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## **Criticality and the Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL)**

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### **Introduction**

This paper considers the notion of ‘criticality’ in relation to the Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL), the Teacher Development Agency (TDA) funded Masters programme for school teachers in England. The genesis, introduction and explication of the MTL have been presented elsewhere (BBC 2009; Burn et al. 2010; McAteer et al. 2010), including within this journal (Burton and Goodman 2011). It is not our intention to reiterate all of the contextual information again here. It has to be highlighted that after the two current cohorts have completed the MTL in 2013, one a cohort of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) and one of more senior Teaching and Learning Responsibility holders (TLRs), government funding has been withdrawn for any subsequent recruitment to the course.

Certain issues have already been highlighted and commented upon in relation to the MTL. Burton and Goodman have raised key issues, including the incongruity of only allowing for 30 masters-level (M-Level) credits to be transferred in when many PGCE M-Level courses award 60 credits; the cost, roughly five times the cost of other CPD courses; the paradox between the ‘emphases on standardisation and personalisation’ (p.55) and the fact that there is no dissertation element to the degree (Burton and Goodman 2011). Of course, now that we know that the funding for the MTL is to cease, much of the debate around the MTL rings hollow. However, discussion of what a Masters course in education might consist of is still a relevant and urgent matter.

Taking everything into consideration, there is one issue that we feel has not hitherto been addressed in sufficient depth and that is the notion of ‘criticality’ in relation to the MTL. More specifically, it is our concern that as much of the MTL is ‘practice-based’, and involves research work within schools, this may present difficulties in terms of teachers reporting critically on practice in the institutions in which they are employed. We do not have such

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strong feelings about the lack of a dissertation nor the fact that the MTL is viewed as ‘practice-based’, one of Burton and Goodman’s concerns (Burton and Goodman 2011, p. 57). Rather, what we feel has not been problematised sufficiently in relation to the MTL is how far it affords the students a critical schema.

Although we have stated that, to some degree, debates around the MTL may be viewed as redundant, we do need to acknowledge that there will be a ‘generation’ of students who hold a Masters in Teaching and Learning and that, for the time being, it is a valid qualification. There are also many academics in higher education, such as us, investing a lot of time in the MTL. It is entirely appropriate that we research the MTL and issues surrounding it. However, where we choose to engage with the process is to examine criticality in relation to the MTL, something we feel will be of interest to all involved with the MTL and broadly similar courses of essentially part-time CPD. Just as there is an MTL degree, so there are Masters and Doctorates that are designed to be studied alongside full time employment. Issues around criticality in relation to the MTL may be of interest to those involved with such courses. In other words, criticality is an issue that is more than just MTL-specific.

In this paper we briefly consider ways in which the practice of critique might be construed and practised before going on to argue that a certain idea of critique, which draws upon historical conceptions of education’s role in serving the social good, is essential to educational practice and to claims to mastery in education. We conclude by drawing attention to difficulties that may be presented to teacher-researchers on masters courses by the closeness of the links between the research conducted and the institutions, the schools, from which students are drawn.

### **Criticality as a criterion of M-Level work**

According to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK, (QAA), masters courses in England, Wales and Northern Ireland<sup>2</sup> are expected to meet a ‘generic statement of outcomes’ as laid out in the ‘qualification descriptors’ (QAA 2010). The issue of ‘criticality’ is highlighted in relation to M-Level work, both explicitly and implicitly, we would argue, as follows:

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<sup>2</sup>There is separate documentation for Scotland: *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*, 2001

Masters degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated ... a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a *critical awareness* of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice.

And further:

... conceptual understanding that enables the student ... to *evaluate critically* current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline; and ... demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level (QAA 2001, our italics).

This notion of criticality has been introduced into the framework for the MTL degree as a required aspect of the programme. To underline this, we set out some examples of this requirement in relation to the MTL modules as follows<sup>3</sup>: In the first Module ‘Developing Professional Enquiry Skills’, the emphasis is on a ‘small scale *critical* enquiry of practice’, with students engaging in and writing up classroom research, for example an action research-type study. In the second Module ‘Reflecting on Professional Practice’, work is ‘characterised by a *critical* approach to day-to-day practice in the key areas of teachers’ professional standards’, the submitted work taking the form of a reflective portfolio. Module 3, ‘Dynamics of Teaching, Learning and Assessment’, is designed to ‘develop ... *critical* understanding of the role of assessment in learning and teaching’ and, in terms of the written assessment, ‘[t]he written paper will draw on a range of sources of evidence to *critically* evaluate the interrelationship of learning, teaching and assessment in your professional context’ with ‘... evidence of *critical* reflection...’. In Module 4, ‘Curriculum Perspectives’, the aim is to ‘develop [the] ability to *critically* analyse a range of sources of evidence in order to improve your practice’ and further ‘encourage you to adopt an open and questioning mindset, recognising the need to subject different sources of evidence, including your own thinking and practice, to *critical* scrutiny’. Module 5, ‘Diversity and Learners’ aims to

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<sup>3</sup>Although the MTL is essentially the same degree across all providers in terms of content, there can be regional variations, for example in the names of the modules. University of Sheffield MTL Module 4, ‘Curriculum Perspectives’ is referred to as ‘Curriculum Development’ within the North West MTL Consortium: MTL North West Consortium (2010). *Masters in Teaching and Learning Programme Handbook 2010-2011*. North-West Consortium, accessed 15/11/11 from: <http://www.nwmtl.org.uk/files/MTL%20regional%20handbook.pdf>.

develop the students' 'abilities to *critically* reflect on theory and professional practice in relation to the areas of knowledge, understanding and skills'. For Module 6, 'Leadership, Management and Collaborative Working', students should '*critically* evaluate research, national frameworks and practical knowledge ...' and '*critically* reflect on the importance of their role as a member of an inter-agency team...'. (all examples cited from: University of Sheffield 2010, our italics). Apart from Module 2, 'Reflecting on Professional Practice', MTL modules thus far are characterised by students engaging critically with classroom or school practices, usually in the form of an empirical research investigation.

Building on the first six modules, the MTL culminates in Modules 7 and 8 which comprise the two-part 'Professional Enquiry', replacing the traditional dissertation element of a masters degree. The Professional Enquiry focuses on planning, undertaking and writing up research based on a facet of the student's professional practice, to be determined by the student and supervisor. The notion of 'criticality' is mentioned in the module brief '*Critically* review the research and professional literature around a chosen area of enquiry to inform understanding' (Module 7) and '*critically* evaluate the research, interpret the findings and relate the study to educational theory as well as drawing out implications for practice' (Module 8). In essence, the first of these two 'enquiry' modules is concerned with the literature review and planning of the empirical investigation which is itself the primary focus of the final module.

In summing up this part of the paper, it is the case that students are encouraged to engage with the MTL course in a critical fashion. If we might have seemed to labour this point in paraphrasing from the individual module outlines, above it is because the MTL, in common with many other masters courses, appears to assume that the notion of *criticality* is a transparent one, that what it means to be critical is clearly understood by students and that their tutors have a common understanding of the term's significance. It is our experience that *being critical* often presents itself as a difficulty to many students and that no shared agreement of what is involved in criticality exists amongst those responsible for teaching at masters level. The rest of this paper sets out some of the variant understandings of the term *critique* (all of them entirely defensible as practices) and argues the case for an idea of the critical approach that derives its legitimacy from historical antecedent. We argue this conception of the function and practice of critique is essential to the idea of mastery in education considered as a liberal art. Finally, it is our contention that the urge for MTL students to be critical may have been employed *uncritically*, without acknowledging that

critical engagement with school practices and school structures from an educational research viewpoint may be professionally hazardous for some students.

### **Versions of critique**

Scarcely any university humanities or social science course will fail to assert that it values the development of critical thinking as a key aim. Yet what is meant by critical thinking or by critical practice, varies widely<sup>4</sup>. If one considers the research output of university humanities departments critical practice can denote, *inter alia*, the ability to adjudicate between conflicting arguments, to assess the quality of evidence presented or to problematise ideas and issues on the basis of some normative framework. For the purposes of our argument we wish to establish a distinction between two broad currents of critical practice: critique can operate comfortably within its institutional setting, accepting the boundaries, the established directions and methods of the field within which it operates, but working always towards the refinement of its procedures for producing knowledge and enhancing practice; or it can seek the transformation of the academic field in which it is located, the radical redirection of its aims, purposes and self-understanding. This distinction may be expressed differently and perhaps more provocatively: critique can be acquiescent in what might be seen as the dominant values of society; or it can commit itself, however implausible such a project might seem in present circumstances, to the subversion of existing relations of power and their replacement by some other organisation of those relations.

Of course, the picture is much more nuanced and complicated than the above characterisation suggests. Critical practices can, variously, aim at the reaffirmation of existing understandings, at their modification, at their substantial renewal or at a radical transformation that falls short of the overthrow of a system of thought or social organisation. Empiricisms can put critical thinking at the service of gathering notionally value-free, objective information about the world, but empirical research can also serve pronounced social-political analyses which are framed within a different order of critique. This paper will argue that the notion of masterliness cannot be sustained apart from a robust conception of criticality, that the fostering and practice of critical inquiry that is responsible to scholarly values – notably, a tradition of thought that does not subject itself to governmental imperatives, a disposition to

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<sup>4</sup> See Heyting and Winch (2004) for an indication of the varieties of ways in which criticality might be practised.

interrogate explicit claims to truth, to expose and examine the assumptions that underlie argument and, importantly, a commitment to the notion that education is concerned with the fostering of liberty and civility – are essential aspects of the professional identity of the educational researcher and practitioner and, therefore, should be at the heart of any course aiming to shape teachers as ‘masters’ of their profession. A brief consideration of the provenance and the changing understandings of the idea of mastery within education will, we believe, help to substantiate this claim.

### **Origins of masterliness**

Carr (1997) traces the notion of masterliness back to its origins in the medieval liberal arts curriculum. What he suggests is that the medieval university, far from implementing a regime of induction into compliant thought, had its own vigorous tradition of critique. The student who had been ‘determined’ as a Bachelor of Arts would then go through a course of training under the supervision of an authorised master practitioner, at the successful conclusion of which he (it would be a male) would be awarded the title of Master of Arts and be qualified as a teacher of the texts that constituted the curriculum of the medieval university and thus to practise as a master of his craft, the craft of the free person. For the purposes of our argument we would draw attention to two essential aspects of this training in masterliness, aspects which we submit are vital to an understanding of what mastery in education might mean today, in that they underline education’s aboriginal function of putting critical thought to the service of the social good. *Firstly*, it will be apparent that an important function of the medieval liberal arts curriculum was vocational; it prepared its subjects, its apprentices, for vital social roles in the priesthood, law and medicine (Carr 1997; Daly 1961; Leff 1968). What was at stake, however, was a very particular notion of vocational training. What Carr points out (see also: Bernstein 1996) is that such apprenticeships were taught according to a pedagogy which developed ‘a disposition to think and act on the basis of cultivated reason rather than natural inclinations and desires’ (Carr 1997, p.320) and that this was a moral education aimed at developing those virtues – Carr mentions amongst others, patience, humility, intellectual honesty and respect for the truth - which would work to produce ‘civilised social and moral conduct’ (Carr 1997, p.319). Thus, like apprentices in all the craft guilds of the Middle Ages, the liberal arts student was taught the skills required in order to perform according to the standards of excellence that would lead to correct practice of his craft, but he was also inducted into a moral tradition, a disposition to think and act in ways that shaped the individual and his practice in accordance with virtues which not only served

the distinctive excellences to which his vocation was committed, but also the wider social purpose within which that practice was located, the pursuit of communal goods. This was preparation for vocations which operated within and at the service of a coherent and communally recognised moral system and social ordering. *Secondly*, at the heart of the pedagogy to which the apprentice was subjected was a method of teaching which he had to master. This was known as *disputatio*, disputation. Carr says that the purpose of disputation was not primarily to add to existing knowledge so much as to ‘modify, through criticism, the doctrines of received theology’ (Carr 1997, p.319). It did this by employing dialectical reasoning to conduct systematic debate, by formulating questions which were subjected to arguments for and against. Disputation stimulated intellectual activity and curiosity and ‘made radical dissent a real possibility’ (Carr 1997, p.319).

Thus, the medieval university curriculum in the liberal arts was (i) committed to the development of individual excellence in the service of social goods which were defined by communally accepted moral criteria and (ii) conducted the intellectual activity which was intended to secure these social and moral norms - its inquiry into the meaning of revelation and the forms of moral practice - according to a method of reasoning which opened established theses to discussion and debate; what can be described as a critical problematisation of controversial issues. It may be readily argued that any critique which subjects itself to such social and moral norms hardly deserves the epithet ‘radical’, to which the response might be made that it is only the kind of thought that has emerged since the Enlightenment that imagines that it can achieve a position outside dominant discourses, free of a formative authority. It is precisely this notion, of an entirely deracinated rather than radical critique, that has been established as a vanity, an illusion, by the post-modern theorists like Derrida who insists that we cannot speak outside of the tradition we inherit (Derrida 1978). The question is how we might make the dominant discourse tremble, how doubt might be introduced into its theses (Derrida in Kearney 1984).

What needs to be underlined here is that in medieval culture, rational debate - moral and critical inquiry – could only exist and have meaning within the framework of a unified social and moral order. It will be recognised that in the present period, society does not have such unity, that it does not function according to a moral system that commands universal acceptance and which provides, as it were, the scales in which disagreements could be weighed; instead we are consigned to irresolvable conflicts between individuals and groups

speaking from incommensurable moral positions (MacIntyre 1981, p.253 *et passim*). As MacIntyre points out, it is as seen as an achievement of modernity that it has freed humanity from such moral subjection; today we may think as we wish and choose our own moral dedications, free of the constraints and oppressions of a tyrannical social authority. What this freedom entails is that intellectual activity is no longer conducted according to a common understanding of the purposes of social existence; the academy no longer operates in the service of a communally agreed moral system. A consideration of how this condition has come about and what it implies for the conduct of intellectual inquiry will help to clarify our argument concerning the nature of masterliness in education and the function of critique within courses like the MTL. We have no space here to consider in detail what brought about the destruction of the unifying schema of the medieval university and the social and moral system in which it was founded. Such an account would perhaps attend to the eventually destabilising consequences of the Christian church's engagement with Graeco-Arabian thought (Bernstein 1996) and it would have regard to the social upheavals of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries consequent upon the expansion of a vigorous mercantile class which chafed at the moral orderings, the social hierarchisation and the communal bonds of early medievalism and whose social and cultural ambitions challenged the educational resources of scholasticism (Skinner 1988); it would take in the new territorialised conceptions of government, originating in the city states of this period, which called for trained personnel who might provide practical and ideological service to the princes who had taken control of these states (Kristeller 1988); considering a later time frame, it would refer to the final defeat of scholasticism by the supposedly superior ontological conceptualisations of Descartes and the eventual ruin of medieval cosmology by the scientific inquiries of Galileo and Newton; the insubstantial notion of the rise of individualism would no doubt also need attention, as would the impact of humanist study, with its newly found sense of the individual's capacity for shaping and guiding his own life (McCarthy 2000, p.55), its practical, even vocational orientation and its role in shaping the sensibilities and the moral perspectives of the future rulers and leaders of society. However, for our purposes we will focus on that event in intellectual history which marked out a willed project for the overcoming and replacement, on a secular basis, of the medieval intellectual and moral system – the Enlightenment.

### **Modernity and critique**

The promise of the Enlightenment - the project of modernity - was that the systematic application of reason to human affairs would free humanity from ignorance, unthinking conformity to authority and the infantilising constraints of dominatory power, that the production and dissemination of knowledge must lead to progress towards a just and rational social order and that the principles upon which such a society should be based could be identified and could command universal assent. The task of education was to form morally autonomous individuals who might, acting upon those principles, critique and counter irrational belief, prejudice and the coercions of arbitrarily constituted power. Underpinning the project was the conviction that human knowledge, as it was accumulated, could be assembled into a unity that would correspond to and bring about a fully rational social order. The task of scholarship as it was enshrined in the modern university was to add to the edifice of human knowledge and thus to contribute to the realisation of that social order. It was, says Carr, this meta-narrative that underlay the self-understandings in terms of which the first professors of education legitimised their roles (Carr 1997, p.314) and which was also, we would submit, the narrative which explained and justified their role and function to the educational practitioners of the modern age. However, the core postulates of Enlightenment rationalism have been subject to philosophical refutation (Foucault 1970; Horkheimer and Adorno 1973; Lyotard 1984; MacIntyre 1981; MacIntyre 1996; Rorty 1979; Taylor 1989). We no longer believe that the recalcitrant stuff of humanity is susceptible to the totalisations of rational scheming (and have good reason to be wary of projects which claim to order society on rational lines); we know that the principles underpinning Enlightenment have no universality or, indeed, any existence beyond the speculative musings of philosophers; we no longer subscribe to the notion that knowledge may be formed into a coherent whole which mirrors the world or represents its ideal, but somehow achievable, true form. An age of modernity has - whether we welcome it or loathe the idea - yielded to an age of postmodernity. Yet the Enlightenment narrative continues to provide a kind of rationale for many educational professionals, what MacIntyre calls 'a set of no longer quite held, not to be explicitly articulated, background presuppositions, a set of almost but not quite believed propositions still informing both the academic curriculum and modes of teaching and enquiry (MacIntyre 1996, p.229).

Schools of education in the modern – which is to say, erstwhile - university may be viewed as having defined themselves in opposition to the faith-based inquiry of the medieval university, believing that it was possible and necessary to found education, as a system of

teaching, learning and inquiry, on the basis of reason rather than a willing and pious subjection to received truths. And, of course, the task of the academy, and, in particular, philosophers of education, was seen as indicating to government, after diligent research and reflection, the forms of education appropriate to the schooling of young people in our society. (A brief reflection on the history of the influence of this branch of the educational academy on the decisions of policy makers will suggest that this relationship is more imagined than real). The enterprise outlined above was doomed to failure because it was an attempt to impose a set of abstract theoretical analyses upon human activity and social intercourse, a rationalist project that had no purchase on, no roots in and no means of inserting itself into the lived and subjective experience of humanity (MacIntyre 1981). In this, it stood in stark contrast to the medieval system of thought it sought to replace. Premodern Christian ontology and epistemology were embedded in, nourished by and, in turn, they animated a way of life that was understood by, and informed the self-understandings of all who belonged to that society.

Foucault said that the thread connecting us to the Enlightenment was not a doctrinal one but might be 'a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era' (Foucault 1984, p.42). Perhaps one of the tasks of such a critique might be to address the problems - identified here - that it unwittingly gave form to: how can the impulse towards justice and liberty, moral discourse and the kinds of knowledge it generates, be connected to the realm of social decision-making; how can the production of knowledge be connected to and inform the moral experience of the diverse communities of contemporary existence? For education, the question presents itself, how can teaching and learning re-establish their link to moral reflection and practice?

### **The unworldliness of critique**

The point, then, is that enlightenment thought, and all the progressive, emancipatory educational projects that flowed from it, have never found lodging within a communally accepted understanding of the social good. This is the price paid for the profound social transformations which led to the freeing of Western thought from the limits and boundaries of the medieval world view. The gain of thinking and, eventually, acting freely outside a systematised and unquestionable set of moral and ontological precepts led eventually to the fragmentation of communal life and the endless and irreconcilable moral conflicts and disputes that characterise the divided social existence of the world we inhabit. In such an

environment no moral authority can claim universal recognition and the reforming, rationalising critiques, the prescriptive formulations, of modernist thought appear as forlorn attempts to impose an abstract and idealised conceptualisation of moral order upon irrecoverably divided social and cultural forms. Where the critical inquiry and debate of medieval scholarship was geared to the positive task of refining interpretation of the religious texts whose theses were the bedrock of the medieval order, in order to establish the true understandings that would lead to civilised social and moral conduct (Carr 1997, p.320), moral-theoretical critique today is consigned to a negative role, anatomising and seeking to correct the misconstruals and the wrong directions taken by a society where thought, reason itself, has gone into error and the great rationalising project of Enlightenment betrayed<sup>5</sup>. Hunter (1994) has an image for what he sees as this vain and unworldly moral posture: principled critical theorists view the modern school system and see a lowly church built out of stones intended for a cathedral, an edifice which speaks of a potential that has been unrealised because of its builders' loss of faith, their 'moral and spiritual bankruptcy'. The school is configured as 'the flawed realisation of an ideal form' (Hunter 1994, p.1). Hunter's target is theoretical or moral critique, the practice that proposes to uncover the hidden nature of things, the true social or economic relations that underlie social experience, to lay bare the abusive realities of power that operate under the surface of things; this is the practice that reveals to a benighted populace that its perceptions, its beliefs are illusory and promises to correct its mistaken assumptions so that it might organise society on rational lines. Critique, in this view, stands outside social reality, a carping meta-analysis that is scornful of the untidy, messy improvisations, compromises and wheeler-dealing involved in the necessary business of actually administering and ordering human affairs. It offers ethically pure but unworldly solutions to the mundane problems of government. In popular usage, criticism is equated with negativity, as a heartless and destructive activity and, in a time-worn complaint, entrenched authorities charge that critical voices have nothing positive to offer by way of alternatives to current policy. At a more philosophical level, the Nietzschean sense of critique as an attempt to impose a restrictive organisation, a rationing, of human thought and behaviour in accordance with a miserably impoverished and sceptical reading of the world, is

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<sup>5</sup> Foucault (1970) and Hunter (1994) address what they see as the delusions of a theoretical critique which imagines itself as a meta-narrative operating above the mundane and sordid activity of everyday government. The latter is particularly scathing about the work of educational critique.

to be found in comments like these of Bruno Latour's, comments which strikingly evoke the delightedly self-righteous judgementalism that he and others detect in the critical attitude: Do you see now why it feels so good to be a critical mind? Why critique, this most ambiguous *pharmakon*, has become such a potent, euphoric drug? You are always right! When naïve believers are clinging forcefully to their objects, their gods, their poetry, their cherished objects, you can turn all of those attachments into so many fetishes and humiliate all the believers by showing that it is nothing but their own projection, that you alone can see. [Then] you strike them and humiliate them again, this time by showing that, whatever they think, their behaviour is entirely determined by the action of powerful causalities coming from an objective reality they don't see, but that you, the never sleeping critic, alone can see. Isn't this fabulous? Isn't it really worth going to graduate school to study critique? (Latour 2004, pp.238-239)

Both Hunter and Latour offer a somewhat caricatured and unnuanced account of the critical personality, but their depiction of critique as an intellectual activity, a theoretical method that is divorced or excluded from (they would say, has divorced itself from, has stood aloof from), the realm of social decision-making, a style of thought that has become irrelevant to the government (and education is a form of government) of human affairs, is accurate. The critical problematisation of the thinking that structures our social being is marginalised, rendered irrelevant to the concerns and activities of government because, as we have indicated, a moral discourse has no integral and privileged place in the ordering of a society that has abandoned, has - happily or regretfully set aside - commitment to the notion that civility is dependent on the construction of a common social purpose, a unified moral system. Such a state of affairs may have been an historical inevitability, may be a trying stage en route to a new mode of social existence or it might, as MacIntyre suggests, be a disastrous historical aberration, an irruption of barbarism whose correction we must hope for.

### **Education in the age of technical rationality**

It is not difficult to see that what we must perhaps refer to as postmodern government does not seek to order society according to a particular overarching moral purpose and it will not surprise us that education systems in the present period are not organised by a concern for the pursuit of the moral truths that will foster right living. The disjointed, fragmented curricula of the modern humanities academy, with their catch-all structures of modular courses, ad hoc training in competing methodologies and their ever-shifting modes of assessment are clearly

intended to be responsive to the disjointed and fragmented social reality to which the academy must address its scholarly and educational activity. They are structured and they operate without the narrative and teleological legitimations that guided the endeavours of pre-modern and modern universities. It would, however, be wrong to conclude that the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge – education – functions to no commonly understood purpose, is subject to no ordering governmental imperatives.

Education today works to sustain a system, just as scholasticism and medieval education worked to sustain the social and moral order of the Christian world view. It is not a system that commands universal assent and it is a system whose priorities, rather than being derived from any traditional understanding of the relation between education and society, are imposed upon education from without. In our period education is shaped, regulated and administered in the service of economic priorities and instrumental ends. As we have seen, it is only recently that an understanding of education as a means to an end other than education itself has come to dominance (Carr 1997, pp.324-325). Education is now routinely viewed in emphatically utilitarian or instrumental terms – from the perspective of government, its vital role in enhancing the nation's economic competitiveness, in producing a flexible, adaptable and skilled work force and, from the viewpoint of the subject of education, its function in securing the qualifications that will lead to a good job and social progression. One might add to this list of extrinsic justifications for the importance of education the service it has performed throughout the period of popular and compulsory schooling - the gentling of problem populations (Donald 1992; Hunter 1994). From the point when capitalism detached itself from what Weber saw as the Calvinist ethical commitments that had been the necessary cradle for its modern development, from that point when capitalism allied itself to the post-Enlightenment understanding of knowledge as a process of scientific and technical rationalisation in the service of progress, critique – the moral problematisation of social issues – was set, along with spiritual exhortation, on a path to increasing marginalisation in the consideration of how human life might be organised and governed. This was a passage, traced by thinkers like Benjamin and Adorno, whose final destination, the imperium of instrumental rationality, was described by Lyotard as a period in which knowledge had been replaced by data. In a socio-economic order which 'detotalises meaning', functioning at 'the level of truth-without meaning' (Žižek 2008, p.68), as a completely value-neutral machine (Žižek 2008, p.133), there can be, to put it in Foucauldian terms, no position of enunciation for critique. Weber, Adorno, even Lyotard, write the pathos of critique. Another way of

putting the matter is that a world which can only be governed by a pragmatic, yet sophisticated technical rationality, can (quite properly) find no usefulness for analyses that have been passed through the unworldly (literally so, for it has no place within a governmental domain ordered to instrumental considerations) sensibility of the moral theoretician (Hunter 1994). The only debate that matters centres on technical questions of how the system can be made more effective.

It seems that educational research, if it is to survive, has to become useful, which is to say, it has to show itself capable of effective contribution to the social and economic goals set by government. Such a view of the educational researcher's role accepts a heteronomous determination of the purposes of education, speaking 'as the reflex of an unquestioned society' (Borrelli 2004, p.449), bleeding dissent and values debate from educational discourse, so that the truths research produces only have meaning, can only have sense, within the strictly policed boundaries of a technical-economic rationality. These circumstances present a daunting challenge to the community of education and to those who are responsible for the formation of masters of education. In setting out, within the limits of a brief study such as this, education's historical responsibilities, we have sought to indicate a tradition of inquiry that has sustained the pursuit of masterliness in education through premodern and modern periods. We outline below the implications of that tradition and the responsibilities it brings in train for educators in the present period.

### **Masterliness and critique in the postmodern**

We argue that the claim to mastership of the craft or profession of education can only be sustained by an awareness of, and responsibility to, an idea of critique as the activity of testing the dominant theses structuring educational discourse. However, as we have argued, the story of modernity was the story of the disconnection of moral discourse from the realm of social decision-making. It was the story of the disembodiment of knowledge, its divorce from the knower and from the personal moral commitments formed in the exchanges and interactions of communities which achieve cohesion through a shared morality. In postmodernity, critique has lost its grounding in such communities and has been marginalised by an instrumental rationality which is driven by the implacable impulses of modern capitalism. Unrestrained by any concern to consider how the production, transformation and dissemination of knowledge can serve the ends of moral community, of a just and ordered sociality, the work of education is put at the disposal of bureaucratic rationality and the

market economics it serves. How then can the activity of critique find purchase within a system of education which, as we have shown, has evolved to ensure its exclusion, its irrelevance? How can its practices be legitimated within a domain that is now governed by a radically unsympathetic rationality?

We have shown that in its medieval origins the enterprise of education was dedicated to the task of developing in its students mastery of its distinctive craft, the craft of the free person, and that that craft was committed to the realisation of a morally fulfilling life by way of serving a wider social purpose, the pursuit of the communal good. Our argument is that such moral and social purpose is an essential, ineradicable component of educational practice and that its marginalisation in current educational discourse testifies to the extent of the field's subsumption by a technical rationality which lacks the resources required for the construction of civilised social being. It is, then, through a renewed understanding of the tradition of moral and intellectual inquiry in which we are located that teachers and researchers may find the resources needed to endure and resist technicist definitions of their roles, definitions which distort and would defeat the essential purposes and dedications of their craft. It is within such an understanding that critique would acquire the legitimacy and potency - one might say, the performativity - that it otherwise lacks. We are not, of course, arguing for a return to the forms and protocols of the medieval liberal arts curriculum and, least of all, for a return to the obediences and obligations – the power relations – of that period, but we are arguing for a similar intensity of moral performance to be brought to bear upon the urgent matter of forming the free and responsible, self-governing citizenry required by an aspirationally democratic society.

On our analysis, educational mastery must entail the inculcation of a very precise critical disposition. It is the disposition to assess each and every policy initiative, every administrative expedient urged or imposed upon educational practice, in the light of the question, *Will this measure contribute to or detract from the task of sustaining and extending civility and the virtues of justice and liberty which underpin that goal?*

### **A concluding and cautionary note**

An insistence on critical rigour in teaching the MTL presents difficulties and problems. Courses like the MTL are marketed to schools on the basis of their usefulness to the developmental ambitions of those schools; a synergy is proposed between the research

interests and activities fostered by the course and schools' aims and priorities. We would not wish to dispute that masters research carried out by teacher-researchers should be of value to schools; we firmly believe that such inquiry, well-conducted, must enhance educational practice and thus be of benefit to the schools involved. However, what is perhaps too much taken for granted is that there will always be accord between the interests, the educational convictions and the priorities of a school's senior management and those of the classroom teachers who undertake a masters course. To put it baldly, critical analysis is not always welcomed unreservedly, and teachers may be reluctant to air their views if they conflict with their school's official aims and strategies. We make no recommendations about how such misalignments of perspective and purpose might be handled, although we would argue that a masters course in education should always prioritise the claims of independent research over those of educational bureaucracy. We merely observe that these are problems which are bound to arise when academic courses, concerned with developing individual mastery in education, also offer themselves to schools as likely to produce outcomes that will coincide with their administrative and pedagogical plans.

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