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Article abstract

In considering philosophy of education now and in the future, this paper explores the issue from an Australasian perspective. While philosophy of education in this part of the world has strong international links there is an absence of indigenous influences. A number of philosophical strands have developed including naturalism and postmodernism which have informed thinking about education policy and practice. The institutional side of philosophy of education has witnessed both the promotion of philosophers to professorial positions and the slow decline in numbers as departing staff are not replaced. How philosophy of education will fare in the future will depend on the survival of an academic community, the opportunity to teach papers in the subject to undergraduate and postgraduate students (and so replace ourselves) and convincing teachers and policy makers that philosophy of education makes an indispensable contribution to improving policy and the educational experiences of students.

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Philosophy of Education in Today's World and Tomorrow's: A View from 'Down Under'

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In considering philosophy of education now and in the future, this paper explores the issue from an Australasian perspective. While philosophy of education in this part of the world has strong international links there is an absence of indigenous influences. A number of philosophical strands have developed including naturalism and postmodernism which have informed thinking about education policy and practice. The institutional side of philosophy of education has witnessed both the promotion of philosophers to professorial positions and the slow decline in numbers as departing staff are not replaced. How philosophy of education will fare in the future will depend on the survival of an academic community, the opportunity to teach papers in the subject to undergraduate and postgraduate students (and so replace ourselves) and convincing teachers and policy makers that philosophy of education makes an indispensable contribution to improving policy and the educational experiences of students.

In addressing the special theme, "How does Philosophy of Education 'fit' in today's world?" there is some advantage in being able to look from afar and observe one's own situation in the light of what is happening on the broader international scene. It soon becomes apparent that there are some common themes, issues and concerns about the nature of philosophy of education, its relevance to educational theory, policy and practice, and the health of its institutionalised formation. There is widespread disagreement about how philosophy of education is to be understood, ranging from those who have held fast to the analytic/conceptual approach to others attracted to a number of competing alternatives including Marxism, postmodernism and materialism. This diversity has resulted in a clearer appreciation of the role of philosophy of education to not only critique but also to influence change in schools, classrooms and policy in an increasingly global economy. Philosophers of education have come to see themselves not only as scholars but also as politically active agents in the 'reform' process. Yet, commendable as all of this is, the collective efforts of philosophers of education 'to change the world' rather than 'leave everything as it is' will amount to little if their dwindling numbers continue to be eroded. This paper examines these issues as they have been, and continue to be, felt 'Down Under' in Australia and New Zealand, first through a brief review of the past followed by a more speculative sketching out of how philosophy of education might fit into the world of today and tomorrow.

The Nature of Philosophy of Education

If ever there was a time when there was a generally accepted view of what philosophy of education consists of, this has now long gone. To some extent, two traditions or schools of thought did, successively, tend to dominate the field. The 'isms' approach, whereby a variety of philosophies such as realism, idealism, positivism, empiricism, existentialism, Marxism and the like were examined for their educational implications, had its heyday in the 1950s-60s, as evidenced by such texts as Henry (1955) and Weber (1960). However, its demise came with the arrival of analytic philosophy of education.

Influenced by contemporary development in mainstream Anglo–American philosophy, philosophy of education adopted an analytic approach. Instead of being first order talk about social practices, philosophy of education retreated to being second-order conceptual analysis of first-order talk. Hirst and Peters (1970), for example, state "Philosophy is an activity which is distinguished by its concern with certain types of second-order questions, with questions of a reflective sort which arise when activities like science, painting pictures, worshipping and making moral judgments are going concerns" (p. 2). From having a primary interest in the lives of teachers and students in schools and classrooms, philosophy of education was reduced to analysing the meanings of concepts by trying to get clearer and clearer about the necessary and sufficient conditions for their use. Thus, much ink and paper was spent to futilely argue over, for example, whether the concept of indoctrination was best defined by intention, method, content or outcome (Snook, 1972). So removed was the analysis from practical affairs that the protagonists soon lost sight of what was actually going on in schools and classrooms. In short, philosophy of education, at least in its analytic guise, lost contact with its subject, the lived world of those educating and being educated (or indoctrinated). Divorced from the technical disputes of philosophers of education earnestly caught up in semantic debates, practitioners gave up hope of receiving helpful advice and so turned their backs on the discipline. One could hardly blame them. But even philosophers of education, or some of them at least, began to question this conception of philosophy of education: Harris (1977) powerfully argued that any account of education must be located within an understanding of schools as social institutions subject to contemporary political and economic conditions and forces, and Walker (1984), equally critical, rejected analytic philosophy of education (APE) for its narrowness of focus, inappropriateness of method and inadequacy in addressing what really matters.

Now, one does not need to be all that perceptive to recognize that the account so far has been singularly restricted to philosophy of education in the English speaking word of Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, United Kingdom, United States and an assorted few other areas of the globe. But of course the world consists of more nations than these alone, even if philosophers of education in these countries have largely failed to recognize that other regions have their own, and perhaps rather different, ways of doing philosophy of education. These have had some influence, at least in part, on redirecting the attention of Anglo-American philosophers of education.

First, there has been a return to first-order activity. Philosophy, like other disciplines, is seen to be concerned with contemporary educational policies and practices – philosophy is conceived of as being closely aligned with other branches of educational inquiry. As a consequence of this there has been, as we shall see in the next section, a significant shift in the focus of the subject.

Second, there has been widespread recognition that analytic philosophy with its method of conceptual analysis is only one approach to philosophy of education, and a limited one at that. The writings of philosophers of science have been influential. Popper (1959, 1963) cast his shadow across the landscape, shaping the thinking of Corson (1985). Harris (1979) and Mathews (1980) built on Lakatosian (1970) research programs whilst Quine (1995) has left his mark on that version of naturalism in education promoted by Clark (1997), Evers and Lakomski (2000) and Walker (1985, 1991). Another stream has its origins in critical theory; Codd (1988) and Young (1990) were attracted to the insights offered by Habermas (1971) while Freire (1972) has provided fertile territory for Roberts (1997). Finally, post-structuralism and postmodernism have opened up new directions for philosophical

inquiry: Foucault (1972) and Lyotard (1984) in particular have stimulated Marshall and Peters (1991) to examine educational issues in a different light.

What is largely missing from philosophy of education 'Down Under' is any real awareness of indigenous and regional philosophy of education. In Australia, Aboriginal thought is almost totally absent, while in New Zealand Maori understanding fares little better (The one exception is an issue of *Educational Philosophy and Theory* (32(1), 2000) devoted to education and cultural difference). Homage is often paid to bi- and multi-culturalism, but there is little evidence that any consideration is given to seeking out and trying to incorporate an indigenous way of philosophizing about educational matters such as personhood, knowledge, education and the like. Probably the same applies to First Nations peoples in Canada and the United States as well. Just as indigenous philosophy of education is ignored, so too are the rich philosophical contributions of Asia-Pacific neighbours. Melanesian and Polynesian culture, important in the South Pacific and New Zealand, gets no look in. And Australia, with its Indonesian and Philippines neighbours, and more a field China and Japan, has felt no need to take on board any insights which philosophy of education in this region has to offer.

Relevance to Educational Theory, Policy and Practice

While philosophers of education in Australasia, as elsewhere, have continued to examine a wide range of issues central to the development of educational theory, the critique of policy and the enhancing of practice, there have over the past several decades been two significant research programs of note. One is decidedly local, the other more international in scope. Both have had an impact on philosophy of education in this part of the world.

Epistemology has occupied a central place in philosophical discourse about education. Hirst's (1974) thesis on the forms of knowledge generated widespread criticism from Australasian philosophers; collectively Brown (1972), Phillips (1971), Simons (1975) and Watt (1974), amongst others, were instrumental in heralding its demise as a viable framework for the curriculum. As new epistemologies scrambled for attention, none gained as much traction as 'Australasian materialism' which drew its inspiration from Quine (1960) and the Churchlands (1986, 1989). Philosophy was held to be continuous with science, and like science has something to say about the world. Ontologically, the world is a material universe devoid of such metaphysical entities as minds and mental states: all we have are bodies and brains. Hence the elimination of folk psychology— human conduct is to be explained psychoneurally, not by reference to such mental states as intentions. Epistemologically, we create theories to account for our sensory experience and in doing so we project our ontology within our theories. Like a spider's web, our theories form a seamless whole, held at the periphery to the material world via observation sentences, with logical and mathematical constructions radiating, and towards the core are the more abstract theories of science, literature, aesthetics and morality amongst others. Constantly learning, we process received information and revise our conceptual scheme as we go to accommodate accepted anomalies and new discoveries. Axiologically, there is no sharp distinction between expressions containing empirical context and those of an evaluative kind. Because all statements in the theoretical system are anchored to the empirical content then the empirical content of observation sentences is the empirical content of the whole, with even logic, mathematics and ethics imbibing empirical context. And values infuse the web, for each element reflects judgments of how best to explain or accommodate our experience. No part is immune from revision – like the planks of Neurath's (1983) boat at sea our understandings may be replaced bit by bit. Thus is epistemology naturalized.

The impact of naturalism has been felt most keenly in two branches of educational inquiry where philosophers of education have turned their attention: administration and research. In their three volumes of collected philosophical writings, Evers and Lakomski (1991, 1996, 2000) have forged a

powerful epistemological analysis of administrative practice which builds on and significantly advances the earlier work of Willower (1994) who rejected the positivism (Griffiths, 1959), interpretivism (Greenfield, 1993) and critical theory (Foster, 1986) of his North American peers. Clearly, the theoretical challenge laid down to those in educational administration is a fundamental one, but sadly, those who should confront it ignore it. The other branch of educational inquiry, research, has also been subjected to the naturalist's pen, where the work of Clark (1997) and Walker and Evers (1988) has set out a strong and systematic alternative account. Although having little impact outside of Australasia, materialism does represent a sustained attempt to develop a more 'home-grown' philosophy at odds with other imported philosophical traditions.

Social philosophy, in Australasia as elsewhere, has been to the fore since the mid 1980s, largely because of the political 'reforms' imposed on education internationally in response to globalization and the ascendancy of neo-liberal 'New Right' policies. In the footsteps of Reagonomics and Thatcherism, 1984 witnessed the election of a Labour government in New Zealand committed to two rather opposed radical policies: foreign policy took an independent line with the promotion of a nuclear free country while domestic policy was shaped by economic rationalism applied first to the business sector and then later to the social realm. 'Tomorrow's Schools' (Lange, 1988) sought to reduce central power and increase local control; governance, management and teaching were divorced (Clark, 2000) and a Treasury-inspired program (Treasury, 1987) towards privatization was embarked upon through such measures as the abolition of school zones, the introduction of bulk funding and the removal of senior teachers from collective agreements and placing them on individual contracts. Snook (1989) was one of the first to ask 'What is going on here?' through his critique of the philosophical assumptions of individualism as advanced by Nozick (1975) and Hayek (1949) and adopted with alarming alacrity by the government, state bureaucracy and the Business Roundtable. Since then, Snook (1995) and Marshall and Peters (1991), amongst others, have entered into a sustained campaign against the neo-liberal agenda in general as well as opposing particular practices such as privatization, vouchers and the bulk-funding of teachers salaries (Eley & Clark, 1999; Snook, 1996). The resistance to the policies of economic rationalism has been an international affair mounted by philosophers of education (e.g. Burbules 1999; Jonathan 1997) with few (e.g. Tooley 1996) in support of its measures. Out of this critique has emerged a strong reaffirmation of the values of democracy, community, caring, co-operation and justice as the underlying principles of education in an increasingly globalized world characterized by individualism, competition and ICT control. In a powerful way, this has done much to bring about a large measure of international unity to an otherwise disparate field as those of various philosophical persuasions come together to make common cause.

Institutionalized Formation

The ability of an academic discipline such as philosophy of education to sustain itself in political conditions inimical to a liberal education which devalue as economically 'useless' such subjects in the universities depends on a number of related considerations. First and foremost, can a sufficiently large and robust community of philosophers of education be maintained and reproduced to ensure that there are still enough scholars left to teach and research in the subject? There is a mixed Antipodeon story to be told here which may well be repeated elsewhere. Recent retirements (e.g. Harris, Snook, Walker) have not been replaced, but there has been a satisfying advancement of philosophers of education up the academic ranks as more recently Evers, Hagar, Lakomski and Peters have all attained professorships in a university system where few achieve such status. However, philosophy of education, unlike computers in education, is not a 'growth area'. It has little opportunity to enlist new and younger scholars into academia, and struggles to remain viable. So, 'Down Under' the academic community of philosophers of education survives but remains far from healthy.

Within institutions, the story is much the same. Some universities have never had philosophers of education so have denied themselves the contribution such scholars can make. Others, in restructuring their departments or faculties of education have dispensed with the services of philosophers in the transition from a liberal studies program to one focused on the training of teachers. Elsewhere, in ones and twos, occasionally more, philosophers of educational remain in universities plying their craft in increasing isolation and with decreasing morale.

One characteristic of Antipodean philosophy of education which to some extent distinguishes it from its overseas counterparts is its outward focus. Because of comparative smallness, and hence a limited literature base, there is a willingness not to be parochial— staff and students read widely from the broad international literature, especially journals such as *Educational Philosophy and Theory, Educational Theory, Journal of Philosophy of Education, Philosophy of Education* and *Studies in Philosophy and Education*. So there is deliberate exposure to the best that the international community can offer. But more than this, many academic staff in the early stages of their philosophical careers have made a determined effort to undertake higher degrees at overseas universities: Illinois (the Haynes's, Oliver, Snook) and London (Clark, Gribble) stand out in particular while the (increasingly less generous) provisions for overseas leave have enabled most philosophers of education to visit overseas institutions and attend conferences such as AERA, INPE, PES and PESGB. In return, philosophers of education from elsewhere have made the long haul south to experience Australasian hospitality (Barrow, Burbules, Hirst, Peters and Phillips). All of this has helped to enrich intellectual life, maintain international links and contribute to the life of the Philosophy of Education Society of Australia with its annual conference and vibrant journal, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. However, whether this can be sustained over the longer term remains an open question if older staff, as they retire or whatever, are not replaced by younger philosophical faculty.

Philosophy of Education 'Fit' in Today's World

Where does Philosophy of Education 'fit' in today's world? Somewhat peripherally! Where ought it to fit? Centrally, most philosophers of education would claim, but as Mandy Rice Davies put it (during the 1963 Profimo Spy Scandal which toppled the British government), "They would say that, wouldn't they!" This encapsulates the dilemma philosophy of education finds itself in. On the one hand, philosophy of education might occupy the moral high ground but it certainly does not occupy the centre ground. Its critiques of educational policy have been ignored by those wedded to the economic directions of the past twenty years. Its place in university faculties, schools or colleges of education is tolerated but often looked upon more as a luxury than a necessity. Driven by the imperatives of professional relevancy, teachers tend to be attracted to courses likely to enhance their employment opportunities rather than pursue disciplinary courses out of intrinsic interest. So, philosophers of education continue to eke out a precarious existence.

On the other hand, where philosophy of education *ought* to fit in the world is the question which ought to exercise every philosopher of education. Education, in the sense of personhood, citizenship and moral goodness is central to any human's existence and so should be right at the centre of the study of education in both liberal arts *and* professional degrees in education. In their attempts to occupy the centre ground and gather the professional support of non-philosophical colleagues, philosophers of education must not only work collaboratively with them but also build up their respect through a sustained contribution to developing viable policies and working with teachers by assisting them to reflect critically and systematically on their practice in order to improve it for the betterment of student learning.

How might philosophers of education go about this? There are a number of ways, but here is one, derived from my experience as a philosopher on a multidisciplinary team of educational researchers (educational policy, ICT, education futures, indigenous education, educational

administration) contracted to the New Zealand Ministry of Education to review 'Future-focused research on teaching and learning'. Although most of the international studies were status quo in their future orientation, some located educational practices in exciting futures scenarios. In the concluding paragraph of our report which had as its focus 'the education of our children for their future' I wrote:

> …in addressing the future, it might be helpful to ask, 'For a child of five starting school today, what sort of education and schooling should that child experience over the next 12 years in order to prepare him/her as a school leaver facing the rest of their adult life ahead of them?' Since we cannot know what new knowledge will be available in the future we cannot teach children what we do not yet know. But does what we currently offer best help children to make their future? We must prepare students and teachers for a future which both shapes and is shaped by them. Above all else, teachers and students must be able to critically assess the sort of society they create, be capable of imagining alternative more desirable futures and have ways of achieving these. This will require a major moral reconceptualization of teaching and learning, schooling and administration, curriculum and evaluation, society and the global technological economy far beyond that which has been achieved in New Zealand's educational forums to date. There must be a political, administrative and professional will to think seriously about the future in original and creative ways that rise beyond a myopic focus on status quo economic rationalism. Our children's future depends on it (Codd *et al,* 2001, p. 73).

This provides a framework with which to 'fit' philosophy of education into the world of today and tomorrow. It is an orientation which gives a steer to the direction to be taken. While there is certainly a continuing place for philosophers of education to extend the boundaries of their discipline by tackling theoretical problems at the margins, (see, for example, conference papers published in *Philosophy of Education*), in the final analysis education is a practical activity and if philosophy of education is to justify its continuing existence and leave its mark on the world then it must also address pressing problems of practice. As Harris (1980) noted, philosophers of education are not spectators, they are educators politically engaged in the education of others.

Given this, the question "How does philosophy of education 'fit' in the world?" is a troubling one. It implies the world is a given within which philosophy of education is to be fitted. In a sense, this is so. Philosophy of education, as currently practised, fits into the study and practice of education which fits into universities and schools which fit into nation states which fit into the world at large. And all of this could be described in detail (and to some extent has, see Kaminsky, 1993). But a more interesting tack is to ask how philosophy of education might 'fit' by using its place in today's world to change tomorrow's world. In thinking about his, I would like to speculate a little, building my musings around three foci – the community of philosophers of education, the academy, and practitioners.

As an academic community, philosophers of education must continue to embrace both unity and diversity. They should be unified in accepting that philosophical work in education must address policy and practice by taking a stand and defending through argument a point of view on the validity, worthwhileness or justification of what is of concern to them. But diversity is also important, for there is no agreement about philosophical method. The boundaries between the philosophical and the empirical have loosened, much through "the influence of W.V. Quine who argued that there is no sharp dividing line between philosophy and science" (Cain, 2001, p. 23), so that theoretical work in other branches of educational inquiry such as the traditional areas of history, psychology and sociology as well as more recent work in ICT, cognitive science and economics are seen as continuous with philosophy. This will continue to expand the territory of legitimate philosophical work into empirical realms hitherto ruled out of court.

Philosophical diversity has also come with an increase in women philosophers of education and the influence of feminist thinking. This has been on an international scale and is likely to continue to flourish. But the time is also ripe for further diversity of a different kind. Indigenous or first nations peoples are starting to make their presence felt and philosophers have begun to respond to their

interests. In New Zealand, for example, Patterson (1992) has explored Māori values, although similar work in philosophy of education remains to be done. It cannot be all that far away before Aborigines in Australia and the First Nations people of Canada, along with West Indians in England and Afro-Americans, Hispanics and Asians in the United States begin to assert themselves in ways which philosophers of education cannot ignore. Few if any of these cultural groups are represented in the national and international communities of philosophers of education so their absence remains our loss.

There is room for further diversity still. Earlier, I noted the absence in Australasia of any significant interest in the contribution of philosophers of education in the Asia-Pacific region. There has been some encouraging development in this respect which augurs well for the future. Michael Peters, editor of *Educational Philosophy and Theory,* after visiting China, devoted an entire issue of the journal (34(2), 2002) to Chinese philosophers of education who, writing in English, introduced readers to rather different philosophical outlooks on education. Fortunately this is one example of a recent trend to internationalize philosophy of education. Other innovations include the International Network of Philosophers of Education biennial conferences (Hungary 1988, England, Bulgaria, Belgium, South Africa, Turkey, Australia, Norway, Spain, Malta 2006) and the Philosophy of Education section of the annual European Educational Research Association conferences (Slovenia 1998, Finland, Scotland, France, Portugal, Germany, Crete, Ireland, Switzerland 2006). Increasingly, philosophy of education will become a truly global community.

In the academy, philosophers of education must do their utmost to make their discipline 'fit' today's world. Consider, if you will, the three pillars of academic life: research, teaching, and administration. In all three, solid contributions must be made. Research, if it is to have a practical bite, must at least address the concerns of teachers, administrators and policy makers as well as meeting the exacting standards of peer review. The *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, for example, does well in this respect, as do non-philosophical education journals which publish philosophical articles. Research, if it is to influence practice, must be incorporated into teaching, especially for pre- and in-service teachers. There is an absence of introductory textbooks in philosophy of education – there is scope for an enterprising philosopher of education to plug the gap and meet a pressing need. But research should enter teaching in a more profound way: our own research, especially journal articles, as well as that of our philosophical colleagues in education, should be incorporated into our teaching so that the students we teach are not only made aware of our own research endeavours but are also introduced to the best work of our peers.

The teaching of philosophy of education continues but certainly not under the same conditions of its heyday in the 1960s and 70s. Such courses survive by remaining in Education majors for BA degrees and so retain their titles, but in professional degrees geared to pre-service teacher training there is no place for overtly philosophical courses. One can, and does, subvert this philistine policy by teaching philosophical content under different names – administration, curriculum, multicultural, professional inquiry and the like, bringing in ethics, epistemology and social philosophy to add intellectual richness to an otherwise dull and functionally pragmatic degree. Many students appreciate the philosophical content even if they would rather not have a 'philosophy of education' paper listed on their university transcript!

In their administrative service, unwelcome as it may be, philosophers of education have a particular responsibility to bring their craft to bear on leadership and informed decision-making. Whether in a capacity of Dean, HOD, chair or member of a committee, there is an obligation to scrutinize policies and practices in the academy for their coherence, relevance, integrity and consequences. In New Zealand, for example, it is legislated that the universities are 'the critic and conscience of society' and so it falls on philosophers of education (amongst others) to protect and promote this and through their administrative work encourage colleagues to live up to such an ideal.

Finally, practitioners. Philosophic involvement with teachers, administrators, policy-makers, researchers and parents can, and should, be engaged in whenever the opportunity arises, for it is here that the activities of philosophers of education will leave their mark on professional practice. The

possibilities are endless, but here a few: participate in teams to undertake research, consultancy and the like; present written submissions and oral presentations to politicians holding public hearings; lead in-service courses; attend professionally oriented conferences where philosophical ideas can be conveyed to teachers and challenged by them. Speaking to the profession, attending to their concerns, and having an over-riding interest in the educational welfare of children are, I submit, in the final analysis the raison d'être of being a philosopher of education.

Conclusion

Where philosophy of education 'fits' in today's world, and whether it will 'fit' in tomorrow's world at all, are matters for philosophers of education to think seriously about. The world does not owe philosophy of education its place; philosophy of education has to earn it on its merits and through its best efforts. During the last century, philosophy of education acquired a respectable reputation through the contributions of, for example, Dewey, Peters and Scheffler and a whole supporting cast of lesser known colleagues who in their myriad ways contributed to the development of the discipline and disseminated their ideas to their students and a wider lay and professional audience.

What does the new millennium hold for philosophy of education? If the journals and conferences are a guide, the prospects look good. There is a vibrancy here which must not be lost. But there are darker clouds also lurking on the horizon. The greying of the faculty must be accompanied by new young blood if the philosophy of education community is to survive, let alone prosper. And this will only happen if the current instrumental ideology so prevalent in teacher education is replaced by a more liberal notion of the 'educated teacher'.

A final thought. No philosopher of education is indispensable, but every philosopher of education has an ethical duty to persuade his or her colleagues and superiors that philosophy of education is indispensable. This is a tall order to place upon ourselves, but in the interest of the discipline, the reputation of teacher education institutions, professional teacher integrity and the improvement of children's education, we have no alternative.

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