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Philosophy of education as action: transcending the division between theory and practice

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Philosophers of education are often criticised for not being "practical" about educational issues. Their work is often seen as being too theoretical and failing to be responsive to practical situations in universities and schools. This article is a reflective autobiographical account of the role that theory has played in my own professional development as an education theorist/practitioner. I specifically highlight moments in my professional development which illustrate that the philosophy of education does not simply involve abstract theorising disconnected from the practical experiences of people. I go on to show that "doing" philosophy of education facilitates "practical" action such as compassionate imagination — an aspect of human action which can help us to counteract claims that the philosophy of education is simply academic jargon reflecting esoteric, incomprehensible theorising.

Opvoedkundige filosofie as handeling: oorstyging van die teorie-praktyktweedeling

Van filosowe wat hulle met die opvoedkunde besig hou, word daar dikwels gesê dat hulle opvoedkundige sake nie "prakties" benader nie. Hulle werk word dikwels as te teoreties gesien en ook dat dit geen respons bied op praktiese situasies aan die universiteit of skool nie. In hierdie artikel word 'n reflektiewe, outobiografiese beskrywing gegee van my eie professionele ontwikkeling as opvoedkundige teoretikus/praktisyn. Die artikel beklemtoon spesifiek momente in die ondersoeker se professionele ontwikkeling wat duidelik demonstreer dat die filosofie van die opvoeding nie oor losstaande, abstrakte teoretisering gaan nie. Verder word daarop gewys dat die filosofie van die opvoeding "praktiese" sake soos die verwerwing van deernisvolle verbeeldingskrag fasiliteer — 'n aspek van menslike gedrag wat kan help om aansprake dat die filosofie van die opvoeding akademiese jargon is wat esoteriese, onverstaanbare teoretisering reflekteer, teen te werk.

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My purpose in this article is to offer an account of the philosophy of education which transcends the theory-practice divide. In focusing on theorising as a practice, my intention is to dispel criticisms that to theorise about education does not involve engaging in a practice. In my own professional development as an educational theorist and teacher educator there have been sufficient critical encounters to demonstrate that my theoretical work has been grounded in highly practical situations.

I begin my autobiographical account with my appointment to a university tutorship. I had just completed a Masters in Philosophy of Education and so had some knowledge of theory. Prior to this I had been a high school teacher for several years, so I had some professional knowledge and experience as an educational practitioner. The students I had to tutor in Philosophy of Education (more specifically metatheory) were mostly in-service teachers completing a postgraduate degree in education and had to attend tutorials on the basis of assignments they had completed for the metatheory course. Although I was not the metatheory teacher, I was expected to know what the course entails and what students had to know. I completed the same metatheory course in the late 1980s, so had some idea what students were expected to know — in this instance, positivist, interpretive and critical educational theory. The critical comments and concerns I kept hearing from students were that metatheory is too abstract and theoretical because it does not relate to practical classroom situations.

My efforts to convince the students whom I tutored that the philosophy of education involves theoretical aspects with the aim of changing (the word I used was "transforming") one's classroom practice led me to turn to the work of philosophers who could help me make practical sense of deep theoretical issues. For example, from my reading of Paul Hirst & Richard Peters (1970) I began to understand that educational theory consists of rational justifications which are logically necessary conditions that can inform and guide the practice of educational professionals. For instance, one does not know what constitutes teaching until one analyses the concept of "teaching" — one has to find those logically necessary conditions which make teaching what it is. Only then is one able to know how teaching can manifest itself or be lived out in classroom situations. Thus, knowing that teaching involves some

transactional relationship which a person has to establish with others in some way suggests that teaching has both a theoretical meaning (the idea of transacting) and a practical implication (that learners are transacted).

From Charles Taylor (1985) I learned that this "theory" is not acquired through the study of educational theory, but is discernible in the intersubjective modes of mutual action in which human beings are engaged — that is to say, in practice. Taylor argues that practices are not just patterns of "do's and don'ts", such as those actions which regulate activities, but rather meanings which constitute modes of human action (Taylor 1991). Without these constitutive meanings practices would cease to exist. Thus, to analyse the teaching activities of a teacher or the learning of learners, one has to focus on the meanings which constitute forms of human action — meanings which guide and shape forms of human action. So, too, I learned from Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) that meanings or practices have both internal and external goods. The internal goods are those intrinsic or theoretical ideas which are inseparable from their extrinsic manifestations — their practices and their external goods.

As I began to develop this non-dichotomous view of theory and practice, I encountered profound support for my ideas as a professional tutor in the book by Wilfred Carr & Stephen Kemmis (1986) entitled *Becoming critical*. At this stage in my professional development, educational analysis remained important for my practices. An understanding of educational theorising as an action which could critically empower and emancipate teachers' classroom practices proved extremely helpful in tutoring my students. What Carr and Kemmis taught me was that educational theorising can become far more meaningful if teachers can show how they can, first, reflect self-critically on the work they do in classroom practice in relation to theoretical premises and, secondly, become aware of just how emancipatory or empowering theoretical constructs and assumptions can be in enriching and altering or adjusting (transforming) teaching and learning in the classroom. Although many students were easily attracted to critical educational theory, they seemed in general to have struggled with the educational "theories" underlying the metatheory course. Although students tended to be apprehensive about metatheory, it certainly had a profound influence on my thoughts

— in particular on how such a theory could transform classroom practice. Critical educational theory as advocated by Carr and Kemmis would remain influential in my theorising and practice throughout my professional development.

The second key moment in my professional development that I wish to describe occurred about five years later. By then, critical educational theory seemed to be a major liberatory academic discourse to which critical South African educational professionals could reconcile themselves. After all, apartheid education had held us captive for many years and critical educational theory surfaced as a response to undermine distorted educational concepts and practices. My appointment to a senior lectureship in a Philosophy of Education department immediately confronted me with an urgent question that was both personal and practical in my professional development: what should I teach? Since my students were educational professionals, I should not only teach them how to analyse educational policy matters but also how policy can be implemented and evaluated in practical situations. One of the central features of educational policy implementation involves both individual analysis of educational policy and joint evaluation of its feasibility for implementation. For instance, in-service teachers should not only be taught how to analyse educational policy on teaching and learning in a self-reflexive manner, but also to engage collectively with others in evaluating the feasibility of policy — what counts as good policy on teaching and learning. My search for a language which would enable me to clearly articulate my aspiration to consider educational policy implementation and evaluation as a practice that can only be done in relation to others drew me to the work of three of the leading exponents of deliberative inquiry. The point here is that "doing" philosophy of education (theorising and practising) involves engaging deliberatively in educational policy analysis and concomitant implementation and evaluation.

Firstly, Jürgen Habermas (1996) proposes that deliberation can best be achieved through argumentation and persuasion. Deliberation needs to result in consensus, whereby the most persuasive argument prevails. Certainly, when educational professionals theorise about education through deliberative engagement they come to consensual agreement — and they have performed a practice. This idea of practice does not

involve making a product (poesis), but rather signifies a kind of "doing action" (praxis) aimed at achieving some worthwhile end — in this case, consensual agreement. Hence, in line with the Habermasian view of deliberation, philosophising about education is not only an individual activity but also one which involves praxiological action — a matter of performing a practice.

Secondly, Seyla Benhabib (1996) argues that not all forms of deliberative engagement should necessarily result in permanent consensus. For her, deliberative engagement can also result in a temporary consensus whereby deliberative agents reflexively reconsider a less persuasive argument in order to reach a more reasoned and justifiable conclusion. So, philosophy of education does not have to attain final conclusions. Decisions can be reconsidered in a reflexive way after some time in order to provide for more justifiable and convincing arguments.

Thirdly, what I have learnt from Iris Marion Young (1989, 1996) is that persuasive arguments are often most eloquently articulated by those who have a command of the language of power — the language which dominates all forms of academic communication. She therefore proposes that deliberation needs to take people's narratives (stories) into account irrespective of how communicatively unstructured these narratives may be. The point she makes is that no one should be excluded from deliberation on the basis of poorly articulated linguistic expression. Only then does deliberative engagement stand a chance of lasting, in the Rortyan sense.

In essence, education policy analysis and its evaluation and implementation have a better chance of being realised through deliberative engagement which includes rather than excludes people from participating and telling their stories. In this way, the use of philosophy of education as a deliberative discourse has the potential to be highly practical — after all, deliberation is a profoundly communicative experience, in which the voices of all participating in the activity should be heard. And, if one considers that philosophising about education policy is a theoretical activity establishing space for practical deliberative engagement, philosophy of education in this sense is unlikely to remain an abstract activity.

1. Philosophy of education as compassionate imagining

The third narrative in my professional development relates to my current work. Just as I had five years before, I again found myself searching for a language that would enable me to articulate my concerns about integrating educational theory and practice. Deliberative engagement in its current form was no longer a practical way of living out philosophising about education. I became aware that students' narratives can also be silenced if classroom conditions are not established to ensure that unheard voices will be heard in any deliberative engagement. For instance, students in university classrooms may have been subjected to, or still be experiencing, some form of discrimination, racism, exclusion from conversation or gender inequality and may not find the classroom situation conducive to telling their stories. Or they may be experiencing some form of suffering or vulnerability such as HIV/AIDS, a family setback or grief.[1]

In such situations, students may not tell their stories unless conditions are established in the classroom which support or encourage them to do so. Teachers therefore have to establish such conditions. In this context I find Martha Nussbaum's account of compassionate imagining quite apposite. Nussbaum (2001: 299) raises the question of the positive contribution that can be made by emotions such as compassionate imagining in guiding deliberation among students. Her main argument in defence of compassionate imagining is that it ought to be the emotion most frequently cultivated when people embark upon deliberation and just action in public as well as private life. For her, deliberation ought to be occasioned by the impulse to treat others justly and humanely — with compassionate imagining. Certainly in South African universities, where a diverse population of students from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds (Black and White) is beginning to

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1   I remember how difficult it was for a Black student at our university to share with us his grief about his father's "necklacing" during the apartheid years. His story was that it was sometimes difficult for him to adjust to university life and to participate in deliberations with others since his father, a political activist during the 1980s, had been burnt alive by means of a burning rubber tyre around his neck.

deliberate about matters of public concern — such as crime, victimisation, homelessness, job discrimination, unemployment, domestic violence and the abuse of women, poverty and famine, political alienation, alcoholism and drug abuse, and the absence of good prospects — certain practical judgements have to be made by students about these variables in their personal and public lives. Invariably, judgements to be made will be based on students' perceptions of others' distress, undeserved misfortune, suffering, injustice, plight, disability and disease. In this regard compassionate imagining becomes a necessary condition for acting and deliberating on such matters because it not only prompts an awareness of the misfortune or suffering of others, but also "pushes the boundaries of the self" outward by focusing on others' suffering, which might not be their fault (Nussbaum 2001: 299).

Nussbaum's understanding of compassionate imagining as painful emotional judgement embodies at least two cognitive requirements: first, the belief or appraisal that the suffering of others is serious and not trivial, as well as undeserved, and secondly, the belief that the possibilities of the person experiencing the emotion are similar to those of the sufferer. I shall now discuss these two requirements of compassionate imagining in relation to how students and teachers ought to deliberate rationally, yet at the same time cultivate a concern with being just and humane towards others — to act with compassionate imagining.

First, insofar as one can become serious about the suffering of others, one believes them to be without blame, having suffered an undeserved injustice, and one recognises that their plight should be alleviated. Many students who are perhaps not to blame for their inability to pay university fees (due to their parents not having enjoyed economic prosperity during the decades of apartheid) require the compassion of others. In such circumstances, deliberation at university should rather take the form of ascertaining what can be done to ensure that students who do not have the finances to study remain part of the educational community, rather than finding ways to penalise or at times humiliate them. So, compassionate imagining assumes blamelessness on the part of students who are unable to pay tuition fees, as well as "onlookers" who can make judgements about the need to expedite the advancement of the students in question. Similarly, a teacher has compassion for students who have had an impoverished school background, not neces-

sarily through any fault of their own (parents could not afford to send children to more affluent, organised schools, or to pay for the services of extra-mural tutors). Such a teacher recognises the need to find creative ways to assist disadvantaged students in coming to grips with difficult concepts in their studies and at the same time acknowledges that they are not responsible for the unjust education system to which they were subjected. One could argue that all students should be treated equally and that no student should receive preferential treatment in terms of additional pedagogical support. But then this would be to ignore the undeservedly inequitable education that many students, certainly in South Africa, have been or may still be subjected to.

Secondly, compassionate imagining is best cultivated if one acknowledges some sort of community between oneself and the other, understanding what it might mean for one to encounter possibilities and vulnerabilities similar to those of the sufferer:

> [One] will learn compassion best if [one] begins by focusing on their sufferings [...] in order for compassion to be present, the person must consider the suffering of another as a significant part of his or her own scheme of goals and ends. [One] must take that person's ill as affecting [one's] own flourishing. In effect, [one] must make [oneself] vulnerable in the person of another (Nussbaum 2001: 317).

What this recognition of one's own related vulnerability means is that students who have a clear understanding of say concepts in a literature classroom, for example, and become impatient with their peers for not grasping such concepts should imagine what it would mean for them to encounter similar difficulty with concepts. Likewise, a teacher of literary studies should become more aware of what it means for students to encounter epistemological difficulties. In the words of Nussbaum (2001: 317):

> ... the recognition of one's own related vulnerability is, then, an important and frequently an indispensable epistemological requirement for compassion in human beings.

In essence, compassionate imagining brings to the fore the intellectual emotions of people in ethical deliberation. It is not sufficient to educate by focusing merely on deliberation without also cultivating compassionate imagining. Deliberative argumentation prompts students and teachers to question meanings, imagine alternative possi-

bilities, modify practical judgements, foster respect and develop critical engagement. Yet it seldom brings into play the emotions of people who are necessary to make it worthwhile to continue the dialogical interaction. If one is going to ignore the pedagogical vulnerabilities of the weak, very little will be done in the direction of meaningful education, that is to say, action with unpredictable and unintended outcomes. So we also need compassionate and imaginative students and teachers.

As I reach the end of my autobiographical narrative, it becomes clear that it is only by adopting an account of educational theory as practice that I now feel able to make adequate sense of my professional development as a philosopher of education and a teacher educator. What I have come to realise is that to construe educational theory merely as a body of "theoretical" concepts independent of action (deliberative engagement and compassionate imagining) would be to deprive it of its inherently practical orientation.

2. Reflective insights from my autobiographical account

I shall now attempt to articulate some of the reflective insights from my autobiographical account concerning the role of educational theory in my own professional development. My starting point for pursuing the question of the integration between educational theory and practice was my initial obsession with reading philosophical texts in an encyclopaedic way — that is, as master texts. Encyclopaedic inquiry consists of three interrelated functions: first, inquiry is fragmented into a series of independent, specialised and professional activities (unrelated to a whole), with facts being "collected" and pragmatically ordered for convenience of reference; secondly, inquiry advances a determinate account of how a list of "Great Books" is to be read, interpreted and elucidated, and thirdly, inquiry leads conclusively to agreement, whether constrained (enforced) or unconstrained.

If I relate such an account of encyclopaedic inquiry to my initial reading of texts on the philosophy of education, then it follows, first, that I initially understood the philosophy of education to comprise a body of knowledge (definitions, descriptions and explanations), ap-

parently neutrally (objectively) "collected", which can be used as a reference to give an account of meaning. For instance, I thought it would not matter if one were to define the philosophy of education as a collection of rationally justifiable facts about events in the world. But I soon realised that such a definition of the philosophy of education would itself be at odds with other competing and rival adjudications, such as those of the philosophy of education as representing "shared (intersubjective) standards of rational argumentation" or "transcultural modes of critical engagement" or "incommensurable paradigms" of/about events in the world. The point I am making is that my initial encyclopaedic approach to the philosophy of education seemed to have been blind to conflicting, contending and incommensurable viewpoints on the subject.

Secondly, I also realised, with the aid of Hirst, Peters, Habermas, MacIntyre and Carr, that philosophy of education cannot merely advance an account of how Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, Descartes' *Discourse* or Nietzsche's *Zur Genealogie der Moral* are to be read, interpreted and elucidated. Of course, proponents of such a view often defend it as a way of restoring to us what they refer to as our cultural tradition. I agree that these books put us in touch with the best that has been said, written, done and made in our cultural past. But we are appropriators of our cultural traditions, which are often incompatible, and there is no way that either selecting a list of great books or advancing a determinate account of how they are to be read can bring about any single neutral understanding of such texts, as the encyclopaedists would wish us to achieve. In the first place, these great books represent rival and often incompatible traditions, which in turn demands that we read texts against each other with "rival possibilities of interpretation" (MacIntyre 1990: 231).

Thirdly, I also learned that inquiry in or about the philosophy of education cannot result in conclusive agreement for the reason that multifarious protagonists advocate contending standpoints of the discipline. Whether proponents are logical empiricists, critical rationalists, deconstructionists or Habermasians, each position on the philosophy of education seems irrefutable to its own adherents. Hence, debate among such protagonists about what the philosophy of education means would inevitably be inconclusive, since the major standpoints on the

discipline are mutually incompatible and each contending position seems sufficiently warranted on the basis of rational argument. These new insights into, and understanding of, the philosophy of education disposed me to reflectively reconstruct my own professional practice as an educational theorist/practitioner.

The question now arises: what exactly have I learnt? The first lesson is that the kind of reasoning appropriate to theorising about what I should teach in practice is not a matter of theorising first and then instrumentally trying to achieve some "ends" in consonance with my thinking. In practical reasoning, "means" do not technically result in "ends"; rather, they are constitutive and interdependent — they cannot be separated. Hence, theorising and practising are reciprocally related.

Secondly, practical reasoning or reasoning together with others can only be achieved through people's engagement in social relationships. University teachers can engage with students, for instance, but their engagement may not necessarily take the form of reasoning together. For MacIntyre (1999: 105), to sustain one in this quest of reasoning together — that is, to give others an intelligible account of one's reasoning — one needs to demonstrate the ability and the willingness to evaluate the reasons for action advanced to one by others, so that one makes oneself accountable for one's endorsements of the practical conclusions of others as well as for one's own conclusions. In relation to university education about educational theory, university teachers may socialise postgraduate education students with understandings of critical pedagogy and reflexivity, so that they can in turn critically and self-reflectively evaluate such concepts. Students can evaluate university teachers' explication of educational concepts by interrogating the logical soundness, clarity and coherence of the arguments produced in justification of these concepts and may then decide to relate certain concepts to their own educative practice.

The point is that socialising students with educational concepts no longer centres on decisions made by individual university teachers, but also on evaluation of the teachers by the students, who may decide to use concepts such as critical pedagogy and reflexivity in their educative practice. In other words, students may decide to do something with these concepts. They may decide to experience what it would mean if these concepts were to be used in action. For instance, some stu-

dents might want to experience how other students would engage with them if they questioned and challenged one another's views on educational transformation. Dewey (1925: 11) describes such pedagogical activity as students and teachers engaging in a transaction. Consequently, the action performed by individual university teachers constitutes part of some whole, so that by their performance the whole is brought into being. University teachers act in the classroom, while at the same time opportunities are created for students to experience the transaction — they are not excluded from pedagogical activity. Dewey (1938: 38) explains experience as a (university classroom) practice that leads to "patterns of action … [which constitute] the basis of organic learning".

Consequently, I came to understand the philosophy of education as including reasoning together with others which leads to some kind of transaction between university teachers and students — learning through experiencing actions such as questioning, challenging and reflecting on what is being done. Put differently, teachers and students deliberate with one another. MacIntyre (1999) makes the point that deliberation occurs when people care for one another, respect one another and engage justly in conversation. In the concluding section I shall explore these constitutive meanings of deliberation with the aim of showing how university teachers and students can experience intelligent action — a matter of "doing" in practical terms philosophy of education.

3. Caring, conversational justice and respect as instances of "doing" philosophy of education

One of the central goods intrinsic to practical reasoning is possessing the virtue of caring. It is not enough for a university teacher simply to be affectionate towards, or to be attached to students, which promotes caring. One has to be affectionate towards, or attached to a student in order to care. But this does not mean that one merely has to please a student, even if one's actions are not in his or her best interests. For example, in an educational theory classroom, university students might want to analyse concepts such as critical pedagogy, reflexivity and educational transformation without having been educated to construct the logically necessary conditions which make these concepts what

they are. It would please them if you allowed them to write down what you as a university teacher have to say about these concepts, but this might not be in the best interests of the students' own understanding and imaginative construction of what these concepts mean. If one is really to acquire the virtue of caring for students and not just being affectionate towards them, one needs to cultivate in others the capacity to reach their own justifiable conclusions, to which they are to be held accountable by and to others — referred to by MacIntyre (1999: 83) as the ability to evaluate, modify or reject one's own practical judgments. As students are "taught" the procedures for analysing concepts, the ways to find their logically necessary conditions, and how to articulate meanings logically and skilfully, they are initiated into a practice of evaluating, modifying and rejecting their judgements in the process of analysing concepts. Students arre cared for if they receive a good education in conceptual analysis as well as acquiring ways to discover their own version of philosophical educational inquiry. In turn, students will act prudently, that is, exercise practical reasoning without simply being "told" what to say and what to do. If a student is cared for, deliberation has a better chance of taking place.

To give students a good education in conceptual analysis, a university teacher in an educational theory classroom does not just impose on students his or her own understanding of concepts, but allows them the freedom of choice to reflect on, to modify and to sustain the practice of analysing the concepts, namely critical pedagogy, reflexivity and educational transformation. Students develop the capacity to make practical judgments when they encounter unforeseen possibilities in class, which involves responding to questions they had not thought about prior to the lecture; they analyse the concepts rationally by articulating in a clear and coherent way to fellow students what they entail, and at the end of every lecture they re-educate themselves in relation to other students' views on the concepts by comparing notes, based on the teacher's critical feedback to other students' understanding of them. Caring, then, does not merely involve cultivating in ourselves "degrees of affection" toward others, but also encouraging others to develop the capacities of evaluation and modification — that is, what others consider to be sufficiently good reasons for acting — and to imagine alternative possibilities so as to be able to re-educate themselves

rationally, to become practical reasoners. When students are encouraged to evaluate, modify and imagine other possibilities, they experience intelligent action. In this sense, they are willing to acknowledge that they may not always know the appropriate answer, but must set out to try alternative ways of addressing a problem, and imagine possibilities which can guide their "patterns of action". This is precisely what caring does: it is the imaginative reconstruction of "possible lines of (intelligent and deliberative) action" (Dewey 1925: 132).

Secondly, the kind of caring which university teachers as practical reasoners experience will not only help students to make rational choices, to be imaginative and to re-educate themselves, but also to trust and rely upon those teachers from whom they have received such care. This implies that both the givers (teachers) and the receivers (students) of care have to engage justly in conversation with one another. According to MacIntyre (1999: 111)

> ... conversational justice requires, among other things, first that each of us speaks with candor, not pretending or deceiving or striking attitudes, and secondly that each takes up no more time than is justified by the importance of the point that she or he has to make and the arguments necessary for making it.

Along these lines, I should like to elucidate some touchstones of conversational justice, which I think constitute a MacIntyrean understanding of the concept: "candour", "the importance of the point" and the "arguments necessary for making it".

Considering these touchstones of conversational justice, the concept emerges as both a view of human experience and a moral value which recommends a certain attitude and response to human engagement. On the one hand, as a moral value, conversational justice conceives of the relationship between the self and the other dialectically, being the basis for an engagement based on honesty, openness, sincerity, and truth. These moral aspects link strongly with the notion of candour, which implies that conversation should be understood not merely as a pleasant and willing sharing, but also as involving provocation, threats and resistance. Thus being honest, open, sincere and truthful is essential in order to evaluate and sometimes to abandon or to alter old ways (Fay 1996: 233).

On the other hand, conversational justice as a view of human experience encourages people to engage with their differences and to present arguments justifying "the importance of the point" in ways that explore possibilities for productive and positive learning from others. University teachers can also learn about students and from students, thereby opening up new possibilities for themselves and the students in the process of critical, deliberative engagement.

I shall now elaborate on the notion of conversational justice as an engagement in which people not only encounter each other's differences, but also improve the possibilities for deliberation by means of which they can produce arguments to justify their points. First, engagement based on conversational justice refers not only to one's capacity for eliciting students' regard for one as a university teacher and for becoming invested in the lives of students, but also to an enhanced ability to listen and respond to students; a deepened appreciation of the ways in which students contribute to one's own self-knowledge, and an enlargement of one's moral imagination. Enhancing one's ability to listen and respond to students implies that university teachers have to be willing to hear and open to accepting what students have to say. They have to interact with different types of students, and should mutually explore and share all students' perspectives as a way of developing their own and students' understandings. In other words, university teachers must be willing and able, when the time comes, to deliberate with students, to listen and be listened to, and to take responsibility for what students say or do. To be able to listen and respond to students implies that engagement on the part of university teachers should be unconditional, which increases the possibility of becoming unconditionally engaged by students — that is, of deliberating on matters without attaching any conditionality to such engagement. In this way suspicion and unnecessary antagonism among university teachers and students can be obviated, thus improving the credibility and legitimacy of their human engagement and their decisions by fostering greater co-operation and mutual respect between and among themselves, thus enhancing their desire and ability to extend their mutual relationships, as well as their eagerness to share with one another. Once university teachers and students deliberate in a sharing, uncon-

ditional and co-operative manner, they embark on intelligent (deliberative) action — that is, they start "doing" philosophy of education.

Finally, why is mutual respect a condition for deliberative pedagogical activity? Unconditional engagement of university teachers and students in educative practices would not of itself ensure conversational justice. My contention is that mutual respect has to exist among university teachers and students. In seeking to achieve mutual respect in the face of disagreement, for instance, we need to pay attention to the way in which people hold or express positions. For example, the way in which university teachers should treat each other with regard to policy issues — even when the policy debate ends in legislation and the university takes a position favouring one side of the dispute — needs to be grounded in principles constituting mutual respect. In other words, mutual respect is a form of agreeing to disagree, which of course requires a favourable attitude towards, and constructive interaction with, the people with whom one disagrees. The point I am making is that mutual respect does not imply unconditional acceptance of everything others say or propose — people should agree to disagree. University teachers do not show respect for students by simply accepting everything they say; students do not show respect for university teachers merely by imitating them. Mutual respect demands that we hold others to the intellectual and moral standards we apply to ourselves. To excuse others from the demands of intellectual rigour and honesty or moral sensitivity and wisdom on the grounds that everyone is entitled to his or her opinion, no matter how ill-informed or ungrounded, is to treat them with contempt. We honour others by challenging them when we think they are wrong and by thoughtfully accepting their justifiable criticisms of us. To do this is to take them seriously; to do any less is to dismiss them as unworthy of serious consideration, or to treat them with disrespect (Fay 1996: 234).

If, for example, university teachers prevent students from exercising critical reflection and imagination regarding educational issues, or if students are unable to give critical evaluations about such matters, their actions should not be beyond the pale of critical judgment. Respect does also not mean that everything students do, for example expressing incoherent and unjustifiable points of view, is acceptable. Respect means that students should be held accountable for supporting and

implementing educational practices, for instance critical pedagogy, on the basis of self-reflection. Hence, respect does not simply mean accepting everything students do or say. Respect conceived as mere acceptance negates the process of deliberation.

In essence, the principles of mutual respect imply that the university classrooms in which we conduct our educational deliberation should encourage students to justify their actions with moral reasons and give teachers the opportunity to criticise those reasons, and vice versa. Only then can we be said to have embarked upon philosophical action.

This discussion has shown how caring, conversational justice and mutual respect can enhance deliberative action in university classrooms. In concluding, I shall explore the ways in which the philosophy of education as deliberative action can enhance educational problem-solving in and beyond university classrooms.

4. Conclusion: the philosophy of education and educational problem-solving

In my view, deliberative university classroom activity offers possibilities which can be used as instruments for making educational problem-solving more desirable. In the first place, deliberation demands that teachers and students do not merely accept given educational problem definitions with pre-determined ends, needing to be instrumentally engineered and controlled. Through deliberation, university teachers and students should approach educational problem-solving by offering possibilities as to what is achievable and whether achieving it is desirable (Biesta 2004a: 14). It is quite possible to pursue this line of educational problem-solving because deliberation creates possibilities for teachers and students to come up with alternative possibilities for desirable action. Educational problems are not solved in advance. Rather, through deliberation, possible solutions are imagined, contested, and experimented with. For this reason Ramsden (1992: 19) claims that university education should lead students to the "imaginative acquisition of knowledge", which encourage them not only to think critically, but also to stretch their creative capacities in relation to others to the point at which ideas can be changed. In other words, solutions to educational problems are imaginatively and deliberatively constructed,

involving the use of both teachers' and students' imaginative powers and creative judgements in the production of ends which are not previously negotiated but develop out of the deliberative (philosophical) teacher-student pedagogical activity.

Secondly, educational problem-solving should not be confined to the university classroom, but should extend beyond its boundaries. Democracy itself may be considererd a problem for education. In this context, there seems to be merit in arguments which suggest that universities cannot engender democratic citizens, but can only create the conditions under which democracy can flourish (Biesta 2004b: 1). If societies are not able to produce democratic citizens, politicians and policy-makers (as agents of the state) could hold universities accountable for their apparent failure to cultivate good citizens. One way of preventing such a situation from occurring is to extend the process of deliberation beyond the university classroom. For instance, associational networks such as clubs, churches, corporations, support groups, unions and families could be used as seedbeds to cultivate deliberation. This would mean that university teachers and students should become more actively involved in such associational networks, where they may gain a better understanding of the social, political and economic contexts in which they live and appropriately deepen their "friendship, sense of trust and confidence" (Biggs 2000: 134) in order to enhance their (deliberative, that is, philosophical) educational problem-solving abilities.

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