



Education in the North

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Foreword to the Special Issue

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Foreword

Many years ago, introducing a volume on *Education and Cultural Pluralism*, Maurice Craft showed that there are two distinct senses of the term 'education'. The first is familiar to all of us who have sat in a school classroom, as pupils, or who have stood up before the class to teach. This is the sense of the Latin verb *educare*, meaning to rear or to bring up, to instil a pattern of approved conduct and the knowledge that supports it. A variant etymology, however, traces the word to *educere*, from *ex* (out) + *ducere* (to lead). In this sense, education is a matter of leading novices *out* into a world that is continually unfolding, rather than – as it is conventionally taken to be today – instilling *in* to their minds the knowledge of a world that is already formed. Where in the first sense, education aims to place the learner in a position from which he or she can take a particular perspective on things, or to entertain a certain viewpoint, in the second sense it is just the opposite. It is about being pulled out of position, about *ex-posure*. And it is through such exposure, through being brought into the immediate presence of things – or opening up to them rather than taking a critical distance – that one learns. If the former is an induction into the rules and representations, or the 'intentional worlds' of a culture, the latter is an ex-duction (drawing out) of the learner into the world itself, as it is given to experience. This is an education not of intention but of *attention*.

Should our aim, in education, be to fill the minds of young people with the accumulated knowledge of the past, so that each generation can stand on the shoulders of its predecessors? Or should it be to empty their minds of prejudice and preconception in such a way that their eyes, ears and touch can be opened to the world, and to what it has to teach them? Should it be to educate as *educare* or as *educere*? Those who pretend to know too much about things, as indigenous people have so often reminded us, are inclined to see their own knowledge, and not the things themselves. Knowing all, they fail to recognise what is going on under their very noses. Today, with the benefits of literacy and information technology, we know more than at any time in history, yet it seems that the more we know, the less we understand. Never in the history of the world, indeed, has so much knowledge been coupled with so little wisdom. It is not that we should turn our backs on knowledge, and no-one would seriously advocate a return to medieval ignorance. The challenge is rather to restore the balance: between intention and attention, between an education that would equip novices with the skills to become masters in what they do, and one that would teach a humility and respect for the world around them, between induction and exposure.

In this, we have much to learn from the experience of the people of the North, whether of indigenous provenance or descended from later settlers or colonists. For in the education of every hunter, herdsman, fisherman or farmer – indeed of everyone who has drawn a livelihood from land or ocean – this balance has been at stake. We may speak, then, not just of education *in* the North, but of education *from* the North, consisting in ways of thinking about what it means to know, to learn and to teach that are rooted in environments, in movements and the places they make, and in lives and stories. Just as the West is everywhere, so too is the North. No part of the world has remained untouched by the western model of education, with its emphasis on progress, enlightenment and civilisation, and on the classroom as a dedicated space of learning sequestered from the world in which this learning is applied. But a northern model, centred on movement, environment and narrative, and on a learning that goes on in the doing, out of class and out of doors, has an equally world-wide salience, perhaps now more than ever before. The West has already been brought to the North, in the histories of colonisation and expanding statehood. It is time for the North to be brought to the West. This is why the University of Aberdeen has recently established 'The North' as one of four strategic, interdisciplinary themes in which to concentrate its research. The aim is to learn from the North and its people, and not just about them. And that aim, too, underscores this special issue of *Education in the North*.

Tim Ingold

Aberdeen, 28th May 2013