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MORAL EDUCATION AND THE CHALLENGE OF PRE-SERVICE PROFESSIONAL FORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Janet Orchard

School of Education, University of Bristol, United Kingdom

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Corresponding author Janet Orchard edjlo@bristol.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

As teaching, irrespective of its geographical location, involves personal relationships (Griffiths 2013), all teachers are in some sense moral educators through the ‘hidden curriculum’, or learning which takes place through the process of being educated. However, teacher education (TE) in many parts of the world is increasingly pre-occupied with content and academic attainment for its own sake, rendering it insufficiently attentive to those fundamentally human concerns that characterize teaching and through which teachers educate their students. This paper attends to those elements that professional formation must include to support teachers as moral educators effectively, whether, or not they identify as curriculum specialists in this area. I conclude by outlining three specific examples of initiatives which address current deficiencies in practical terms through reclaiming ‘leaky’ spaces within conventional pre-service programmes: ‘Philosophy for Teachers’ (P4T), ‘Shared Space’ and ‘Going Global’.

Introduction

Husserl’s warning (1970) of a loss of ‘meaningfulness for life’, in a world in which positivistic views and the pursuit of outcomes and performance dominate, has proved alarmingly prescient. Somewhat ironically, a view of the world which seeks to strip itself of human subjectivity, has imposed on education systems across the world an assumed ‘ethic’ of its own. Teachers and teaching in some curriculum subjects are valued over others for their perceived economic worth and the art of classroom teaching is reduced to knowledge transfer as a form of coaching in preparation for high stakes testing. Professional formation increasingly is pre-occupied with content and academic attainment. Furthermore, somewhat ironically, a false sense of ‘certainty’ about what we ‘know’ from tests and pseudo-scientific educational studies pervades the policy discourse; at the time of writing, in lockdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the future has never seemed more uncertain.

The impact of this worldview on notions of the good teacher (and by extension good teacher educator) has been to introduce and sustain reductive assumptions within the dominant global discourses of policy and practice with at least two urgent issues for teachers and teaching with respect to moral education. First, is a concern for the school curriculum, for while epistemic and moral ‘truths’ are questioned and problematised consistently in the public space, including but not limited to comments on Twitter and social media, these discussions take place in ways that are detached from informed ‘moral discourse’. This can only get worse as moral education is either marginalized or removed entirely from the curriculum, alongside the humanities and arts, subjects that are at risk of extinction at the level of higher education for all but the most elite institutions.

A second concern, and the main focus of this paper, is that while the development of teachers’ moral identity ought to be attended to in professional formation, currently this is at best marginalized, if present at all in programmes. Teaching, irrespective of its geographical location, involves personal relationships (Griffiths 2013); the quality of shared human

experience while being educated is foundational to flourishing, for all concerned: students, teachers and school leaders. However, advice to new teachers, euphemistically described as ‘managing’ those classroom relationships, too commonly rests on reductive and behaviourist assumptions about human nature and scant regard is given to those fundamentally human concerns that characterize teaching, and the ‘hidden curriculum’ of learning taking place through being educated.

Schools, teaching, teacher education, urgently need *re-humanising*. Philosophy of education, history, policy sociology, critical theory, cultural studies to name but a few curriculum areas, have a crucial role to play in calling out notions of teaching and teacher education that dominate in our current times as ‘impoverished’. Ill-informed popular assumptions and truisms about teaching abound and require questioning and challenging as much as other aspects of the body politic. Yet appreciation of the contested nature of educational practice, and its complexity, and the kinds of stimuli needed to develop it in response to the challenges of classroom life, are under-represented on standard teacher education programmes (Orchard, Heilbronn and Winstanley, 2020; 2016).

Teachers as moral educators

I have previously argued (e.g. Orchard and Davids, 2019; Orchard, Heilbronn and Winstanley, 2016) that insufficient recognition is given to the ‘space’ and quality of time which teachers need to reflect on ethical matters as these arise inevitably in their practice during their professional education (Orchard, Heilbronn and Winstanley, 2020). An artificial distinction is drawn between teaching and learning narrowly conceived and specific professional values which teachers are expected to abide by, evident for example in the way in which the Teachers Standards for England (DfE 2012) are split in two parts, when in practice all aspects of teaching are value-laden (Orchard et al, 2016). How can teachers sustain schools and colleges as civic institutions without being thoroughly prepared through deliberation, discussion and critical reflection in relation to their chosen profession?

Moreover, with Winch and Oancea (Winch et al 2015; Orchard and Winch 2015), I have argued that to be able to exercise judgement well along these lines requires ‘good sense’ (Gramsci, 1976); that theory has an important part to play in fostering it; but this is similarly under-represented in many conventional teacher education programmes. Here I relate these established concerns to the lack of appropriate preparation for teachers as moral educators during pre-service professional formation although my remarks also have relevance for the continuing professional development of in-service teachers.

Philosophers have long argued that moral or values education takes place through the experience of ethical living, a notion that extends, although it is no way limited to, the ethical relationships that take place in schools and classrooms. Might some of these established and well-respected traditions be re-imagined in order to address the current challenges facing teachers and teacher educators? The notion of moral education from experience originates with Aristotle (1953) and is developed subsequently both by general philosophers (e.g. Dewey, 1916, Bradley, 1927, MacIntyre, 1981, Hegel, 1991, Taylor, 1992) and philosophers of education (e.g. White, 1996, Haydon, 1997, McLaughlin, 2000, Carr, 2007). For example, Hegel's view of the ethical life suggests that a complex dialectical relationship exists between "subjectively" held moral beliefs by individuals and the sense of “truth” reflected in established social norms. Moral understanding develops through immersion in habits, particular moral codes enshrined in laws, customs and traditions of the society in which one is located; as well as the capacity to reflect on those beliefs critically, which should inform

one's sense of what course of action might be appropriate, given the particularities of the context in which ethical reflection is situated.

For Hegel, this process takes place not only at a micro level, within the consciousness of individual people, but at the macro level of society itself; as groups of people within civil society wrestle with the tension between those norms reflected in custom and practice and beliefs particular to them as individuals. In *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre argues (1981) that people achieve the highest standards possible through engagement in social practices (as these standards are defined by the particular social practice concerned) and through reflection on activity, so that one's conceptions of the ends and goods involved in the social practice are also enabled to develop (MacIntyre, 1981: 187). Charles Taylor (1992) argues that moral character is formed through participation in a social context, adding that moral maturation involves reflection on the kind of life one finds oneself living. Taylor argues that over time people construct personal narratives which provide terms against which they may judge their actions and beliefs, either as virtues or as vices.

Moral education from experience of ethical living which takes place through the ethos of a school, may sometimes be described as its "hidden curriculum" (Huddleston and Kerr, 2006:10). This includes the learning which takes place as a result of the ethical deliberation undertaken by teachers, made manifest in their actions, dispositions and attitudes. Contemporary teachers may be uncomfortable with this idea, identifying instead as morally neutral teachers of subjects, concerned not to indoctrinate their pupils and in the past, the complexities around this issue, the personal and professional positioning of the teacher, might have been explored in some depth during pre-service teacher education.

Certainly, on my own PGCE this was the case: whether, or not, a 'value neutral' stance as a classroom teacher is possible occupied several hours of professional reflection and discussion during a university-based teaching session. However, this wasn't my practice as an initial teacher educator. The curriculum was too crowded, tightly organized around concerns with subject knowledge and practical 'what can work' teaching strategies. There was simply no time set aside in the 12 precious weeks spent in university on the PGCE to discuss the complex relationship between how a teacher behaves ethically and the quality of moral education that this extended through their actions.

Of course, children do not derive moral education solely from teachers. As Haydon makes clear, teachers may only be one of a number of moral authorities that children and young people encounter, given the time that they spend in places other than school, with alternative influences including their parents or carers, family members and people encountered in wider society, directly or via the media. Nor should teachers worry that they are simply 'broadcasting' values to pupils as passive receivers of moral signals who accept the teachers' values without subjecting them to rational assessment (Haydon 1997:121). However, teachers' professional knowledge cannot be reduced to academic competencies and practical skill alone given their actions in school have such a bearing on their students.

This, potentially, sets a very high bar for teaching and teacher education. Yet too often the immense skill and judgement which really good teachers demonstrate is falsely attributed and reduced to 'common sense', a problematic notion in this context. First, because it may not be 'common' to all as a recent article in the TES, "*Imitating God ... and other ways that teachers break the rules*" (Emma Kell 14.08.2019) clearly illustrates, whether it be "drinking gin in the staffroom" or "losing the school minibus". Nor is all, so-called, common sense

particularly ‘sensible’, for example the simplistic assumption that ‘no new teacher’ should ‘smile until Christmas’. More seriously, in South Africa I learned from pre-service teachers encountering at first hand the ‘common sense’ assumption that children needed to be ‘beaten’ to behave themselves, no matter that the practice of corporal punishment has been illegal for some time (see Orchard and Davids 2019 for further discussion of this issue). Rendered simplistically into maxims and homilies, these truisms will persist unless more systematic and sustained professional education is provided as one part of a suite of strategies needed to eradicate this inhumane practice.

Gramsci’s (1976) notion of ‘good sense’ in action offers a more useful alternative. Yet the kinds of stimuli needed to develop it are under-represented on standard pre and in-service teacher education programmes (Orchard, Heilbronn and Winstanley, 2019; 2016). Perhaps it is assumed that professional judgement in this sense comes ‘naturally’; yet this is unlikely, for the reasons just indicated. Wider experience of life and learning may well contribute to teachers’ capacity to reach appropriate responses of all kinds consistently and well. However, as Hegel and others make clear, consistent and systematic, resourceful, discerning and insightful *reflection* on action is an essential element in learning thoroughly from experience. Moreover, that reflection requires a quality that is missing where formulaic and reductive practices are deployed that are divorced from a structured and ‘academic’ dimension. Theoretical and research-informed perspectives on education have an indispensable role to play here in developing good sense in teachers (Winch et al 2015; Orchard and Winch, 2015).

In arguing for teachers’ engagement with theory and research-informed perspectives on education, I understand that academic practices of writing and reading may not be those in which people who wish to be teachers feel a need to become adept. However, accessing ideas, processing them, reflecting on their application to teaching through discussion with those who do possess such skills exposes practitioners to perspectives on issues they might, but do not, encounter directly themselves. It encourages the established teacher in South Africa to ‘think otherwise’ about corporal punishment; it interrupts what they think they know about ‘effective’ practices; it introduces perspectives they do not hold personally. “Without contraries, no progression”, William Blake maintained. The wide-held assumption that teachers are good, or not, from habit and disposition alone must be challenged.

There are practical pedagogical problems with the way in which education as a discipline/field of study has traditionally been taught to teachers and I am not alone in having misjudged at the time the value of a one-year PGCE that attempted to distil the BA/BEEd Honours curriculum. Justice may not be done to the study of education in this condensed form, nor do those who take a PGCE always appreciate why they need to engage with education in its theoretical form or accept the significance of theory to practice. This problem does not apply equally across different contexts internationally, for example the highly regarded context of Finland, where teacher education programmes find ways to retain a strong university-based component. However, if they are to encourage their pupils to subject values to rational assessment when they encounter them through life in schools, teachers need to understand education well enough themselves. This, as Graham Haydon (1997: 121) argues, avoids indoctrination into those values because teachers capable of interpreting educational practice meaningfully and securely allow (even encourage) disagreement in pupils.

Professional Development for Teachers as Moral Educators

I will sketch briefly examples of what I consider to be more promising practices in teacher education, because they create time and space for ethical deliberation in ways that are

implicitly theoretical if not explicitly so thus promoting critical reflection. First, 'Philosophy for Teachers', or 'P4T', adapted from the more familiar idea of "P4C" or Philosophy for Children (Orchard et al 2019; Orchard and Davids 2019) which draws on the model of learning through dialogue within a "community of practice" comprising new teachers, teacher educators and philosophers. Inevitably at this exploratory stage, each example creates new questions as well as answers. At no point do I claim that these offer complete solutions to what are nuanced and complex practical and theoretical issues.

One attempt to re-assert the place of the ethical in teacher education in England, 'Philosophy for Teachers', or 'P4T', has been adapted from the more familiar idea of "P4C" or Philosophy for Children (Orchard et al 2016). Drawing on the model of learning through dialogue in a "community of practice", comprising new teachers, teacher educators and philosophers, it supports teachers in thinking ethically about dilemmas they face in their early experiences in classrooms. 3 pilot events took place in England in 2015-16 which suggested that a number of benefits could accrue from the opportunity for extended 'critical reflection' of a particular sort away from the 'busy-ness' of conventional teacher education in a residential setting. The model was trialed again in Cape Province, South Africa (Orchard and Davids, 2019) bringing student teachers and tutors together for the first time from 3 universities and across religious, cultural and ethnic divisions.

P4T is not without its limitations as those who have been developing it (and P4C) readily acknowledge. Take the potential absence of expert or 'powerful' knowledge in a community of enquiry established on democratic principles, for example; during one P4T pilot session, a religious matter arose and the ensuing discussion wandered down an intellectual cul de sac which, arguably, a more didactic teaching approach might have avoided. By the same token, some structured subject specific input from a community member was possible; and the process of wandering had value.

Waks (2020) has noted that P4T need not be residential and Karen Murriss (2016) has demonstrated clearly how P4C can be incorporated successfully, potentially at far lower cost, within a conventional PGCE programme, arguably to similar effect. A 5th pilot and non-residential P4T event is planned for Hong Kong in 2020, working with local teacher educators who judge this to be a fruitful, realistic and culturally appropriate approach to take in this context. That said, observation so far has been that the (intense) quality of ethical living which the residential version experience of P4T promotes is uniquely powerful, if not to the extent that the experience in other formats could not also be worthwhile and valuable.

In similar vein, a further exploratory residential project in 2017 brought together a mixed, inter-generational group largely comprised of actual or aspiring secondary teachers of Religious Education (RE) in England (the age of participants ranging from 18 to 69) which included: student teachers on a one-year PGCE, in-service teachers, consultants/advisers and university-based teacher educators; religion and theology undergraduates, one of their tutors and two multi-faith chaplains. Spending 36-hours in N Ireland at the Corrymeela community and Belfast arose when it became clear the student RE teachers knew little or nothing of the politics or history of sectarian division and an opportunity arose to address this by visiting.

The dialogical and experiential professional learning that ensued was loosely framed within the interfaith tradition familiar to the group leaders in England and N. Ireland rather than P4C and was consistent with the ethos of the university's 'multi-faith' chaplaincy. Given the commitment of the group to teaching RE in England, and clarity around expectations prior to

departure, the framing worked well with this particular group; many, but not all, were personally religious. Some adjustments might have been needed to be made to the explicit positioning of the trip had the group comprised a broader Humanities team of teachers; or perhaps the positioning of the experience would have shifted with a different group of participants. However, this remains an unusual example of teacher education in which both subject knowledge and ethical deliberation in teaching was promoted through ethical living.

The Corrymeela initiative just described was part of a broader project called ‘Shared Space’ that has been concerned to address the claim that RE promotes warmer community relations, looked at through the social psychological lens of ‘contact hypothesis’ (Williams et al. 2019). Other activities within this body of work explored the potential of the contact principles applied to RE teaching: equal status, collaboration towards common goals within context of wider institutional support. Once again, the notion of dialogue through being ‘in residence’ was key but this time along the lines of an ‘artist in residence’ i.e. over a longer period but without the same emphasis on common life in community.

Two teachers were welcomed to ‘residencies’ in the university for a period of one week each (along the lines of the Farmington Fellowship scheme for RE teachers in England <http://www.farmington.ac.uk/index.php/history/>) to participate in a research-informed community of inquiry. In turn, the researchers were welcomed to local group meetings of RE teachers, sharing conversations about RE and diversity in convivial surroundings. We consciously addressed the issue of inter-group relationships across the theory practice divide (see above) by applying the contact principles to ourselves. In June 2018 a further 24 hour Shared Space residential event was hosted to extend the community to 24 RE teachers.

‘Going Global’ has attempted to translate a different existing and successful dialogical pedagogy once again from the context of work with young people in schools to that of higher education, recognising the respective differences in adults’ needs as learners. Generation Global <https://generation.global> is a not-for-profit educational organization which brings together school students aged 12-17 from over 40 different countries to share ‘difficult dialogues’ using video-conferencing. ‘Going Global’ extends that possibility of difficult and potentially controversial international on-line dialogue to pre-service teachers from the Universities of Bristol, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Queen’s University, Belfast and Stellenbosch University. As with P4T, creativity and commitment have been required to create a ‘leaky space’ (Orchard et al 2016) for more humanistic activity on an otherwise over-crowded and instrumental ITE curriculum.

A particular concern of the ‘Going Global initiative has been that of encountering ‘otherness’, thus promoting knowledge, understanding, dispositions and skills that will help participants to navigate difference in a peaceful and constructive way. Exploring the potential of this model seemed particularly apt, given the recent and potentially relevant concerns that have been raised about the unintended racism implicit in the notion of reason being assumed in communities of inquiry promoted by P4C, as a consequence of ‘white ignorance’ (Chetty, 2018). Going Global has been promoted as a means by which pre-service teachers might be exposed to complexity, diversity and uncertainty which they are required to navigate in dialogue with others, by engaging globally on-line according to a different, but complementary pedagogical model.

While the positive benefits of Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) on experiences of learning and teaching more generally are well established; far less is known

(Stahl, 2017; Wegerif, 2006) about its benefits to cognitive engagement in intercultural dialogue, particularly in a higher education setting. In the short-term, our relatively modest aims have been to test whether, or not, the initiative can work at all and, if so, what we might gain from the experience. In the longer-term, our agenda centres on the promotion of intercultural understanding and awareness in new and beginning teachers through digital learning, in ways which promote safe and positive on-line behaviours, rather than risky and potentially harmful ones.

Led by the Chinese University of Hong Kong, we are exploring the use of visual methodology to analyse the student teachers' reflections. Visual methodology, we maintain, enables participants to 'craft' their personal experience in ways that help to capture hidden knowledge and feelings that might not otherwise be expressed (Orchard, Wan, Davids and Smith 2019), creating spaces for reflection and re-organising existing ideas. Given the culturally diverse group of people participating in Going Global, a further advantage of expressing reflections through drawing rather than writing has been the opportunity to escape English as the dominant mode of communication, something we have had to accept in the dialogues ourselves as our one shared language.

Tentative Conclusions

Becoming a good teacher takes time and space for reflection of a particular kind, which has been squeezed out of much contemporary pre-service teacher education. This is not to hark back necessarily to a golden age of provision in the past, which did not always engage new and beginning teachers; also, variations in practice across jurisdictions must be acknowledged. However, a focus on values and ethics during teachers' pre-service professional formation programmes is essential in preparing them, not only for the complexities of pedagogical relationships in schools but the role that teachers play in modelling values and reasoning with those they teach. This requires the theoretical dimension that is currently missing to be re-introduced, in ways that are pedagogically more effective than those that characterized PGCE programmes (in particular) in the past.

Opportunities for learning together through experience and dialogue in teacher education offers a promising way forward towards starting to address this need. Various open and inclusive dialogical approaches might be adapted for the purpose and drawing on established pedagogical practices and expertise has been a critical factor in the success of these initiatives to date (Orchard et al 2016). Undertaking experimental work of this nature requires heavily on having some kind of 'structure' or model in place as a starting point for adaptation and improvisation. Given the very limited time available and multiple pressures experienced during pre-service teacher education, any proposed non-standard activity should be assessed carefully by those seeking to introduce it.

These initiatives mentioned specifically in this paper represent only a small step forward and some examples of what might be possible. I have various ideas with others about how those projects we already have might be extended and developed. At the same time, I am acutely aware that in seeking to exploit 'leaky spaces' to enable modest experimentation in what might be pedagogically possible here and now on the margins of existing practice, resources of time and intellectual energy are being taken up that in the longer term might be better invested in tackling more fundamental problems with mainstream teacher education.

For now, these projects expand horizons and open up new possibilities, trying to preserve the place of reflexivity and the opportunity to provoke critical questions through experiential

learning in teacher education, whilst also reinstating the opportunities for a series engagement with educational theory. They have proved to be personally rewarding for many of the few people lucky enough to have been able to participate in them. For a while, at least, I am reminded of the rich rewards that being and becoming a teacher brings at best, as a life-long process and with space and time to think.

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