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4 Education for shalom: dimensions of a relational pedagogy

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Introduction: the need to reconnect with purpose

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Katya is a thoughtful 13-year-old student in a large school in Kiev. Her older brother, Vanya, is in the Ukrainian army and there has been no word from him now for over a week. She tries to forget her worries about him and the ongoing war by focusing on her studies. The subject for the first lesson of the day is Mathematics, and this is one of Katya's favourite subjects. The teacher is enthusiastic for the subject but strict in her approach to classroom life and distant in her relationships with her students. Katya wants to talk with others, not about the war, but about the mathematical topic before them. However, talking to others is not allowed in this class. English Language comes next. Katya finds languages difficult, but she enjoys the opportunities this teacher gives everyone to practise their English with one another. The teacher is relaxed and fun-loving, and he relates easily with all the students as he moves around the room. History comes next, and this takes the form of a lecture, delivered with little expression by a teacher who seems to be disconnected from what he is saying and disconnected from the students before him, who are all scribbling their lecture notes in complete silence.

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With school finished for the day, Katya walks home to her mother's apartment at the end of the morning, still trying not to think about Vanya and the war, still attempting to focus on her studies. She wonders what it is all for. How does it all connect together? How does Mathematics relate to History or to Language or the other subjects of the school curriculum? It all leads to a good job when you leave school, or so her mother and teachers seem to be saying. It all helps the national economy, they say, and the government and media seem to agree. But the nation is divided and people are killing each other; somehow, to Katya's mind, job prospects and economic issues seem trivial in the face of such suffering. Why can't people get on with one another? What have classes in Mathematics, English and History got to do with learning to live together in peace, with or without prosperity? Can her teachers help? Is the way they teach something to do with it?

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With her own family's and nation's problems such a concern to her, Katya does not ask whether it might be different elsewhere in the world. Doubtless, the experiences of Mary in Dublin or Mahmoud in Doha, Banji in Lusaka or Raquel

in Lima would differ significantly from that of Katya in Kiev and from one another. 1
In more peaceful contexts than that of Ukraine, they may be more concerned 2
about environmental issues than civil war. However, if they share her questions 3
about connectedness, both within the curriculum and among people, and about 4
connection with the overall purpose of the education they are experiencing, it is 5
not likely that these questions will be receiving much attention in discussions 6
of education in their schools or their national contexts. Policy-makers and 7
educationalists in general are more likely to be preoccupied with their country's 8
position in international comparison studies such as PISA (Programme for 9
International Student Assessment) than with the overall purposes of education. 10
School leaders and teachers are more likely to focus on their school's performance 11
in relation to other schools. 12

Katya's questions are lost sight of in what Gert Biesta (2009) has called 'an 13
age of measurement', an age not limited to the Western world but one that is 14
having global impact through PISA and similar studies. Biesta (2009, p.34) argues 15
that preoccupation with the measurement of educational outcomes is having 16
a profound influence on research that seeks to provide an evidence-base for 17
educational practice and also on practice itself, 'from the highest levels of 18
educational policy at national and supra-national level down to the practices 19
of local schools and teachers'. He questions 'whether we are indeed measuring 20
what we value, or whether we are just measuring what we can easily measure and 21
thus end up valuing what we (can) measure' (Biesta, 2009, p.35). 22

This loss of sight of issues of ultimate value and overall purpose is partly due, 23
Biesta (2009, p.36) says, to what he terms 'the "learnification" of education: 24
the transformation of educational vocabulary into a language of learning'. 25
He highlights two problematic aspects of this: 26

One is that 'learning' is basically an individualistic concept. It refers to what 27
people, as individuals do – even if it is couched in such notions as collabor- 28
ative or cooperative learning. This stands in stark contrast to the concept 29
of 'education' which always implies a relationship: someone educating some- 30
one else and the person educating thus having a certain sense of what the 31
purpose of his or her activities is. The second problem is that 'learning' is 32
basically a process term. It denotes processes and activities but is open – if 33
not empty – with regard to content and direction. This helps to explain why 34
the rise of the new language of learning has made it more difficult to ask 35
questions about content, purpose and direction of education. 36

(Biesta, 2009, pp.38–39) 37

When there is an absence of explicit attention to questions of value and 38
purpose, there can be implicit acceptance of a 'common sense' view of the aims 39
of education. Biesta comments: 40

We have to bear in mind, however, that what appears as 'common sense' 41
often serves the interests of some groups (much) better than those of others. 42
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1 The prime example of a common sense view about the purpose of education
 2 is the idea that what matters most is academic achievement in a small number
 3 of curricular domains, particularly language, science and mathematics – and
 4 it is this common sense view which has given so much credibility to studies
 5 such as TIMMS, PIRLS and PISA.

6 (Biesta, 2009, p.37)
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8 In this chapter, I seek to respond to the need to reconnect with the purpose of
 9 education by proposing that in the idea of shalom we can find an aim that answers
 10 Katya's questions and is not beset by the problems of learnification, individualism
 11 and exclusive focus on measurable outcomes identified by Gert Biesta.

12 My proposal has its source within a particular worldview, one that is by no
 13 means universally accepted in our plural world, but it is offered as a contribution
 14 to ongoing discussion of the ends of education in the hope that it may contain
 15 insights of general interest, including to those who may not share the set of basic
 16 values and beliefs that characterise that worldview. This is not to suggest that the
 17 differences in ultimate commitment themselves are beyond rational discussion:
 18 indeed, I have argued at length elsewhere to the contrary (Shortt, 1991), but that
 19 is not the focus of this chapter.
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21 **Shalom and knowing of the third kind**

22 'Shalom' is a Hebrew word that is often translated as 'peace'. However, if we
 23 understand 'peace' as it is generally understood in our current English language
 24 usage as freedom from or cessation of war or violence or, alternatively, as an inner
 25 emotional or mental tranquillity, we fall very far short of the full and positive
 26 meaning of shalom.
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28 Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann (1976, p.185) says that shalom
 29 'conveys a sense of personal wholeness in a community of justice and caring that
 30 addresses itself to the needs of all humanity and all creation'. Cornelius Plantinga
 31 writes of shalom as:
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33 the webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfilment,
 34 and delight . . . Shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness and delight –
 35 a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts
 36 fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator
 37 and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights.
 38 Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be.

39 (Plantinga, 1995, p.10)
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41 Nicholas Wolterstorff defines shalom in terms of relationships of four kinds
 42 and writes:

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 44 Shalom is present when a person dwells at peace in all his or her relationships:
 45 with God, with self, with fellows, with nature . . . To dwell in shalom is to

enjoy living before God, to enjoy living in one's physical surroundings, to
 enjoy living with one's fellows, to enjoy life with oneself.

(Wolterstorff, 2002, p.101)

These and other accounts show that the meaning of shalom as used in the Old
 Testament is wide-ranging and includes wholeness, community, justice, caring,
 flourishing, delight, well-being, soundness and integrity. Shalom is relational
 and is therefore a matter of what could be termed 'knowing of the third kind'.
 Whereas Gilbert Ryle (1949, pp.28–32) distinguished between 'knowing that'
 and 'knowing how', this is knowing with a direct object, knowing a person, place
 or thing.

The three kinds of knowing are related. Some 'knowing that' is necessary for
 relational knowing for it would be strange to claim to know a person and not be
 able to state some facts about her or him even though the facts that we state may
 not be exactly the same as those stated by somebody else who also knows that
 person. At the same time, it is possible to make an in-depth study of facts about
 a person and still not be justified in claiming to know that person. In a similar way,
 some interpersonal skills may also be necessary for relational knowing but they
 cannot be sufficient for it because we may know to some extent how to relate
 appropriately to a person without actually knowing that person. Relational
 knowing cannot be reduced to either 'knowing that' or 'knowing how' or
 even to a combination of the two. Something more is required by way of a
 direct acquaintance with or immediate awareness of the person, place or thing
 that is known.

These distinctions among kinds of knowing are reflected in many languages.
 In French, for example, relational knowing is 'connaître' while 'savoir' is used
 for both 'knowing that' and 'knowing how'. German distinguishes usages
 even further for it has different words for all three kinds of knowing – 'wissen'
 (know that), 'können' (know how) and 'kennen' (know a person or place). In
 contrast with the distinctions made in contemporary languages, the Hebrew
 conception of knowledge was strongly relational. The word used almost always
 in the Old Testament for knowing of any kind is 'yada'. This is the word used
 when intimate sexual relations are written about in terms of 'knowing' a man
 or a woman. The same word is used for knowledge of God. Knowing God is
 not merely an awareness of his existence but a recognition of who he is and
 of his demands upon the obedience of those who know him. The opposite of
 knowing God is not ignorance of him but a turning away from him in sinful
 rebellion.

Persons in relation

As we have seen above, Wolterstorff defines shalom in terms of relational knowing
 of other people, of the physical world, of God and of oneself. In similar but less
 explicitly religious terms, John Fisher gives an account of what he terms the four
 'domains of human existence: relation with self, in the Personal domain; relation

1 with others, in the Communal domain; relation with the environment, in the
 2 Environmental domain; and relation with Transcendent Other, in the
 3 Transcendental domain'. He goes on to say of the Transcendental domain that it
 4 is to do with: 'relationship of self with some-thing or some-One beyond the
 5 human level, i.e. ultimate concern, cosmic force, transcendent reality, or God . . .
 6 involves faith toward, adoration and worship of, the source of Mystery of the
 7 universe' (Fisher, 2000, p.43).

8 In the remainder of this chapter, I will focus mainly on education for shalom
 9 in the communal and environmental domains with some brief comments on
 10 shalom as relation with God/Transcendent Other. For the sake of space, I will
 11 leave shalom-ful relation with self to one side, except to suggest that it may be,
 12 to a large extent, a result of getting the other three kinds of relation right.

13 I turn first to the communal domain, that of relation with other human beings,
 14 as a domain that is of central and obvious significance for teaching and learning.
 15 In their joint contribution in the opening pages of a book entitled *No Education*
 16 *Without Relation*, the authors say this:

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 18 [E]ducation is not mainly about the facts that students stuff into their
 19 heads . . . education is not mainly about developing thinking skills . . .
 20 education is primarily about human beings who need to meet together, as a
 21 group of people, if learning is to take place . . . learning is primarily about
 22 human beings who meet. Meeting and learning are inseparable.

23 (Bingham et al., 2004, p.5)

24
 25 In similar vein, Parker Palmer (1998, p.16) quotes Martin Buber's statement
 26 that 'all real living is meeting', and he relates this immediately to education by
 27 adding that 'teaching is endless meeting'. Again, also in similar vein, Brueggemann
 28 (1976, p.167) says that 'learning is meeting' and goes on to point out that this
 29 poses problems for our usual way of thinking that education is for competence:
 30 'We are learning slowly and late that education for competence without education
 31 as meeting promises us deadly values and scary options'.

32 All of this is based in a particular view of human being and nature which finds
 33 expression, for example, in poet John Donne's talk of no person being an island
 34 or, more positively, in the usual English translation of the word 'Ubuntu' as used
 35 by the Xhosa people of southern Africa: I am because we are.

36 Rowan Williams, drawing upon the small but very significant body of work of
 37 Russian writer Vladimir Lossky, writes of 'an essential mysteriousness' about the
 38 notion of the person in the human world which is about the place the person
 39 occupies in terms of being 'the point where the lines of relationship intersect'.
 40 He continues:

41
 42 To be the point where lines of a relationship intersect means that we can't
 43 simply lift some abstract thing called 'the person' out of it all. We're talking
 44 about a reality in which people enter into the experience, the aspiration, the
 45 sense of self, of others. And that capacity to live in the life of another – to

have a life in someone else's life – is part of the implication of this profound mysteriousness about personal reality.

(Williams, 2013, pp.12–13)

This view of the human being and human nature is quite far removed from the Cartesian rationalist view that was dominant in philosophy of education in the mid to late 1900s and is still quite influential in spite of the postmodern shift that has taken place since. In those days, the development of the individual student's rational autonomy was widely accepted as the central aim of education and a 552-page volume appeared with the title of *Education and the Development of Reason* (Dearden, Hirst and Peters, 1972). In a paper published just a few years after that book, Paul Hirst (1979, pp.101–102) discusses propositional knowledge (knowing-that), procedural knowledge (knowing-how) and what I have termed knowledge of the third kind, and he concludes that knowledge of people, places or things is always reducible to knowing-how and knowing-that plus 'another non-knowledge element' that he does not define any further.

Relatively unknown at that time was the personalist philosophy of John Macmurray whose work was mostly written in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s and who now, nearly 40 years after his death, is coming to be seen as a philosopher for the twenty-first century. Macmurray argued that we should move from the isolated self of rationalist philosophy to see the self in relation to the Other:

I exist as an individual only in a personal relation to other individuals. Formally stated, 'I' am one term in the relation 'You and I' which constitutes both the 'I' and the 'You'. But within this relation, which constitutes my existence, I can isolate myself from you in intention, so that my relation to you becomes impersonal. In this event, I treat you as object, refusing the personal relationship.?

(Macmurray, 1961, p.28)

This is very similar to Martin Buber's talk of 'I and Thou' (Buber, 1970) but seems to have been arrived at independently by the less widely-known Macmurray. According to Macmurray's biographer, John E. Costello, they knew each other, and Buber was an admirer of Macmurray's work and is quoted as saying to him, 'I see no difference between us . . . it is simply that you are the metaphysician and I am the poet' (Costello, 2002, p.322). Buber and Macmurray said very similar things about persons in relation with other persons but there is, I think, a significant difference between them: Buber gave attention to our relationship with the physical environment in a way that Macmurray with his focus on relations between persons does not seem to have done. It is to this relationship I turn in the next section.

Partnership with the otherness of the world

The title of this section is a phrase used by Parker Palmer that shows the influence of Buber upon his thinking. Buber (1970) famously distinguished

1 between I-You (Thou) and I-It relationships. At first sight, it might seem that
 2 I-You relationships are relationships with other people and I-It relationships are
 3 relationships with things in the physical world, but this is far from what Buber
 4 intends by the distinction. Our relationships with both our fellow human beings
 5 and with things in the world can be both I-You and I-It and, indeed, should be
 6 both provided, always that the I-You relationship remains the primary one. We
 7 can experience a person or thing as an object or we can relate to the person or
 8 thing as an Other subject. It is not that we are not to be objective but to be
 9 exclusively objective and detached, i.e., always in I-It mode, is to be objectivist.

10 Buber gives an example of observing a tree in a range of I-It modes and
 11 encountering it in an I-You relation:

12 I can accept it as a picture . . . I can feel it as movement . . . I can assign it to
 13 a species and observe it as an instance . . . I can overcome its uniqueness and
 14 form so rigorously that I recognize it only as an expression of the law . . . I
 15 can dissolve it into a number, into a pure relation between numbers, and
 16 eternalize it. Throughout all of this the tree remains my object and has its
 17 place and its time span, its kind and condition. But it can also happen, if will
 18 and grace are joined, that as I contemplate the tree I am drawn into a rela-
 19 tion, and the tree ceases to be an It . . . This does not require me to forego
 20 any of the modes of contemplation. There is nothing that I must not see
 21 in order to see, and there is no knowledge that I must forget. Rather is
 22 everything, picture and movement, species and instance, law and number
 23 included and inseparably fused.

24 (Buber, 1970, pp.57–58)

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 26 Esther Meek (2011, p.262) likens the movement between I-It and I-You to
 27 the rhythm of breathing. She also makes a distinction between what she terms the
 28 ‘looking’ of the I-It relation and the ‘seeing’ of the I-You relation (2011, p.463):
 29 ‘*Looking* is passive, across a space, non-interactive . . . By contrast, seeing is active
 30 and interactive, a kind of interpenetration . . . embodied . . . a phenomenon of
 31 love, or reveling. It attends, gazes, and soaks in.’

32 Buber (1970, pp.56–57) says that we may ‘encounter the You in all spheres of
 33 life’ including our relationships with nature as well as with one another and with
 34 God: ‘In every You we address the eternal You, in every sphere according to its
 35 manner’. This is not a pantheism that identifies God with the world. Meek (2011,
 36 p.381) says that reality is gift and is therefore ‘metonymously personal . . . fraught
 37 with the personal, imbued with the dynamic interpersonal relationship which
 38 contexts it, yet freely distinct from Giver and recipient’.

39 The I-You relationship with the world should be characterised by love and care
 40 rather than a desire for mastery and control. Palmer urges us to practise knowing
 41 as a form of love so that we may enter this ‘partnership with the otherness of the
 42 world’, and he continues:

43
 44 By finding our place in the ecosystem of reality, we might see more clearly
 45 which actions are life-giving and which are not – and in the process participate

more fully in our own destinies, and the destiny of the world, then we do in our drive for control.

(Palmer 1998, p.56)

We are indeed placed in ‘the ecosystem of reality’. If Ubuntu’s ‘I am because we are’ is a way of saying that we are persons in relation, then perhaps we can express something of this partnership with the physical world as ‘I am (and we are) because the physical world is’. We are embodied beings, made of the dust of the earth or, as some put it, made of stardust.

Buber, Meek, Macmurray and Palmer all share a belief in a God who is personal and who is the Transcendental Other encountered in relation with nature. They could add a third Ubuntu-like ‘I am . . .’: ‘I am (and we are) because God is’. This is the relation that they believe makes all other relationships meaningful. They relate to the world as being, as Gerard Manley Hopkins put it, ‘charged with the grandeur of God’.

However, many people in our plural world do not believe in a personal God, so does this talk of partnership with otherness contain any insights for them? I think it can. In spiritual but less explicitly religious terms, this encounter with the You in nature can perhaps be described as being with the ‘moreness’ that Dwayne Huebner (1991, p.15) writes about: ‘There is more than we know, can know, will ever know. It is a “moreness” that takes us by surprise when we are at the edge and end of our knowing’.

Conclusion: teaching for shalom

The questions running around in Katya’s mind about her school studies raise the need to reconnect with purpose in education. I have suggested that the Hebrew idea of shalom can help us in our search for ultimate values and overall purpose. Shalom is about community, connectedness and flourishing and resonates with the common good, an idea that has a long history as far back as Aristotle. What the even older idea of shalom has that is absent in the common good as usually defined are the interests of the natural world. Partnership with the otherness of the world is rather more than care for the environment because it promotes human flourishing: shalom involves relationship with it for its own sake.

What could all this mean for the teachers and students in Katya’s school in Kiev, Mary’s in Dublin, Mahmoud’s in Dubai, Banji’s in Lusaka or Raquel’s in Lima? What might a relational pedagogy look like if rooted in shalom?

Connectedness is, I think, a key characteristic. One of Katya’s teachers is connected with her subject but not, apparently, with her students. Another appears to really enjoy being with his students and is probably also enthusiastic about his subject. A third is clearly disconnected from both subject and students. Palmer (1998, p.115) says that ‘connectedness is the principle behind good teaching’. Not only is it the case that, as he puts it (1998, p.1), ‘we teach who we

1 are' as we relate to those among whom we teach and learn, but we also need to
 2 be connected with what we are teaching. He (1998, p.107) writes:

3
 4 [O]ur conventional images of educational community ignore our relation-
 5 ships with the great things that call us together – the things that call us to
 6 know, to teach, to learn . . . By 'great things' I mean the subjects around
 7 which the circle of seekers has always gathered – not the disciplines that
 8 study these subjects, not the texts that talk about them, not the theories that
 9 explain them, but the things themselves. I mean the genes and ecosystems
 10 of biology, the symbols and referents of philosophy and theology, the
 11 archetypes of betrayal and forgiveness and loving and loss that are the stuff
 12 of literature . . . the artifacts and lineages of anthropology, the materials of
 13 engineering with their limits and potentials, the logic of systems in manage-
 14 ment, the shapes and colors of music and art, the novelties and patterns of
 15 history, the elusive idea of justice under law.

16
 17 Connectedness is not only between and among teachers and students and
 18 between them and the great things of the subjects they are teaching and studying,
 19 it is also across the curriculum. Katya is puzzled about the wholeness and inter-
 20 relatedness of her studies. Teaching for shalom-ful wholeness requires teachers
 21 to work together to provide an integrated curriculum in their schools, colleges
 22 and universities. Individual teachers can take their students across subject-
 23 area boundaries in their teaching of their own specialism. Take Francis Su for
 24 example. He is a mathematics professor in California (and also a song-writer
 25 and currently President of the Mathematical Association of America) who seeks
 26 to cultivate in his students 'a mathematical yawp . . . that expression of surprise
 27 or delight at discovering the beauty of a mathematical idea or argument' and help
 28 them to transform it into poetry (Su, 2010, p.760). Another example is a unit
 29 entitled 'Art meets Science' in Charis Science, one of the products of the
 30 Charis Project, in which teachers are encouraged to help their students to explore
 31 Joseph Wright's 18th century paintings *The Alchymist* and *An Experiment on a*
 32 *Bird in the Air Pump* as part of their study of the nature of science (Shortt, 2000,
 33 pp.21–28).

34 Humility is another characteristic of teaching for shalom. In his book *Exiles*
 35 *from Eden*, Mark Schwehn (1993, p.49) says, 'Some degree of humility is a
 36 precondition for learning'. I would add that it is also a precondition of good
 37 teaching. Teaching for shalom-ful I-You relationships with one another and with
 38 our physical environment calls for humility before the Otherness of our fellow
 39 human beings and the Otherness of the natural world, the 'moreness' that leads
 40 us to acknowledge that there is always more to know, more than we can ever
 41 know. Knowing is always coming to know. As Palmer (1998, p.108) puts it,
 42 'humility is the only lens through which great things can be seen – and once we
 43 have seen them, humility is the only posture possible'.

44 Love and care are also important characteristics. If, as Palmer argues, knowing
 45 is a form of love and if learning is coming to know then learning is falling in love.

The relational teacher is therefore not so much, as Plato said Socrates saw himself to be, a midwife in the service of ideas as she is a matchmaker who introduces the to-be-lover to the to-be-loved in the hope that the falling in love of learning takes place. Wittgensteinian philosopher D.Z. Phillips (1970, p.163) said that the teaching of religious beliefs is a matter of ‘elucidation . . . displaying a thing of beauty’. Teaching that something is beautiful involves talking about it and drawing attention to its features in the hope that learners will come to see for themselves. I would suggest that this is true right across the curriculum and not only in religious education.

There is much more that could be said about relational pedagogy that promotes shalom e.g., the importance of listening in dialogue with the Other and the place of silence, but I hope that I have covered some of the key characteristics here.

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