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Reflective practice and student satisfaction

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Reflective practice and student satisfaction: never the twain shall meet?

Introduction

This article is based upon a presentation at the European Conference for Educational Research in Copenhagen (ECER 2017). Its main focus is the inter-relationship between two canonical notions in contemporary education discourse: namely, 'reflective practice' on the one hand and 'student satisfaction' on the other. Both have wide currency in teacher education in the Anglophone world, yet very rarely are they considered in relation to each other. Reflective practice has a longer and more august pedigree. With specific reference to the UK context, Gillies (2016) has explored in some detail how the idea can be traced through the influential work of Schön (1983) back to Dewey (1916) and even to Aristotle, whose 'concept of *phronesis* [practical wisdom] has been drawn upon extensively lately as a way of further understanding professional practice' (Gillies, 2016, 150).

The distinguished lineage of the term reflective practice may partly explain why the notion has become so firmly established in the canon of educational thought in one particular area of the European educational realm. Another reason is perhaps the inadmissibility of asserting that one does *not* reflect on practice, or at least that doing so is not in and of itself an ameliorative activity. As Todd (2016, 621) has argued in the pages of this journal, the current direction is EU education policy emphasises the development of skills and competences and has led to a 'false, delusional sense of education as being able to stabilise uncertainty'. As we shall see, the Anglophone discourse around reflective practice bears traces of this particular conceptualisation of education.

The critique of student satisfaction advanced below is premised upon a vision of education 'as a process fundamentally engaged with uncertainty' (Todd, 2016, 622). It also implies rejection of a narrow conceptualisation of education as 'that which we can "see" and "measure" through "outcomes", "outputs" and "performance"' (Todd, 2016, 621). It calls into question the viability of trying to establish a 'context within which reflective practice can be conducted, and a knowledge base, a range of reflective resources … to assist such activity' (Gillies, 2016, 149).

But where has the notion of 'student satisfaction' come from? How has it become the dominant driver of institutional change in the UK higher education context? What does it tell us about the entrenchment of a vision of education that is subservient to 'assumptions about efficiency, behaviour and management' (Todd, 2016, 621)? The notion of student satisfaction has only really become established over the last decade in the wake of the marketization of higher education that has taken root in the UK and further afield (Molesworth *et al*, 2011;

McGettigan, 2013; Ball; 2003; 2015; Burrows, 2012; Lynch *et al*, 2012; Raaper and Olssen, 2015; Ek *et al*, 2013; Texeira and Dill, 2011; Giroux, 2014). Reflective practice and student satisfaction may have particular currency in UK educational discourse, but concerns about the direction of travel in the contemporary university are shared across the European Higher education arena. Halffman and Radder (2013; 2015, 1) describe how 'universities are occupied by management, a regime obsessed with "accountability" through measurement, increased competition, efficiency, "excellence", and misconceived economic salvation'. [i] These developments have pervaded education systems across Europe and have attracted a wealth of commentary and analysis in recent years. In her keynote address at ECER 2017, Rajani Naidoo observed that 'contemporary education reform worldwide appears to be locked in a competition fetish'. It is not our intention here further to contribute to this debate. Rather, it is to point out that this is the broader context against which the main theme of this article, namely the inter-relationship between reflective practice and student satisfaction needs to be considered. These may only have become compulsory reference points in the Anglophone world, but their reduction to empty and gestural references is indicative of the increasingly instrumentalist vision of education that has taken root across Europe in recent decades. Todd (2016, 626) has drawn attention to the negative consequences of such a vision: 'seeing education primarily in terms of skills and competences deadens its potential, flattening it out into a monotonous tune of performance, measurement and testing'. As we shall see, discourse relating to reflective practice is also marked by a preoccupation with performance within a prescribed framework for action, to the detriment of experience. However, before we embark upon our consideration of these two canonical notions, some consideration of the narrower contextual factors is required, including some reflections on our roles as co-authors.

The first step in preparing for the ECER conference was to read over the abstract that we had submitted prior to the deadline. In the guidelines for submission, prospective delegates were reminded of the requirement to state their research questions *in advance*; to make explicit their objectives and theoretical framework; to detail their methodology, and, most surprising of all, to specify the expected *results* of their work (our emphasis). The language of the guidelines for submission is perhaps one indicator of the extent to which priorities in educational research have shifted across Europe in recent decades, in line with the broader policy trends noted above. For instance, the description of the range and scope of the European Educational Research Journal (EERJ) refers *inter alia* to the 'policy-driven redefinition of the idea of research' and the concomitant shift from 'moral inquiry into a process of technical action.' To judge from the guidance provided to potential contributors to ECER, specifically the clear emphasis on a unilinear process of data gathering, analysis and

the reporting of 'findings', things seem to have moved quite far in the direction of 'technical action'. This latter term is rather opaque, but it seems reasonable to interpret it as referring to the reduction of academic inquiry to the methods of applied science. The form of words adopted in the guidelines implies a clear dichotomy between 'moral inquiry' on the one hand and 'technical action' on the other. And yet, the editorial board of the EERJ has offered scope for us 'to sing a different tune' and provided a forum in which to 'champion alternative voices; that is, those who become marginalised in and through enforced harmony' (Todd, 2016, 620). We take this as licence to provide a brief account of how we got our jazz, especially as this played a key role in beginning 'to unravel the taken-for-granted melody that we all seem to be humming along to' in an attempt to respect the flat harmonies of Eurovision education (Todd, 2016, 626).

Part of the rationale for our collaboration was to bring discursive approaches to educational scholarship to bear on quantitative approaches to understanding the opportunities and limitations of particular educational initiatives, such as those designed to foster 'reflective practice'. We also set out to challenge the dichotomous thinking that pitches one approach against the other. In short, we resolved to set forth together along a path of discovery that would displace our gaze 'so that we are '(t)here' and the 't(here)' can present itself to us in its evidence and command us' (Masschelein, 2010, 44-45). This, we suggest, is a true marker of reflexivity. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's *One Way Street* Masschelein (2010, 45) further explains that 'displacing one's gaze' means that 'one can see differently, can see what is visible (since the "distances, belvederes, clearings, prospects" are not hidden, not *beyond*) with the result that the individual (the "I" and "we") can be transformed.'

As co-authors with different disciplinary backgrounds, there was substantial variation in our responses to the strictures imposed on what seems to count as admissible scientific practice (*Wissenschaft*) in the ECER and EERJ guidelines for contributors and authors. The lead author of this article has a background in the humanities. Her colleague has a background in the biomedical sciences. In the case of the first author, the guidelines provided by the EERA to prospective contributors to the annual conference prompted feelings of dismay and alarm. The focus on results rather than upon the process of discovery seemed to her to mirror more narrowly educational and institutional practices that tend towards specifying learning 'outcomes' or scholarly 'outputs' in advance. Her response to this state of affairs was a profound *ennui*, which gave way first to feelings of incapacity and incompetence and then to a profound sense of entrapment. If this author could speak for herself in an unmediated way, then this is what she might say: '*If I knew what each day would bring, or where I was going before I set out, why would I even get out of bed in the morning? If I knew what I was going to write before I wrote it, why on earth would I ever set to work?*' For the second author, on

the other hand, the implicit appeal to the methods of inquiry in the natural sciences (i.e. acquiring knowledge through empirical inquiry and rational analysis) evoked a reassuring sense of business as usual. The emphasis on methods and findings was familiar to him from his previous life as a biomedical scientist. In our presentation at ECER 2017, we addressed the interplay between these different views and briefly discussed the character of our collegial co-existence. For our current purposes, however, it will suffice to note that our commitment to working together across our differences is a marker of mutual recognition, and a rejection of straightforward dichotomies between, say, 'moral inquiry' and 'technical action' on the one hand and qualitative and quantitative approaches on the other. More fundamentally, it is also an indication of how we aspire to live our lives, as teachers and academics with different backgrounds living and working in a community of inquiry that values difference rather than sameness. That is to say that we embrace living with differences in approach and refrain from attempting to promote one approach to academic inquiry at the expense of another. We also resist the temptation to promote the interests of one academic 'tribe' over the other. As we shall see below, the gestation of this article has a direct bearing on the matter under consideration, namely bringing the notions of reflective practice and student satisfaction to bear on each other. We acknowledge the risk of discursively reproducing stereotypical distinctions between research practice in the natural sciences and in the humanities and social sciences. We have chosen to foreground the account of our improvisatory practice for several reasons. First and foremost, it sheds some light on 'the qualities of experiences that being "educated" enables' (Todd, 2016, 626). Secondly, it draws attention to the specific form of 'aesthetic sensibility' that arises from creating and embracing opportunities 'for "accepting" uncertainty (and the mystery this entails) without seeking to encapsulate it in categories of understanding' (Todd, 2016, 625) or to establish a firm terrain upon which to reflect (Gillies, 2016). Lastly, our improvisatory practice embodies an orientation to life that privileges a turning towards the other rather than the sterile acquisition of skills and competences and a means-ends approach to reflective practice.

Setting aside our own immediate reactions to the task in hand, as co-authors we noted that a common response of professionals to the kind feelings of incapacity and uncertainty described above is to do everything they can to deny, suppress or overcome them. This seems to be the case irrespective of career stage, disciplinary background, or indeed the nature of the educational experience or practice under consideration. We generally learn to rush past such moments, to deny hesitation and to avoid doubt. Driven on by the dominant culture of performativity, we mutter 'you must go on I can't go on, I'll go on' like *The Unnameable* in Samuel Beckett's eponymous play. Indeed it is this very process that renders

us hapless unnameables in a system that, to paraphrase Butler (2004) leads us to feel other to ourselves precisely at the place where we expect to be ourselves, namely the contemporary university. This type of response extends beyond mere solipsism or an undue concern with professional reputation (although these may also play a role in an increasingly professionalised workforce). Individuals are afflicted by doubt and uncertainty at all stages of their careers, and we are no exception. Indeed such responses seem to be part and parcel of professional practice *per se*. In the preface to his book *Architecture Depends*, Jeremy Till (2009, 1) explains that as its title suggests the book was based on two premises. 'First, architecture is a dependent discipline. Second, architecture, as profession and practice, does everything to resist that dependency'. As we shall see below, much the same can be said of professional practice in education, in respect of both teaching and research. Here too, there are marked tendencies towards resisting dependency and promoting the autonomy of learners in an era in which the neoliberal turn 'elevates the norm of competition as a dominant ordering frame of reference undergirding all of social life' (Raaper and Olssen, 2016, 149). As already noted, these developments are in part driven by the broad trends in European education policy outlined by Todd (2016), for example 'the framing of the relationship between education and transition' that is evident in the Joint Report of the European Council and Commission. It is here that the EU 'outlined its concerns with transition for youth from "education" to "work" and its objectives for Education and Training 2020' (Todd, 2016, 620; European Commission, 2015). The focus on labour market transitions in contemporary EU education policy also reflects an enduring vision of the learner as 'not yet complete … not yet knowledgeable, not yet skilful, not yet competent, not yet autonomous and so on' (Bingham and Biesta, 2010, 134). Moreover, the latter perspective discursively positions teachers and academics as those who can make good these deficiencies through the transmission of knowledge or, increasingly, through the implementation of strategies rather than by the development of understanding. As we shall attempt to demonstrate with reference to the cultivation of reflective practice in an HE policy climate dominated by the notion of student satisfaction, the development of understanding is a human activity that depends in part on the particular qualities of the individual, the quality of her engagement with the broader environment and the enlivening and inherently unpredictable interactions that ensue.

It is evident that detailed treatment of the European policy dimension is beyond the scope of this paper. We shall restrict our analysis to examining the fault lines between autonomy and dependency, as these have conditioned Anglophone discourse on reflective practice and student satisfaction. They also account for the tendency to consider the two notions as discrete entities and to ignore the extent to which they are inter-related.

Having it both ways: towards autonomy and dependency

There is evidence to suggest that fostering resistance to dependency and promoting students' autonomy has been a key plank of European education policy in the two decades since the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy, the European Union's overarching programme focusing on economic growth and jobs. Thoutenhoofd and Pirrie (2015) reviewed the literature on learning to learn within the context of *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning: a European Reference Framework* (European Commission, 2006).[ii] They drew the following conclusion:

> We take the view that the narrow construction of learning to learn as self-regulated learning has resulted in a striking denial of learning as social performance and an over-emphasis on individual agency, autonomy and responsibility in the pursuit of pre-determined educational ends (Thoutenhoofd and Pirrie, 2015, 73)

Forearmed and forewarned with 'learning outcomes' that are dictated in advance, it appears that learners are expected to proceed along an individualised trajectory of learning, and to become ever more autonomous and accomplished in the process. The function of teachers is largely restricted to ensuring the smooth running of the system. It is as if the teacher's role were limited to making minor adjustments to the learner's cruise control system, in the manner of well-drilled co-pilot.[iii] To borrow an expression from the late, great Leonard Cohen, the net effect of these developments is that teachers and learners find themselves 'on different sides of a line that nobody drew'.[iv] As we shall see below, this has profound implications for the likely success of initiatives designed to encourage students to engage in reflective practice. It is also likely to have an impact on the richness and humanity of educational practice more generally. However, there is not scope here fully to do justice to such a vast and important topic.

As we shall see, the persistence of the idea that education is essentially about the *transmission* of authorised and codified knowledge rather than about the development of understanding can result in a means-ends approach to developing reflective practice. As Todd (2016, 620) has pointed out, instrumental views of education leave 'little room for thinking about education itself as a process of transition, which implies … change and transience'. Education has a social dimension: it can be regarded as a process of going along together, with students who teach and teachers who learn, and *vice versa*. However, as long as the idea of education as transmission persists, then educators will be on one side of the line and students on the other. As we shall see, this has profound implications for their collective ability to embrace learning and teaching as social performance rather than to reduce them to the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences. The idea of education

as transmission also has implications for the levels of satisfaction that both students *and* teachers will derive from learning and teaching.[v]

The developments outlined by Thoutenhoofd and Pirrie (2015) (see also Pirrie and Thoutenhoofd, 2013) have been further exacerbated by the ascendency of human capital theory in the European education policy arena over the last fifty years (see Gillies, 2011). As Gillies (2011, 236) notes, human capital theory presents education as 'instrumental for economic growth or economic "success", without ever indicating what this this economic development is for'. This is a curious omission in such an avowedly instrumental approach. In contrast, we might even suggest that one of the purposes of education might be to enable students and teachers to determine the purposes of education.[vi] However, that would entail dispensing with the line that nobody drew. It would also imply the resurrection of a vision of education where students and teachers learn with and from each other. As Ingold (2018, 2) has pointed out, the idea of transmission 'seriously distorts the purpose and meaning of education'. Education, he argues, is about leading a life, with others, in a community of students, scholars and teachers.

Ingold's alternative vision of education may seem radical when compared to Eurovision education (Todd, 2016). However, it is important to record that the ideas that underpin it can be traced back to the work of the philosopher John Macmurray (1891-1976). According to Macmurray, schools (and by extension universities) are communities in which people are treated as ends in themselves rather than as means to ends. (See Stern, 2012 for an excellent overview of the thought of John Macmurray.) Following Masschelein (2010), Ingold (2018) argues that education is about attending to things, and to their entanglement in the world. As Masschelein (2010, 43) puts it, education is about 'becoming conscious about what is happening in the world and becoming aware of the way our gaze is itself bound to a perspective and a particular position'. As such, the process of writing this article is educational, as we have attempted to demonstrate above. It is premised upon close attention to concepts such as reflective practice and student satisfaction, and to the implications of the manner in which they are inter-related. Moreover, it is conducted in the spirit of critical 'e-ducational' research outlined by Masschelein (2010, 48), one that is characterised by attention, presence and generosity.

What happens when we consider reflective practice in relation to concurrent developments within the educational arena at the micro- and macro-level (e.g. the current emphasis on student satisfaction within a HE system governed by market principles)? It has been noted that 'the prevailing discourse around teacher "training"… compromises the whole notion of the reflective practitioner, and that the political drive for "what works" solutions, together create significant barriers for this sort of approach to extended professionalism' (Gillies,

2016, 157). Yet the 'what works' agenda is also deeply entrenched in educational thinking, to the extent that Gillies adopts means-ends rationality in order to rehabilitate the concept of reflective practice. He is intent on exploring mechanisms through which it might be rendered 'purposive' and more effective. This would entail setting it up *'in such as way as to allow chosen ends to be realised'* (Gillies, 2016, 149) (our emphasis). According to this view, fostering reflective practice would also involve establishing a context 'within which it is to be conducted, and a knowledge base, a range of reflective resources, available to assist such activity' (Gillies, 2016, 149). Such an approach offers the reassurance of a particular starting point and an ameliorative end point, with some indication of the steps that will be taken along the way. However, 'setting up' reflective practice in a particular way implicates students in a form of undergoing that they have played little part in determining. It thus fails to take account of their full humanity and the quality of their lived experience. The emphasis is on developing consciousness and awareness within a canon of accepted and acceptable practice rather than on cultivating patience and attention in a climate of uncertainty. The approach taken by Gillies (2016) displays the characteristics of what Ingold (2018, 22) describes as the *principle of volition*. Once again, teachers and academics are cast on one side of the line that nobody drew, and students firmly relegated to the other. It is the teacher who starts the ball rolling, for instance by determining the resources upon which students might draw. This incurs the risk of promoting a reified notion of the 'reflective practitioner'. The alternative vision set out by Todd (2016) is of education as a more socially responsive process of transition and change. Ingold's explication of the principle of volition merits detailed consideration:

> According to this principle, every act would deliver on an intention wilfully placed before it. The doing would begin here, with an intention in the mind of an agent, and end there, with that intention fulfilled in the world. Between beginning and ending there are, of course, things the doer has to undergo – and possibly not only the doer, but also others subject to his command and enrolled in his project. All are bound to endure its effects, and many indeed be changed by them. But so long as the undergoing is inside the doing it is passively borne, for the active part of conduct is defined by its ends, its finalities. With the principle of volition, in short, doing and undergoing are set apart on opposite sides of a division between the active and the passive, agency and patiency. (Ingold, 2018, 22)

We shall explore below the limitations of the principle of volition in relation to the discourse on reflective practice and draw attention to the importance of bringing the undergoing *outside* the doing. We shall now turn our attention to the evolution of the second term of our inquiry, namely student satisfaction. Its ascendency in the UK higher education system in recent years has set a number of obstacles in the path of thoughtful action.

The irresistible rise of the student satisfaction agenda in the UK higher-education area

A new educational orthodoxy has taken root over the last decade, and reached an unprecedented level of ascendancy. Student satisfaction has become the prime measure of quality in the audit culture of contemporary HE. This is particularly evident in the UK higher education arena. The argument advanced below is that, somewhat paradoxically, the student satisfaction agenda runs counter to the emphasis on individual agency, autonomy and responsibility that permeates European education policy discourse. As we saw above, this particular focus was evident in *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning: a European Reference Framework* (European Commission, 2006); and in the raft of academic literature reviewed by Thoutenhoofd and Pirrie (2015). It appears that the approach to reflective practice taken by Gillies (2016, 157) is also premised on systematic engagement with a range of resources to which teachers introduce their students 'gradually and systematically'. Once again, this is premised upon a vision of education as teaching (*educare*) rather than as a process of leading out, reaching out (*e-ducere*) (Masschelein, 2010, 44).

The notion of 'student satisfaction' has arisen in an era where, as noted briefly above, students are cast as 'customers' or 'consumers' and teachers, scholars and researchers as '(service) providers' or 'facilitators'. Skea (2017) charts how in the last decade student satisfaction has been increasingly privileged over and above the other aims of higher education. In the UK at least, academics and university administrators live and work in an environment dominated by metrics derived from measures of student satisfaction. These have become at least as important other measures of institutional success (such as the equally nebulous notion of 'research excellence'). Indices of student satisfaction determine the position of institutions in competitive league tables, which in turn have an impact on funding allocation. The irresistible rise of student satisfaction as the supreme educational good militates against what Ingold (2018, ix) considers a necessary reassessment of 'the traditional view of pedagogy as the inter-generational transmission of authorised knowledge'. Ingold argues that the idea of transmission needs to be supplanted by a vision of education that is

> not a "stilling in" but a "leading out", which opens path of intellectual growth and discovery without predetermined outcomes or fixed end-points. [Education] is about attending to things, rather than about acquiring the knowledge that absolves us from the need to do so; about exposure rather than immunisation. (Ingold, 2018, ix)

In contrast, the idea of student satisfaction appears to immunise students from exposure to uncertainty and doubt. The notion of student satisfaction risks infantilising students by creating a dependency relationship rather than fostering *interdependence*, i.e. a 'way of leading life with others' (Ingold, 2018, viii).

The notion of student satisfaction first came to prominence in the UK with the introduction of the National Student Survey (NSS) by the UK higher education funding bodies in 2005. As Skea (2017, 364) points out, 'results from the NSS exert a large influence on institutional reputation' and the findings are used 'for marketing purposes and as a public relations exercise'. The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), which 'aims to recognise and reward excellent teaching and learning'[vii], was introduced by the Westminster Government in the 2016-17 session. An amendment to the Higher Education Bill passed by the House of Lords remove the clause that proposed that universities were entitled to raise student tuition fees by £250 per annum. However, this should not be considered an ideological rejection of the link between student satisfaction and higher tuition fees in England. Rather, the consensus was that the TEF was 'not ready' as a measurement for fee increases. The peer who proposed the amendment is reported to have said that 'this is an approach to fee setting that has not been properly thought through'.[viii]

In the UK higher education arena there are thus strong systemic and institutional drivers for academics to ensure that university students never experience anything short of total satisfaction (see Fulford, 2013). However, it is difficult to imagine what this might look like, particularly if we regard education as an open-ended process of transformation and 'an orientation of openness to uncertainty' (Todd, 2016, 626). For our present purposes it will suffice to suggest that the emphasis on student satisfaction in UK higher education can all too easily result in a painting-by-numbers approach to teaching, learning and scholarship – and to attempts to disguise the extent to which this is the case. We take the view that such an approach to education is intellectually, emotionally, spiritually and physically barren. Moreover, as Skea (2017, 367) points out, 'the dominance of student satisfaction measures … assumes that students know what they want, are able to assess their experience accurately, and that they should get what they want/need from higher education.'[ix] She considers satisfaction as 'settling up' (as in a financial transaction) and as a 'settling down' (i.e. making someone feel comfortable or at home). Skea explores Heidegger's notion of *das Unheimliche* (the uncanny) 'to argue for the ontological import of being unsettled within HE' (Skea, 2017, 369). This is broadly in tune with the 'key signature' identified by Todd (2016, 626), namely 'an education in negative capability, what could perhaps be called "an aesthetic education in the everyday sublime"'.

Critics of the student satisfaction agenda and the prevailing means-ends rationality that it implies have suggested that the function of the university is 'to bring students to confront accounts of the world that are new to those students … and to disturb the students with strangeness' (Barnett, 2011, 124). Talk of 'student experience' implies that this is a unified category, writ large, as it were. The reality is that there are as many 'experiences' as there

are students, and that not every experience (*Erlebnis*) needs to be 'satisfactory' in order to make a positive contribution to, say, the *longue durée* of a successful education (*Erfahrung*). Moreover, the educational import of trying, and trying, and trying, and trying and not getting 'no satisfaction' (Richards and Jagger, 1968) seems to have been systematically undervalued in the discourse around the notion of student satisfaction.

As co-authors we became aware that the feelings of incapacity noted above had implications for the object of enquiry, [x] and that these were perhaps also worthy objects of what Paulo Freire described as epistemic curiosity. This is a politicised variant of curiosity that leads to questioning and unveiling conditions of oppression. As Freire (2001, 44) puts it

> the more I acknowledge my own process and attitudes and perceive the reasons behind these, the more I am capable of changing and advancing from the state of ingenuous curiosity to epistemological curiosity.

There is an increasing body of work that is concerned with what Richard Smith (2016) describes as the 'virtues of unknowing'. In our interactions with students we believe that it is important to convey that not knowing how to begin is part of beginning rather than an indication that one is not yet complete, not yet knowledgeable, and so on. We also take the view that the quality of attention brought to this phase ultimately determines the quality of the work. The corollary of this is that teachers and students find themselves on the same side of a line that nobody drew.[xi] We shall now attempt to argue that the acknowledgement of the inter-relationship between such individual processes and attitudes is a *sine qua non* for a reflexive treatment of the notion of reflective practice. Moreover, we suggest that this has to play out within a conceptualisation of learning that emphasises its character as social performance in a 'variegated web of social, emotional and material entanglements' (Thoutenhoofd and Pirrie, 2015, 82-83) rather than one that emphasises the exercise of individual agency that is implicit in the notion of developing the reflective practitioner.

The reflective practitioner in the context of student satisfaction

In this section, we shall draw upon a recent attempt to revive the notion of reflective practice with specific reference to teacher education (Gillies, 2016). Gillies draws on Hannah Arendt's work on judgement, particularly her concept of 'enlarged thought' to propose 'a stronger basis for the nature of reflective practice and for the validity of the professional judgement involved' (Gillies, 2016, 148). There is a tacit appeal to a vision of 'a social world carried along by its *vis insita* [a force inscribed in objective or subjective structures] which frees agents from this endless work of creating or restoring social relations' (Bourdieu, 1995, 30).

According to Gillies, in order for students to make 'sound judgements' about their work, 'beginning teachers would need to bring into professional consideration outlooks drawn from

three broad and distinct categories: self; others; and literature' (Gillies, 2016, 157). Despite the impression created by references to learning from self and others, the approach taken by Gillies appears to be posited upon a vision of education as transmission, as a process of 'becoming conscious or aware' rather than 'becoming attentive, about paying attention'. As Masschelein (2010, 44) explains

> … consciousness is the state of mind of a subject that has or constitutes an object(ive) and aims at knowledge. Attention is the state of mind in which the subject and the object are brought into play. It is a state of mind which opens up to the world in such a way that the world can present itself to me … Attention opens up an atopical (and not an utopical or heterotopical) space: as space of possible self-transformation and self-displacement, i.e. a space of practical freedom.

Despite the manifold references to learning from others, the approach taken by Gillies implies a rejection of this alternative conceptualisation of education as a way of leading a life, with others and leans in the direction of the techno-rationalist approach critiqued by Todd (2016). In addition, the rather arbitrary division that Gillies draws between self and others is also open to question. The philosopher John Macmurray reminds us of the central paradox of human existence: namely, that we are born human, but our humanity consists in learning to be human. As Macmurray explained in a public lecture to teacher educators and students in 1958, we learn to become human in and through our relation to others.

> This dependence on others is his life – yet to be human he must reach beyond it, not to independence, but to an interdependence in which he can give as well as receive. (Macmurray, 2012)[xii]

Gillies provides a useful overview of the perceived advantages of reflective practice: namely, it places 'thoughtful action' at the heart of teaching and elevates the importance of professional judgement; *it provides the basis for a rejection of technical rationalism and the dangers it represents for limiting teachers to a functional role and misrepresenting the contexts of teaching as invariable*; it reasserts the moral aspect of teaching in relation to the choice of virtuous ends and means; and it enhances and entrenches teachers' professionalism by regarding it as a practice for which nuanced judgement is required rather than as something susceptible to 'training' (Gillies, 2016, 150-151) (our emphasis). He then draws attention to the 'problems with reflective practice as a concept'. Following Zeichner (1994), he points out that the term is used 'in an imprecise and fuzzy manner and so it is unclear which *tools and processes* should be deployed in this reflection' (Gillies, 2016, 151). The language used in the second part of the last sentence seems to constitute an indirect appeal to precisely the form of technical rationalism that Gillies rejects. He

acknowledges in passing the salience of 'the political drive for "what works" solutions' (Gillies, 2016, 157). Yet he seems 'captivated by the horizon of expectations, projections, perspectives, visions, views, images, dreams, i.e. our intentionality, which constitutes us as a subject in relation to an object(ive)' (Masschelein, 2010, 48). Furthermore, there is an unchallenged normative expectation that reflection necessarily leads to action that pervades the article.

Gillies' primary objective is to offer 'some suggestions about ways in which teacher professional reflection could be undertaken in a more robust and coherent manner' (Gillies, 2016, 149). This presupposes that 'robustness' and 'coherence' are incontestable educational virtues in the service of critical thinking, as opposed to the qualities of attention, presence and generosity that Foucault (2001, 762) singled out in his approbation of Maurice Blanchot's remark '*que la critique commence par l'attention, la présence et la générosité*' (cited in Masschelein, 2010, 48). The deployment of terms that are immediately 'settling' in contemporary education-speak ('robust', 'coherent') and the avowedly ameliorative intent signal the teleological focus that is the hallmark of a vision of education as transmission. Gillies (2016, 149) provides further balm to educational administrators and hard-pressed faculty members concerned with effective 'course delivery' by suggesting that 'if reflection is to be *purposive*, then it needs to be set up in such a way as to allow chosen ends to be realised' (our emphasis).

Closing remarks

Is there really no time to stand and stare, to wait, to be open to the world? Does reflection always *have* to be purposive? The title of L.S. Stebbing's book *Thinking to Some Purpose* (1939) suggests that there is something that we might just call thinking.[xiii] The question then arises as to the extent to which aspirations to encourage purposive thinking reflect priorities dictated by the student satisfaction agenda. Is the underlying purpose is to 'settle' students rather than to encourage them to engage in the risky enterprise of thinking without banisters?

Arendt herself seems to doubt that thinking results in the safe arrival at a satisfactory end point. On the contrary, she sees the inclination, or rather need, to think as part of the human condition that can only be satisfied through thinking: 'the thoughts which I had yesterday will be satisfying this need today will be satisfied only to the extent that I can think them anew' (Arendt, 1971, 422). She explains that it is only our desire to *know*, 'whether arising out of practical necessities, theoretical perplexities or sheer curiosity' that 'can be fulfilled by reaching its intended goal'. According to Arendt, 'the inclination or need to think' cannot 'be stilled by the allegedly definite insights of "wise men"' (Arendt, 1971, 421-422). Arendt describes the endlessly recursive process of thinking in the following terms: 'the business of

thinking is like the veil of Penelope: it does every morning what it had finished the night before' (Arendt, 1971, 425). Arendt (1971, 423) outlines how thinking interrupts all doing, and how this doing, this 'everything else' interrupts thinking in turn. As she explains:

> Doing and living in the most general sense of *inter homines esse* "being among my fellow men – the Latin equivalent for being alive – positively prevents thinking. As Valéry once put it: "*tantôt je suis, tantôt je pense*", now I am, now I think… Closely connected with this situation is the fact that thinking always deals with objects that are absent, removed from direct sense perception. An object of thought is always a re-presentation, that is, something or somebody that is actually absent and present only to the mind which, by virtue of imagination, can make it present in the form of an image (Arendt, 1971, 423).

What, then, are the implications of this for prospects of success for reflective practice construed as an ameliorative endeavour within the framework of an education policy agenda that places the emphasis on the measured (and measurable) acquisition of skills and competences? Perhaps rather than the development of the capacity to reflect all such initiatives can achieve is to ensure that students acquire further knowledge, thus revalidating the idea of education as transmission and systematically underplaying the transformative importance of *inter homines esse*.

The danger in providing structured guidance on how students might be encouraged to engage in reflective practice is that this tacitly directs attention towards meeting the expectations of students (i.e. keeping them satisfied). The argument advanced in this article is that in respect of cultivating reflective practice, the primary focus on getting things right, on making things work in terms of getting students to think and reflect by developing 'purposive' activity to that end on their behalf. We suggest that this is at the expense of a more nuanced and politicized consideration of reflective practice in relation to the broader currents of contemporary education policy. We argue that the latter can only be achieved if, as in the case considered here, the notion of reflective practice is theorised in relation to the student satisfaction agenda and viewed within the broader context of current trends in European education policy. Such an approach also entails a more nuanced consideration of the inter-relationship between doing, undoing and undergoing than there has been scope to achieve in this article. Moreover, it implies shifting the emphasis from epistemological or methodological concerns towards existential ones, and espousing a 'poor pedagogy'. Not to do so, we suggest, represents a radical failure to hold a mirror up to nature and to reflect on any unsettling of contents that might ensue.

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[i] Even those who are sceptical about the value of metrics may agree that the fact that at the time of writing the *Academic Manifesto* (Halffman and Radder (2013; 2015) had been downloaded 20k times is an indication of a high level of interest in this topic across Europe. There have been two such manifestos published in the UK in recent years: Holmwood, J. (ed) *A Manifesto for the Public University*. London: Bloomsbury; and Ingold, T. (2015) *Reclaiming our University* https://reclaimingouruniversity.wordpress.com/

[ii] The Framework was one of the outcomes of the joint work of the European Commission and the Member States within the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme launched in 2001, a year after the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy.

[iii] The pervasive use of the verb 'to facilitate' (i.e. to make easier) and references to teachers as 'facilitators' in contemporary education speak springs to mind in this context.

[iv] Leonard Cohen, 'Different Sides', from the album *Old Ideas* (2012).

[v] While the expression 'student satisfaction' has gained considerable purchase in UK higher education, this is not matched by institutional attention to 'teacher satisfaction'.

[vi] A colleague in another institution recounts how at an information day for prospective students, he asked a young man what he thought university was for. The young man paused for a moment and responded by telling his interlocutor that that was what he was coming to university to find out.

[vii] http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/teaching-excellence-framework

[viii] https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/house-lords-rejects-plans-link-tef-results-tuition-fees

[ix] In contrast, in 1965 Keith Richards and Mick Jagger gave their generation and subsequent generations a rock anthem that challenges the very notion of 'getting satisfaction'.

I can't get no satisfaction
I can't get no satisfaction
And I try, and I try, and I try, and I try
I can't get no satisfaction

When I'm drivin' in my car
And that man comes on the radio
He's tellin' me more and more
About some useless information

Supposed to fire my imagination
I can't get no, oh no no no
Hey hey hey, this what I say…

[x] Experience has taught us that collaboration and co-authorship do not generate greater certainty, but rather a dogged commitment to going on, together.

[xi] Kirsten Darling-Mcquistan, a lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Aberdeen who attended our presentation at ECER 2017 recounted how a thoughtful student came up to her at the end of a teaching session and asked 'is it supposed to be this hard?' The fact that the student asked the question is an indication that she had placed her trust in her interlocutor, had come to the inchoate conclusion that learning is indeed 'hard', and suspected that her teacher would understand her perspective and indeed regard it as her own. The student's question also indicates those pervasive feelings of incapacity to which we referred earlier. Her choice of the word 'supposed' betrays a normative conception of the educational process.

We are greatly indebted to Kirsten for this example, and regret that we have not been able to do full justice to it within the present context.

[xii] In his lecture, Macmurray refers to the need to restate the fundamental purposes of education, i.e. to enable children to learn to be human in the face of 'the stress of immediate demands' and the political pressure relating to the university of his day. 'We have certain politicians telling the universities that they should be producing far more scientists – three Scientists to one Arts man was mentioned in one case as the desirable figure. One of the main reasons was … that this is what Russia is doing. It seems a little odd that the imitation of Russia should be held up by British politicians as an exemplar for our own practice – but that is not the important point. It is not even that more government officials take it upon them to instruct a university on educational policy – which is an expression not of democratic but of totalitarian values. The important point is that those who make and those who accept such statements about what universities should or should not do, are clearly not thinking in terms of education at all.' (Macmurray, 2012, 665)

[xiii] *Thinking to Some Purpose* was described on the front cover of the Pelican edition as 'a manual of first aid to clear thinking, showing how to detect illogicalities in other people's mental process and how to avoid them in your own.' We suggest that this may be the by-product of 'just thinking' rather than an objective.