

***Pádraig Hogan******Mykhailo Boichenko***

## **Education as a calling and way of life: Interview with Doctor Pádraig Hogan**

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*This paper presents an interview with Pádraig Hogan – a prominent Irish educator and researcher in the field of pedagogy, well-known in the European Union and beyond it. This interview is an echo of discussions at an International Conference – The 9th Congress of the Philosophy of Education Society of Poland “Education and the State” on September 24-26 2001 in Krakow, organized by the Institute of Pedagogy at the Jagiellonian University, the B. F. Trentowsky Society of Philosophical Pedagogy, the Polish Philosophical Society and other authorities. Pádraig Hogan opened this Congress with a report “Uncovering Education as a Practice in its Own Right”. Pádraig Hogan is a Professor-Emeritus of the National University of Ireland Maynooth. He has a keen research interest in the quality of educational experience and in what makes learning environments conducive to fruitful learning. Now he is an active participant in several international scientific-educational researches. For a long period (from 2003) he was leader of the research and development programme ‘Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century’ (TL21), a schools-university initiative. His books include *The Custody and Courtship of Experience: Western Education in Philosophical Perspective* (1995); *The New Significance of Learning: Imagination’s Heartwork* (2010); *Towards a better Future: A Review of the Irish School System* (co-authored with J. Coolahan, S. Drudy, Á. Hyland and S. McGuinness, 2017). To date he has published over 130 research items, including books, journal articles, book chapters and commissioned pieces. This interview give answers on the questions about topicality of personal education, issues of educational experience, cognitive and emotional aspects of the communication of teacher and students, perspectives and limits of educational hermeneutics and the best maintenance of educational traditions.*

**Key words:** *education, educational experience, communication of teacher and students, educational hermeneutics, educational traditions.*

**Mykhailo Boichenko (MB):** In 1979 you began one of your first publications with a question in the title: “*The System or the Student? – A response to Seán Ó Conchobair*”. How would you answer this question now? Has your vision changed or does it remain the same, but with some modifications? Maybe your own experience of more than 40 years of teaching and educational research makes your answer different in some aspects?

**Pádraig Hogan (PH):** Yes, that response to Seán Ó Conchobair was one of my first published articles. I'll give a few details of the context here, so that I can answer the question properly. The article was jointly written with my late colleague Prof. John Coolahan. Mr Ó Conchobair was the Secretary General of the Department of Education of the Irish Government at that time, so he was a leading figure in the world of education in Ireland. His original article, to which ours was a response, was titled “The System or the Scholar?” That article presented his views on recent developments in teacher education, particularly the move from traditional two-year diploma courses to three-year degree-level courses. He did not aim to present a bureaucratic view, but he argued for some changes in the design of the new courses to achieve a better balance between the needs of students (“scholars”) and those of the system. He understood the needs of the student to be primarily those of personal education, and those of the system to be for a supply of teachers who were adequately trained for the requirements of the job. He saw a potential conflict between these two sets of needs in most of the newly-designed B.Ed. type courses.

John Coolahan and I considered however that his argument lacked an adequate conception of educational experience. Our own argument was that, in the absence of an *incisive and fertile conception of educational experience*, it is not possible to do justice to the needs of the student. Consequently the impersonal needs of the system would continually be granted priority, if only by default. The conflict of purposes that Mr Ó Conchobair perceived in the new courses was itself a symptom of that absence, notwithstanding the fact that the conflict was real enough in some of the new courses.

An adequately rich conception of educational experience would make it clear that it is chiefly *through* one's personal education that one becomes a teacher – of this kind or that (e.g. an inspiring teacher, or a boring one, or a bureaucratic one etc). As we put it in our response: “in designing the degree programme the essential *harmony* between personal education and teacher preparation should be envisaged and articulated from the start, before any conflict of purpose is allowed to manifest itself in the student teacher's experience as an undergraduate.”

I would approach this old question in a similar way today, more than four decades later. Of course, in the interval many things have changed utterly. For

instance, we now live in a world of digital communications and virtually all aspects of teaching and learning have been affected by the digital revolution that still continues apace. In many places today, teaching and learning are themselves viewed as a technology. To combat this disfigurement of educational experience we need to continue to reaffirm today, albeit in new and different ways, the kinds of arguments I began to make at the start of my work in teacher education and educational research.

**MB: It is very important for teachers to have a rich conception of educational experience. Is this something common among teachers, or is it a special task to understand properly a concept of educational experience so that the teacher's influence can work harmoniously with the student's interests?**

**PH:** It would be comforting to assume that all experiences of learning that take place in schools, colleges and universities are educationally nourishing. But we know this is not so. Indeed for many, such learning has been regularly boring, or frustrating, or even an irrelevance, rather than the enrichment of mind and heart that it is expected to be. Works of literature and drama, as well as the findings of educational research, have long provided examples of unfortunate or damaging experiences in schools. John Dewey has some perceptive comments to offer here, especially in his book *Experience and Education*, where he distinguishes between educational and mis-educational experiences. Mis-educational experience, he points out, arrests the growth of engagement between a student and the world of ideas and possibilities that might open up for him/her if the experience were properly fruitful. Dewey highlights the point that students never merely engage in cognitive action when teaching and learning take place. Students always take some *attitude* to what they learn, or what they are taught, even if they sometimes do so silently rather than through overt actions. For instance, it could be an attitude of liking or disliking, of eagerness or aversion, of delight or puzzlement, and so on. "Collateral learning" is what Dewey calls this attitudinal dimension; it is always there but not always explicit. He points out moreover that the enduring attitudes that are formed in collateral learning may be far more important in the long-run than whatever measure of success a student might achieve in tests and examinations. The most important attitude to cultivate, he adds, is that of the desire to go on learning. He stresses that it is crucial for teachers to attend closely to the collateral learning of their students. By doing so, teachers can use the insights gained through this perceptiveness to match the curriculum to the student's interests and aptitudes, and to be more alert to potential obstacles and pitfalls; in short, to arrange and plan for high-quality educational experiences. Such a discerning disposition on the part of the teacher is in itself the embodiment of a rich understanding of educational

experience. It also involves alert leadership and close monitoring of the teacher's own practice; a proficiency in self-evaluation. We could perhaps regard this kind of incisive action as a special task, as you have mentioned in the question; indeed teachers sometimes overlook it, or remain unaware of it. But I'd argue that such proactive leadership and monitoring are an essential part of the teacher's work as a capable practitioner.

**MB: To the students, the teacher is always, or almost always, an 'oldy' - someone from an older generation - even if he/she is only 25 years old. Should the teacher keep a distance, as a representative of an older generation, or should he/she identify fully with the students, thus making the experience of education one that is shared in common? Or is this something inappropriate, or even impossible?**

**PH:** Two brief comments to start with: Firstly, the relationship between teacher and students is different from a relationship between friends. Secondly, a teacher is a representative of an inheritance of learning – in maths, music, history etc. – rather than a representative of an older or younger age group.

A teacher, whether young or old, has a range of responsibilities that his/her or students don't have; responsibilities arising mainly from the kinds of leadership that yield a high quality of learning. At least this is the situation in formal education, and that is the context that we are dealing with here. These responsibilities call for informed action on the teacher's part in seeking to achieve high standards: in preparation and planning; in engaging students; in responsiveness and feedback; in the inclusion and even-handed treatment of diverse students; in regular evaluation of the students' learning and the teacher's own work, and so on. The teacher moreover needs to see the learning environment from both sides – something that can hardly be expected of the students. This double requirement for the teacher is complex, because seeing it from the students' side makes ever-changing demands on the teacher's perceptiveness and judgements as a lesson proceeds, and as different students participate, or fail to do so.

In regard to keeping a distance, I think it's more helpful to regard it as a matter of discernment in recognising and observing boundaries, just as we would expect of a doctor, or a nurse, or of other practitioners in their own fields. There can of course be warmth and humour in the encounter between teachers and students. Indeed these can help to make learning highly fruitful. But the teacher also needs reserves of firmness, compassion, perseverance and so on, in anticipating and negotiating interpersonal difficulties that inevitably arise. The example of Socrates in the early Platonic dialogues shows how challenges were approached by a real 'oldy' teacher and students who were typically youths – late-teens to mid-twenties. The learning experiences

in these early dialogues clearly embody relationships of learning rather than relationships of friendship. They are based on tasks of enquiry, sometimes difficult ones, to be pursued co-operatively. Thus, it is correct to speak here of an experience shared in common, but it is one shared by participants with different perspectives, different backgrounds, different abilities and different levels of experience. The teacher has to *orchestrate* these differences, insofar as possible, into a coherent and inclusive learning environment.

Finally, Socrates had to rely on his personal evocative capabilities to open up new landscapes of mind and heart for his students. By contrast, the digital resources that are available today give unprecedented opportunities to design and to provide highly imaginative educational experiences. But teaching itself is not a technology and there is no substitute for human qualities like those mentioned in the previous paragraph.

**MB: You have several publications on hermeneutics and teaching. Is there some special significance in hermeneutics for teaching and learning? Should we talk about special educational hermeneutics and its special tasks and special means? Could educational hermeneutics help to solve the issues of personal identity, motivation for learning or other similar problems?**

**PH:** The word 'hermeneutics' can be uninviting for many, so I use it less now than I did when I first studied the works of Gadamer, Heidegger, Ricoeur and others who are regarded as central figures in hermeneutic philosophy. But I haven't discarded the concerns, or the lessons to be learned, from such thinkers. Let me explain in a concrete way. The word 'hermeneutics' in contemporary philosophy refers to a range of insights that challenge traditional epistemologies. Such insights have a crucial importance for educators and for educational practice. It's these insights, rather than anything theoretical called 'hermeneutics', that have largely informed my own orientation in exploring questions of teaching and learning, and of educational practice more widely. Among the most important of these insights is the recognition that even the best efforts of human reason and intellect cannot achieve the certainty, the impartiality, the unshakeable foundations for knowledge, that epistemology sought from Descartes onwards. In fact, this acknowledgement is itself a consequence of another key insight, expressed by Gadamer in the words: 'it is not so much our judgements as it is our prejudgements that constitute us as human.' That is to say, we always understand *through* our *preconceptions*, our *presuppositions*, our *prejudgements* and so on. Such prior influences, including unconscious biases, act as filters that ceaselessly process and categorise what we experience. In doing so they decide (i.e. judge) what is to be significant for us and what is not. They make us *predisposed* to embrace this and to reject that; to act on this, to postpone that, to avoid the other. Without this background of influences, interwoven as they are in the unfolding

history of our experiences, our effort to understand couldn't get started. This point remains equally true of the student in an infant class and the student in the graduate class; of the salesperson and the research scientist. These and similar insights have often been criticised as relativistic, but in fact they make us acknowledge human limitations that are simply inescapable. Such insights are now increasingly accepted by different traditions and fields of philosophy, including metaphysics, ethics and philosophy of mind, pragmatist and analytic philosophy, as well as the many currents of European Continental philosophy.

A discipline of critical self-reflection is necessary to bring such prior influences to light and to scrutinise them, with a view to justifying, or revising, or abandoning them. This discipline will not, of course, bring those who practise it to a supreme vantage point of objectivity, above all historical and social perspectives. But – and this is the important point – it can make advances toward more universal, or less parochial, standpoints by enabling participants to invite scrutiny of their best ideas, beliefs and theories to date. That is to say, the practice of such a discipline can build genuine communities of learning where differences and tensions can be illuminated and investigated to mutual benefit. It can do so moreover in anything that's properly called a subject or field of study – i.e. geography, science, religion, literature etc. where there is an ongoing inheritance of learning to be *encountered* and *opened up*, not just transmitted. Such a discipline can be promoted through regular reading and self-reflection. But I think an invaluable way to cultivate it is through renewed and sustained dialogue with others; not just any kind of dialogue, but dialogue that is constructive and well-focused, as well as critical in character.

Collective efforts of this kind define for me the most promising forms of educational practice and they are particularly appropriate to the education of teachers. I stress the importance of this because over many years I've observed how the experience of engaging regularly in such a discipline enables student teachers, including experienced teachers in professional development courses, to transform their understanding and their practice. For example, issues like motivation and personal identity, which you mention in your question, take on a more promising complexion when learning itself is approached as a matter of encounter rather than a matter of transmission.

**MB: A significant and honest answer. Thank you. Now I'll move on to the next and the last question for this interview. Every period of mankind's history left its own image of education. For primitive society it was mythology; ancient Greeks gave us paideia; in the Middle Ages education was a servant to the confession of Faith; the Renaissance opened the humanism of education as an art of education; the Enlightenment put forward education as a general civic obligation; capitalism took education as a part of training the worker for production of goods and**

**services; the leisure society transforms education in joyful game in tolerance. What image has education now and for a future?**

**PH:** The brief historical survey you have provided takes in a large and varied range. Indeed some further contrasting priorities could also be included. But what you have said illustrates that in different ages education was viewed as means to promote some set of preferred values, beliefs and capabilities, all for the supposed betterment of individuals and of the society more generally. But a critic might allege here that these examples just show that, throughout history, dominant groups were using education to further their own interests: those who advocated *paideia* (the cultivation of excellence of mind and body, of spirit and character) never included the poor, or slaves, or indeed females, in their lofty considerations; the medieval Church was inclined in the first and last instance to serve the interests of the ecclesiastical institution; the same kind of self-propagation remains true of capitalist and Marxist parties in their stances on education.

There is much truth in such criticisms I believe, but they don't capture the whole story. The spotlight the criticisms place on self-advancement by dominant groups also tends to overshadow the point that there might still be something valuable in what such groups were seeking to promote. For instance, Plato has been much criticised for the restrictions he built into the *paideia* ideal in books like *Republic* and *Laws*, especially things like censorship and prohibitions for the arts, and the associated surveillance of educators. But this should not eclipse the point that there may still be something educationally inspiring and worthy in some universal sense in some of Plato's educational insights. Take for instance the renowned similes of the sun, the divided line and the cave. Or to take another example, the historical record shows that prominent Marxist regimes like the USSR and China have routinely used education as an instrument of indoctrination. Characteristically, such regimes have also insisted that all educational endeavours – including research as well as practice – must comply with the state ideology. But such disfigurements should not blind anyone to the fact that Marxist traditions provide valuable sources for a penetrating analysis of how schooling can cultivate and reproduce deeply-rooted inequities and exclusions.

The fact remains that history has few examples of education being regarded as *a practice in its own right*, as distinct from a subordinate arm of the state, church, or party. The most striking example perhaps is that of Socrates, as disclosed in the early dialogues of Plato (e.g. *Apology*, *Euthyphro*, *Gorgias*, *Protagoras*, *Republic* Bk. I), in marked contrast to the Socrates that features in the middle and later dialogues. A careful study of the educational encounters in the early dialogues reveals that Socrates had already come upon the insight that it is through our presuppositions, our prior influences, that we understand anything. Critical dialogue can help its participants to

bring such predisposing influences to light, and to understand more clearly and more wisely, but “real wisdom” remains elusive and is probably not attainable by human beings (Apology, 23a). Not until Gadamer’s writings in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century was this insight to become fully explicit, and henceforth a central theme in Western philosophy. Regrettably, in the history of Western learning a Socratic educational heritage was largely eclipsed by various forms of Platonist and Aristotelian metaphysics. It was also neglected by the epistemological successor of metaphysics – the quest for unshakeable certainty – from the Enlightenment onwards. Yet this original Socratic heritage was never quite extinguished. There are evocative suggestions of it in notable figures like Heloise – even more so than in Abelard – in Erasmus, Montaigne and Kierkegaard, to mention just a handful.

The full flourishing of such a tradition has better prospects where societies are genuinely democratic. Such a flourishing is what I believe education, as a distinct and fertile practice, must continually aspire to realise, notwithstanding the obstacles that will continually be placed in its path.

***Педрег Хоган, Михайло Бойченко. Освіта як покликання і спосіб життя: Інтерв'ю з доктором Падрейгом Хоганом. 19 жовтня – 17 грудня 2021 року***

У цій статті представлено інтерв'ю з Педрегом Хоганом – видатним ірландським педагогом і дослідником у галузі педагогіки, відомим у Європейському Союзі та за його межами. Це інтерв'ю є відгомінном дискусій на міжнародній конференції – 9-му з'їзді Товариства філософії освіти Польщі «Освіта і держава» 24-26 вересня 2001 р. у Кракові, організованій Інститутом педагогіки Ягеллонського університету. Товариство філософської педагогіки імені Б. Ф. Трентовського, Польське філософське товариство та інші органи влади. Педрег Хоган відкрив цей конгрес доповіддю «Розкриття освіти як власної практики». Педрег Хоган — почесний професор Національного університету Ірландії Мейнут. Він має великий дослідницький інтерес до якості освітнього досвіду та того, що робить навчальне середовище сприятливим для плідного навчання. Зараз він є активним учасником кількох міжнародних науково-освітніх досліджень. Тривалий період (з 2003 р.) був керівником програми досліджень і розробок «Навчання та навчання для 21-го століття» (TL21), ініціативи «школи-університет». Його книги включають «Опіка і приваблення досвіду: західна освіта у філософській перспективі» (1995); «Нове значення навчання: сердечна робота уяви» (2010); «На шляху до кращого майбутнього: огляд ірландської шкільної системи» (у співавторстві з Дж. Кулаханом, С. Друді, А. Хайлендом і С. МакГіннесом, 2017). На сьогоднішній день він опублікував понад 130 наукових праць, включаючи книги, журнальні статті, розділи книг та статті на замовлення. Це інтерв'ю дає відповіді на питання про актуальність особистісної освіти, питання освітнього досвіду, когнітивні та емоційні аспекти спілкування викладача



та студентів, перспективи та межі освітньої герменевтики та найкраще збереження освітніх традицій.

**Ключові слова:** освіта, освітній досвід, спілкування вчителя та учнів, освітня герменевтика, освітні традиції.

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