

EDITORIAL

The Complexity of the Educational Enterprise

IAN WINCHESTER
University of Calgary

Sometimes, usually when some difficulty appears, we are reminded of the complexity of the educational task and wonder that learning occurs at all. But most of the time we forget its complexity in the problems of the educational moment and strive for a simplicity of thought, or the conveying of a thought. Or we strive for the simplicity of an administrative arrangement and perhaps its improvement. Usually we find education to be simply dichotomous. There are the things to be learned and the ways in which one can help someone learn them. And there are the daily arrangements, the administration if you will, of the places and spaces and the people involved in the learning enterprise. Teaching-and-learning are one apparent educational pole. The other apparent educational pole is the administration of the enterprise (the teachers, the learners, the spaces, the finances). Often we try to solve the teaching and learning problems by teaching and learning solutions alone. And often we try to solve the administrative problems by administrative solutions alone. We forget sometimes that they are not independent of one another, at least in our public arrangements.

Any useful change in teaching-and-learning will nearly always require administrative changes. These may be as simple as a principal or dean tolerating a daring teacher's new vision and supporting her or him. Or they may require an entirely new design for a place of learning. Similarly any interesting and useful administrative innovation or change will almost certainly have an effect on the teaching and learning within the places and spaces of the educational locus, be it school or college. In offering us a way to model educational change and innovation Goddard and Bohac-Clarke attempt in this issue to take on this integrational complexity.

One rarely talks about the virtues involved in the educational enterprise. Wisdom, courage, honesty, and persistence are four virtues that necessarily appear when one wants to improve teaching and learning and its administration. Most of us living and working in aspects

of the great educational enterprise find our wisdom, courage, honesty, and persistence sorely tested from time to time. Many of us falter on wisdom. Many more falter on courage. Many more still falter on honesty, especially brutal self honesty. And finally, nearly all of us falter on persistence. So many good ideas collapse because we did not persist long enough in our innovation, vision, or approach to see their fruits. One might think of the great religions teachers here for such figures as Buddha, Moses, Jesus, or Mohammed required all of these virtues and founded great systems of teaching and learning. There must have been many times when each of them doubted their own wisdom, felt their courage falter, were suspicious that they were no longer being honest with themselves, or that they had not hung on to their convictions long enough and persistently enough for their pupils to get the message and begin to show the wisdom, courage, honesty, and persistence themselves.

One could equally look at great figures in the history of human scientific thought or musical or artistic achievement. Galileo, for example, must have wondered from time to time about his own wisdom, especially when he found new ways to irritate the church. He must also have wondered if his courage would hold up under house arrest and his being forbidden to publish anything in favour of the Copernican system of the world. When he struggled for nearly 40 years to get clear about the notion of acceleration and finally understood it to be change of velocity over equal units of time and not of equal units of distance he must have had difficulty with his own honesty. And given the opposition in official circles and from scientific rivals he must also have wondered if he would be able to persist in the face of official disfavour and his own real technical difficulties.

One of my English painter friends remarked that the popular mind in our time has come as far as Van Gogh's work. But think of what doubts as to wisdom, courage, honesty, and persistence must have assailed Van Gogh in his exile in the south of France, painting with among others Gauguin (who must have suffered equal doubts). The work of both these painters was a study of self-education of the highest order. Painting has never been the same since. The old classical models and styles were banished and the century just past was more or less entirely in their debt. Would Picasso, Miro, Klee, and a host of others have been possible without their breaking new ground, ground that led to changes in the education of the future artist?

One of our authors in this issue, Batagiannis, speaks illuminatingly about one of these virtues, that of courage in the educational context.

One hopes the reader will be inspired to use her methods to think better about wisdom, honesty, and persistence as well.

Is the educational enterprise supported so forcefully by governments in our time primarily for its usefulness? Or is there room in it for the personally delightful or the ornamental or the beautiful or perhaps the just plain fun? My own sense is that we have no idea what, in fact, will turn out to be useful in the future. And usually that which we think to be useful often turns out not to be so useful after all. It is not long ago that a young person aspiring to work in a Canadian bank had to learn something about a complicated machine called a "comptometer." Comptometer operators were in great demand. Many of us also learned, as a matter of course, typewriting in high school or perhaps earlier. The wisdom of the time saw comptometers and typewriters, great inventions of the 19th and 20th centuries as having an indefinite future. Yet comptometers and typewriters have disappeared completely from the business and the educational context. It is true that the skill of typewriting was easily transferred to computer keyboarding and so has not been lost. But many of the things one learned as especially useful, how to clean and maintain a typewriter for example, have now no application whatsoever.

But what are we to make of the personally delightful, the ornamental, the beautiful, or the just plain fun? Most of the advances of human thought and action have been made by people whose learning was guided by these considerations or similar ones. The mathematical discoveries of Pythagoras, Archimedes, Newton, and Gauss, for example, were probably guided by all four of these aesthetic considerations. Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead, when writing *Principia Mathematica* and so presenting mathematical logic in a systematic form for the first time, did so for such reasons. How were they to know that the basis for the modern stored program computer that is now a ubiquitous feature of our everyday lives would depend entirely on their logical musings, their putting of logic into mathematical form? No. We certainly do not know where the next useful discovery, thought, or action will come from. So we are probably better to encourage the complexity of education which delights in the ornamental, the beautiful, and the just plain fun. This is, of course, a critique of the notion of "efficiency" in education and of its near relative "usefulness," as if these are things we can always know in advance. Another of our writers in this issue, Menashy, tackles the task of a critique of the assumption of the

importance of efficiency in education from the vantage point of an education for democracy.

Closely allied with this critique of the useful is the notion that one might engage in the understanding of something, perhaps a book, a text, a narrative, a disciplinary piece of some kind, a poem – for its own sake with a view to the better understanding of it. This is the task of the hermeneutic enterprise. Holy or religious texts have always been a centrally important source of this activity. But in our own time there are many specimens of the nature of a holy text worthy of such persistent aims at understanding. Scientific texts, for example, deserve such concern. The reading of, say, Darwin's *Origin of Species* is such a text. This is an educational enterprise that can be astonishingly rewarding and is usually never undertaken. Many important works, such as Darwin's, are only referred to not read with care, at any level of the educational enterprise, not thought about, not discussed. Binding, Moles, Tapp, and Rallison undertake such an enterprise and report on what they did.

Perhaps I have said enough to convince you that the educational enterprise is not as simple as it looks or seems, that simple dichotomies are misleading and that an enormous number of concerns enter into that enterprise. This issue of JET illustrates this complexity and the rewards to be had from recognizing that complexity for what it is.

Ian Winchester
Editor