

## A Response to “Pedagogical Maturity” by Glenn M. Hudak

Duck-Joo Kwak

*Seoul National University*

We educationalists today seriously suffer the lack of *educational languages* that allow us to make good sense of what we are doing as teachers. Problematic educational languages, such as teaching as customer service for students’ satisfaction or as knowledge business for students’ academic scores, have been overflowing; it depreciates the nature of teaching as *educational practice*, treating it only as an instrument for students’ personal goals reducible to dollar values. I think what language we use in making sense of what we are doing in the classroom matters since, as the linguistic turn in philosophy shows, the language we use for our teaching affects and constitutes the reality we live and teach in. In this respect, Glenn’s paper on pedagogical maturity can be read as introducing a powerful new educational language, which not only sheds a new light on the kind of frustration or self-doubt that teachers often face in teaching, but also empowers them by opening a new way of channeling their negative emotions into a positive direction. It both redeems and enriches our teaching experiences, the importance of which has often been underappreciated in the midst of the non-educational or even anti-educational school culture today.

What is “pedagogical maturity,” then, according to Hudak? Why does the phrase exert such a power over us? I think that “pedagogical maturity” in Hudak’s term can be understood as “a way of being” that (good) teachers are supposed to be grown into, as a *professional* way of being, so to speak. Notice that it is not “a skill” to master or “a virtue” to cultivate; it is a kind of orientation we teachers are expected to be drawn into in relation with our environment. Now let me reconstruct what this term means and what it presupposes about the nature of (good) teaching, according to Hudak.

As a way of giving us an ontology of teaching, Hudak seems to say that teaching consists of two phases of being that intersect (or intertwine with)

each other in the actual practice of our teaching: teaching as a verb and teaching as a noun. In the first phase of being, that is, teaching as a verb, the *pedagogical* aspect stands out while the *maturity* aspect of teaching as a noun recedes into the background. By *the pedagogical* aspect, he seems to refer to the distinctive feature of teaching that makes teaching a unique and irreplaceable form of human practice. Drawing upon Biesta's idea of teaching as transcendence, he says that "the pedagogical" highlights the transcendent moment of revealing or interruption for students, which is caused by the force outside them, namely teachers. Here the role of teachers is essential to students' discovery for subjective truth, truth that matters to them. Teachers are here described as those who can *offer*, not convey, something that lies outside students' worlds, yet something that students find important to themselves as radically new.

What is so interesting about his description of this pedagogical moment is twofold. One is that it is the moment when teachers show something new at the risk of being refused by students; but it is also the moment when students *could* perceive or receive it and give authority to teachers as a form of appreciation of it. This is why it is described as a moment when students have "experience of *being taught by someone*," not "experience of *learning from someone*." The *indirectness* and *passiveness* of teaching *in affecting students* are worth noting; no party (neither students nor teachers) has control over the formation of students' educative experiences. It is neither student-centered nor teacher-centered. Then how exactly is the transcendent moment triggered for students? This draws our attention to the second feature of the *pedagogical*. The pedagogical is also described as the endless process of interaction between teachers and students in which both parties are *continuous to* each other through communication, which in the end leads them into the creation of common understanding. It is called the shared world as a *transitional* third area of human living between teacher and students. Citing D. W. Winnicott's words, Hudak says that this transitional space of play or interaction develops a sense of trust for students since it is perceived to be *sacred* as a site of creative living. In the end, the pedagogical aspect of teaching highlights teachers' *active* role and responsibility in mediating this third space of the shared world that allows students to experience and play

the cultural life of man. This is why the pedagogical phase of teaching may be described as teaching *as a verb*.

On the other hand, according to Hudak, in the second phase of being, that is, teaching as noun, the maturity aspect stands out against the background of the pedagogical aspect of teaching. And the maturity aspect of teaching involves how to facilitate a site where teachers can feel at home with students who are beyond teachers' grasps or vice-versa. This maturity comes only with teachers' *realization of students as separate sovereign persons* with their own distinct inner world destined to remain unfound by the other: realization that they are *sacred as sovereign* agents. Thus, the maturity aspect of teaching highlights teachers' roles in facilitating an environment where students can feel safe and trust teachers emotionally, while standing with teachers side by side within the shared world without a fear of being judged or evaluated. What matters most here seems to be emotional proximity between teachers and students to the extent that students can feel relaxed in their teacher's presence. They can be said to be *contiguous with* each other in a non-communicative engagement, acknowledging each other's sacred existence. What is to be noted here is that, while maturity as an (emotional) capacity to be alone in another's presence is the target state that students are expected to achieve through education in the end, it cannot be achieved without the teacher's role in facilitating a site where they can feel safe and relaxed in order to be able to receive the teacher's offering. This means that students' maturity can be developed only by teachers' maturity or their emotional tolerance. The latter is the precondition to the former.

Given this reconstruction of the two phases of our being in teaching, there are two things to be noted about good teaching. First, the maturity aspect seems more fundamental than the pedagogical aspect because the latter is likely to appear only when the former is present, (even if the author seems to hold that it is a matter of emphasis in the sense that one aspect fades where the other aspect emerges). I also think that the maturity aspect can be said more basic because maturity as a capacity to be alone in another's presence is directed to a more general mode of being as humans, whereas the pedagogical aspect is more specifically directed to a professional mode of being as a teacher. It seems

that only a humanly mature person can make a professionally good teacher in Hudak's ontology of teaching. Second, there seems to be a genuine gap between a student's feeling at home in the beginning *as* a precondition for their living engagement in learning and their being able to be alone in a teacher's presence at the end *as* an educational achievement. In the beginning, students are emotionally dependent upon teachers, whereas in the later stage they are less so, as they grow into cultural existence. Teachers are expected to facilitate students' transitions from the first to the second stage. Yet there is some danger involved here. As part of a legitimate educational process, students are expected to be taught or affected by teachers; this is how they can give authority back to the teachers. But isn't this give-and-take interaction itself still a way of reproducing students' dependency upon teachers in a different way, even if it is a kind of dependency students would voluntarily choose? As students' emotional dependency does less since the maturity aspect of being in teaching is emotional in its nature, their cultural dependency could grow; the pedagogical aspect of being in teaching is epistemological/cultural in its nature. Even if the two phases of our being as teachers are said to play a role in a complementary manner in the formation of a student as a mature person, there seems to be a tension between them in teachers. How to deal with the danger or tension (i.e., giving trust to students versus interrupting them as an outside force) to avoid violating students' own *sacred* solitude and at the same time to facilitate the *sacred* shared world seems to depend upon teachers' practical wisdom. This must be a big challenge for teachers, and this is why teaching is always said to be tricky and risky in its nature.

Now, let me give the author a few questions for clarification. First, I wonder how the author views the relation or tension between the pedagogical phase of being and the maturity phase of being I have just described. In the article, he seems to just assume that they are complementary in teaching. But are they simply complementary or could they be potentially threatening to each other in facilitating the formation of students' maturity? Second, I want to ask the author to make clearer the differences between the Socratic maieutic act of bringing out knowledge from students by recollection and Biesta's sense of teaching as an act of bringing out a transcendent/revelation moment, as two

different concepts of teaching. I wonder if he can give us a more specific example for the latter case. (The latter sounds like a case with a medieval religious idea of teaching, which makes the nature of teaching look again mysterious.) Lastly, I am also curious about hearing more about what role culture or subject-matters as part of curriculum plays in Hudak's ontology of teaching. This may be related to the second question I raised above.