

## **Reinstating Emotion in Educational Thinking**

Marjorie O'Loughlin  
University of Sydney, Australia

My starting point in this paper is the identification of a reason/emotion dichotomy which I believe characterizes much educational thinking including the curriculum. Two brief points from the current Australian educational context will illustrate what I mean by this.

First, one has only to look at the senior curriculum in Australia to see that school knowledge remains roughly divided into those subject areas constructed out of the hard cognitions (math, sciences, technology) and those regarded as soft (humanities and the arts in particular). The distinction relies on the evacuation of all traces of the affective from the very construction of the former, but its simultaneous retention as a crucial requirement in appreciation, response, and expressiveness within the latter.[1] My second point is that theories of human development which have played such an important role in educational discourse over the past several decades have served to support a view equating emotion with lesser maturity and therefore with an individual's having less developed knowledge. Hence the widespread assumption that the junior years of schooling are somehow more directly affect oriented and the senior less so. Of course good classroom practitioners know that there is something strange about this claim. Nonetheless the myth persists that as learners develop, they are somehow constructed as increasingly rational subjects for whom emotion then assumes a compartmentalized and marginal accessory to their primarily cognitive status as knowers. As they progress towards the mastery of mature forms of public knowledge, emotion becomes for them an essentially private concern, not a legitimate accompaniment to institutional and corporate life .

### **NATURE OF THE "PROBLEM"**

The question I want to raise here is: Why has emotion or affect remained discursively submerged in education?

In what follows I will very briefly outline some of the problems as I see them in present depictions of the reason/emotion dichotomy which characterize educational thinking generally, including philosophy of education. In exploring some of the issues, I will make use of an example taken from the current Australian educational context - that of civics education.[2] The main thrust of my paper is to suggest some philosophical resources for a project of reinstating the emotions in education. I will begin by raising four points of criticism for consideration and will then elaborate on each of these in the second part of the paper, indicating in what directions solutions may lie.

First, as I see it, the concept of the learner/knower which is implicit in much of the Australian literature on civics education relies on a very narrow cognitivist view of "self." In most of the material to which I refer there is an assumption that learning or knowing is about having knowledge which is essentially of two kinds: "knowing that" and "knowing how." Thus in civics education students come to "know the facts" about the constitution, the parliament, how to vote and so forth. No doubt as they engage in mastering these "facts" about what is involved in being a citizen of a democracy, issues of feeling or affect arise. Very occasionally this is acknowledged. But the level of official discourse about what civics education is or could be, emotion remains firmly subordinated to the operation of a quite narrow account of rationality.

Second, the notion of coming to know is based on an ideal of genuine knowledge as the manifestation of rationality, and this seems to me to be about transcendence, or overcoming of the particular and of perspectivity, in order to arrive at a position that is beyond any carnal dimension, any felt bodily depth or lived emotional experience.[3] The notion of transcendence can be looked at in two ways: on the one hand it involves the idea of the individual's transcending the particularity and limit of her own emotions, preferences, concerns and interests, and in so doing being transformed into a full participant in a knowledge community. On the other, it suggests that fully developed knowledge is precisely that which is free of emotional content, subjectivity and particularity of perspective. Thus arguments about curriculum knowledge are still frequently presented as choices between various kinds of full-blown knowledge vs particularist or pluralistic notions, or, as a subjectivist/ objectivist dichotomy, postmodern and feminist epistemological critiques notwithstanding.

Third, the concept of learners and their knowledge deals exclusively with those aspects of human action and interaction which following Giddens, Iris Marion Young, and others I will call "discursive consciousness." [4] This occurs at the expense of the dimension of "practical consciousness" which in turn is grounded in the reality of each individual's material well-being - their continued physical integrity and resistance to disintegration. Meaningful human action which is the domain of practical consciousness is intimately concerned with the socially situated body-subject in a dynamic of trust and anxiety in relation to its physical environment and in terms of its intersubjective relations. "Discursive consciousness" as I use the term here is a product of a way of thinking in which a generalized system of representation has rendered thought or cognition independent of specific human action. It is this kind of fetishism of abstraction which I see as privileged in much educational theorizing.

Finally the particular conception of knowing which underpins many educational debates tends to lack any recognition of the manner in which emotions are deeply embedded in the way we are and in everything we do. Once again I refer to Australian discourses on civics education. While the development of attitudes and orientations toward democratic participation and so forth are regarded as integral to civics curriculum, there is no attempt to articulate what might be involved in the cultivation and development of feeling in the potential citizen, nor is there any attempt to show how a recognition of embodiment and affectivity are crucial to the development of a point of

view, a perspective or intellectual orientation on what it means to be a citizen and what civic behavior might entail. The point I want to illuminate here is that genuine understanding of these issues must also involve an understanding of complex habituated bodily dispositions, habits, and expression, and an awareness of the functioning of unconscious experience and motivating forces which operate at a basic ontological level.

## THE KNOWING/FEELING DICHOTOMY

Recently in Australian education there has been an emphasis on the notion of a "civics deficit," that is, an insufficiency in knowledge about civics among young people.[5] Influential writers have identified the following issues as central to civics understanding in contemporary Australian life: "multiculturalism, the recognition of ethnic and cultural diversity; reconciliation, the recognition of the special status of the indigenous peoples of the country; and republicanism, the recognition of constitutional self-sufficiency.[6]" In the educational literature and the media there is an increased demand that individuals know "the facts" of the history of Australian political institutions.[7] Clearly each of the three issues listed above is important in contemporary Australian life. But it is clear that mastery of an identifiable knowledge base (for example a knowledge and understanding of the history of Australians and their institutions) emphasizes learning about multiculturalism or reconciliation (the "facts"), rather than learning how to be multicultural, tolerant of diversity, appreciative of difference and so on. Elsewhere in the literature there are fleeting references to the need to develop attitudes and values of civic responsibility. But only very rarely is it made explicit that emotion is in some way involved; there is no attempt to problematize the concept in the context of a discussion about citizenship. One is left with the distinct impression that any effort to explore the functioning of the affective dimension in civics education may be regarded as a dangerous enterprise and therefore to be avoided at all cost.[8]

In the civics curriculum documents there are references to "knowledge and understanding," and also to "skills," though the differences are not really explained. Values are discussed, but it is unclear what values are, and whether "civic" values inculcation is to be conceived as a kind of knowing "facts," or something altogether different. Although there are a number of vague references to the development of attitudes about social responsibility and civic awareness, the role of emotion and affect does not appear as a significant issue. In contrast, within teachers' professional journals the role of emotion in learning is frequently addressed - in discussions of student motivation, in debates about what constitutes best classroom practice and in suggestions about catering to individual student needs. Indeed teacher talk it seems, is replete with references to emotional states though it seems they are rarely identified as such. Could it be that teachers themselves have also been made to feel that discussing emotion per se is not the sort of thing they should be doing as professionals?

It seems to me that underlying this view of knowledge and learners, as represented not only in the Australian civics curriculum but curricula generally, there is on the one hand a rather old fashioned rationalist notion in which knowledge is unproblematically made

available for absorption by the upcoming generation. It is implied that this knowledge has come into being through the application of objective rules and techniques of knowing and is an expression of rationality understood as the practice of essentially disembodied, decontextualized, and detached observers whose aim and achievement has been to fix the truth in the interests of those who are to receive the "knowledge." Thus in the civics education example, gaining knowledge is a cognitive process in which unambiguous meanings are conveyed about notions of heritage, historical events, and national consciousness. Unfortunately, it is not seen as a process of engaging with the present (unavoidably emotional) involvements of individuals and of creating relevant and meaningful educational experiences from which can be drawn understandings about identity, community, social responsibility, and active citizenship.

### KNOWLEDGE AS TRANSCENDING AFFECT AND EMOTION

I use the term "transcend" because in this model an individual transcends her/his private interests and particularity, as they participate with others in deliberative decision making. Thus knowledge about civic life and citizenship is brought into being. But it seems to me that knowledge on this model involves a process of distancing from all that relates individuals directly to production and reproduction, from processes of everyday life, and from everyday bodily activity, accustomed action, and habit - from materiality. For as Maurice Merleau-Ponty pointed out, this sort of rationality consisting of idealizations cannot convey the richness of lived experience.[9] There can be no place for the emotions in a process of idealization, the aim of which is to move as far as possible from the realities of embodiment. Postmodernism which had in a sense offered a return to bodily specificity, insisting that we pay attention to the positionality of different types of bodies, has been less than helpful because although it rekindled interest in differently inscribed bodies, at the same time it has served to dematerialize the body as a figment of discourse, thereby playing down the body as material activity. Acknowledging feelings means that we must also acknowledge their felt bodily depth and this is not an easy thing to do.

In accepting that knowledges are in an important sense socially constructed, we cannot avoid the realization that differences in perspective will exist, especially in fields such as social or civics education. What we must also recognize and not attempt to gloss over, is the reality that the differences which matter are irreducible, and therefore must be at the very least publicly recognized. For example, social groups whose ways of seeing involve quite different foregrounding of concepts and understandings (such as Australian Aboriginal notions of being and knowing, and their cultural focus on place rather than time) can only "transcend" their particularity of perspective if at a more basic level of existence they are accepted as being fully human and fully contributing to the knowledge "base" of the society. This I believe only occurs at the level of practical consciousness not at the level of abstracted, discursive consciousness.

### KNOWING AS PRACTICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

My third point of criticism concerns the failure to understand the functioning of practical consciousness and its affective dimension in educational discourse in relation to the construction of educational knowledge. I still do not believe that there are sufficient opportunities for teachers to explore the issue and articulate their own views as felt not merely thought opinions. This is no doubt connected to the major taboos which are placed on talking about emotion in the society at large, but chiefly because such talk would constitute a threat to the dominance of discursive consciousness in this sort of culture. Discursive consciousness is about those aspects of action and situation which are verbalizable or founded upon explicit formula. Practical consciousness on the other hand refers to those very complex but often overlooked facets of situation involving awareness of and attention to the relation of an embodied subject to others' and to its own habituated space. The work of Dewey, Merleau-Ponty, and Bourdieu draws attention to the habitual routinized background awareness that enables individuals to carry out everyday purposive activities and which is the very stuff of which intersubjective encounters consist.[10]

While at the level of discursive consciousness (the level of public protocol and contemporary social etiquette) I may tend to behave in such a way that I do not exhibit discursively conscious racism or some other form of bigotry against a particular group of people, I may, nonetheless, at the level of unconscious meaning in interactive contexts, make judgments which are conveyed through negative or positive behaviors that may variously deride, privilege, devalue, or stereotype some groups of people, thereby indicating that I do not really regard them as my "fellow citizens." So there remain those aspects of practical consciousness which routinely convey patronizing attitudes, dislike, avoidance, discomfort, and even fear.[11] The source of the problem is located within the realm of practical not discursive consciousness and those exhibiting such attitudes are frequently quite unaware of their behavior. Indeed at the level of discursive consciousness they may espouse quite different views.

But individuals may have strong aversion to others. Therefore, however, much they have expunged such reactions from discursive consciousness the unease or dislike remains as bodily disposition or orientation. It is these underlying hostilities, fear, or other emotional reactions which are conveyed in social encounters. Those who exhibit the behaviors may initially have done so out of some not consciously recognized sense of threat to their basic sense of security, but in behaving as they do, they succeed only in threatening the security of others who have then only a group identity to fall back on, the result being stigmatization, denigration, or invisibility. It seems to me that education has a particular role initially in helping individuals get at the level of practical consciousness at which they respond to others in ways that are not yet inscribed within discursive consciousness, and then in assisting them to see what precisely is involved in the discursive construction of those who are experienced as "other." Only then can genuine empathy be experienced and felt understanding be achieved.

An important part of the problem is that emotions are embodied experience and as Merleau-Ponty's work suggests, they move outwards through bodies as structures of

ongoing lived experience.[12] Self-feeling constitutes the inner core of emotionality. As a result, "emotion's body" seen as a totality, becomes a feeling, mobile complex of lived bodies, intentional value, emotions, and affects of a "self." However for individuals to come to some understanding of their own emotions, they must experience them socially and reflectively. There is a point of intersection of emotions as embodied experiences, their social dimension and their attachment to feelings that one is a self or has personal identity. But it seems to me that in order to see emotions this way we need to articulate more fully the reflexive, relational nature of embodied emotional experience in all aspects of life especially that of the social, as well as in all the processes of knowledge construction.

## DENIAL OF THE BODY

Despite the fact that much of modern Western culture revolves around themes of love, longing, jealousy, fear, regret, and sadness, emotions nonetheless have inferior status. The denial of embodied emotionality is epitomized in that bureaucratic and instrumental rationality which while relying upon the undeniable existence of human embodiment including its emotional and affective foundation, simply denies their existence at the discursive level. As Young has pointed out what operates is a "sanction of silence," ensuring that the realities of emotion which activate specific dispositions, postures, perspectives and movements (which are intersubjective and therefore unavoidably communicative) remain hidden.[13] The attitudinal dimension to all learning, which is at base physical and involves the manner in which particular bodies in concert with others articulate a common design, purpose or order, is briefly acknowledged but quickly passed over. It seems therefore that education must somehow find a means of seriously attending to the dimension of practical consciousness and that citizenship education in particular could be designed to allow access to and understanding of this realm of human existence. Such a project would enhance our awareness of what ontological security means for the individual and a broadened and deepened understanding of what citizenship might be.

## EMOTION AS EMBODIMENT

The conception of knowledge and of learning suggested in most of the educational literature to which I have previously referred, relies on a view of the individual whose embodied nature is at best glossed over as an embarrassing particularity and whose placement as an ecologically niched and mobile perceiver is ignored. But as Nietzsche has shown, in order to understand what we may become - through what we may know - we must turn to the body itself.[14] Our ideas have their complex roots in bodily drives. As Thomas Eagleton expresses it : "We think as we do because of the sorts of bodies we have and the sorts of complex relation with reality which this entails." [15]

It is the body which acts and so gives rise to practical consciousness. Practical consciousness is about interpretations and perspectives having their root in the frequently conflicting longings of the body, in competing affects and emotional states which are

variously restrained and displaced within specific cultural contexts. Nietzsche's critique of modernity and Merleau-Ponty's account of embodiment constitute major attempts to reinstate the body to its central place in human life and culture. As such I believe their works have an important role in assisting us to understand of the place of emotion in education.

Learning cannot occur without emotional involvement. Good teachers know this better than anyone else. Emotional depth, which is surely required for true appreciation of one's social situatedness as a learner, can only occur when there is a growing awareness in the individual of her involvement with others. People only "matter" or make a difference to each other through emotional involvement, through experiencing the emotional expressions of others who are tied up in various ways with one's own life project. In the process of experiencing the emotions we are reaffirmed in our spatio-temporal existence. For Dewey the depth of an emotion is dependent upon its maturity - that is upon its growth and enhancement over time. The gradual development of the depth of an emotion depends on the fine balance between the distancing of self from others on the one hand, and on the other, our intimacy with them. Dewey described the ways in which deepened emotions gradually develop into that which is beyond feeling or affect.[16] In his account, increasingly deepened emotion "congeals" over time into a character formation. Thus deep emotions can tell us how an individual is, or has the possibility of being, not how they are feeling at precisely the moment we encounter them. So for example, someone is characteristically emotionally "cold" with members of a perceived socially inferior group, or happy in the company of children or perhaps, angry when encountering others whom she sees as socially advantaged. But the emotion has deepened to the point where it then becomes a characteristic orientation under specific circumstances. Dewey's discussion of the deepening of emotion yields the insight that emotions are deep to the extent that they return into the self or subject. His account of an emotion is that of an effort of adapting "formed habits" or co-ordinations of the past to present necessities which have been made known in perception, or as idea. Emotions deepen into habitual orientations. Emotional depth then can be seen as transformations in identity over time.

Of course the enhancement of emotional depth can only occur if we have sufficient privacy to be ourselves but at the same time recognize our basic connectedness to others. But we need to be cautious about what this actually means. The "management" of emotional depth is not unproblematic, for there is a sense in which there can be so much emotional depth achieved that we are quite overwhelmed by it, going in a sense, beyond feelings, and subsequently crossing over into a realm of non-feeling, which in terms of social life may lead to undesirable consequences such as blind allegiance to tyrannical and inhuman regimes, or to seductive and charismatic but unscrupulous leaders. In the case of civics education there is equally a requirement to avoid generating an over-emotionalized sense of citizenship (one which presents a banal, excessively sentimentalized conception of the relationship between citizens and their society) at the same time as there is a need to overcome the present remote and abstract notion of citizenship implicit in current documents.

## CONCLUSION

The time is ripe I think for a shift of emphasis in our theories of knowledge and learning towards the emotions and the affective domain. We need to rediscover the material, embodied roots of knowing. In terms of citizenship and civics education I think that Michel Maffesoli's notion of sociality as involving shared feelings and passions and "keeping warm together" is a good basis upon which to begin to articulate a more satisfactory account of civics knowledge and the role of the emotions.[17] More broadly, the notion of "intercorporeality" derived from Merleau-Ponty's work has potential for helping us better understand human interaction and cooperation. Dewey's insights into the nature and role of habituated behaviors in cementing social ties and reinforcing a sense of community is most important. Such work should encourage in our attempts at somatising education, at renewing our appreciation of experience in all its dimensions, lived life in all its material sociality.

\*\*\*For a response to this essay, see Hammond.

[1] Indeed, it may be that an essential aspect of socialization into a curriculum area is the tacit acceptance on the part of the learner that the issue of emotion is somehow involved in the designation of specific forms of knowledge as "hard" or "soft" in their mature form .

[2] Education for citizenship has been a major issue in Australian education in recent years, its proponents lamenting the demise of earlier kinds of "civics education." The apparent failure of young people to identify as Australian is often attributed to the deficiency in civics training. Needless to say there are complex political dimensions to the various debates, some of which are linked to a resurfacing of discourses about race, ethnicity, and immigration. The discussions had intensified throughout the latter part of 1996.

[3] This view which is somehow beyond perspective has been regarded as central to the conception of the detached scientific, emotionally neutral knower but has been the subject of major criticisms by feminist and postmodern writers and others.

[4] Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) and Iris M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990).

[5] Much of the thinking about the so-called "civics deficit" among young Australians arises as a response to an Australian National Opinion Poll which showed that significant proportions of young people were ignorant of "the facts" about such issues as the nature of the parliamentary system of government and the names of key figures in the Australian political landscape.

[6] Macintyre, S., Address to the Conference of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association, cited in "A tale of ignorance, reality, and megatrends," K. Kennedy in EQ Australia, Issue Spring 1996.

[7] There is, of course, contestation of what these "facts" of the history of Australian institutions are, especially on the part of indigenous writers and those working in the area of multiculturalism.

[8] In making this comment I do not want to imply that there are no risks in affirming emotionality. I am aware of the possibility of a lapse into excessive indulgence in the passions especially in social and political life. Certainly there is danger, but as Nietzsche saw without a recognition of the realm of affect there is no possibility of challenging and satisfying cultural and personal existence.

[9] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis, (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

[10] Each does this from within a different discursive framework, but there are in my view, major similarities in the way they deal with habituated practices and characteristic modes of dealing with one's world.

[11] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*.

[12] Thus in an important sense emotions cannot be merely private to the individual.

[13] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 130-36.

[14] As Nietzsche writes in *Zarathustra*, "body I am entirely and nothing else," 34.

[15] Thomas Eagleton, 1990, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 235).

[16] Naturally Dewey was aware that feelings differed in intensity and according to the significance of their object to us. Therefore some will affect us more deeply than others.

[17] Michel Maffesoli, *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society* (London: Sage Publications, 1996).

©1996-2004 PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION SOCIETY  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED