



© 2012 Taylor & Francis. This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Ethics and Education on 01/03/13, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/17449642.2012.672032>

Conversations: Risk, Passion and Frank Speaking in Education

Amanda Fulford

Department of Secondary Education, Leeds Trinity University College, Leeds, United Kingdom

a.fulford@leedstrinity.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

This paper considers conversations in and about education. To focus the discussion it uses the scenario of a conversation between a trainee teacher and her mentor reflecting together on a lesson that the trainee has just taught. I begin by outlining the notion of reflective practice as popularised by Donald Schön, and show how, in the scenario, the reflective practice conversation leads to talk characterised by recourse to particular dominant discourses within education, and how this in turn can lead to a certain voicelessness. I then consider what the possibilities for the reflective practice conversation might be, looking first at the Greek notion of *parrhēsia* and how this has been discussed in the work of Michel Foucault in contrast to other forms of talk such as rhetoric or chattering. I argue that, whilst the *parrhēsiastic* conversation may allow for the exploration of the relationships (between the mentor and the trainee, each participant and their words and a relationship of care for the self), such possibilities are fraught with difficulty. I then move to consider how such relationships might be developed through recognising the expressive aspects of language emphasised in Stanley Cavell's notion of passionate utterance. I first trace the development of Cavell's thought through John Austin's contrast in language between the constative and the performative. I then illustrate the idea of passionate utterance from the films Cavell describes as the 'Hollywood comedies of remarriage', and argue that the passionate utterance opens up opportunities for the kind of conversation in education that is itself educative.

Keywords: conversation; flattery; rhetoric; *parrhēsia*; performative, passionate utterance

Conversations: risk, passion and frank speaking in education

Scenario

Teacher: Well, you're nearing the end of this teaching placement, and you've built a good relationship with this class over the half-term; how did you feel that lesson went?

Trainee: Yeah, fine. I've thought a lot about the conversation we had after my last observation. I know you said then I needed to be using more self-assessment and peer-assessment in my teaching, so I tried to do that today. So I should have better evidence now to show I'm meeting the part of the teaching standards on assessment, shouldn't I?

Teacher: Well, yes, that's good, but you shouldn't be restricting this to just one lesson, otherwise it all looks a bit 'ad hoc'. You will need to show that you can use different types of assessment in all your lessons, across a whole topic that you're teaching, for example, or in your plans for a whole term. When you've qualified and get a job in a school, your Head of Department will want to see the evidence of this in your planning documentation, and, of course, OfSTED¹ will be looking to see that you're competent in this too – that way you'll get the higher grades.

Trainee: I know, yeah. Sorry. I do think it's a really good idea – trying out something new, you know. I was meaning to change some of my lesson plans for next term, to include peer-assessment with this class every week. But I was asked to do some after-school revision classes over the last couple of weeks and was really pushed with time for getting the planning finished. I have thought about it, just not written up the plans.

Teacher: It sounds as if you've got things in hand, then. I've talked to the school and they seem happy with the progress you're making with things generally. It sounds as if you should get a good report at the end of this placement.

Trainee: I'm a bit worried about jobs, though, for when I've finished – there don't seem to be many being advertised yet. I really want to get the best grades to improve my chances, especially if there's lots of competition. Do you think I've got a chance of getting a grade of outstanding overall?

Teacher: Well, it is important you keep things going in the right direction. Don't be thinking too much about jobs yet, just focus on building on your strengths and look

*Email: a.fulford@leedstrinity.ac.uk

¹ The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills – the regulatory and inspectorate body for England. OfSTED conduct periodic inspections of schools in England, grade school provision and report publicly on their findings.

carefully at the feedback I'm giving you, particularly around assessment. That's a really big focus for schools at the moment- it's all about being able to show that the kids are learning. How do they know that they've understood something, and how do you know? So your lesson today was ok, but you've still got next term to develop this aspect of your teaching, and you've obviously got to be observed again, so we'll see.

Conversations and Voicelessness

All kinds of conversation take place in education: some are themselves a form of education - we only have to look to Socratic dialogue to see this. The scenario that begins this paper, however, is from the context of initial teacher training. It is typical of the kind of conversation that takes place between a trainee teacher and a more experienced and qualified colleague/mentor who has observed the trainee delivering a lesson, and is giving feedback². It raises two interesting questions: first, what is going on in this type of conversation, and second, how could things be different in a conversation about the practice of teaching? These questions are rather broad, so let me expand on them briefly. When I ask ‘What is going on in this type of conversation?’ I am not wishing to subject the language to the kind of discourse analysis that is common in, say, James Paul Gee’s work (2005). Whilst this might be interesting in studying how individuals enact specific social identities, my interest is rather in the forces that are at play in the conversation, in what we might call its emotional dynamics.

But to consider how things could be different in a conversation about the practice of teaching requires that we give attention to the purpose of the conversation. Here, the teacher’s intention is to start a dialogue that enables the trainee to engage with her feedback through a process of ‘reflective practice’. Now widely promoted as

² For clarity, the term ‘teacher’ will be used throughout this paper to denote the experienced colleague/mentor who has formally observed the lesson, and who gives feedback, and ‘trainee’ to denote the individual who has been observed.

a means of improving teaching and learning in a range of professional settings³, reflective practice is often traced to the work of Donald Schön (1987, 1991). In promoting his ‘epistemology of practice’ (1991, viii), Schön shows how professionals characteristically reflect in and on action, both during and after practice, and in this way make sense of their work.

The impact of Schön’s thinking has been significant⁴. But reflective practice, in its many iterations, tends to be at risk of being hijacked by instrumentalism (Bradbury et al. 2010). In education, it often equates to mere description of what happened in a class or to a regurgitation of standard responses. This is perhaps not unsurprising in an age of increasing regulation, managerialism and accountability. Given such constraints, the focus on the technical aspects of classroom practice (on planning, classroom management and the like), seem inevitable. This ‘standards-rich’ discourse is indicative of the ways in which both the teacher and the trainee (in the scenario) think, and of the power of certain discourses to authorise such thinking. It is as if the use of certain quasi-technical terminology has a stifling effect. This is not to say that some kind of technical vocabulary is wholly inappropriate for describing practices in education, but to draw attention to where the extent of this, and the aura of prestige and of professional expertise that it brings to mind, gets in the way of other kinds of thinking, or talking. Furthermore, where there is an ineluctable link between reflective practice and assessment, there is a tendency for the teacher to restrict her conversation with trainees to issues relating to the achievement of the all-important

³ See, for example, the work of Mann et al. 2009 on reflective practice in the health professions.

⁴ It has not, though, been without its critics. Some have questioned how the notion of reflective practice addresses praxis (see for example Usher et al. 1997). Schön’s idea of reflective practice has been subsequently developed, particularly in relation to health and related professions: see the work of Johns (1995) and Rolfe et al. (2001).

standards. For her part, the trainee - keen to meet the standards required to pass the course - wants detailed and specific feedback, but feedback confined to what she must do to pass. Whilst the trainee must master the technical aspects of her work, a conversation dominated by such issues neglects other (less easily measured) matters such as what teaching 'is' or what it is to become and to be a teacher. Yet, to ignore these is to diminish, in some way, both the trainee and the teacher; it is to fail to recognise adequately that teaching is an ethical pursuit⁵.

To return to our scenario, we might think about this type of conversation in relation to Neil Mercer's classification of talk, and in particular to his concept of 'interthinking', or 'the use of language and thinking together for collectively making sense of experience' (Mercer 2000, 1). But if what is meant here is nothing more than a bringing of language to bear on experience (as if our experience were not already bound up with our language), then Mercer's concept of interthinking does not help us to see how the reflective practice conversation might be revitalised. The etymology of 'sense' (in Mercer's 'making sense of experience') hints at something richer than just 'understanding'. From the French *sens* we are reminded of 'way' in Greek (*logos*) and in Chinese (*Tao*). Perhaps if interthinking is about making our way, our *logos* together, then we are getting closer to envisioning the kind of con-versation⁶ that enables us to live meaningfully with our words alongside others.

I suggest that in the scenario conversation a number of relationships are being played out: between the teacher and trainee; between each individual and her words - the truth of what is said -and, finally, the relationship of each individual to herself.

⁵ On this point, see, for example, the work of Nel Noddings (1992, 1993) and David Carr (2003).

⁶ The Latin roots of 'con-versation' are significant here: that in talking we are 'turning' (*vertere*) with (*cum*) others.

The teacher's conversation here seems like that of a rhetorician, impressing on the trainee the dominant discourses to which she herself is subject and which the trainee must replicate: those of standards and of achievement. We might think of this in relation to what Mercer calls 'disputational talk', the purpose of which is to privilege a certain position (2007, 97). Let me try this out in relation to the scenario. The teacher challenges the trainee regarding how she has failed to make considered use of self-assessment: 'Well' she says, 'You shouldn't be restricting this to just one lesson, otherwise it all looks a bit *ad hoc*. Here our speaker is fully intent on asserting and defending her own position. But the trainee, well versed now in this discourse, resorts to a form of flattery, to an easy acquiescence with the words and ideas of the teacher; she merely replies: 'I know, yeah'. This is similar to what Mercer calls 'cumulative talk', where one speaker supports the position of another (2000, 97). This is not to generalise, but rather to recognise that such conversations and relationships are indicative of a certain culture within education. It is as if something in this culture steeps those who pass through it in particular ways of thinking and talking that block and force out other ways. But just as certain topics of conversation are 'allowed', others are off-limits, excluded. The trainee tries to raise an issue that has been exercising her for some time: the relationship that she feels she has with the Head of Department in the school where she is undertaking her placement. Her language betrays an ongoing concern; she says that she 'still' finds it difficult to talk to this person, and that she's 'mentioned it before' in previous conversations. But the teacher's response is telling: she interrupts the trainee, dismisses this particular topic of conversation, and re-focuses the trainee on what really matters, on completing the placement and on meeting the standards. Such a closing down of the conversation happens certainly because of time constraints, but may also be indicative of a certain

cultural expectation, a preoccupation with what *really* matters at the expense of a space for frank speaking about the everyday stuff of teaching. What would it be like, for example, if there were space within the reflective practice conversation for a trainee to say: ‘I’m sick of teaching. I don’t even like the kids that much any more. It’s just not what I hoped it would be’?

What I am drawing attention to here is not characteristic of educational contexts alone, but of our human condition; it is what Foucault calls our subjectivation. This results in a form of silencing, a voicelessness that prevents frank speaking. If we do not recognise what is stale and lifeless in this kind of conversation, we are, as Stanley Cavell points out⁷:

stopped short in the obligation to make our desires, hence our actions, intelligible and hampered in our demand and right to be found intelligible in those desires and actions, to ask residence in the shared realm of reason. (Cavell 2005, 188)

Cavell has written not only about his own voice in philosophy (1994), and about how Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau are the (repressed) voice of American philosophy (1994a) , but also about crises of expression and voicelessness in his readings of Hollywood film (1996)⁸. For the heroines in the films that Cavell identifies as ‘melodramas of the unknown woman’,⁹ there is hope for the recovery of

⁷ Cavell is talking here specifically of ‘the role of ordinary language in relation to the imperative of expression’ (2005, 188). I use the quotation here, though, as it captures in a particularly articulate way the point I am pursuing about the need for a revitalised form of conversation.

⁸ See also Fulford, A. 2009. Ventriloquising the voice: Writing in the university. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43, no. 2: 223 – 237.

⁹ Cavell (1996, 3) identifies the following films as representative of the genre: *Stella Dallas*, (1937) *Now Voyager* (1942) and *Gaslight* (1944).

voice, an initiation into a way of speaking that has been previously blocked. But there is a danger in talking about a renewed kind of reflective practice conversation for education in terms of ‘recovery’ of voice, as if the discourses to which we are subject in our human condition could somehow be laid aside. We have a consistent propensity to inauthenticity, as Heidegger would put it; we cannot step outside the discourses that structure our Being-in-the-world. Living inauthentically means to be cut off from a certain expressiveness, from a capacity to have what Richard Polt calls a ‘decisive and clear-sighted way of being oneself’ (2005, 3). For Emerson and Thoreau, our lives are lived in a constant battle against conformity; but this is not a battle we can win, we can only ever struggle to be self-reliant, to speak frankly. But what does this struggle consist of? How might we open up ways of thinking about our conversation that avoid rhetoric and flattery, or, as Finn Daniel Raaen puts it, ‘break with modernity’s normalising discourses’? (2011, 631). How might we give account of ourselves and speak the truth? One possibility for conversation is to consider Michel Foucault’s discussion of the ancient Greek notion of *parrhēsia*, of ‘frank’ or ‘fearless speech’ (Foucault 2001, 2005), and it is to this that I now turn.

***Parrhēsia*, rhetoric and flattery**

The term *parrhēsia*, often translated as ‘frank speaking’ (*franc-parler* in French, *Freimütigkeit* in German), first appears in the Greek literature of Euripides in whose plays it occurs as a characteristic of Athenian democracy. It is a guideline for democracy in terms of how individuals should behave towards each other and in the assembly, a characteristic of the good citizen, a moral obligation and a personal virtue (Foucault 2001). Foucault stresses how *parrhēsia* is strongly opposed to other forms of conversation: to chattering, rhetoric and flattery. Chattering implies saying all that

one has in mind, but without qualification of what is said; rhetoric's primary purpose is to persuade, not necessarily to speak the truth frankly. The opposition of rhetoric and *parrhēsia* is clear in both Plato's *Gorgias* and in the *Phaedrus* where the distinction is between the *logos* that speaks the truth and the *logos* that is not capable of truth.

Foucault identifies a distinct form of Socratic *parrhēsia* which 'tries to shape the specific relationships individuals have to themselves' (2001, 106). Socrates, as *parrhēsiastes*, addresses an individual and engages in dialogue; the listener, for his part, responds and gives account of himself. The intention here was not to elicit some form of narrative in an autobiographical or confessional sense, but rather to allow the speaker to demonstrate a relation between their rational discourse, *logos*, and the manner in which they live their life. In short, the *parrhēsiastic* conversation shows that the *logos* gives form to a life. Socratic *parrhēsia*, underpinned by the requirement to care for others and for the self, might necessitate a significant changing of one's life. This amounts not merely to altering one's own beliefs, but might entail a more radical changing of one's style of life, relation to others and relation to the self.

The relationship to truth is key in the notion of Socratic *parrhēsia*; speaking the truth in this way entails risk. For a *parrhēsiastes* who confronts a tyrannical leader with the effect of his unjust policies, the risk could be punishment, exile, or even death. But the *parrhēsiastes*, unlike the rhetorician or flatterer, cannot stay silent in the face of this danger, and this sets up a particular relationship to the self. In this sense, there is a care for the self that is at the heart of Socratic practice of *parrhēsia*¹⁰. Care for the self - the attention to the perfection of the soul - and the requirement to

¹⁰ Foucault notes that Socratic (or philosophical) *parrhēsia* is closely associated with the notion of the care of the self, and this is clearly shown in the *parrhesiastic* role Socrates plays in the *Alcibiades Major* (see Foucault 2001).

care for others, follow from the practice of *parrhēsia*. In particular, there must be attention to the relationship between the *logoi*, the words spoken, and the *bios*, the manner of the life led such that words (*logoi*) and deeds (*erga*) are in harmony.

***Parrhēsia*: fearless speech in education**

To champion *parrhēsia* as a preferred form of conversation in education¹¹ would be too simplistic. It would be to ignore some of its most basic characteristics that render its easily transferability between settings more difficult; foremost among these is the fact that the ancient practice of *parrhēsia* commonly entailed risk – mortal risk¹². That risk is still present today for some who speak to challenge tyrannical regimes in their countries. But the risk for our teacher or trainee in speaking frankly is plainly not the same. A trainee who speaks out may risk having her judgement questioned, and her achievement of high grades in assessments and perhaps even her ultimate success on the course might be put at risk. Similarly, the teacher may not be immune from the

¹¹ I would not want to argue that this kind of conversation is useful for considering teacher training alone. There are other contexts in education where the practice of frank speaking and truth telling, informed by the notion of *parrhēsia*, might also be richly explored. There are possibilities, for example, for the lecturer/student tutorial in the university. Recently, Papadimos and Murray (2008) argued that *parrhēsia* should be considered as an ethical response to the American Medical Association's identification of a gap in the education of medical students, and that it could contribute to the enhancement of their training and mentoring. This is interesting because it considers the training of *professionals*, and thus has relevance also to the training of teachers. This is not to ignore the vast literature, not least in sociology, on professions and professionals. For this debate in education, see for example, Jane Green's discussion (Green 2011), but also Martinez, Desiderio and Papakonstantinou (2010) and Campbell (2008).

¹² I am reminded of this in just one example: at the time of writing this paper, BBC Radio 4 is broadcasting its 2011 series of Reith lectures. One of the invited lecturers is the Burmese pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, who acknowledges in her second lecture (recorded secretly in Burma) that, despite being freed from her latest period of house arrest, she risks her life by continuing to speak publicly against the regime.

consequences of what Foucault calls the '*parrhēsiastic* game' (2001, 17). Speaking frankly against the latest policy imperatives and curricular requirements risks at the very least her being called to question by managers, inspectorate bodies and funding providers. But our teacher is no tyrant, and the authorities that the teacher may choose to speak out against could hardly be described in such terms. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that Foucault sees *parrhēsia* as a matter of rare, heightened experience: on the contrary, his concern is with the stuff of our ordinary lives, and the inevitable responsibilities that attach to what we say and think.

But even if the conversation between our teacher and trainee is of the more ordinary stuff of our daily lives, we still need to explore something of the very nature of frank speaking. In our scenario the teacher is forthright in her criticism of the trainee using the somewhat derogatory term 'ad hoc' in relation to the trainee's assessment practice. Without doubt, this comment is bluntly critical, but is it frank speaking? It appears that both the teacher and the trainee tell the truth. The trainee admits to being pushed for time and to not being more comprehensively prepared for teaching the lesson. The teacher refuses to be pressed on whether the trainee will achieve an overall outstanding grade for her placement. When asked directly, she tells the truth: 'We'll see'. This may not be so much an example of *parrhēsia*, as a conversation showing both the teacher and the trainee in the grip of certain dominant discourses that limit the dialogue so that certain topics are then off-limits. But it is not easy to say what would constitute a *parrhēsiastic* conversation here; moreover it is difficult to state that any utterance (or indeed the inclusion of any topic) is *parrhesiastic* just by virtue of the words (or themes) themselves. The context in which those words are said, and their intended force (about which I will need to say more in my discussion of Austin's work later) are crucial.

Any discussion of *parrhēsia* and its possibilities in contemporary educational practice must address the insistence on speaking the truth that is at the heart of the *parrhēsiastic* conversation. The ancient *parrhēsiastes* knows what he says is true because he possesses certain moral qualities that guarantee his access to the truth. Even if we could lay aside the tricky issue of access to the truth here, let me try out a further thought. I want to consider under what circumstances *not* speaking the truth would be an appropriate response to a trainee teacher (since, as Raaen points out, *parrhēsia* does not imply telling the truth no matter what). I think of an example where the teacher, knowing the trainee is both lacking in confidence and at a point of crisis, says after she has observed her teaching a mediocre lesson: ‘That was great! Well done!’ Is this frank speaking? And is it truth-telling? Clearly it is not true at a propositional level - the lesson was only mediocre, not a great one. But what the teacher has done here is truly acknowledged the situation in which the trainee finds herself; the teacher is fully engaged with it. Because she has measured the context well, and is sensitive to what needs to be said, she is fully present in the words she speaks. She gives her words a nuanced exaggeration to help the trainee achieve the greater confidence that she lacks. This is precisely what this discursive, ethical context demands. It is not that the factual elements of this situation are irrelevant (the mediocrity of the lesson, judged, presumably, according to certain external standards), but that meaning in language cannot be divorced from what Cavell calls its perlocutionary effects.

But even taking account of these cautions, can *parrhēsia* be useful in reconceiving the conversation between teacher and trainee? In imagining how current practices could be thought of otherwise, I am not advocating that *parrhēsia* should, or even could, be taught in some way as a desirable skill, nor am I arguing that *parrhēsia*

is in some way a further stage of development from the reflective practice conversation – an ‘extension activity’ for those who are ‘more able’ or even a practice pertinent to particular elements of the professional standards. *Parrhēsia* is not some kind of trophy, with reflective practice considered as a somewhat shameful alternative. Perhaps what *parrhēsia* can open up are opportunities for recognising how we are in the grip of certain powerful discourses, the multiple ways in which we fail to speak our minds. In coming to a recognition of this - to use Thoreau’s words from *Walden* - to be awakened ‘not by the mechanical nudgings of some servitor...but by our own newly acquired force and aspirations...to a higher life we fell asleep from’ (1854/1999, 82), we are able to begin to speak our mind. It is through such opportunities for frank speaking that teachers reflect on and discuss their practice not just as skilled technicians, but as individuals with responsibilities for themselves, for their pupils and for others in the profession.

If flattery and rhetoric in the teacher/trainee conversation in some way serve to illustrate the inauthenticity of our human condition, then a *parrhēsiastic* conversation, characterised by challenge and uncertainty, is a site of transformation for the individual; some might call it a ‘conversion’ (Papadimos and Murray 2008, 4). This view of the development of, and the responsibility to, the self is a far richer one than many current iterations of reflective practice offer. In the context of teaching, both the teacher and the trainee benefit from the *parrhēsiastic* game. The *parrhēsiastes* herself has no personal interest in the exercise of *parrhēsia*; it is in some sense her gift, engendered by generosity. But she recognises her role to ‘act on them (the trainees) so that they come to build up a relationship of sovereignty to themselves with regard to themselves’ (Foucault 2005, 385). The trainee teacher herself also has a responsibility. Having heard the truth spoken by the *parrhēsiastes*, she has some accountability to

others; it is as if she says: ‘I must respond - I am encouraged, called upon, and obliged to respond - to the words of truth that teach me the truth and consequently help me in my salvation, with a discourse of truth by which I open the truth of my own soul to the other, to others’ (Foucault 2005, 391). The *parrhēsiastic* game, perceived in this way as a commitment towards the building of a relationship of truth that is rooted in the care of the other and of the self, should be part of the ethical pursuit of teachers and of teaching itself.

Doing things with words: John Austin’s performative utterances

Parrhēsia is just one possibility for a revitalised conversation in education. But in thinking further about how language shapes our relationships - particularly through forms of linguistic exchange or conversation - I move now to consider Cavell’s writing on what he calls ‘passionate utterance’ (2005, 155). This is both an extension of, and departure from, Austin’s theory of the performative in language. For those not familiar with this, I start by providing a very brief overview.

Austin’s interest lies in a category of expressions which are not constatives,¹³ but which are plainly not nonsense. Take for example: ‘I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*’ (Austin 1979, 235). He writes of such utterances, which he calls ‘performatives’, in this way:

If a person makes an utterance of this sort we should say that he is *doing* something rather than merely *saying* something.... In saying what I do, I actually perform that action....I am indulging in it. (Austin 1979, 235)

¹³ Constatives can be thought of in terms of truth and falsity.

Austin identifies a number of conditions that must be satisfied for an utterance to be classed as performative, and calls these ‘felicity conditions.’¹⁴ However, Austin makes a remarkable reversal when he concludes that what holds for constative utterances (that they can be thought about in terms of truth or falsity) also holds for performatives, so collapsing the very distinction he originally set up. He takes the utterance ‘I apologize’, and notes that for it to be a performative, it must meet certain felicity conditions: that the person apologising must have the very feelings that lead her to the utterance, and that she conducts herself in accordance with the apology thereafter. In this sense, then, it is not only happy (felicitous), but also true (Austin 1975). So if the constative/performative distinction breaks down, how does Austin move forward? He advises re-assessing all the ways in which saying anything is doing anything at all. This will lead us, he claims, not to focus only on what a word *means*, but also to consider the ‘force’ of the utterance (1979, 251). Austin then proposes a ternary model that distinguishes utterances in terms of their locutionary aspect (of saying something meaningful); illocutionary force (of doing something *in* saying something) and perlocutionary effect (of doing something *by* saying something). Perhaps we should take up Cavell again at this point. Austin’s interest is in how the illocutionary force of words relates to the act of performance; Cavell, in contrast, takes up the perlocutionary force of language to draw attention to what he calls philosophy’s tendency to ‘discount the role of passion in human life, as if that discounting might be a step toward a welcome reduction of it’ (2005, 156).

¹⁴ Austin’s felicity (or happiness) conditions are summarised as follows: the utterance must take place as part of a conventional procedure where the context and people involved are appropriate; the procedure must be executed completely and in an appropriate fashion; the utterance must be backed by appropriate feelings by the people involved who must conduct themselves accordingly afterwards.

Stanley Cavell and passionate utterance

In opening up his discussion of the perlocutionary effects of language, Cavell develops the idea of what he calls ‘passionate utterance’ (2005, 155). Cavell sees in Austin’s felicity conditions what amounts to the working of conventional procedures,¹⁵ but, whilst clearly inspired by Austin’s work, wants to move beyond this, and draws the following distinction:

A performative utterance is an offer of participation in the order of law. And perhaps we can say: A passionate utterance is an invitation to improvisation in the disorders of desire. (2005, 185)

To talk of passionate utterance, and of desire, perhaps brings to mind certain contexts: the intimate exchange between lovers, or even a frenzied argument between sworn enemies. Though these might well be the scene of passionate utterance, they are extreme examples. Cavell’s passionate utterance might well take place in much more mundane contexts (the conversation between a teacher and a trainee, perhaps?). So whilst the passionate can relate to the expression of strong feelings, it is also there in the everyday expression of our feelings that are characteristic of our ordinary lives. In this sense, even the expression of a feeling of indifference might be thought of as passionate utterance. A teacher who, in response to a colleague’s comment on a new classroom assessment policy, says: ‘I can’t see how that will help’, expresses genuine feelings. Let me explain why I consider this to be passionate utterance. It is

¹⁵ Cavell considers whether there are conditions for the successful functioning of perlocutionary utterances that might align to Austin’s felicity conditions for performatives. What he demonstrates is that it is difficult to find analogous perlocutionary conditions.

not the relationship between the speakers themselves that needs to be 'passionate' (in terms of, for example, wild desire or intense hatred), but rather that what is said is spoken from genuine emotion, the expression of which has an effect on the person addressed such that she must respond. If a precise definition of passionate utterance fails to grasp what Cavell is trying to convey in the very idea of it - that is to say, that to provide a formula for passionate utterance would be to miss the point - then we *can* say what the motivation for passionate utterance is. Cavell writes: 'The setting or staging of my perlocutionary invocation or provocation, or confrontation, backed by no conventional procedure, is grounded in my being *moved* to speak, hence to speak in, or out of, passion' (2005, 181). Unlike constatives which can assert or inform, the examples of passionate utterance that Cavell offers demonstrate their expressive nature, their capacity to excite emotion.¹⁶

A passionate utterance, then, is an invitation to a form of exchange, one in which a speaker invokes or provokes the words of another. How is this different, though, from any utterance said by one to another? It is perhaps that to a greater degree the invitation to respond is made without knowing its effects, whether the invitation will be accepted, postponed or rejected, and what the consequences of this might be. In writing about the 'disorders of desire', Cavell is drawing attention to just such perlocutionary effects of language. Passionate utterances, unlike illocutions, do not have a distinct ending (once the 'performance' is complete). In the passionate utterance a speaker invokes or provokes the words of another; speaking out of

¹⁶ Cavell lists the following as examples of the passionate utterance:

- a. 'I'm bored.'
- b. 'You know he took what you said as a promise.' (Roughly, a rebuke from Margaret Schlegel to Mr Wilcox in *Howard's End*.)
- c. 'Monster, felon, deceiver!' (Donna Elvira to Don Giovanni).
- d. 'Carmen, I love you.' (End of Don José's Flower Song) (Cavell 2005, 177).

passion, they invite a linguistic exchange that is the working out of a particular relationship. This is not to say (to repeat) that the passionate utterance can only be expressed by those with a particular relationship: by those who are, for example, lifelong friends, lovers or even sworn enemies. What Cavell hints at, rather, is a context for passionate utterance where, although perfectly ordinary words may be used (just as in Cavell's example, 'I'm bored'), the perlocutionary effect of the utterance is marked. Cavell says this of such effects: 'once issued, each [passionate utterance] appears as deeply characteristic and revelatory of both the utterer and his or her addressee' (2005, 180). It is in the laying bare of motivations, of commitments and of thoughts that the passionate utterance is most readily exemplified.¹⁷

Even though Cavell describes passionate utterance in terms of exchange, there is an important point to be made here regarding how we commonly think of this term. To think of exchange here as an act of giving and of receiving, in terms therefore of reciprocity, would be to ignore the fact that the invitation to exchange may be questioned, dismissed out of hand or just postponed. But it is in the offer of exchange that Cavell claims that we 'declare our standing' with each other, that we 'stake our future together' (2005, 185). So there is risk in passionate utterance, as in the practice of *parrhēsia* - but it is the risk of refusal to accept the invitation to exchange, and what this implies. In the demand for a response, Cavell notes that 'I make myself

¹⁷ See my paper considering student writing in the university (Fulford 2009), where I draw attention to Cavell's reading of the Hollywood film *Gaslight*. In one of the final scenes of this film there is arguably an example of the passionate exchange. Paula Anton, the film's heroine, has been driven to the verge of derangement by her murderous husband, Gregory. He is seen frantically searching for hidden family jewels in the attic of their home, and Paula is in the house with her friend, Cameron, a detective. Acutely aware of Paula's state of mind, and of the evil intents of her murderous husband, Cameron asks of the terrified Paula: 'Mrs Anton, you know, don't you. You know who's up there, don't you?' Paula accepts the invitation, engages in the exchange: 'No, no'. But Cameron persists 'Are you sure you don't?' And she replies 'No. No, how could he be?'

vulnerable to your rebuke' (2005, 185). My speaking from passion means that I must also be 'suffering the passion' (2005, 181) and that each instance of such an utterance 'risks, if not costs, blood' (2005, 187). Let us return again to our scenario and imagine how the (risky) conversation might run. The trainee, still concerned about her relationship with the Head of Department, listens as the teacher says this to her: 'But it's not *her* that's the problem. You know, I've often found *you* quite a difficult person to talk to, especially when I'm saying something constructively critical to you.' The risk here may be one of embarrassment, anger, perhaps even self-doubt for the trainee; but such is the risk of frank-speaking or of the passionate exchange.

There is no suggestion here that our engaging in a *parrhēsiastic* conversation, or indeed, inviting an exchange invoked by a passionate utterance, are competing forms of conversation in or about education. I would want to strongly resist the idea that these possibilities of language are in some way strategic choices for the speaker. In drawing attention to these possibilities in language, I am accentuating two things: first, the perlocutionary effects of our words and the responsibility that such effects realise, and second, the manner in which relationships can be negotiated and renewed through conversation. To flesh this out further, I turn to some of the films of which Cavell has written as a means of illustrating these points.

To see how these characteristics play out in the remarriage films, let us consider one example, the 1949 film *Adam's Rib* directed by George Cukor. Here Spencer Tracey plays Adam Bonner, a District Attorney who is married to Amanda, an Attorney at Law played by Katharine Hepburn. The film opens with a scene showing a woman, Doris Attinger, shooting and injuring her husband (whom she believes has been unfaithful). The marriage crisis, a feature of the genre of the Hollywood comedies of remarriage, comes about when Adam Bonner is assigned the

Attinger case, and phones Amanda with news of the assignment. Amanda, believing Doris to have been wronged, decides to handle her defence, and breaks the news to her husband and guests at a dinner party that same evening. This leads to what Cavell calls an ‘enforced silence’ between the couple (2004, 71), a fracturing not only of conversation between the pair, but also of their relationship. Both parties speak, but fail to say what is really on their minds, what really matters. Here, just as in our scenario, the conversation is limited to those topics that are authorised, and anything else is blocked. This is clearly illustrated at one point in Adam’s terse rejoinder to his wife: ‘Excuse me, may I say just one thing? Save your eloquence for the jury!’

Amanda speaks from her passion (passion not only for the case, and for her belief in Doris’ innocence, but also for the hope of a married life on their dream farm in the country) when she asks Adam: ‘Shouldn’t we talk about it? Don’t you want to hear my side? Don’t you want to talk to me?’ This is her invocation, her appeal to exchange; but it is also the couple’s ‘crisis, or impasse, of mutual credibility’ (Cavell 2004, 381), the refusal of the invitation – or at least its postponement.

It is only in the final scenes of this film, when Amanda has won the Attinger case, that what we might variously describe as frank speaking, as an acceptance to exchange in passionate utterance, is witnessed. Adam and Amanda visit their accountant, Jules Frick, who is bemused by the conversation between the pair as they discuss the tax deductibility of seeming trifles: a bet, a gift of underwear, seeds for the garden. But the accountant’s mention of one large payment triggers an exchange that we might think of in terms of the Cavellian passionate exchange. In this poignant scene the conversation reveals something about the speakers that allows them to speak frankly and out of passion for what is really important: their house in the country and their future life together:

Jules: ‘*And this, \$8,740.30? What’s that?*’
Adam ‘*That’s the last payment on the farm*’
Amanda ‘*We own it now – every scrap*’
Adam ‘*It took us six years*’
Amanda ‘*But we made it*’
Adam ‘*Free and clear*’
Amanda ‘*Yeah*’

(Adam begins to cry)

Amanda ‘*Listen Pinky*’¹⁸
Adam ‘*What?*’
Amanda ‘*If we started out now, we could get there in time for dinner*’
Adam ‘*You mean, and see the dogs?*’
Amanda ‘*Of course, there’s not much in the freezer*’
Adam ‘*You don’t want to go*’
Amanda ‘*Come on, come on*’
Adam ‘*Where?*’
Amanda ‘*Home*’
Adam ‘*Back to the farm*’

A conversation for education

So what can we say, then, about the extract of conversation in our opening scenario?

In one sense, there is nothing at all wrong with it. Feedback is given and, it appears, understood by the trainee. An inspector, assessing the quality of the trainee’s programme of study and her progress on the course, may think that this feedback conversation is exemplary: the trainee is encouraged to reflect on the lesson; she is set a specific target for improvement, and the teacher’s feedback clearly relates to the professional standards which the trainee is working to achieve. But this is not all that is at stake here. To take a view of language as merely providing a means of exchange of information would be to ignore what is possible in our conversation and what the implications are of this for those involved. But how might these possibilities of language enable a different kind of conversation about education? This would not be

¹⁸ ‘Pinky’ is the nick-name Amanda uses for her husband throughout the film.

to think of these ideas in terms of developing a curriculum for teacher trainers or a formula for them to follow in giving feedback. It is not even that this ‘different kind’ of conversation precludes the topics for discussion or the contexts for conversation that I have described. This is not a call to abandon existing reflective practice procedures, nor indeed is it a claim that nothing usefully can be said in such conversations. It is not the case that I am arguing for a particular mode of speech or the adoption of a prescribed procedures or rituals for speaking; indeed such approaches would risk undermining the very nature of *parrhēsia* itself.

What I am calling attention to is how such conversations can be opened up, and what this would then allow. It is a call to a form of conversation about education that is rooted in the passion for what it means to educate and be educated. It is a conversation that challenges, that risks frank speaking and that demands a response. Such conversation requires, following Cavell, ‘an attitude toward or investment in words... an attitude allegorical of an investment in our lives that I believe those trained in professional philosophy are trained to disapprove of’ (Cavell 1990, 34). This attitude to words of which Cavell writes is not a matter simply of using the latest terminology or of repeating the most recent policy agendas. What Cavell hints at is something much richer in our relationship to language: an attention to the expressive in our speech, to the perlocutionary force of our words. It is the taking on of this responsibility for our words that allows our being fully present in them; perhaps this is also the kind of conversation that some in education would be likely to disapprove of.

The conversation that I envisage is of course not one that is necessarily limited to the context of teacher training; I used this here merely as an example to explore the possibilities. A conversation characterised by frank speaking, by challenge and by

invitation to respond could equally take place in the school classroom¹⁹ as well as the university tutorial. To talk frankly about education in this way would be to find our voice in it.

But we might say that our teacher and trainee already have a voice in the conversation: they speak frankly about what matters. The trainee is concerned about doing the right thing in the classroom, about the quality of her teaching, the achievement of the highest grades and her successful entry into the profession. Similarly the teacher is keen to do all that she can to facilitate the trainee's success, to keep her focussed, to provide feedback that helps to improve her practice. Both have made a kind of investment. But the investment in words of which Cavell speaks is one where we do not simply borrow words and pass them back - regurgitate the prevalent discourses, or to use Thoreau's metaphor, pass the axe back without first sharpening it. It is rather an investment that might come through a type of conversation where we come to recognise our own subjectivation and how we can speak out from, as it were, within it.²⁰ It is this moment that is perhaps reflected in Cavell:

Until we are capable of serious speech again – i.e., are reborn, are men “[speaking] in a waking moment, to men in their waking moments”²¹ – our words do not carry our convictions, we cannot fully back them, because either we are careless of our own convictions, or think we haven't any, or imagine they are inexpressible. They are merely unutterable. (Cavell 1981, 34)

¹⁹ Ian Munday's (2009) paper considers, for example, Cavell's idea of the passionate utterance in relation to moral education in schools when he responds to Michael Hand and his discussion of the teaching of homosexuality as a controversial issue (Hand 2007).

²⁰ Raaen refers this as 'averting stagnation' (2011, 632).

²¹ Here Cavell is quoting from Thoreau's *Walden* (Thoreau 1854/1999).

We might argue further, though, that we can think about this type of conversation not only as a possibility for talking *about* education, but as educative itself. Richard Smith makes a similar point in relation to philosophy when he illustrates how it might be thought of in such terms as ‘the enterprise of continuing conversations of an educative kind’ (2009, 438). In his paper, Smith is writing primarily about the problem of thinking of philosophy as having a ‘method’. The majority of the paper is in the form of a dialogue, a conversation between a ‘teacher’ – George – and students who take part in a seminar discussing, amongst other things, Plato’s *Phaedrus*, the differences between the spoken and written word and the Rorty’s distinction between systematic and edifying philosophy. The fact that my concern here is not primarily with conversations about philosophy may not be that important: what I have tried to show is that serious conversations about education can, and perhaps should, be educative themselves. Let me explore this briefly in relation again to film, and try out an analogy. In the Hollywood comedies of remarriage, Cavell points to what he sees as two main themes of this genre: the woman’s ‘demand for an education’ by the man (1996, 13) and the man’s reciprocal struggle for knowledge of the woman. Conversation is central here to the way in which these themes play out, to what Cavell calls ‘the quarrel, the conversation of love’ (1981a, 32). Relationships in education, between teacher and trainee or tutor and student, might be similarly revitalised through the kind of conversation that leads to knowledge of each other, to their mutual education. Quite clearly, the nature of the relationship between a teacher and trainee is different from that between the protagonists in the comedies of remarriage. *Adam’s Rib* shows moments of intimacy between Adam and Amanda as a married couple: the pair appear in several scenes together in the bedroom; they give each other a massage; use nicknames for each

other; engage in what Cavell refers to as ‘mild sexual bi-play’ (2004, 71). But there also exists a certain intimacy between teacher and trainee. Like in the marriage, it is a relationship built on trust, one where a break down in conversation threatens the very relationship itself. Perhaps this analogy is not entirely satisfactory, but it does draw attention to how the possibilities of conversation in which expressiveness, challenge and the demand for response are all key components, can lead to an enriching of an established relationship which is educative for both parties.

To talk of a responsibility to our words, to our need for ‘serious speech’ (Cavell 1981, 34), is part of an ongoing encounter with our words. To be in conversation is a way of daily contesting our inauthenticity. Daniel Ross (2006), in writing about Cavell’s *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*,²² notes that in the remarriage comedies the marriage is reaffirmed at the end of the film. This does not mean, however, that the couple will not face the same challenges another day; the conversation – just as our relationship to words – will be an ongoing task. Cavell captures this same sentiment, this idea of a continual investment in our words and lives, when he describes Adam and Amanda Bonner in the final scene of *Adam’s Rib*:

Hatted, as for departure, away from us, they resume their adventure of desire, their pursuit of happiness, sometimes talking, sometimes not, always in conversation. (1981a, 228)

References

- Austin, J. L. 1975. *How to do things with words*. 2nd ed. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
Austin, J. L. 1979. *Philosophical papers*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²² Ross, D. 2006. Screening the Past.
<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/19/philosophy-day-after-tomorrow.html>
(accessed June 29 2011).

- Bradbury, H., N. Frost, S. Kilminster and M. Zukas, eds. 2010. *Beyond reflective practice: New approaches to professional lifelong learning*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Campbell, E. 2008. The ethics of teaching as a moral profession. *Curriculum Inquiry* 38, no. 4: 357 – 385.
- Carr, D. 2003. *Making sense of education: An introduction to the philosophy and theory of education and teaching*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Cavell, S. 1981. *The senses of Walden*. San Francisco: North Point Press.
- Cavell, S. 1981a. *Pursuits of happiness: The Hollywood comedy of remarriage*. Cambridge MS: Harvard University Press.
- Cavell, S. 1990. *Conditions handsome and unhandsome: The constitution of Emersonian perfectionism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Cavell, S. 1994. *A pitch of philosophy: Autobiographical exercises*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cavell, S. 1994a. *In quest of the ordinary: Lines of skepticism and romanticism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cavell, S. 1996. *Contesting tears: The Hollywood melodrama of the unknown woman*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Cavell, S. 2004. *Cities of words: Pedagogical letters on a register of the moral life*. Cambridge MS: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Cavell, S. 2005. *Philosophy the day after tomorrow*. Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Foucault, M. 2001. *Fearless speech*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
- Foucault, M. 2005. *The hermeneutics of the subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-82*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fulford, A. 2009. Ventriloquising the voice: Writing in the university. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43, no. 2: 223 – 237.
- Gee, J.P. 2005. *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
- Green, J. 2011. *Education, professionalism and the quest for Accountability*. New York: Routledge.
- Hand, M. 2007. Should we teach homosexuality as a controversial issue? *Theory and Research in Education* 5, no. 1: 69 – 86.
- Johns, C. 1995. Framing learning through reflection with Carper's fundamental ways of knowing in nursing. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 22, no. 2: 226-234.
- Mann, K., J. Gordon and A. MacLeod. (2009). Reflection and reflective practice in health professions education. *Advances in Health Science Education* 14, no. 4: 595-621.
- Martinez, D. M., M.F. Desiderio, and A. Papakonstantinou. 2010. Teaching: A job or a profession, the perception of educators. *The Educational Forum*, 74, no. 4: 289 – 296.
- Mercer, N. 2000. *Words and minds: How we use language to think together*. London: Routledge.
- Munday, I. 2009. Passionate utterance and moral education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43, no. 1: 57 – 74.
- Noddings, N. 1992. *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education*. New York: Teachers' College Press.

- Noddings, N. 1993. *Happiness and education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Papadimos, T. J., and S.J. Murray. 2008. Foucault's "Fearless Speech" and the transformation and mentoring of medical students. *Philosophy, Ethics and Humanities in Medicine* 3:12, <http://www.springerlink.com/content/67648933n4615611/fulltext.pdf> (accessed July 5, 2011).
- Polt, R., ed. 2005. *Heidegger's Being and Time: Critical essays*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Raaen, F.D. 2011. Autonomy, candour and professional teacher practice: A discussion inspired by the later works of Michel Foucault. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 45, no. 4: 627 – 641.
- Rolfe, G., D. Freshwater and M. Jasper, eds. 2001. *Critical reflection for the nursing and helping professions*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Ross, D. 2006. Screening the Past. <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/19/philosophy-day-after-tomorrow.html> (accessed June 29 2011).
- Schön, D.A. 1987. *Educating the reflective practitioner: Towards a new design for teaching and learning in the professions*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schön, D.A. 1991. *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Smith, R. 2009. Between the lines: Philosophy, text and conversation. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43, no. 3: 437 – 449.
- Thoreau, H. 1854/1999. *Walden*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Usher, R., R. Johnstone and I. Bryant, eds. 1995. *Adult education and the postmodern challenge*. London: Routledge.