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Education as if people matter - John Macmurray, community and the struggle for democracy

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Abstract

One of the finest philosophers of his generation, the educational writings of John Macmurray have a special relevance for us today. In similar circumstances of international crisis he argues for the central importance of education addressing fundamental issues of human purpose – how we lead good lives together, the emphasis on wisdom rather than merely knowledge, the advancement of a truly democratic culture, and the overriding importance of community in human flourishing. A pioneering advocate of education of the emotions, he champions the development of imagination, spontaneity, and authenticity as key to educating ‘the capacity for change itself’. For Macmurray educators must place relationships and care at the heart of all they do. Overemphasis on technique and its typical separation from wider human purposes is emblematic of much of our contemporary malaise. An inclusive, caring community is the precondition of our human being and becoming. The paper concludes by taking some of Macmurray’s key philosophical insights and developing a framework which enables us to make judgments about whether or not contemporary approaches to education support or diminish our lives as creative, caring human beings within a context of social justice and democratic human fellowship. (193 words)

Key words

John Macmurray, democracy, education, relationships, care, community, democratic fellowship.

1 Philosophy, Education and the Crisis of Contemporary Humanity

The work of John Macmurray is immensely important, not only because he is a philosophical pioneer of great eloquence and insight, but also because he speaks clearly, bravely and wisely, both to the wider challenges of our contemporary condition and to our particular responsibilities as educators committed to a better future than the present allows or understands.

Here is a philosopher whose work came to prominence at a time, not unlike that we are experiencing today, in which much of the world stands on the brink of financial collapse, where bewilderment and hope, deep disillusionment and passionate commitment to the creation of a more just and fulfilling society zig-zag their way to a precarious future. His radical response through a series of eloquent, highly-successful radio broadcasts published as *Freedom in the Modern World* (Macmurray 1932) 'probably had a deeper and more lasting effect than any other book of a philosophical character published this century' (Macmurray 1932 [1968] Frontispiece). Certainly, his capacity to identify key underlying issues and offer principled, persuasive alternatives mark him out, then as now, as a thinker of enduring stature and contemporary relevance.

Here is a philosopher who at the beginning of the 1930s argued that we should educate the emotions, place relationships and care at the heart of teaching and learning, educate 'the capacity for change itself', eradicate fear and the pressures of high-stakes testing, replace aristocratic traditions of schooling with the development of a truly democratic culture, and locate all we do as educators within the wider, deeper context of how we learn to live good lives together.

Admired by earlier generations of philosophers of education like Louis Arnaud Reid and his London Institute successor, Richard Peters, some of Macmurray's best known work, also significantly influenced humanistic psychologists of education like Ben Morris, Professor of Education at Bristol University, as well as some of today's most outstanding educational thinkers such as John Elliott, David Hargreaves and Richard Pring.

A significant presence in the educational world in the early 1930s, some of Macmurray's best work on education remained unpublished, though widely circulated through networks of colleagues and admirers. One of these papers - 'Learning to Be Human' (Macmurray 1958) – is published for the first time in the on-line version of this Special Issue of the *Oxford Review of Education* and a number of others are referred to later in this paper.

There has been some engagement with Macmurray's work from eminent educationalists such as those mentioned earlier; by significant figures within the field of progressive education such as Kenneth Barnes (Barnes 1969) and Robin Hodgkin (Hodgkin 1997); by contemporary educational writers such as myself (Fielding 2007, Fielding and Moss 2011) and Julian Stern (Stern 2001, 2009). However, a full examination and evaluation of his educational writing

has yet to be written. Whilst those wider aspirations remain at the heart of my current work the prime intention of this paper is to entice and encourage teachers, researchers and those involved in formal and informal educational contexts to engage with, challenge and extend Macmurray's contribution to an educational future worthy of a more just, creative and caring world.

Animated by these broad-brush, invitational intentions the manner and object of this paper are suggestive and exploratory rather than encyclopaedic or aspirationally definitive¹. The main section - *Education, Democracy and the Centrality of Community* - explores key themes and preoccupations of Macmurray's educational writing from the 1930s to the 1960s and argues for their particular relevance to the opening decades of the 21st century. The short concluding section - *Countering the poverty of the present – persons, purposes and the renewal of democratic fellowship* - additionally argues for the power and promise, particularly of his underpinning philosophical work, in helping us to develop frameworks and perspectives that not only retain the integrity of person and community at the heart of any educational undertaking, but also offer practical tools for interrogating the present and authoring a more imaginative, more humanly fulfilling educational future.

2 Education, Democracy and the Centrality of Community

For Macmurray, the task of contemporary education is to understand and respond to fundamental questions about how human beings lead good lives together in the context of profound and persistent change. How we place this at the heart of what we aspire to and also ensure that it informs what we do on a day-to-day basis are difficult and important matters which I come at, firstly, by looking at what Macmurray has to say about the notion of an educated person. Here a number of key distinctions emerge, particularly about the relationship between knowledge and wisdom and the primacy of the latter over the former, the point being to live wisely and well, not merely to accumulate knowledge.

Having said that, the importance of knowledge remains, the key companion questions being 'What kinds of knowledge are of most worth?' and 'How are they best nurtured and extended?' Then as now, given the obsession with knowledge of things, or what Macmurray sometimes calls 'technical knowledge' and the typical neglect of purposes in the consuming pressures of daily life, his emphasis on the development of our knowledge of values through the education of the emotions is as refreshing and radical now as it was seventy years ago.

¹ This paper does not, for example, include reference to Macmurray's important work on the nature of university education, adult education, science education or religious education.

Underlying and informing these valuational imperatives is a view of human flourishing that places substantial emphasis on spontaneity and imagination and in the development of a living, egalitarian culture which is both the basis of democracy and a principled and effective answer to the perennial challenge of how people come to understand and adequately respond to the realities of unremitting, often fundamental, change in their ways of life. In a more profound, more resonant anticipation of 21st century emphases on 'learning how to learn', it is, in Macmurray's phrase, about educating 'the capacity for change itself' (Macmurray 1931a, 3).

Finally, I look briefly at the third, and most important, form of knowledge, namely, knowledge of community. This has to do with our essentially relational nature as human beings and forms the fundamental basis of all true education, profoundly influencing the nature of schools as communities, the relationships between teachers and students, the techniques and methods we use to engage each other in learning and the curriculum itself.

2.1 *Learning to live good lives together*

At the core of Macmurray's analysis of the crises of the early 1930s was the view that the most profound challenge facing society lay in what, at the time, he called the mistaken relation between knowledge and values.

In later formulations Macmurray modified the knowledge / values dichotomy, preferring to explore these overarching questions by reference to different kinds of knowledge arising from different but interconnected questions, in this case between what he sometimes called 'technical knowledge' or knowledge of means which answered the question 'How can we achieve what we wish to do?' and 'valuational knowledge' or knowledge of ends which answered the question 'How can we decide what is worthwhile doing?' In both formulations the core point remained the same: our difficulties are largely due to our development of the first kind of technical knowledge at the expense of valuational knowledge, knowledge of ends. In sum, 'We have immense power, and immense resources; we worship efficiency and success; and *we do not know how to live finely.*' (Macmurray 1935, 76 [my italics]).

Macmurray was, in effect, posing the fundamental question 'How do we lead good lives together in the context of profound and persistent change?' which he returned to again and again in his educational writing over the ensuing forty years. Thus in the 1931 BBC Radio pamphlet *Learning to Live*, which forms part of Peter Cunningham's paper in this Special Issue, Macmurray reminds us that education is 'the only means we possess to create in us and in our children the capacity to lead a civilized life' (Macmurray 1931a, 2). Likewise, in the companion broadcasts published in *The Listener* he insists that education is fundamentally about helping us to 'live a rich, full, abundant, joyous human life' and that 'if instead it cramps and limits the spirits of our children, makes them narrow-minded, dependent, wanting in courage and grace and the joy of living – then it is not merely unnecessary, it is positively criminal' (Macmurray 1931b). We must judge education, not by competitive

exams or by yardsticks of academic knowledge, but by the kinds of lives people lead.

‘The only way, in the end, to answer questions to do with the success or otherwise of the school system is by watching the effect that education has on the children, and by judging its results, not in terms of cleverness or knowledge, but in terms of character’ (Macmurray 1931b).

Whatever we choose to do in schools and other formal educational institutions must be judged by whether or not it contributes to the wider educational task of helping us ‘to live human lives properly’ (Macmurray 1931c, 911). In 1931, as now, the danger was that in concentrating on subject specialisms or economically driven imperatives we lose sight of the fundamental question ‘who is now concerned to make the (child) a good human being and to teach him to live?’ Reflecting on the lack of adequate answers to his own question he remarks, ‘Somehow, the all important thing has got squeezed out in the process of professionalizing education ... The golden aim of education – to teach the child how to live – has vanished over the horizon, crowded out by a multiplicity of little aims.’ (Macmurray 1931c, 912)

Macmurray returned to these fundamental questions of purpose again and again in his educational writing, in part because of a fear that they were too often marginalised or forgotten altogether in the scramble for narrower, more pressing contemporary imperatives. Thus, in his hitherto unpublished 1958 paper, ‘Learning to be Human’, that appears in the electronic version of this Special Issue, he insists, in a redolent phrase we would do well to cherish in our increasingly myopic times, ‘education is not concerned with immediate results but rather with persisting effects’ (Macmurray 1958).

2.2 *What it means to be an educated person.*

Macmurray returned to these overarching matters directly in one of his last unpublished lectures – ‘Reflections on the Notion of an Educated Man’ - given at the invitation of Professor Ben Morris at the University of Bristol in 1965. Re-emphasising the essential connections between knowledge and moral purpose he argues that an educated person, who may or may not have gone to school or university, was someone who ‘through learning, had achieved a human quality which could be gained in no other fashion. He was a man to whom one could turn for advice; a man who had become wise. We might define him, perhaps, as one who had achieved a full humanity by study, reflection and experience.’ (Macmurray 1965). Wisdom, then, is one of the pre-eminent qualities of an educated person and has no necessary connection with specialised knowledge.

Of course, as we have already seen, knowledge is not all of a piece and one of the most notable aspects of the paper is its capacity to help us understand within a short span, not only the nature of fundamentally different kinds of knowledge, but also their interconnection and, even more significantly, their relative value. The first kind of knowledge, which in this context he calls ‘knowing how’ is typified by the sciences. The second kind of knowledge,

'knowing why', helps us to determine ends and assign priorities and is typified by the arts. No surprises thus far, given the tenor and direction of his earlier reflections. What is of particular interest here is the addition of a third, even more important, kind of knowledge which was central to Macmurray's life's work and received its fullest expression in his 1955 Gifford Lectures (Macmurray 1957, 1961). This 'kind of knowledge which is even more fundamental for human life,' is essentially to do with how human beings become persons and since, for Macmurray, human beings are by nature relational, he calls it 'knowledge of community' (Macmurray 1965).

This particular sense of priorities, rooted in a coherent and elegant view of human being and becoming, has a number of implications for education, not only in terms of the interrelation of different forms of knowledge and action, but also in terms of how they might best be realised in practice. Focusing on the two most important and most neglected, Macmurray argues that valuational knowledge, knowledge which helps us name what is worthwhile and pursue it appropriately, has largely to do with education of the emotions, whilst communal or inter-subjective knowledge is best understood, exercised and developed through the fostering of certain kinds of relationships within the context of an inclusive, caring community.

2.3 *Education of the emotions and the development of authentic values*

Macmurray's fullest treatment of the education of the emotions is to be found in his pioneering book *Reason and Emotion* published in 1935. It is as challenging as it is compelling and, largely because many received notions of rationality and knowledge exclude or marginalise the emotions from serious consideration, can only be hinted at briefly in this context.²

The part of his argument I want to pick up on first concerns the relation between our valuational knowledge and our emotions and the objectivity or otherwise of both. The origin of values lies in our liking or disliking and gradually, through the processes of education in both its wide and narrow senses, we come to learn what is worthy of our support and admiration, our abhorrence and rejection. Whereas traditional approaches to these matters require us to internalise received notions of value, Macmurray argues that we should be authentic, or as he often termed it in his early work, 'real' in our choices and judgments, not parroting social convention or traditional conviction. The choices we make should be *our* genuine choices and judgments, not someone else's.

Macmurray also argued that our valuational choices should be rational in the sense that they should be subject to the rigours of living contexts and realities. Emotions and the values which arise from them are rational if the

² For a very fine appraisal of both John Macmurray's and R.S. Peters's work in this domain see Francis Dunlop's undeservedly neglected *The Education of Feeling and Emotion* (Dunlop 1984) which remains one of the most accessible, perceptive philosophical treatments of the subject

judgments and actions they prompt are appropriate to context and circumstance: 'In thinking thoughts we think the things to which the thoughts refer. In feeling emotions we feel the things to which the emotions refer. And therefore we can feel rightly or wrongly' (Macmurray 1935, 25). Wisdom is possible: 'To maintain that there can be no valid knowledge of values is to deny that there is any proper difference between wisdom and stupidity, (itself) surely a very stupid statement' (Macmurray 1965).

The second part of Macmurray's argument I want to pursue is his claim that because 'we can feel rightly or wrongly' and thus be right or wrong in our judgments of value we must take seriously the education of the emotions. 'Emotional education should be ... a considered effort to teach children to feel for themselves; in the same sense that their intellectual training should be an effort to think for themselves' (Macmurray 1935, 69-70).

At root, this is a two-fold process consisting, firstly, of training of the senses through 'sensuous apprehension of the world for its own sake' (Macmurray 1935, 72) and secondly, of encouraging and refining expressive activities which are, as before, performed 'for their own sake and not for any end beyond them' (Macmurray 1935, 73). Clearly, the arts are key here. What is also clear is Macmurray's underlying view that if we are to flourish as human beings we have to be interested in and attentive to what is not ourselves, to the realities of the world around us:

'human nature is essentially the capacity to think and feel about the reality of the world outside. It is the ability to know things truly and value them at their proper worth ... to be ourselves is to live in communion with what is not ourselves.' (Macmurray 1932, 207).

We cannot succeed in this unless we approach those realities in a receptive, non-instrumental way which encourages us to enter into the nature of the other. Thus 'the training of the emotions is primarily a training of the capacity of sensitiveness to the object' (Macmurray 1935, 51). It requires a contemplative attitude in which we attend to the object 'in the search for its uniqueness and reality, and so provide an emotional objectivity for the apprehension of its value' (Macmurray 1958).

This emphasis on the reality of the other provides a discipline which partners the advocacy of freedom, authenticity and spontaneity that features so strongly in Macmurray's early work. Traditional notions of discipline as subordination are replaced by discipline as integration, discipline as an attentiveness and responsiveness to the other which, in the case of other persons, is reciprocal: 'The creation of harmonious relationships between children so that the joy of skilful and disciplined co-operation develops is the primary condition of the development of the individual himself' (Macmurray 1935, 88). Indeed, 'Instead of training *for* society, what is required from the beginning is training *in* society in which children learn the capacity for rhythmic co-operation. ... All discipline is communal.' (Macmurray 1935, 88-89, 90)

The education of the emotions is thus not only an enabler of the vitality, spontaneity and imaginative expression of our individuality and a primary

source of valuational knowledge; it is also a reminder of the inescapably communal nature of our human being to which I turn in a moment.

2.4 *The development of democratic culture*

Before I do look in more detail at Macmurray's pivotal notion of community I want to say a little more about the development of spontaneity and the imagination that not only contribute so centrally to the education of the emotions, but also play a crucial role in the development of what Macmurray calls a democratic culture.

Macmurray's valorisation of wisdom and rich notions of education over the accumulation of knowledge and erudition is also pursued within the social and political context of democracy as a way of life. In his earlier work he comes at this through the notion of education for leisure. Leisure has a pivotal position in his argument, largely because it epitomises the importance of spheres of human experience freed from the (invariable) drudgery and necessity of work. 'Leisure', he insists, 'is the essential basis for "the good life", that is the life that is full of rich humanity' (Macmurray 1931a, 24). Indeed, 'we only live when we are free to choose what we shall do and how we shall do it; we are only really alive as human beings, when we are doing what we want to do, and not what we must.' (Macmurray 1931a, 25).

Leisure not only belongs to the sphere of possibility rather than necessity; it is also integrally connected to the sphere of culture. A democratic culture - that is to say, one that is empowering and expressive of the quest for meaning and fulfilment amongst all persons, not just a privileged elite; one that is animated by 'the spiritual values of social justice and social equality' (Macmurray 1943, 291) - is both dependent upon and expressive of democratic leisure. For Macmurray two educational consequences which follow from this are, firstly, the importance of opposing the traditional, aristocratic notion of culture, which by definition and by intention was only ever available to a very small, highly privileged minority and which 'prevents the development of a spontaneous culture of a democratic and progressive type' (Macmurray 1931a, 26). Secondly, we must maintain the key distinction between being educated and being knowledgeable, or, as Macmurray expresses it in this context, between knowledge and culture. A person can be knowledgeable, but uncultured and vice versa. Knowledge is not life; we can be knowledgeable but stupid, cultured and wise without possessing much knowledge. 'To impart knowledge is easy; to produce and maintain a spontaneous democratic culture, which is the real task of modern education, is a difficult and delicate undertaking' (Macmurray 1931a, 32-33).

How we go about doing this brings us to a number of fundamental issues which lie at the heart of Macmurray's positive response to the international crises which provided the immediate context of his early work. These have to do with the need to educate 'the capacity for change itself' (Macmurray 1931a, 3) which he approaches in slightly different, but complementary ways at different stages of his life.

2.5 *Educate 'the capacity for change itself'*

Throughout the 1930s and 40s Macmurray emphasised the need to embrace change by developing and celebrating our capacity to respond creatively and imaginatively to its inevitability and irreversibility. Reverting to old or newly compendious curricula, old outlooks and old approaches to learning are unlikely to prove effective or satisfying. In schools, as in life, Macmurray argued for the centrality of spontaneity, imagination, experiment - orientations and practices reciprocally sympathetic with the education of the emotions.

Instead of clinging to fixed beliefs he argues we need to develop a willingness to embrace 'the true security that comes only through the capacity to change our opinions continuously, in a balanced and controlled fashion, by a continuous testing of them against the changing facts of experience' (Macmurray 1931a, 21). Changing our opinions is triggered by our encounters with the realities of the world around us and if our responses, if our opinions are to be real, worthwhile and appropriate to circumstance they must be rooted in the testing ground of real contexts and real issues from which they arose. We thus need an education which 'embodies and expresses continuous transformation as the norm of life,' one which

'within the cultured and technical field, is an education in which continuous transformation is both the law and the delight of life, a training which will make (children) both active and happy, agents in the transformation of their own society.' (Macmurray 1946).

How education might help us develop that transformative capacity leads Macmurray to challenge much that was and still is at the heart of dominant educational practices within schools and other educational institutions.

In line with his emphasis on education of the emotions and the necessity of cutting through the jungle of inertly received presumptions about the world he insists that 'Young minds should not be allowed to think in ways that are unreal for them about things that have no significance for them. ... There are masses of things we should refuse to know' (Macmurray 1932, 141). His arguments against cramming young people with more and more facts, his enduring opposition to high stakes competitive examinations, and his mistrust of traditional, aristocratic notions of culture extolled in particular by the old universities and public (i.e. private) schools are partnered by a spirited advocacy of radical alternatives many have belatedly, half-heartedly and only partially begun to recognise some seventy years later. Not only does Macmurray make the progressive argument for the importance of young people pursuing their interests, thinking for themselves and making wise and foolish choices from which they can learn, he also argues that to do these things as part of an educational undertaking requires us to develop capacities and dispositions which are invariably neglected.

Pre-eminent amongst these is the development of the imagination which, he argues, is integral to the cardinal democratic virtue of thinking for oneself. In Macmurray's view, 'Imagination is the real driving force of the mind's

spontaneity, and the richer the imagination is, the greater is the mind's capacity for self-development' (Macmurray 1931a, 14). Whilst we must commit ourselves to training in experiment, we must also ensure the origins of imaginative activity are rooted in real experience and its outcomes similarly grounded in their return to the contexts and concerns that prompted enquiry. As with the earlier advocacy that changing our opinions continuously must be 'balanced and controlled' and constantly tested 'against the changing facts of experience', so with the development of the imagination. Insisting on its pervasive importance is neither dilettante nor delusional. Within an educational context it has a seriousness of purpose and an authenticity of outcome that typifies its course and its conduct. The requirements of reality are absolute.

In his later work, whilst retaining his commitment to education of the emotions and all it entailed and implied, Macmurray also emphasised a complementary response to the inevitability of change that drew more explicitly on those aspects of human being and becoming that retain an enduring, almost timeless significance. These have to do with our deep nature, with what it is to be and become a person, to human being as essentially and unchangingly communal in nature:

'The fixed points, by which we can steer our course as teachers, have become those human qualities and aptitudes which remain unaffected by social transformations; qualities and aptitudes which belong to all men everywhere because they are involved in the structure of human nature itself.' (Macmurray 1958)

It is to the most important elements of that structure to which I now turn.

2.6 *Knowledge of community*

Macmurray's persistent and profound emphasis on the overriding importance of the third kind of knowledge, what he variously calls 'inter-subjective knowledge', 'communal knowledge' or 'knowledge of community' has its roots in his conviction that individualism is philosophically mistaken, experientially illusory, and a social and political aberration. Human beings are essentially relational in nature and communal or inter-subjective knowledge is best understood, exercised and developed through the fostering of certain kinds of relationships within the context of an inclusive, caring community. It is not the kind of knowledge typical of psychology or sociology which offer insights into human beings as objects of study and reflection. Rather it is the living knowledge of encounter which reaches its fullest living expression in and through friendship between persons. It is thus necessarily mutual and its structural principles are freedom and equality. It is the personal knowledge which we have, not *about* persons, but *of* persons. It arises only through entering into personal relations with other people; and it carries with it as a derivative of our knowledge of others, what knowledge of ourselves we manage to achieve. We can have it only by caring for others, and only to the extent that we are able to produce and enjoy freedom and equality in relationship. (Macmurray 1965)

It is more important than instrumental knowledge or valuational knowledge because it is expressive of who we are and enabling of who we wish to become. Not only is agency the starting point and aspiration of our human being, the knowledge it presupposes and produces gains its present meaning and future possibility within the context of our interdependence. As he says in the Introduction to the first of his Gifford Lectures, 'All meaningful knowledge is for the sake of action and all meaningful action for the sake of friendship' (Macmurray 1957, 15).

The educational implications of such a view are immensely important:

The first principle of human nature is mutuality ... This principle that we live by entering into relation with one another, provides the basic structure within which all human experience and activity falls, whether individual or social. For this reason the first priority in education - if by education we mean learning to be human - is learning to live in personal relation to other people. Let us call it learning to live in community. I call this the first priority because failure in this is fundamental failure, which cannot be compensated for by success in other fields; because our ability to enter into fully personal relations with others is the measure of our humanity. For inhumanity is precisely the perversion of human relations.' (Macmurray 1958)

Before looking briefly at some of the philosophical and practical consequences of Macmurray's view of community it is worth saying a little more about what he meant by 'fully personal relations'. One of the key distinctions he makes is between what he calls 'functional' and 'personal' relations. In functional relations we relate to other people in terms of roles and instrumental purposes; it is these functional relations that comprise society (as opposed to community) and make up the reality of economic, social and political life. This aspectual or partial revelation of ourselves typical of functional relations is not, however, true of personal relations. Personal relations are not defined by their purpose and, indeed, have no purpose beyond themselves: we enter into personal relation with others because it is through them that we can be and become ourselves. In these kinds of relationships, as, for example, in friendship, we do, of course, do things together. However, the joint activities or encounters do not define the relationship; they are expressive of it. Going by train to the seaside is not the purpose of our friendship; the day out is an expression of our care for and delight in each other. It is in personal relations, in relations of community (rather than society), characterised as we have seen by the principles of freedom and equality within the context of care, that we can be and become most fully ourselves, most fully human.

Of the many philosophical and practical consequences of taking community seriously there are four that Macmurray returns to on a number of occasions in his educational writing. These have to do with, firstly, the importance of the school itself as a living community, not just an effective organisation; secondly, the centrality of relationships of care in the educational process; thirdly, with teaching technique and, lastly, how his advocacy of education in

all the richly human senses touched on in this paper relates to the daily demands of economic life and more obviously instrumental understandings of education which dominate so much contemporary debate.

The distinction between community and society has, of course, a long and illustrious history and much of Macmurray's finest philosophical work (see especially Macmurray 1950, 1961, and Kirkpatrick 1986) contributed towards a richer understanding of their nature and interrelation. The key points which emerge in his educational writing are not only that community is both the end and the means of human fulfilment and that the 'element of personal community which underlies the process of education ... produces the atmosphere in which real education becomes possible' (Macmurray 1964, 24). It is also that the relationship between the teachers, not just between teachers and pupils, is of fundamental importance:

'The pattern of motives which sustains the relationships between the adults in the school is the governing factor in its whole activity. If these are right all other relationships will come right automatically or will very easily be straightened out, whether between the pupils and the staff or between the children themselves. If they are wrong, nothing will go right. If the staff is a community, the school will be a community. If the staff is a mere society of functional co-operation nothing will make a community of the school.' (Macmurray 1946)

Just as community is defined by certain kinds of relationships between persons the same holds true in education: 'any kind of teaching involves establishing personal relations between teacher and pupil, and the success or failure of the teaching depends very largely on the character and quality of this relation' (Macmurray 1958). At the heart of that character and quality lie the dispositions and demands of care. The relationship between teacher and pupils

'is, and ought to be, and must be, if it is to be successful, an intimate relation. It must be a relation in which two human beings meet, like one another, care for one another, help one another. ... (U)nless one does really care for children – indeed unless one loves children – one makes a bad teacher.' (Macmurray 1964, 17, 22).

One of Macmurray's enduring concerns was that these profoundly human orientations were increasingly being marginalised and distorted, not only by an overemphasis on technique, but by the disappearance of purposes from the discourses and practices that give teaching its specifically educational character:

'without an understanding of what he is undertaking in proposing to teach another person to be human, (the teacher) cannot succeed. No technical training in educational methods can ever be a substitute for this, however unexceptionable the methods may be in themselves. Education is not and cannot ever be a technical activity. The attempt to turn would-be teachers into technicians by teaching them classroom tricks is as stupid as it is ineffective.' (Macmurray 1958)

Lastly, complementing Macmurray's unremitting emphasis on certain kinds of relationships between persons and on the development of a truly democratic culture in which we learn to think and feel for ourselves, he also has some important and interesting things to say about how this radical re-orientation relates to how we 'Learn to Live' in a more narrowly and more frequently encountered economic sense. Three points are particularly pertinent here. Firstly, he acknowledges this more restricted understanding of what is most commonly meant by education and 'is, on the whole, what we teach to the great majority of our citizens.' However, secondly, he adds that his 'main aim has been to suggest that this is not the whole of education, that it is not even the more important part of it. It is rather the minimum that an industrial society must demand for efficiency's sake.' (Macmurray 1958). Macmurray does not necessarily deny the legitimacy of most curriculum arrangements with which we are familiar. They are 'important and should be done well' (Macmurray 1958). His support is, however, conditional upon their internalisation of and transformation by wider, more humanly oriented aspirations his work so firmly and so eloquently affirms.

Macmurray's third point thus entails his insistence on any curriculum's capacity to not only value, but foreground, the development of imagination, creativity and authenticity and all those other capabilities and dispositions that enable us to embrace 'the capacity for change itself' (Macmurray 1931a 3), primarily through education *in* rather than *for* society, through immersion in forms of community life that both affirm our uniqueness and our mutuality as persons in relation to each other. Customary curricula are tolerable insofar as they are approached through these more demanding and more profound ways of engaging with, understanding and transforming the world in which we live. Engagement both with more traditional subjects and more contemporary economic imperatives needs to be

'done as part of a whole task, in and through the other aspects. What matters most is that those who design (the curriculum) and those who teach it should be under no illusion that it constitutes the whole of education, or that it can be treated as if it were the paramount aspect.'(Macmurray 1958)

3 Countering the poverty of the present – persons, purposes and the renewal of democratic fellowship

Part of the case for Macmurray's enduring importance undoubtedly lies in the profound nature of his insights into the challenges that still face many societies today and the prescience and creativity of his responses in the fields of philosophy, education and public life. Not only are cataclysmic financial upheavals and widespread disorientation and disillusionment echoing key contexts within which his early work came to prominence, the core issues which he saw as contributory factors remain as problematic as they were in the past: pursuit of instrumental knowledge has accelerated rather than diminished; knowledge of values and purposes has continued to decline; and

our understanding of the nature and importance of community as the means and the end of human flourishing has been opportunistically co-opted and betrayed by the increasingly visible hand of neo-liberal market economics.

A similar picture emerges in the field of education where the most commonly enacted realities of policy imperatives mirror the intellectual myopia and moral disarray of the national government in England. Having said this, there are, of course, other traditions, including counter-traditions which continue to name alternative realities and possibilities: there are still many teachers in schools, universities and other formal and informal educational contexts who see education as a holistic, moral and existential practice; who continue to place care and personal encounter at the centre of their work; who remain committed to the active engagement of young people as 'active and happy agents in the transformation of their own society' (Macmurray 1946) from one typified by greed, fear and heady mendacity to one animated by less acquisitive, more other-regarding understandings of human flourishing.

For those of us within these counter-traditions, whilst Macmurray's small, but immensely significant, corpus of writing on education provides an important intellectual and cultural resource, it is also to his wider philosophical work that we can usefully look to rebut the narrowness and meanness of dominant contemporary educational outlooks. It is the creative depth and existential generosity, the bravery and wisdom of Macmurray's writing that gives it its stature. In rooting a view of education in the soil of a profound account of human being and becoming he enables us both to ask questions we too often ignore and develop responses that transcend and transform the more superficial turbulence of contemporary debate into something worthy of the generations whose future it prepares.

3.1 *Education and schooling for human flourishing*

By way of brief illustration, I return to his work on community and human flourishing. As we saw above, at the heart of Macmurray's account of society and community lies the distinction between functional relations and personal relations. Whilst both are necessary and interdependent, they are not of equal importance. The functional life is *for* the personal life ... the personal life is *through* the functional life' (Macmurray 1941, 822). It is not only in a temporal sense that personal relations precede our emergence as social beings: they provide the point and purpose of the functional relations on which society depends. Community is prior to social, economic and political life in the sense that their justification, their legitimacy and point are dependent upon whether or not they do in fact enable personal and communal relations to develop between us. It thus raises the most profound and subversive question of all: that is to say, 'What are our social, economic, political and educational arrangements *for*?'

I would want to augment and extend this line of thinking and argue that not only is the functional for the sake of the personal, and the personal realised through the functional, but the influence of the personal on the functional is

transformative of it; the functional should be *expressive of* the personal; the means should themselves be transformed by the ends by which they are inspired and towards which they are aiming. In other words, the functional ways in which we work together in schools to achieve personal, communal and educational ends should be transformed by the moral and interpersonal character and quality of what we are trying to do.

Taking the categories and interrelationships between the functional and the personal we can develop schema which give us a feel for how we might make judgments about the nature and desirability of policies, institutions and practices within society, in this case formal institutions of education such as schools. In Table 1 below I sketch out five basic organisational types which, in their varying emphases on and interrelations between the personal and the functional, exhibit markedly different educational orientations and practices which enable us to make judgments about their desirability.

Table 1 to appear here

This is, of necessity, a highly compressed account of a basic typology I have developed and extended over a number of years (see e.g. Fielding 2000, 2007, Fielding and Moss 2011). Its significance in this context is gestural and invitational, suggesting both the generative and the interrogative power of Macmurray's philosophical anthropology.

Two of the three orientations of particular relevance here concern the school as a 'high-performance learning organisation' and the school as a 'person-centred learning community'. Both share a commitment to young people's achievement, but take very different stances towards how that achievement is conceived and how it is best realised within the context of a school.

At first glance these two modes seem very similar and it is that apparent similarity, or at least the sometimes extreme difficulty in telling the two apart, that suggests there may be important underlying issues to address. In essence we are talking about one mode which says 'Have a nice day' as part of a human relations mantra and another mode which is genuinely welcoming and engaging of us; one mode which uses extra time for tutorials to boost test scores and another that places personal encounter through dialogue at the very heart of its daily educational processes and intentions; one in which creativity and personalisation are primarily the servants of a debilitatingly reductive standards agenda and another in which creativity and the engagement with young people as persons is the harbinger of a much richer, more demanding fulfilment of education for and in a democratic society.

The activities and worth of the school as a high performance learning organisation are dominated by certain kinds of narrow, easily measurable attainment. Its form of unity is collective, rather than personal or communal. The significance of both students and teachers is derivative and rests primarily in their contribution, usually via high stakes testing, to the public performance of the organisation and in this very real sense high performance learning organisations are totalitarian. The high performing school is an

organisation in which the *personal is used for the sake of the functional*: relationships are important; the voices of students are elicited and acknowledged; community is valued, but all primarily for instrumental purposes within the context of the market-place. Social and, indeed, personal relationships are reduced to social capital; 'having relationships' moves subtly towards 'doing relationships', towards relationship management.

In contrast to the school as high performance learning organisation, in its more fully developed, expressive mode the person centred learning community is one in which *the functional is both for the sake of the personal and expressive of it*, structures and daily practical arrangements having within them distinct traces of person centred ways of being. Invariably one sees the development of organisational forms that deliberately establish a sense of place, purpose and identity within which emergent, fluid forms of learning are encouraged. Such schools deliberately develop more participatory, less hierarchical forms of engagement and decision making and boundaries between status, role and function are increasingly transgressed through new forms of radical collegiality (Fielding 1999).

The 'high-performance' model, to which we in England are currently in thrall, understands the power, but denies the point of the personal. In acceding to the depth and speed of such a disastrous betrayal we accelerate our rush to a future whose spurious productivity deepens our demise and jeopardises the future of our species and our planet. In opting for a 'person-centred' model based on Macmurray's critical realist respect for and delight in the integrity of the other we open up rather than close down the vista of wise and joyful possibility.

3.2 *On democratic fellowship*

The fifth and final component of my typology of schools extends the values and orientations of person-centred education to the domain of democratic praxis and argues for the too long forgotten notion of 'democratic fellowship'. Here the school as a person-centred learning community develops its commitment to education in its broadest sense in an explicitly democratic form. Not only is the functional expressive of the personal, the political is also utilised in the same way.

In reviving the notion of fellowship we retain the essential link with democracy, not just as a plural means of forming intentions, agreeing action and holding each other to account, but also as a deliberative, appreciative and creative form of personal and communal encounter; as a form of living and learning together; as a mutuality defined by the principles of freedom and equality within the context of kindness and care; as a shared commitment to a richly conceived, constantly developing search for and enactment of good lives lived in a just and diverse commonality.

Macmurray is important for us now. He reminds us, not only to ask questions of our approach to education that take us back to the nature and purposes of

human flourishing: he also commits us to responding to those questions with a tenacious and discomfoting integrity that insists our means exemplify the ends we desire. Just as Macmurray argues that politics ‘has significance only through the human fellowship which it makes possible; and by this its validity and its success must be judged’ (Macmurray 1950, 69–70), so I am arguing that in the field of education the systems we develop and the practical arrangements we make are most appropriately judged by the same criteria. Democratic fellowship is at once the precursor to and hope, not just of democratic politics, but of education in and for democracy which is both its agent and an important site of its prefigurative enactment.

‘The democratic slogan - liberty, equality, fraternity - embodies correctly the principles of human fellowship. To achieve freedom and equality is to create friendship, to constitute community between men’ (Macmurray 1950, 74-5).

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I dedicate this paper to the late Irene Grant and her family, who have for thirty-five years helped me to better understand the nature and significance of John Macmurray’s life and work.

Tables

Table 1

Education and schooling for human flourishing

Schools as Impersonal Organisations	Schools as Affective Communities	Schools as High Performance Learning Organisations	Schools as Person-Centred Learning Communities	Schools as agents of Democratic Fellowship
<i>The Functional marginalises the Personal</i>	<i>The Personal marginalises the Functional</i>	<i>The Personal is used for the sake of the Functional</i>	<i>The Functional is used for the sake of the Personal</i>	<i>The Political expresses / supports the Personal</i>
Mechanistic Organisation	Affective Community	Learning Organisation	Learning Community	Democratic Fellowship
Efficient	Restorative	Effective	Humanly fulfilling / Instrumentally successful	Democratic living and learning

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