

*Mindful Practice*  
*Hope for the*  
*Future*

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Schleiermacher's *Human Education*

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# Mindful Practice & Hope for the Future: Schleiermacher's *Human Education*

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## Abstract

In a field increasingly dominated by managerial terminology and constructs of the psychological and neurological sciences, this paper presents education as an explicitly *human* “science”—as integral to human projects such as individual and collective self-definition as well as cultural reproduction and transformation. This paper undertakes the initial steps toward this human way of thinking about education by introducing the educational work of Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834). Schleiermacher, virtually unknown in English-language educational scholarship today, can be said to have been one of the first to seek to establish education as a rigorous but consistently human way of understanding. I show how Schleiermacher worked towards this in his 70-page introduction to his recently reissued (and soon to be translated) *Lectures on Education* from 1826. I begin with a short biographical introduction to Schleiermacher and then focus on his treatment of three basic, closely interrelated themes—or rather, pairs of opposed elements: 1) Theory and practice; 2) teacher and student (also parent and child); and 3) education as preparation or as “life itself.”

## Introduction: Teaching as Losing Sleep, Inspiring Hope and Living Life itself

There is no shortage of inspirational advice for teachers today; we are told that “Educators are the only people who lose sleep over other people’s children;” that “a good teacher inspires hope;” or as John Dewey said, that “education is not preparation for life, [it] is life itself.”<sup>1</sup> But what exactly do these statements mean? Are they just for motivational signs and posters, or is there a deeper, interconnected truth behind them? Outside of these sentiments about losing sleep, having hope, and about education as living life itself, the vocabulary we hear and read today is very different: It is managerial and natural scientific. It is one of *accountability*, not inspiration, *mastery*, not hope, testing and *preparation*, not life. Teachers are held strictly *accountable* to competitive measures and benchmarks, and are expected to *master* techniques—scripted to the smallest detail—to get students “college ready,” to *prepare* them for life. In a more general sense, this vocabulary and discourse is also about *learning* rather than teaching. Underpinning expectations about mastery and college readiness are constructs of the natural science of psychology and neurology which see students and their brains as learning naturally. Both the “learning sciences” and “brain sciences” insist that teachers must work to facilitate this natural learning, to set the right conditions for it, or else to simply “get out of the way.” Teachers are expected to work to optimize specific cognitive or neurological processes (e.g., decoding and encoding in reading and writing), and are expected

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<sup>1</sup> This is a paraphrase of Dewey’s famous statement from *My Pedagogic Creed* (1897): “I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (p. 18). Dewey’s assertion is discussed further below.

to address the problems and possibilities presented by a particular developmental stage or psychological diagnosis.

The inspirational messages above, about losing sleep, inspiring hope and living life itself, nevertheless remain important and vital. In fact, demands for accountability, mastery and ever more efficient student learning arguably make them *more* rather than less important. For example, it becomes *more* urgent to see teaching as a matter of hope when a teacher’s “mastery” in the classroom inevitably fails or when we lose sleep over the problems of someone else’s child. It becomes ever *more* valuable to see students as unique individuals when we are pressured to treat them largely terms of a cognitive stage, a specific learning process or a psychological diagnosis. We know that they are always much more than that. For teachers, student-teachers and researchers alike, it becomes *more* important to understand aspects of education like hope, worry, preparation and life more deeply, and as interconnected. It is necessary to reconnect with ways of thinking and speaking about education as a *human* rather than as a psychological or managerial endeavour.

This paper undertakes the initial steps toward this human way of thinking about education by introducing the educational work of Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher, who lived in what is now Germany and Poland from 1768 to 1834, was one of the first to begin the task of establishing a rigorous, but consistently human way of understanding education. He saw it as a “science” or rather, what was later called a *human* “science,” rather than as based on (what were later known as) the *natural* sciences.<sup>2</sup> Human science refers to ways of thinking that are based on the most fundamental elements of human existence and culture—for example, the fact that humans have hope and plans, that our existence is limited or mortal, or that we have language, culture and values that are passed on but also modified from one generation to the next.<sup>3</sup> I show how Schleiermacher worked towards a human understanding of education in his 70-page introduction to his lectures on education from 1826. The paper begins with a short biographical introduction to Schleiermacher and then focuses on his treatment of three basic, closely interrelated themes, or rather pairings or oppositions: 1) Theory and practice; 2) teacher and student (and also parent and child); and 3) education as preparation or as “life itself.” It concludes by pointing to the developments in human science pedagogy and existentialist education that Schleiermacher’s work made possible.

Although these might seem quite different from the kinds of ideas and assumptions that underlie education as it is often understood today, I show how these themes or oppositions—the most anthologized and likely the most accessible in Schleiermacher’s introductory lecture—provide the

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<sup>2</sup> This is based on developments in the understanding of “science” (*Wissenschaft*) that were not known in Schleiermacher’s time. It was articulated some 60 years later, particularly in the work of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911).

<sup>3</sup> This understanding of that which is uniquely human is known as (philosophical) *anthropology*. Anthropology in this sense refers to a “discipline within philosophy that seeks to unify...investigations of human nature in an effort to understand individuals as both creatures of their environment and creators of their own values” (Britannica, 2016, n.p.). It understands humans not as being predetermined by biology or evolution, but as cultural and historical beings, ones that are open to the future and are capable of both self-definition, both individually and collectively.

building blocks for a consistent understanding of education as something explicitly human rather than as managerial or natural scientific at its base. Education is a way of understanding, in other words, that is able to address concern for other people’s children, to speak to the importance of hope, and is able to comprehend the tensions between preparation for the future and simply living life itself.

### **Schleiermacher: The Reformed Romantic**

However, before going further into these themes and the oppositions that constitute them, let’s begin with a brief sketch of who Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher was. Born into a long line of Protestant clergymen, Schleiermacher began work as a private tutor and as a student of theology (Schmidt, 1972, p. 451). He was later engaged as an activist, a preacher, as well as a professor and one of the founders of the first modern research university, the Humboldt University of Berlin. As a young man, Schleiermacher worked as a tutor in the home of a wealthy count and, soon afterwards, completed his theology studies, and worked as a Reformed minister at a hospital in Berlin. He soon came to be involved with literary and cultural groups or salons in Berlin, specifically with the German Romantics, a group of young writers and poets who were not particularly religious, but who greatly valued the young pastor for the depth of his knowledge and his profound humanity.<sup>4</sup> They challenged Schleiermacher to write something of his own, and his response was an over 200 page collection of “speeches:” *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*—addressed, tongue in cheek, to his Romantic friends. Here Schleiermacher emphasized that religion is not about priests and rituals, prayers and commandments. It is instead about seeing the infinite, the source of creative insight so valued by the Romantics, in our everyday lives. Schleiermacher emphasized that one should do things *with* religion and belief, rather than *out* of religious belief or obligation (Blankertz 1982, p. 112).

Schleiermacher then took up a professorial position in nearby Halle, where lectured widely on subjects ranging from theology, history and ethics to hermeneutics, the science and art of interpretation. And he did so, perhaps unfortunately, often without taking the time “to give written form to most of his ideas” (Schmidt 1972, p. 451). As a result, many of his texts, including the one discussed here, are a combination of Schleiermacher’s own lecture notes, along with those made by his students, published posthumously. Despite its depth and striking originality, Schleiermacher’s work on education remained largely unknown in Germany—only to be discovered after the Second World War (Bollnow 1986, p. 720). As one recent author explains, we are waiting for a similar discovery in the English-speaking world, where “work on Schleiermacher” has long been “confined... to a kind of theological ghetto of seminaries and divinity schools” (Vial 2013, p. 1). There are currently only two papers in English, to my

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<sup>4</sup> Two female members of this Romantic circle seemed to be almost swooning over the young minister: Although “he was not the greatest man [*Mann*] of his time,” one says, “he was the greatest human being [*Mensch*].” A second effused that Schleiermacher possessed “so much understanding, so much knowledge, [was] so full of love and yet so tender” (Vial, 2006, p. 12).

knowledge, which focus on Schleiermacher's theory of education.<sup>5</sup> I've written this paper in the hope of helping to change this.

### The “Dignity of Practice”

Schleiermacher's 1826 *Lectures on Education* begins as follows:

It is safe to assume that everybody knows what education means in general. But if we ask [why] ...this common knowledge is to be turned into a theory and what this theory should be about, we have to start over. Originally, parents undertook education, and as is commonly acknowledged, they did so without reference to a “theory.” (Schleiermacher, 1826/2000, p. 7)

Schleiermacher is saying that we all share some common knowledge regarding education, at least as it understood in the broadest sense—as undertaken both by teachers at school *and* by parents at home; we've all undergone our own education and upbringing, and many of us are now engaged in the education and upbringing of others. Schleiermacher wants to take this common knowledge and turn it into a broader understanding, a theory—or into what I have described above as a “human science.” As stated above, he wants to develop a coherent way of thinking and reflecting—a type of “mindfulness”—for teachers and educationists that would have the “human” as its starting point. These few sentences also indicate that Schleiermacher's thought about education is striking similar, at least in its outlines, to his most basic ideas about religion expressed in his *Speeches on Religion*. Neither of these human practices for Schleiermacher are in their most basic sense about teachers and classrooms, or priests and cathedrals. In both cases, Schleiermacher can be said to start “from below” (Vial 2013, p. 18), to begin from the ground up, so to speak.

Taken in its untheorized and broadest sense, education for Schleiermacher is a type of activity, a “practice” and also an “art”—something that humans do that has characteristics all its own. As such, Schleiermacher emphasizes that it “would be incorrect to say that this practice gains its character and specificity only through theory” (2000, p. 11). Qualities such as hope, worry, and questions of preparation or living life itself—as well as the corresponding inspirational messages (above) can be understood as what Schleiermacher calls “educational *teachings*” (*Kunstlehre*), rather than a theory or science. They are the wisdom passed from one teacher to another—without necessarily being brought into close and critical interrelationship that is the prerequisite for something to be called a “theory.” Regardless, this type of knowledge and these activities have

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<sup>5</sup> A search for “Schleiermacher” in the ERIC education database retrieves only 2 articles that deal with directly with Schleiermacher as an educational theorist. One is by Schmidt, cited just above, and the second is: Kenklies, K. (2012). Educational Theory as Topological Rhetoric: The Concepts of Pedagogy of Johann Friedrich Herbart and Friedrich Schleiermacher. *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 31(3), pp. 265-273. Finally, one essay by Schleiermacher has recently been published: Schleiermacher, F.D.E. (2017/1808). Occasional thoughts on the German university in the German sense. In: L. Menand, P. Reitter & C. Wellmon. *The rise of the research university: A sourcebook*. Pp. 45-66. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

been going on well before someone stopped to reflect on theory in a rigorous way, to devise general principles or ways of making it more “efficient.” In the case of education, as for any other “domain that can be called an art in the narrow sense of the word,” Schleiermacher explains, “practice always *precedes theory*” (p. 11). Children were taught and brought up long before the existence of childhood development experts, school systems or parenting guides. Expertise, institutions, guidebooks and the generalizations and theorizations that underpin them, come later.

This “primacy” of practice over theory has important implications. It means that educational practice, as Schleiermacher puts it, has a “dignity,” an importance, value and integrity all its own that “exists independently from theory” (2000, p. 11). However, in insisting on the “dignity” of educational practice, Schleiermacher is *not* saying that educational activity doesn’t need theory, or that practitioners are best *not* to reflect on or be mindful of their practice. Schleiermacher is also *not* saying that upbringing and education cannot be improved, or that there have not been many terrible “mis-educations” that children have suffered at the hands of adults. Rather, it means that what parents have been doing for millennia, and what has been happening in schools for centuries, has a certain value or wisdom that theories—and by extension, the latest findings in sciences of learning and the brain—would do well to recognize and respect. As I emphasize throughout this paper, we cannot invalidate attempts of the past, simply because we think we have found so many better or more efficient solutions that can help us in the present. Instead, we have much to learn from the struggles and achievements—and in a different sense, also the failures and abuses—of the past.

Schleiermacher’s clear insistence on the dignity of practice also reflects a problem that plagues education and teaching to this day. This is the wide gap that separates any general findings in education from their specific application in this classroom, for *this* child, and in *this* situation. Schleiermacher puts it this way: Using theories, “one can only formulate entirely general statements that do not help. This is in part because there are just too many exceptions and because they have nothing to say about the most difficult question—namely the application of these general statements” (2000, p. 7) Schleiermacher’s affirmation of the “dignity of practice” is in this sense also an affirmation of the individual practitioner, the specific situation, place, time and personalities involved, the concrete opportunities that can be taken advantage of and the specific challenges that need to be overcome.

### **“What does the older generation want from the younger?”**

Here are a few examples of the kinds of situations that the art of education must cope with, that simply aren’t solved through general principles, and that also help to illustrate Schleiermacher’s later points in his *Lectures*:

- Young Julie is holding her mother’s hand, watching people enter the elevator. Julie turns and says: “Mom, that lady is *fat!*” Everyone heard! What do I say?

- Kaylie comes to school tired and unbathed—wearing the same clothes all week! It breaks my heart! What’s going on at home?
- Grace is the perfect student. She has to be the best at everything. Her other teachers are happy, but this all makes me uneasy.

Which types of theory and generalization would work in these examples? Thinking just of classroom education, books like John Hattie’s on *Visible Learning*—long high on the list of “required reading” for educators—inform us that activities such as “microteaching” and “phonics” instruction are some of the most efficient ways of “maximizing impact on learning” (Hattie, 2008; see also Fisher, Frey & Hattie, 2016, pp. 45-48). But it is no surprise that none of these activities, or the theories used to justify them would address the three situations outlined above. Is there anything shared among these three situations and myriad others that teachers and parents face every day? What common point of reference can Schleiermacher find to take the first step towards something both general and human? Schleiermacher begins by reasoning as follows:

Humankind is made up by individual beings who live through a certain cycle of existence on this earth before leaving it. And this happens in a way that those who are in this cycle at the same time can be divided into an older and younger generation, with the older being the first to leave... (2000, p. 9)

This very general description readily applies to each of the examples provided above. In each there are two individual human beings, and each pair, to use Schleiermacher’s words, “can be divided into an older and younger generation.” These two groups—the older and the younger—exist side-by-side in these three situations as they do everyday at home, in the classroom, and in many other public and private places. And even though we don’t think of it this way, the adult in a particular educational situation will be the first one to pass on, leaving those younger, in a sense, to take their place. And this includes everyone reading this, who is naturally a member of the “older generation.” Even through these most basic facts of human life and culture might seem rather obvious, they are the starting point for understanding education for Schleiermacher. He continues:

A significant part of the activity of the older generation extends toward the younger, and [this activity] is more incomplete or imperfect, the less aware the older generation is of what it is doing and why it is doing it. Therefore, there has to be a theory that is based on the relation of the older generation and the younger... which proceeds from the question: What does the older generation actually want with the younger? ... This is the basis for everything in our theory. (2000, p. 9)

Schleiermacher is saying a great deal here: First, he is emphasizing how much effort the older generation expends on the younger. This is overtly the case for teachers and parents, but also applies to anyone who supports the development of children and the young, from doctors and family therapists to anyone simply paying taxes for public schools. And this activity can be made more complete, Schleiermacher says, simply by becoming more self-aware as an activity—through reflection, mindfulness or theory. That is why Schleiermacher says that there has to be a theory to help us as adults better understand what we are doing. And such a theory, for Schleiermacher, starts with the question about “what we, as the older generation, actually want from the younger?”

Every parent or teacher seems to want something from their children or students; every adult as well: To not make the mistakes that they did, to enjoy things they never could, to have fun, to love and be loved, to be respectful, to remember, to behave, and for some, even to be seen but not heard. For all the talk about student-centeredness and student learning in contemporary educational theory, Schleiermacher is in effect reminding us that education remains the business of adults. It is adults in education who lay claim to the time, attention, and efforts of the younger generation. We shape and develop children and young people, contributing not only to their areas of ability and knowledge, but also to their habits, orientations and beliefs. We thus exercise power or influence over them—something which Schleiermacher identifies as a “*pedagogical influence*” (2000, p. 15).<sup>6</sup> This refers to an intention to affect the lives of children and young people in order to change some aspect of their existence or character. It is oriented not only to the child’s present circumstances, but also to what the adult wants for him or her in the future.

One of the reasons we do this, as Schleiermacher unhappily reminds us, is that we pass on before the young people that we are seeking to influence—meaning that we must prepare them to inherit the world we have helped to create. This is a world characterized by rapid change, radical uncertainty and sometimes rabid competition, but it is also one that can be secured by ties of family, love, identity and belonging. It is also a world where adults and previous generations have made irreversible decisions regarding the lives of children and future generations. In this sense too, we adults want—or have in effect demanded—something from them. As just one example, children are now brought into a geological age known as the Anthropocene, where the greatest changes to the planet are wrought not by nature, but by humans. This means rapidly diminishing resources and rapidly increasing climate instability for those who are now young and for the generations that follow them.<sup>7</sup>

In the context of such realities, the teacher—as someone in the larger world rather than in the home or family—has a special responsibility in relation to this world. In explaining this point in Schleiermacher’s thinking, I refer briefly to Hannah Arendt, an existentialist philosopher who wrote about and greatly admired Schleiermacher.<sup>8</sup> Arendt explains:

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<sup>6</sup> Of course, none of this should be taken to imply that children don’t also want something of adults, and don’t also significantly influence us. Speaking specifically of infant children in the family, Eric Erikson describes this as follows: “this weak and changing little being moves the whole family along. Babies control and bring up their families as much as they are controlled by them; in fact, we may say that the family brings up a baby by being brought up by him.” This type of “upbringing” or “teaching,” however, is different from the pedagogical influence of adults. The influence of adults on children is subject to deliberate adult intention, as well as the possibility of adult reflection.

<sup>7</sup> For example, in the US, youth have filed a constitutional climate lawsuit claiming that, through the government’s affirmative actions that cause climate change, it has violated the youngest generation’s constitutional rights to life, liberty, and property, as well as failed to protect the public trust (see: <https://www.ourchildrenstrust.org/us/federal-lawsuit/>).

<sup>8</sup> Arendt praises both Schleiermacher’s conception of religion and the work of his most prominent follower, Wilhelm Dilthey, who founded the “human sciences” as a multidisciplinary field of study: “In Germany, Schleiermacher was the first to detect in the “lived experiences” the central interest of man and he transformed, accordingly, religion into religiosity, faith into religious sentiments, and the “reality of God” into the feeling of dependence. It is by no means accidental that Dilthey’s greatest admiration went to Schleiermacher and that one of his most elaborate and best known works was devoted to his biography.”



Insofar as the child is not yet acquainted with the world, he must be gradually introduced to it... educators here stand in relation to the young as representatives of a world for which they must assume responsibility although they themselves did not make it... Vis-a-vis the child it is as though [the teacher] were a representative of all adult inhabitants, pointing out the details and saying to the child: This is our world. (1961, p. 189)

In the relationship between the older generation and the younger, the teacher has an indispensable representative and mediating role. Whereas parents and other adults in children's lives (e.g., relatives, adult neighbors and friends) play an indispensable role at home or in the *private* realm, the teacher—whether in a public or private school—is answerable to a broader *public*, to multiple parents, to a curriculum, to school administration and to other stakeholders. In this and other senses, education is not an individual or isolated endeavor, but one that is social, collective and communal. In this sense, it can be said to be “political” insofar as it involves a “polity”—an organized community or body.

Finally, in having this question—what does the older generation actually want with the other—as the starting point for understanding education, Schleiermacher makes it clear that education is relational and above all, *ethical*. It is relational, of course, in that it is defined by a relation between the older and younger generations, between a parent and a child, a teacher and a student. It is *ethical* insofar as the older generation is *responsible* for the younger generation. The older has the ability to act and decide that the younger generation, especially its youngest members, do not have. This sense of what *should* be done, of what is the right and *responsible* thing to do, is manifest in all of the three short examples or dilemmas above. Whether it is about the “perfect” student or a child's failings, the questions raised by these examples have to do with ethical dilemmas, with the question of an ethically and relationally appropriate response. These questions obviously do *not* have to do with how to achieve greater efficiency in learning or how to leverage specific cognitive or neurological functions. Instead, the examples show how teachers—as a part of the older generation—do indeed face worrisome dilemmas about other people's children—those from the younger generation who faces them in the classroom everyday.

On the other hand, thinking of education in terms of “learning,” as is so common today, simply darkens or conceals the question of adult responsibility. Speaking of “learning,” and how learning (of whatever kind) can be facilitated does not capture this question of what adults actually want with the younger generation. The vocabulary of contemporary education, in other words, distracts and detracts from Schleiermacher's urgent question of “why” the older generation is doing what it is doing. In fact, this vocabulary is based on the assumption that this question has an obvious, agreed-upon answer that isn't open to discussion: Namely that we have to get children “college ready,” to ensure they are successful in a highly competitive world. Even more, the attempt to simply focus on optimizing the conditions for learning can be regarded as kind of collective attempt of adults to remove themselves from ethical questions of responsibility, power and concern (even worry) that is directly implied in what adults want from children and why. It also removes the older generation from the kind of reflection, mindfulness and even theorizing that I (with

Schleiermacher) argue is needed to make education more complete and accomplished: “The less aware the older generation is about what it is doing or why it is doing it [the] less complete or perfect” its educational efforts will inevitably be (2000, p. 9).

Schleiermacher probes into these questions of “what” and “why” by asking: “To what extent does the action [of the older] correspond to the [given] goal, the result?” (2000, p. 9). In other words: Do the consequences of the influence or action of the older generation correspond to the goal that they themselves have set? By reflecting on whether this is the case, by making this correspondence and alignment clearer, education can be made more complete, or be brought closer to perfection: “The more the older generation has already been developed, the less we can leave question of this influence to mere chance. Consequently, we can now clearly see the definite relation of the theory of education to ethics, and that it is a theory of an art that is derived from ethics.” In other words, the more developed we are or have become in our understanding of what we are doing in education and why we are doing it, the more we collectively become aware of the profoundly ethical character of educational dynamics and demands. Also, the more aware we are of the “what” and “why” of what we want from the younger generation, the more we will see this not as an individual endeavour, but as involving everyone—from the school administrator through the researcher to the everyday taxpayer. Schleiermacher expresses this relationship of education to both politics and ethics in his own inimical way: “Pedagogy is a field of inquiry that is at once closely connected to ethics, and also derived from it as an applied field, which is coordinated with politics” (2000, p. 13).

### **Hope vs. Life Itself: Sacrificing the Present for the Future**

Schleiermacher addresses the key ethical question of what we as the older generation should want of the younger in a wide range of ways in his *Lectures on Education*. Many of these are explicitly related to the collective or “political” nature of education. However, one that is of particular relevance here is his discussion of *time*, of the *present* and the *future* in education and upbringing. The question of time has already been shown to be central to Schleiermacher’s more general understanding of education: Older and younger generations are defined by their different positions in time, and the task of education is presented to us as a result of the limited time that each of us has on this earth.

Schleiermacher begins his discussion of this theme or opposition of present and future by speaking specifically of the pedagogical influence of the adult, and how it is inevitably oriented towards the future: “In education as such, the relation to the future cannot be neglected in any way, since it is truly the nature of the pedagogical influence to be oriented towards the future.” However, this orientation to the future reflects more than the just the need to ensure children are one day able to “take our place” in the world. According to Schleiermacher, it is much broader and involves all of humankind. For Schleiermacher, this future orientation has to do with what he calls “the advancement of human activity on earth”—his (perhaps somewhat religious) belief that some level

of “perfection” is attainable over the decades and centuries. He says at one point in his lectures that all “cultural and intellectual [*geistige*] life...rises towards perfection” (2000, p. 12). Today we often (but not necessarily always) subscribe to related beliefs in human, scientific, technological or social progress, or more broadly, to a kind of hope or faith that things will work out or continue to get better. As is sometimes said, we are “creatures of hope.” This applies not only to our common, collective, “human” situation, but also to the child or young person before us—we see their emerging abilities in terms of hope, in terms of their eventual realization and fulfillment in the larger world. We hope that young people we know will avoid our (or other’s) struggles and failures in life, and that what we do for them now will help or prepare them for the future.

It is here that the quote about teachers inspiring hope comes into focus. It is also here that the meaning of John Dewey’s famous statement about education can be clarified: “that education... is a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (1897 p. 18). Both of these sentiments address the tendency of education to be oriented towards the future. They can be readily explained through Schleiermacher’s notion of adult pedagogical influence, and its orientation not just to the present, but also to the future. First, Schleiermacher has indicated that to “inspire hope” as a teacher or adult is to give the wants, desires and expectations that constitute hope a more tangible and substantial form. It is to make the expectations of the student for his or her future appear more real, rich and attainable to both the teacher and to the student him or herself. To inspire hope as a teacher, in other words, is to offer a concrete educational preparation or pathway towards this attainment.

To say on the other hand that education should be about life itself, rather than a preparation for it, as Dewey does, is to apparently contradict what was just said about hope. This quote about preparation versus living life first appeared in Dewey’s *Pedagogic Creed*, written over 70 years after Schleiermacher’s lectures. He also writes that an “education which does not occur through forms of life...worth living for their own sake” is an impoverished one, even one that is “cramp[ing] and deaden[ing]” (1897, p. 18). So how can education be about hope for the future and at the same time be “life itself”—a way of life “worth living for its own sake?”

In developing a consistent and coherent “theory” for education—one beginning with the pedagogical influence of the older generation on the younger—Schleiermacher recognized this dilemma, and also worked to resolve it. Schleiermacher begins by reasoning that the everyday desires of the child—particularly of the very young child—are not about the future, but very much about the present, about living life itself: “Surely the child in every moment desires some kind of specific activity in life” Schleiermacher says; and ultimately, “all of our life activity manifests consistent opposition to the practice” of preparing for the future (2000, pp. 51, 52). The problem, however, is that “in all purely pedagogical moments,” this same preparatory “practice... encourages something to appear that has not yet come into appearance” (2000, p. 51); it develops knowledge and capabilities, in other words, that were in some way previously not there. The

dilemma that arises through this situation is as follows: On the one hand, there are the adult purposes and intentions of education, oriented as they are towards the future; and on the other, there is the undeniable importance of the present, especially for the child as he or she lives life. In “this relation,” between past and present, as Schleiermacher puts it, “the child lives entirely in the present, not for the future, and the child therefore cannot participate in [adult] purpose[s or intentions], and cannot have an interest in [these] for the development of his or her own individual character” (2000, p. 51).

In other words, in the relation between generations, the expectations for the future held by the older inevitably requires the interruption, the degradation, even the suspension of present life and interests for the younger. The exasperated parent often has no choice but to tell the crying child that something happening *now*—sitting on the dentist’s chair, being sent off to school, doing homework—is “for your own good.” It is “for your own good” insofar as present pain is justified by the “good” of some future gain—whether it be healthy teeth or educational achievement. We seem to have no choice as Schleiermacher puts it, but to “sacrifice the present for the future.” This is made all the worse, Schleiermacher says, by the fact we can never be sure whether our pedagogical intentions as parents or educators will actually bear fruit. Sitting in the dentist’s chair or doing schoolwork *now* offers no assurance of oral health or academic success *later*. Schleiermacher explains: “To justify the sacrifice of the moment would be right only if the child were [eventually] satisfied with the substance of the pedagogical influence. However,” Schleiermacher adds, “one can never know this” (2000, p. 53). One can never really know, in other words, whether the child, at some time in the future, will see the wisdom behind sacrificing some childhood joy and pleasure for the sake of preparing for the future.

We all want to avoid sacrificing the present for the future, and things like educational games and songs, experiential and discovery forms of education, or even the “gamification” of educational activities (i.e., learning complex subjects through elaborate simulations and video games) can all be seen as expressions of this. Almost 200 years before the most recent of these developments, Schleiermacher framed these and other attempts in a very precise and distilled form—one that is in keeping with his understanding of education as above all *ethical*. He understands the satisfaction of children’s present desires as exemplified in “play,” and preparation for the future as epitomized in academic “exercises:”

We call “play” in the broadest sense that which, in the life of the child, offers satisfaction in the very moment rather than being attuned to the future. On the other hand, we call “exercise” that activity which is directed towards the future. If therefore education were to be consistent with the moral goal [of not robbing the child of the present], our solution would have to be as follows: In the beginning, exercise has to present itself exclusively as a game. However, gradually both—play and exercise—would become separate to the

degree to which the child develops an appreciation for the exercise and rejoices in it for what it is. (2000, p. 56)

Schleiermacher here is hoping that it is possible to have younger children participate in a kind of play that would be entirely engaging while at the same time being educational. He says that this would allow such children, as they grow older, to engage just as fully in academic assignments and exercises, knowing that the reward, the “fun” will only come later. He refers to this as “unification” of present pleasures with preparations for the future, saying that there could in theory be preparations and exercises “in which no sacrifice occurs.” Sounding very much like John Dewey, Schleiermacher explains: “Even when...the life of the child... is interrupted in a period of education, it is [a life] that is ethically treated as an end [in itself], and the pedagogical influence becomes the satisfaction of his or her very way of being” (2000, p. 54) In other words, the child or student is just as happy and satisfied to engage in preparations for future as he or she is with the pleasures of the present.

However, despite all our advances in psychology, and the techniques and technologies of “learning,” we know that the unification of which Schleiermacher speaks is all too often impossible. We might be inclined to conclude that Schleiermacher’s remarks here—just like Dewey’s thoughts about education being “life itself”—are aspirational rather than purely observational.

### **Conclusion: From Practical Art to a Human Science Pedagogy**

Schleiermacher—seemingly more than either Dewey or today’s gamification experts—has put a fine point on one of the key dilemmas or double-binds facing education: That the present, so important to the child, must sometimes be sacrificed for the future. And that the hoped for gains from such sacrifices are by no means assured. Educators sometimes have no choice but to sacrifice the present for the future—to be in the unenviable and in some ways unethical position of having to rob children of their present to secure their future. Rather than the “unification” of present pleasures and preparations for the future that Schleiermacher sought, perhaps the best we can do is to seek a kind of balance.

Schleiermacher has also shown us that it is our unavoidable fate as the “older generation” to “want” something of the younger. This, combined with our own mortality, places us in a position where we are unavoidably responsible, and where we must reconcile our “want” with what is actually best for this child and for future generations. We cannot allow our engagement with children to simply become a matter of compensating for what we “want” for our own selves or what we believe we missed out on when we were once the younger generation.

To address these challenges, what is required is reflection, understanding and, above all, simple recognition and mindful awareness of what is facing us. Education becomes better first and

foremost by becoming self-aware as a practice. In addition, Schleiermacher provides us with the most basic theoretical framework for reflecting on our own educational activity, and thus moving towards this self-awareness. Also, Schleiermacher does so by starting with a description and reflection of educational and pedagogical practice as it *is* (or *was* in his own time), rather than with his prescriptions for how this practice *should be*. He presents it to us in terms of its flawed, paradoxical idiosyncrasies and particularities—its unreflected sayings, aphorisms, even clichés (what he calls its “teachings” or *Kunstlehre*)—and not what some theory or psychology says it *should be*. And this starting point, moreover, originates with that which is emphatically *human*: The hope, mortality and also the combination of intergenerational continuity and renewal that are all irrevocably part of human life.

The type of thinking that Schleiermacher develops from these basic starting points does not in any way come to an end with what I have presented here. In addition to Schleiermacher’s own significant further contributions, there are many who followed in his wake, elaborating further on his notions of the educational relationship between the generations, and describing with their own insight and precision the irresolvable dilemmas that foster education reflection and self-awareness. Those working with these ideas referred to themselves as “human scientists” and labelled their study of education “human science pedagogy” (*Geisteswissenschaften*). Among their insights is the “pedagogical relation”—a special relationship that arises between individual members of Schleiermacher’s older and younger generations.<sup>9</sup> This intergenerational relationship, marked as it is by human uncertainty and mortality, by hope, risk and renewal, has been developed further in specifically *existential* approaches to education, for example, by Hannah Arendt and Otto Friedrich Bollnow.<sup>10</sup> Arendt places emphasis on *natality*, the promise or renewal that each new generation brings, and Bollnow, on hope and trust as the educational antipodes to the existentialist emphasis on *Angst*. An additional insight developed in the wake of Schleiermacher’s work is “educational reality,” a notion that builds on Schleiermacher’s own *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive* treatment of educational practice.<sup>11</sup> This is the idea that education presents us with a relational, interpersonal, ethically- and even emotionally-charged “reality.” This idea has been further extended by other human science pedagogues to include the notion of “pedagogical tact” that is demonstrated through a kind of reflective practice.<sup>12</sup> However, it is Schleiermacher who initiated this explicitly human, practice-oriented approach to education and who outlined its key themes—providing the opportunity for further generations of educationists, perhaps including ourselves, to develop them further.

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<sup>9</sup> See: Friesen, N. (May 1, 2017). The pedagogical relation past and present: experience, subjectivity and failure. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*. Available “Online First” at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00220272.2017.1320427>

<sup>10</sup> See: Koerrenz, R. & Friesen, N. (2017). *Existentialism and Education: An Introduction to Otto Friedrich Bollnow*. London: Palgrave.

<sup>11</sup> See: Koerrenz, R. & Friesen, N. (2017). Pp. 51-92

<sup>12</sup> See: N. Friesen & R. Osguthorpe. (in press). Tact and the pedagogical triangle: The authenticity of teachers in relation. *Teaching and Teacher Education*.

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