



Professing Education

A publication of the Society of Professors of Education

June, 2006. Vol 5 No. 1

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Editorial: Normal Nihilism

Ken McClelland

Welcome to this issue of Professing Education. In his 1997 book *The Plain Sense of Things: The Fate of Religion in an Age of Normal Nihilism*, James Edwards outlines what he intends by his notion of “normal nihilism.” Nihilism is most commonly understood as one of two things – it is a pathological condition of individual or society, or it is understood as a philosophical synonym for sociopathy; the brutal individual who is without a controlling conscience and who coolly does whatever he or she wishes. Contrary to these more common understandings of nihilism, Edwards offers a more pragmatic, though no less stunning interpretation that outlines his particular notion of normal nihilism. He says:

To be a nihilist is not (necessarily) either to be hopeless and inert (like the catatonic) or to operate brutally and without effective restraint (like Ted Bundy or the Nazi *Gauleiter*); on the contrary, *all* of us now are nihilists, even those among us who are most energetic and most scrupulous. *To say that we are normal nihilists is just to say that our lives are constituted by self-devaluating values.* What makes these values *values* is that we normally recognize, as our ancestors normally did not, their reality as pragmatically posited filters through which experience must be passed to become manageable; what makes them self-devaluating is that we also recognize – and only with their help, of course – their contingency, their subjection to history understood as the Mendelian evolution of life-forms. (p. 46)

Clearly, such a philosophical insight must send ripples across the education professoriate, if not across the professoriate generally. But as intellectuals, is this not an insight we have been grappling with for a long time now, if not explicitly in our teaching and learning environments then at least tacitly so? We are all now nihilists in Edwards’ sense of the term. This Nietzschean notion of self-devaluating values, though tending to trigger vitriolic attacks against the general denigration of Truth and an otherwise happy cohabitation with relativism, nonetheless bears profound implications for the education professoriate, particularly as they retain pluralistic cross-disciplinary affiliations.

There seems to me no way of avoiding in these late modern times the implications of what Edwards highlights. To the extent that within such an environment Truth loses its absolutist, representationalist pretensions, we feel perhaps more than ever the necessity of some notion of truthfulness that comports in humane ways with the necessary fallout that comes by way of *our* self-devaluating values – namely, that we are the creative crafters and ongoing re-constructors of our values. As educators we are imaginatively called forth to developing attitudes of truthfulness that at once forego absolutist notions of Truth while avoiding the amoral traps of arbitrary, anything-goes relativism. The normal nihilism that imbues our present late modern trajectory can be faced courageously only by the discipline of imagination, but an imagination tethered by a fidelity to one’s enculturation. The modern imagination once disciplined by Truth has now itself become the disciplinarian. Truthfulness, a drive that we cannot existentially forgo, at the risk of falling into chaos, must now be disciplined by imagination. The future is never born *ex nihilo*, it is always the result of established conditions that hopefully entail some element of propriety – the propriety of getting it right, of imagining well, of being truthful and offering a sincere account. These are some bright (though imperfect) lights of our Western Enlightenment enculturation, parts of what make us *us*. This is why the charge that such represents an abandoning of truth altogether is a silly one.

The intrepid explorer (and the responsible educator) is always experimenting, always trying for new and better ways of doing things, always searching for better modes of communication. It is never a matter of riding roughshod over past modes, but nor is it a matter of blind or unthinking allegiance. Dogmatism is the enemy of novelty and growth. Truthfulness is thus a part of the eros of living well, disciplined by the ameliorative hope brought on by our ability to always imagine a different and hopefully better future. Such a turn to the future, then, is finally an aesthetic turn, the substance of which infuses the very best elements of educational living.

Professing *Bildung*

Jim Garrison
Virginia Tech

In his recent book, *A Search for Unity in Diversity: The “Permanent Hegelian Deposit” in the Philosophy of John Dewey*, James A. Good makes much of what he calls “the lost *Bildung* tradition in American philosophy.” Good places Dewey in that tradition. In doing so, he gives us a new, yet familiar way of looking not only at Dewey, but at the very idea of professing education.

For Hegel, *Bildung* is a crucial concept that unifies issues of development, education, and form, including logical, aesthetic, and ethical forms. The idea of *Bildung* expresses the emergent formative development of the natural biological individual by the institutions and practices of culture, including, but not limited to, explicitly educational institutions and their

agents (e.g., professors), along with the development of culture by individuals. It is connected to the idea that every individual has unique potential and it is the task of education to form that potential so that every individual can make their unique contribution to the culture that originally shaped them. Those who know Dewey well can readily recognize these themes in his educational writings.

Hegel was a member of the first full generation of German artists and intellectuals (including Herder, Goethe, and later Novalis) who reacted against the excesses of the Enlightenment. Hölderlin, one of the greatest and most philosophical of all German poets, was his close friend. What all these Romantics (or perhaps more accurately neo-humanists) had in common was a concern with unifying the ideals of the radical freedom of the subject with the subject’s expressive richness. The highest achievement was to exercise one’s freedom in such a way as to creatively express oneself as a unique work of art. The narra-

tive of self-creation, the *Bildungsroman*, was an especially popular expression of this ideal. The German Romantics tended to work out freedom and expressiveness within the narrative of the larger culture that initially shaped them and that they then reshaped in the course of their personal self-creation. Those who sense undercurrents of Romanticism and other than Enlightenment thinking in Dewey are correct (see Goodman, 1990 and Haskins, 1999).

Hegel (1807/1977) insists that “an individual cannot know what he is until he has made himself a reality through action” (section 401). This making is *Bildung*, and for Hegel that involves the use of tools and language that emerges in organized labor. As Alexandre Kojève (1969) writes: “Work is *Bildung*, in the double meaning of the word: on the one hand, it forms, transforms the World, humanizes it by making it more adapted to Man; on the other, it transforms, forms, educates man, it humanizes him” (p. 52). The transformative *activity* of socially organized labor is crucial for Dewey who sees labor as transforming the self as the self transforms the world. I wish to emphasize this aspect of Hegel’s influence on Dewey. This influence not only leads Dewey (1916/1980) to write a chapter in *Democracy and Education* titled “Vocational Aspects of Education,” but to say in it: “An occupation is a continuous activity having a purpose. Education *through* occupations consequently combines within itself more of the factors conducive to learning than any other method (p. 319). Dewey’s emphasis on “through” here is crucial. He did not mean *for* an occupation, but the formative development that occurs through participating in the various occupations of a culture.

I want to look at the occupation of professing education. I am especially interested in how it educates those who occupy that social role. I will only look at one facet of the occupation of professing education, the one where the proper professing of education is inseparable from the proper receiving of education. This is the place where *Bildung* implicates the professor, the professed (subject matter), and the recipient of the profession. Consider Dewey’s (1916/1980) following comment regarding communication:

Not only is social life identical with communication, but all communication (and hence all genuine social life) is educative. To be the recipient of a communication is to have an enlarged and changed experience . . . Nor is the one who communicates left unaffected. Try the experiment of communicating with fullness and accuracy, some experience to another, especially if it be somewhat complicated, and you will find your own attitude toward your experience changing... The experience has to be formulated in order to be communicated. To formulate requires getting outside of it, seeing it as another would see it, considering what points of contact it has with the life of another so that it may be got into such form that he can appreciate its meaning. (p. 8)

The foregoing comment is, however, thickly layered; let us explore three layers as they pertain to the recipient of an educative communication, the conveyer of communication, and what is communicated.

If Good is right that Dewey is in the *Bildung* tradition, then the most educative communication should assist the recipient, let us say a student, to realize their unique potential and, thereby, become a truly unique individual capable of making creative contributions to the community (including, for instance, the classroom community). Now let us turn to the conveyer of communication; for example, one who professes education. The professing of education is communicative; hence, if Dewey is correct, educative. The best professors of education help students realize the Romantic ideal of developing their own narrative of creative self-expression. Notice, however, that if Dewey is correct, the act of professing should also allow professors to develop their own narrative. Communication, hence, education, is transactionally transformative for Dewey. Finally, notice that it is necessary to reformulate the structure of what is being communicated; for instance, the subject matter. Sometimes, restructuring the subject matter leads not only to better understanding, but to genuinely novel creation. In this way not only are individuals transformed, but so also are cultural artifacts. I have only examined three layers, but suspect there are more. I do not think the three “layers” form a hierar-

chy, but they are actually organically related. They are simply three subfunctions of the larger function of educating (or communicating). Exploring the emergent relations of communicative education poses an exciting possibility, but I leave that for another occasion, though the readers might enjoy coming up with their own, perhaps different, ideas. Instead, I want to draw a somewhat surprising conclusion.

My computer comes equipped with an electronic version of the *Oxford American Dictionary*, which allows lazy people like me to quickly look up words like “professing.” When I did, I got “profess”:

profess: verb [trans.]

1 claim openly but often falsely that one has (a quality or feeling): *he had professed his love for her* | [with infinitive] *I don't profess to be an expert* | [with complement] (**profess oneself**) *he professed himself amazed at the boy's ability.*

2 affirm one's faith in or allegiance to (a religion or set of beliefs): *a people professing Christianity.*

• (**be professed**) be received into a religious order under vows: *she entered St. Margaret's Convent, and was professed in 1943.*

3 dated or humorous teach (a subject) as a professor: *a professor—what does he profess?*

4 archaic have or claim knowledge or skill in (a subject or accomplishment).

ORIGIN Middle English (as *be professed* [be received into a religious order]): from Latin *profess-* ‘declared publicly,’ from the verb *profiteri*, from *pro-* ‘before’ + *fateri* ‘confess.’

Not being ridiculously lazy, I found that other dictionaries provide similar definitions. If we are to properly profess education then it is best we receive an education when engaging in the occupation. My conclusion is this: if by “professing education” we mean professing Deweyan *Bildung*, we can define ourselves in much better ways than some other authoritative sources in society would define us, and I am not just thinking about dictionaries.

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A Conversation with Joseph L. DeVitis

Jan Armstrong, University of New Mexico and Joseph L. DeVitis, Georgia College and State University

This is the second of a series of interviews with past presidents of the Society of Professors of Education. One of the goals of this effort is to capture the history of the Society, as recalled by individuals who have contributed to the work of the Society over the years. I talked with Professor DeVitis (JDV) by phone on January 13, 2006. The text of the interview was captured from notes taken during the course of our conversation. In order to ensure accuracy, JDV reviewed and made minor editorial changes to the transcript.

Joseph DeVitis is a professor of education at The Georgia College and State University, Georgia's public liberal arts university. His wife Linda is Dean of its School of Education. He was assistant, associate and professor of education at the University of Tennessee at Martin for 13 years (1972-1988), taught at The State University of New York, Binghamton for 13 years (where he is professor emeritus) and taught at the University of Louisville from 2001 to 2004. He is a graduate of The Johns Hopkins University, where he earned a B.A. in history, with general honors in 1967, and M.Ed. in 1969. He was a teacher in the Baltimore Public Schools (1967-1969) and holds an M.A. in counseling psychology from the Adler-Dreikurs Institute of Human Relations, Bowie (Maryland) State University and a Ph.D. in Social Foundations/Educational Policy Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Throughout his career, Joe DeVitis has been active in leadership roles in professional associations and in community organizations. He is a past-president of the American Educational Studies Association, the Council of Learned Societies in Education, the Society of Professors of Education, and the Southeast Philosophy of Education Society. In 2001, he received the Distinguished Service Award from the Society of Professors of Education. An *abbreviated* list of the varied roles he has played in community organizations follows. In Tennessee, he was president of the Jackson Writers Group and co-editor of its *Old Hickory Review*; Vice-President and Communications Director for the Jackson Area Habitat for Humanity; Superintendent of Schools Advisory Council member; Education Chair for the League of Women Voters; West Tennessee Peace and Justice Network and Bread for the World member; Jackson-Madison County Democratic party Executive Committee member, and candidate for the Madison County Commission. He received the Madison County Woodmen of the World Outstanding Citizen Award in 1987. In upstate New York, he was a member of the Oneonta Peace Network; Northern Susquehanna Habitat for Humanity Communications Chair and Board member; Crime Victims Assistance Center Board of Directors member; Citizen Action of New York (Binghamton) Board of Directors member; Southern Tier Service-Learning Network Steering Committee member, Binghamton City School District; Centenary-Chenango Street United Methodist Church lector and Social Justice Committee member, and Oneonta Little League coach.

Professor DeVitis' academic interests focus on history and philosophy of education, moral development, and adolescence. He is the author of numerous articles and book reviews, and is author or co-author of *To Serve and Learn: The Spirit of Community in Liberal Education* (1998); *The Success Ethic, Education, and the American Dream* (1995); *Theories of Moral Development* (1994, 1985); *Competition in Education* (1992); *Helping and Intervention: Comparative Perspectives on the Impossible Professions* (1991); *School Reform in the Deep South: A Critical Appraisal* (1991); *Building Bridges for Educational Reform: New Approaches to Teacher Education* (1989), and *Women, Culture and Morality: Selected Essays* (1987). He is co-editor with Linda Irwin-DeVitis of a Peter Lang book series on "Adolescent Cultures, School and Society," has served on the editorial boards of *Educational Theory* and *Educational Studies*, and currently serves on the editorial boards of *Teacher Education Quarterly* and *Vitae Scholasticae*.

JKA: How did you first become involved with the Society of Professors of Education?

JDV: I joined SPE in the mid or late 1980's. Art Brown originally got me interested in it. He kept asking me to join. Joe Burnett was involved, and John Martin Rich was active, but it was Art Brown who kept asking me to join. I used to kid him: "Art, I thought you had to be at least 65 years old to join SPE!" He persisted. At the time, SPE members met at the AERA [American Educational Research Association] meeting, as they do now.

JKA: What is the function of SPE? Why do people become and remain members?

JDV: In terms of a foundations perspective, I belong to it because I have that perspective. One benefits from the camaraderie and fellowship at meetings. Also, as an AERA SIG, SPE provides people with opportunities to get on the AERA program. Round tables are a good way for newcomers to get a foothold in AERA. A number of colleagues get interested in joining SPE because it provides a less formal way of getting on the program. This can be especially important for doctoral students and new professors.



Joseph De Vitis

JKA: How do you think non-members view SPE?

JDV: SPE is a small organization, but if people know of it, it is probably because of the events we sponsor, particularly the DeGarmo lecture at AERA. AERA continues to give the DeGarmo lecture a good time slot each year. Although we have *Professing Education* and *The Sophist's Bane* for members, both useful vehicles, we don't have a widely distributed journal. This might have held SPE back. Yet I doubt we could afford that kind of journal. I would say SPE members are a combination of Foundations of Education and Curriculum and Instruction professors, with a few other people as well. One thing SPE could do is to try to get more membership from other areas of education. In the last 20 years, we have had few members from Educational Leadership, Special Education and Educational Psychology.

JKA: Are most SPE members historians and philosophers of education?

JDV: Yes. If you look at who has received the Raywid Award in the last 10 years, for example, most are historians and philosophers.

JKA: What do you remember about your work with the Society?

JDV: I would say that most of my involvement took place in the late 80's to late 90's, when I was president-elect and president. I also served on the Executive Board before that. During the years that I served as president, I concentrated on several things. I started the Wisniewski award for teacher education. I did this largely because university departments of education are constantly under fire. I thought it would be good to highlight the accomplishments of teacher education programs, showing them in a positive light. They too often play the role of whipping boys. The award has been given out to programs that are not necessarily well known, but that are doing good work.

My other big contribution has been chairing the DeGarmo Award and Lecture committee for ten years. Tony Johnson (SPE President) asked me to take this on after Mary Ann Raywid retired. I changed the thrust of the DeGarmo Award, which had in the past tended to be awarded to in-house members. I wanted to make the award even broader than that. We sought speakers who ran the full gamut of educational fields. Linda Darling-Hammond was the speaker at the 2006 AERA meeting.

I think the DeGarmo lecture each year is something that SPE could use to make itself more visible. The lecture manuscripts are sporadically published. Authors do not always choose to provide manuscripts. Bob Morris (SPE Secretary-Treasurer) has been in charge of requesting and publishing the lectures. He has

proposed that the lectures could be published in a single or multiple volumes. I think it is an idea that SPE should pursue.

JKA: Tell me about the Wisniewski Award and how it is funded.

JDV: The award is given at the SPE business meeting at AERA each year. Representatives from the institution receiving the award make a presentation. Aside from AACTE and SPE, there are few other organizations that I know of that give awards to teacher education programs.

I constituted the committee and have remained on it for the past 6 years. Alan Jones has chaired it, and the other members include Doug Simpson, Gary Claybaugh, Joan Smith and me. We make decisions about the award based on merit, and I haven't seen a hint of favoritism on the part of committee members. I do a lot of research about teacher education programs throughout the year. Alan Jones puts the call for nominations in the SPE program once a year. My research on these programs has created a bank of information about promising programs.

The award goes to a teacher education program that has made a distinctive and singular contribution to the theory and practice of teacher education. The emphasis on "distinctive" is important. The program must be really unique. It is surprising, when you look at teacher education programs around the country, how similar they seem to be. Ernie Boyer suggested in the 1980's, when he was working on a book on the undergraduate experience, that colleges were becoming like shopping malls. Today, colleges and universities are becoming more and more that way. You can't tell one from another most of the time.

For the Wisniewski, we are looking for programs that are distinctive and that have evidence to support the idea that they are making a difference. When we call programs to let them know they have been selected, they are sometimes flabbergasted. They tell us that they didn't apply. We tell them that they didn't have to apply to be nominated for the award. As to funding, it's not costly. It involves a plaque that costs \$75 to \$100 and, in recent years, has afforded institutions an opportunity to write about their programs in *Professing Education*.

JKA: Tell me about your work with the Executive Board and with other SPE committees.

JDV: The Executive Board members got along pretty well, as they usually do. Larger organizations (AERA and AESA) can be more contentious, but the SPE board remains informal and without much controversy. Some other groups are much larger and include members whose viewpoints differ.

JKA: What should others know about the context in which you were working during your term as President of SPE?

JDV: Actually, the time during which I was the president of SPE was not a good time in terms of my health. I was diagnosed with advanced colorectal cancer, which meant my survival chances were less than 10%. My regular physician suggested I have a routine screening, and the resulting diagnosis came as a complete surprise: the cancer was metastatic and had spread to two spots on the liver. All this was going on during the two years that I was SPE president. I got help from Doug Simpson, who was the past president. While I underwent surgery, radiation and chemotherapy - a process that took a whole year, Doug filled in as program chair.

I did initiate the Wisniewski Award that year, but I owe Doug a debt of gratitude. I took a semester off from teaching. Then, about a year later, they decided they had missed one spot on the liver. They re-operated, and I had chemotherapy (this time, in pill form) for another 7 months.

JKA: So the context for you was survival.

JDV: I was president at my own worst time. My world was falling apart. Most of my interactions with board and committee members were by phone or email. I wasn't much of a computer person until my illness, but I learned because I was home a lot that year. The officers of SPE sent me a plaque. It has been seven

years. I get cat scans once a year now. They tell me I have licked the cancer. I'm quite fortunate and appreciate the small things in life much more now.

JKA: If you could talk with any past SPE president, with whom would you most like to talk, and about what?

JDV: Dewey. He is, of course, the major figure in my field throughout the 20th century. I would be interested in the whole notion of how he became such an influential public intellectual. Early in my career, when I was in Tennessee, I was very active in public affairs and active in politics. I ran for office as county commissioner. I was very engaged. Dewey was involved with labor unions, interested in the Soviet Union, Trotsky. I would be interested to talk with him about how he connected his philosophical work with public affairs. He was able to talk with scholars, but was also able to communicate very well with general audiences. I think one reason the public tends to look down on academe in general is that we don't talk to them. We don't get into the wider community, even the teacher education community.

That is one reason for the breadth of the Wisniewski Award. In looking at the six institutions that have received the award, the largest are the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee and the University of Washington, Seattle. All the others (Bank Street College, Trinity University in Texas, Evergreen State College, University of Maryland - Baltimore County, and the University of Southern Maine) are mid-size or smaller institutions.

JKA: How do you account for that?

JDV: It reminds me of Georgia College and State University which is a public liberal arts college. There are not many in the country. (SUNY Geneseo and St. Mary's College are some other examples.) It has an enrollment of 5-6 thousand students and emphasizes undergraduate education. The people I work with here are among the most committed teacher educators I have ever worked with. It seems to me that larger institutions tend to lose sight of the day-to-day work of teacher education. The Georgia College faculty are committed to working with teacher education on a day-to-day basis.

At larger institutions there is more emphasis in the reward structure on research and publications. Sometimes interest in teacher education gets lost or becomes an afterthought. At Georgia College, we have just three departments and all three are committed to teacher education. It is a highly selective school. There is a cohort program here and faculty put a lot of work into it. I have gotten to know faculty here very well. They talk with each other about teacher education. At larger institutions, that is often not the case. Faculty in Research I institutions tend not to talk with each other. They are individual entrepreneurs.

JKA: I have been thinking lately about the relative merits of brief academic writing projects - for example, research reports, book reviews, columns and articles in professional newsletters and essays. What are your thoughts about "writing small" in academe?

JDV: I have found that some of the short pieces in *Professing Education* have been useful for me to read. I am interested in tips on college teaching, for example. I would add that I write about six short review articles each year for *Choice*. The audience in this case is the people who pick books for college and university libraries. So, *Choice* reviews have an impact on the Education books we find in our campus libraries. Unfortunately, the reward structure doesn't always support this kind of work. Someone at SUNY suggested that I not bother to list *Choice* book reviews in my Vita, because I would get no credit for them! That illustrates the problem. I did so anyway, with pride.

I used to write book reviews for *Educational Studies*. I was on its editorial advisory board for several terms. But what I have found is that after you write a number of books, you tend to think in that mode. I wrote three or four books with John Martin Rich. We would see each other at AESA meetings and throw ideas out for books. On some occasions, ideas for books developed out of articles we had written. Once you start writing and editing books, you don't feel like writing articles anymore.

JKA: What advice would you offer to professors of education, particularly those new to the professoriate?

JDV: For junior faculty, it is important to join some of these organizations in order to network and get to know people in the field. I'd say to get involved in several groups in your field. Volunteer for committees, and get involved with journals as a reviewer. And join regional and state societies as well as national organizations.

What started me in a big way was getting a call from Don Warren in the mid 70's. I was only a year or two out of graduate school, and Don was on the faculty at the University of Illinois, Chicago. He was the president of the American Educational Studies Association (AESA) and had established the Committee on Accreditation and Standards (CASA). I didn't know him at all. I was about 29 years old. I guess they wanted to pick a young, eager beaver who wrote well. My advisor at Illinois, Joe Burnett, probably told him about me. In any event, he called me up and asked me to chair this committee. The CASA committee did some significant work and its Standards remained in place until, when I became president of AESA, I appointed another committee in the late 1980's to revise the Standards for CLSE [Council of Learned Societies in Education, now the Council for Social Foundations of Education - "<http://www.uic.edu/educ/csfe/>"]. Gary Claybaugh did an excellent job as chair of the second committee, as did the committee members. Chairing the first CASA committee is what got me interested in professional organizations initially. I have no idea how I was picked. I was amazed when I got that call!

JKA: How did it go?

JDV: The work began in 1975 and the Standards were published in 1978. The committee met at least twice per year over three years. We met at AESA and AERA, and I never saw the outside of the convention hotel at some of those meetings. I didn't see Detroit at all. The CASA group broke into subgroups. We had a nucleus of people who were willing to work very hard. One thing I learned is that it is not always the big names that get such things done. We worked together and when the work was completed, we saw to it that those who did the work were acknowledged.

JKA: It was that group that came up with the idea of "Interpretive, Normative and Critical" foundations in the AESA Standards?

JDV: Yes - "INC!" I actually came up with the three conceptual categories. It was Glorianne Leck who liked to shout out the INC acronym during our meetings. It was an open committee. Anyone could come and join the discussions if they wanted to. Alan Jones, Don Reeves, Marie Wirsing, Barbara Finkelstein, and C. J. Schott were other core group members. How we came up with it? At the time, the Educational Psychology people wanted to say that they represented Educational Foundations. On the other hand, Social Foundations people wanted to get beyond strict empiricism and behaviorism. We tried to figure out what could unite all the other fields — Political Science, History, Philosophy, and Sociology of Education.

JKA: So chairing the CASA committee had an impact on your career.

JDV: It got me involved in AESA. I had only attended one meeting before being asked to chair CASA. Some organizations are more welcoming than others. AESA is pretty welcoming. Some others seem stuffer and more acerbic. I was a member of the John Dewey Society briefly. My advisor, Joe Burnett, was an officer in the Society and tried to get me to join. But at that time, in the early 70's, Dewey was not as popular as he is today. Those were heady times. I was working on my doctorate. The Vietnam War was underway, as were demonstrations against the war. We felt the world was changing and we also felt we were going to change the world. We read Clarence Karier, Paul Violas and Walter Feinberg, who all expressed very strong points of view. They all were writing critiques of Dewey and the corporate liberal state at that time.

Throughout my career, I've had great interest in the idea of the public intellectual. If I had a model for this, it was probably Ken Benne. His interests were very broad. He was interested in education, aesthetics, and also worked actively with T-groups. I remember the first time I went to an academic

conference as a graduate student. It was the 1970 meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society in Dallas, Texas. Ken Benne sat with me in the lobby of the Adolphus Hotel for an hour and a half. We had a collegial conversation about the field. I have never forgotten it.

JKA: And your advice for more experienced professors?

JDV: There is an ebb and flow in your career. The Boyer categories¹ — Scholarship of Teaching and so on — make sense to me. Georgia College uses the Boyer framework, but there are few other places that do. The Research I universities where I have worked acknowledged teaching and service, but what really counted was writing. There are times when you want to write, and other times when you just want to concentrate on teaching. I have done most of my book writing over about a 15-year period. I have written 9 books in that time. It is just part of the ebb and flow of one's career. I always did like teaching, but it became especially important to me when I was diagnosed with cancer. At times, research may be the center of attention, at other times, teaching or service. There is an ebb and flow. But I've enjoyed it all. Being a Social Foundations of Education professor has enabled me to reflect on, and be active in, a wider arena of professional and civic work than most academicians experience during their lifetimes.

Footnote

¹ Boyer, E. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Character Development in Teachers and Teaching¹

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Introduction

To paraphrase Walter Anderson's (1990) sentiment about reality - character and how we regard it isn't what it used to be. What educators and the educational system understand and can do about character and character development in schools isn't what it used to be either.

Character as a meaningful measure of individual nature seems to have become largely trivialised, representing codes of conduct and behavioural expectations that drag ideology along rather than lead it. Character development and character education, in the very best sense, have vestiges of the positive side or universal good will that traditional meanings still convey. It remains an idea whose time is always present. Much current usage and understandings of character and its development espouse fixed and firm definitions of goodness and related behaviours.

From the time of Plato, education and the

opportunities presented by teacher - learner interactions have served as fertile grounds for the development of character. Character is a deep-rooted conceptual designation that connotes desirable or undesirable aspects of person and personality. To "be of good character" was, and in some places still is, a significant accolade used to describe an individual. To "be of questionable character" or to "lack in character" insinuates badness or flaws- specified or not. Being of good character implies that an individual recognises the differences between goodness and badness, and acts in ways that show higher order ethical and moral functioning. Most persons would agree that the larger social interest is best served by cultivating a citizenry comprised of people of good character than not. People of exceptionally good character are viewed as exemplars leading often to stories from which others might learn and pattern their choices.

¹A previous version of this paper was presented at the 12th biennial meeting of the International Study Association on Teachers and Teaching (ISATT) (29 June- 03 July 2005) Sydney, Australia.

Education systems are ideal venues for promoting incipient character development because of the social, cultural and legal ability to reward and reinforce goodness and punish or banish badness. Judging goodness and badness of character may be done with reference to absolutes or on a continuum. Examples of absolutes would include zero tolerance policies many schools have towards bullying, drugs, weapons and other forbiddens. Judging character on a continuum lends a “more or less” dimension to determining the gravity of actions that stray too far towards badness. That learners of good character create schools of good character seems to be a common hope and goal towards which many administrators work as a way of combating discipline problems and establishing a measure of control over behaviour. The obvious social understanding is that learners of good character will become citizens of good character and contribute to the larger social good directly by actions and indirectly as exemplars.

Much emphasis and interest in character education is evident throughout Western society, particularly in response to general perceptions that we live in troubled and undisciplined times fuelled by rapid socio-cultural and technological change. A quick Google search on the Internet in early 2005 turned up nearly 2.5 million hits with the query line “teacher education and character development.” A few days of scanning showed great diversity in focus and sub topics. While repetitions and marginally related topics might reduce the total number of interesting and important programs, research and ideas, promotion and advocacy of “character” seems ubiquitous. Programs aimed at character development exist in all possible forms in all possible venues. Schools, districts, federal, state and provincial departments of education are well represented with home grown or professionally developed programs that emphasise the desirability of positive attributes such as are required to be of good character.

In spite of this interest, few teacher education programs provide direct character education. Several factors may account for such an absence. Berkowitz (1998) outlined the obstacles as such: disagreement on what character education means, disagreement of what constitutes character education, limitations on preservice curricula, limited scientific evidence,

locating expertise and resources, and ambivalence about the appropriateness of educating for character.

Successful teacher education applicants are usually deemed to be of good character because of the vetting process through which they must go. Academic standing and favourable field related experiences give paper indications of socially and academically defined good character. In the Canadian Province of Ontario, new teachers must also submit to a criminal records check by the police. Even with such measures as a baseline of good character, each year the Ontario College of Teachers reports many cases of teachers dismissed for inappropriate conduct. In spite of any set of measures in place, questionable or bad characters still slip in.

Character education as it appears in teacher education seems not to be a part of the taught curriculum as pertains to the preparation of the teacher but rather it is taught to be passed on eventually to the students over whom new teachers will have responsibility. Hauer (2000) found that a group of Russian teachers had a raised level of awareness that impacted on their own behaviour and attitudes when teaching character education to others. An environment that fosters development of character as an overt or hidden agenda raises expectation levels and levels of awareness as to what constitutes attitudes and behaviours likely to lead to the demonstration of good character. Reinforcing demonstrations of good behaviour and thus good character becomes a socio-cultural imperative of the context in which specific educational practices will take place.

A comprehensive program called *Character Matters* (Havercroft, 2002) has been implemented by a large school district in Ontario encompassing a diverse approach to understanding and inculcating personal and social values thought likely to lead to academic, career and personal success. A conversation with the author revealed a broad-based strategy that was spreading to other learning communities, but whose effects had not yet been measured. Intentions were expressed to make this program available through workshops to teacher education programs. Further conversations with the Chair of a University’s teacher education program indicated that character education was not part of the overt agenda in teacher preparation in part because of

its controversial nature and cultural sensitivity. Both individuals agreed that teaching about and for character involved setting and enforcing visible standards and expectations sensitive to local circumstances. Both also acknowledged that such matters become difficult from a multicultural perspective as conflicts inevitably arise.

Prototypes of Character and the Diversity of Goodness

Character is a multi-purpose concept defined in many ways by many different groups and individuals. Not all definitions agree. The various definitions of character are influenced by the values, morals, and ideals of social groupings such as religion, state, race, and family. The goodness, lack, or questionability of character is codified and communicated through social and personal expectations that define potential and circumstance for both sainthood and sanction.

Character prototypes emerge in all societies that embody the highest level of development. The “what” of character, (e.g. traits), are easily named and visible in the missions of many schools and educational organisations. Examples include Respect, Courage, Responsibility, Good judgment, Honesty, Integrity, Empathy, Kindness, Fairness, Perseverance, Initiative, Self-Discipline and Optimism. Character by definition must have both construct and contrast poles (see Kelly, 1955) in ways that each pole is what the other is not. In other words, choosing goodness also means not choosing badness. Goodness of character derives its various definitions from examination of questions having to do with what is virtuous. Virtue, and leading a virtuous life, is embedded in religion and social philosophy as a measuring stick for behaviour, attitude and aspiration. Behavioural benchmarks from religious belief systems demand codes of conduct on which merit and perhaps access to better afterlives depend. To be virtuous, according to most Judeo-Christian belief systems, requires acceptance and demonstration of Humility, Generosity, Love, Kindness, Self Control, Faith and Temperance and Zeal. These virtues stand in the shade of their more popular counterparts: the seven deadly sins (Pride, Avarice/Greed, Envy, Wrath/Anger, Lust, Gluttony and Sloth). Dogmatically, these lists stand in either/or fashion and not as a continuum as lived experience might provide. These sins receive attention in proportion to the advocacy of belief and political systems that espouse them as vividly portrayed in the media dramas of politicians and pulpsters. (Interestingly, the “seven deadly sins” appear nowhere in formal religious texts but are derived from religious teachings.) How to act and not act are also contained in the ten commandments, and other spiritual expectations of various belief systems and are subject to both group and individual interpretation. Anti-abortionists aspiring to the highest levels of spiritual and moral development who believe passionately in the rights to life violate laws set by the state through acts of civil disobedience such as public protest and picketing. In several cases, zealots have assassinated or seriously wounded doctors who perform such acts.

A patterning effect that mixes belief, behaviour, and being provides both content and process for character and character development. However, what is taken as “good” character in religious contexts overlaps and is sometimes competitive with matters of family, state, and universe. While loyalty to family and respect for parents is stressed in some belief systems, the perceived supremacy of state can override familial loyalty. Examples of children turning in parents for violations of state expectations are scattered throughout the history of oppression. In such examples, the children, from the view of the state, were of good character. Families were also torn apart because of contrary loyalties to the state when Americans opposed to fighting in Vietnam fled to Canada during the 1960s, earning the derogatory label of “draft dodgers”.

However, what is of good character in one context is sometimes perceived as a lack of, or badness of character in another. A dramatic example of this is the idea of the “good terrorist.” Whether for matters of religion or political and economic oppression, zealots express commitment to cause and goodness of character through willingness to surrender life whether by suicide bomb or by carrying out any militaristic function. Terrorists are individuals who carry grievances they feel can only be addressed by threatening safety through aggression and acts of war and destruction. If they are successful and very good at what they do, they earn the designation of good character from their compatriots. Recipients of acts of terrorism deem perpetrators to be of bad character and either succumb or fight facing the risk of hostility beyond reason.

Who the “good terrorist” is depends mostly on who wins and writes the historical account. The foregoing descriptions apply equally well to American revolutionaries from a British perspective, the hunted-

down resistance fighters in WW2, and those associated with activities surrounding the tragedies of 9/11. Power may well be a defining aspect of character as wielding it leads to unique challenges and singular or group development of vision. The accoutrements of power and potential for abuse seem most evident when associated with policy. Policy, whether, economic, cultural or moral, is refracted through governance systems that foster loyalty to flag and national identity. Loyalty to dictators seems counterintuitive from a democratic capitalist perspective mainly because different gods are served; each with persuasive local powers. Defining the goodness or badness of character seems an impossible task if considered primarily from a local perspective. The task faced by policy makers who include character education in the conditions of learning and teaching involves prioritisation of loyalties as well as determining the circumstances for inculcation and the consequences of deviance.

Character and Community

Character is a function of community. As with the good terrorist, tribal expectations trump global hopes. Within this very idea lurks the assumption that a universal definition of goodness in character is possible or even desirable. In times past, first loyalties were contested by (in no particular order) state, religion, and family. The transitions afforded by such forces as democracy and capitalism has brought “self” into the contest for loyalties.

Sustained good character may well be the stuff of fiction, parables, or myths, lying at the furthest reach of volition. The new media alluded to by Neil Postman (1995) has become community and has shaped beyond imagination the forces that define reality for new generations. At the heart of Postman’s dilemma are the “gods” that define community: mainly consumerism. Media continuously redefines community with a flux of sufficient temper to promulgate whimsy and withstand nature’s call for depth by providing an endless landscape of shallow dealings and meanings. Whether or not experiences available through vicarious means sufficiently emulate the actual and substitute voyeuristic adventure and perceived engagement for the “real” thing is unfortunately left to the discernment of individuals whose tastes have been “super-sized” and sensitised for instant gratification.

How functional are the traditional virtue-based attributes of character or even the compelling family or state definitions? If good character leads to a successful life, how might we re-view what success has come to mean and what lengths are required to reach it? The idea of “being of good character” seems close to the social set of what it means to be a “hero.” Heroism has taken somewhat of a beating and seems more a designation of acts performed by an individual rather than a status conferred on the individual. A review of tarnished heroes would validate such an assumption. The definition of what “hero” or at least “looked-up-to-other” constitutes seems also to have altered. Those who attain success in financial, sports or political arenas while reaching a version of Andy Warhol’s fifteen minutes of fame seem also to experience a mercurial rise and fall characterized by adulation, popularity and frequently notoriety. Moments of indiscretion or poor judgment either reveal masked prior intent or tarnish lifetimes of good work. Is good character something then, that may be fleeting or occasionally rise to the surface, against a backdrop of otherwise banal everyday expressions of human frailty?

Theoretical Constructions of Character

If the concept of character is viewed as having a basis in, or at least relationship to, morals, values, ideals, goals and the like, then viewing how it might be described as part of a meeting space between psychosocial and cognitive development seems worthwhile. Character as a concept in psychology and sociology is a theme rather than a topic. The aspects of psychology that define much of its practice deal with persons of abnormal character and set boundaries beyond which the varying shades of normalcy begin. Associating the idea of normalcy with “acceptable behaviour” for individuals defines, or at least contributes to the social role expectations expected by those who study groups of individuals and the societies they form as well as the norms under which they act. The implicit continuum or dichotomy of character goodness and badness is constructed according to, or in spite of social and other expectations. The personal and social construction of

reality and its impact on the definition and formation of character seems linked in ways that can be understood by drawing on such theorists as Maslow (1970), Piaget (1962), Kohlberg (1984) and Kelly (1955).

Maslow's ideas are based on ascendance through a hierarchy of needs. A pyramid of these needs is usually depicted from base up: physiological, safety, belonging and love, self esteem, with self-actualisation at the apex. Once a level of need is satisfied, capacity and importance builds for the next. A self-actualised individual is one who is fulfilled and doing the best that his or her capabilities permit. The characteristics of a self-actualised individual include the qualities of awareness, honesty, freedom and trust. Maslow's understanding of these aspects encompass relationships between self, others and society, and while humanistic in orientation are somewhat culturally bound. The idea of limitless individual potential, while laudable, seems somewhat more indicative of the spirit of the times during which Maslow's thoughts developed.

Piaget's work is important for consideration of character development for at least two reasons. First, the understanding Piaget provides of schema and the organisation of experience through the dynamics of accommodation and assimilations may be used to explain aspects of character development as linked to cognitive capacity and readiness. Second, the work of Kohlberg extends Piaget into the area of moral development providing further explanation of character and linking neatly with aspects of Maslow's work. The levels of moral development dovetail somewhat as ascendancy through each hierarchy occurs. For example great correspondence might be imagined between self-actualisation and the highest level of moral reasoning.

Kelly's (1955) ideas about how individuals construe events and circumstances are also important because of the anticipatory nature of such constructions. When an individual's anticipations turn out to be successful, those constructions and related constructs are likely to be drawn on again and again in similar circumstances until revised. Kelly felt that the core constructs that are central in individual lives remain relatively stable over time with the caveat of dysfunctional impermeability.

In these theories less attention is paid to the influence of social and cultural determinants than are needed in the multi-cultural, multi-media milieu of teaching and learning found in the postmodern condition. Character formation can be understood in terms of these factors: when (age), where (home, school etc.), what (expressed through goodness or lack thereof), how (impression formation repetition of successful short and long term strategies). However all of this leads back to the conundrum of the good terrorist.

Changing Times Change Character

“Innumerable confusions and a feeling of despair invariably emerge in periods of great technological and cultural transition.” Marshall McLuhan

It seems illogical that as society adapts to the ever-changing forms, machines and garments of progress, the desired fit calls for more adjustments on the part of persons than otherwise. The late Neil Postman put such an argument forth persistently and eloquently. In *The end of education* (1995a), Postman asked three important questions: “Do television and computer technology limit or expand opportunities for authentic and substantive freedom of expression? Do new media create a global village, or force people to revert to tribal identities? Do new media make schools obsolete, and create new conceptions of education?” (p. 141). To these questions might be added “What attributes of good character are required to meet and address the consequences of the challenges created by information and communications technology?” Times have changed with regards to education and the constitution of character expectation simply does not fit. The language and symbols are different; the goals values and ideals have become infomercials and meaningless slogans.

Aspirations implied through educational successes are also deluding. For teachers, especially those in higher education, significant tensions may erupt between the sirens calls of vocation, careerism and professionalism. Vocation is a sense of calling or mission to enter teaching or some sort of ministry associated with religion. An embraced and fulfilling vocation may resonate with Maslow's higher (or perhaps highest) level of actualising, or with Kohlberg's higher stages of moral development. Contrasting with a sense of vocation is the ideals of professionalism such as are expected of the professoriate. The lure or command of publish or perish have been further complicated by grant-getting and the new status it is accorded by fiscally driven institutions. Reputation-building is linked to earning power and potential for upward academic mobility.

While the idea of character has breadth and depth in the larger social regard, it also has great meaning and significance when focused on specific noteworthy activities. Of great importance are the forming grounds for character such as family, community, and schools. Of these, schools and schooling are of special importance because all influences of character development seem to be brought together, formed, tested, and revised for present and future action. How the social and personal constructions of character meet and take shape in educational circumstances is of concern for students, the ultimate recipients, whose character is thus formed into a set of expectations that are subsequently passed on to the next generation in ways that can be understood through the ideas of social reproduction and cultural production. The formation of character is thus linked in a social-developmental perspective.

Character *per se*, unfolds as it is formed imbuing an individual with a set of expectations for behaviour and attributes. Writers such as James Hillman (1999) believe that no full assessment of character can be made of an individual until after they have died, as it is still a work in progress until life's end.

Character has a dark side when used as an agenda for behavioural control, discipline, and conformity. To be of good character means to meet or exceed the expectations of accepted systems of values, morals, ethics, and ideologies that represent the dominant view of society with which an individual is engaged, whether micro or macro. Expressions of any sort that run counter to dominant expectations may be met with reactions ranging from mild disapproval to designating need for correction. Thus a conformist and uncritical view of character expectations may be countered. An example can be drawn from experiences had in North America when legislation was brought in to eliminate the presence of religion and religious practices in public schools. Recitation of the Lord's Prayer as a part of opening announcements in the morning were excluded leaving pledges of allegiance (which ironically contains "under God" as a provision) and perhaps recitation of local mission statement or goals. Ironic confusion reigns.

Further questions must be addressed regarding the divisiveness of cultural definitions of character, how a universal model for goodness of character can exist and whether or not individuals understand goodness from a multiplicity of views. All of these topics are within the scope of research into thinking about teachers and teaching. Clearly much of the conversation hinges on the language and concepts used to describe and discuss what we mean by character and whether or not it is a path to goodness or simply another manipulation of spirit serving the end of control.

I'd say the most pervasive intellectual idea of this century (one finds it in physics, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, almost everything else) is that the form in which we express whatever we have to express about the world controls to some extent what we are saying and what we can see. You find this in Heisenberg's remark that we do not see nature as it is, only by the questions we put to it. And you find in linguistics people discovering that different grammatical forms give people different perceptions of how the universe works. Some people say "We don't see things as they are but as we are". It's this idea which I think is the major thrust of scholarship in our own century. (Neil Postman, in an interview with Modern Reformation Newsletter, 1995)

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