

Economy of ‘Beyond the Self’: Teacher Education in and as Higher Education

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*The purpose of this study is to examine the picture of higher education described in Paul Standish’s *Beyond the Self*. Standish notes that the language of the open-ended approach to education bypasses the dichotomy of liberal and vocational education. Focusing on the chapter ‘Towards an Economy of Higher Education’, I will explore the possibility and plausibility of the open-ended approach by applying it to the realities and practices of teacher education in colleges. In this regard, I will discuss the nature and peculiarity of the education of the closed economy as the background of a separation of teacher education into what is called solely practical and purely theoretical. Accordingly, this study highlights the fact that Standish takes Henry David Thoreau’s experiment in Walden as a ‘good example’. It exemplifies the practice of an alternative economy, to the extent that it goes beyond the limitations of the conventional language of economy.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Paul Standish’s *Beyond the Self*, originally published in 1992 in his native language, is about to be reborn. A decade and a half later, the project of translating and publishing it has been carried out in Kyoto, Japan. Born twice, *Beyond the Self* transcends the change of the centuries, the shores of the oceans, and the barrier of language. Although readers can treasure the longevity of the book’s argument, they can also cherish the changes that have been made through the process of publication in Japan. Standish mentions that, in addition to the changes of the subtitle (from *Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and the Limits of Language* to *Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Levinas*), ‘[t]he chapters in the original text had been reworked and edited, and three additional chapters, plus a new introduction, were to be added’ (Standish, 2008, p. 1). A newly included chapter is ‘Towards an Economy of Higher Education’, which I will highlight in this paper.¹

Specifically examining this chapter on higher education, I will examine the picture of higher education portrayed in Paul Standish’s *Beyond the Self*. Standish notes that the language of the open-ended approach to education bypasses the dichotomy of liberal and vocational education (Standish, 2005, p. 67). Its application to the realities and practices of teacher education in colleges and in professional training, will facilitate exploration of the possibility and plausibility of an open-ended approach in the face of the crisis that results from the dominance of the closed economy in education. In the process of exploring Standish’s notion of the two economies in higher education,

this paper highlights a predicament in which teachers are stuck: the absurd situation wherein they are alienated from engaging in their own continued education.

II. TWO ECONOMIES AND TEACHER EDUCATION

'Two economies' of education: first, Paul Standish's definition of that idea must be clarified. In 'Toward an Economy of Higher Education,' a distinction of the two forms of economy is presented. One is an economy in which all relationships and interactions are understood in terms of exchange (Standish, 2005, pp. 53-54). The other is a different kind of economy, which Standish designates as an open-ended approach to education, or an economy of excess (pp. 55; 62). In the management and administration of schools where the closed economy rules, the ideas of teaching and learning are naively assumed to be the trading and accounting of knowledge that is commodified (pp. 68-69). Resisting this tendency, Standish suggests that the content of the curriculum and the manner of teaching be kept open to the possibilities and infinite nature of learning and learners (pp. 69-70).

After stating the distinctions of two economies, Standish continues to critique the current direction of higher education. He argues that, as long as thinking about higher education is confined within the economy of exchange, the understanding of what it is to teach and learn in a university is impoverished. The understanding is impoverished because they cannot have a viewpoint to counteract the confusion that is endemic in the system of higher education. The confusion here is, for example, that a university's management and administration extol the virtues of freedom of globally networked activity while reinforcing centralized control in terms of funding and so forth (*ibid.*, p. 69).

The confusion depicted by Standish resonates with the situation of teacher education in today's Japan. Manabu Sato argues that Japanese teacher education reform since the 1980s has been inclined to neglect the model of the teacher as an autonomous professional and reinforce that of teachers as public servants and as technicians (Standish, 1992, p. 166). Although the two latest models share the same root of the economy of exchange, they are mutually at odds at a practical level: the centralized bureaucracy cannot come with a globalized free-market. Here again, management and administration of higher education serve to change education without overcoming the confusion but rather fueling it.

As a result of impoverished understanding of teaching and learning, schoolteachers are alienated from engaging in their own continued education and alienated from their teaching practices. According to some researchers, teachers are exhausted by daily logistics, such as administrative work, coaching club activities, dealing with the growing demands of parents and students, and so forth (Gordon, 2005, p. 464; Kudomi, 1999, p. 69; Sato and Asanuma, 2000, pp. 125-26). Looking back, all teachers used to be students of their own academic areas, mathematics, English, pedagogy, etc. The reality is that they are so busy with daily chores that they cannot even read a single book and make progress along their own path of learning.

How could this absurdity in teacher education be alleviated? In other words, how might we reclaim a place for learning without being confined within the closed economy and its inherent instabilities? I specifically examine the nature and peculiarity of the education of the closed economy as the background of a separation of teacher education into what is called solely practical and purely theoretical. Teachers are not allowed to learn because it is not directly connected with the efficiency of their

performance in school. At the same time, their teaching is disturbed by trivial jobs because they are compelled to assume a growing workload under the terms of market economy such as accountability, profitability, etc. The underlying assumption of the teachers' predicament is the dominance of efficiency, the leading logic of the closed economy. The nature of instabilities of the closed economy is connected to this overemphasis on efficiency. The efficiency-based education tends to neglect what is considered as 'inefficient'. The administration and management of higher education judge what is efficient and inefficient based on, of course, their conception of efficiency and inefficiency. The trick here is that any person or institution has only limited conception. The overemphasis on efficiency, thus, proves to be counterproductive to the motivation to reconsider the possibilities of what has been conceived as inefficient. Conversely, the efficiency-oriented system does not have approach to the conflict between different pursuits of effectiveness, such as one between the globalization of the market and the centralization of bureaucracy.

This divisive thinking—a thinking that detaching what is efficient from what is not-is most evident in the dichotomies of liberal and vocational in education for pre- and in-service teachers. As described above, administration and management tend to starkly define vocational trainings as practical and useful, while they define liberal learning as theoretical and unproductive. This alienation puts teacher education in a crisis because it does not serve teachers to reconstruct their schools and culture that are confused and exploited by the dominance of the economy of exchange. How could the division in teacher education be mended? When shall teachers take full advantage of their education and start reclaiming new and better place for learning with their students and colleagues?

Citing Michael Oakeshott's notion of conversation as the learning of a subject, Standish claims the crucial role of language in the process of learning a subject, a language that breaches the forms of closure (Standish, 2005, p. 61).² The closed economy often confines learning within simple exchange of banks of knowledge and skills. In contrast, Standish re-sees learning as perpetual acquisition of language that frees learners from the education as fixed transaction.

Based on Standish's view, higher education for prospective educators shall transcend the curriculum that confines itself to education of exchange to satisfy the needs of future practitioners. The learner's self, therefore, can be exposed to the experience of professional education that contains the beauty and intensity. In such a moment, the learners and their learning escape the framework of the closed economy. How might such a moment be attained? Standish says that teachers can develop their own way of approaching the economy of excess through attending to examples of good practice (p. 66). Where do teachers find their examples, then?

III. ECONOMY IN UNCOMMON SCHOOLING

Standish recognizes Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* as an experiment wherein Thoreau explores the territory of 'the economy of living' (Standish, 2006, p. 146). Thoreau lived not in the remote countryside, but close enough that his neighbours in the town of Concord were able to see what he was doing; thereby it is implied that Thoreau's experiment has some intention of teaching others, although he expected to learn from it himself (p. 147). Thoreau coined the expression 'uncommon schools', in contrast to common schools, a systematized place for adolescents to learn (Thoreau, 1997, p. 99). He further elaborated on the notion of a 'father-tongue'—a kind of language that is

held as a 'reserved and select expression, too significant to be heard by the ear, which must be born again in order to speak' (p. 93). The vision of uncommon schooling—an education designed not to equip and accommodate adolescents' entry into society and its conventional economy, but to help adults to acquire the language that enables them to find their own economy of living—resonates with Harvard philosopher Stanley Cavell's notion of education for grownups (Cavell, 1981, p. 150).

After stating that Thoreau and the town of Concord were strangers to each other, Cavell asks why Thoreau insists especially on examination of his readers' outward condition or circumstances in this world. The 'readers' referred to here means people in Concord, the town from which Thoreau came and distances himself. Responding to the question, Cavell proceeds:

Because the outward position or circumstances in this world is precisely the position of outwardness, outsidership to the world, distance from it, the position of stranger. The first step in attending to our education is to observe the strangeness of our lives, our estrangement from ourselves, the lack of necessity in what we profess to be necessary. The second step is to grasp the true necessity of human strangeness as such, the opportunity of outwardness (p. 55).

Here, two meanings of the notion of outwardness are implied. The first is outwardness as outlook: Thoreau emphasizes the outward condition because the outlook of Concord is only observable from outside of the town, i.e., Thoreau's position. Why should this be emphasized? The question endangers the second implication of outwardness, namely, outsidership. Thoreau's perspective reveals how people's lives are alienated from the world in which they live. The world they believe they live in is not the only single world. Thoreau places particular emphasis on revealing this misconception because it is only recognizable from the outside, and is only slightly sensed by his neighbours.

In this sense, Cavell's two steps of engaging in education resonate with the economy of excess in terms of one's going beyond an inward, self-contained exchange within the enclosed world. Through this lens of Cavellian education, Thoreau's experiment represents the possibilities for alternative teacher education in which a reading teacher becomes a writer of the language, in terms of inventing a sense of outwardness of herself related to her town, her school, or the world.

IV. CONCLUSION: STRANGENESS OF THE ORDINARY

This study highlights the fact that Standish takes Henry David Thoreau's experiment as a 'good example' of the practice of an alternative economy. The idea of reading and writing has significance in the 'uncommon schooling' of Thoreau to the extent that exists beyond the limitations of the conventional language of economy. Consequently, Thoreau's experiment, as described in *Walden*, is educational in two senses: Thoreau's and his life in the woods have educational implications for his neighbours; moreover, Thoreau's use of and relationship with language serve to perfect the ongoing process of education. According to Cavell, Thoreau reveals the strangeness of people's lives, including his own. This Cavellian-Thoreauvian educational experiment helps us to re-examine the conception of teachers' learning, from a viewpoint of the attainment and re-attainment of an alternative language.

What is called liberal education might echo with the ordinary practice from a new

point of view. What is conceived as theoretical might start to exhibit its vocational association in the process of defining and refining the alternative language. Standish is correct to the extent that the alternative economy breaches the dichotomies of liberal and vocational education. Further, the alternative economy of education reconciles the dilemma whether learning or teaching should come first in teachers' professional lives. Thoreau's teaching—his educational experiment in a sight of his neighbours—became possible only through his own path of learning—his exploration of unfamiliar language—, and vice versa. The confusion of the closed economy is not something to be fixed by means of strengthening the system, but rather it is something to be released from the framework of exchange itself. In this sense, being open to what exists beyond the economy of exchange helps us to reconsider the daily practices of higher education, an education that undeniably involves a birth and rebirth of teachers.

NOTES

1. 'Towards an Economy of Higher Education' was originally published in 2005, as an independent essay. References to the chapter are indicated based on this original appearance.
2. Standish quotes: 'Education, properly speaking, is an initiation into the skill and partnership of this conversation in which we learn to recognize the voices, to distinguish the proper occasions of utterance, and in which we acquire the intellectual and moral habits appropriate to conversation. And it is this conversation which, in the end, gives place and character to every human utterance'(Standish, 2005, p. 61; Oakeshott, 1962, p. 198).

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