

## Introduction

Kenneth R. Howe  
*University of Colorado*

Nick Burbules initiated the practice of including an introduction in the annual *Philosophy of Education* volumes in 1986, as a way to help identify the major currents in the field. I follow his lead in this year's volume. In the process, I provide a brief description of each article, giving slightly more attention to those from general sessions and considerably more to Bob Floden's presidential address. The descriptions serve the more customary purpose, however abbreviated, of providing the reader with an overview of the contents.

Burbules saw philosophy of education in 1986 as characterized by an increased concern with normative (read: moral-political) issues and as having become more "consciously interdisciplinary" in its "topics and methods." He saw an important explanation of these trends to be the "niche" available for philosophy of education in the changing ecology of the university.

Burbules's general characterization has held up well. Floden's "When Is Philosophy of Education?" focuses directly on making philosophy of education "consciously interdisciplinary." In particular, he urges philosophers of education to do less talking among themselves and to actively seek out opportunities to join in the general conversations about educational policy and practice in which the larger educational research community and policymakers are engaged. This can help secure philosophy of education's niche in the academy, which Floden believes is currently under significant threat. Floden also believes that philosophers of education have a very useful role to play in enhancing the quality of the general conversations and the prescriptions they produce.

As it turns out, the contents of this volume depart significantly from Floden's vision. This, I think, points to a gap in the field, though it may well be overestimated when based on the contents of the *Yearbook* if, as in my case, philosophers of education do different things at PES than they do in other professional contexts. David Hansen, one of Floden's respondents, provides a twist on this caveat by suggesting that the philosophical dimensions of formal education are more pervasive and subtle than those emphasized by Floden. Hansen finds these dimensions potentially a part of virtually all of the professional activities in which philosophers of education engage in schools and colleges of education, from classroom teaching to student advising to participating on teacher education curriculum committees. These contexts, too, respond to the question, When is philosophy of education? and, as I understand Hansen, philosophers of education have special responsibilities in each qua philosophers of education. Implicit in Hansen's observations is that philosophers of education do most of their "talking among themselves" in gatherings like PES, not in their day-to-day work in schools and colleges of education.

Gary Fenstermacher, Floden's other respondent, may be interpreted as suggesting that it is not an altogether bad thing that philosophy of education would depart

from Floden's vision. Fenstermacher warns of the potential for the philosophy of education to be co-opted were Floden's vision to become the norm. According to Fenstermacher, philosophy of education should preserve its role as providing fundamental criticism that permits — and expects — philosophers of education to criticize a policy like No Child Left Behind from the ground up, in terms of its general principles, not only in terms of the vagueness and ambiguity of concepts such as “highly qualified teacher” (one of Floden's examples). Fenstermacher is rightly skeptical about the prospect of educational policymakers welcoming into their conversations philosophers of education who would provide this more fundamental kind of criticism. For Fenstermacher, Floden suggests *a* useful role for philosophy of education, but one that does not fulfill, and may be in tension with, philosophy of education's more fundamental role.

Hansen, Fenstermacher, and I agree, and so, no doubt, would many other philosophers of education, that it would be a good thing for philosophers of education to seek opportunities to engage in the kind of work that Floden recommends. It should be observed, however, that engaging in a kind of collaboration in which policymakers and education scholars from other specialties define the *problem space* is not a requirement for philosophers of education to engage the issues currently animating scholarship about policy and practice in the field of education more generally. Philosophers of education may engage these issues employing their own methods and vocabulary. This volume of the *Yearbook* indicates that these days a large contingent of philosophers of education is doing just that. Their work exhibits a particularly strong emphasis on moral-political issues — an important area of work for philosophers of education identified by Floden as well as by Burbules in his inaugural *Yearbook* introduction.

Terms such as “multiculturalism,” “diversity,” and, to a lesser extent, “pluralism” are each used to describe a general set of moral-political concerns cutting across scholarship in the field of education that share the ultimate goal of fostering “dialogue across differences.” More specific topical concerns — focusing on differences in culture, religion, race, or sexual orientation, for instance — combine with differences in method to produce two broad philosophical approaches to the moral-political endeavor: a *progressive approach*, focused on the application of moral and political theory to push the endeavor forward, and a *deconstructive approach*, focused on “deconstructing” the endeavor itself, particularly regarding how it can result in oppressing and excluding diverse identities in the name of recognizing and including them. The distinction between these approaches is crude and shifting, to be sure, and does not mark off mutually exclusive categories. I apologize in advance to any contributors who reject my classification of their work.

THE PROGRESSIVE APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF  
DIALOGUE ACROSS DIFFERENCES

Robert Kunzman's general session article, “Educating for More (and Less) Than Intelligent Belief and Disbelief: A Critique of Noddings's Vision of Religion in Public Schools,” provides a clear illustration of the progressive approach to the problem of dialogue across differences. Kunzman employs Rawlsian political theory to

argue that the critical examination of religious belief in public schools, which he believes Noddings advocates, ought to be avoided in favor of fostering appreciation of the need to conduct civic dialogue in the face of deep religious disagreement.

Other instances of the progressive approach are an application of Jeremy Waldron's account of cultural cosmopolitanism to education (Victoria Costa); a criticism of conflating "toleration" and "recognition" on the grounds it eliminates an important distinction (Josh Corngold); an examination of the problem of educating across postcolonial and religious borders (Jeffrey Ayala Milligan); a criticism of the deliberative democratic theory of Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson as infringing on the rights of religious minorities (Anne Newman); and an investigation of whether Hannah Arendt's conception of public spaces might be applied to public schools (Terri Wilson).

#### THE DECONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF DIALOGUE ACROSS DIFFERENCES

As I intimated previously, the deconstructive approach exhibits more self-doubt than the progressive approach about the capacity of philosophy of education to move the goal of fostering dialogue across difference forward. This concern is prominent in Audrey Thompson's general session article, "Philosophers as Unreliable Narrators," in which she problematizes the claim to authority she believes is inherent in much "progressive" philosophical writing. From their position of privilege, philosophers are unavoidably limited in their ability to tell the "whole story." Thompson suggests that philosophers of education might help mitigate the problem by inviting readers to discern the limits of the philosophical position being advanced by borrowing the idea of the "unreliable narrator" from literature.

Other instances of the deconstructive approach are an examination of whether and how backsliding into a commitment to the "liberal individual" can be avoided in the articulation of whites' culpability for complicity in systematic racism (Barbara Applebaum); a proposal for a strategic use of tolerance for teaching across seemingly incommensurable differences in identities (Ann Chinnery); an argument for distinguishing the "recognition" of privilege (as a gain for who has it) from the "reevaluation" of it (as a loss for who has it) to avoid rendering work to subvert domination self-defeating (Jennifer Logue); and a "deconstructive critique" of recent theories of "place-based education" that offers an alternative "trans-local" basis for community identity (Claudia W. Ruitenberg).

#### ON THE BORDER OF THE PROGRESSIVE AND DECONSTRUCTIVE APPROACHES

Part of the interest in dialogue across differences includes differences in philosophical focus and approach themselves. This is especially evident in Jim Garrison's "A Pragmatic Conception of Creative Listening to Emotional Expressions in Dialogue Across Differences" and in Sarah McGough's "Political Agency in the Classroom." Dewey figures prominently in both Garrison's and McGough's analyses, and perhaps this is because Dewey's philosophy is itself often on the border of different philosophical camps. In any case, both Garrison and McGough bring Dewey's views into dialogue with contemporary "deconstructive" thinkers — Sue Campbell and Judith Butler, respectively.

## THE BROADER MORAL-POLITICAL ARENA

The problem of dialogue across difference is an element of virtually any moral-political analysis that assumes a nonauthoritarian framework, but it can remain more in the background than in the collection of articles just discussed.

Martin Benjamin's Kneller Lecture, "Moral Reasoning, Moral Pluralism, and the Classroom," sketches the method of "wide reflective equilibrium" that he argues at once captures a form of moral reasoning shared by all who engage in it and yet makes room for "reasonable moral pluralism." Benjamin suggests that such an approach can and should be taught in public schools. (The issue of dialogue across difference remains relatively prominent in Benjamin's analysis by virtue of his tackling moral pluralism. Thus, not surprisingly, Ann Diller, in her role as respondent, challenges the adequacy of Benjamin's handling of the problem of dialogue across difference from the less self-confident perspective associated with what I have been calling the "deconstructive approach.")

Articles with a strong moral-political component comprise a wide range. Several focus on moral and civic education, as exemplified by a proposal to employ the insights of multicultural education to develop peace education (Sigal Ben-Porath); a critique of current conceptions of democratic education for presupposing a Kohlbergian moral psychology (Charles Howell); and a critical examination of the "multiple ethical languages" approach to professional ethics courses (Daniel Vokey).

Other articles with a strong moral-political component but that are otherwise difficult to group in more precise ways include an explication of W.E.B. Du Bois's educational philosophy, focusing on the *Souls of Black Folk* and racial justice (Rodino F. Anderson); an examination of Emmanuel Levinas's ethics as applied to education, focusing on the significance of the third party in Levinas's treatment of justice (Matt Jackson); a critique of the push in teacher education to foster better normative judgment, qualities of character, and so on, by employing the "mind game" of cognitive psychology (Shelby Sheppard); an argument for the significant element of truth of the so-called "student error" that they labor in schools for the benefit of teachers and the interests of the larger society teachers represent (Alexander Sidorkin); and an analysis using Jacques Lacan's construction of desire as an adjunct to Jane Roland Martin's concept of the "love gap in education" in understanding love in educational relationships (James Stillwaggon).

## ROUNDING OUT THE YEARBOOK

As the preceding indicates, moral-political concerns predominated in this year's volume. But epistemology, including philosophy of science, also has a significant presence, including as an element in several articles previously described (for example, those of Benjamin, Kunzman, Sheppard, and Thompson).

Antifoundationalism without relativism continues as a topic of interest. In his general session article, "Avoiding Philosophy's 'Biopolar Disorder': Elgin's Revision of Epistemology," Nakia S. Pope agrees with Catherine Elgin's diagnosis of philosophy as suffering from a "bipolar disorder," where the poles are absolutism versus arbitrariness. Pope then goes on to suggest that Elgin's remedy in the appeal

to “reflective equilibrium” is overly cognitive and thus disconnected from interaction with the environment, but that her view can be refined and improved by being brought more into line with Dewey’s. In the same general vein as Pope’s (and Elgin’s) projects, Chris Hanks proffers an analysis of educational research that suggests embracing interpretivism as a way to come to grips with the problem of incommensurability that avoids radical skepticism.

Additional articles in the general area of epistemology include an argument for the view that educational theory affects practice through contextualized symbolic action rather than through its ideas alone (Haithe Anderson); and a critique of D.C. Phillips’s framework of constructivist views as omitting the kind of pragmatic realism exemplified in the views of Catherine Elgin and Israel Scheffler (Frederick S. Ellett and David P. Ericson).

Finally, there are two articles focusing heavily (one exclusively) on Wittgenstein: an analysis of the concept of a “practice” as applied to education (Paul Smeyers and Nicholas C. Burbules) and an argument that Wittgenstein’s analysis of learning language games by following rules includes creatively interpreting and renegotiating such rules (Jeff Stickney). Coming up with some more general category with which to classify these two articles would be reaching. It is noteworthy, however, that in each case the authors challenge the conservative conception of pedagogy so often attributed to Wittgenstein.

Identifying the major currents in philosophy of education by appeal to the contents of the PES *Yearbook* has its limitations, of course, both because the sample is small and because the composition of the program committee could affect the pool of submissions as well as what was accepted from that pool. Nonetheless, I surmise that, at least with respect to the United States, the high level of attention devoted in this volume to moral-political concerns, in general, and to dialogue across differences, in particular, reflects what a large segment of philosophers of education are doing these days when they are doing philosophy of education.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I end by acknowledging the individuals who were essential in producing this volume.

I begin with thanks to Kathy Hytten, executive secretary of PES, who patiently guided me through all stages of my stint as program chair for the 2005 PES conference, leading up to and including the meeting in San Francisco. Kathy was quick to respond to my many questions in a way that always conveyed just how on top of things she was. Kathy stepped down as executive secretary this year, and she has set the bar very high for her successors.

I thank the program committee (whose names are included as contributing editors on the title page) for their high level of support and collegiality. As I observed in the July 2004 edition of the PES *Update*, I was delighted by the unreserved willingness of these individuals to perform this important task. In addition to their primary responsibility of reviewing submissions, several also served very ably as respondents or chairs.

I am fortunate to have been the first editor of the *Yearbook* to benefit from the new arrangement whereby the University of Illinois has assumed more editorial responsibility. Managing editors, Joyce Atkinson and Tim McDonough, made the process amazingly hassle-free. They handled the few hitches that did arise with remarkable ease and cordiality. I can't imagine having a better experience as editor.

At the University of Colorado, I thank my dean, Lorrie Shepard, for supporting me with a course release and also a graduate assistant. That assistant was Sam Foster, who took responsibility for organizing submissions, sending them to program committee members for review, tracking the review process, and entering numerical ratings into a database and computing statistics. She also participated in editing the articles in the volume, including this introduction. I thank Sam for her sizeable contribution, from start to finish.

Finally, thanks to all of the contributors. The relatively hassle-free way in which this volume came together also owes much to them. And, of course, the volume would not have been possible without their good work.