

## What is an educated person?

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### Introduction: Maynooth's mission

First, I must express my delight at being once again, not only in Maynooth, but also embedded in the Dublin Room in Stoyte Hall. Did that great Professor of Ethics, the revered and Reverend Dr Michael Forker, once grace that room, remembered for his praise of, and expertise in, the virtue of prudence? Was it not he, Professor of Ethics for 40 years from his appointment in 1895, who felt confident to declare to the assembled students (with overtones of Aquinas) that '*summum bonum* is here' (yes, here in Maynooth)? However, (and those of you from Universities other than Maynooth will be glad to hear) he then felt it prudent to add, 'but I can assure you that it has at least a quasi-domicile elsewhere'.

But that surely is what should be the case. When Lord Macauley, in 1845, vigorously denounced in the British Parliament the representatives of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge for opposing the wishes of Prime Minister Peel to enlarge the grant to Maynooth, he surely warmed the hearts of Maynooth men when he declared:

Whatever this institution be, whether good or bad, it is clearly an important institution. It is established to form the opinions and the moral character of those who are themselves to form the opinions and moral character of a nation.<sup>1</sup>

Hence, the importance of a tradition in Maynooth, represented in the 40 years' formation of moral character by that Professor of Ethics, in whose famous black notebook lay

all the ethics he cared about, the residuum of all ethics, a crystallization, an irreducible minimum, an essence, a *formula formularum*.

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<sup>1</sup> See Kevin, N., 1945, *I Remember Maynooth*, Burns, Oats and Washbourne.

And in this mission to form the opinions and the moral character of those who were to form the opinions and moral character of a nation, that eminent philosopher was ably assisted by the Professor of Sacred Eloquence. After all, does not the pursuit of our educational aims require not only knowledge of *summum bonum* but also the communication skills to convey it to the minds of the young (although ‘sacred eloquence’ is now referred to more prosaically as ‘pedagogical skills’)?

That is the theme of what I shall argue. For, in addressing the question ‘What is an educated person?’, I want to point to a central feature of being a person, namely the capacity to pursue the ‘good life’, that is, a life which is shaped by both knowledge and virtues. This is worth saying because it is rarely recognised by those who shape educational policy and too often remains implicit only in the practice of our schools. In the case of the former, policy is understandably shaped by perceived economic needs. The economic imperative reigns supreme. In the case of the latter, ‘virtue’ seems, along with piety, a rather medieval quality. ‘Virtuous women’ thrived once upon a time in England, according to the plaques on the walls of our ancient churches, but rarely in the more recent ones. One never hears a teacher say to a parent that, though Johnny is rather backward in his reading and mathematics, he is extremely virtuous.

In pursuing this argument, I pay particular attention to the virtue of ‘caring’ since it is the key to so much else that we aspire to in our schools, but received little attention from our Professor of Ethics, bent on being prudent, or indeed from Aquinas or Aristotle. But the pursuit of this virtue of ‘caring’ would seem to be a central aim of those teachers in our schools and colleges who are, in the words of Macauley, ‘to form the character and moral opinions of a nation’.

In what follows, therefore, I shall,

first, examine more closely the idea of being ‘a person’, and of being one more abundantly, for that remains central to the educational enterprise;

second, pay particular attention to the development of the virtuous life with particular reference to the virtues of ‘caring’ and of ‘self-respect’;

third, assert that no school can go it alone but requires partnership within the wider educational communities and with employers helping with the longer term vision of educating persons;

fourth, conclude by pleading that we ‘bring back teaching’.

### On being a person

We educate persons, but not dogs or donkeys. Why not? What is so distinctive about persons that we see the need for their development through processes which are graced with the title of education?

There are two connected meanings to the word ‘education’. The first is a purely descriptive one as in the case of someone asking, “where you were educated?” The answer would lie in reference to the school you attended or the university. That would be a matter of fact, easy to verify. But such an answer could well be accompanied by the further comment that it was not really an *education*. It was, in the words of John Dewey, a ‘mis-education’. “The *so-called* education made me want never to read a book again. It put me off studying. It deadened my curiosity”.

Here we are seeing ‘education’ as an evaluative term. It implies that you are, as a result of certain activities, in some sense a better person. There has been some sort of growth as a person. The philosopher, Richard Peters, likens ‘education’ to ‘reform’<sup>2</sup>. To be reformed is to be changed for the better – no longer committing crime, for instance, as in the case of a reformed prisoner.

Therefore, we need to ask what are those distinctive characteristics of being a person which, if developed, make someone a better person, indeed a person more fully. The question could be put in another way, namely, what are the characteristics which make us distinctively human and which, if developed or nurtured, would make us even more so?

The question was raised and answered in dramatic fashion by the Principal of an American High School I met in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She sent the following letter to the new teachers joining the school.

Dear Teacher

I am the survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness:  
Gas chambers built by learned engineers.

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2 Peters, R.S., 1965, *Ethics and Education*, Geo. Allen and Unwin

Children poisoned by educated physicians.

Infants killed by trained nurses.

Women and children shot and burned by high school and college graduates.

So, I am suspicious of education.

Those engineers, physicians, nurses, college graduates had all been educated in the descriptive sense, but was there not something lacking which would make us want to deny to them the title of 'educated persons'? Is there not a moral dimension – the possession of particular values, the exercise of certain virtues, and a moral seriousness - which should shape and direct their learning as engineers, as physicians, as nurses and as college graduates?

The High School Principal, therefore, continues:

My request is: Help your students become human.

Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths,  
educated Eichmans.

Reading, writing, arithmetic (one might add 'getting your leaving certificate)are important  
but only if they serve to make our  
children more human.<sup>3</sup>

One can see how that moral dimension gets omitted – why the overall aims of education rarely get explored with the seriousness they deserve, and why therefore many people are rejected as poorly or ill-educated, despite their having acquired profoundly human insights, qualities and virtues. When I started teaching, I was given Form 1x, the bottom stream of five streams of the first year of an inner city comprehensive school. The head teacher called in to see 1x and to urge them to work hard, or otherwise they would end up as dustbin men or street cleaners. And yet most of 1x were the sons and daughters of such workers. Can there not be educated dustbin men, street cleaners and people engaged in such lowly occupations?

A hundred years ago, here in Renehan Hall, were once seated a 100 students listening intently to the *Quares*, *Quids* and *Quomodos* of our learned Professor of Ethics, debating the conflict between the Thomists and the Ockamists on the nature of the *summum bonum*. But that philosophical conflict between the essentialists, on the one hand, and the nominalists, on the

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3 Strom, M.S., 1981, 'Facing history and ourselves', *Moral Education Forum*, p.4

other, (who, in denying the reality of universals such as ‘human nature’, reduced reality to perceived particulars only) permeates our thinking to this very day. Those who know University College London (the first English university since Oxford and Cambridge but founded 30 years after Maynooth), should look up to the second floor window of 19 Gordon Square where they may still see the ghost of A.J.Ayer, whose *Language, Truth and Logic* dominated English philosophy for a generation. ‘The meaning of a proposition is its mode of verification’, namely, either that of empirical observation (e.g. science) or that which is true by reference to the principle of contradiction (e.g. mathematics)<sup>4</sup>. Gone, therefore, as *meaningless* are statements about moral values, educational aims, or human nature. The question I have been invited to answer cannot be meaningfully asked.

This, you might say, is but the esoteric debate of philosophers, removed from the practical deliberations of those engaged in education. But is it? The inheritors of that positivism of Ayer (and indeed of the nominalism of Ockam) are those who transform the language of values to that which is measurable, who reduce educational aims to observable targets, who see ‘education’ as but the means to some further non-educational end (high grades, better job, employers’ needs, place in the league tables). There is little room in this changed language of education (of targets, performance indicators, audits, payment by results, and *delivery* of the curriculum) for seeing education, not as a means to an end, but as a transforming of the persons themselves – as the route through which young people learn to become human as the High School Principal requested, as recognising what it means to be human as Jerome Bruner argued, or as, in the words of Michael Oakeshott, making one’s *debut dans la vie humaine*.

But if you peep behind the spectre of A.J.Ayer, you may see another ghost – the severe and sad looking one of John Macmurray, who preceded Ayer as Grote Professor of Logic at UCL, but the memory of whom was forgotten awhile under the blitz of the logical positivism of his successor. For Macmurray, far from reducing everything to what is a construction from the observable and measurable, spoke of the ‘form of the personal’. To speak of ‘the form of the personal’ is to indicate that there is something distinctive about calling someone ‘a person’ which requires a distinctive way of describing, evaluating and understanding what is so described. In failing to see that distinctiveness (as when, for example, the ‘personal’ is subsumed under the very different language of ‘performance management’), the young person becomes a means to the institutional ends (in England, place in the league-tables; in Ireland, increase in the total points score in the

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4 Ayer, A.J., 1947, *Language, Truth and Logic*, Penguin

Leaving Certificate). The aims of education are narrowed to performances, which are dictated by those in power. Teachers become *deliverers* of the curriculum (which is written elsewhere) - no longer curriculum creators or thinkers.

According to the philosopher Michael Oakeshott, therefore, a different language is required for an account of education, a different metaphor from that which draws upon the management-speak of those who shape our educational encounters. Education is an *engagement* between learners, on the one hand, and, on the other, what others have said and done. In this engagement, Oakeshott likens education to a

conversation – an endless unrehearsed intellectual adventure in which, in imagination, we enter into a variety of modes of understanding the world and ourselves. [It is] an initiation into the art of this conversation between the generations of mankind

in which we begin to recognise the voices of science, of history, of poetry, of religion, of philosophy, and learn

to distinguish their different modes of utterance, and to acquire the intellectual and moral habits appropriate to this conversational relationship.<sup>5</sup>

Education, therefore, is a bringing to bear upon the yet unformed minds of the young the cultural riches we have inherited, through which we come to understand more deeply the physical, social and moral worlds we inhabit. And if phrases like ‘cultural riches’ or, in Matthew Arnold’s words, ‘the best that has been thought and said’ seems a little far-fetched for us, think again of what good drama teachers can achieve with them, drawing upon their familiarity with, and participation in, the arts. Think, too, of the transformative effect of the humanities (given the grasp and love of history or literature that the good teacher brings to the classroom) on all young people who are trying to make sense of their social and personal lives. To see, for instance, how the English Ballet’s production of Prokofiev’s *Romeo and Juliet* (with a cast taken entirely from disenchanting, excluded, disadvantaged young people, and with its themes of dysfunctional families, street fights and knife crime) is to see how young lives can be turned round through educational engagement. [Emma – Lady Capulet]

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5 Oakeshott, M., *Experience and its Modes*

That conversation, of which Oakeshott spoke, engages the feeling as well as the understanding. Indeed, why should they be seen as opposites? Poetry, drama, art, literature – chosen by the wise teacher to touch the concerns, aspirations, and understandings of the learners in their charge – engage the emotions and transform how one feels. The humanities are surely the source through which previously unquestioned values are probed and challenged. And indeed the sciences, as deeper understanding of the physical world enters into how we experience it, providing greater insight into what it means to be human and how to become more so. Jerome Bruner's interdisciplinary *Man: a Course of Study* (addressing the three questions: What makes us human? How did we become so? How can we become more so?) drew upon a range of disciplines – anthropology, history, literature, science.<sup>6</sup>

But if so, can all be educated? Can 1x be exposed successfully to what too often is seen as accessible only to the academically able? After all, as reported in *Le Cheile*, the Leaving Certificate has become the minimum qualification necessary to secure access to reasonable quality employment and to a good education and training after leaving school – very much a one way system, denied to the many leaving before the Leaving Certificate<sup>7</sup>.

But denied not only for the low achievers. Again, as Le Chiele asks,

How do we respond to the increasing criticism of a second level system considered by many to be driven by rote learning, examination pressures, higher education entry requirements, rather than real understanding and skills?<sup>8</sup>

I need to add, to this Irish audience, that the same criticisms apply much more so – in the USA, as so passionately argued by Diane Ravitch<sup>9</sup>, and in England, as so continually argued by myself<sup>10</sup> (for which I have recently been rewarded by a billious diatribe from Mr Gove's adviser in the *Daily Mail*).

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6 Bruner, J., 1966, 'Man: a course of study', in *Towards a Theory of Instruction*, Harvard University Press

7 *Le Cheile*, 2010, No.4, p.17

8 op.cit., p.12

9 Ravitch, D., 2010, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, NY: Basic Books

10 Pring, R., 2012, *The Life and Death of Secondary Education for All*, London: Routledge.

It is surely the case that the insights of different kinds, embodied within the arts, humanities and the sciences can at some level of intelligibility enter into the thinking of even 1x. Those pupils may not reach the depth of understanding of Nobel Prizewinners or indeed of those with high points in their Leaving Certificates. However, they can come to make the connection (the conceptual continuity) between, on the one hand, how they see the world and experience human relationships, and, on the other, what science and the humanities have given insight into – connections, for instance, between Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and the street life of even the most disadvantaged young people, or between the simple act of cooking and the scientific revelations of gastronomy, as the philosopher John Dewey so powerfully argued<sup>11</sup>.

And let us avoid, in emphasising the growth of understanding as an educational aim, the false dualism between the academic and the vocational, between thinking and doing, between knowledge and practice, which has limited the educational experience of the academically successful as well as impoverished the experience of those deemed unacademic. As Richard Sennett extolled the accomplishments of *The Craftsman*,

History has drawn fault lines dividing theory and practice, technique and expression, craftsman and artist, maker and user; modern society suffers from this historical inheritance. But the past life of craft and craftsmen also suggests ways of using tools, organising bodily movements, thinking about materials which remain alternative, viable proposals about how to conduct life with skill.<sup>12</sup>

Failure to recognise the logical continuity of understanding between the experience of the child, on the one hand, and the inherited knowledge and understanding of science, literature and the arts and crafts, on the other, results in the failure to touch the minds of the learner, and a substitution instead of the emphasis on measurable outcomes and therefore on teaching to the test.

However, there is further aspect of becoming an educated person picked out by the High School Principal which too often gets forgotten in the focus on knowledge and academic success, namely, the propensity to utilise such knowledge and understanding for the good of oneself and of the wider community. The educated person in Plato's *Republic* were the Guardian Class who,

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11 Dewey, J., *The Child and the Curriculum*

12 Sennett, R., 2008, *The Craftsman*, p.8



in seeing what was of worth (the Professor of Ethics' *Summum Bonum*) took responsibility for creating a society which reflected that.

### Virtue as an educational aim

The propensity or disposition to act according to what is perceived to be good is called 'virtue'. Often we lack the requisite virtue – courage, for instance, or patience – and it is surely an educational task to transform what might be a struggle to do what is right into a disposition to do so. Such a transformation is effected in many different ways, but particularly through the embodiment of those virtues in a way of life - in the school or university or employment community, into which the learner is being initiated. Lawrence Kohlberg of Harvard University, whose extensive research on the development of the concept of fairness, discovered that no amount of principled thinking about fairness would result in the students being terribly concerned about fairness. Hence, Kohlberg's creation of the Just Community School – an example of which was that very High School in Cambridge, Massachusetts whose principal I quoted earlier.<sup>13</sup>

I want to illustrate this by reference to the virtue of 'caring', about which the philosopher, Nel Noddings has written much.

Essential to being, and to becoming more fully, a person is to be able to recognise others as well as oneself as a person – capable of understanding, seeking personal fulfilment, worthy of respect. It involves entering into relationships with others and a caring for others in one's ever widening community. And this is essential, too, for the intellectual endeavour. The intellectual virtues of caring for the truth, of openness to criticism, of perseverance are demanded in the co-operation with and learning from others, in addressing problems and in opening the mind to further possibilities. As Noddings says, 'when I really care, I hear, see or feel what the other tries to convey'.<sup>14</sup>

The development of the virtue of caring requires a 'caring community'. In the absence of such a community, many become disillusioned, outsiders. And even the apparently successful ones

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13 Kohlberg, L., 1982, 'Recent work in moral education', in Ward, L.O., (ed) *The Ethical Dimension of the School Curriculum*, Swansea: Pineridge Press.

14 Noddings, N.,

(those with high grades) have probably failed to see this connection of their learning with the possible fruitfulness of such learning for others as well as for oneself.

Let me provide an example of a school I am closely associated with, which puts the pursuit of the virtue of caring at the very centre of its educational programme

A class of 10 year olds were gathered together for the weekly sharing of their problems (often very personal) and their reactions to them. The school was in one of the most disadvantaged districts of England. Of the class of 30, 11 were on the social services' 'at risk' register. The father of one boy had just been murdered on the nearby estate. But over the last couple of years they had learnt the rules for engaging in discussion (dialogue): only one person at a time (he or she who holds the ball); nothing hurtful of another in the group to be allowed; everyone to listen to what each says; none forced to speak, though everyone has the opportunity to do so. It was crucial to have developed a safe environment in which each could speak honestly about what he or she thought and felt. They were talking about events in their lives which they had found hurtful. Some were of bullying. One was of the anger of her stepfather who had confined her to her bedroom. Discussion was of how one felt, how to deal with one's feelings, how to manage the situation. The courage in engaging in such personal exposure and the caring reactions of the others were quite remarkable. But that atmosphere of interpersonal support and caring resulted from a whole-school policy, and one which involved the parents and carers, many of whom did not initially possess the skills and attitudes which prevailed within the schools

At the core of that personal development, as argued above, lie qualities of personal relations, self-esteem and emotional well-being. Such qualities can remain undeveloped, indeed stunted by the social conditions and relations in which young people live at home and in their wider social networks. They can so easily be ignored in the pursuit of an academic but narrow conception of the educated person. As Kohlberg argued, it is difficult to foster moral attitudes and principled thinking unless these are embodied in the very institutions in which they are being fostered.

#### A caring society: partnership and collaboration

Crucial to the development of the 'educated person', therefore, is the institutional framework in which that sense of a caring community flourishes – where everyone, what ever his or her ability, is respected as having a part to play – the sense of solidarity which provides the ethical

foundation for citizenship. The fortunate amongst us recognise a mutual interest with, and a care for, the less fortunate. As *Le Chiele* argues in relation to the poor performance of many, what is required is a 'positive school climate' in terms of quality of relationships, with school leaders fostering the climate which will support such students<sup>15</sup>

But this remains increasingly difficult in a society where such a large number of young people, whether or not they extend their formal learning into university, are denied the employment and career opportunities which give them a sense of purpose, the dignity of labour, a standing in the adult world into which they are entering. On average, 25% of Europe's 16-25 year-olds are unemployed, including those who have recently graduated.

That is why I argue for the greater integration of schools within a wider sense of a 'caring community'. No school can go it alone. Collaboration rather than competition is essential:

- ⤴ the sharing of resources and expertise, which few schools can possibly contain on their own (in England, 500 secondary schools have no qualified teacher of physics, thereby depriving many of that broad vision of learning));
- ⤴ the provision of an independent careers and guidance service which knows about the skills needed in the labour market and about the different pathways into employment which young people might profitably follow;
- ⤴ help from local and national employers in the development of the qualities needed for the world of work.

It is interesting to see, for example, how increasingly employers are recruiting from school-leavers rather than graduates so that they can be trained in the required skills and nurtured in the required work ethic.

But all this requires a wider community commitment – especially the involvement of employers in the provision of post-school opportunities for young people at different levels of achievement. For example, an increasing number of firms are establishing school-leaving programmes, increasing their apprenticeships, and demanding better careers guidance services for all young people. For instance, Careers Academy UK (a business education charity set up to address social mobility and now working in 140 schools involving 1400 employers) has equipped more than 4000 students to benefit from internships, networking and mentoring, with 85% progressing directly into higher education or employment

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<sup>15</sup> *op.cit.*, p.22.

The point is that if we are wanting an educated society, then the burden does not fall uniquely on the school and its teachers. The development of a caring community for all, in which is developed for everyone hope, respect and a sense of dignity, requires collaboration between schools, employers, universities and the wider community. Indeed, was not ‘partnership’ one of the five principles of the 1995 White Paper, informing the 1998 Education Act, and followed up in the Symposium, *Partnership and the Benefits of Learning*, based on collaborative work with teachers?<sup>16</sup>

Without that, one can see, in so many, a sense of disillusion and hopelessness. David Lammy’s (Member of Parliament for Tottenham) gave an excellent account of the August riots in North London<sup>17</sup>. It shows how that sense of hopelessness in not feeling part of a wider community in which there were shared interests, leads to anti-social behaviour of disillusioned young people who feel they have no stake in the wider society.

More vocational education, then? That depends on what one means by ‘vocational *education*’. For John Dewey

A vocation means nothing but such a direction of life activities as renders them perceptibly significant to a person, because of the consequences they accomplish .... The opposite of a career is neither leisure nor culture, but aimlessness, capriciousness, the absence of cumulative achievement in experience, on the personal side, and idle display, parasitic dependence upon the others, on the social side.<sup>18</sup> [*surely, the very antithesis of an educated person*]

And so, the educated person, may not be academically shining, may not score high in the Leaving Certificate, but would have this sense of direction in life activities, informed by a critical sense of what is worthwhile, of what has wider social usefulness, and through which he or she gains a sense of personal worth.

But the achievement of that requires a wider caring community.

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<sup>16</sup> Hogan, P., 1995, Maynoth: Educational Studies of Ireland

<sup>17</sup> Lammy, D., 2013, *Arising from the Ashes*,

<sup>18</sup> Dewey, J., 1916, *Democracy and Education*, NY: the Free Press, p.307

### Bring back teaching

The disputes which were pursued with rigorous discipline here in Reneman Hall, as students clarified their theses, examined the antitheses and finally reached syntheses, clearly went over the heads of many. But some stood out in their insightful understandings into these age old disputes, in arriving at the correct answers, and in doing so in impeccable Latin. Those few accomplished souls were known as the First of First. Surely they were cut out to be teachers – ‘to form the opinions and moral character of a nation’. Did they not possess the wisdom, the deep understanding, the knowledge and love of the subject which must be the main characteristic of a good teacher?

But let us pause a moment, and take the example of Luke Delmege. Though First of First in his year (or possibly because of it), he wished to ‘form the opinions and moral character of the younger generation’. He wished to teach. And thus he found himself in the little mountain school-house of Dorrha. Given the sad state of pupils’ health, he sought to introduce the topic of hygiene within the broader framework of science. Class Six had never heard of hygiene. Fr. Luke then tried to make the class interesting by working through examples as all good teachers do, reminded them that their teeth were decaying, and so he asked what such decay proceeds from, or how it may be arrested. To which Class Six, now awakening to the relevance of science, in one united effort brought the discussion down to their own level. ‘A’tin’ sweets’, they all chorused. To which the First of First, his vigorous mind swiftly reflecting back to the exposition in the lecture halls of Maynooth of primary and secondary causes in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, with not a little exasperation, replied

Perhaps that is the remote or second cause, the immediate cause is want of phosphates in the blood.

Class Six, only a few minutes beforehand rising to the excitement of a science class on sweets, collapsed back into a state of torpor. Somehow a connection had not been made between the limited understandings and interests of the learner, on the one hand, and the profound knowledge of the First of First, on the other, whose understanding ranged from Aquinas’ *De Ente et Essentia* right through to the chemical decomposition created by want of phosphates. Participating in that conversation between the generations of mankind, of which Oakeshott spoke, the First of First

could not connect that conversation to the different conversations of Class Six. But making such connections is precisely the role of the teacher. Surely, Luke needed the help of the Professor of Sacred Eloquence.

My plea, therefore, is 'Bring back the teacher', whom John Dewey rather extravagantly referred to as 'the usherer in of the Kingdom of God'. Why is that?

The teacher is the mediator of, on the one hand, the rich culture we have inherited in the arts, crafts, humanities and sciences, and, on the other, the ways of thinking and valuing (limited though these may be) of the young learners. That is the distinctive role of the teacher – namely, to open the limited vision of the learners to a deeper, more critical way of seeing the physical, social and moral worlds they inhabit. But that vision of teaching gets smothered by the concept of the teacher as the *deliverer* of a curriculum which has been imposed upon them from above. The teacher should be seen as the curriculum thinker and creator, not the deliverer. Language matters.

To that end, the continuing professional development of teachers is essential if they are, first, to maintain the knowledge and love of that part of the conversation between the generations which they bring to the learners, and if they are, second, unlike the First of First, to enable Class Six to make those connections between that conversation and their limited knowledge of their teeth.

The maintenance and continuing development of such knowledge and pedagogical skills, in which teachers seek continually to implement their critical understanding of an educated person in their classroom practices, is crucial to the development of educated persons. Such professional development – knowledge and research based, yet practical and critical – requires a continuing and close relationship between schools and universities, and between educational establishments and the economic community. It requires above all the cultivation of their sense of value, as Professor Coolahan has concluded following his 2009 survey for the Teaching Council.

The quality of life in schools and its ethical standards have a big bearing on young people's formation and development in modern society. How teachers ... nurture their talents, cultivate their sense of values, support their sense of self-esteem and confidence, and cultivate their interpersonal skills is of crucial importance.

But be hopeful. The OECD reports that

Ireland is still favourably advantaged in the quality of its teachers. Indeed, an absolute advantage over all the other OECD comparators.

It has been a great pleasure over several years to see such a close relationship blossoming here in Maynooth through its Diploma and Masters programmes, now extended through the teachers' centres to many parts of Ireland. And I can bear witness to the high quality of the research based work established through those programmes, in so many schools, and to those sentiments of the OECD – and especially their contribution to maintaining that long tradition in Maynooth of forming the opinions and the moral character of those who are themselves to form the opinion and moral character of a nation.

### Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I make the following ten pleas:

1. Constantly ask the question, “What counts as an educated person in this day and age?”
2. Ensure the answer applies equally to 1x – they are developing persons, too.
3. Ensure that the answer covers the wide range of qualities which make us distinctively human – not only knowledge as traditionally recognised and basic skills of literacy and numeracy, but also practical capability, a sense of moral purpose, and civic engagement.
4. Recognise that such ethical considerations at the basis of educational aims require constant deliberation and teacher creativity to turn them into a curriculum.
5. Recognise that, in achieving this, no school can go it alone but needs partnership (not competition) with other schools, universities and employers within caring communities.
6. Get rid of the impoverishing effect of high stakes testing.
7. Enable employers to create the social and economic networks which provide further apprenticeships, further training and continuing education of school-leavers.
8. Establish independent Information, Advice and Guidance systems, with a wide understanding of local and national training and employment possibilities which will further help the young person to find a sense of purpose.
9. Respect teachers, for there is no curriculum development without teacher development.
10. Provide the opportunities for such teacher development through well resourced teacher centres, teacher focused research and leadership programmes.

## Postscript

These are brief responses to the questions or statements made after the lecture

- (i) *Too many pressures (e.g. assessment) on teachers to meet educational ideals as outlined*

There is a need to distinguish between assessment for learning and assessment for accountability. The two are confused. The work of the NAEP in USA shows how you can provide an excellent testing system for accountability on a stratified light sampling basis which does not interfere with the teaching of the school. Second, the accountability of schools needs to reflect the educational aims and ideals of the school (not vice versa) and thereby take into account many more factors than the current exam and testing systems.

- (ii) *Lack of importance attached to vocational education*

We suffer from the ‘dualism’ between academic and vocational. When a student studies English with a view to becoming a journalist, is that academic or vocational? When a student pursues design and technology with a view to either later studying engineering or entering into an apprenticeship, is that academic and vocational? We learn in disciplined, reflective and intellectually rigorous ways practical capabilities (e.g. becoming a plumber or an electrician), and we need an examination system which gives equal weight to such practical capabilities.

- (iii) *High stakes testing*

Everyone needs to recognise that putting so much weight on testing, and on the production of such tests in such a way that highly precise and easily measurable outcomes are required, leads to teaching to the test, failure to recognise deeper intellectual effort and understanding, and (on the teachers’ side) ‘gaming’. This increasingly dangerous as for-profit companies are increasingly employed in producing the tests and in producing the text-books needed to do well in them. There is lots of evidence for this – (see Pring, 2012, *The Life and Death of Secondary Education for All*)

- (iv) *‘The good life’*

There will of course be disagreements on what exactly is meant by this and therefore on educational aims – just as there are on all moral matters. But once moral discussion is engaged in by teachers who are seriously concerned about the future and the welfare of their students, I suspect that there will be more agreement than disagreement about the individual and social good



of those in their charge. What I am arguing for is moral engagement at the very centre of educational thinking at government, school and classroom levels. Too prescriptive a curriculum and examination system makes such engagement redundant.

v) *Critical thinking*

This is often seen (and was in the discussion) as something separate from the learning which takes place within subjects. But once again, is this not a false dualism? What is the good teacher of history doing if not equipping the students to think critically – producing arguments, sifting evidence, imagining solutions to problems given? Or the teacher of mathematics, when not dictating formulae to be applied unthinkingly, is teaching the learner to think critically. I do not know what it means for someone to think critically divorced from the conceptual frameworks and modes of enquiry which are developed through well taught subjects and practices.

(vi) *Technology*

The use of technology, especially where there is a shortage of expertise in particular areas and subjects, needs to be explored further. There are excellent examples of its success (in Higher Education the work of the Open University over many years, in schools the work of NISAI with children unable to get to school through exclusion or medical conditions). But in all cases, its use depends on teaching skills and qualities of a high order and interaction between learner and teacher through the internet.