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ANCHORS OF STABILITY AMIDST THE TIDES OF CHANGE?

The Challenge to Teacher Preparation

As the new millennium dawns, teachers in Canada's public schools are buffeted on all sides by increasingly strident demands for change, for improvement in the educational services they provide and in the results their students achieve. These demands are many and varied — demands for increased public accountability, for better teaching, for the integration of special needs students, for the effective use of technology in the classroom, for stronger, firmer discipline; demands to respond swiftly and creatively to the forces of globalization and attendant pressures for national economic competitiveness in world markets; demands from particular provincial agendas to improve the quality and

character of public education, from various stakeholder groups including corporate interests, teachers themselves, and parents, all of whom seek to advance their own conceptions of public educational reform in the service of their definition of self and the public interest. The school, not surprisingly, as a significant social institution, finds itself at the vortex of these pressures to change, and closely affected by these pressures are Faculties of Education across the country, charged with the responsibility for preparing the next cadres of teachers.

How then, in the face of this maelstrom of change, do teachers cope in their classrooms and schools? To what personal, professional anchor do they

hold? How do they maintain a sense of constant educational purpose? And, derivatively, how do or should Faculties of Education prepare new teacher candidates to navigate in this maelstrom of change? What pedagogical anchor will enable new teachers to hold to their purpose when confronted by these tides of change? These are important educational questions; the answers will undergird future professional pedagogical success.

Faculties of Education often respond by making structural changes to the arrangement of their pre-service program: e.g. adding an internship/induction component, extending the length of practica placements, arguing for a two year program. In some instances,

teacher preparation programs endorse a particular pedagogical approach like Schön's reflective practice. Some of these changes are last minute, opportunistic shifts in response to new political realities; others are carefully considered and intrinsically worthwhile. Yet to some extent at least, the concern with form and structural arrangements runs the risk of missing the point of assisting beginning teachers develop a sense of what is intrinsically worthwhile, valuable and durable about teaching as a moral enterprise. Such a conception can provide a pedagogical anchor and pedagogical soul, if you will — a sense of constant educational purpose to which to hold fast in tumultuous seas and with which to assess, accept, or reject proposed educational changes.

This paper seeks to open a conversation about the implications of the changes emanating from global, national and provincial contexts, as well as from education stakeholders, as a prelude to considering the impact of such changes on initial teacher preparation programs. Also — and I think more importantly — it seeks to “frame” these changes in the context of the need to identify the “stable” in teacher preparation. By “stable” I mean that which should, external changes notwithstanding, remain constant in professional life by providing internal, professionally defensible, pedagogical anchors for the vocation and practice of teaching. Such concern leads me to re-frame “teacher education”, to propose an alternative conceptualization, one that is potentially transformative, in which teacher pre-service preparation is seen as the necessary and essential — but only the first step in a lifelong commitment to teaching as a professional career.

The crux of the challenge facing us is an acute need for teachers to retain a sense of professional stability and purpose in their lives and work. By this I do not seek to endorse resistance or reluctance to change on the part of those who teach but rather, speaking metaphorically, to view teachers as “anchors of stability amidst the tides of change.” Such a notion pre-supposes some over-arching conceptualization

that will permit this sense of stability yet admit the need to accept warranted change; a conceptualization that encourages teachers to establish and preserve their professional attributes — pedagogical competence, vocational commitment, ethic of service, integrity, and educational leadership. I submit that Thomas Green, in *The Formation of Conscience in an Age of Technology*, provides such a framework.¹

The Green Framework and its Relevance to Teacher Education

Green addresses the formation of conscience as a problem of moral education by distinguishing and explicating five voices of conscience: craft, membership, sacrifice, memory, imagination. Except in an extensive explanatory note, he does not address primarily the application of his schema to the professions nor to teaching in particular, so the application of his framework to teacher education is quite deliberately my extension of his exposition. I choose to do this, as will become clear, because of the apparent compatibility of these notions. Central is the recognition that Green treats the formation of conscience as a moral enterprise, and certainly teaching is fundamentally a moral endeavor, vocation and profession. As a starting point, however, let me review Green's argument.

Green sets out to explore the language useful “. . . in thinking about conscience and its formation in educational practice . . . [The] capacity of ours to be judge, each in his own case, is all that I mean by conscience.”² But conscience in Green's view has several voices.

The first voice is that of the sense of craft, where judgement attends to the quality of our performance and where matters of excellence in performance are involved. Such a voice implicates competence, skill, sense of craft, an understanding and appreciation of the nature of the standards of practice undergirding one's life and occupation.

“...[I]t may be in the acquisition of a “sense of craft” that the formation of conscience takes place most clearly. If we cannot teach children that it matters

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whether they craft a good sentence, for example, why should we be surprised that they do not craft a good life?³

In the case of teaching, the voice of conscience as craft speaks to us about pedagogical competence in all that that phrase invokes. It is learned through practice, and following Shulman's classification of teacher knowledge, pedagogical competence would certainly subsume these categories :

- content knowledge;
- general pedagogical knowledge;
- curriculum knowledge;
- pedagogical content knowledge;
- knowledge of learners and their characteristics;
- knowledge of educational contexts; and
- knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values.⁴

The second voice, that of membership, recognizes that accomplishment is public, especially where public role and service are at stake. So, for Green, it is not the individual qua individual who is important here; it is the individual qua *member* of a community or a civic order, because it is in that context that conscience is formed. Conscience as membership is primary in Green's thesis because it is as

a member of a community or of a profession like teaching that the individual comes to understand the normative expectations respecting personal and public behavior in the discharge of role.

*. . . [I]f we seek to induct persons into a profession by giving them command of the relevant expertise, and if at the same time we neglect to teach them the point of the practice, then surely it will become necessary to offer instruction in professional ethics. But that need will then arise from our failure to teach the point of the profession itself . . .*⁵

It is to this voice of conscience as membership that teachers need attend when contemplating public or private behavior that discredits their profession. Developing a mature sense of conscience as membership implies that teachers would not only become familiar with the ethics of professional behavior and practice, but would also engage in moral deliberation about these ethics. They would develop a sense of a moral curriculum to guide their own practice as members of the profession.

The third voice, that of conscience as sacrifice, invokes the actual sacrifice of self-interest in the sense of some "other" good. While "sacrifice" has an emotional significance that invites images of loss of life, that is not the primary notion here. Sacrifice means to

put self-interest aside, to subjugate self-interest in favour of some other, more altruistic good. Nominally, this should be the case for teachers who might be expected to put aside their own interests in favor of those of their students. Such is certainly central to the notion of teaching as a vocation.

The fourth voice, that of conscience as memory, focuses attention particularly on the sense of rootedness that occurs from membership, for example, in a well-established religion or cultural tradition which has been preserved over centuries. Arguably teaching — at least in the sense of mass public education and the formal professional organizations of teachers — does not have that kind of pedigree. There is, however, an emergent tradition of institutionalized teaching and teacher organization and, in a looser sense, a tradition of teaching that finds its origin in Socrates and other known, gifted individual teachers whose commitment and integrity is evident to those who knew them.

Frequently pre-service students are strongly guided by the memory of their own schooling and their own teachers; these memories often guide their beliefs. Such teachers provide examples of rootedness in a pedagogical tradition.

It is not sufficient for us to find our roots simply in some space or in some

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*profession or in relation to our contemporaries. We must find them also in some membership that extends through time. Thus there is an educational problem posed by the simple fact that, in any literal sense of the matter, our memories cannot be longer than our lives . . . it can only be by education that we can acquire a social memory whose reach is more remote.*⁶

The fifth voice is that of conscience as imagination. It is, in Green's view, this voice that carries the power of transformation — the capacity to appreciate and contemplate new possibilities:

*It is its transformation — the urging, the invitation to enter now into the realm of possibilities that so far exist only in imagination and that being acted on will change the future. That, I believe, is the moral significance of the conscience of imagination. It may begin with membership and rootedness, but it is nurtured in conversation with the great writers of imaginative literature.*⁷

My argument, continuing to extend Green's reasoning, is that it is this conversation with the cultured icons of the tradition that teachers are charged to preserve and discharge. Teachers, relying on their sense of pedagogical conscience as their "anchor of stability," can assess the virtue and value of changes and decide whether, and if so how, such changes should be accommodated.

There is thus a profound and tenuous balance that must be secured in our institutions. They must be malleable enough so that good and skillful persons who dream

*of what is not yet, but might be so, can be set free to decide and to act. But our institutions must also be sufficiently resistant to change so that those whose conscience is merely technical and limited to the skills of managing the political apparatus, but who are rootless in their souls, may not do irreparable harm. Rootedness and vision ultimately are what provide both the only salvation there is for those institutions and the only fixed point for the guidance of persons engaged in public policy.*⁸

Such admonition speaks directly to the preservation of conscience in times of political coercion respecting schooling and curriculum.

The Argument Re-Stated

This article began by recognizing the pervasiveness of change in the context of educational practice and the need to acknowledge that change in curriculum revision and alterations to professional practice and preparation. But it also recognized that the tides of change could, if allowed, create conditions for teachers akin to post-modern chaos and uncertainty. Clearly the propagation of chaos and uncertainty cannot be the purpose of teacher preparation nor of public education. We must have some sense of moral purpose to the educative enterprise, else the ship founders on the shoals of postmodern nihilism.

What anchor? What will hold the educative enterprise steady amidst the buffeting of tides and currents of change? I submit that the formation of an educational conscience provides one framework for looking seriously at teacher education as a lifelong quest and commitment. It is such a conscience, developed seriously and systematically, that could establish that intellectual and professional anchor.

Very recently, Thomas Green has extended and elaborated his argument respecting the formation of conscience as a quintessential moral enterprise, defining conscience as... "reflexive judgement on things that matter . . . formed by the acquisition of norms, norms that take on the role of governance."⁹ In addition to re-visiting and

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Les enseignants ont un besoin aigu de stabilité professionnelle et de savoir que leur vie et leur travail ont un sens, affirme Michael Manley-Casimir. En s'inspirant des travaux de Thomas Green, il estime que la formation d'une « conscience pédagogique » serait un cadre susceptible de permettre à la formation des maîtres de devenir un exercice et engagement permanent. Seule une telle conscience, développée d'une façon sérieuse et systématique, dit-il, peut offrir l'ancrage professionnel et intellectuel dont on a un si grand besoin et empêcher une dérive vers le chaos et l'incertitude qui caractérisent l'époque postmoderne.

elaborating his conception of the voices of conscience, Green makes the case for strong normation in the civic order and culture at large; by 'strong normation' I interpret him to mean a clearly articulated set of morally grounded norms governing professional and civic life. Teachers, through the example of their lives, necessarily play a central role in living and teaching such norms.

So what is the teacher's professional anchor? The answer is a uniquely developed and maturing sense of professional conscience — a commitment first and last to the educational welfare of their students; to caring for and about the children and young people with whom they work.

The development of an educated conscience following Green would, in my view, enable us to focus on developing in teachers a morally grounded perspective to equip them to withstand the shifts in political currents affecting schools. Ultimately such a perspective would empower them to say: "I will continue to do what I do best as a classroom teacher and I shall continue to put the educational needs of my students first; and I will do so because that is consistent with my professional conscience."

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Implications for Teacher Preparation

The main implication of adopting the development of a professional conscience as the primary goal of teacher pre-service preparation is for those engaged in that enterprise to become familiar with Thomas Green's argument and reasoning. To use his conceptualization as a heuristic or as a guide for teacher education presumes a practical, working understanding of the five voices of conscience. The second implication is to recognize and internalize the significance and power of Green's approach for our own personal lives as professional/academic educators. Teaching others presumes our own appreciation and understanding of these notions and their evident presence in our own lives; for "we teach who we are."¹⁰

An approach like Thomas Green's needs to permeate the process of teacher preparation because the five voices are like the facets on a diamond: inextricably bound together and inter-dependent. Beginning teachers need to be introduced to the five voices as 'voices' that will need attention throughout their professional lives. Teacher educators in Faculties of Education, associate teachers in schools and classrooms, and teacher candidates themselves need to ask themselves continuously:

- How does the way I teach demonstrate my sense of craft?
- Is my teaching the best that I can do?
- How can I improve my teaching and, thereby, student learning?
- How do my actions as a teacher in both my public and private life demonstrate my commitment to the normative principles of the profession?
- Is my behaviour compatible with the ethical standards of the profession?
- How do I demonstrate in my practice

my commitment to the welfare of children and students in my care?

- Do I place their concerns and needs ahead of my own?
- How do I display my understanding and appreciation for the pedagogical tradition of which I am part in my daily life as a teacher?
- How do I live out in my daily practice my hopes for improvement in the potential for human betterment through education?
- How do I open the minds of young people to new possibilities?

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- 2 Green (1985): 1, 3.
- 3 Ibid., 6.
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- 5 Green (1985), 27-28.
- 6 Ibid., 22.
- 7 Ibid., 24.
- 8 Ibid., 25.
- 9 Green, Thomas F. (1999) *Voices*. Notre Dame: University Notre Dame Press. 23
- 10 Drake, Susan (1997) "Confronting the Ultimate Learning Outcome: We Teach Who We Are." In T. Jennings (ed) *Restructuring for Integrative Education*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 39-51.

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- 6 G.J.S. Dei et al., op. cit., p. 11.
- 7 R.S. Brown, *A Follow-Up of the Grade 9 Cohort of 1997 Every Secondary Student Survey Participants*. Report no. 207 (Toronto, Toronto Board of Education, Research Services, 1993), p. 5.
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- 9 J. Birrell, *A case study of the influences of ethnic encapsulation on a beginning secondary teacher*. Mémoire présenté à la réunion annuelle de l'Association of Teacher Educators (Los Angeles, 1993).
- 10 L. Paine, *Orientation towards diversity: What do prospective teachers bring?* Research report 89-9 (East Lansing, MI, National Centre for Research on Teacher Learning, 1989).
- 11 M.Wideen et al., op. cit.

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