

Teaching as Contemplative Professional Practice

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Article abstract

Starting with the argument that what we attend to is important for how we act in and on the world – and, thus, our moral living – the article conceptualizes teaching as contemplative practice, arguing that attending pre-conceptually and non-judgmentally to our inner life as teachers as we teach moment-by-moment will give us the basis upon which we can engage developmentally in teaching as a moral endeavour. Central to the conceptualization of teaching as contemplative professional practice is the idea of on-going work on one's awareness, attention, and noticing of one's inner life while teaching. Such on-going professional development is undertaken in regard of others, the students, and, thus, makes teaching as contemplative practice a moral endeavour.

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Teaching as Contemplative Professional Practice

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Starting with the argument that what we attend to is important for how we act in and on the world—and, thus, our moral living—the article conceptualizes teaching as contemplative professional practice, arguing that attending pre-conceptually and non-judgmentally to our inner life as teachers as we teach will give us the basis upon which we can engage developmentally in teaching as a moral endeavour. Central to the conceptualization of teaching as contemplative professional practice is the idea of ongoing work on one’s awareness, attention, and noticing of one’s inner life while teaching. Such ongoing professional development is undertaken in regard of others, the students, and thus makes teaching as contemplative practice a moral endeavour.

Introduction: Observations From a Personal Journey

For over two years now I have been engaged in mindfulness meditation. One central component of my practice is *vipassana*-style sitting meditation, in which the meditator is to observe rather than live out the processes in her mind and her body as they unfold and change, particularly her feelings and thoughts as they arise and change (see, for instance, Gunaratana, 2002). During these past two years of practicing *vipassana*-style meditation, I have made five observations. First, I noticed that in phases of my sitting when I was actually *observing* my thoughts rather than being lost in them I had a much greater awareness overall of things that went on around me: noticing cars driving by, birds twittering outside on warmer days and the moments when the heating system switched on on colder ones. In contrast, whenever I “awoke” from a phase during which I was “lost in thought”, I did not remember having noticed any of it.

Second, I noticed that some of the “objects” of my awareness were easier to become aware of than others. “External” objects like car noises or birds twittering seemed to be the easiest to become aware of; my attention is relatively easily *drawn* to them.¹ “Inner” objects like my breathing or my thoughts were more difficult to become aware of; generally I had to *direct* my attention to them. Another type of objects of my awareness seemed to be even more difficult to become aware of, namely what I am aware of. One of the core *vipassana*-style meditation exercises is to non-judgmentally notice when one is not attending to one’s breathing anymore but is instead, as seems to be quite often the case, immersed in thought. I was often immersed in my thoughts for quite a while before I became aware that my attention had shifted away from my breathing and that I was actually attending to whatever my thoughts drew my attention to. Finally, the most challenging “objects” of my awareness were the actual *shifts* of my attention, i.e., not just noticing *that* but also *when* my attention shifts from one object to another.

¹ Below the idea of “external objects” as objects of our awareness will be qualified.

My third observation was that as I regularly engaged in my meditation practice, I started *in my day-to-day activities* to become more aware of the second and third types of objects distinguished above. For instance, I became more often aware of my increased heart beat after a physical activity, of the feeling of my feet's movement when walking to work, or my thinking of a particular incident that happened a few days earlier (second type). I also, though not as often, became more aware of what I was aware of during a certain time interval (third type). For instance, I was not just aware of my thinking about that particular incident that happened a few days earlier, but I also became aware *that* I was aware of that particular thought (awareness of awareness). It was the latter rather than the former that allowed me to realize how deeply that particular incident impacted me emotionally.

The fourth and fifth observations were directly linked to the development of greater awareness during my day-to-day activities. I started to observe how arising thoughts impact physiological responses. For instance, I noticed while sitting at my desk that just thinking of a challenging experience I had two days prior, without any change in my physical activity, increased my heart rate. On another occasion I observed how first a thought about an idea that I read in a book arose unrelated to what I was doing and how I then got up from my desk to go to the book shelf to pick up the book and reread the idea in the book. This second case illustrates also my fifth and final observation that most of my behaviours seem to be automatic or habitual, occurring without any conscious control over the initiation as well as the execution phase. These automatic behavioural routines seem to be initiated by some form of awareness (sometimes at the unconscious level). Such routines range from more trivial phenomena like scratching my head or tapping my feet to more serious matters like what I say in response to someone else's comment.

These five observations have contributed to a deeper understanding of the important role that my awareness and what I attend to play in how I act. These observations have given me some appreciation both for the potential role that mindfulness practices can play in training attention and for the fact that attention capacities developed in one domain can be transferred to other domains of my life. One important domain of my life is my professional work as a teacher in a post-secondary institution and as a teacher educator. Through my own reflective practice as a teacher educator, I have noticed the importance for my teaching of both what I am aware of (and often am not aware of) as I teach and the habitual and automatic behaviour routines in my teaching. Thus, the question arose for me of the relevance of mindfulness practices and attention capacities for my teaching. *This article outlines my ideas about how teaching as a contemplative (mindful) practice can be conceptualized.*

While my awareness capacity seems to have transferred to other domains of my life, my actual mindfulness practice was limited to my sitting meditations. How can I move from the mindfulness practice I have been engaged in to conceptualizing my teaching practice as a contemplative (mindful) practice? How can I move from sitting in a room by myself engaged in a practice that is focused on my personal development to a practice of being actively engaged with a group of students in a way that is focused on my students' development? I will do so, first, by linking the moral purpose of mindfulness practice to the moral purpose of teaching; second, by identifying the importance of a teacher's awareness capacity for her teaching, and; third, by identifying ways in which teaching as a practice can involve being mindful. In the next section I lay the groundwork for these three steps, which I then take in the section on teaching as contemplative professional practice.

Theoretical Framework

The Moral Purpose of Mindfulness Meditation and of Teaching

Sitting meditation practiced by oneself in a quiet room as I described it in the introduction is a tool to develop better attentional capacity. However, while meditation is often practiced *in* a quiet room by oneself (or with other quiet practitioners), it is practiced *for* our everyday life:

Meditation that is not applied to daily living is sterile and limited. The purpose of vipassana meditation is nothing less than the radical and permanent transformation of your entire sensory and cognitive experience. It is meant to revolutionize the whole of your life experience. (Gunaratana, 2002, p. 157)

This greater ambition for the impact of meditation on how one lives one's life should not come as a surprise, considering that in Buddhist philosophy and psychology, (right) mindfulness is part of the Eightfold Path of Enlightenment, which is the path toward the end of suffering arrived at "by fulfilling the human potential for goodness and happiness" (Keown, 1996, p. 44). This characterizes the moral purpose of mindfulness meditation.

This moral purpose of mindfulness meditation is linked with the moral purpose of teaching. In the Western tradition, teaching has always been seen as a moral endeavour (see, for instance, Dewey, 1909/1975; Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990), and, whatever the differences in detail, at the core of the conceptualization of teaching has always been the recognition that teaching is properly done for the betterment of others—the students—and that the teacher's decisions, actions and behaviour are central to that moral endeavor (see, for instance, Fenstermacher, 1990). Thus, the teacher's inner life that is linked to such decisions, acting and behaviour (including what she attends to) is an important aspect of teaching as a moral endeavour, and working on one's inner life is a way for teachers to be responsive to the moral purpose of teaching.

Awareness, Attention, and Noticing

In the way that I am using the term, *awareness* is an intentional state in the sense that one is aware of *something*, an idea that goes back in Western philosophy at least to Brentano (1874/1973) and then Husserl (1975). We can only be aware of "internal" states and processes. If we say that we are aware of the cat that walks in our backyard, we mean that we are aware of a sensual and perceptual stimulus of a particular type; and if I am an ontological realist, I would conclude from that stimulus that there is a cat in my backyard that stimulated my perceptual apparatus. The internal states and processes that we can be aware of the "content" or "objects" of our awareness—include thoughts, motives, feelings, emotions, and our sensual and perceptual stimuli (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 822). Our thoughts, motives (intentions), feelings, and emotions are objects of our inner life.

Following Mason (2011, p. 43), I conceptualize "awareness" in such a way that I can say that *awareness enables behaviour and action* (the latter being behaviour with intention), where awareness can be self-conscious or non-self-conscious. Behaviour enabled by awareness includes somatic behaviour of our bodies, like the increase of our heart beat, which might have been enabled by our body becoming aware of something that in turn we are not consciously aware of. When I walk down the stairs rather than thinking of the object I want to pick up from the basement, I can try to become aware of my walking down the stairs—of each step I take and of how each step feels underfoot. It is awareness of my awareness that enables my walking down the stairs. Becoming aware of the awareness that enables action—second level awareness—is always conscious awareness. With Mason, (2011, p. 43), I call this second level of awareness "awareness-in-action", and, as he suggests, it is the systematizing of such awareness-in-action around a particular aspect of our experience that gives rise to academic disciplines like mathematics, biology, nutritional sciences, and teacher education. For instance, counting objects and ordering sets of objects by the number of objects in the sets constitute awareness-in-action; awareness of such forms of awareness-in-action gives rise to the systematic formalization of such awareness of awareness in the discipline of mathematics (Mason, 1998, p. 258). This view of academic

disciplines as being rooted in our awareness of our awareness that enables action suggests that understanding something requires awareness-in-action.

Kahneman (1999) has pointed to the conceptual difference between *remembering* an experience and *experiencing* the experience. In case of the former one remembers the qualities of an experience on the good-bad spectrum and, in the case of the latter, one expresses the qualities of the experience more or less at the time one experiences the experience. Kahneman (1999) has discovered that there is often quite a discrepancy between what we remember of the good-bad qualities of an experience and how we have assessed the good-bad qualities while we actually experienced the experience. Kahneman's distinction between an experience and remembering that experience becomes important for the concept of awareness, because we can be aware of an experience as we experience it or as we bring the experience from our memory into our awareness. Kahneman's studies suggest that we can expect a substantial difference between the former and the latter type of awareness of the same experience. This becomes important for the role of mindfulness practices, since those are designed to train the former type of awareness. Let us now turn to the notion of attention.

Attention is a process of focusing conscious awareness, providing heightened sensitivity to a limited range of experience... In actuality, awareness and attention are intertwined, such that attention continually pulls 'figures' out of the 'ground' of awareness, holding them focally for varying lengths of time. (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 822)

My attention can be *directed* by me toward something or it can be *captured* by something, like noise, light, or a TV that is turned on. Schumacher (1977) goes so far as to suggest that "the difference between directed and captured attention is the same as the difference between doing things and letting things take their course, or between living and 'being lived'" (p. 67). As such, he suggests that studying and working on one's "attention" in order to be better able to direct one's attention rather than having it captured, is at the very core of human agency.

Csikszentmihalyi (1988) suggests that we should think of attention as "psychic energy", because "attention is the medium that makes events occur in consciousness" (p. 19). Psychologists have been trying to establish how much psychic energy is available to us to use at any given moment. While the specific quantification might vary, what is clear is that we have only a limited amount of psychic energy available at any given time, which limits what and to how many things we can attend to at any given time (pp. 17-20). I will now turn to the concept of noticing.

Noticing is a *shift* of attention from one object of my attention to another (Mason, 2011, p. 45). As such, to notice something means to become aware of that something as attention shifts from something else to that something. If I notice something, it *draws* my attention away from whatever I was attending to before. While we can intend to notice something, such intention can only ready us for the moment that that something comes to our awareness, but our intention cannot direct our attention itself to that something. In other words, we cannot intentionally notice something. However, our intention to notice something can ready us for actually noticing that something, which suggests a central role for noticing in our capacity to direct our attention rather than having it drawn to something. Also, Mason (2011) points to the importance of noticing as a human capacity when he suggests that "awareness of awareness arises from noticing" (p. 43) and that awareness of awareness "develops and is internalized through being sensitized to notice" (p. 45). He and others (see, for instance, Marton & Booth, 1997) even suggest that learning means shifting our noticing patterns, suggesting that having learned something manifests itself in our ability to notice something—for instance, certain qualities of an entity that we did not notice before.

Let me suggest the relevance of the concepts discussed here for teaching and teacher professional development by illustrating the concepts in the context of teaching. A teacher looks at the clock and speeds up her talking (awareness of the time enables action). One student says something as the teacher speeds up her talking and the teacher shushes the student (awareness of interruption

enables action). The teacher blushes slightly in response to her shushing; she is aware of her blushing while she blushes (awareness of an experience as it is experienced). The teacher now attends to her blushing (she notices her blushing, which is a shift of her attention). The teacher then notices that she wonders about why she blushes, which means that the teacher must be aware of her awareness of her blushing (awareness of awareness arisen from noticing). This episode illustrates a teacher's inner life at work while teaching. Her speeding up, her (particular way of) responding to the interrupting student, her awareness of her response and her physiological response to that awareness are all aspects of her inner life worth exploring as part of her professional development. If, as Palmer (1998) suggests, we indeed teach who we are, then we better get to know ourselves, which means particularly to get to know and work on our inner life. The proposed idea of teaching as contemplative professional practice suggests exactly this.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness—in the sense used here—is a type of awareness that plays a central role in the Buddhist psychology of mind, but that has also found its way into Western psychologies and philosophies of the mind. A very common notion of mindfulness in the sense used here is the following: “Mindfulness can be thought of as moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness” (Kabatt-Zinn, 2005, pp. 108-109). Mindfulness as non-judgmental awareness that is focused on the present moment rather than the past or the future seems to be the characteristic most commonly adopted in different Western disciplines like health and medicine (Kabatt-Zinn, 2005; Garner-Nix, 2009), psychology (Brown & Ryan, 2003), psychotherapy (Martin, 1997; Siegel, 2010), and education (Bai, 2001; Schoeberlein, 2009). Drawing on this tradition, I want to conceptualize mindfulness as a technical term in the following way: *mindfulness is pre-conceptual and non-judgmental awareness of present experiences.*

Pre-conceptual awareness is pure awareness that occurs prior to conceptualization. As Gunaratana (2002) explains, “When you first become aware of something, there is a fleeting instant of pure awareness just before you conceptualize the thing before you identify it” (p. 138). A challenge with our awareness is that “[the] mind superimposes concepts on percepts, thereby concealing the latter from our ordinary introspection. . . . The Buddhist ‘mindfulness practice’ . . . is a way to recover the non-conceptual awareness” (Bai, 2001, p. 91). As I described my experience in the introduction, all those who have tried to focus their mind on their breathing can attest to the possibility of non-conceptual awareness (“thought-less” awareness of one’s breathing) and how quickly the mind tries to conceptualize what we are aware of, like judging our breathing as slow or linking it to breathing when we are engaged in a physical activity like running.

Our capacity to conceptualize our perceptions helps us understand the world and make sense of it in terms of the categories that we have formed, like the category of being human. While this capacity is of great value to us, it also frames how the world appears to us, this is how the constant stream of perceptions is shaped into particular conscious experiences. Having at least partially pre-conceptual awareness of the stream of perceptions can provide us with a basis upon which we are able to conceptualize our experiences differently and address our conceptual biases. Schumacher (1977) expresses the same idea when he suggests the important role of “bare attention”: “The Buddha’s Way of Mindfulness is designed to ensure that man’s reason is supplied with genuine and unadulterated material before it starts reasoning” (p. 70).

Non-judgmental awareness of something means that we do not judge it as being good or bad, desirable or less desirable, and so on. We simply notice it as we are aware of it in the moment of awareness. In this sense non-judgmental awareness is “*open or receptive awareness*” (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 822); we are open and receptive to whatever comes to mind. Non-judgmental awareness, however, does not mean that we have to attend without intention. We can intentionally direct our attention. This requires assessing different states of awareness. However, this is different from judging what we become aware of.

The value of non-judgmental awareness lies in its capacity to help us “observe” what goes on within us (our inner life); whenever we move into judging what we become aware of in the sense of it being good or bad, helpful or not, we move away from attending to our inner life (observing) to thinking about (judging) ideas, experiences, feelings, and so forth.

Mindfulness is awareness of *present experiences*. At first glance, this statement might seem trivial, since what else is there that we can be aware of? When we remember an event from three weeks ago, the memories are experienced in this moment. However, if we distinguish between the experiences that created the memory and the experience of remembering, then we can say that our awareness of the former—the memories of a past experience—is not mindfulness. Awareness of *my presently remembering* is an experience that, if pre-conceptual and non-judgmental, can be an instance of mindfulness.

In the next section I argue for the relevance of a (contemplative) teacher’s capacity to be pre-conceptually and non-judgmentally aware of present experiences when teaching. It should suffice here to suggest that it is that very awareness that provides the (contemplative) teacher with experiences from her inner life relevant to working on her teaching practice.

Teaching as Contemplative Professional Practice

In this section I develop a notion of teaching as contemplative professional practice by drawing on the theoretical framework outlined above. I propose that teaching as contemplative professional practice has three components: an ethical component, a noticing component, and a mindfulness component. Subsequent subsections will address these components in more detail. The selection of these three components is based on the following idea about teaching as contemplative professional practice more generally: teaching as contemplative professional practice supports the teacher to live a morally better life for the benefit of those she is working with (ethical component); in order to do so, she will have to engage in ongoing work on the functioning of her inner life and professional practice (noticing component); for such work she needs to be aware of the functioning of her inner life as it is part of her professional practice (mindfulness component). The ongoing professional development makes this a contemplative *professional* practice.

The Ethical Component

Teaching as contemplative professional practice is *the ethical imperative of teaching being a moral endeavour for the betterment of all living beings embedded within a holistic view of human living* (the ethical component). The ethical component provides the normative orientation needed to move from *understanding* our inner life to *improving* our inner life and professional practice: it helps to decide what needs to be improved and worked on. The concepts of awareness, attention, noticing, and mindfulness as explicated above have been taken out of the context of Buddhist philosophy (though inspired by it), which, thus, leaves their use without an ethical orientation. Thus, the ethical component gives meaning to the idea of teaching as a moral endeavour within the context of contemplative teaching practice.

The Noticing Component

Teaching as contemplative professional practice is a practice in which the teacher is *using noticing in a disciplined way to change her knowing-to act in the moment in order to change the functioning of her inner life and her professional behaviour* (the noticing component). The idea of this component draws on Mason’s idea of working on one’s noticing to improve one’s knowing-to act in the moment as part of one’s professional development (Mason, 2002; Mason & Spence, 1999).

At the core of the noticing component lies the idea that in order for us to change our teaching practice substantially—for instance, how we respond emotionally and behaviourally as teachers to particular types of student behaviour—we need to systematically work on our inner life as it relates to these aspects of our teaching practice. The following lays out the steps that are involved in the noticing component. *First*, I need to identify types of teaching situations that are linked to the inner-life experiences in question—for example, negative thoughts or negative emotions or certain thought patterns and automatic behavioural routines. (The mindfulness component will support the identification of such types of professional situations; see below.) The *second* step is to develop alternative, more desired ways of experiencing and responding. This should generally involve deep reflection, drawing on literature, as well as involving others and their wisdom on the issue at hand. *Third*, I work on developing the sensitivity *to notice* those professional situations or experiences *as they arise*. I need to notice those situations “as they arise”, because I want to have available my knowledge of how I want to experience or act differently *before* I experience or act. This third step is probably the most challenging part, because it generally requires working on my thought patterns and automatic behavioural routines. Having developed routines that can and are executed with automaticity in order to deal efficiently with a number of aspects of a complex practice like teaching is a characteristic of teaching expertise (Berliner, 2001; Bransford, Derry, Berliner, & Hammerness, 2005). But it is that very automaticity that characterizes good teaching that can also be problematic because “the trouble with habits is that they obscure noticing the possibility of choosing to act differently, precisely because they have become part of habitual practice” (Mason, 2002, pp. 71-72). The *fourth*, and final, step is to draw on our knowing-to act in the moment to actually change our experiencing or acting in the situations in question. Contemplative teaching practice is characterized by the teacher being engaged in these four steps as a regular part of her professional practice.

The Mindfulness Component

Teaching as contemplative professional practice is a practice in which the practitioner is in a state of *non-judgmental, pre-conceptual conscious awareness of the inner-life experiences in the moment while being engaged in her teaching* (the mindfulness component). This characteristic of contemplative professional practice is its *mindfulness component*, because mindfulness was characterized above as non-judgmental, pre-conceptual awareness of present experiences. Mindful awareness in teaching as contemplative professional practice provides the practitioner with the awareness of her inner life *while teaching*. As pre-conceptual and non-judgmental, this awareness cannot serve the purpose of changing or adjusting one’s responding or acting in the very moment of the awareness. On the other hand, such awareness—exactly because of its nature as pre-conceptual and non-judgmental—can be the basis for understanding our inner functioning as part of our professional practice of teaching, which forms the basis for our working on our inner functioning to change our teaching practices (noticing component). Thus, mindful awareness as non-judgmental, pre-conceptual conscious awareness of present experiences can help the contemplative teacher identify the types of teaching situations that characterize the first step described in the noticing component above.

The mindfulness aspect of teaching as contemplative practice is to provide the teacher with a better “sense” of her experiences while engaged in her teaching. Mindful awareness of the inner life while being engaged in teaching is important because the content of one’s inner life is, particularly, a response to one’s engagement with the external world as it is shaped within one’s teaching. For instance, emotions arise during one’s teaching in response to what one experiences while teaching, and thoughts (also inner objects) arise in response to the feeling of those emotions. A conscious awareness of one’s feeling of an emotion that has arisen in response to a particular teaching situation and one’s thoughts linked to the feeling are an integral aspect of one’s professional functioning, and as such an awareness of those aspects of one’s inner life is an awareness of one’s professional functioning. Since such awareness would be non-judgmental and pre-conceptual, the purpose of the awareness is not to

form the basis for professional reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983), but rather for the conscious awareness to be available at a later time to be reflected upon as part of the four step-process outlined in the description of the noticing component. Drawing on Kahneman's (1999) distinction between remembering and experiencing mentioned above, we can also say that the central role of the mindfulness component in teaching as contemplative professional practice is to make the experiencing available to the remembering of the experience, in other words, the awareness of one's inner life while engaged in one's teaching should allow for accessing that awareness at a later time.

Ideas of Teaching as Contemplative Practice

This article is not the first that conceptualizes teaching as contemplative practice. In this section I like to opportunistically draw on some of the other writings to help shed more light on the conceptualization presented here.

One important distinction is made in the literature between "mindful teaching" (teaching *as* contemplative practice) and "teaching mindfulness" (teaching contemplative practice to others), the former focusing on the development of the teacher as a mindful practitioner (MacDonald & Shirley, 2009; Miller, 1994), the latter focusing on helping students to become more mindful (Bai, 2001). Some authors focus on both (O'Reilley, 1998; Schoeberlein, 2009). The focus on the conceptualization of teaching as contemplative practice presented here is only concerned with the former.

The idea of a teacher "being present"—one of the characteristics of being mindful in the Buddhist psychology of mind—is conceptualized by Miller (1994) as "unmediated awareness [which] is characterized by openness, a sense of relatedness, and by awe and wonder" leading to the duality of teacher-student "drop[ping] away and as teachers we see part of ourselves in our students" (p. 25). While I would not say that this view is an explicit part of the conceptualization presented here, there is a sense of "being present" explicit in it. The awareness of one's inner life while engaged with one's students—a core feature of my conceptualization of teaching as contemplative practice—adds a more holistic experience and awareness of my engagement in those situations. I am more present *to the situation* through this more holistic experience.

While Miller (1994, chapter 2) contrasts reflection with contemplation, MacDonald and Shirley (2009) see (collaborative) reflection as an integral part of mindful teaching practice. In the conceptualization presented in this article, reflection (on remembered awareness of one's inner life) is an important aspect of teaching as contemplative professional practice. Also, MacDonald and Shirley (2009) propose a collaborative group approach to working on one's contemplative practice that is also recommended in the conceptualization presented in this article (see below).

What I hope the conceptualization of teaching as contemplative practice presented in this article contributes to the small body of literature on the topic is a precise and very explicit concept of teaching as contemplative practice that makes use of the insights from a range of disciplines that are relevant to the concept—not just Buddhist psychology, but also phenomenological studies (e.g., Mason) and psychological theories (e.g., Kahneman, Csikszentmihalyi). Flanagan (1992, 1997) has called the method of bringing three different disciplines—phenomenology, neuroscience, and psychology/cognitive science—together to study human consciousness "the natural method". In this spirit, I hope that the conceptualization presented here can provide the basis for the use of the natural method to study and work on one's teaching as contemplative professional practice.

Conclusion: Disciplined Practice for Contemplative Professional Practice

My experience with working on and with my attention has demonstrated to me the important role of what and how I attend to for how I act and, thus, for how I live my life. It has also demonstrated to me

how mindfulness practices can change what and how I experience by impacting what I attend to and therefore become consciously aware of at a given moment. Considering the literature on mindfulness these “insights” are not surprising, but their personal and experiential origin have been a motivational force for me to think about their potential impact on my teaching, which I see as a moral endeavour requiring constant “working on”. The conceptualization of teaching as a contemplative professional practice outlined in this article is a result of this thinking.

In the introduction, I wrote about the challenges to attending to my inner life. These challenges are well reported in the literature on Buddhist mindfulness practices (see, for instance, Gunaratana, 2002, chapter 7), and they suggest that the enactment of teaching as contemplative professional practice as conceptualized here will be a challenging undertaking. Responsive teaching already takes up quite a bit of the psychic energy (attention) that we have available at any given moment. Teaching as contemplative practice requires *additional* psychic energy to attend to one’s inner life as one teaches. Considering the limited psychic energy available in any given moment (Bransford et al., 2005, p. 57; Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, pp. 17-20) the question arises whether such contemplative practice is possible in the first place. However, more recent research on neuroplasticity—the ability of the brain to physically alter itself in response to changed demand patterns on the brain—suggests that our mind’s functioning can be altered with training. More recent research on the impact of longer-term Buddhist mindfulness practices on changes to the brain *and* the mind’s capacities (see, for instance, the research reported in Begley, 2008) suggests that systematic and disciplined training of the mind might be a way to expand our capacity of using our psychic energy efficiently so that we might be able to attend fully to our professional practice *as well as* to our inner life at the same time. Research on metacognition suggests that we can become more efficient in using our psychic energy because “the amount of attention that we must devote to a task depends on how experienced and efficient we are at doing it” (Bransford et al., 2005, p. 57). There are already a number of concrete approaches suggested for working on one’s awareness and attention to one’s inner life that seem very promising, some of which address working on one’s awareness within the professional practice of teaching (e.g., Schoeberlein, 2009), and others within a broader range of professional work (e.g., Depraz, Varela, & Vermersch, 2003).

The noticing required in teaching as contemplative practice also represents a challenge to us considering the need for a heightened sensitivity for a particular situation to arise. Change in our behaviour and inner-life aspects of our professional practice requires a shift in our attention from what we do not or only insufficiently attend to, to what we have recognized we *need* to attend to. Mason’s “Discipline of Noticing” (Mason, 2002; Mason & Spence, 1999), which was developed to help professionals improve their practice, provides a systematic and disciplined way of developing our capacity of knowing-to act in the moment by helping us develop our sensitivities to particular situations as they arise.

Teaching as contemplative professional practice as it is conceptualized here has ongoing professional development as an integral feature, which characterizes it as *professional* practice. Through our awareness and then understanding of our inner life as it is linked to our idiosyncratic professional practice we will want to change aspects of how we conceptualize situations, how we act in particular moments, and so on. For such changes we have to develop our sensitivities to notice particular situations *as they develop* to provide us with the opportunity to act, feel, etc. differently. As Mason (2002, p. 144) has suggested, while teaching as contemplative professional practice can be a solitary affair, as professional development it will greatly benefit from collaborative efforts.

In this article I have conceptualized teaching as contemplative professional practice and made the argument that such practice requires systematic and disciplined practice. Although I have made some reference to already existing approaches to working on one’s attention and noticing, whether and how the proposed form of contemplative practice can really be developed is still an open question. However, this question cannot be asked without having available a conceptualization of teaching as a contemplative practice of the type presented here. Teaching is a moral endeavour in regard of others

(the students) and such an endeavour requires the teacher to bring into focus her attention (or non-attention) to her inner-life. Contemplative practices are inherently moral as part of a teacher's contemplative professional practice.

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