

Reframing responsibility in an era of responsibilisation: feminism, education and an ‘idiom of care’

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Late modern social theories and critiques of neoliberalism have emphasised the regulatory and negative aspects of responsibility, readily associating it with self-responsibility or analytically converting it to the notion of responsibilisation. This article argues for stepping back from these critiques in order to reframe responsibility as a relational disposition and practice in education that warrants a fresh look. Feminist scholarship on the ethics of care, affective equality and relational responsibility are revisited in light of a consideration of teachers’ work and educational purposes. It is argued, first, that there is an urgency for repositioning responsibility as a productive orientation and practice, given definitions of teaching are increasingly instrumental. Second, feminist theories of care and relational responsibility remain relevant to normative discussions of education and its knowledge and person-making purposes. Third, critical engagements with the affective and social circumstances of precarity bring new challenges for how educational institutions might respond to a pervasive sense of vulnerability, and accompanying opportunities and demands for care, interdependence and relational responsibility – towards others, not only the self.

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Introduction

- I mean things were changing [late 1950s] and you knew you could do anything, that was the sort of feeling you had, especially as you had Miss Jones, that was really ... she was an inspiration ...
- Well Miss Jones if we needed any help would’ve been the one. You know, she was very supportive ...
- I just would’ve liked to have said to Miss Jones and Miss Stitchnoff, thank you, thank you, so inspirational.

(Marilyn H., oral history interview 10 June 2010, reflections on being a secondary school student in the 1950s, small country town, Australia)

It is a familiar experience for teacher educators to hear from aspiring teachers that they are motivated by a desire to make a difference, relishing the opportunity to work with young people, helping to mould their individual and collective futures. I suspect my own experience of school teaching was framed by similar ambitions, even if one looks back now with a mix of condescending nostalgia and scepticism about the redemptive discourses of teaching. Nevertheless, similar desires have fuelled the work of generations of teachers. This came home to me forcefully while I recently listened to life-history narratives of former teachers who were working in Australia during the mid-decades of the twentieth century.¹ The vivid memories of turning points in their lives commonly pivoted not on the formal curriculum, but on acts of thoughtfulness and care, on special efforts teachers made towards them when they were students themselves, or the personal and sometimes transformative encounters they had with their own students across their teaching careers. None of

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this is likely to be surprising, but the fond intensity of these recollections was striking, warranting more critical attention than a simple acknowledgement of the memory of strong feelings. Equally striking was the sense of social responsibility many of them carried into teaching – responsibility for education in the abstract, as a public good, as part of a social mission or a radical politics, and as an individual right or entitlement, alongside a sense of responsibility for the lives of individuals and classes of students.

These observations gave rise to a number of questions about how the idea of responsibility is articulated in contemporary educational discourses. What does a ‘sense of responsibility’ mean in discussions about education today? What are the dominant terms in which responsibility is understood, and how might it connect to an ethics of responsibility towards other? What kind of pedagogical and subjectivity work does responsibility enable or oblige? How are the gendered dimensions of responsibility playing out or reconfiguring? And what theoretical resources might be helpful for opening up renewed thinking about responsibility in and for education today?

Such questions arise at a particular historical moment of widespread feelings that we are living in especially precarious times, when issues of care and interdependence become more pressing. Concomitantly, across social policy, high theory and popular advice, notions of individual and social vulnerability have a renewed visibility (Eccelstone, 2015), with vulnerability represented variously as a sign of personal pathology, a fragility that registers our humanity and a characteristic of the contemporary socio-politico-affective era (McLeod, 2012). In her ‘affective histories of the present’, Lauren Berlant (2012, p. 166) writes of vulnerability and precarity as ‘magnetizing concepts’ (see too Butler, 2004), citing a sense of precariousness in response to war and military aggression, unstable economies and uncertain futures: her notion of ‘cruel optimism’ captures feelings of precarity in the face of the attrition of the ‘good life’ fantasy (Berlant, 2011). Berlant’s interest in precariousness lies in ‘the relation between its materiality in class and political terms, its appearances as an affect, and as an emotionally invested slogan that circulates in and beyond specific circumstances’ (Berlant, 2012, p. 166). In her view, the reach and intensity of precariousness has become ‘a rallying cry for a thriving new world of interdependency and care that’s not just private, but it is also an idiom for describing a loss of faith in a fantasy world to which generations have become accustomed’ (Berlant, 2012, p. 166). Of particular relevance to the arguments explored here is Berlant’s (*ibid*) observation that ‘precarious politics’ signifies a shift ‘from an idiom of power to an idiom of care as grounds for what needs to change to better suture the social’. Trying to figure out what a shift to an ‘idiom of care’ might involve in the field of education in the specific circumstances of now (and not in a universalist or ahistorical sense) is one background provocation, including what such a shift enables and what it recedes from view, as suggested by the description of a move away from an idiom of power. Looking afresh at responsibility, and revisiting earlier and recent feminist debates about care and ethics offers one route into this.

A sense of responsibility is not the same as techniques of responsabilisation

The idea of teaching as a vocation has a long lineage, tied to the religious origins of educational provision as well as to the civic ambitions of state schooling. Notions of duty, obligation, service, responsibility as well as care have historically framed the practice of teaching. These have been powerfully constituted as gendered qualities (Warin & Gannerud, 2014), with the care work of teaching both romanticised and devalued – materially and symbolically: women care, men inspire. This has produced mixed messages about heroic and charismatic teachers (the ‘Dead Poets’ Society’ syndrome) alongside the ambivalent ideal of self-sacrificing and mythically kind teachers. There is an urgency to revisit questions of teaching and responsibility now, at a time when teachers’ work is increasingly being recast in instrumental terms (metrics of performance, merit pay). Amidst checklists of ‘professional standards’ and measures of teaching effectiveness, where does the work of care and relational responsibility fit? Listening to former teachers reflecting on their educational

experiences underscored the extent to which these vital aspects have become sidelined in recent discussions about teaching.

A further context is the reach of late modern social theories and critiques of neoliberalism that have emphasised the regulatory and negative aspects of responsibility. Responsibility is commonly rendered as self-responsibility or analytically converted to the notion of responsabilisation, referring to the diverse processes by which individuals not only assume greater and greater responsibility for their own destinies but in so doing re-configure relationships between individuals and social and political life. Following a line of work influenced by the arguments, among others, of Beck (1992), Giddens (1991), and Rose (1996), responsabilisation is typically associated with intensified pressures on individuals to be self-governing, emphasising a pessimistic account of rampant individualisation. A raft of critical educational scholarship informed by such work has documented the damaging personal and social effects of responsabilisation, particularly for young people (e.g. Furlong & Cartmel, 2006; Kelly, 2001). Such discussions draw attention to various compulsions to govern and discipline citizens, teachers and students, inducing them to be relentlessly responsible for their own destinies. In blunt terms, social mobility and educational success are represented in individualistic terms, of sticking to personal goals and ambitions (e.g. Reay, 2013), children are seen as increasingly responsible for their own futures and the normative pupil and future citizen of curriculum is a self-starter, the opinion-forming individual able to make judgments and determine their own (unique) path through a mass of competing messages (e.g. McLeod and Yates, 2006). An accompanying sociological critique is that such injunctions and norms of responsabilisation work more or less effectively for groups depending on their cultural and social positioning: they exacerbate relations of privilege and poverty; favour cultures that prize autonomy as a virtue; have gendered and classed consequences; and contribute overall to insinuating the divisiveness of neoliberalism into the pores and minutiae of everyday existence.

I present a case for stepping back from these critiques to allow space for other ways of thinking about responsibility in education. The immediate context is educational debates within Australia, but given transnational policy logics, and the traveling discourses of feminism, the arguments are likely to have a wider resonance. While remaining cognisant of the effects of a pervasive responsabilisation and the historical circumstances which produced both the phenomenon and its various critiques, I want to re-position responsibility as a productive and affirming orientation to self and other in educational work, particularly in teaching. I argue that responsibility should be reclaimed as a relational disposition that warrants a fresh look outside late modern and neo-liberal critiques that have harnessed it to quite specific analytic and political purposes. To do so, I revisit a body of feminist scholarship on care and ethics which offers helpful directions for shifting the critical gaze from a predominant focus on self-responsibility to recognition of relational responsibility towards others. This encompasses feminist work that has theorised care and responsibility (Beasley & Bacchi, 2005; Warin & Gannerud, 2014; Young, 2011) as well as work that seeks to revalue the affective, ethical and relational dimensions of education (Baker et al., 2009; Zembylas, Bozalek, & Shefer, 2014).

Before proceeding, a brief caveat is noted. In some respects, the case made here might be working from a 'false antithesis', in that there is not necessarily an exclusive opposition between self-responsibilisation and responsibility towards and for others. Conventionally for women, this has not been perceived as a straightforward either/or identification. Indeed, being oriented to obligation and care for others is a conventional hallmark of femininity – deeply implicated in its normalization and repetition – often positioned in tension with the pursuit of freedom to make one's own life (a dilemma elaborated by Carol Gilligan (1982) among others, as the tension between autonomy and connection). It could be also argued that developing a habit of orienting to others is, in Foucauldian terms, a technology of the self (Foucault, 1998), a mode of gendered self-making that is simultaneously ethical in expressing care for others and a mode of subjectification that inscribes gender difference and asymmetrical relations of power and autonomy. While these observations warrant a larger discussion, they nevertheless suggest that responsibility is not usefully

characterised as either principally about regulation or relationality, and that gendered resonances of responsibility, belong in the forefront, especially when looking to the field of education.

Affirming responsibility and its scope in education

The responsabilisation thesis, while influential today, is of course not the only way in which notions of responsibility have shaped the educational field. Before turning to its uses in education, it is helpful to signal briefly some of the diverse ways in which responsibility surfaces in social discourse. As Hage and Eckersley (2012) observe, the ‘language of responsibility permeates social life’: its ‘everyday useage is more often than not closely associated with questions of causality and the formal/legal, or informal, attribution of liability’ and encompasses questions of ‘duty, accountability and morality’ (p. 1). Responsibility is, they argue, a concept that touches on many aspects of people’s lives, noting that: ‘All spheres of belonging that encompass our social being are delimited by explicit or implicit attempts at defining, assigning, assuming, questioning or resisting such conceptions of responsibilities and their scope’ (p. 2). They explore the legal and political dimensions of responsibility and accountability – for example, the responsibilities of states in international relations or the responsibility and accountabilities of elected governments.

Legal and political responsibilities are often construed in terms of liability and blame, as Iris Marion Young (2011) elaborates in her proposal for an alternative account of responsibility to address structural injustice. In contrast to the ‘liability model’ dominant in moral and legal discourse, Young proposes a ‘social connection model’ of responsibility, which posits that ‘all those who contribute by their actions to structural processes with some unjust outcomes share responsibility for the injustice. This responsibility is not primarily backward-looking, as the attribution of guilt or fault is, but rather primarily forward-looking’ (Young, 2011, p. 95). Being responsible means ‘that one has an obligation to join with others who share that responsibility in order to transform the structural processes to make their outcomes less unjust’ (p. 95). Linking responsibility to collective and personal action and structural change resonates with debates about individual, institutional and state responsibilities to distant and intimate others, to strangers and to those closer to home (one’s family or friends, networks of affiliation, citizens of the same nation state). Many of the big moral and political dilemmas of our time such as the nature of hospitality, belonging, movements of people, citizenship claims and rights (Benhabib, 2004; Somers, 2008) as well as ecological crises, call up notions of responsibility – towards others and the other-than-human, towards principles and universal values, towards places. According to the political philosopher Seyla Benhabib, working out how to respond and act in the face of such multi-layered issues requires an ongoing mediation of ‘moral universalism with ethical particularism’ (2004, p.16). This formulation also speaks to the universal and particular dimensions of responsibility and the type of principles (absolute, contextual) and motivations called upon to guide our sense of acting and being responsible. These matters are especially pressing in the field of educational work, where, for example, classrooms bring together intimates and strangers (in fact complicate such distinctions) and teachers’ daily actions and decisions navigate normative and contextual factors as well as affective relations.

The attribution or claiming of rights is often paired with responsibility to honour, recognise or enact those rights, and this alliance extends into more informal injunctions in everyday life. This is manifest in admonitions for children and young people to exercise responsibility as they acquire more freedoms and rights. Similar notions of responsibility are woven into developmental accounts of subjectivity, with acquiring a sense of responsibility aligned to gaining autonomy and adult status. Remaining in the realm of intra- and inter-subjectivity, responsibility can also be invoked by its absence, as suggested by Sara Ahmed (2014) in her dazzling analysis of the gendered ‘willful subject’ in literary and cultural texts. The figure of the willful subject has her own mind and a kind of excess of will that makes her stubborn, disobedient, contrary and *not* responsible in the sense of

not adhering to social norms or a conforming femininity, nor subjecting herself to the containment of will. Even this small snapshot of how the idea of responsibility is variously invoked suggests its centrality in political, social and interpersonal life.

Responsibility has long been a pivotal notion in education, from formal philosophical deliberations on norms and purposes to more vernacular accounts of how schools ‘ought to fix’ whatever the prevailing problem is said to be. Looking to classic formulations in the philosophy of education, R.S. Peters (1973/1959), for example, articulated the value of personal responsibility for individual actions, in contrast to what he observed as a modern malaise, with too many attributing their failures or problems to external causes of a psychological or social nature. This illustrates Hage and Eckersley’s (2012) observation that responsibility is often allied to questions of cause and liability, and it also links the exercise of responsibility in education to a kind of a robust and self-reliant individualism.

In the contemporary era, educational work is shaped and defined by shifting regimes of governance and policy rhetorics that mark out the pragmatic as well as aspirational responsibilities of schools and teachers, as much policy sociology has shown (Ball, 2005); it is embedded in local/global political and social conditions (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) and it carries with it promises of transformation and responsibilities to students and larger social collectivities. Moreover, teachers’ work is defined by an almost overwhelming repertoire of responsibilities. Key attributes of the good teacher encompass responsibility for the learning of children, their wellbeing and future success, effective classroom management and good results on tests. The multiple responsibilities of schools in educating the next generation are articulated in the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008): these principles underpinned the development of an Australian national curriculum. Responsibility is represented as a social duty, with schools seen as vital in ‘promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation’s ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion’. This role is conceived as a ‘collective responsibility’, shared with ‘students, parents, carers, families, the community, business and other education and training providers’ (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 4). The attribution of weighty responsibilities to schools is not new, and while this statement of admirable principles affirms a rhetorical commitment to the full development and wellbeing of individuals, elsewhere, including in associated assessment regimes, a more instrumental sense of the reach and responsibilities of schools is evident.

An influential strand of transnational educational policy discourse is reframing teaching as an activity principally concerned with testing and improving student learning and outcomes (Lingard, 2011). From this viewpoint, pedagogical responsibility is properly discharged through ensuring that measurable forms of learning take place and improvement can be documented. This represents, as others also argue, a narrowing of the vision and purposes of education (Yates, 2012). Education becomes synonymous with learning and normative questions regarding the person-forming and knowledge-building aims of education or the nature of the ethical relation between student and teacher virtually disappear (Biesta, 2012). A sense of responsibility becomes re-articulated as being professionally responsible for student learning. As Lynch, Lyons, and Cantillon (2007) argue, the ‘teacher’s role as an affectively engaged caring person is not attributed much significance, not least because the teacher is largely seen as midwife for delivering student performance’ (p. 14).

Increasing concerns with testing and measurement of effective schools and quality teaching are part of the context in which consideration of care and relational ethics appear to have dropped off the educational agenda. There are other likely factors as well – perhaps as a critical response to shun naïve conceptions of teaching as ‘merely’ caring work and a refusal to trivialise the feminisation of the profession. Or, given widespread concerns about childhood abuse, a response to the perceived and actual dangers of teachers being ‘too close’ to pupils, which gives rise to a different set of issues about responsibility, protection and duty of care. Others (such as Lynch et al., 2007) argue that matters to do with caring for others have never been part of the mission of schools,

because of an ‘implicit if not explicit assumption that the development of autonomous, rational, public citizens remains the core educational project (p. 4). Critics themselves have contributed, even inadvertently to this sidelining of care: as Lynch et al. argue, ‘research in the sociology of education has also been quite indifferent to the importance of other-centred work, the work arising from our interdependencies and dependencies as affective, relational beings’ (p. 2).

In contrast, other scholars have lamented a perceived influx of ‘feelings’ into schools, noting a therapeutic turn that has displaced attention from what children should know or are learning, with an over-focus on how they feel about themselves. Critics of the rise of self-esteem agendas in schools have argued that concerns with ‘feeling good about myself’ have displaced the moral and knowledge functions of schooling, emptying out the curriculum in favour of a self-focussed agenda (Stout, 2000). In reference to the UK and the US, Furedi (2009) has observed that ‘the therapeutic objective to make children feel good about themselves is [increasingly] seen as the primary objective of schooling’ (p. 190). Such orientations have been criticized for their individualized solutions to complex social and structural problems (Kenway & Willis, 1990) and for overstating the efficacy of an introspective gaze for navigating social life (McLeod, 2015). Critics of therapeutic culture in schools have exposed the excesses of individualised self-esteem, however, it would be mistaken to conflate their targets of critique with the more relational and socially-oriented account of responsibility and care proposed here. In these latter accounts, tendencies to self-absorption and personalisation of care and self-responsibility are equally criticised as problematic and dangerous (Tronto, 2013). Nevertheless, debates about therapeutic culture point not only to the mixed views on emotions in education but also to the repeated polarisation of learning and emotion.

The partitioning of affective realms in the work of education echoes longstanding distinctions between the public and private sphere, which have been at the core of much political theory, aligning emotions and relationality to the private sphere and valorising the public domain as the space of rationality and freedom from affective ties. These old dualisms have been comprehensively challenged by a range of feminist work (Arnot & Dillabough, 2006; Pateman, 1988; Tronto, 2013), including recent accounts of ‘public feelings’ and the affective charge of social life (Berlant, 2011), all of which collapse neat oppositions between private and public, and bring into sharp relief the significance of inter-subjectivity and relationality cutting across both domains. To develop these arguments, I re-visit feminist debates about care and relational responsibility as they offer useful directions for re-articulating responsibility and for drawing out its ethical, transformative and affective dimensions in educational work.

Ethics of care and relational responsibility in teachers’ work

A resurgence of feminist interest in the ethics of care (Baker et al., 2009; Beasley & Bacchi, 2005) exists alongside growing attention to the politics of vulnerability and precarity (Berlant, 2012; Butler, 2004; Eccelstone, 2015). It follows earlier work from second-wave feminism associated with figures such as Nell Noddings (1984), Joan Tronto (1993) and Carol Gilligan (1982). While this influential early work emerged from different philosophical positions – which deserve more attention than is possible here – in combination it brought centre-stage questions about gender and morality, care relations in the public and private spheres and notions of women’s way of knowing (caring, learning, writing ...). As Beasley and Bacchi (2005) argue, ‘care was refreshingly recast as a resource for both private and public life’, challenging ideas of the public sphere having ‘a monopoly on the political imaginary’ (2005, p. 50). While the salience of this work did not recede, it met an increasingly critical reception, in part because of charges of essentialism and the emergence of new feminist theoretical hotspots.

A wave of new work is opening up a fresh appraisal of the importance of these debates and an associated reconsideration of responsibility. Across different styles of theorising, responsibility as a

practice and mode of inter-action is emphasised. Margaret Urban Walker (2007) argues it is ‘fruitful to locate morality in *practices of responsibility* that implement commonly shared understandings about who gets to do what to whom and who is supposed to do what for whom’ (p. 16). While much rests upon and is even repressed in claims of ‘commonly shared understandings’, Walker proposes that in ‘the ways we assign, accept, or deflect responsibilities, we express our understandings of our own and others’ identities, relationships, and values’ (p. 16). In her philosophy of ‘agential realism’, Karen Barad (2007) foregrounds responsibility as an inter-action with the world around us, arguing that ‘[W]e are responsible for the world of which we are a part ... because reality is sedimented out of particular practices that we have a role in shaping and through which we are shaped’ (p. 390). Barad’s distinctive take on this general proposition is the challenge of ‘learning how to inter-act responsibly as part of the world’ while ‘understanding that “we” are not the only active beings’ (p. 391). The social connection model of responsibility advanced by Young (2011) also emphasises practices and collectivities, focusing on responsibility for actions to address injustice. Framing responsibility as a practice and inter-action directly speaks to the specific characteristics of educational work and the relational encounters of teaching.

Working from this rich body of theorising, I highlight three related clusters of argument that directly engage with education, and which together suggest approaches for forging a multi-dimensional conception of responsibility, one that seeks to address the ethical and affective in conjunction with the social, distributive and knowledge aspects of schooling. The first concerns the idea of relational ethics, between self and other in pedagogy, as explicated in the work of Sharon Todd (Todd 2003); the second is relations of care, love and solidarity in education, building on a critical social justice and equality framework (Baker et al., 2009; Lynch et al., 2007); and the third is the concept of relational responsibility, drawing from Joan Tronto’s (2013) work and its application in educational settings (See also Zembylas et al., 2014).

In her analysis of ‘learning from the other’, Sharon Todd (2003) proposes that one aim of social justice education is for teachers and pedagogies ‘to arouse responsibility through “developing” concern for and connection to the lives of “Others”’ (p. 66). This can be achieved through exposure to another’s suffering’ (p. 66) and a ‘*committed* regard’ for the suffering of another has the ‘potential to lead to responsibility and hopefully responsible action’ (p. 66). She stages an encounter between Levinasian philosophy and psychoanalysis to help understand how ethical responses such as guilt, shame, love, responsibility – all dimensions of encounters between self and other – take place in classrooms and pedagogies. Todd argues that, despite their seeming incommensurability, these two views ‘may be held in tension’ in productive ways. ‘Both discourses offer education a way of thinking through the relationship between self and Other that refuses to ignore affect as significant not only to learning but to engagements with difference’ (p. 13). Together they show how negotiating ‘complex ethical formation[s] involves the subject inescapably in both a psychological history and a metaphysical dimension’ (p. 92). An ethical responsibility of teaching, then, is to cultivate in students a sense of social responsibility: this might include teachers seeking to evoke in students feelings of shame or love in relation to Others, in order to forge a ‘more complex understanding of responsibility’ (p. 91). In this account, responsibility both encircles the pedagogical encounter and is ‘responsibly’ produced in it. The role of the teacher is critical in evoking a sense of responsibility beyond the self and towards others. Conceiving responsibility in education in this way brings affective relations and inter-subjectivity into the foreground, along with the notion of teaching as an ethical practice, with the teacher more than a facilitator of assessment regimes.

Kathleen Lynch and colleagues (2007, Baker et al 2009) advocate for ‘affective equality’, a conception of equality that takes as integral the emotions of love, care and solidarity. They define equality as encompassing five core dimensions: respect and recognition; resources; love, care and solidarity; power; and working and learning (Baker et al., 2009, p. 24). There are resonances with the social justice frameworks debated in feminist political theory, notably in the work of Nancy Fraser (1997) and Iris Marion Young (1990; 2011). Lynch et al’s (2007) contribution is distinctive,

however, in its insistence on the centrality of love, care and solidarity and linking these emotions to reconceiving the core practices and purposes of schooling. They argue that recognition of these fundamental relations has traditionally been excluded from the realm and practices of education, which has typically 'been indifferent to other-centred work arising from our interdependencies and dependencies as affective, relational beings' (p. 2) and, as noted above, more focused on educating for an ideal of the rational, autonomous citizen-subject.

Relations of love, care and solidarity build on and evoke a sense of responsibility toward others, not only toward one's (performative) self, and are deeply embedded in the purposes and work of education. They are not to be trivialised as mere 'feelings' or personal affairs to be relegated for teaching through 'values education' or 'personal development' (the non-core, soft options) curriculum. Rather, these relations are essential to the citizenship-forming and knowledge-building purposes of schooling, with educational institutions understood as 'arbiters of what is culturally valuable, not only in terms of what is formally taught, but also in terms of the manner in which it is taught, to whom, when and where' (Baker et al., 2009, p. 142). Moreover, love, care and solidarity are inter-connected with the sociological and distributive dimensions of education and crucial to understanding forms of inequality in education. Baker et al. (2009) argue that 'equality in education has generally been a matter of dividing education, and education-related, resources more equally or fairly. Inequalities of status and power have been defined as secondary, while issues of love, care and solidarity have been largely ignored' (p. 143). The role of emotions in education more generally has been neglected, they argue, despite the central importance of emotional work in teaching and learning. This is in terms of, for example, providing care students need 'as well as helping them to learn to care for and to develop bonds of solidarity with others' (p. 164). Education is thus crucial for people in learning how 'to recognise and appreciate the feelings of others, to know how to care for others and to develop supportive relations' (p. 167). There are echoes here with the broad argument proposed by Todd in teaching to foster a sense of responsibility towards others.

So far, I have been using caring for and responsibility towards others in relatively interchangeable ways. Similarly, in discussing the idea of affective equality, I have configured responsibility into the mix, not as a substitute but to suggest how responsibility is linked to care work and solidarity; and I have situated responsibility as part of relational affects that are firmly within the remit of educational work and theories of social justice. Joan Tronto (2013) offers a differentiated account of these ethical orientations, distinguishing between four phases in her analysis of a feminist ethics of care in which she emphasises care as both a 'disposition and a practice' (Zembylas et al., 2014, p. 200). First, there is '*Attentiveness – caring about*'; the second is '*Responsibility – caring for*', the third is '*Competence – care giving*', and the fourth is '*Responsiveness – care receiving*' (Tronto, 2013, pp. 34–35). To these four, she adds a fifth suggested by Sevenhuijsen, and which also captures elements of the affective equality emphasis on care and solidarity: '*Plurality, communication, trust and respect: solidarity – caring with*' (p. 35). These latter qualities, Tronto proposes, 'make it possible for people to take collective responsibility, to think of citizens as both receivers and givers of care, and to think seriously about the caring needs in society' (p. 35). This is not a call for greater 'personal responsibility', a notion that Tronto sees as 'an embodiment of neoliberal ideology' (p. 47) and at odds with building a democratic politics in which care is at the heart of how societies are organised. Moreover, Tronto (pp. 46–64) argues that as a moral position, elevating personal responsibility is insufficient and even dangerous as it allows some people to 'pass' on being responsible for others and for the care work of responsibility to be differentially distributed – along gender, class and ethnic lines, for example. This, in turn, allows certain groups to live in a state of 'privileged irresponsibility', in which they both depend on but fail or refuse to acknowledge the systems of care that support and make possible their life – domestic labour, cleaning and maintenance, care of young children, the elderly, the ill and infirm; while those who do the care work of society are necessarily highly aware of the labour of their responsibilities.

Although Tronto's arguments are not specifically directed to the field of education, there are important implications for teaching and educational work, particularly in its emphasis on responsibility as a disposition *and* a practice: some of these implications are explored by Zembylas et al. (2014) in a discussion of critical pedagogies of emotion in higher education. Focusing on the notion of 'privileged irresponsibility', Zembylas et al. argue that –

Tronto's political ethics of care framework enriches the transformative potential of critical pedagogies ... , because it helps educators expose how power and emotion operate through responsibility – that is, how responsibility is connected with the meaning and practices of power and the place of emotion in caring practices. (p. 201)

In pedagogical practice, this could include encouraging 'students and educators to be attentive to their own emotional positions with regard to caring responsibilities and privileged irresponsibilities' (Zembylas et al., 2014, p. 210). Critical attention to such emotional investments is not intended to replace recognition of structurally differentiated relations to responsibility, but rather to show how these dimensions intersect and have a hold on people's caring practices and expectations: and in doing so to 'locate individuals and decision-making in emotional investments, relationships, and structural contexts' (p. 211).

The role of the teacher in this account, as with Todd's arguments, is attributed with significant responsibilities, emphasising how pedagogical encounters can be personally and ethically transformative, in the context of understanding education's role in achieving social justice and democratic aims. Yet, as I have noted, educational institutions also have responsibilities for curriculum and knowledge building (Yates, 2012), and this is a vital element of teachers' work. I have been arguing for a reframing of responsibility as relational and as a practice, and not simply a mode of governance or practice of self-responsibilisation. As I have emphasised, this is not a proposal for relational and ethical responsibilities to override or stand in for schooling's other normative and epistemological purposes. Rather, my argument is that relational responsibility and care are central (neither add-ons nor replacements) to the work of schools, implicated in the inequalities they produce, reinscribe or challenge, and fundamental to philosophical and policy debates about curriculum content and educational purposes.

Concluding comments

I began with questions prompted by a teacher remembering her own school teachers, and the strong impact their support had upon her at the time and subsequently. Such vivid memories of teaching-as-care were not an isolated example in the suite of oral histories, offering an embodied 'feel' of the power of relational and affective dynamics in teaching, and the significance of expressing care and responsibility for and towards others. From the preceding discussion of feminist ethics, three main propositions are highlighted that together speak to how responsibility might be re-imagined in teaching and educational work. First, an ethical pedagogical role for teachers is to foster a sense of social responsibility in students and to cultivate a sense of openness to others. Second, relations of love, care, solidarity *and* responsibility belong within frameworks of equality as well as in debates and policies about the purposes and curriculum of educational institutions. Third, responsibility is relational, a practice and a disposition; it is linked to democratic imaginaries, and has a collective remit, rather than a singular focus on personal responsibility (or responsabilisation). Attention to the effects of responsabilisation and technologies of individualisation in education has offered valuable insights into modes of subjectivity and governance in the contemporary era, and it is important to bear these analyses in mind in any re-assessment of responsibility and its potentially double-edged qualities as both regulatory and relational. However, I have also argued that the responsabilisation thesis can be reductive if it eclipses from view other equally significant dimensions of the movement, practice and sense of responsibility in education.

Overall, I have argued, first, that there is an urgency for repositioning responsibility as a productive orientation and practice, linked to framing education as a transformative and relational endeavour, particularly given the current educational climate where definitions of teachers' work are becoming more and more instrumental. Critical analyses abound of this and the performative measures that govern teachers' work. While such critiques have been necessary, they – and their targets of critique – can also serve to mute the pleasures and sense of purpose that both propels and keeps people teaching. This was touched on in my necessarily brief opening remarks regarding the oral history memories of teachers. Second, I have proposed that feminist theories of care and relational responsibility remain relevant to normative discussions of education and its knowledge and person-making purposes. There are risks in emphasising the affective realm of schooling – downplaying (inadvertently) the knowledge functions of schooling, fostering a self-involved individualism, romanticising feelings at the expense of understanding schools' role in credentialing and the differential distribution of educational success and pathways. The discussions canvassed here, however, advocate placing relations of responsibility and care as integral to, not instead of these epistemological and distributive aspects of schooling, and as relational – other-directed, not self-focused. Third, critical engagements with the affective and social circumstances of precarity bring new challenges into view for how schools and other educational institutions might respond to a pervasive sense of vulnerability. Berlant (2012) points in the direction of interdependence, a concept aligned to the idea of relational responsibility that has been elaborated here. Finally, Berlant's remarks about an 'idiom of care' as now the mode of managing the social forcefully brings our attention to the specific circumstances of the historical present in which these various discussions about ethics and relational responsibility take place. In doing so, it brings us back to ground, to the insecurities and divisiveness of contemporary life, and to the motivations for trying to rethink responsibility towards others, not only towards the self.

Notes

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