

The Purposes and Connections of School

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In March of 2020, while early versions of the articles and responses in this issue were being presented at the Philosophy of Education Society's annual meeting in Pittsburgh, *school* (the idea of school; the practice of school) underwent a major shift around the world as school buildings began to close due to COVID-19. In what seemed like a heartbeat, schools closed their bricks-and-mortar spaces and had to grapple with how to do school, or whether to do school, in the middle of a global pandemic. Schools in Italy, France, Switzerland, China, Korea, Canada, and the U.S.A all closed their doors and worked to set up some approximation of schooling that could happen outside of school buildings. For many schools, this meant wrestling with how to move schooling online while recognizing that teachers weren't trained in best practices in online education, curriculum was not designed for online spaces, many parents, teachers, and students had never experienced online education, and, beyond that, there were students in many places who still did not have robust access to the internet. Communities had to grapple with how to get food and mental health services to students and their families—as the school building is often the access point, for many people, to food services, mental health services, special education services, employment services, and many other forms of life support. Parents had to figure out how to balance their own employment and other workloads while supporting their children in 'online school' or some other form of schooling. Questions around the purposes of schools and schooling, and around the ways that schools interact with and support (or do not support) local communities, suddenly felt far more cogent and pressing.

As of this writing, many schools around the world are safely opening for 'school as normal' for their students. Other schools are starting online or using a hybrid model where students attend the bricks-and-mortar building on certain days and on other days work from home. Still other schools

are starting the year in a ‘school as normal’ mode even while public health experts caution that this practice will lead to super-spreading clusters of the disease. We are still grappling with the various purposes of schooling: Is school primarily a place to send kids while the parents work? Is school primarily a place where we teach vocational skills and develop human capital? Is school a place where we learn critical thinking and social interaction? Should schools be focused on mental health and social-emotional learning at least as much as content knowledge? Is it the school’s job to help children process the death of loved ones due to the disease? Is school a chance to try out democracy and civic action? Is school meant to provide pathways into a higher social class, or is it meant to inculcate class values and norms in a way that prepares the oppressed to stay oppressed and the elite to stay elite? Should schools intentionally be used to try to close gaps in equity and equality? Should schools work to do more than educate students; should they, in fact, act as community hubs? The answers to these questions have implications for how we reimagine schooling in these difficult times, as well as where we put our resources. While this moment of crisis has led to a new understanding of these tensions, the tensions are not new.

The articles and responses in this issue grapple with the many purposes of schooling and the connections between the school and various communities. Lauren Bialystok’s excellent article shines a spotlight on the tensions of practicing social justice in educational spaces and the ways that our own sense of authority and agency come into play. Jo Hinsdale responds to Bialystok’s piece with an analysis of how education cultivates, or not, that sense of agency and authority. Jane Gatley allows us to think through the purposes of a liberal education and asks: Can a liberal education be viewed through a Utilitarian lens? Canute Thompson responds to her work by pinpointing the usefulness of a liberal education and actively pushing against the detractors of a liberal education that are concerned with its monochromatic lens. David Backer puts Althusser and Ranciere into debate in order to think through the purposes of schooling and the connections of school to the state. Jessica Davis extends Backer’s argument by pinpointing moments

of education as an apparatus of power. Derek Daskalakes fleshes out the discourses around learning disabilities. He gives voice to what it means to transition from the secondary schooling space into other spaces where the student must choose whether to continue on with the categorization that comes with being seen as having a “learning disability” or to be free of that categorization. Susan Verducci’s response to Daskalakes adds context and meaning to the stories that he tells. Addyson Frattura allows us to consider what it means to be expelled from school. Frattura actively grapples with the purposes of schooling while highlighting what it means to be inside and outside of its structure. Dini Metro-Roland’s response continues that analysis. Stefan Dorosz and James Stillwaggon, as author and respondent, grapple with both pedagogical and curricular issues around freedom, voice, and storytelling. Claudia Ruitenbergh and AG Rud, as author and respondent, take up the process of subjectification that is possible in cross-curricular projects and thereby think through the purposes of what we learn how to do while in school. Deron Byles and Jeff Frank, as author and respondent, wrestle with the divisions between the public and the private in regard to ‘the business of school’. Aline Nardo and Dragan Trninic advocate for both empirical as well as theoretical modes of justification for new forms of STEM education. Sam Rocha responds to their work by questioning the supposition that theory and empiry can co-exist in quite so neat a way. Finally, Sean Henry parses the difficult dynamics of safe spaces, educative moments, and keeping in line with curricular edicts while navigating schools—and particularly schools associated with a dominant religious group. These texts remind us, as readers, of the many debates around what should be taught, who should be teaching it, and where there is room for dissent.

All of the papers in this issue bring to the fore the many tensions around why we do school, how we do school, and the ways that the school intersects with various factions in our communities, as well as with governments and other state entities. This issue is most definitely an issue for our time, as well as one that will continue to be meaningful years from now.