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**Critically adaptive pedagogical relations: the relevance for education policy and practice**  
**Morwenna Griffiths**

*Abstract*

The article argues that teacher education policies should be predicated on a proper and full understanding of pedagogical relations as contingent, responsive and adaptive over the course of a career. It uses the example of the recent Scottish Donaldson Report into teacher education, arguing that for all the Report's considerable merits, it remains deficient because it does not attend to the complexity and contingency of pedagogical relations. The complexity arises from the existence of (at least) four analytically distinguishable pedagogical relations each of which interact with the others. These relations are contingent on the embodiment of teacher and students and on the political and social-cultural context of the class. Therefore they are also contingent on time, as teachers age, and as the political and social-cultural context changes. Conclusions are drawn for the creation of a teaching profession in which teachers are reflectively and critically adaptive during the course of their careers.

## **Critically adaptive pedagogical relations: the relevance for education policy and practice**

**Morwenna Griffiths**

### *Introduction*

The article argues that teacher education policies should be predicated on a proper and full understanding of pedagogical relations as contingent, responsive and adaptive over the course of a career. It uses the example of the recent Scottish Donaldson Report into teacher education to demonstrate the import of these factors for teacher education policies beyond Scotland. The Report has been widely welcomed, rightly, because it acknowledges the significance of teacher professionalism and of career-long teacher education. However, for all its considerable merits, it remains deficient, because its model of pedagogy is based on a disembodied and decontextualized teacher acting on, rather than with, her students. I suggest that this deficiency means that the Report's recommendations will not meet its objectives of "developing teachers as reflective, accomplished and enquiring professionals who have the capacity to engage fully with the complexities of education"<sup>1</sup>.

The article begins by focusing on Donaldson's characterisation of a good teacher in terms of complex skills and qualities, together with the capacity to exercise professional judgement. It is argued that this characterisation is inadequate because it overlooks pedagogical relations: embodied, played out in specific social-cultural contexts, and necessarily changing over the course of a career for reasons beyond the control of any individual teacher. In the following section it is further argued that the significance of these features of pedagogical relations has not been sufficiently explored in educational philosophy and theory, and a possible analytical framework is outlined. It is suggested that there are four analytically separable forms of pedagogical relation, each of which is contingent on the changing social-cultural context, the changing embodiment of the teacher and on the capacity of the teacher to reflect on these changes. The article concludes with a discussion of some implications for life-long teacher education which would encourage teachers to be critically adaptive rather than reactive in the face of their fast-changing worlds.

### *The Donaldson Report*

At the request of the Scottish government, a major review of teacher education covering the entirety of teacher education for primary and secondary schooling was carried out by Graham Donaldson in 2010<sup>2</sup>. Widely supported and highly influential<sup>3</sup>, it has been accepted in its entirety by the Scottish Government and has been followed by a number of policy initiatives which draw on it. However, the Donaldson Report is of interest beyond its national impact. Its conclusions are based on a thorough literature review of recent educational research and scholarship on which it draws to resist powerful global trends in education towards the construction of league tables, and towards increasing managerialism, standardisation and competency-based approaches. It unambiguously distances itself from policies on teacher education which seek to attain particular standards of competence and to achieve change through prescription. As Donaldson expressed it:

Some see teaching as a relatively simple task that depends heavily on techniques, subject knowledge and personality...but 21<sup>st</sup>-century education is far more complex and challenging and requires the highest standards of professional accomplishment and commitment. Teacher education must...develop expertise, scholarship, collegiality and creativity.<sup>4</sup>

This example of an influential policy report which resists simplifications of teaching and teacher education is to be welcomed. However, precisely because it is largely welcome it is a good place to begin a constructive critique goes beyond addressing the widely studied problems of managerialism and neo-liberalism in global teaching and teacher education policy.

### *The characterisation of a good teacher*

The Donaldson Report has considerable merits in its appreciation of the complexities and challenges of teaching. However there is one important omission which needs to be addressed: pedagogical relations. Donaldson ties the quality of teaching to his characterisation of a good teacher, to what he terms the ‘qualities and skills’ of a teacher – the qualities and skills he includes are far from being only craft-based or technical. As well as including a teacher’s capacity for continuing, theory-based, reflective practice about the complexities and

intellectual challenges of teaching, he mentions a commitment to teaching as a vocation and to the development and learning of each child; a passion for learning as well as a deep understanding and enthusiasm for the subject; and a capacity and willingness to work in a range of partnerships and to share ideas. What he does not include is also significant. Only once does he mention teacher-student relations.

Such a characterisation omits any serious consideration of relations between people when they come together in a joint enterprise of teaching and learning some subject matter. The Report discusses the individual teacher in relation with colleagues. However in the discussion of a good teacher it does not mention relations between teacher and students either at the initial stage of teacher education, or during continuing professional development. Moreover, in tying the characterisation to “skills and qualities”, it omits any consideration of the contingency of pedagogical relations connected to the embodiment of both teachers and students, and of the social-cultural context of a classroom. Therefore, for all its welcome emphasis on the necessity for continuing professional development, it pays no attention to the aging bodies of teachers, or to changes of social-cultural contexts over the course of a teaching career.

Perhaps the omission of pedagogical relations is not surprising. While it is not a new topic – it can be found in the history of Western philosophy since the time of Socrates – it is only recently that the subject has again begun to be a focus of attention in educational philosophy and theory. Much recent work explores pedagogical relations in terms of relations between individuals and how those may be affected by being in educational settings. Noddings’ conception of relation as care has been particularly influential. For her, the pedagogical relation is a caring relation in which there is a concern for the benefits a specific individual relation can bring to a pupil’s development. This approach permeates much recent work in North America. Noddings draws from feminist critiques of Kantian ethics. She remarks that the ethic of care has “much in common with the ethics of alterity described by Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas.”<sup>5</sup> Other recent influential accounts which draw directly on Levinas are based on his concept of alterity, the ethical face to face relation of one with a single and singular other. These accounts make central the concepts of ambiguity allied with

trust; violence allied with responsibility; and the preservation of openness to alterity as a mark and condition of relationality.<sup>6</sup>

The significance of group relations in classrooms has been overlooked in this recent research which begins with a teacher faced with a single student. While the work has been extremely valuable in the critique and re-conceptualisation of the ethical basis of teaching, further exploration is needed. The dyad is an unusual context for teaching. Any account that begins with a teacher and a single student risks misrepresenting the range of relation that occurs in the usual teaching situation of public education: a single teacher and a group of students, often a large one, in which the opportunity to pay attention to individual pupils is necessarily constrained. It is hardly surprising that the issue that most preoccupies beginning teachers is the difficulty inherent in teaching a group of students: responding to all the students in the class, exercising authority, and teaching them all something worth learning.<sup>7</sup> In the next section I explore the complexity inherent in classroom pedagogical relations.

#### *Complexity: four kinds of pedagogical relation*

Pedagogic relations between teachers and students are extremely complex, and need to be explored in more depth to understand why “21<sup>st</sup> century education is complex and challenging”<sup>8</sup>. I distinguish four forms. Hogan in this symposium discusses another set of what he calls domains of relations. Like him, I point out that these kinds of distinction are not readymade or separate. The forms I discuss are subdivisions of his first two domains which concern teachers and students, though I also address issues deriving from his fourth domain, the teacher’s relation to him/herself. The four forms can be distinguished analytically, but in any real classroom situation they all interact with each other and teachers need to pay attention to all of them. Higgins outlines some of the complexity of pedagogical relation in his discussion of the environment in which teaching occurs. He begins with “the instructional triangle of teacher, student and subject matter”<sup>9</sup> but, as he says, this leaves out other important relations. For instance, he points out that group dynamics are relevant to relations that can be, and are, formed in classes of students, drawing attention to “the teacher’s relation to group dynamics and the

individual student's place therein."<sup>10</sup> For the purpose of this article, I distinguish relations which are (1) dyadic, (2) associational, (3) instrumental, and finally, (4) subject-based. By "subject based", I refer to relations arising from the teacher and students engaging in a focus on the substantive matter at hand: on what is being intentionally taught and learnt. Intention is not to be identified with specified outcomes. Equally what is being taught and learnt is not necessarily identified with a specific disciplinary subject but refers to whatever is being intentionally taught and learnt, such as, for example, facts, theories, concepts, judgements, skills, sensibilities or ethical conduct. My attempt to list what is taught and learnt betrays a similar concern to the one expressed by O'Donnell in her discussion of subject matter, to what Hogan expresses when he writes of the "imaginative neighbourhoods opened up by the teacher", and to what Assiter refers to as a "life view".

First, there are the *dyadic* relations that can develop between a teacher and a single student; relations which could be independent of what it is that the teacher intends to teach or the student may want to learn. These relations are caring or ethical in a Levinasian sense because they arise from the acknowledgement of the singularity of the other. These relations may occur during a class, even if there are many students, or they may be developed outside formal lessons. An example can be found in Todd's account of a student teacher deciding to intervene during a whole class activity in which one child is distressed. The account analyses how the student, in learning to be a teacher, is learning to negotiate her responses to a pedagogical situation as a result of a felt ethical imperative of her relation with the one distressed student.<sup>11</sup> Another example, this time in school but not in class is provided by Thompson. She discusses a teacher in a dyadic relation with a student by drawing on a pedagogical scene from the French documentary *Être et avoir*, during which the teacher has a private conversation with a pupil who is about to transfer to secondary school.<sup>12</sup>

Second, classes usually include many students, which is why group dynamics are significant. Relations are found in *associations*, a term borrowed from Iris Marion Young. She explains:

An association is a group that individuals purposefully constitute to accomplish specific objectives. ... relations are often defined by explicit rules and roles, although many of the relationships in associations will also be informal and tacit.<sup>13</sup>

She distinguishes such a group from an “aggregate”, which “does not express a subjective social experience”<sup>14</sup> and from a “social group” which is:

a collective of persons differentiated from others by cultural forms, practices, special needs or capacities, structures of power or privilege. Unlike associations, social groups are not explicitly constituted. They emerge from the way people interact.<sup>15</sup>

In any association, each member finds that the rest of the group includes some people who are easy to remember and some who it is easy to overlook; some who are likeable, others who are not; some who are irritating and some who are difficult to understand. To some extent these responses are idiosyncratic, depending on the capacities and peculiarities of the individuals involved. They are also influenced by their socio-cultural norms, by how far each member feels the others can be described as “people like us”. Thus it is possible, indeed likely, that social groups will emerge. In so far as these reflect structures of power and privilege, social justice issues become relevant. These latter become pressing when they happen to correlate with powerful roles within the association. It is in these formations that the possibility of civil friendship, as analysed by Shuffelton, becomes relevant at classroom or school level.

Associations in formal educational settings have specific formations, arising from the reasons that students and teachers are present, and from the structures of power that are in place in the institution. In most associations the members have a choice about whether to be there.

Moreover they come together for an agreed common purpose. Within a formal educational setting it is different. Students may come because they want to learn, but also for may come for other reasons<sup>16</sup>. Classes may be compulsory. Alternatively, a student’s desire or need to achieve accreditation may keep them there in the absence of coercive compulsion. (See Kodelja in this symposium.) Equally, a teacher rarely has the option to walk away from a class. Similarly, while power and authority may be evident in any human group, the context of formal education is one in which these have specific, inescapable formations.<sup>17</sup>

Compulsion may be beneficial. For instance a shy or awkward person may welcome the chance to feel part of the social group of the class. The kind of education towards civic



friendship discussed by Shuffelton can be instigated. However, compulsion can also be harmful. Compulsion, desire or need to learn may require a student to remain in an associational relation, even when he or she finds it painful or damaging. Such painful relations can be based on idiosyncratic responses to different members of the class based on their capacities and peculiarities. They may also reflect structures of power and privilege such as sexuality, gender, race, or religion, resulting in bullying, harassment, social exclusions and discrimination.

One specific formation of association is so significant in pedagogy that it is useful to distinguish it as the third kind of pedagogical relation. *Instrumental relations* are fostered by the teacher through the use of strategies and techniques for developing a good working atmosphere in a classroom, even if some students reject formal learning for the kinds of reasons noted in Shuffelton's article. These techniques then have a dual agenda, as Haydn points out:

One is concerned with trying to get pupils to want to learn; the other is concerned with discouraging pupils who do not want to learn from spoiling the learning of others.<sup>18</sup>

Thus some strategies follow the first agenda and are adopted to try and get students to perceive the teacher as “warm, responsive, caring and supportive, as well as holding high expectations of their students.”<sup>19</sup> Examples are the adoption of particular ways of greeting students or through the use of humour, as O'Donnell argues in her discussion of atmosphere. There may also be conscious use of superior knowledge and skill in order to establish authority. Thompson discusses some of the ways that students may – or may not – position themselves in relation to the knowledge and understanding the teacher has to offer. Similarly, authority can be claimed through the use of institutional power; or of demonstrations of status as teacher or student, through clothing, use of space, use of voice, and so on. Other strategies are deployed to deal with specific incidents of what the teacher sees as appropriate or inappropriate behaviour by the students. Teachers use a range of such strategies, including praise, reward, reprimands, punishments and the use of behaviour contracts.<sup>20</sup> The teacher may be reflectively conscious of their use of these various strategies, but they may also be expressions of the values the teacher holds about

relations with others; as Shuffelton expresses it, in their adherence (or not) to the values of civic friendship.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, there are subject-based relations arising from the teacher and students engaging in a focus on the substantive matter of the class. Teachers and students all have a relation to the subject matter, and also, as Higgins observes, the relation is not only of each of them to the subject matter but also the relation of teacher and students to the others' – teacher's and students' – relations to the subject, and then, recursively, of each of these relations to the other's relations to the relations, and so on.<sup>22</sup> These relations depend on a teacher's conception of the subject matter in hand: on the kinds of openness described by O'Donnell; on what sort of imaginative neighbourhood of learning is being offered by the teacher, to use Hogan's terminology. They also depend on the approach a teacher takes, and encourages on the part of the student, as Assiter shows so clearly with regard to Kierkegaard and Arendt. Such relations may produce intense delight, joy or satisfaction, or, if the relations go badly, despair, depression, frustration or fury, as I have argued elsewhere.<sup>23</sup>

The complexities of negotiating pedagogic relations are increased because the possibilities of carrying out any pedagogical action are always affected by all of individual, associational, instrumental and subject relations. That complexity is intensified because of the way that actions can be perceived under more than one description. To take an example: a teacher may perceive that students think her both fair and also frightening as a result of her sharp questioning and intense desire for intellectual rigour<sup>24</sup>. She may well develop a pedagogical relation with the students which is both instrumental in terms of control but also intrinsic in the learning of the subject matter at hand. Alternatively she may see that even if she is seen as fair, the fear she inspires gets in the way of students' motivation to learn and that she needs to curb her enthusiasm for sharp questions. Equally, it may be that her passion for intellectual rigour itself engages and ignites a similar passion in some of her students so that they are motivated to face down their fears. As all this is going on, she may see that a single student is reacting differently from the others. For instance sharp questioning may be harmful to a student who is emotionally vulnerable – yet perhaps this same student has real potential in the

subject. How far is this student to be singled out for a different approach? How far should the approach for all the students be modified for the sake of this one?

*Contingencies of embodiment and the political and socio-cultural context*

Up to this point in the argument nothing has been said that might not be subsumed under the aspirations in the Donaldson Report for “interpersonal skills”<sup>25</sup> or for ‘better student-teacher relations’.<sup>26</sup> Equally, they could refer to his requirement that for teachers are able to “manage challenging behaviour”<sup>27</sup> and know “how to contribute personally to...address underachievement including the potential effects of social disadvantage”<sup>28</sup>. The analysis of the different forms of interpersonal skills that are needed in these cases has shown how complex professional teaching skills have to be.

However, teaching is even more complex than the Donaldson Report acknowledges. In the preceding discussion the teacher and the students remain disembodied and decontextualized. I now go on to discuss the significance of embodiment and the political and socio-cultural context. For ease of discussion I shorten the phrase to “politico-cultural” context.

In what follows I develop an Arendtian argument (in ways she would have repudiated) to address issues of embodiment and context. Arendt argues that action is always an expression of a unique person. She argues that both “who” and “what” a human being is, is relevant to understanding their actions – and to what an action is. She says:

In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world, while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of the body and sound of the voice. This disclosure of “who” in contradistinction to “what” somebody is – his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide – is implicit in everything somebody says and does...It is more than likely that the “who,” which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others remains hidden from the person himself.<sup>29</sup>

Arendt suggests that embodiment is not part of the “who”; is not expressive of the person. This is odd. The stance of the body, the quality of voice and the use of gesture all reveal who a person is to others, clearly and unmistakably, while remaining invisible to the person him or herself. Embodiment is also a feature of the “what”. Most obviously sex and skin colour are marked on the body. Further, the politico-cultural is an aspect of the “what”. Arendt does not mention the politico-cultural in the passage above, but elsewhere she does suggest that being a Negro or a Jew counts as a quality.<sup>30</sup> Again, the stance of the body, the quality of voice, and the use of gesture are all influenced by gender, ethnicity, and specific cultural contexts. Teachers and students appear to each other as unique, embodied persons, with embodied, politico-cultural qualities.

In any specific teaching context, pedagogical relations are contingent on the embodiment of the teacher and the students, and on the politico-cultural backgrounds of all of them. Some examples follow, which are intended to indicate the contingency of each form of pedagogical relation, depending as it does on the “who” and the “what” of all the actors. I consider each form of pedagogic relation in turn.

*Dyadic* relations can be the result of some chance episode or common response, of the kind O'Donnell recounts as unpredictable educational encounters, and as Todd's account (mentioned above) indicates.<sup>31</sup> Equally they can be the result of the specific personal, embodied and politico-cultural qualities of the teacher and student. In her ethnographic account of visiting some classrooms in England, Kamala Nehaul demonstrates the subtleties and specificities of such encounters. She discusses the response to her of one particular seven year old child, a response which was influenced by the skin-colour and accents of them both. Nehaul herself is light-skinned, of Indian-Caribbean heritage, and speaks with a Caribbean accent. She describes the unfolding of a relation with the child, who was much darker skinned and of African-Caribbean heritage. The turning point in the relation was when the two of them were reading a picture book about two African princesses and Nehaul exclaimed ‘What a beautiful brown skin she has!’.<sup>32</sup> It was only after this, that the child felt able to tell Nehaul about the Caribbean food she ate at home, in a whispered conversation that included a pupil of

Asian (i.e. Indian sub-continent) origin. This episode exemplifies why the students' will to respond to the teacher's role and authority cannot be taken for granted, as Thompson argues.

The dyadic relation described by Nehaul betrays some of the *associational* relations in the class. When Nehaul asked why the two children were whispering they "had a discussion of different foods, the differences between backgrounds, and about name-calling at school."<sup>33</sup> This experience can be contrasted with that reported by Jacky Smith. Jacky Smith, another black teacher of Caribbean heritage was the deputy head of the primary school. She recounts a discussion with her black pupils about the scholarship examination for a largely white local secondary school. Nehaul, an experienced teacher, was a guest in a class where the teacher was white, and who had a conviction that a culture-neutral class would benefit all children. Smith's class was one in which different backgrounds were openly discussed, in a way that discouraged shame or name-calling about racial background: overt racism would have been difficult for the children to show, given that their teacher was black. In both classes the associational relations between the class members, including the teacher, are affected by the embodiment and social-cultural qualities of the teachers, notably in these accounts, their colour, accents and cultural heritage. These examples are politico-cultural. They focus on racism, but the general point would apply to other politically significant differences such as the gender, social class, sexuality and disabilities of the teacher and students. O'Donnell points up the significance of her own background for the possibilities of a fruitful pedagogical relation in the prison context.

Embodied, politico-cultural factors also feature in *instrumental* pedagogical relations. Greetings, the use of humour and demonstrations of status as teacher or student, through clothing, or use of voice, are different depending on both embodiment and on the specific politico-cultural backgrounds of all the class members, both teacher and students. Margonis gives a useful account of a teacher, Eduardo Lopez, realising the need to change his usual successful strategies of obtaining a good working atmosphere when he moved to a school where the students had a different social background to the ones where he had previously taught. Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke and Curran<sup>34</sup> discuss several contexts in which the cultural assumptions of the teacher collide with the assumptions of the pupil, with the result

that the working atmosphere is impaired.<sup>35</sup> Delamont's ethnographic exploration of capoeira teachers draws attention to the many ways in which the authority of the teacher may be exercised through embodiment. The analysis is particularly telling because the authority is exercised in the absence of other sources, including compulsion, economic motivation for accreditation, or enforceable conformity with role. She shows how: "authority is performed, emblazoned, embodied and even occasionally explicitly announced" by the capoeira teachers.<sup>36</sup>

Lastly, *subject-related* pedagogical relations are both embodied and politico-cultural, as the following example indicates. Steedman's account of being a primary school teacher describes her embodied love for her pupils, as a result of her passionate concern that these young working class children should learn to read, regardless of the disadvantage their backgrounds might indicate.

I loved my children and worked hard for them...my back ached as I pinned their paintings to the wall...We stayed together in one room most of the day long. Shabby depressed, disturbed, social-priority children learned to read under my care: the efficacy of affection.<sup>37</sup>

It is relevant that she herself is of working class origin, but that she also had a university education. She says<sup>38</sup>:

What mattered most was they believed that they could do it – learn, learn to read, defy the world's definition of them as deprived, pitiful, social priority children...I didn't know what was happening to me. My body died during those years, the little fingers that caught my hand, the warmth of a child leaning and reading her book to me somehow prevented all the other meeting of bodies.

Assiter talks of the visceral, passionate commitment to an idea. Such visceral, embodied relations have been understood in terms of eros, that passionate, transformative and risky aspect of personal relations which is connected to the desire for knowledge and wisdom.<sup>39</sup> Steedman hints at the connection in her allusion to the other meeting of bodies. McWilliam argues that pedagogical events can be erotic, mutually seductive encounters, which are not necessarily sexual, using examples from published autobiographies. For instance, she

discusses a passage by Zora Neale Hurston about her experience at a night school in Baltimore which introduced her to ways of understanding Coleridge. McWilliam points out that:

the student's [Hurston's] interest is not an overtly sexual interest, but it is physical, a recognition of the materiality of the teacher as a "body of knowledge". She describes his skin, his tone of voice, using powerful heterosexual metaphors about the relationship between teacher and learner (e.g. "[he] let the fountain flow"; "direct[ed] the stream at me").<sup>40</sup>

### *Contingencies of time*

The previous section discussed the contingencies of embodiment and of politico-cultural factors. These contingencies are themselves contingent on the passing of the years, as teachers age, politico-cultural norms change and education policies come and go. Life-history and narrative research into teachers' lives sheds some light on ways that aging affects how teachers are regarded and regard themselves. Bodies change and age and this can affect teaching. Physical education and dance teaching are a particularly clear example, since the ability to perform declines with age.<sup>41</sup> Another example is parenting. Sikes draws on a life-history study to investigate changes in teachers' perceptions of their professional practice on becoming parents.<sup>42</sup> (Of course, *not* becoming a parent may become salient for some teachers as the years advance.) In short, the "who" of a teacher changes in the course of a career.

Politico-cultural factors influence the perceptions of bodies, whether of sportsmen and women, or of parents. These perceptions, too, have been, and are, subject to change over the years and decades. Some of these changes affect whole societies; in the last half century there has been a revolution in attitudes to diversities, including gender, race, sexuality, disability, religion and ethnicity. All teachers who have been teaching during that time will have had to deal with this. Globalisation and the increasing complexity of communication technologies affect possible pedagogies. At the same time, teachers have to deal with changing demography even if they do not move schools, as Margonis's discussion of the teacher, Eduardo Lopez, showed. Stengel discusses teachers learning

from and reacting to changes in context<sup>43</sup>. She illuminatingly discusses the possibility of beginning (and serving) teachers reflecting and changing with respect to their own socially constructed and influenced fears and expectations about racism. In short, the “what” of both teachers and students changes over a teacher’s career.

Time is a feature in teaching in another way. Each class is a singular event in time and place: no class is exactly the same as the previous one. The same material presented to different students or in a new context will generate a different response. It is probable that the same material presented by a teacher at a different stage in her life will generate a different response. Consider a teacher of English who presents the lyrics of current popular music for discussion.

The contingency and time factors in pedagogical relations can be seen as analogous to that for contingency and time factors in dance. Teaching involves a specific interaction between teacher and students, in which everybody participates, second by second, in relation to the others. Similarly, a dance performance depends on the nature of that participation and on the bodies and expertise of the dancer, but, like teaching, it is also always dependent on the physical and/or politico-cultural conditions in which it is enacted. Each dance is different even if the choreography and tune remain the same. Using a similar analogy, Crane compares a pedagogic interaction (a specific class) with its specification (a course) He says the distinction between a course and a class is the specificity of context. It is: “temporal, locational, dynamic, personalized”: performative, with a “specificity that cannot be duplicated.”<sup>44</sup> The teacher is analogous to the professional dancer. As time passes she gains experience and her body develops, strengthens but also ages. A dancer who wants to keep dancing all her life will have to decide in which directions to cultivate her capacities and will also have to learn to adapt to new contexts some of which will be unexpected.<sup>45</sup>

### *Re-thinking Donaldson*

Donaldson has generated a huge amount of activity and discussion in Scotland. The many publications that have ensued – from government, independent reviews, teaching



associations, universities and newspapers – contribute to the debate within Scotland. The critique in this article is far from being a rejection of current policy directions: on the contrary, it should be seen as a further contribution to that debate. The critique should also be seen as a contribution to a more international debate about teacher education: the current proposals in Scotland are significant precisely because the Report has taken a stand against viewing teaching and the education of teachers through the lens of a neo-liberal, measurement-driven, competency-based managerialism. The Report is significant internationally as providing a policy basis for serious consideration of what initial and career-long education of teachers might become if the complexity and challenge of teaching was more fully understood and acknowledged.

The argument in this article thoroughly endorses the view expressed in the Donaldson Report that teaching is “complex and challenging, requiring the highest standards of professional competence and commitment”<sup>46</sup> and that teachers need to develop “expertise, scholarship, collegiality and creativity.”<sup>47</sup> The paper has shown the sources of some of this complexity and challenge in the sheer difficulties of living the life of a teacher – juggling, resolving and managing different, sometimes competing, always interconnecting pedagogic relations. There needs to be an explicit acknowledgement of those reasons for complexity which lie in the different, interacting forms of pedagogical relation. Further, there needs to be an explicit acknowledgement of the contingencies of embodiment, politico-cultural context, and time. Of particular significance is the probable need for teachers to make radical and often painful adaptations of their pedagogy as a result of these contingencies.

It is hardly surprising that, as is widely acknowledged, new teachers are likely to fall into safe, orthodox strategies in dealing with management and subject knowledge. New teachers are in positions where it is difficult to do anything else. They are still inexperienced and have no seniority. Hogan remarks on the long history of unequal power relations as inherited and renewed norms in schools between older and younger teachers, and with colleagues in various hierarchical roles.

As Hogan comments, teachers become habituated in inherited attitudes and practices. Only after gaining some years of experience can most teachers be in a position to respond to challenges and to re-think their attitudes and practices in respect of pedagogic relations. By that time they have gained confidence and developed their educational views. They will have gained some experience of the deeply felt loves, hates, frustrations, desires and disgusts of teaching. Moreover, the contingencies of the passing of time will have begun to make themselves felt.

This is an argument that has much in common with the ones underpinning the model of the adaptive expert<sup>48</sup> but unlike standard explanations of the model, it puts much more emphasis on changes in embodiment and politico-social context as reasons to adapt. This kind of adaptation requires a critical consciousness of self and other in their politico-social contexts. The model put forward in this article could be described as a variant of the standard: the critically adaptive expert.

There are implications for career-long continuing professional development (CPD). Early career teachers need to develop their practice. More experienced ones need to re-think it critically and radically. The self-reflection required for critical adaptation is necessarily challenging and can be painful. It requires input and support of the kind that colleagues are unlikely to be able to provide in any but the most ideal situations. Colleagues are just as likely to hinder the enterprise for a variety of reasons. They may have an investment in the status quo; it can be difficult to maintain good working relations during risky, joint reappraisals of self and values; power relations are in play making some critiques impossible to voice. It is probable that experienced teachers undertaking a focused period of CPD would need input and support from external sources, of the kind described by Hogan in the “Teaching and Learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” (TL21) project.

Unfortunately, the recommendations for CPD in the Donaldson Report point in a very different direction. They depend on establishing local communities of practice, supported by existing partnerships with external bodies, but there is no provision for ensuring that these communities and partnerships are created and then continue to operate

with a coherent programme which includes challenging input, of the kind described by Hogan. Instead, further recommendations suggest that CPD should be planned on the basis of a negotiation between a teacher (especially an early career teacher) and a mentor. The negotiation would take into account the school and national priorities as well as the specific needs of the teacher in relation to generic or subject specific professional knowledge. Such arrangements use the kind of individualistic language of learning discussed by Thompson. There is a danger that this kind of approach will lead to the formation of a narrow version of the adaptive expert. It is unlikely to lead to critically adaptive experts.

The argument in this article thoroughly endorses the view expressed in the Donaldson Report that teacher education should be life-long, and needs to be based on reflective practice. However, the argument undermines the assumption in the Report that this reflection can be carried out by teachers with the help of early career mentors and then continued through collegial partnerships. There is a need for CPD which supports teachers in deep and possibly painful re-evaluations of values, understandings and techniques, and which challenges the orthodoxies of the workplace. Finally there is a need for a form of CPD which can respond to teachers facing new socio-political contexts.

### **Coda**

As already mentioned, there is much to admire in the Report. However even this largely welcome policy falls short of showing an understanding the significance of the contingencies of embodiment and politico-cultural contexts and of how they change over time. It is not expected that the articles in this symposium will result in immediate changes in policy in Scotland or elsewhere. Policies that result from the Donaldson Report will be in place before this article can be read. That is to be expected. The article is also unlikely to have an immediate impact on policy internationally. Academic writing has another purpose. The task for academics is to produce more adequate accounts of teaching and pedagogy, so that in the many and various ways that educational theory and philosophy impacts on policy – whether through semi-formal meetings or through

systematic reviews – the articulation of what teaching entails is relevant to the current time and to the current set of policies.<sup>49</sup>

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- <sup>16</sup> Terry Haydn, ( *Managing Pupil Behaviour: Improving the Classroom Atmosphere*, (London: Routledge, 2012): 9
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<sup>45</sup> Sarah Giddens movingly describes an aging dancer's performance: "The palpable presence of Sheila (then in her seventies) is my overarching memory of this show: as I close my eyes I can still sense her. The frailty of a body, now more present than ever, a body beginning to fail...to behave how its owner wanted it to behave, technically anyway...[The show] became a space-time for a gathering of memories of my own and others." (Author *et.al.*, 2010).

<sup>46</sup> Donaldson "Excellent teachers are not photofits," 21.

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