning, if it is a process of induction into inquiry, is also a process of choosing which inquiries to participate in, or at least, to what degree to participate in the various inquiries in which our society is engaged. These inquiries include those associated with citizenship, spiritual life, and various spheres of professional inquiry and practice. Learning is a process of development of values, and also of identification of inquiries that fulfil values gradually becoming more deeply held, and which address key life problems as well as a process in which careers are chosen. Of course, in real schools, which are only educative in highly constrained ways, this process of choice is truncated, limited and episodic, but that is no reason to embrace limitation rather than to reduce it. Learning and teaching are again

deeply united by common characteristics. Consider the learner-teacher and the process of choosing to be a teacher. In its way it tells us something crucial about the lifelong process of learning, in any learner, in any course of life.

Let us do this by looking at how the teaching career and vocation fares under traditional, modern and postmodern assumptions. From the debased traditional view, it is difficult to see why anyone, particularly someone academically 'able', would choose to teach, because 'training' reduces a vocation to a career. Too many teacher educators are looking for training rather than education in teaching. From such a point of view the ethics and values intrinsic to the body of knowledge and direction of inquiry associated with a profession offer little or no guidance to someone whose task is to 'pass on' a pre-decided, 'economically-relevant' curriculum to others. The intrinsic values of disciplines guide the practice of inquiry in them, not external relations *with* them. On this account, teaching can only be a career not a vocation, to be pursued by those who, generally speaking, are unable to participate in the community of inquiry concerned. Perhaps that has something to do with the fact that in our society among the professions, teaching is definitively inferior *as a career*, and that there appears little motivation for the most academically able to enter it. If teaching is seen to be radically different from learning, then the temporary asymmetry of the teaching role is seen to be the distinguishing feature of it rather than the link with wider communities of inquiry. Perhaps that is why, in the English-speaking world the status of teachers is so low and there is little institutional linkage between a career in schools and one in universities (in contrast with the situation in Germany).

But perhaps the drive for social justice can provide motivation to enter a teaching career? No doubt it could, but only motivation for dedication to an inferior career, not the ethical reinforcement or rational guidance characteristic of a vocation and which alone, as Weber pointed out in 1919, is a rich enough source of consolation in the face of poor career conditions, for educators as for the scientists to whom Weber spoke. The possibility of teachers, particularly of 'academic' school subjects, contributing to progress in social justice through treating students as clients rests upon the notion that the kinds of knowledge taught are valued instrumentally, for ends beyond themselves—for improving administration, for saving the environment, or overcoming oppression or, more narrowly, that individual learners may acquire qualifications and 'good jobs' so overcoming disadvantage at a personal level. But these ends are not intrinsically related to the bodies of knowledge concerned. For instance, medical science can tell you a lot about prolonging life, but little or nothing about what quality of life is necessary to make prolonging it worthwhile. Similarly, a focus on forming the consciences of student/clients on issues such as race and gender finds little to guide it in the subject matter of the curriculum of the disciplines considered useful in the human capital curriculum.

Nor can a direct focus on social justice issues in the curriculum by, say, increasing the social science content, provide an antidote. The competitive academic curriculum and the vocational curriculum both have a direct relationship to the market, but a social justice curriculum does not. What such a non-competitive, non-vocational curriculum asks of learners who might otherwise 'succeed' in schooling is that they forgo personal socio-economic mobility in the name of class, gender or ethnic solidarity. Moreover, it is not yet clear what body of knowledge would provide intrinsic guidance for a curriculum of this kind or what discursive arena would permit some degree of compromise or consensus among the sometimes competing viewpoints and agendas of diverse oppressed groups, for example, Islamic minorities and some feminists.



In any case, there is room for doubt as to whether this curriculum is what it seems. From some post-structuralist standpoints the social justice curriculum is a curriculum which forms the governmentalised subjectivity required by the administrative state and any orientation to 'social justice' in it is illusory (for example, Hunter 1994).

But can a market-oriented approach which treats either students or other community groups as customers help? No, because it not only opens itself to the extrinsic, instrumental approach of the debased traditional view but it also conceptualises the educational process as an exchange of education for a consideration (usually a fee). The education of a teacher is not something that the teacher educand or the taxpayer can buy; it is something that can only be had in the becoming of it.

In a sense, all *educations* are also *vocations*. From a critical-pragmatic perspective, they are seen as processes of entry to the state of consensus, dissensus and questioning (inquiry) of a group of people concerned about the problems of and committed to the values realised in, the inquiry, who recognise each other as competent interlocutors, having questions in common, and simultaneously of entry to the institutions, roles and social conditions in which members of such communities find employment (careers). Of course, with Dewey (1916, 1938, see also Garrison 1995) it is necessary to recognise that inquiry is not merely abstract and cognitive; it is concrete, intelligent adaptation. Inquiry is the adaptive process at large and the education of the young is just their joining in that inquiry and is not confined to research institutes. It takes place in parliaments and pubs, and on television and talkback, and is carried out in informal life-decision as well as expressed in scientific papers. It takes place in both original discoveries and in appropriations of these into the practices of people's lives.

It is for this reason that 'economic rationalism' provides but a thin gruel to feed teachers' potentially lifelong commitment to a community of inquiry and their commitment to engaging potential new participants in it (learners). The market approach leads to a motivational contradiction—to an expectation of heroic selflessness for which it provides no grounding: for the sake of a relatively mediocre salary the teacher is to take on a career which has recently been characterised by falling levels of real remuneration and rising levels of political interference and public denigration. Market enthusiasts, critical of what they see as low standards of entry to teacher education programs, appear to believe that for the sake of national economic efficiency the able, accomplished student of a discipline, such as, say, mathematics, is to teach a pre-decided version of it to children rather than to sell their knowledge of it to the highest bidder.

The point is sharpest when applied to market critics' views on the need to modernise teaching practices by introducing information technology into classrooms, since the skills teachers need to do this are infinitely more marketable elsewhere.

So it would seem that each of the views considered thus far has significant limitations. Egalitarian views, underpinned by a watered-down Marxism, seem to leave out the educational moment in schooling, market-oriented liberalism appears to undercut *vocational* motivation, traditionalism appears vulnerable to debasement and, in any case, we are all familiar with arguments against it. But can we rescue nothing of value from these approaches? Or are we to answer somewhat cynically that students, clients and customers are all inappropriate labels for a process of formation of subjectivity according to the requirements of the 'administrative state' (Hunter 1994), and thus accept the view that the very concept of education is an inappropriate description of what happens or could happen in schools?

But traditional views possessed a 'high' concept of the vocation of teaching. Surely it would be valuable if this could be rescued. Egalitarian views struggled with questions of justice and democracy. Aren't such questions worth asking? Even market-oriented understandings of education offered some sense of an emphasis on freedom and choice that could be valued when much else was rejected. We have already seen that choice can be an important part of learning. These things can be saved and postmodernism's dissolution of the very idea of education can be rejected.

### **Critical-pragmatism**

In a critical-pragmatic account of knowledge, inquiry and education it is possible to recognise that meaning is always to some extent ambiguous, that subjectivity is socially formed, that truth is always charged with ideology and that the local and the particular can never wholly be absorbed in the universal. In short, it is possible to account for much of the limitation of high modernity that postmodernists have identified. But it is also possible to rescue some account of high moral purpose, justice and freedom. Critical-pragmatism represents a return in many ways to a sceptical but humane attitude of early modernity. In a critical-pragmatist view, we can renew something of the meliorist hopes of traditional views of knowledge and inquiry, show how choice plays a crucial role in it, and foreground issues of justice and participation as necessary to choice and progress.

Critical-pragmatism is an account of the nature of inquiry and so, at the same time, an account of the nature of education. It rests on three key insights—a moderate historicism, a fallibilistic understanding of reason, and an ontogenetic understanding of discourse.

The historicism of critical-pragmatism is both historical and biographical. Just as Piaget's genetic epistemology connected the history of European thought with the developmental process in the individual's life, so too, Habermas connects the formation of subjectivity with the institutional and structural state of contemporary society. But unlike Foucault, Habermas sees this connection as sufficiently loose to permit innovation and development. If Foucault's absolutist historical logic was applied to the development of individuals there would be little educational hope. But history and biography always work against a developmental horizon in a zone of proximal development. If it is possible to envisage a more or less well-integrated personality and to speak meaningfully, as Foucault tries to do, of the 'care of the self', it is possible to envisage institutions and social relationships which would reflect/foster that care and integration. If you want to abandon the idea of social progress (however reversible, fallible, fragmentary) you must also abandon any idea of personal growth, personal development or personal progress other than that implied by biological maturation, *or* abandon the idea of the link between social structure, institutions and practices and subjectivity (which characterises Foucault's discursive regimes). In a critical-pragmatic view the truth lies somewhere between the absolute social-structural formation of subjectivity that Foucault described and the epistemic individualism of liberal modernistic theory of society and self.

The implications of this from an educational point of view are what is crucial. If subjectivity is totally controlled by an 'episteme', there would seem to be little role for educative teaching and learning, only for the continued formation of the subjectivities the system demands. But in a pragmatist view, because values may prove unworthy, particular hierarchies of value unworkable, particular strategies or policies to realise them inappropriate, learning about value inquiry must be an important part of education. And because values are not simply about ranking of goods which liberally conceptualised individuals may separately appropriate to satisfy their desires, but are also about common

goods, learning about values must, in part, be through participation in a way of life in which values are evaluated as they are more or less successfully realised, and there must be an internal connection between one's personal search for a satisfactory set of values and the social-institutional practices, roles and careers historically available to individuals born at a particular time and place. Participation in this inquiry or at least, in the processes at its focus, is not something that can be bought and sold. Indeed, it is not something that can be abstained from. You are in the game of possible improvement of self and circumstance whether you like it or not. The only question is whether or not you will be an historically and culturally aware participant, and that is an educational question. Also at stake is the degree to which the participation of any individual implies the participation of all.

The mode of engagement in the inquiry of biography and citizenship is fallible reason. You cannot buy or sell the conviction that comes with a good reason. Arguments convince and there can be no analogy between the market place for goods and services and the exchange of ideas, unless, of course, you deny the possibility that some reasons are better than others. But even then, conviction could not be bought and sold, only acquiescence, since under such an epistemic regime (that is, a postmodernist one) there would *be* no conviction.

The issue here is not that we may be mistaken in our judgments about the quality of the arguments we hear and the evidence we experience. We may be. Similarly, we may change our views about what we think constitutes a criterion for good arguments. We must judge many of these things against the historical horizon of the particular areas of inquiry we are engaged in. This seemingly impossible self-reflexivity of method is not a fundamental difficulty, however, at least, not if we accept that scientific knowledge has progressed, since scientific inquiry itself proceeds by a moving historical boot-strap process too.

Nor is the reference to reason in some way exclusive of values, feelings, the body and so on. It is simply the case that reason is the mode in which we *talk about* feelings and the like, and in which we can attest as to whether certain feelings are good or bad or lead to other states of affairs or not. In reason we reflect on the meanings of the body and its actions and on the effects of desire. Both desire and the body can be said to have their own reasons, but by this we mean that they resist our presently inadequate reason.

But perhaps the decisive pragmatic basis for accepting a fallible, limited conception of reason as central to educative processes is that, like democracy, it's the best lousy method available. Reason looks bad until you consider the alternatives—resolving our differences by coercion rather than the conviction that comes from better reasons. As we have already seen, conviction cannot be bought and sold, nor can reasoning and the capacity to engage in a reasoned discourse with other inquiries be purchased, even if it were possible to direct a payment to all inquirers on the planet. Reason and democracy and so reason and justice, are internally connected.

The reasoned discourse in which inquirers participate does not ignore experience, feeling, and the like, since it is in part about feelings, the body, and desire. It is discourse which proceeds by argument *about* experience and its meaning, argument about our being. But it is also a means whereby we become what hitherto we have not been. Discourse which carries conviction is ontogenetic—it creates the realities of which it speaks, not the least by creating the reality of 'participant-in-a-discourse'. Our identity is produced in the tension between the active, desiring 'I' and the incoming messages through which other people tell us who we and they are—the 'me' (and the 'other').

To put it another way, if social reality is socially constructed, and we adopt a moderate historicism, then our discourses both constitute and reconstitute our subjectivity in ways determined by the overall structures of discursive participation and the content of the pre-

existing discursive roles of our institutional life, and they reconstruct this process by finding prior discourses to be inadequate to our experience and to the needs of the 'I' and expressing this in innovation, resistance and critique. Inquiry is just the institutionalisation of this necessary and ubiquitous process of continuing adaptation, a process that gives modernity, particularly late modernity much of its restless character. Education is about the process of adaptation and about the skills and capacities for judgment that are necessary to *constructive* participation in it.

In this view, students and teachers can again see the lineaments of vocation—the purposive realisation of values and the education of desire. For the teacher and the student have the same vocation—partnership in inquiry—they are simply at different moments in the life cycle of human involvement in each others' becoming—that is, the ontogenetic inquiry process of species history. Whatever else students are, they are not customers when they are learners, nor are teachers merchants. Equally, students are not clients, nor are they totalised subjectivities. They are (potentially) equals, engaged in a necessary and necessarily common, fallible enterprise of becoming. You can no more sell that than you can create a market in memberships of the human race.

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