

Creativity, enterprise and the absurd: education and the Myth of Sisyphus. A challenge to an educator.

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Abstract

*Albert Camus explores the imagery of Sisyphus' infinite, unending labour, rolling a boulder up a hill for eternity, in portraying the absurdity of human being. This paper draws upon *The Myth of Sisyphus*¹, and Camus' notion of the absurd as a challenge to the purpose of education in a paradigm of creative enterprise. This paradigm contributes to an absurd educational game in which educators engage in a never-ending play of problem solving and students, as consumers, in a refusal to engage in the enterprising. How then might the educator invest in different purposes for education, creativity and enterprise? This paper argues that educators require a familiarity with the absurdity of both their role as educator and the situation the student finds herself in, in any contemporary or future educational terrain. *The Myth of Sisyphus* provides a rich metaphor for exploring the ups and downs of such terrains; an exploration that has led, in this paper, to the recognition of a positive refusal in the educational relationship.*

Introduction

So what is the nature of this challenge to an educator? To identify a challenge, we need to first identify a problem. The problem that we will address in this paper relates to the question of whether the enterprise ethos facilitates creativity in a manner that respects how we might think about creativity from a philosophical point of view in an educational context. While the term enterprise culture is used in the call for papers and maybe considered an important element of the conference theme, to us it is an opaque term. In this paper, we are looking at what enterprise might mean in the educator/student relationship that intend that education should be a creative activity. We posit that enterprise inhibits creativity, as entrepreneurial reason – the reason that governs education under neoliberalism – prescribes pragmatic objectives for creativity that relate, only in part, to the real nature of the problem of what it is to be creative. These pragmatic objectives, when applied with the education sector, are supposed to generate innovation (see Ministry of Education, 2006); an ideological device that is to have the role of enabling the accumulation of capital. Furthermore, it is thought that the consequence of our requiring that the contemporary student make herself into enterprising/consumer subject is that she will develop a habit of living before she acquires a habit of thinking; that is that she will learn to make enterprising and consumer choices that will lead her to act both upon herself and in the educational context without thinking beyond the political nature of those choices. This presents education with an impasse, for the reason that in the moment when it might be necessary to create intellectual conflict in the classroom, the student, as a consumer, reserves the right to refuse to engage for the reason that she presumes that the customer is always right. Here, there is a double refusal: the student *refuses* to respond to the educator's invitation to pursue an argument that requires that we extend reason beyond the confines of pragmatic thought (that which governs the function of education as an enterprise) and she *refuses* to consider her refusal (as a customer) is itself an aspect of her formation that must be brought

into question if she is to engage in argument beyond the confines of pragmatic thought. This presents the educator with a challenge that, in our view, can only be responded to by both parties – the student and the educator – entering into revolt. We will explore this challenge, in this paper, through using Albert Camus' text 'The Myth of Sisyphus' as a tool through which we hope to understand how the absurd might encourage the subject of education to understand the importance that she learn to act alone (not as an autonomous chooser but as an independent thinker); that there is inevitably a separation between the subject (as an actor) and her setting; and that without knowledge of this absurdity, her judgements (choice making) inhibit the possibility that her political subjectivity will inform creative activity for the reason that she must recognise that enterprise will never completely capture the nature of our relations with the world.

Within this conundrum, the enterprise ethos and creativity sustain an absurd relationship. Essentially, the formation of the subject is thought of as taking place within an arranged marriage, where the ruling ideology and its enterprise ethos oblige the student to accept to be governed in a manner that does not facilitate her understanding that reason, when she is creative, might require her to break with that which forms her as an obliging subject. In this paper, this break is thought of in terms of being a radical-critical break, along the lines of that which Marginson (2006) described in his keynote address at the last Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia conference (Sydney, 2006). Marginson draws on Castoriadis' notion of "radical otherness of creation", an agency that brings itself "into being as other and not simply as a consequence or as a different exemplar of the same" (1987, pp. 184-185, cited in Marginson, 2006, pp. 5-6). While this notion of the radical-critical break exhibits otherness in the form of not being simply a consequence of or an exemplar, it does not signify, according to Castoriadis, the creation of an autonomous agent who pursues his freedom from a responsibility to others. While the subject's "agency freedom is the enhancement of autonomous identity as an end in itself" (Marginson, 2006, p. 6), she is "socially defined and never entirely independent from the situation" (Castoriadis, 1987, p. 27), in which the break itself occurs². This notion of subjective agency lends itself in this paper to understanding the problem of how political subjectivity sometimes requires the subject of education to refuse to be governed in a creative activity by either the difference in rationale of the other or, more particularly, by notions of creativity that might be prescribed in education by pragmatic thinking.

In the context of the contemporary education experience, the subject of education is unaware that thinking independently requires her to break with the unreasonableness of the world, to separate her experience of the relation with the self from the institution of this marriage. At the end of the day, a rupture must be precipitated as a creative subject cannot be made to be both "critical and absolutely in agreement with everything" (*La Vanguardia*, May, 2006).

Proceeding with this enquiry, we will briefly report on how Antiquity, according to Camus, mythologized the life and death of Sisyphus³. This will be followed by an examination of Camus' essay 'The Myth of Sisyphus', which, in particular, will involve looking at the absurd and why consciousness of the absurdity of one's relation with the world logically leads one to revolt. We then contextualize this comprehension of our fate as a problem of contemporary learning, where education as an enterprise construes to isolate the subject of education in a habit of living that does not require a more significant implication in creative activity other than that which serves its own interests. Fundamental to this enquiry is the notion that the contemporary subject is a paradoxical subject and that this paradox is both defined and obscured by enterprise. The student is understood here as being both a subject of enterprise and a subject of her own sovereign experience⁴, meaning that her educational experience, on the one hand, requires her to accept to be governed by enterprise while, on the other, implies that if she is to be creative then she must be prepared to break with the governance of enterprise – otherwise, creativity is nothing more than an ideological device constructed to serve the promotion of the enterprising subject. The revolt of the educator becomes fundamental in the extrapolation of this dilemma, the character of which is developed in the last Section.

Camus' account of the Myth: the life and death of Sisyphus

The Gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They thought with some reason that there was no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labour (Camus, 1991, p. 119).

This is how we think of Sisyphus: his punishment after death in the underworld, Sisyphus as this figure who toils ceaselessly to roll a rock up a top of a mountain only to watch it roll down again from the whence his toil must begin all over again. But this is only one aspect of his fate. Sisyphus also lived a life of passion for the pleasures he most enjoyed – second coming in that he had a reprieve at death's door and was permitted to return to live on earth, all be it to carry out a task he forgot all about. To understand the usefulness in education of Camus' account of the Myth (See *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1991, pp. 119-123), we will not only need to look at Sisyphus' passion for the pleasures of life on earth but also at the relation this experience has to his punishment. What do we understand about the relationship between Sisyphus' enjoyment of pleasure and his punishment? Sisyphus would appear to ignore the significance of death in life in such a manner that he gives the impression of being unconscious that he is preparing his fate in advance: his experience of death. This is to say that he does not appear to be conscious that he will have to live out the fate of the choices he is making during life. It is this trial of the design that one gives to one's self-formation that makes this myth relevant to our understanding of the role education plays in relation to our passion for pleasure – or, put in more contemporary language, the role education plays with respect to our passion for the consumer experience. In drawing this connection between self-formation and its logical consequences, Camus has the following to say about Sisyphus' fate:

...Sisyphus, being near to death, rashly wanted to test his wife's love. He ordered her to cast his unburied body into the middle of the public square. Sisyphus woke up in the underworld. And there, annoyed by an obedience so contrary to human love, he obtained from Pluto permission to return to earth in order to chastise his wife. But when he had seen again the face of this world, enjoyed the water and sun, warm stones and the sea, he no longer wanted to go back to the infernal darkness. Recalls, signs of anger, warnings were to no avail. Many years more he lived facing the curve of the gulf, the sparkling sea, and the smiles of earth. A decree of the gods was necessary. Mercury came and seized the impudent man by the collar and, snatching him from his joys, led him forcibly back to the underworld, where his rock was ready for him (1991, pp. 119-120).

In relation to this text, we might speculate upon the following questions: First, to what does the motif of the "unburied body" refer to? Should we consider it to be irrelevant that Sisyphus was near death for the reason that the effect of being alive was the same – that his refusal to be conscious of what he was doing in life was in fact an equivalent condition of being near death? This is to say, if he had been buried alive, would it have been any different in result to his being cast into a public square in an unburied state? Perhaps this incident refers to the way in which, in Antiquity, the subject was taken off life-support. Further to this thought, we might speculate that perhaps Sisyphus had a near-death experience in which he discovers that his wife had good cause to be rid of him. Secondly, Sisyphus' wife's act of casting his unburied body into a public square can be interpreted as being a consequence of the manner in which Sisyphus had come to effect the formation of her thinking and therefore her behaviour towards him. In this sense, the underworld can be allegorically interpreted as the symbolic space in which both the real nature of our self-formation and the effect this self-formation has on others is revealed to us. Perhaps if Sisyphus had treated his wife with dignity, she would not have obeyed him out of either resentment or duty, in the manner that the test stipulated and instead would have chosen to disobey him out of love, or just because the request itself was itself absurd. Thirdly, we learn nothing of how Sisyphus chastises his wife. It would appear that, on returning to earth, he altogether forgets his objective: the pleasures on earth quickly assume importance greater attraction, leading Sisyphus to abandon his original intention to respond to his wife's betrayal of him.

Whatever art he practices, Sisyphus is able to dislocate himself from his own story, to isolate himself in time, unconscious of the implications of occupying himself with his passions and the formation of such a habit of living. Fourthly, the responsibility to the other and seemingly, to his relation with self as a multiple relation with others, would seem to have disappeared, become an absence of relations within him. In his punishment, he has no company – his principle companions are his rock and his consciousness of self as he follows the rock back down the mountain. This is both logical and disturbing: Sisyphus was as alone on earth as it were possible; the only difference between his experience of life and his experience of death being that he does not become conscious of his aloneness until he finds out that it is he alone who must push this rock up to the summit of that brutal mountain. Lastly, we are left to believe that the objects of consciousness – for Sisyphus, they are a mountain and a rock – are always already awaiting the assumption of the responsibility our self-formation implies. For Sisyphus, “His rock is his thing” (p. 123) – the rock being, it would seem, that which makes him conscious that he is acting upon himself.

What further reflections can we draw from these interpretations? As highlighted above, if we focus on Sisyphus’ punishment, it is impossible to escape the image of the torment that comes with the repetitious nature of his penalty. However, as we also intimated, the image of this act does not tell Sisyphus’ full story, not only because there was a life lived on earth (make that two, remembering that he comes back from the dead) but because this story does not give importance to his *consciousness* of what he lives *through* in life both and death. To Camus (1991), Sisyphus is a hero: he lived *through* his passions (in life) and *through* his torture (in life after life or in death) not for the passions and the torture in themselves but in order to scorn the gods (p. 120). According to Camus, Sisyphus, in choosing to indulge his nostalgia for the pleasures of life to their fullest extent, knows full well that there is a penalty that he will have to pay – a penalty that will result in him having to exert his whole being, in the fulfilment of his punishment, towards accomplishing nothing. Not only is the penalty deemed to be worth the pleasure but, furthermore Sisyphus is also able to continue to scorn the gods in his punishment, in that each time he descends from the top of the mountain to collect the rock, he is able to free himself from his labour and reassert a superiority over his fate and, as such, know for himself “the full extent of his condition” (p. 121). Yet, while it is possible to say that Sisyphus is able to free himself, it must be highlighted that the Myth itself is considered to be a tragic one: Sisyphus, in freeing himself, becomes conscious of his fate (p. 121). From this paradox, we are led to understand that with the consciousness of self and impending death that comes from our independence, also comes from the fact that our fate is a tragic one.

Given this situation, how are we to understand this Myth to be useful in our quest to explain the problem that arises on account of the manner in which enterprise administers creative activity in education? This question will be addressed in Section Three. First though, we ought to examine Camus’ own thesis as to the importance of the absurd in relation to the human condition; an examination in which we will need to explore Camus’ essay.

‘The Myth of Sisyphus’ and the value of the absurd to contemporary education

In this paper, we will restrict our exploration of Camus’ interpretation (‘The Myth of Sisyphus’) of the Myth to that which we understand as relating to the challenge we believe is faced by the contemporary student and, by implication, the contemporary educator. This exploration will involve our examining what the absurd is to Camus and, furthermore, what the implications are for this idea in the relationship between the educator and the contemporary student.

Peculiar to the thesis of Camus’ essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1991) is the tension that Camus says he sustains in his work between what he calls “assent and refusal” (pp. v-vi). To Camus, the artist and his calling are defined by an essential fluctuation between *assent* and *refusal*, a fact that should not be altogether insignificant, given that in this paper, creativity supposes the existence of a political subjectivity that cannot be prescribed but rather must be won by the student herself. In Camus’ explanation of the Myth, we see

assent and refusal lived out on various levels: for example, in Sisyphus' refusal to listen to the gods when they demanded that he should return to the underworld. Most prominently though, we see this tension between contrary attitudes in Sisyphus' ascent of the mountain (his acquiescence to accept his punishment) and in his descent (the moment when he refuses to be defeated by his fate). Both in refusing to respond to the gods and in refusing to be dominated by his fate, Sisyphus refuses death. It would seem that it is this refusal to accept death is that which inspires Camus to give value to the absurd. So, when we come to explore how the absurd facilitates creativity in education, evidently we will need to consider how the conditions under which this essential fluctuation between agreement/acceptance and refusal takes place.

In continuing our discussion, we need to extrapolate a preliminary notion as to what Camus means by the absurd. In general terms, the feeling of absurdity is man's experience of his divorce from his own life (Camus, 1991). To Camus, man is a stranger and alien in his own world for reason that he is deprived of "the memory of a lost land or a promised land" (p. 6). In its nature, this divorce of man as an actor from his setting is conceived of by Camus as being necessarily final for the reason that to desire to recover the lost or to hold out for the promised is to hope, which would be an obstacle to our realizing the absurdity of our fate. Such a fact might lead us to wonder whether we have not constituted ourselves as agreeable subjects for the purpose of avoiding the fact that it is we ourselves who have contrived our own exile; meaning that, for the most part, we have, till now, refused to be conscious of the implication that our actions would lead us to where we find ourselves. If the latter were not the case, we would logically have a way back but, as Camus says, this situation is without remedy (p. 6); we have dislocated ourselves from the action through which we formed ourselves – a fact that will be explained more explicitly when we look more closely at the influence of enterprise on education. We will also, describe at a later point, the divorce which takes place, as we understand it, between the subject of education and her life – the divorce that is mediated according one's capacity to accept and refuse as a student, and to accept and refuse as an educator. The nature of this refusal, as a possible *refusal to refuse*, will be discussed in the next Section.

Before looking at the reasoning that makes the absurd possible, we need to identify how the relation between life and thought are configured; a relationship that should be fundamental interest to educators. According to Camus, "[w]e get into the habit of living before we acquire the habit of thinking" (1991, p. 8). To Camus, we have the propensity to elude thinking on account of our placing our hope in a particular way of living (p. 8). This is another way of saying that we learn to live without thinking or if we think we are not conscious of the implications of our actions and, as such, we act without thinking. This configuration of a habit of living as an experience that satisfies itself without need of an experience of thinking suggests certain possibilities of how we might interpret the difficulties of being creative is an educational experience that conforms to the interests of enterprise. As we will see in the next Section, the pragmatic performance of the subject in such a mode of education conforms to a habit of living that does not require conscious thought but rather depends upon the hope that the purpose of instruction is well intended. In effect, in this mode of education, there is no presumption that the student need *test* the merit of her education as a pragmatic performance: this mode of education – education as an enterprise – does not require one to be conscious of why one is being educated beyond the intentions enterprise has for that subject. In this context, the absurd is the reasoning that occupies itself with the question why.

So, what does Camus call absurd reasoning? Just as all great thoughts have a ridiculous beginning so too is absurd reasoning characterised by its leap in the *beginning* (Camus, 1991, p. 12). Camus speaks about this leap to consciousness in the following manner:

But one day the "why" arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. "Begins" – this is important. Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness. It awakes the consciousness and provokes what follows. What follows is the gradual return into the chain or it is the definitive awakening. At the end of the awakening comes, in time, the consequence: suicide or recovery.

In itself weariness has something sickening about it. Here, I must conclude that it is good. Everything begins with consciousness and nothing is worth anything except through it (1991, p. 13).

Following this line of thinking, absurd reason does not arise without there first being an experience of weariness with the acts of a mechanical life. This consciousness could be thought to occur in the subject of education as a result of her weariness of entrepreneurial mode of education; that is to say, she tires of the mechanical acts that are obligatory that are demanded by the prescribed learning outcomes. In the moment of her leap to consciousness, simplistically, she has two options as to how she should respond to this weariness: she either returns to the drudgery of the mechanical life where she resumes her place in the construction of systems of pragmatic thought or she pursues her definitive awakening⁵. To Camus, these options of response inevitably follow very different paths: either there is the return to the mechanical life, which Camus asserts, leads to suicide (as in life without thought assumes its own fate) or there is the transformation of relations with the world through a revolt against the world.

While the mechanical life of education as an enterprise may produce weariness and thus provoke a consciousness of the absurdity of one's relation to life, the world itself is not absurd. Rather the world itself is unreasonable (Camus, 1991). Furthermore, it is not education as an enterprise that is absurd, but rather that the enterprise ethos pretends to be reasonable in the way it configures the experience of the educator/student relationship; a mechanical life that is wearisome to both educator and student because it fails to recognise the more profound nature of the relation between the need for political subjectivity and creative activity. The absurd embodies the confrontation between the irrational (the pragmatic act from the point of view of what pragmatism does not recognise in the subject of education) and the subject of education's wild longing for clarity (Camus, 1991). The context of this confrontation is that in which we visualize the need in contemporary education for an interaction between the educator and the student that produces a disagreement.

Staying with Camus, there is the question of how we should understand the nature such a confrontational interaction in contemporary education. Absurdity arises not from the mere scrutiny of a fact or from an impression but from a comparison made between "a bare fact and a certain reality, between an action and the world" (1991, p. 30). This is to say, a learning outcome in itself is not absurd. Rather, the learning outcome must be put in confrontation and compared with a particular reality, for example, a creative activity that refers to a subjective experience that extends beyond the learning outcome's points of reference. In this context,

Thinking is not unifying or making the appearance familiar under the guise of a great principle. Thinking is learning all over again how to see, directing one's consciousness, making of every image a privileged place (Camus, 1991, p. 43).

In this context, we are able to think of the habit of living as that experience which has acquired the habit of thinking, meaning, in Camus' words (1991), that the subject is able to keep the absurd alive and, above all, to continue to contemplate it. This contemplation must inevitably produce in the subject of education a sense of defiance or what Camus calls revolt. Thinking inevitably leads to disagreement – disagreement that requires, in the context of creative activity, revolt: a refusal to agree when this agreement would inhibit further contemplation, further evaluation of the nature of the divorce with one's setting, and further self-formation. To discuss the nature of this revolt, we need to first examine the nature of the conflict that is understood here to exist between enterprise and creativity.

An absurd relationship: creativity/enterprise

Earlier, we said that we would concern ourselves with how we might understand the usefulness of Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* as a means of exploring how an enterprise ethos impacts upon creative activity in education. We will now address this question in a more direct manner. So, how are we to think of creativity in an education system that conceives of itself as an enterprise? It would seem that creativity, at least in

name, has been co-opted by enterprise and, as such, has been delimited to function according to the purpose that enterprise gives itself – namely, the accumulation of capital. In other words, the game is simply one of creating new forms of accumulating capital. However, while the accumulation of capital is important in itself, as an activity that defines one of the functions of education (as education is understood in the enterprise ethos), it cannot be said to speak to the broader horizon of what creative activity as an experience might possibly imply. While creativity can be thought of as being responsible for the production of objects (whether they enter the market or not), it can also be thought of as the subjective experience that leads to the creation of those objects. In the latter situation, the political subjectivity of the student cannot be contained as an experience that is adequately represented by those objects. In this context, the creative activity, as prescribed by learning outcomes, can appear to be unreasonable and, as such, an absurdity. It is likely, therefore, that the creative subjectivity will seek to escape the confines of the pragmatic reason, leading the student, who is subject of her own sovereign experience, to break with the enterprising subjectivity that she had previously accepted to be governed by.

Rescuing creativity from enterprise would seem almost impossible if it were not that we could situate our dilemma in the education experience; the context in which subjects are formed as enterprising subjects. In this paper, creativity refers to what one does to change one's relationship with a problem of the present; a problem of the present, here, being the problem of overcoming or refusing to engage an obstacle in the process of learning. An important point to note is that this problem of the present is not a problem that is externally defined by the interests of enterprise; rather it is defined in the interaction between the subject herself and the educator, an exercise which here implies the need for a critique of the manner in which the enterprise ethos ascribes the role of creativity in education. For example, if creativity is to begin for the student with the relation she has with the self which, according to Foucault, is a power relation (1989b) and proceeds to involve an interaction with the educator in relation to an obstacle to learning, then accepting to be governed by the educator requires the student to make a judgement as to whether or not she will go along with the reasoning of the educator. In a creative activity, the student must retain the right to assent or refuse this interaction on her own terms, meaning she must assume a responsibility to make judgements in relation to what her experience is of her relation with the self. In this respect, creativity in education presumes the presence of an ongoing conflict – something that pragmatic reason of enterprise has little time for.

Accordingly, it is when this conflict results in a change to a problem of the present that it can be said that creativity exists. It is the creative activity that results from a *refusal* by the student, the educator or both that most interests us. On the part of the student, this refusal cannot be a refusal to participate in an interaction without it in some way involving a criticism of education as an enterprise in the form of a critique of her own formation as a consumer. In this sense, creativity implies the need to break with the way in which one is governed by the enterprising ethos. This is to say, a refusal cannot be made by the student on grounds that the student reserves the right, as consumer, to decide what creativity should mean in relation to the service that has been purchased; the problem of being creative is somehow independent from the nature of what a commercial service comprises. Judgements made in relation to this issue are not simple. If the student critiques her own formation as an obstacle to understanding how she might overcome an obstacle to learning that doubles as the problem of the present, she has to deconstruct the power relations that are implicit in her own formation. In effect, the obstacle to learning exists in the character of the formation of the relation the subject has with herself, when accepting to be governed by the educator.

The term enterprise can be thought of as an endeavour where economics defines political relations according to economic objectives, however in this paper, enterprise is understood as being governed by pragmatic reason (economic reason), a form of reason that is not obliged to acquaint itself with that which concerns the nature of creativity. Pragmatic reason is concerned with outcomes; they alone reconcile our relationship with the problem of the present as an obstacle to learning. For this reason, pragmatic reason and creativity do not coincide in the same truth game; a game which is concluded before it starts as creativity is defined in purely entrepreneurial terms; a result that produces confusion among students in the hour of

understanding how they should implicate themselves as political subjects in a creative activity. In the *New Zealand Curriculum Draft Framework* (Ministry of Education, 2006), this notion of creativity can be seen as being that activity that should produce a capacity to be innovative; enterprise's ideal for education⁶. Yet if this prescription of creativity is to have meaning in relation to the need for power relations to be free to pursue conflict, who can explain how the capacity to be innovative should result from a process of self-formation, where the self must be both identical to itself and always in agreement with the notion that education must be an enterprise?

While we are not going to address the above question in the fuller sense of what it refers to, we are going to address how the formation of the subject of lifelong learning might be thought of as inhibiting her understanding of the nature of the obstacle to learning. Sennet (2006) makes two interesting observations that relate to how we form ourselves in the course of lifelong learning – lifelong learning itself being a practice that is as much in danger, as any educational practice, in becoming a habit of living that precedes the development of the habit of thinking. According to Sennet, a “skill” can be defined as that which refers to our ability to do something new (p. 98). What is peculiar to this understanding of skills in lifelong learning is that there is no need of a logical and sequential relationship between the skills as they are acquired; one accepts to learn something new when the world of work demands that one supply it with the human capital that is required in that moment. In this sense, a skill as acquired in the paradigm of lifelong learning (as it is conceived of by education as an enterprise), is not a “durable possession” (p. 95); to learn a new skill the subject is not required “to draw on what one has already learned to do” (p. 98). According to Sennet, this form of acquisition of skills involves the surrender of the possession of established realities. Established realities not only refer to where the subject worked, how she worked, what she worked on, what capabilities she had to exhibit to accomplish the task but the manner in which these experiences contributed to the way she formed herself. The relationship between the surrender of the possession of established realities and the way we agree to form ourselves in the working world relates to the manner in which enterprise and creativity are adjoined in contemporary education for reason that this is where it is desired that we develop our identity as enterprising subjects – a question that brings us to the second observation that Sennet makes. It would appear that this above described process of skills acquisition results in a dislocation of the self from the self, an experience that, according Sennet, “deprive[s] people of a sense of *narrative movement*” (emphasis in original, p. 183), resulting in “people frequently succumbing to feeling that they have no narrative agency; that is, that they lack the power to interpret what is happening to them” (p. 188). This lack of a capacity to explicate one's narrative movement through life not only indicates the existence of a dislocation of the self from the particular historical capacities but also indicates that there is a dislocation of the self from the substance of her own history. Sennet suggests that, over time (read lifelong), the absence of the power to interpret what is happening and the failure to accumulate experience in a manner other than that which accedes to the purely momentary demands of enterprise, leads the subject to being unable to account for how she managed to arrive where she presently finds herself to be. This is a rather strange and alarming outcome in an age where identity is said to be so important. How can the subject know who she is if she cannot say how she got to where she is?

We now need to transpose this question to the context in which the contemporary subject's education takes place and as such, read the significance of Sennet's observations back onto the education experience; that experience where this form of skills acquisition is supposed to begin. The fact that the contemporary student's judgements are conditioned by the need to make consumer choices⁷ means that, while their experience in secondary school may not be particularly advanced in terms of the lifelong learning habit forming attributes (e.g., the subjugation of her political subjectivity, her abandonment of the will to intervene upon her own behalf, the disinterest in being a politically conscious protagonist in her own formation), the student arrives at school, as a consumer subject, already able to dislocate herself from established realities; a situation that leaves her being unable to explain how she got to where she finds herself. As a result we might speculate that instead of identity being formed as the result of creative activity, it is appropriated in order to

give legitimacy to the experience of her wider process of formation as a consumer. Furthermore, if education is oriented towards serving the same result as the consumer experience produces, it legitimates consumer behaviour as *a priori* form of thinking in the context of the learning experience or, more particularly, in the context of needing to change something in one's relation with the self in relation to a problem of the present/an obstacle to that process of learning. The absurdity of this situation presents the educator with a peculiar challenge. If education (as an experience of enterprise) requires that the subject of education be a consumer in her choice making, how will she be able to accept to divorce herself from the consumer that she has become and, as such, see the absurdity in accepting to be educated as a consumer? It would seem unlikely that there was much possibility of the subject of education revolting against the absurdity of the educator's reason if this same subject is not first able to revolt in the context of the relation with the self and against how she formed herself as a consumer. First, she would need to see the absurdity of her self-formation as a consumer, then revolt and, as such, refuse this prescription of creativity by the enterprise ethos. Only then, would she be in a position to refuse to agree with the educator in the course of changing her relation with a problem of the present/an obstacle to learning that had to do with educational content that functioned beyond the bounds of pragmatic reason. At this point, I am going to pass the baton to Andrew!

The absurd as a challenge to the educator

Richard's exploration of 'The Myth of Sisyphus' and Camus' play with the absurd (above) puts upon the educator a not unreasonable responsibility to address some uncomfortable questions. It has been suggested above that the educator has a responsibility to revolt – and to revolt, in particular, against the culture of enterprise for the purpose of unchaining the creative student. This revolt occurs in the climate of the absurd. In a sense, the weather condition necessary for the educator, as helmsperson, is a stiff breeze to blow away the mists of reason, and open up the possibility of having some fun, some irony, some risky business – and achieving this radical-critical break. This radical-critical break is clearly not what many students and educators might think occurs in the breaks between lessons – it is rather the refusal by the student of existing reason. It's true that while in the classroom the absurdity of education remains obscured, the joke in the playground begins to make sense. The challenge is to bring the joke back into the classroom!

With much credit to enterprise, there is education everywhere; it is about quantity (bums on seats) of qualifications (caps on heads). In this sense education as enterprise, and educator for enterprise, resonate with a sense of progress and growth characteristic of the 'pathos of the new':

From this source [the pathos of the new] there was derived at the start an educational ideal, tinged with Rousseauism and in fact directly influenced by Rousseau, in which education became an instrument of politics, and political activity itself was conceived as a form of education (Arendt, 1954, p. 176).

The educator as instrument is, in an enterprise culture, responsible to their students, not responsible for them. The relationship is a business contract written on government paper using government language: you (the educator) will provide me (the student) with a set of discrete learning outcomes that have been predetermined, in an enterprise ethos, as necessary for my qualification (that has been predetermined as necessary for my pathways [that have been predetermined as necessary for my/our society]). There is too much vocationalising (Plotz, 2001) going on here for educators, where vocationalising is the enterprise of education for the educator.

It is little wonder then that the student has been constituted as a consumer; the student is not being blamed here. The will to build education, and the will to sell education to the public, is the problem. 'We' all have come to think we want an education as we might want a cellular phone – a marketing success story without equal. And obscured by this success are the forgotten possibilities to create and dwell, and be enterprising.

Perhaps in two thousand more years, sitting on the Starship Enterprise (coincidentally), Spock will observe one of those forgotten ideas 'its education Jim, but not as we know it.'

Back in the now of education and enterprise, each educator labours up a hill, perhaps called lifelong learning hill. The metaphor of lifelong learning is frequently employed to dress-up the enterprise culture and to remind us that we must all go to school, that education is never ending. The student in an enterprise culture appears to the educator as a consumer, a client, who comes back again and again. The student's learning, and the educator's labour, is their boulder, their thing, that which they share for a moment of time, as it rolls back down the hill upon their arrival at the summit, the summit called, for argument's sake, assessment.

Climbing the lifelong learning hill is a punishment meted out to educators in a paradigm of enterprise – lifelong learning, in the enterprise paradigm is a truism reinvents the educator/student relationship. It is not so much the suggestion that the subject learns throughout life, but rather the expectation that 'we' must all learn throughout our life, and then die. This more than any aspect of education reveals the absurd. Like Sisyphus, we roll learning up a hill for it to "fall back of its own weight" (Camus, 1991, p. 119), ready to be rolled up again. Lifelong learning is a ceaseless effort. Our concern is the seriousness with which we must productively apply ourselves to this effort.

So the educator has a limited time, and this parameter, the book end, characterises the absurdity of thinking of education with any great vision, aspiration or legitimation (it is not just enterprise that is absurd: empowerment, enrichment, emancipation – they are all absurd). Yet, would Camus suggest to the educator, conscious of that absurd matrix of student, educator, world and death, lie down, give up? When my unburied body is left to rot in the middle of the quad, will I have a chance to return to the school to affect my revenge on those that left me there? And upon my return, will I look at my educational terrain with a different lens?

While Sisyphus' may have scorned the gods in his refusal to return to the underworld, his passion for the beauty of the mortal world may also constitute an admission that he did not enjoy what he had previously experienced – perhaps this deserted silent empire that Pluto speaks of (Camus, 1991). Perhaps Sisyphus the educator appreciates the smell of the classroom only once he has a chance to return to it. This claim might rest comfortably with Camus' challenge to live life in the presence, and not ignorance, of the absurd.

How then do 'I' the educator assess and model my character alongside the images of Camus' revolting characters: the Don Juan, the conqueror and the actor? What is called for in education to revolt against the absurd and to scorn the gods of education? What is the educational equivalence of many lovers, or many conquests, or many roles: many students, many courses, many schools, many exams, many ideas, many questions, many revolts? What is the quantity of these things that engenders a life? This is where a problem resides in the relationship between the living and the absurd. A life of ten years and a life of one hundred years are lives with finite experiences. However, if Camus wishes to suggest that the quality of one is contrasted to another because of its quantity, I am confused. Camus comes to my rescue:

"It is essential to be absurd", writes a modern author, "it is not essential to be a dupe" (Camus, 1991, p. 68).

So the challenge to the educator is to play an absurd game without being duped (and this means not being fooled into quantifying or qualifying). Just one student will reflect 'what do I bring to the learning relationship?' and I will throw my own self quite happily up the hill with or without the boulder. This is a revolt, perhaps, from the subjectivity constituted for the student and educator as particular game players in the enterprise culture. The educator, once conscious of the absurd, is not going to give up the game and is not going to enter into some self-hypnosis just to forget that the climate has changed. Is then the challenge for the educator to be responsible for others in the game (the students?)? To be responsible for a student an educator might listen to Arendt (Arendt, 1954, pp. 192-3):

The problem is simply to educate in such a way that a setting-right remains actually possible, even though it can, of course, never be assured. Our hope always hangs on the new which every generation brings; but precisely because we can base our hope only on this, we destroy everything if we so try to control the new that we, the old, can dictate how it will look. Exactly for the sake of what is new and revolutionary in every child, education must be conservative; it must preserve this newness and introduce it as a new thing into an old world, which however revolutionary its actions may be, is always, from the standpoint of the next generation, superannuated and close to destruction.

Calling upon Arendt here is a revolt against the progress of education as enterprise, and the 'enterprisation of the creative'. Now, I am not sure what 'our hope' is, however Arendt does not require that I buy into a universal hope, she requires that I revolt:

...simple, unreflective perseverance, whether it be pressing forward in the crisis or adhering to the routine that blandly believes the crisis will not engulf its particular sphere of life, can only, because it surrenders to the course of time, lead to ruin... Arendt, 1954, p. 194).

So I do not persevere unreflectively. I think about education.

To educate, in the words of Polybius, was simply "to let you see that you are altogether worthy of your ancestors," and in this business the educator could be a "fellow-contestant" and a "fellow-workman" because he too, though on a different level, went through life with his eyes glued to the past. Fellowship and authority were in this case indeed but the two sides of the same matter, and the teacher's authority was firmly grounded in the encompassing authority of the past as such. Today, however, we are no longer in that position; and it makes little sense to act as though we still were and had only, as it were, accidentally strayed from the right path and were free at any moment to find our way back to it. This means that wherever the crisis has occurred in the modern world, one cannot simply go on nor yet simply turn back. Such a reversal will never bring us anywhere except to the same situation out of which the crisis has just arisen (Arendt, 1954, p. 194).

This is an absurd predicament that education has gotten 'us' into. Arendt, like Camus, helps us to sense the absurdity and to use such a sense to engage in some responsible revolting. For just one student, again, the revolt might be directed towards assessment. At the summit, where-in assessment dwells, enterprise requires that we assess creativity, make the creative useful. For the 'enterprising' student, a refusal is invoked whereby the student refuses the educator on the grounds of failure to ensure the goals of enterprise are met, to ensure the student passes, and moves on. This is a refusal that I, as a challenged educator, would like to supplant. The refusal of importance to this paper is one in relation to the student's creativity in their constitution of self. And it is not simply that I wish to supplant the enterprising student with the empowering or empathising student, it is that I wish the refusing student to refuse me as an expert in creativity in an enterprise culture. The creative student is creative in refusing the possibilities that I, or any other aspect of their education (the curriculum, the national assessment system), might have their subjectivity as a student predetermined. I think it is the possibility of this refusal that allows for the possibility of being responsible for a student. And it is the possibility of this refusal that allows for the revolt, or radical-critical break in this absurd life.

Notes

- 1 The principal text in this paper is Camus' *The myth of Sisyphus and other essays* (1991), a text that contains both an essay by Camus called 'The Myth of Sisyphus' and a short account, again by Camus, of the actual myth which is also called 'The Myth of Sisyphus'. In this paper, Camus' essay will be called 'The Myth of Sisyphus' and the account of the myth itself will just be referred as the Myth.

- 2 Such a break is also described in the interview by Foucault in 'On Literature' (1989a, pp. 118-119)
- 3 Given the peculiarities of Sisyphus' story it would appear a good idea to provide an abbreviated account of its basic character. Sisyphus lives and dies twice! Near death the first time, Sisyphus is cast into a square by his wife. There he has what we might call a near-death experience in which he has an interaction with the gods, after which he is given permission to return to life on earth. After this seemingly second life on earth, he is this time hauled off to the underworld – where his punishment awaits him.
- 4 See Agamben (1998), on the paradox of the subject's sovereignty, in particular, Chapter One.
- 5 It is not clear in this policy document what the capacity to be innovative means with respect to how innovation can be thought of as a creative activity.
- 6 This definitive awakening may be likened to Marginson's notion of the radical-critical break (2006).
- 7 This is both desired by the proponents of the transformation of education into an enterprise (see The Treasury, 1987) and its critics (amongst others, see Marshall, 1999).

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