

Introduction

Philosophy of Education at the Millennium

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Where does philosophy of education stand at the millennium, and how does this volume reflect where it stands and where it might be going? The question begs to be asked, but admits of no easy answer. I will comment here on the complexity of this question, and offer a very limited answer which addresses what may be said to distinguish the present volume from its predecessors. What distinguishes it, I will suggest, is the extent to which these essays occupy the expanding common ground shared by philosophy of education as it is practiced in schools of education and philosophy of education as it is practiced in philosophy departments.

An account of the nature of philosophy of education must be true to the history of the field, yet without some notion of its nature one cannot judge what does and does not belong to that history. So it is with our attempts to understand any field of study and anything else that has a history. One begins inevitably with texts or bodies of thought which identify themselves as philosophy of education; but the understandings of the nature of the field embedded in these sources may be internally flawed, may conflict with each other both synchronically and diachronically, may seem collectively incomplete, and may suggest that other works or bodies of thought which do not expressly identify themselves as philosophy of education are equally worthy of the title. (One must be struck by how many of the historical classics of the field *do not* identify themselves as works of philosophy of education.) One begins, thus, from what amounts to a kind of testimonial evidence about which individual bodies of thought belong to the named field of study. These are the initial data points from which one must work, but they lead one ineluctably toward a more idealized or normative conception of the nature of the field — in the case of philosophy of education, toward a conception of what *ought* to count as philosophy of education, and what the concerns of philosophy of education would *naturally* be. The form of interpretation involved is one that aims to formulate the most coherent and attractive, in short the best, conception of the nature of the field that is broadly compatible with the historical data. Compatibility with the data is something that admits of degrees, of course, and attractiveness may be subject to irresolvable dispute, so there is no assurance of a univocal outcome, though neither is it inevitable that there will not be one.

Saying where philosophy of education stands at the millennium is thus no straightforward matter, first because it is a field of study with a history, and it is in the nature of such things to have natures that are subject to indeterminacy. More importantly, it is a field whose history remains largely unwritten, and whose nature can thus scarcely be said to be well examined. Individual episodes of that history have received serious scholarly attention, but no comprehensive scholarly history of the field has ever been undertaken.¹ This must be counted a great oddity in a field

whose history over the past half century has been marked by repeated attempts to define its nature and trajectory.²

Further, unlike mathematics, physics, and other fields which are truly international, the philosophy of education retains a degree of regional particularity which would complicate if not defeat any attempt to do more than report on the status of the tradition to which the present volume belongs. This Anglo-American tradition, or tradition of the English-speaking world, is itself complicated by the institutional divide between philosophy departments and schools and departments of education, the two principal (though not the only) settings whose histories and demands influence the kinds of work that are done in philosophy of education. I will say a few words here about the ramifications of this institutional divide, and the progress toward fruitful collaboration across this divide which the essays in this volume represent.

It is widely agreed that philosophy of education has existed in the Western tradition since the dawn of philosophy itself, but it has only existed as a distinguishable subdiscipline within philosophy for about fifty years. Historically, it was integral to moral and political philosophy, and often associated with epistemology and the philosophy of language, but the emergence of pedagogical studies as an increasingly autonomous enterprise in the nineteenth century gave rise to a twentieth-century tradition of educational philosophy as an endeavor largely divorced from the mainstream of philosophy. Where once there had been Immanuel Kant lecturing on metaphysics, ethics, pedagogy, and an astonishing array of other subjects, there later came to be philosophers who did not lecture on pedagogy, on the one hand, and professors of pedagogy who did, on the other. The separation of function created a separation in thought which the field of philosophy of education has had to struggle against ever since. That separation was institutionalized in the distinct missions of philosophy departments and schools of education devoted largely to teacher training, and has been exacerbated by the education schools' ambivalent and ever-cooling embrace of the humanities generally. It was also exacerbated by the tenor of Anglo-American philosophy through the mid-twentieth century, by which I mean above all its preoccupation with the *language* of morality, at the expense of its *substance*. In this state, the very domains of philosophy which had launched philosophy of education could no longer sustain it.

The situation in the mid-twentieth century, then, was that philosophy of education was little practiced in the leading departments of philosophy and

in the teacher education curricula, courses bearing [the] name [philosophy of education] were not uniformly related to formal philosophy. A philosophy of education referred to a set of beliefs about life and schooling. Sometimes these beliefs were the results of 'being thoughtful or reflective about education.' Often they embodied proverbial wisdom about the young or long experience in the schools.³

This passage from Jonas Soltis is followed by the observation that the philosophies of education of Plato, Rousseau, and others often did find their way into philosophy of education courses, but the general picture is one of a very great distance between the worlds of academic (what Soltis calls "formal") philosophy and philosophy of education as it was known in education courses.⁴

In the meantime, within philosophy departments the philosophy of education has experienced two revivals, one stretching from the late 1950s to the 1970s, and a second which has been building momentum since the end of the 1980s. The first wave, an offshoot of Oxford-style “ordinary language” analysis, was known as “analytical philosophy of education.” It can be dated to Charles D. Hardie’s *Truth and Fallacy in Educational Theory*, and received influential expression in such works as Reginald D. Archambault’s *Philosophical Analysis in Education* and Israel Scheffler’s *The Language of Education*.⁵ Through this period the common ground between the two worlds of philosophy of education broadened and solidified a great deal. Significant numbers of scholars in education and philosophy programs worked in much the same way, addressed the same topics, and published together in volumes of readings and special journal issues devoted to philosophy of education.⁶ A few were even jointly appointed. The involvement of philosophy departments in this movement seems to have reached its zenith in the early 1970s, and to have all but completely collapsed by the end of the that decade.⁷ With this collapse, philosophy of education nearly disappeared from philosophy departments through the 1980s, and the publication of philosophy of education in philosophy journals all but ceased.⁸

The methods of analytical philosophy, the philosophy which still dominates the leading philosophy graduate programs, have meanwhile broadened and evolved, as have the methods of many philosophers of education working within schools and departments of education.

For our purposes here, the most important changes in Anglo-American philosophy during the past thirty years include the rebirth and flourishing of political philosophy and ethics, especially practical or applied ethics, the resurgence of work in the history of philosophy, and the “empirical turn” that analytical philosophy has taken. Philosophers are increasingly willing to get their hands “dirty” with facts, not only in various domains of practical ethics, but in social and political philosophy, philosophy of law, and philosophy of psychology and the other sciences. Collectively, these changes have made mainstream philosophy not only more receptive to philosophy of education, but also more capable of nurturing work in it which is both philosophically significant and seriously engaged with contemporary education. This has made possible in the course of the 1990s a second revival of philosophy of education in philosophy departments, one which has been matched by parallel and often related developments in political science departments and law schools. Work in philosophy of education has begun to appear in such journals as the *Public Affairs Quarterly*, *Metaphilosophy*, *Synthese*, and *Ethics*. Philosophy departments are beginning to produce dissertations and books in philosophy of education, and philosophy of education appears again with regularity on the programs of the American Philosophical Association meetings.⁹

These conditions have transformed the potential for fruitful collaborations across the institutional divide that has separated schools of education from philosophy departments, and if there is anything that distinguishes the present volume of papers from its predecessors it is the evidence it gives of this potential.¹⁰ One sees this most obviously in the pairing of papers and responses by Michael Slote and Nel

Noddings, Charlie Howell and Peter Markie, Lawrence Blum and Natasha Levinson, James Cunningham and Kenneth Westphal, Laura Purdy and Barry Bull, and Susan Verducci and Michael Mathias. But it also becomes evident in such comparisons as those one could make between the papers of Karl Hostetler and Kenneth Strike and those of Edward Sankowski and Jeffrey Jones: one could hardly guess from the choice of topics or background literature, or the degree of abstraction or engagement with educational problems, that it is the former pair who teach in schools of education and the latter who belong to philosophy departments.

A related aspect of this volume which warrants comment is the extent to which it is dominated by papers which find their philosophical orientation in ethics, moral psychology, and political philosophy. These are the fields in which one would expect the common ground between the two worlds of philosophy of education to find its center of gravity, for these are the areas in which the current growth in philosophy of education in philosophy departments is concentrated. Yet while there is much reason to hope for increasingly fruitful exchanges and collaborations in these areas, there is also reason to hope that other areas of philosophy may become better represented in future years. Most notably perhaps, the exchanges between Tapio Puolimatka and Denis Phillips, and Dennis Lomas and Michael Matthews point up the overwhelming influence of “constructivism” on current pedagogical and curricular thinking, and make it clear that this is a topic of debate to which much more could be contributed by epistemologists and philosophers of science and mathematics.¹¹

The future of philosophy of education depends upon both the strength of its roots in general philosophy and the vigor of its engagement in ongoing debates about the curriculum, pedagogy, educational testing and measurement, school safety and the moral climate of schools, educational priorities, access, equity, choice, and the like. Without the former it will lack philosophical consequence, and without the latter it will lack educational consequence. Without both it will fail to earn and maintain the respect it must have as a domain of practical philosophy, an intellectual enterprise aimed — in the aggregate, if not in every part — at the guidance of educational practice. It would seem obvious that the educational discussions in which philosophy is misused and abused, as it is in the ongoing promotion of constructivism, philosophical idealism, and neo-romantic farewells to reason, are ones in which philosophers of education should be most vigorously engaged, and in which the contributions of experts in related domains of philosophy are most urgently needed. It is the farewells to reason that Emily Robertson takes up in the Presidential Essay that follows, a fitting place for this volume to begin, for more reasons than one.

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1. My own efforts to remedy this have so far yielded only the barest outline of a proper history of the field. See my "Education, History of Philosophy of," in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 3, ed. Edward J. Craig (London: Routledge, 1998), 222-231.
2. See for example, John Brubacher, ed., *Philosophies of Education: The Forty-first Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, Part I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942); Nelson Henry, ed., *Modern Philosophies of Education: The Fifty-fourth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955); *Harvard Educational Review* 26, no. 2 (1956), which was devoted entirely to the nature of philosophy of education; Jonas Soltis, *Philosophy and Education: Eightieth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, Part I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) and *Philosophy of Education Since Mid-Century* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1979).
3. Harry S. Broudy, "Philosophy of Education Between the Yearbooks," in *Philosophy of Education Since Mid-Century*, 3.
4. For another account of the distance between the two fields, see John Passmore, *The Philosophy of Teaching* (London: Duckworth, 1980), 3-7.
5. Charles D. Hardie, *Truth and Fallacy in Educational Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942); Reginald D. Archambault, *Philosophical Analysis in Education* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965); and Israel Scheffler, *The Language of Education* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles Thomas, 1960).
6. See for example, the October 1974 issue of the *Monist*.
7. Two volumes from this period which provide some sense of the stature of the philosophers working at least part time on philosophy of education are James F. Doyle, *Educational Judgements* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973) and Glenn Langford and Daniel J. O'Connor, eds., *New Essays in the Philosophy of Education* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973).
8. By "philosophy journals" I mean journals generally recognized as philosophy journals by scholars who teach in philosophy departments. Philosophy of education is quite different from the history of education, or educational psychology, or education law, in having no journal in which its two fields fully intersect: no journal in which scholars employed in philosophy and education programs both publish, which is regarded as a philosophy journal by both.
9. Witness for example, Robert Fullinwider, ed., *Public Education in a Multicultural Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Amelie Rorty, ed., *Philosophers On Education: New Historical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1998), Harry Brighouse, *School Choice and Social Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), the forthcoming *Nomos* volume on political and moral education edited by Steven Macedo, and the twenty-three (and counting?) titles in the Rowman and Littlefield academic ethics book series edited by Stephen Cahn.
10. An important, but different, precedent was set in *Philosophy of Education 1995*, ed. Alven Neiman, (Urbana, Ill.: Philosophy of Education Society, 1996) with the inclusion of invited papers presented at the Pacific Division meetings of the APA and crosslisted on the program of PES. Another publication which brings together educational philosophers and "mainstream" philosophers, though in yet another way, is David Carr and Jan Steutel eds., *Virtue Theory and Moral Education* (London: Routledge, 1999).
11. This is not to say that philosophy departments have not been represented in these debates. See *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 10, no. 1 (1990), which is devoted entirely to science and math education and Michael R. Matthews, ed., *Constructivism in Science Education* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishing, 1998).