

## Editorial

### Hunter McEwan and Heesoon Bai

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## Editorial

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This special issue of *Paideusis* is based on articles that were first presented at the 38th Annual Meeting of Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia (PESA), held in December 2009 at the East-West Center in Honolulu, Hawai'i. The aim of the conference was to invite a broad group of philosophers of education to engage in philosophical reflection on questions related to intercultural dialogue. The conference theme was given the title, Dialogue and Difference, to capture what the conference organizers (Hunter McEwan, Margie Ma'aka, and Hannah Tavares) took to be at least two of the many central concerns that arise when two or more people from different traditions of thought meet and attempt to communicate—in what Daniel Vokey, in his article in this issue, usefully refers to as “border crossings.”

In the conference call for papers, we encouraged presenters to explore issues related to the apparently irreducible diversity of educational ideas and practices. In the words of the call for papers:

Global society is increasingly an arena of marked divergence in educational values and philosophical orientations arising from a wide variety of traditions and perspectives. This is particularly true in the context of education in the Pacific Region in which differences can be defined not only in terms of competing European philosophies of education and their respective visions of value and practice, nor only in terms of the vastly different traditions of educational thought of East and West, but also in terms of different indigenous perspectives, such as those represented by various aboriginal and minority groups.

It was perhaps good fortune that the organizers were able to secure the facilities at the East-West Center on the campus of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. The East-West Center is an organization dedicated to promoting better relations and understanding among the many peoples of the Pacific Region. Thus, a happy convergence of place and conference theme was achieved.

Out of a total of one hundred and sixteen presentations, there were seventy-three full paper presentations, eighteen works in progress, and six symposia with a total of twenty-five speakers. Roger T. Ames opened the conference to a large audience of conference participants, university faculty, and other guests. The topic of his talk: *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vision of the Moral Life*. Ames argued that Confucian ethics is a distinct version of morals that is strikingly different from the versions that dominate Western philosophy—utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics. Confucian ethics, he explained, originates in and builds upon concrete family feelings and relationships. It is an ethics that appeals to models of conduct and teaching and learning from experience. Laiana Wong, Professor of Hawaiian language at the University of Hawai'i, Kawaihuelani Center for Hawaiian Language, gave an illuminating and entertaining talk that warned against adopting culturally-centred approaches to questions of knowledge—a theme that is nicely summed up in the title of his presentation, *All Knowledge is Not Contained in One Hālau* (school of thought). The Saturday keynote talk, *The Secular Conscience*, given

by Austin Dacey, a human rights advocate based in New York. His work is a defense of liberal values and of reason-based secular morality in the face of an increasingly strident faith-based morality.

Conference participation struck a similar note of diversity as the conference theme with participants drawn from many different nations. All the continents were represented, apart from Antarctica. Participants came from Sweden, Nigeria, New Zealand, Macau, Taiwan, Nigeria, Thailand, Hong Kong, Japan, the United Kingdom, Korea, Norway, Australia, Mexico, Canada, and the U.S. Indigenous peoples were also represented with Hawaiians, Maori, Marshalese, Australian aborigines, and Canadian First Nations' people in attendance.

All the articles in this issue of *Paidensis* began as presentations at the PESA conference. Each was submitted to the journal's peer-review process. The seven articles that appear in this issue all address the theme of intercultural dialogue and understanding from a variety of standpoints. Of course, this topic covers a vast and enormously complex terrain—one that we can only hope to explore in a piecemeal fashion in this issue. Nevertheless, we feel that the articles that now appear in this volume discuss some important contemporary questions relating to the theme of dialogue and difference. Naturally, the authors strike distinctive chords and develop characteristically unique approaches to the complexities of dialogue and difference in intercultural exchanges. If there is common feature it is one of attitude—of not taking an easy route that offers up pieties about the value of cultural interchange. Instead, they see in their different ways the problems with adopting simplistic versions of the concepts of dialogue or difference. They invite us, therefore, to rethink these categories. Thus, Mattice warns against the tendency that is deeply embedded in Western thought to view dialogue as a contest aimed at victory. In contrast to this adversarial or “combat model” of philosophical dialogue, she explains how a very different tradition has evolved in Chinese thought—one that places a premium on consensus and harmony. It is a version that those of us who have been educated into a more adversarial form of dialogue may benefit from studying. Similarly, Hershock takes issue with a concept of difference that he views as outmoded—too closely tied to an earlier, modernist paradigm that “imagines difference as an external relation” and a problem to be solved. In contrast, he argues that we need to re-conceptualize difference in terms that preserve variety and diversity.

A recurrent motif in several articles in this issue is that of the Kuhnian concept of the paradigm. Hershock raises it in regard to an important distinction that he makes between problems (old paradigm) and predicaments (new paradigm). Strand introduces the same concept in relation to the idea of a “new” form of cosmopolitanism, which, like Hershock's concepts of predicaments and diversity are connected to the idea that our modern, globalized world with its interconnected economies and rapid, new forms of communication, has brought about a new era that demands a drastic rethinking of our basic philosophical and educational categories. In Vokey's article, the Kuhnian concept of the paradigm is invoked to explain what he regards as two different kinds of “border crossing”—engagements across disciplines and engagements within a discipline. Vokey invites philosophers of education to engage in an integrative scholarship that seeks to enlarge our understanding of different worldviews—by learning to appreciate the perspectives of others on analogy with learning to speak another language. In a similar vein, Benade interprets Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as an appeal to recast the idea of teaching in terms of dialogical pedagogy rather than in terms of the dominant managerial model. Finally, he argues that a Freirian understanding of teaching opens up possibilities for an alternative conception of the teaching profession and teacher professionalism.

Another recurrent theme is the idea of undertaking a journey as a metaphor for learning about and from other cultures. For example, Strand refers to cosmopolitans in terms of world travelers, and Vokey talks of “border crossing.” All seven authors point to the need for us to engage in a more rigorous rethinking of our basic categories if we are to commit to educational change. Thus, Tanabe argues that the ideal of the post-racial America that was supposed by some commentators to be heralded by the election of Barak Obama as U.S. President is, as yet, an unrealized dream. Could it be that Obama's roots in Hawaii and the cultural diversity of the state promise a new model of the new post-racial world? Tanabe insists that any such development would require a much more fundamental

change in the current structure that underlies the inequalities that exist among different groups in America.

The theme of cultural diversity has occupied western thought for several centuries. Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) is credited by Isaiah Berlin (1982) as the creative genius who was the first to develop a philosophy that took account of the idea of cultural diversity and whose insight that understanding people from other cultures implies, as Berlin explains: “a field of knowledge besides that of the most-obviously man-made constructions—works of art, or political schemes, or legal systems, and indeed, all rule-determined disciplines—which men could know from within: human history; for it, too, was made by men” (Berlin, 95).

What is the value of understanding the past and studying other cultures and other traditions of thought? Mary Midgley (1995) sums up the benefits in a useful way: “Many half-formed suspicions about our own society have been shaken up and clarified into valuable insights by comparison with strange cultures” (p. 16). It is through learning about other societies that we gain a better understanding of our own.

In addition, understanding the historical roots and tracing the subsequent developments of our own conceptual schemes and categories are on a par with understanding the traditions of thought of other peoples and their cultures. Both demand a similar effort of factual knowledge, imagination, and interpretation—of attentiveness to the meanings implicit in the actions and words of those who are different from us. Thus, efforts at historical and intercultural understanding, which can only occur in an intimate exchange of ideas and dialogue can have a beneficial, indeed, liberating effect on our own thinking. They help us to understand the contingent nature of our own categories and worldviews and draw our awareness to ideas and values that our familiar and customary ways of viewing the world usually prevent us from seeing.

One way to build on this insight is to remind ourselves, as John Dewey did in his works, of the characteristic dualistic thinking implicit in Western ideas and thinking and its baleful consequences for educational thought and practice. Thus, Eppert helps us to see how Theravadan Buddhism avoids the consequences of Western body/mind dualism and offers a more complete and harmonious conception of the education of the emotions. Likewise, Mattice shows how Confucian traditions of thought avoid the consequences of an adversarial conception of dialogue and discourse—one that also places emphasis on social harmony and pragmatism rather than opposition and victory.

Also, we include in this volume an interview that Heesoon Bai, accompanied by Avraham Cohen, conducted with Roger T. Ames, who is a professor in the Philosophy Department of The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. As was mentioned earlier in this editorial, Professor Ames gave the opening keynote address of the 2009 PESA conference on the topic of Confucian role ethics. Ames is equally familiar with Western and Eastern traditions of thought and this knowledge gives him a unique insight into the intricacies of intercultural understanding. Our interview with Professor Ames aimed to explore his thinking on the importance of understanding the nature of Chinese thought and its value in the education of those of us brought up exclusively in Western ideas.

Cross-cultural and intercultural realities penetrate deeply into all the layers of modern social life. In addition, modern humans are challenged by a large number of complex social and environmental problems that make traditional solutions, with their more limited intra-cultural perspectives, seem ineffectual. We hope that these articles provoke discussion on some of the important and thorny philosophical questions that arise when we struggle to understand others.

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### **About the Guest Editors**

Hunter McEwan is professor of educational foundations at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. He is editor of the journal *Educational Perspectives*. Currently, his interest is in the history of the idea of teaching and the ways that philosophers have used narrative to explore the nature of teaching. His work has appeared in *Educational Theory*, *The Journal of Teaching and Teacher Education*, and *The Journal of Philosophy of Education*.

Heesoon Bai is associate professor at Simon Fraser University, specializing in philosophy of education. Heesoon has been the Editor for *Paideusis* since 2005. This co-edited Special Issue is her last production as the Editor. She wishes to thank not only her present co-editor Professor Hunter McEwan for the fruitful and delightful collaborative experience, but also all her trusted and hardworking tech-support members (Charles Scott, Peter Kovacs, Buddy Young, Don Nelson), Assistant to the Editor, Dr. Johanne Provençal, and Managing Editor, Dr. Thomas Falkenberg. It has been a very special pleasure working with you all for the past five years.