Refurbishing MacIntyre's Account of Practice

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The concept of practice has featured increasingly in recent writings on education. This is part of a broader trend in the arts and social sciences. Schatzki (2001) points to a 'practice turn' in diverse disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, history, anthropology, cultural theory, and science and technology studies. He suggests that despite much disagreement about details, practice theorists conceive of "practices as embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding" (Schatzki 2001, p. 2). For practice theorists, "embodied capacities such as know-how, skills, tacit understanding, and dispositions" displace "once cited mental entities such as beliefs, desires, emotions and purposes" (Schatzki 2001, p. 7). This practice turn has a strong philosophical lineage including Hubert Dreyfus (1986, 2001) (inspired significantly by Heidegger), MacIntyre (1981, 1990, 1994, 1999) (strongly influenced by Aristotle) and Schatzki (1996, 2002, 2005, 2006) (strongly influenced by Wittgenstein). As well, Schatzki numbers Dewey, Brandom, and Charles Taylor amongst practice theorists. Of course, leading social theorists (e.g. Bourdieu 1977, 1990; Giddens 1984) have also produced detailed accounts of practice. The growing prominence of the concept of practice in educational writings clearly reflects the influence of this practice turn (see, e.g., Kemmis 2005, 2008; Green 2009).

However, despite the major influence of philosophers on the practice turn, this literature as a whole appears to have had limited impact on philosophy of education. The main exception here is the strong interest by philosophers of education in MacIntyre's Aristotelian account of practice. The centrality of MacIntyre's ethical theories for his account of practice has had particularly strong appeal for those philosophers of education seeking to understand teaching as a practice. This is so despite MacIntyre's own vehement denial that teaching is a practice (see MacIntyre & Dunne 2002). This debate stimulated a 2003 Special Issue of the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* on *Education and Practice: Upholding the Integrity of Teaching and Learning*.

Why have MacIntyre's views on practice enjoyed such pre-eminence amongst philosophers of education, seemingly to the exclusion of other writers on the topic? According to McLaughlin (2003, p. 347) the advantageous features of MacIntyre's account are "…. coherence, complexity, internal goods, invitation to a certain kind of self-involving and self-transformative co-operative engagement and a necessary involvement of the virtues in this engagement …..". McLaughlin added that these features

> …. all correspond to deep-seated intuitions about the nature and value of teaching, properly conceived, particularly in opposition to technicist and instrumentalist conceptions of this activity.

So MacIntyre's work connects well with recent interest in Aristotelian practical wisdom as an account of ethically significant actions. Teaching bids fair as a prime instance of ethically rich practical wisdom. So the overwhelming attraction of MacIntyre's account of practice for philosophers of education is understandable. However, despite many of the contributors to the Special Issue wanting to

characterise teaching as a practice (e.g. Hogan, Dunne, McLaughlin, Katayama, Noddings), the matter remained unresolved.

This paper will argue that this impasse was unsurprising as MacIntyre's theorisation of practice has several crucial deficiencies that need to be addressed. Despite Smith's (2003, p. 314) assessment of MacIntyre's account of practice that it is "opaque and dubious", this paper takes a more optimistic view. Its aim is to elucidate some key limitations of MacIntyre's theorisation of practice, thereby enabling a refurbished, but still MacIntyrean, account.to be developed. In undertaking this refurbishment, there is no intention to downplay the importance of MacIntyre's seminal contributions to ethics. Indeed the enormous influence of MacIntyre's work on ethical thought more broadly may explain why the deficiencies in his characterisations of practice have gone largely unnoticed. One significant outcome of refurbishing MacIntyre's account of practice will be to clarify the issues around the question of whether teaching is a practice.

But there is a further benefit in refining MacIntyre's account of practice. This is that his work promises to help to solve a major difficulty in much of the literature inspired by the practice turn. This problem concerns the seemingly illimitable scope of the deployment of the term 'practice'. A typical example is Usher and Edwards (2007). They use the term 'practice' ubiquitously throughout their book, seemingly at a bewildering multiplicity of levels of description. Thus, at different places in the book, we meet truth-telling practices, meaning making practices, confessional practices, discursive practice, vocational practices, homemaking practices, learning practices, lifelong learning practices, educational practices, assessment practices, disciplinary practices, pedagogical practices, social practices, cultural practices, political practices, lifestyle practices, signifying practices, and interpretive practices. Clearly 'practice' and 'practices' are key notions in this book, yet Usher and Edwards never enlighten the reader on what they understand by these terms.

MACINTYRE'S ACCOUNT OF PRACTICE AND ITS INHERENT LIMITATIONS

MacIntyre's famous characterisation of a practice in *After Virtue* is that it is
> ….. any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partly definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (1981, p. 175)

MacIntyre then goes on to clarify the key notions involved here of 'goods internal to a practice' and 'standards of excellence', and to relate both to his understanding of the virtues. He defines *internal goods* as those goods that can only be had by engagement in the particular practice (MacIntyre 1981, p. 176). He states that these goods are internal in two senses. Firstly they can only be specified in terms of the particular practice, and, secondly, they can only be identified and recognised by the experience of participating in this practice. Hence MacIntyre's claim that those "who lack the

relevant experience" of the practice "are incompetent thereby as judges of internal goods" (1981, p. 176).

In contrast, external goods achieved by a particular practice could always have been obtained in other ways – "… their achievement is never to be had *only* by engaging in some particular kind of practice" (1981, p. 176), Examples frequently given by MacIntyre are prestige, status and money. There are other crucial differences between internal and external goods. The achievement of internal goods "is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice", whereas external goods "when achieved …. are always some individual's property and possession" (1981, p. 178). Both involve competition – for internal goods the competition to excel, for external goods competition for resources that typically involves winners and losers.

MacIntyre illustrates these fundamental notions around practice and internal/external goods with examples that will be discussed shortly. However, there are several major issues surrounding MacIntyre's account of practices that are crucial for us to appreciate in any attempt to clarify if, and in what sense, teaching might be a practice. I will now outline and discuss three such issues. The first is that MacIntyre's discussion of practices is beset by scope problems of several distinct kinds. The second is that the distinction between internal and external goods is not as clear-cut as MacIntyre's writings often seem to suggest. The third is that while external goods are relatively easy to specify, internal goods have an inescapable tacit dimension that limits our capacity to specify them precisely. The following sections examine each of these issues and their implications for whether teaching is a practice.

1. Scope problems

Three kinds of scope problems will be considered. Firstly, that MacIntyre's characterisation of practices was strongly influenced by examples of games with not enough consideration being given to other practical and productive activities. Secondly, that MacIntyre provides unclear membership criteria for inclusion in the community that participates in a given practice. Thirdly, that supposed practices like farming and building, as well as being subject to the other two scope problems, raise still other scope issues. These three kinds of scope problems are considered now in turn.

    (i)   A strong games influence with not enough consideration of practical and productive activities

MacIntyre's introduction of practices and their characteristics (1981, p. 175ff.) lists various examples: chess, football, architecture, farming, theoretical inquiry (e.g. physics), painting and music are all practices, whereas tic-tac-toe, throwing a football with skill, bricklaying, and planting turnips are not practices. There are several problems here. An influential critique is due to (Miller 1994, see also Smith 2003, Wain 2003). Miller pointed out that the sharp contrast between internal and external goods, as drawn by MacIntyre, fits well with "self-contained practices" such as games, where the point of the practice "consists entirely in the internal goods achieved by participants and the contemplation of those achievements by others" (Miller 1994, p. 250). However, Miller argued that practical and productive practices, such as architecture and farming, or intellectual practices, such as physics, are

"purposive practices" in that they "exist to serve social ends beyond themselves" such as "the creation of attractive and comfortable buildings, the production of food for the community, and the discovery of scientific truth" (Miller 1994, p. 250). So for Miller, the good of being an excellent architect, farmer or physicist encompasses more than the internal goods of these practices themselves as described by MacIntyre. It also involves considerations around the broader social ends of these practices.

At this point, someone might seek to defend MacIntyre against Miller by questioning whether internal goods can ever be regarded as something existing separately from the broader social ends to which practices contribute. But such a defence seems unlikely to succeed since, as noted above, MacIntyre is insistent that internal goods can only be had by engagement in the particular practice, whilst external goods can be obtained in other ways. But Miller's examples of social ends are precisely ones that can be obtained in other ways, e.g. other practices, such as fishing, also serve to produce food for the community, likewise other practices, such as chemistry, contribute to the discovery of scientific truth. Hence, it seems that the broader kinds of social ends of productive practices, highlighted by Miller, are indeed external goods according to MacIntyre's own definitions.

MacIntyre's own response (1994, pp. 284-286) to Miller is, I maintain, unsatisfactory and unconvincing. Firstly, he charges that Miller ignores his "crucial distinction" between a practice and the way it is institutionalised. For MacIntyre practices exist in a very uneasy relationship with institutions. On the one hand, "no practices can survive for any length of time unsustained by institutions" (MacIntyre 1981, p. 181). Yet institutions are "characteristically and necessarily" concerned with external goods. Here MacIntyre yet again instances a morally dubious trio (money, power and status) as exemplars of external goods. Thus MacIntyre aligns institutions with external goods and practices with internal goods. However this separation is largely conceptual, as MacIntyre also cautions that:

> ….. so intimate is the relationship of practices to institutions – and consequently of the goods external to the goods internal to the practices in question - that institutions and practices characteristically form a single causal order in which the ideals and the creativity of the practice are always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institution, in which the cooperative care for the common goods of the practice is always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution.   (MacIntyre 1981, p. 181)

This, of course, is where the virtues enter the picture. However, this response to Miller is still somewhat unsatisfactory because, despite acknowledging the intimate connection of external and internal goods, MacIntyre implies that Miller's social ends of practices belong in the morally dubious bag along with money, power and status. This maintains the clear contrast between internal and external goods that Miller was targeting. As we will see shortly, this contrast is much less sharp than Macintyre suggests in his reply to Miller.

In further response to Miller, MacIntyre admits to "my lack of attention to productive practices" (1994, p. 284). And then, in rebuke to Miller, claims that "the aim internal to productive crafts …. is never only to catch fish, or to produce beef or milk, or to build houses." (p. 284). However, the problem here is that Miller never said that it was. Rather he argued that the good of the respective practices was tied up *both* with

MacIntyre's internal goods and the external purpose of the particular practice. Against MacIntyre, my suggestion will be that external goods are more diverse than his original characterisation appears to suggest. In particular they encompass much that is not morally dubious. This point will be important for our later discussion of teaching as a possible practice.

> (ii) MacIntyre's examples leave it unclear what the criteria are for inclusion in communities engaged in a practice

In the early examples of practices that MacIntyre offers it is relatively clear who are the members of the community engaged in the practice. It seems obvious that it is chess players who are engaged in the practice of chess. Likewise, it is footballers who are engaged in the practice of football, though arguably we should include managers and coaches, perhaps even match officials, though probably not fans. Similarly, farmers are obviously central to the practice of farming, but we might wonder about those who assist them with various aspects of farming, such as shepherds, fruit pickers or fencers. Raising these borderline candidates for inclusion in the practice is not mere nitpicking on my part. MacIntyre's later extended discussion of fishing as an example of a productive practice (1994, pp. 284-86), perhaps inadvertently, raises just these issues. Sometimes in this discussion, it reads as though the fishing crew is the limit of the group of people engaged in the practice of fishing. But in other places, it seems that all members of the fishing village community are participants in the practice. He talks about the "way of life of a fishing community" (p. 286) and observes that:

> ….. the interdependence of the members of a fishing crew in respect of skills, the achievement of goods and the acquisition of virtues will extend to an interdependence of the families of crew members and perhaps beyond them to the whole society of a fishing village.   (MacIntyre 1994, pp. 285)

The possibility of diversity of roles within a practice may be relevant when we come to consider whether teaching is a practice. As I read it, most of the literature on this issue centres on the case of individual teachers working with a class of pupils. We might see things somewhat differently if we think instead of the staff of a school (including the school executive, the librarian, etc.) being engaged in the practice of teaching. In fact this way of putting it suggests to me that it might be better to view *education* as being the practice, with teaching being a major activity within this practice. This point will be considered further below.

(iii) Further scope issues for generic activities other than teaching

But there is yet another kind of scope problem, one that applies to broad generic activities such as farming, construction and fishing, which are three major examples of practices that are cited by MacIntyre. His commitment to broad generic activities like these being viewed as practices, ties in with his somewhat romantic attachment to the pre-industrial past, which is evident at various places in his writings. MacIntyre seems to abhor the division of labour and the growth of specialisation, that was accelerated by the industrial revolution. Hence, his celebrating the virtues of the traditional fishing village (MacIntyre 1994). Perhaps farming can also be viewed as

the dominant practice of communities for much of human history, at least since the decline of hunting and gathering as a way of life.

However, I wonder if it was ever plausible to regard construction (or building) in this way. The sheer diversity of what humans have constructed and built, stretching back into pre-historical times, such as roads, bridges, domestic housing, cathedrals, boats, etc., strongly suggests that rather than being a single practice, construction is a blanket term that covers a multitude of very different practices. Certainly, craft or trade guilds existed as institutions to sustain their particular craft or trade, long before the industrial revolution that MacIntyre laments. These guilds promoted the development of skill and proficiency and celebrated excellence. As well they often served to regulate the supply of skilled labour and protected members' income. As such they exemplified the close symbiosis between a practice and its institution (in MacIntyre's sense). Many of these guilds covered crafts and trades associated with construction. Yet MacIntyre consigns the huge diversity of crafts, trades and occupations that contribute to building in its many guises to the single practice 'construction'. In *After Virtue* he specifically denies that bricklaying is a practice (MacIntyre 1981, p. 175). Whether he does so out of armchair philosopher ignorance of what bricklaying encompasses or whether there are unconscious class assumptions (bricklaying is merely manual), I do not know. But I do know that there is a rich history and tradition behind bricklaying as is evident from the stunning arches and intricate features of innumerable historic buildings around the world, buildings whose brickwork those with an appreciation of the internal goods of bricklaying travel long distances to admire. So I am suggesting that bricklaying, along with numerous other crafts, trades and occupations, is a practice that exemplifies very well those features that MacIntyre assigns to practices, including a balance of internal and external goods and a cultivation of important virtues.

If construction is a broad generic activity that draws on many practices, rather than being practice in its own right, we can ask whether the same might not be so for farming and even for fishing. Certainly there are many and diverse kinds of farming (some involving animals, some involving plants, with many major variations and kinds even within these categories). So is it not plausible to maintain that, say, beef production is a different practice from rice growing? It seems clear that the internal goods in the two cases would differ markedly, as one would expect with different practices. A similar argument could be made for fishing, but I will not pursue that here.

The discussion in this section suggests that MacIntyre may have settled on nominating candidates for practices without really thinking through the implications of his choices. This suggestion is perhaps supported by the fact that in *After Virtue* he includes painting in a representative list of practices, yet on the very next page nominates portrait painting as a practice (MacIntyre 1981, pp. 175-176). Overall, there is a general scope problem in MacIntyre's writings that deserves closer attention.

2. The internal goods/external goods distinction blurs more than MacIntyre appears to suggest

Internal goods and external goods are not as disparate as MacIntyre's account in *After Virtue* is commonly read to suggest. Detailed analysis of MacIntyre's writings confirms that his account of practice requires very close relations between the two kinds of goods. For instance , as noted already, in *After Virtue* he states that there is an "intimate .. relationship of … goods external to …. goods internal" (MacIntyre 1981, p. 181). However, perhaps inadvertently, MacIntyre himself continually muddies the waters on this vital matter. Repeatedly when examples of external goods are needed, he offers the morally dubious prestige, status and money as typical examples. This conveys the erroneous impression that external goods are typically morally dubious. In fact, according to MacIntyre's own account, many (most?) external goods are closer to being morally neutral. Nearly all purposive practices involve external goods that are not morally dubious in this way. MacIntyre admitted as much in his reply to Miller, discussed above.

Accepting for the sake of argument several MacIntyrean 'practices', we can note their resulting morally neutral external goods and the ways that they clearly satisfy MacIntyre's earlier stated criteria. An external good that results from the practice of fishing is food. This is clearly an external good of the practice, firstly, since food can be obtained in ways other than the practice of fishing. Secondly, because the caught fish are some individuals' property and possession – either the fishermens' or those that they pass them on to. Thirdly, fish as food is part of a wider competition for resources. These contrast with the internal goods of fishing as a practice. Firstly, there are those knacks, feels and know-how that are unique to fishing and which can only be experienced and appreciated by those who participate in it. Secondly, there is the competition internal to the practice, which is the desire to excel at fishing, something that benefits the practice itself. A similar story holds for the 'practice' of construction. Buildings serve a social purpose, which is an external good to the practice of construction. For instance, St. Paul's Cathedral, as an external good, provides a venue for religious worship, a need that can be met in other ways. It is also the property of the Anglican Church. Its title of 'cathedral' represents its pre-eminence over rival churches in the area. At the same time St. Paul's stands as an outstanding example of Wren's architectural vision, an internal good that requires the requisite knowledge and experience to be well appreciated. Likewise, it serves as an exemplar and inspiration for those engaged in the various practices that contributed to its construction. Thus, the aesthetic aspects of St. Paul's are the property of anyone who understands them and cares enough to contemplate them. (It might be said that the Anglican Church is merely the guardian of the aesthetic aspects of St. Paul's).

In both of these examples the external goods discussed are close to being morally neutral. (I will not enter into a debate on whether eating fish is wrong). No doubt in both cases more morally dubious external goods (such as prestige, status and money) can and do come into play. But the point has by now been made that something's being an external good does not thereby render it morally suspect, even though a casual reading of MacIntyre might appear to suggest otherwise. Indeed I want to go further and argue that MacIntyre's theory implies that in most practices it is important for their flourishing that there is a balance of internal and external goods, rather than a favouring of one at the expense of the other. This also means that, on MacIntyre's own account, the flourishing of a practice requires a symbiotic relationship between the institution that mostly takes care of the external goods and the practice itself, which fosters the internal goods. Some examples will demonstrate this point.

Consider an organisation X dedicated to providing high quality educational travel tours. Obviously enough, all organised travel tours involve external goods: fees, vouchers, tickets, handouts, brochures, itineraries, etc. Low quality tour operators may be criticised for not even handling this side of it particularly well. While much organised travel focuses heavily on external goods, many tours also aspire to include a modicum of internal goods: cultural understanding, aesthetic appreciation, historical understanding, etc. Organisation X goes further in that educational values drive its activities. It offers highly qualified and inspirational tour leaders/mentors, quality educational support materials, and structured sequences of tour activities designed to enhance participants' learning. It is this focus on a very high level of internal goods that ensures that the tour provision activities of Organisation X constitute a practice in McIntyre's sense. Its patrons pay a premium for this focus on quality internal goods. But it must be stressed that this strategy only works well if the small details (external goods) are all attended to properly. No matter how enticing the internal goods, people will not pay premium rates if the tour is poorly organised. So maintaining a balance of internal and external goods is vital for the success of this niche practice. Whilst the institution and the practice are readily separable at a conceptual level, the actual flourishing of the practice within this organisation requires that the two be closely integrated.

Likewise consider the practice of a symphony orchestra dedicated to the major internal good of excellent performance of great orchestral music. If MacIntyre is correct in his claim that those "who lack the relevant experience" of the practice "are incompetent thereby as judges of internal goods" (1981, p. 176), it would seem that many in the orchestra's audience might have limited appreciation of the internal goods of orchestral performance. Even long experience of listening to orchestral music is not equivalent to experience in the practice of performing such music. But let us be charitable and allow that experienced concertgoers have at least some significant appreciation of the internal goods of orchestral performance. That will still leave plenty of audience members whose participation is more at the level of external goods: a relaxing break from work, a first visit to a symphony concert, a chance to enjoy the antics of the conductor. Indeed, in order to keep a balanced budget, current day symphony orchestras are very likely to perform each year a number of 'pops style' concerts, centred on more mainstream popular music, and aimed at drawing full houses. Here their practice is shifted temporarily towards external goods, goods that in turn will ensure their long-term ability to pursue their commitment to excellent performance of great orchestral music. Again it is not a matter of simply pursuing internal goods and eschewing external goods. Rather, keeping a judicious balance of the two is vital for the ongoing flourishing of the practice. This sort of arrangement will be optimal when the institution that supports the practice clearly accepts that all preoccupation with external goods is there to support the achievement of the internal goods that comprise the orchestra's reason for existing.

The suggestion that maintaining a balance of internal and external goods is often important for the success of a particular practice can be put alongside of MacIntyre's detailed discussion of fishing (1994, pp. 284-86). With his usual penchant for sharply distinguishing internal and external goods, MacIntyre contrasts the practice of two very different kinds of fishing crews. There is a fishing crew from a traditional fishing community, which continues to pursue the internal goods of their practice even in lean

times when catches are meagre. The other is a crew whose aim is "only or over-ridingly to satisfy as profitably as possible some market's demand for fish" (MacIntyre 1994, pp. 284-85). The latter crew, of course, will have no loyalty either to the practice or to one another if profits prove to be elusive. Clearly, MacIntyre disapproves of the second kind of fishing crew since its strong focus on external goods corrupts the practice. However, as emphasised above, MacIntyre's developed account portrays both the practice and the institutions which support it as a single causal order in which internal and external goods necessarily co-exist in a symbiotic relationship, though one which is potentially fragile. Thus, the continuing health of the practice of fishing requires crews to be focused on a balance of internal and external goods. Whilst ongoing commitment to the internal goods of fishing (including avoiding over-fishing, nurturing and sustaining future replacement fish, etc.) is crucial, this need not be incompatible with maintaining a satisfactory long-term level of profit. Thus, though MacIntyre sometimes appears to suggest in his writings that external and internal goods are inevitably in conflict, a closer reading shows, that the flourishing of a practice requires a judicious balance of the two kinds of goods.

So far in this section it has been argued that *external goods* are more diverse in kind than a casual reading of MacIntyre might suggest. However, Higgins (2003) provides a careful analysis of MacIntyre's account of *internal goods* that demonstrates that there is also much diversity in this category. According to Higgins (2003, pp. 287-9), MacIntyre's account of practices features at least four types of internal goods as follows:

- Outstanding work or performance (which the practitioner *appreciates*);
- What it is like to be engaged in the practice (which the practitioner *experiences* as good);
- An excellence of character (which the practitioner *displays*);
- A 'biographical genre' – what it means to live as a practitioner (which *shapes* the practitioner's life).

It is noteworthy that the first of these is realised in the work or performance; the last three are realised in the practitioner. So, some are features of the practitioner, some of the work itself. This adds to the earlier claim that external and internal goods can be very closely commingled. From an external goods perspective, St. Paul's is an impressively built place of worship owned by the Anglican Church. However, it is also a building that exemplifies the internal goods of the practices that went into constructing it. We might even say that, in MacIntyrean terminology, St. Paul's exhibits the virtues of those who constructed it. So one and the same building (object) exhibits internal and external goods simultaneously.

Higgins' fourfold classification of internal goods also serves to reinforce the earlier criticism that MacIntyre erred in designating broad generic activities like construction as practices, rather than as activities served by many practices. Certainly a practitioner should appreciate excellent work in their own area of practice, but it would be stretching credulity to expect such appreciation to extend to every kind of construction of whatever kind. Likewise a practitioner who knows what it is like to be engaged in (say) shipbuilding would not from that experience know what it was like to be engaged in some very different kinds of construction. Yet if construction was really a practice, these kinds of internal goods should be generic.

3. Much about internal goods is tacit and contested

While it is easy to devise a suitable group of words to name or characterise a practice, it is much more difficult to specify what are the internal goods that are crucial to the practice, since much of this is tacit. Internal goods encompass such things as know-how, feels, and knacks that underpin good practice. So while philosophers of education might find it easy from their armchair to discuss a practice, it is much less likely that they will be able to say much about the relevant internal goods without at least some actual experience of, or at least research contact with, the practice. It is a characteristic feature of internal goods that they are capacities that are hard to put precisely into words. However, groups of successful practitioners do share these capacities and they are able to identify fairly readily who has them and who does not.

The tacit, and hence, contested character of internal goods is evident whether we think of them as what makes a practice distinctive or as embodied in some sense in the practitioners. For instance, Wren's aesthetic as exemplified in St. Paul's and elsewhere, is a matter for endless debate and interpretation. This is typically the case for the internal goods of a practice. Likewise, attempts to describe accurately the personal attributes that underpin the performances of excellent practitioners are notoriously partial and subject to contestation (for more on this see Hager 2004). This is evident from a reading of the 2003 Special Issue of the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* discussed earlier. While quite a few of the contributors want to maintain that teaching is a practice, and set out to characterise it as such (e.g. Hogan, Dunne, McLaughlin, Katayama, Noddings), there is quite a range of differences between the attempted characterisations. Of course there are also some overlaps, but it is the differences that testify to the elusiveness of capturing practices in words. As Dreyfus maintains, human practices cannot in principle be made fully explicit (Dreyfus 1986, 2001). So MacIntyre's strategy of encompassing human practices through 'virtues', which are qualities of persons that can be acquired, sits well with the tacit and contested character of this topic area. MacIntyre's 'virtues' also serve to reinforce the point that it is often very difficult to distinguish characteristics of the practice from characteristics of the person that enable the practice to have this character.

IS TEACHING A PRACTICE?

The earlier discussion has suggested that external goods are more diverse than a casual reading of MacIntyre might suggest. Importantly, external goods encompass much that is not morally dubious. Further this entails that rather than external and internal goods being in necessary conflict, a judicious balance of the two is often to the ongoing benefit of a practice. In the Special Issue of *Journal of Philosophy of Education* several contributors were worried by MacIntyre's observation that teaching is always for something else rather than for its own sake. But, I maintain, the social purpose of teaching, need not to be taken as an inevitable threat to the internal goods of teaching. Rather it is an important external good that needs to be kept in a suitable balance with internal goods.

However, focussing on the social purpose of teaching reminds us that in fact there is a huge diversity of *purposes* for teaching. The contributors to the Special Issue of

Journal of Philosophy of Education reacted to this fact in several different ways. Wain (2003, p. 231) pointed out that:

> MacIntyre's concern with teaching is with something broader than what falls within the activity of professional teachers in schools. It incorporates *everyone* with a teaching role within a practice in a community, whatever it may be.

This diversity of teaching left Wain in sympathy with MacIntyre's claim that "teaching itself is not a practice, but a set of skills and habits put to the service of a variety of practices" (MacIntyre & Dunne 2002, p. 5). Other contributors to the Special Issue tackled this diversity by restricting their accounts to teaching in formal education (e.g. Dunne, Hogan). Others (e.g. Smith, Noddings) distinguished different levels of education in which teaching takes place (primary, secondary, tertiary). Dunne characterised his professional teachers as being engaged in a practice of "educative teaching" (2003, p. 366). But others pointed out that there are major differences in the practice of primary school teachers as against secondary teachers (Noddings 2003, Wain 2003, p. 231). How to respond to these issues in the light of the preceding discussion of MacIntyre's account of practice?

A good way to start is by noting that MacIntyre actually has a double-barrelled argument for his claim that teaching is not a practice. As he states in his dialogue with Joseph Dunne: "I say that teachers are involved in a variety of practices and that teaching is an ingredient in every practice" (MacIntyre & Dunne 2002, p. 8). As the subsequent discussion makes clear, the 'teachers involved in a variety of practices' are professional teachers employed specifically to formally induct novices into practices, such as mathematics, music, science, literature, etc. For MacIntyre what distinguishes these teachers of different practices is their commitment to distinctly different internal goods, the internal goods that define their respective practices. MacIntyre maintains that teaching does not have its own internal goods additional to the internal goods of the particular practice that is being taught (MacIntyre & Dunne 2002, p. 9). Thus, on MacIntyre's definition of a practice, teaching is not a candidate as it lacks its own distinctive internal goods. This, then, is one leg of his denial that teaching is a practice. The second leg of the argument concerns the claim that 'teaching is an ingredient in every practice'. As Wain (quoted above) realised, MacIntyre is here taking us well beyond the domains of professional teaching. The induction and initiation of novices is an important part of the activities of all practices. This induction and initiation of novices often involves a formal course taught by professional teachers. But in all cases it also involves a full spectrum of diverse teaching activities ranging from the most attenuated informal teaching (modelling, imitating, observing) through more structured informal teaching situations (experiential learning, supervised practice) to more formal *in situ* teaching activities (mentoring, coaching). MacIntyre's writings show that he is well aware of the multiplicity of such informal teaching situations. For instance, games are important examples of practices for him. Teaching new entrants how to participate in games of all kinds is a major case of teaching, yet hardly any of this teaching is provided by professional teachers. Nor is most of such teaching educational in the sense usually recognised by philosophers of education. Cricket coaches teach cricket skills to novices, but it is doubtful that they are at the same time educating them. Teaching is such a vital, ubiquitous and normal part of the maintenance and continuity of practices that nearly all practitioners become teachers at some time or other. This is so even

though they may never be formally designated as teachers, nor their activity be seen as being teaching. Typical examples of such informal teaching include: showing a new staff member the ropes, briefing a replacement practitioner before going on annual leave, explaining a new procedure to colleagues, etc. In MacIntyre's terms, such teaching can be viewed as directed at external goods related to the efficiency of the carrying out of the practice. As noted earlier, these external goods normally should not be viewed as being morally dubious. The gist of this second leg of MacIntyre's argument is that this kind of informal teaching is but a small part of all practices, a set of activities within each practice that falls far short of meeting his own criterion for what constitutes a practice.

It was argued earlier that MacIntyre probably erred in designating broad generic activities like construction as practices, rather than as activities served by many practices. Might not education, in its broadest sense, likewise be an activity served by many practices, such as pre-school education, primary education, secondary education, higher education, adult education, workplace education, and so on? Teaching would then be an important component within each of these practices, but would have a somewhat different and distinctive character within each. Does not Dunne's attempt to hive off educative teaching already move us in this direction?

As part of his overall strategy for maintaining that teaching is a practice, Dunne (2003, pp. 354-55) argues that teaching is parallel to architecture, which Macintyre himself does number amongst practices. Dunne maintains that while both architecture and teaching serve the goods of multiple other practices, in neither case does this negate their own characteristic internal goods:

> …. well-designed buildings and everything in the activity of architects that contributes to them and …. well-educated students and everything in the activity of teachers that contributes to making them so.

It is certainly true that architecture as a practice is linked to multiple other practices, such as the practices that the buildings are designed to accommodate. However, I doubt if architecture is unusual in this respect. For instance, contemporary health care systems require the integration many and diverse practices that each contribute to the whole. What is more telling here is Dunne's characterisation of the internal goods of teaching as "well-educated students and everything in the activity of teachers that contributes to making them so". Given the diversity of teaching situations that occur in practices of all kinds, if there was to be a generic internal good of teaching, it would be more plausibly construed as "well-*taught* students and everything in the activity of teachers that contributes to making them so". This revision would capture the full range of teaching both formal and informal that Macintyre maintains occurs within practices. However, Dunne is right to point out that the cases of formal teaching that particularly interest him involve important values that extend well beyond mere technique. But it seems that it is the concept of education rather than of teaching that carries these values. It adds a layer of significant internal goods above and beyond the external goods that we saw tend to characterise more informal teaching situations.

But, as already suggested, it seems that education, like construction and farming, is not itself a practice, but a collective term for a set of related practices – primary, secondary, vocational, etc. Acceptance of the Smith and Noddings levels argument then moves us further to primary educative teaching, secondary educative teaching,

tertiary educative teaching, etc. Once we have arrived at this stage, it seems clear that rather than teaching being the practice in each case, we have a series of practices: primary education, secondary education, tertiary education, etc. (Schatzki (2005) anticipates this suggestion. Hogan and Smith (2003) endorse the notion that it is education rather than teaching that is the locus of practices). On this proposal it is not surprising that there are somewhat different institutions to support each of these distinct practices. Teaching is then seen to be an activity that is part of each of these practices (as MacIntyre maintains). In principle it does not seem to be a particular problem that teaching is a part of each of these and many other practices.

We should also note, if we are taking a MacIntyrean view, that we need to think beyond the case of individual teachers working with a class of pupils. Rather it is the staff of, say, a primary school (including the school executive, the librarian, etc.) being engaged in the practice. Likewise the whole staff of a secondary school will be engaged in the somewhat different practice of secondary education. Being engaged in the practice will of course extend to wider associations amongst teachers.

CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated that there is a general scope problem in MacIntyre's writings that deserves closer attention. As well, other issues for MacIntyre's account, such as the balance of internal and external goods, and the inevitably contested nature of internal goods, have been clarified. On the basis of these constructive criticisms, a refurbished, broadly MacIntyrean account of practice has been developed. According to this account, education, in common with construction, farming and fishing, is a broad generic area of activity that includes a diversity of practices. Practices within education include pre-school education, primary education, secondary education, higher education, adult education, and workplace education. Teaching is something that achieves very different and distinctive forms within each of these practices.

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