Preface

There can be few notions that teachers encounter in their daily work that are at once so recurrent, so commonplace and yet so elusive as the idea of practice; and there can be few philosophers for whom this has been so significant and pivotal a term as it has been for Alasdair MacIntyre. While the sensitivity of this matter was evident in the dialogue between MacIntyre and Joseph Dunne published in this Journal last year (36.1), it is clear that the range of its significance for education, and especially its importance in illuminating the character of teaching and learning, extend beyond the scope of those pages. It is precisely this importance that the essays in this Special Issue explore. Is teaching a practice with its own proper autonomy, or is it essentially a subordinate activity? Can actions and goals that are educational before they are anything else be distinguished from those that are not? What is good teaching? What’s the good of education? At a time when schools and universities are subject to ever increasing pressures to serve a variety of ends – for example, economic prosperity, civic accord, or democratic citizenship – and when many think of teaching in terms of a more or less mechanistic set of skills, these questions are both important and urgent. Under the title Education and Practice: Upholding the Integrity of Teaching and Learning, Joseph Dunne and Pádraig Hogan have brought together a rich and provocative collection of essays that, in taking up the challenge that MacIntyre’s work represents, bring new insight to these matters. We are grateful to them and to their contributors for extending this discussion so fruitfully.

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