

Introduction

“Where” are the Philosophers of Education in 1997?

Susan Laird
University of Oklahoma

Whether progress is viewed as a glass half empty or half full, the international environmental agenda is increasingly crowded as the decade draws to a close. Extreme climatic events such as the destructive tropical storms that ravaged North America and Asia in 1996 and the crop-withering heat wave that claimed 465 lives in Chicago in the summer of 1995 have heightened concern about the rising concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Dangers to the natural world are seen in the thousands of species of amphibians, birds, and mammals now threatened with extinction....The first step to action is awareness, and on this front there are many signs of hope.¹

The 7.1 million children growing up in poor communities today face tough odds. Research predicts that they are at greater risk of being sick and having inadequate health care; of being parents before they complete school; of being users of easily available drugs; of being exposed to violence; and of being incarcerated before they are old enough to vote. Although poor neighborhoods include individuals and families with extraordinary resilience and strength, too many kids growing up in such environments will reach adulthood unprepared to parent, to work, and to contribute to society.²

Are these the same worlds in which philosophers of education in 1997 have lived, loved, thought, spoken, written, and taught? This 1997 yearbook of the Philosophy of Education Society (PES) presents contributions primarily from its home continent North America, but also from Africa,³ Australia,⁴ Europe,⁵ and New Zealand.⁶ Except for the occasional but of late increasingly common independent scholar, emeritus, or emerita, professional philosophers of education worldwide locate themselves in universities and colleges. So what? A decade ago, in a volume such as this, their locations would scarcely have been considered noteworthy. But the concerns reflected in my epigraphs may suggest why philosophers of education are starting to take serious note of where they are when they think, and more frequently than ever before they are thinking in front of a computer screen.⁷

TOPICS, TOPOI, AND TOPOGRAPHY: PES 1997

Typically taking their own locations for granted as irrelevant to their thinking just as most other academic philosophers still do, many contemporary philosophers of education have deployed standard philosophical methods to engage analytic and normative questions specifically in and about schooling, teacher education, critical thinking instruction, and philosophy for children. But this volume contains scant mention of such familiar topics, while the presidential essay by Dwight Boyd actually questions the morality of failing to take into account one's social location in doing philosophy of education.

That is a brave question to raise in view of this volume's contents. Debate over questions of "inclusion" continues this year.⁸ Obviously most philosophers of education are academic women and men and therefore either working class or middle class, yet few write consciously from their gendered locations and even fewer from their economic locations past or present. Most are white, but very few write consciously from their racial locations. You will find some religious and ethnic

diversity among this yearbooks' contributors, a very few of whom have addressed such topics. A few contributors are openly gay and lesbian and explicitly write from those locations, but disability is scarcely acknowledged. Yet the few in each category are starting to add up, so that appreciably more philosophers of education this year than in years past do think and write from social locations that they make explicit and relevant in their work. Still, it is common practice for a philosopher of education to write as "just any philosopher who thinks clearly and soundly," a stance whose morality Boyd questions. Insofar as education is an inherently moral endeavor, he argues, a philosopher of education must be aware of standing on "that rickety bridge between self and other" with her or his own "mobs" if the work is not to be morally fraudulent.⁹ On his view, it is a moral mistake for me as I write this introduction to ignore any social location that establishes my relationship to oppressed groups: I am morally obligated here to inform you that I am a white, working-class, heterosexual, middle-aged, tenured, academic woman, of Anglo ethnicity, postchristian, now able-bodied although born with a mild disability, Oklahoman, and so on.

Barbara Houston warns, however, that it is also a moral mistake to assign responsibility on the basis of such social location and that one should not take responsibility without turning to others who can show one one's own part in harms done. "What ultimately matters," she suggests, "are defiant deeds" on behalf of others less fortunate.¹⁰ Commending the value of understanding how our identities shape personal and professional doings "such as why I choose to work on some topics and not others," Victor Worsfold further suggests that a "comma list" such as the one I have provided above needs to be "particularist" to be helpful; that is, tailored to a situation and its purpose rather than reifying oppressive binary social categories.¹¹

His point of commendation recalls the classical rhetorical notion of *topics*, both etymologically and pragmatically related to *topoi*, or *loci*: locations.¹² Surveying the topics philosophers of education in 1997 have found most worthy — and not worthy — of their attention, this *topography* of the field will consider how those current topics reflect — or fail to reflect — acknowledgment of its particular identifying *topoi*. The survey will not only consider this volume's own contents, but also some of this year's new books of likely interest to philosophers of education. Similarly, besides the presidential essay, featured essays, and many other essays collected here, this yearbook includes a cluster of critical essays about two landmark contributions to the field's redefinition, J.J. Chambliss's *Philosophy of Education: An Encyclopedia* and Nel Noddings's *Philosophy of Education*, as well as clusters of critical essays about four other significant works by PES authors and editors: *Dying to Teach: Education and the Longing for Immortality* by David Blacker; *The Gender Question in Education* by Ann Diller, Barbara Houston, Kathryn Morgan, and Maryann Ayim; *The New Scholarship on Dewey* edited by Jim Garrison; and *Rationality Redeemed?* by Harvey Siegel.

Education is both the general common institutional *topos* and the general definitive topic of the field, but this fact can be misleading, for the field's topical reach is broad indeed, and connections between topics and *topoi* are often indirect.

Members of PES continue to discuss their old familiar educational topics informally at conferences and write books and papers about them; this yearbook presents a very few such essays, albeit such essays do take up timely concerns such as parental empowerment, virtue ethics, development of citizens, and the cognitive revolution.¹³ So many PES members are employed within teacher preparation programs in the United States that PES continues to participate in the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Moreover, several editors of this volume are actively engaged in teacher preparation and have themselves contributed substantially to the philosophy of teacher education and schooling, as has this year's PES president Boyd.¹⁴ Therefore, this decade's shift away from such formerly favored topics, (especially evident in this yearbook) is not a consequence of editorial policy or preferences skewed toward the work of those members employed within departments of philosophy. Many philosophers of education are located in departments of philosophy, for philosophers of education, taking their lead from the likes of John Dewey, Israel Scheffler, Jane Roland Martin, and Robert Ennis have always regarded the sharp division between philosophy of education and general philosophy as nonsensical. On this premise, too, philosophers of education need not be located in departments of philosophy to engage in inquiries of the same sorts undertaken by professors of philosophy, whose recent inquiries have taken a markedly self-critical and urgently searching turn also apparent in this yearbook.¹⁵

PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION IN 1997

Richard Shusterman, himself a professor of philosophy taking that turn, does not claim to be a philosopher of education, and he does not cite *Kids Count*; but in his book, *Practicing Philosophy*, his thinking about the art and aesthetics of rap (unfortunately neglecting *sista rap*) as a "poetic alternative to crime" that challenges modernity's "very conception of philosophy" reflects a conscientious (and apparently prefeminist) pragmatist's critical alertness to the alarming situation detailed in that report.¹⁶ He begins his unusual philosophical inquiry by self-reflectively quoting these reproachful words from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*: "There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but not philosophers. Yet it is admirable to profess because it was once admirable to live."¹⁷ Then, prefatory to his consideration of male youth living in hip-hop culture, he asks, "What does it mean to be a philosopher? Is it not enough to study, write, and teach this subject in some academic institution, or does being a philosopher require something else, perhaps a special way of living?"¹⁸ Concerned also to locate himself in relation to his own Jewish identity, Shusterman is not the only philosopher,¹⁹ even if he is a rare philosopher, posing such provocative questions and looking to both the lives and the works of Dewey, Wittgenstein, and Foucault for insights that can help address them. Many contributors to this volume make similar moves.²⁰ They too are looking to popular cultures for new conceptions of philosophical practice (such as Mary Leach's "good gossip"²¹), considering the complexities of cultural identities and social locations,²² thinking about arts and social ethics,²³ interrogating the emotion/reason and mind/body dualisms,²⁴ and also critiquing modernism and reconstructing Pragmatism;²⁵ albeit unlike Shusterman, they explicitly think of themselves as philosophers of education and as educators.

Shusterman's analysis of rap as a philosophical life-practice, along with almost all essays in this volume (except those by Ann Diller and Dilafruz Williams, does set aside those preoccupations with the nonhuman natural environment for which Thoreau is best known.²⁶ But another professor of philosophy, Karen J. Warren, directly connects ecological concerns with self-critical and social-ethical questions like Shusterman's in her newest edited collection *Ecofeminism*. In diverse ways its articles take "the position that there are important connections between how one treats women, people of color, and the underclass on one hand and how one treats the nonhuman natural environment on the other."²⁷ Arguing that philosophers should take seriously the available empirical data about sexual and post/colonial oppression, trees and forests, water, food and farming, technologies, toxins, environmental racism and ageism, and sexist-naturist language, she situates ecological feminist philosophies within a multidisciplinary, multicultural context that includes a "grassroots" global movement, often simultaneously political and spiritual.²⁸ Citing what Warren calls "empirical women-nature connections" as seriously consequential for children worldwide, educator Ruthanne Kurth-Schai has contributed to Warren's book some necessary theorizing about how the subordination of children and the oppression of women and nonhuman nature are mutually reinforcing and intimately related.²⁹ But otherwise philosophers of education are still slow to consider such connections, and neither Warren's collection nor this yearbook includes discussions of environmental education, a field seldom considered by either ecofeminists or philosophers of education. Yet another book new this year, philosopher of education Jim Garrison's *Dewey and Eros*, does critically engage the feminist ethic of care and also inadvertently offer some hope that philosophers of education could soon more seriously consider such social-ecological women-nature connections and their significance for children's education — if awakened to our location in an abused physical environment that increasingly imperils human life: "Every day in every classroom choice we make, we answer life's most momentous questions: What is life (or teaching)? How should I live (or teach)? What does it mean? Dewey answered: Whatever life is, it is a miracle and the live creature must act to maintain its existence and grow."³⁰

HIGHER EDUCATION AND PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION IN 1997

A current flier from the American Association of University Professors, which Dewey helped to found, warns that "The world we professors work in is under attack." But if philosophers of education, as live creatures concerned about maintaining their own existence and growing, share this same embattled perception of their world (and I know many in both Canada and the United States who do), their writings this year scarcely reflect it. They have thought vigorously and rigorously about problems in higher education,³¹ most often quite apart from questions about preparation of future teachers and parents to educate children, not to mention children who live in the worlds of my two epigraphs. Generally, however, philosophers of education have not chosen to pose philosophical questions that might lend some ethical cogency to the most controversial current issues reported and debated in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, for example: topics such as exploitation of

non-tenure-track faculty and graduate students, erosion of shared governance, undermining of tenure, attacks against affirmative action, campus censorship and monitoring of electronic media, civility in academic discourse, political censorship by academic presses, educational functions and dysfunctions of fraternities, academic inattention to the plight of adolescents, ethical imperatives for disciplining college students (especially for sexual violence), a crisis in graduate education, corporatization of the university, politicization of the university presidency, the political economy of science, and the emergence of literary "ecocriticism." This Yearbook includes no critical thought on such provocative topics this year. But cultural critic Cary Nelson's *Manifesto of a Tenured Radical* and his edited collection, *Will Teach For Food: Academic Labor in Crisis*, with Barbara Ehrenreich's foreword reflections on "What Yale Is Teaching Us," could serve well as topical sourcebooks for future work in philosophy of higher education.³² So too could Anita Hill's *Speaking Truth to Power*, an autobiographical study of the politics of sexual harassment and racism, both in Washington, D.C. and on my own campus, the University of Oklahoma, from which she resigned last year.³³

Despite many private confessions of profound anguish within the ideologically troubled and therefore often even anti-intellectual context of current North American campus life, contributors to this volume have directed their philosophical energies elsewhere, toward their own most meaningful everyday *educational* activities. Many have written philosophically in response to their own immediately experienced problems in higher education, albeit problems that educators in other contexts might also somehow encounter themselves and therefore understand: Problems that directly affect the contributors' own teaching, their own students' learning, and their own broadly shared curriculum deliberations. For example, Boyd, an international leader among theorists of moral education, presents himself in the presidential essay as engaged in administrative conversations with faculty colleagues who feel in various ways beleaguered by graduate students' complaints about the social politics of the curriculum in their department. All featured authors in this volume are thinking about questions posed to them as *teachers* in higher education. Nicholas Burbules, editor of the journal that PES co-sponsors, *Educational Theory*, presents himself sitting at his computer, getting lost "on the web" while contemplating the difficulties of teaching a student who feels lost. Jeffrey Ayala Milligan, a Peace Corps veteran new to the field, is teaching rural junior college students near his own birthplace in the U.S. Bible Belt, talking with a faculty colleague about the white southern Christian upbringing they have in common with their students and contemplating the moral challenges that multicultural education poses for their religious heritage and vice versa. Natasha Levinson, an assistant professor of education and an active participant in the PES Women's Caucus, presents herself as a teacher of undergraduate Women's Studies talking with a faculty colleague who teaches Women's Studies also, albeit from a popular and taken-for-granted premise quite different from her own. Addressing themselves to such contemporary practical concerns as educators, this year's presidential and other featured essayists engage in critical conversations with Plato, Wittgenstein, Lorraine Code, Cornel West, and others.

The epigraphs to this introduction only gloss situations that give philosophers of education good reasons to take a long look at where they are standing in relation to those situations, at where the field's collective efforts are directed, and at where they are not yet directed, but perhaps should be. Although its silences about social ecology, political economy, and children's (especially girls') education are causes for some self-critical reflection, 1997 was nonetheless an especially strong year for PES's Pragmatist tradition, for value theory generally, and for thought specifically about teaching — all healthy signs in view of those epigraphs.

The Philosophy of Education Society thanks the University of Oklahoma for the generous support it gave to the compilation of this volume. The editor also thanks Amy Sullivan for her extensive and clever assistance to all the editors in processing manuscripts; Alven Neiman, Jim Giarelli, and Michael Katz for their experienced guidance and hugely generous empathy as past yearbook editors; Rozilyn Miller for her timely and resourceful bibliographic assistance in preparation of the introduction; Dwight Boyd for his liberal presidential support and Diana Dummitt for her extraordinarily compassionate patience, through demanding difficulties of various and complicated sorts that arose for me as work on this project neared completion; Kal Alston, Scott Bilow, Maureen Ford, Jim Giarelli, Barbara Thayer-Bacon, and Steve Tozer for reviewing double the usual number of manuscripts with such timeliness and thoroughness, and without complaints at one of the busiest phases of the academic year; and John Green for his caring good humor throughout the project — even to the point of generously surrendering his own computer in the middle of his own project when mine suddenly “died” as I was finishing the introduction. So much for technology: I don't know whether to thank it or not!

1. Lester R. Brown, et al., *State of the World 1997: A Worldwatch Institute Report on Progress Toward a Sustainable Society* (<<http://www.worldwatch.org/pubs/sow/sow97/index.html>> 2 September 1997).
2. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Kids Count Data Book 1997: State Profiles of Child Well-Being* (Baltimore: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1997), 5.
3. Mark Mason, “In Defense of a Dialectical Ethic Beyond Postmodern Morality.”
4. Trevor Davison, “‘Equivalence’ and the Recognition of Prior Learning in Universities”; Marjorie O'Loughlin, “Reinstating Emotion in Educational Thinking”; and Fazal Rizvi, “Aporia and Imagination.”
5. Gert Biesta, “Revolutions That As Yet Have No Model: Performance Pedagogy and its Audience.”
6. Megan Boler, “Taming the Labile Other: Disciplined Emotions in Popular and Academic Discourses” and James D. Marshall, “Dewey and the New ‘Vocationalism.’”
7. See Nicholas C. Burbules, “Aporia: Webs, Passages, Getting Lost, and Learning to Go On” and Barbara Duncan, “Hypertext and Education: (Post?)structural Transformations.”
8. Kenneth Howe, “What (Epistemic) Benefit Inclusion?”
9. Dwight Boyd, “The Place of Locating Oneself(ves)/Myself(ves) in Doing Philosophy of Education.”
10. Barbara Houston, “A Conversation Beyond Argument on a Bridge Over Troubled Waters.”
11. Victor Worsfold, “Know Thyself: A Contemporary Command.”
12. On these rhetorical concepts, see Catherine L. Hobbs, “Vico, Rhetorical Topics, and Historical Thought,” *Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historiques* 22, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 559-85; Allan Megill, “Jorn Rusen's Theory of Historiography between Modernism and Rhetoric of Inquiry,” *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History* 33, no. 1 (1994): 39-60.
13. Karen Adams, “Common Schooling in the Politically Liberal Society: Implications for the Development of Citizens”; Steve Broidy, “Kindness as a Teaching Ethic”; Peter F. Carbone, Jr., “Two Cheers for Parental Empowerment: A Politically Incorrect Analysis”; Michael S. Katz, “On Becoming a Teacher: May Sarton's *The Small Room*”; Shelby L. Sheppard, “Education and the Cognitive Revolution: Something to ‘Think’ About”; and Stacy Smith, “Democracy, Plurality, and Education: Deliberating Practices of and for Civic Participation.”
14. See, for example, Dwight Boyd, “Professionalization and the Moral Jeopardy of Teaching,” in *Philosophy of Education 1989*, ed. Ralph Page (Normal, Ill.: Philosophy of Education Society, 1990), 102-8.

15. See, for example, Jana Noel, "Interpreting Aristotle's *Phantasia* and Claiming its Role Within *Phronesis*."
16. Richard Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 147. Although Shusterman does make footnote acknowledgments of Rorty's writing on feminism and of Judith Butler's work, he does not take up feminist theoretical questions himself.
17. Quoted by Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy*, 1.
18. *Ibid.*
19. See, for example, Andrew Light and Eric Katz, *Environmental Pragmatism* (London: Routledge, 1996); Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995); and Peter Singer, *How Are We To Live? Ethics in an Age of Self-Interest* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1995). I am grateful to Zev Trachtenberg and to Alven Neiman for introducing me to the first two of these.
20. Nicholas C. Burbules, "Aporia: Webs, Passages, Getting Lost, and Learning to Go On"; Frank Margonis, "Dewey and the Arrogance of Reason"; James D. Marshall, "Dewey and the New 'Vocationalism'"; Cris Mayo, "Foucauldian Cautions on the Subject and the Educative Implications of Contingent Identity"; and Aaron Schutz, "The Metaphor of 'Space' in Educational Theory: Henry Giroux through the Eyes of Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault."
21. Mary Leach, "(An)other Terrain for Thought: Good Gossip."
22. Natasha Levinson, "Unsettling Identities: Conceptualizing Contingency"; Cris Mayo, "Foucauldian Cautions on the Subject and the Educative Implications of Contingent Identity"; Kevin McDonough, "Cultural Recognition, Cosmopolitanism, and Multicultural Education"; Jeffrey Ayala Milligan, "Teaching at the Crossroads of Faith and School: The Teacher as Prophetic Pragmatist"; and James Palermo, "Asante's Myth of *Afrocentricity*: An Ideological Critique."
23. Donald Blumenfeld-Jones, "Aesthetic Experience, Hermeneutics, and Curriculum"; Sheryle Bergmann-Drewe, "Creating Practical Knowledge"; Benjamine J. Endres, "Ethics and the Critical Theory of Education"; and John Rethorst, "Art and Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Moral Education."
24. Megan Boler, "Taming the Labile Other: Disciplined Emotions in Popular and Academic Discourses"; Ignacio Götz, "On Spirituality and Teaching"; and Marjorie O'Loughlin, "Reinstating Emotion in Educational Thinking."
25. Julian Edgoose, "An Ethics of Hesitant Learning: The Caring Justice of Levinas and Derrida"; Mark Mason, "In Defense of a Dialectical Ethic Beyond Postmodern Morality"; Walter Okshevsky, "Richard Rorty on the Power of Philosophical Reflection and the Pragmatist Conception of Critical Thinking: A Redescription"; and Audrey Thompson, "What to Do While Waiting for the Revolution: Political Pragmatism and Performance Pedagogy."
26. Ann Diller, "Expanding Identities: The Importance of Wow! Experiences" and Dilafruz R. Williams, "Dis-Embedded Discourse: Challenge for Civic Education."
27. Karen J. Warren, ed., *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), xi. See also her previous edited collections, *Ecological Feminist Philosophies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) and *Ecological Feminism* (London: Routledge, 1994).
28. Warren, "Taking Empirical Data Seriously: An Ecofeminist Philosophical Perspective," in Warren, *Ecofeminism*, chap. 1, 3.
29. See Ruthanne Kurth-Schai, "Ecofeminism and Children," in Warren, *Ecofeminism*, 193-212.
30. Jim Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), 202.
31. See Trevor Davison, "'Equivalence' and the Recognition of Prior Learning in Universities."
32. Cary Nelson, *Manifesto of a Tenured Radical* (New York: New York University Press, 1997) and Cary Nelson, ed., *Will Teach for Food: Academic Labor in Crisis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
33. Anita Hill, *Speaking Truth to Power* (New York: Doubleday, 1997).