

## INTRODUCTION

### Coherence, Inclusion, Prognosis: Remarks on the State of the Philosophy of Education Society at 51 Years Old

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Given our Society's recent flirtation with historicism, it should not be surprising that as I began to think about writing this introduction, I would want to consult at least some introductions to volumes from previous conferences. What is surely more surprising is what I found: As far as I can tell no volume prior to the one for 1986 contains an introduction by the editor. Moreover, since that introduction, written by Nick Burbules,<sup>1</sup> only one other editor, Hanan Alexander in the 1992 volume,<sup>2</sup> has followed his initial precedent. Perhaps the lesson of history here is that the best course of action would be to give up the task of introduction, to follow the more authoritative precedent (insofar as authority resides in the vast majority of editors and volumes), to remain silent, to simply let the papers speak for themselves.

On the other hand, I found myself at least somewhat persuaded by Burbules's initial example and rationale. His listing of three purposes that an introduction might fulfill strikes me as worthy of consideration. These purposes are:

1) An introduction to the *Proceedings* might provide a context in which (the papers in) a volume could be considered. The words in parentheses are meant to highlight a possibly useful ambiguity in this formulation. Is the introduction meant to help us relate the various papers in the volume *among* each other? Or is it supposed to provide a context in which a particular volume *as a whole* might be related to other volumes that preceded it? Both goals are admirable as long as we are careful, as Burbules was, to indicate that such contexts are to be formulated and evaluated in terms of heuristic or pragmatic utility rather than representational accuracy. The aim of an introduction is certainly not to provide a "view from nowhere" from which the business of the Philosophy of Education Society can be examined.

2) An introduction, secondly, would allow us to reexamine (continue the examination of?) philosophy of education's tradition and methods "so that it might continue as a coherent field of study."<sup>3</sup> I quote Burbules's exact wording because it seems to me to presume that philosophy of education has, as a field of study, been coherent in the past and ought to remain coherent in the future. Here one might ask: Has the field, in fact, been coherent? Should coherence be sought? What kind of coherence are we talking about? I will return to these questions in due course. For now it is enough to imagine at least two kinds of coherence that might be of interest in this context. The first is a coherence (an integrity, perhaps) within the work of any one philosophical inquirer. The second would mark our ability to accurately claim that all those who can be legitimately considered to be philosophers of education are doing things that share if not an essential similarity at least a fairly strong resemblance. The first type strikes me as obviously important. The second is more controversial. Again, I shall return to this issue later in this introduction.

3) Finally, to do (1) and (2) would, according to Burbules, allow us to "take our collective pulse each year, and through this self-examination to identify the emerging questions that characterize our field."<sup>4</sup> The medical analogy strikes me as intriguing and provocative. (In routine examinations a

pulse is taken for different reasons, or at least with a different sort of urgency, than at the bedside of recognizably sick “patients.” In taking the pulse of philosophy of education, what context are we in?) I suspect that any diagnosis I might offer in these remarks will mainly be of value insofar as it provokes the reader to enter into the process of self-examination with me (or, as the case may be, against me, against any diagnosis I might offer) and with other readers, to decide for themselves how our field is doing.

What did Burbules discover in his survey of the field? What did Alexander, whose procedure conformed closely, I believe, to Burbules’s specifications, discover? How was “the patient,” PES, doing then? How is it doing now? What, if we might hazard a guess, will the future bring? Finally should that foreseeable future be accepted as is or encouraged, or ought we to prescribe remedies against that apparent fate?

Burbules and Alexander both spoke in their introductions of a new and ongoing pluralism in method and subject matter, a movement farther and farther away from a previous hegemony of (supposedly) value-free analysis. Burbules especially stressed a new relationship of the self-identity of philosophers of education to other educational theorists, researchers, and practitioners. He pointed to a new attitude among philosophers of education to philosophical ethics, and political philosophy, an attitude that happily accepted the newly found awareness that these fields could in no way be considered “value free.” Even epistemology, the philosophical arena in which modernity’s most cherished claims of objectivity have been traditionally held and safeguarded, has been to some extent reconfigured. For example, Burbules spoke of the ways in which philosophers of education currently “tip-toe around the edges of topics in cognitive and developmental psychology”<sup>5</sup> Of course the danger here for the “standard” epistemologist is that too great an interest in, say, educational research, or collaboration between epistemology and such research, might lead to the blurring of the division between logic and psychology, norms and descriptions, and hence, it might seem, to scepticism.

Alexander, in his 1992 introduction, did us a great service by explicitly naming what might have been, at the time of the 48th meeting, only implicit, that is, the full arrival into our midst of what has been referred to as the various “posties,” post-modernism, post-structuralism, etc.<sup>6</sup> Many commentators have noted the vagueness of this designation; perhaps it is safest to say that at the very least what the “post” prefix names is a new form of opposition to a prior unanimity, an explosion of ideas that may share only their mistrust of a once inclusive enlightenment synthesis.<sup>7</sup> What the posties cause, in short, is a dissonance within the self. What the explicit arrival of the posties among at least some philosophers of education does is threaten a previously felt unity both within individual philosophers and within the group identity as a whole. The threat may or may not be taken as salutary, depending on whether the prior unity in question is seen to have been either a good (“The enlightened stance of courageously rational fighters for truth against dogma and superstition”) or bad (“The long suffered hegemonic tyranny of colonialist white males”) thing. The larger point here, however, is that the posties cause dissonance only if one takes inclusion as in some sense a prior good. Among philosophers of education, at least, the struggle with and among the posties has slowly but surely led to a shared conscious effort to enact inclusion. Just as the various posties have called the enlightenment “intact” self to be an illusion, this new effort towards inclusion marks a new willingness to include, to listen to, various voices, other selves, among those who wish to philosophize with us but might not share exactly our own self-identities.

This new inclusionary “zeitgeist” has played itself out in at least several ways in this year’s program. First, one can point to an especially large influx this year of non-North American participants at the annual meeting. Through participation in international organizations such as INPE (The International Network of Philosophers of Education), as well as national ones (e.g. The British Philosophy of Education Society), by way of fax, e-mail and Internet, North American philosophers of education are entering into fruitful dialogue with philosophers from ever more distant and varied locales. Countries represented in our program this year included not only Canada, but England,

Scotland, Israel, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and The Netherlands. Surely this new inclusivity can only benefit our mission as philosophers.

Secondly, a special attempt was made this year to link our work as philosophers of education, located mostly within schools of education, to the proceedings of those who reside mainly within philosophy departments, and who reside professionally “in” the APA (or American Philosophical Association). Due to the special initiative of our president (who, along with his program chair, in fact is closely associated with a philosophy department), the PES meeting overlapped with the proceedings of the Pacific APA. PES philosophers who arrived a day or two early could, by walking a mile or so down the street from their conference hotel, listen to (for example) Richard Rorty and Jay Rosenberg debate the merits of Robert Brandom’s new philosophy of language or hear Richard Bernstein in his Romanell lecture praise John McDowell’s *Mind and Nature*. And even those less ambitious philosophers of education who simply arrived in time for their own meeting could attend sessions jointly sponsored by the APA and PES, sessions in which mainline APA philosophers (Alvin Goldman, Amy Gutmann and Patrick Suppes) attempted to apply the findings of their previous work to education and were answered, in response, by PES stalwarts (Nel Noddings, Shirley Pendlebury and D. C. Phillips).<sup>8</sup>

I found the reactions to these joint sessions, by APA and PES philosophers alike, very interesting. On the one hand, I listened to a number of “APA types” express what seems to me to be the most unwarranted prejudices against educational philosophers. (For example: “They all are like Dewey, too fuzzy, too convoluted, not objective enough!”) On the other hand, a number of PES philosophers continue to worry that any sustained attention to APA fads and frenzies might lead philosophers of education away from the kind of close attention to the work and worries of real educators that fruitful inquiry requires. Here the challenge for philosophers of education is to learn to take the best from what philosophy departments offer while leaving what is either irrelevant or harmful behind.

Third, our meeting addressed the issue of inclusion directly, in several different forums. As our group reached out both to other philosophical organizations and philosophers of other countries, concern was also exhibited for those who are yet to share in our blessings and responsibilities both as academics and as citizens. Here I would point, to begin with, to our COPA session, ably organized by Steve Tozer on “Diversity, Inclusivity and the Philosophy of Education,” as well as a session organized by Xiaodan Huang on the transition from graduate student to professor. Perhaps most importantly, PES, again largely due to Steve Tozer’s hard work, organized a successful session on possible responses both by individual philosophers of education and by the Society as a whole, to California’s notorious Proposition 187.

Furthermore, at least several of the papers on this year’s program dealt directly with the issue of inclusion, including Harvey Siegel’s Presidential Address. I want to briefly consider the responses to that address by Sharon Bailin and Kathryn Pauly Morgan for together they raise important issues as to how inclusive we are and ought to be. Bailin, in her response, takes issue with several aspects of Siegel’s paper, but is generally supportive. To use Kuhnian language, Bailin’s response explicitly remains within the paradigm of philosophy in which Siegel operates. But Morgan rebels against not just this or that premise, inference, etc. in Siegel’s paper but against what she takes its paradigm to be. Siegel’s paradigm, that of “a more politically aware, principled liberal theorist committed to eradicating objectionable epistemic marginality by incorporating appropriate diversity into their theorizing”<sup>9</sup> is, according to Morgan, an advance over the false neutrality of the 60s’ analysts, but it does not go far enough. To use Morgan’s term, Siegel remains “a wizard,” and the professional education of philosophers of education remains an education in wizardry. As she puts it: “It is not an accident that as a Society we are largely composed of white, middle class, professionally credentialed individuals who are often admitted as legitimate only after we have satisfied other wizards that we, too, can cast the spells of reason.”

To what extent is Morgan correct? As I noted earlier, both Alexander and Burbules wrote of a new and significant pluralism of method and content among educational philosophers. Is, as Morgan seems to suggest, this supposed pluralism merely apparent? Just as I admire Siegel's careful inquiry into the epistemology of inclusion, I found that Morgan's "sting" (I assume gadflies sting!) compelled my attention. Moreover, I believe her remarks ought to compel others to attend as well. For her comments return us to the key foci of the rationale for these introductions that I discussed earlier: Where do each of us stand, both in relation to one's self and to each other? How coherent are we, in what ways and to what extent? What kind of coherence should we seek? And what implications do our answers to such questions have for our diagnosis of the health of philosophy of education at this time?

There is no room in an introduction like this to provide the kind of detailed response that these questions deserve. In conclusion I would only want to say that my own experience as this year's program chair is of a vibrant community of philosophers who share not only (to adapt a motto created several years ago by Jim Macmillan) a concern with *logic* but also *love* of each other.<sup>10</sup> It is the latter that makes it possible for us to passionately yet constructively debate not only the limits of logic but also the nature of coherence as well, to agree to disagree, to share a love for "the patient," the philosophy of education, even while we philosophize about its health or lack thereof. It is my belief and hope that in this book at least some aspects of this spirited and inclusive community shine through.

In conclusion, I want to thank a number of people whose help was essential in making both the 1995 PES conference and this volume a reality.

Among PES colleagues I am grateful, first of all, to the authors of the papers and responses collected here. It should go without saying that in reality this is their book. Secondly, thanks are due to the members of the program committee, listed as contributing editors, for their prompt and discerning evaluations of the many good manuscripts that were initially submitted for inclusion. Don Arnstine and Paul Wagner, as chair of our hospitality committee in California and executive secretary of our organization respectively, carefully handled a number of tricky and time-consuming assignments and in doing so helped make my job as program chair a relatively easy one. All the past program chairs that I spoke to over the course of the last year were kind and helpful in offering good advice and encouragement, but I am especially grateful to Michael Katz and Audrey Thompson for help well above and beyond the call of duty. Finally Harvey Siegel deserves thanks and appreciation for being the best of all possible presidents to work for and with.

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On a personal note, I would be remiss if I did not thank both Elizabeth Rose and Zachary Eli Neiman for allowing their father even more bouts of absent mindedness than usual over the last year or so. Beth and Zak are, to say the least, the best inspiration, philosophical and otherwise, that any weary administrator-editor could possibly want.

1. Nicholas C. Burbules, "Introduction" *Philosophy of Education 1986*, ed. N. Burbules (Normal, Illinois: Philosophy of Education Society, 1986).
2. Hanan Alexander, "After the Revolution, The Normative Revival in Post Analytic *Philosophy of Education 1992*, ed. H. Alexander (Normal, Illinois: Philosophy of Education Society, 1992).
3. Burbules, "Introduction" viii.
4. Ibid., xi.
5. Ibid., ix.
6. The phrase is taken from Richard Rorty; see his "Posties," review of *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, by Jurgen Habermas, *London Review of Books*, September 3, 1987, 11-12.
7. I assume that nothing I say in this very brief description contradicts the impressive account of post-modernism in this volume by Nick Burbules. See also Mary Leach's response to Burbules's paper.
8. Here I have not mentioned the appearance of yet another prominent APA figure, Israel Scheffler, on our program. As those who attended know, our session on Scheffler's *Teachers of My Youth: A Jewish American Experience* was one of the highlights of our meeting. I distinguish Scheffler from Goldman, et al. because he, along with Richard Peters, is one of only two "mainline" philosophers of the last 30-40 years who have in my opinion, truly seen philosophy of education as central to their philosophy as a whole, and have acted (institutionally as well as in other ways) in accordance with this conviction.
9. Quotations are, of course, taken from Morgan's manuscript which appears in this volume. Instead of Kuhnian language, I might have followed Alasdair MacIntyre's recent example and spoken of versions of moral inquiry or rationality instead of paradigms. See MacIntyre's provocative *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990) for an analysis of current academic disagreement that may in fact apply to the situation at hand.
10. C.J.B. Macmillan, "Love and Logic in 1984" in *Philosophy of Education 1984*, ed. Emily Robertson (Normal, Illinois: Philosophy of Education Society, 1984).

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