Paideusis

Journeys and Arrivals: On Becoming a Philosopher of Education

Douglas Stewart

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Years ago as a Grade 13 student in a small southern Ontario town, I had no firm idea what I wanted to do with my life. On one point, however, I was certain: I had not the slightest interest in joining the family clothing business on Main Street. To his credit, and my profound gratitude, not once did my father pressure me on this, and he did what he could to see I got to university. I had briefly toyed with the idea of studying for the ministry. One of my uncles at the time was a successful minister in a large Presbyterian church in West Toronto and I was somewhat enamoured of the "calling" as a result. But there was more romance than reality to my thinking here. Mathematics and science had been of greater interest to me in high school than history and literature—the usual fare for anyone aspiring to wear the cloth. I had been particularly drawn to trigonometry and Euclidean geometry and the ways of thinking they involved, even to the point of taking satisfaction in the little ritual of entering "QED" at the end of my deductive proofs. In the end, I elected to study engineering and was admitted to the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering at the University of Toronto.

By the time I reached fourth year, however, my vocational interests had begun to shift noticeably. Many of my close university friends were preparing for careers in medicine, teaching, social work, and the church and the thought of devoting the rest of my life to working with inanimate materials in contrast to working with people in a helping or service profession became increasingly unsettling. After graduating from the University of Toronto by the skin of my teeth, yet not ready to forgo engineering completely, I joined Bell Canada and a group of engineers involved in the design of telephone cable routes for new subdivisions. Two years of this was sufficient. In 1960, I left the corporation to enrol in the teacher-training programme at the Ontario College of Education (OCE),[1] the shortest route to a service profession. I did not regret studying engineering for it had taught me disciplined ways of thinking and had given me a background in mathematics and science adequate for teaching these subjects in secondary school.

Turning Points

One of the compulsory courses at OCE was in educational philosophy (though it could easily have been called the history of ideas in Western education). The instructor, Andrew F. Skinner, a Scot, was not particularly inspiring and often seemed uneasy in front of students, many of whom thought the class of little or no merit. I did not share this sentiment however. The course opened up for me a world of ideas I scarcely knew existed and of thinkers many of whom I had never heard. I credit this class

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[1] Now called the Faculty of Education University of Toronto.

with stirring my earliest interest in pursuing philosophy of education further and just possibly making a career of it. Three years later, I took what would be a first step in achieving that goal when accepted into the Postgraduate Diploma Programme at the University of London Institute of Education.

In the meantime I had taught in a new suburban high school in Ottawa and a much older collegiate institute, Riverdale, in a Toronto working-class district east of the Don Jail. My most vivid memory of the year at Woodruffe was a visit from the departmental school inspectors. These sober-looking men, dressed in dark suits with brief cases in hand, inhabited the school for a week putting many of the staff on pins and needles. To my surprise, I received what I was later told to be one of the highest ratings possible (especially for a first-year teacher) from the inspector who observed my Grade 10 geometry class. I fared less well with another inspector who was not amused by a basic slip I had made whilst demonstrating an experiment in front of a science class! Riverdale, in contrast, had a long-standing academic tradition. Most of the teachers were honours graduates in their respective disciplines; the principal was co-author of several mathematics texts in use throughout Ontario high schools at the time; and Greek and Latin were very much a part of the school syllabus. I had the pleasure of teaching mathematics to students from grades 9 through 13.

When I arrived in London in the fall of 1963, Richard Peters had just been appointed Professor of Philosophy of Education. Paul Hirst was already in the department. It was an intellectually exciting time to be there. The revolution in philosophy of education in Britain was just getting off the ground. Peters delivered his inaugural lecture, "Education as Initiation" which, in retrospect, was a historic occasion to have witnessed. And there were periodic weekend retreats in which papers on philosophy and education were rigorously debated. Taking classes from Peters and Hirst was certainly a privilege though at times a bit intimidating. I was on a steep learning curve having arrived with no formal background in philosophy. Peters' comments on my papers (which I have saved) were invariably pithy but positive, always urging me to press harder or more deeply in my thinking. Several of the students were obviously advanced, among them Jim Gribble and Pat White. By the end of the year, however, I had done well enough to be admitted to the M.A. programme in philosophy of education, but my wife Mari and I had to return to Canada. Our first child, a daughter, had been born in London and my fellowship funds were drained. I rejoined the teaching staff at Riverdale Collegiate.

The London experience had created a lasting effect on the ways in which I would view the nature and point of education throughout much of my career as an educational philosopher (though I could scarcely have realized this at the time). Fired with enthusiasm from this experience, and while teaching full-time at Riverdale, I completed an M.A. in educational theory over the next two years at the newly-minted Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). Understandably, OISE was in a state of flux, but I confess my experience there was not particularly satisfying. A year later (1968), I accepted an offer to be the administrative assistant to the vice-president academic at the University of Guelph. A major review of the University's academic administrative structure had just been launched and I was given the task of researching the subject of administrative re-organization in the academy for the Special Committee of Senate in charge of the project, and of serving as secretary to several high-level committees. I was one of the principal writers of the Committee's final report, "Academic Administrative Organization" (November 1969), the main recommendations of which were subsequently adopted by the University's Senate. The vice-president under whom I had to privilege to work, Percy Smith, was a professor of English literature and originally from University of Saskatchewan. He was to my mind the epitome of a gentleman and a scholar.

Michigan State University (MSU)

In the fall of 1971, Mari and I with four young children in tow (including one-year-old twins) moved to East Lansing where I began doctoral studies in philosophy of education. We were extremely grateful for Canada Council Doctoral Fellowships and MSU Assistantships that enabled us to survive these

years. The course requirements for the Ph.D. in Education at MSU were extensive, but I was fortunate to have an adviser, George Ferree, who gave me considerable latitude to take senior classes in the University's philosophy department. The London experience had made me acutely aware of huge gaps in my philosophical knowledge and understanding, so this was a welcome opportunity to offset some of these deficits and to ease the feeling of always having to play philosophical catch-up that had been plaguing me and which continued to do so for some time. I plunged into courses ranging from Plato and Aristotle to Kant, Hume and other British empiricists, and the philosophy of mind. The one devoted to Russell's theory of descriptions and Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* particularly seized my curiosity. I had not before come upon anything like Russell's formal analysis of the logical structure underlying propositions, nor of the later Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy as a kind of intellectual therapy that can show us the way out of our conceptual and linguistic muddles. During that term, it seemed my mind was constantly chewing away at passages from the *Investigations*, even when on social outings! The other major component of coursework was devoted—not surprisingly for an American graduate school in education—to the philosophy of John Dewey. I took virtually all the available graduate courses and seminars on Dewey and, as a result, developed a critical appreciation for his experimentalism, especially his method of inquiry and ideas on participatory democracy.[2] But when it came to my dissertation, "The teacher as moral adviser", I scarcely referenced Dewey. To a large extent, this work was an analytical study of "advising" and associated activities,[3] of how advising differs from persuading, goading, commanding, and so on, and of the conditions under which giving moral advice to a student might be justified.

The University of Regina

I joined the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina in July 1975, one year after the University had been granted autonomy from the University of Saskatchewan. The Foundations Subject Area consisted of three full-time faculty positions. Joe Malikail was chair at the time, and over the next eighteen years until he retired in 1993 we enjoyed a wonderful working relationship and lasting friendship. His primary teaching responsibilities were in history and comparative education, but he was equally at home in philosophy for which he had a particular passion. I was extremely fortunate in having Joe as a trusted and wise colleague.

The classes offered by the Subject Area covered the traditional foundations disciplines—history, philosophy, sociology, and comparative education—plus curriculum theory. Later, classes in education and the multicultural society and in moral education (which I developed around 1980) were added. The first time the moral education class was offered, I had a grand total of six students—not a very auspicious beginning! But the demand grew and in due course we had to schedule two sections of 30 to 35 students every winter semester. The Area also administered two classes in the theory and practice of religious education that were established in response to a need of the province's separate school system for teachers of religion.[4] I was surprised and dismayed to learn that education students at Regina were required to take only *one* class in Foundations, which meant that after four years many graduated with no formal exposure to philosophy of education at all. In an attempt to improve the situation, we began to offer three-class sequences in philosophy of education and the history of ideas, but as the programmes in the teaching subject areas became increasingly prescriptive, students were left with too few free electives to register for these sequences. Eventually, they were dropped.

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[2] One of my instructors, George Barnett, was a fine Dewey scholar from whom I learned a good deal.

[3] John Austin's *How To Do Things With Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962.)*,* proved extremely useful.

[4] These were not considered "foundational" and could not be used to meet the Foundations requirement for the B.Ed.

Teaching and Research

I was responsible for teaching classes in the philosophical analysis of educational concepts,[5] the educational ideas of selected 20th century philosophers and social critics,[6] moral education,[7] and a graduate class with variable content.[8] This last course was offered as an elective for students in other graduate programmes. Much later, I added the curriculum theory class to my roster. While Foundations did not have a graduate programme, students could complete the M.Ed. with a thesis or project on a topic related to philosophy of education. This gave me opportunities from time to time to supervise graduate students' research. As a final act shortly after retiring, I returned to teach a course I had designed on issues in the epistemological foundations of education to doctoral students in the new Ph.D. programme.

In establishing a career at Regina beyond teaching, I was anxious to put my analytical training in philosophy to work in research and writing. This turned out to be easier said than done. I soon learned the faculty was under the sway (for the most part) of a group of colleagues who were bent on pushing a competency-based and theoretically-unhinged paradigm of teacher education. They had little respect for foundations disciplines in general and philosophy of education in particular, believing the latter had nothing of relevance to say to student teachers.[9] At the same time, faculty were under intense pressure by this group to boost their time-commitment beyond the lecture room to the supervision of students in the field-experience component that had been greatly enlarged in the new elementary programme.[10] Once it became clear that a good track record in field supervision counted as much if not more than a good record in research and writing in annual performance reviews, colleagues had little incentive to engage in more intellectual pursuits. In fact, not too long after my arrival at Regina, one of the "philistines" in the group told me point-blank that, if I knew what was good for me, I would not waste my time on writing but devote myself to the supervision of student teachers in the field! This mind-set, in my judgment, did not change appreciably until the arrival of Michael Tymchak as Dean of Education in 1992.[11]

Despite the anti-intellectual culture in those earlier years, some colleagues gamely pressed on with various research endeavours. My first refereed article (1978) appeared in *Educational Theory* on the concept of "advising" and had grown out of my dissertation. There followed a number of papers and publications in which I analysed a range of concepts and ideas that had crept into the discourse of teaching and education, and which seemed to me in need of clarification and critical examination. So far as I was aware, these notions—unlike indoctrination, critical thinking, open-mindedness,[12] creativity, authority, and so on—had not been subjected to any extended scrutiny by educational philosophers

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[5] I used a variety of sources including works by Soltis, Hirst, Peters, Green, and Hamm.

[6] I included Dewey, Maritain, Sartre, Buber, and Illich.

[7] Here I drew on selections from the works of R.M. Hare, John Wilson, Kohlberg, Noddings, among others.

[8] I regularly had students examine selections from R.S. Peter's *Ethics and Education*. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966).

[9] That said, there were kindred spirits in the Faculty—colleagues who understood and appreciated the presence of Foundations and the contribution we were making to the "education" of student teachers.

[10] The field-experience model the faculty had embraced, much to the pleasure of the Saskatchewan Teachers Federation, was developmental in nature involving a progression from day visits once a week to schools in one year, to a three-week block of pre-internship in another, to a full semester of internship in yet another year. Student teachers were placed in schools throughout southern Saskatchewan for their practicum, which meant heavy travel demands on many faculty.

[11] Michael's training had been in the philosophy of science. What a pleasure it was to go into a Dean's office and have intelligent conversations! As well, Michael taught one of the sections of the moral education class whilst dean.

[12] Bill Hare's *Open-mindedness and Education* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1979) was the subject of my first book review, which appeared in the December 1980 issue of *CSSE News*.

elsewhere. In addition to "advising", I tackled "teaching strategy", "cooperation", "facilitating learning", "self-esteem", and "spirituality" (though this last held considerable interest for several others in philosophy of education). In some cases, I did not pursue these analyses beyond conference presentations in Canada and occasionally the United Kingdom. With respect to "teaching strategy" (1979; 1982), I had become curious as to why it seemed to be replacing the use of "teaching method" in the pedagogical literature and the lexicon of teacher educators. In mapping the criteria governing the uses of "strategy" in different contexts, I found that "teaching strategy" had certain persuasive overtones which "teaching method" did not, and I showed how the former was being used to give an air of legitimacy to what were half-baked or ill-thought-out (though trendy) approaches to classroom instruction. In the case of "facilitating learning" (1993; 1994), I was reacting to a slogan—"We don't teach, we facilitate learning"[13]—I would hear being chanted by student teachers who had been seized by certain romantic notions about classroom learning. This slogan, I argued, traded on a false dichotomy, one based on a reductionist view of teaching as "telling" and, consequently, on a misunderstanding of "teaching" as a family of intellectual and strategic activities (Green, 1971) inherently aimed—ironically—at facilitating learning in students. I called for a renewed emphasis on teaching and cautioned that we should think twice about turning children over to "facilitators" in our schools rather than well-educated teachers.

During the 1980s, and in the wake of a major curriculum reform movement launched by Saskatchewan Education, opportunities for other projects presented themselves. A blue-ribbon Minister's Advisory Committee consisting of representatives from all the province's "stakeholders" in education, including its two universities, had been given a mandate to bring the schooling of Saskatchewan children into the 21st century. Its final report, *Directions*, laid out an elaborate statement of goals of education, a greatly expanded K-12 compulsory core curriculum consisting of six required areas of study[14] and other entities called "common essential learnings" (CELS)[15] to be integrated throughout the core, plus plans for implementation, and much else besides. The report was by no means bereft of good ideas but, when it came to the "fundamentals" of public education and curriculum reform, its story was woefully inadequate, both with respect to the processes by which the Committee had reached its recommendations *and* the content of those recommendations. At least, this was the conviction of an eclectic group of education colleagues at Saskatoon and Regina whose subsequent critiques were gathered into an anthology with the title, *So Much for the Mind: A Case Study in Provincial Curriculum Reform* (1987) edited by Don Cochrane.

My essay in the collection claimed the reformers seemed unaware of a fundamental distinction between "education" and "schooling" and, as a result, failed to notice that education, or the development and enrichment of the human mind, is itself a central goal of schooling. Nor did they seem to be aware that, by explicitly making "education" a primary goal, they could have provided a much-needed rationale for why they wished to expand the K-12 compulsory core. Most of their proposed required areas of study consisted of the basic modes of human thought and inquiry necessary for young people to make greater sense of themselves and of the world. If only the advisory committee had taken trouble to consider these more carefully, they would have had a solid framework for a well-constructed curriculum. I concluded that a more reasonable approach to a compulsory core, libertarian challenges notwithstanding, was to limit it to the years of compulsory attendance—that is, essentially grades 1 to 10, with the exception of language arts and mathematics. Students would thus be left with greater choices in the final years of their formal schooling.

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[13] This, of course, was reminiscent of a much earlier child-centred slogan, "We teach children, not school subjects."

[14] Language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, aesthetic education, and physical and health education.

[15] These were described as understandings, values, skills, and processes, and were identified as "communication", "numeracy", "critical and creative thinking", "technological literacy", "personal and social values and skills", and "independent learning".

Shortly thereafter, Joe Malikail and I were commissioned by Saskatchewan Education to write a "foundational" document for the CEL called "personal and social values and skills". Over the years, we collaborated on several projects (for example, in 1988), but this was the largest and most important in terms of its potential to influence public policy in provincial education. In our monograph (1987), we expanded the notion of "personal and social values" to "personal and *moral*-social values"—an important addition given the scant attention the "moral" had received in the province's curriculum proposals. We developed a conception of moral-social character and competence that we argued should be central to this CEL. From the social roles that young people typically are expected to fulfill in contemporary and democratic society, we identified a range of moral and social qualities and capacities central to these roles, as well as the subject areas and types of school environments in which these qualities might best be addressed and nurtured. In specifying what this CEL entailed, we were not unmindful of Peters' (1981) argument that to enter the palace of moral reason one must first go the through the courtyard of moral habit. We found Kieran Egan's (1979) stages of the mythic, romantic, and philosophic more suited as an overall framework for our purposes than Kohlberg's stages of moral judgment, a topic *du jour* at the time.

My interests in writing on the philosophy of schooling—its ends and means—continued if somewhat sporadically (see "Administration" below) over the next decade. Included in this stretch was a work on knowledge and the curriculum (1990) that drew liberally, though not uncritically, on the earlier Hirst's (1974) forms of knowledge thesis. Despite several reservations about its treatment of aesthetic awareness and moral experience in particular, I nonetheless agreed (as in my earlier work) that conceptualizing knowledge into a number of logically distinct forms of thought and awareness had important implications for the selection and justification of curriculum objectives. This was followed by two short philosophical critiques (1990; 1991) of "whole language" which was being touted as *the* method for teaching beginning reading[16], a research and public policy paper (1999) that examined notions of "justice" in the context of schooling and special needs children, and an opinion piece in the *Journal of Curriculum Studies* (2000) on national testing in Canada with particular reference to mathematics results for Saskatchewan. Then I turned to a work on the idea of schooling as a journey in humanization (2000) that I consider a personal favourite, followed by a recapitulation of my philosophical reflections on the goals of public schooling (2004).

My analysis of "humanization" and its justification as a primary "good" of schooling represented a new departure in several respects. This was the first time I brought a historical dimension into my work by drawing on the social and economic contexts of mid-19th century schooling in Upper Canada to illustrate that barriers to humanization are not something which only contemporary schools can create. As well, I had never before framed the central purpose of schooling as something wider than "education", though inclusive of it, by focusing on a conception of human flourishing, or of "becoming persons more fully" as I put it (an idea that had jelled after reading John White (1995)). I argued for the qualities of humanness that schools should address. These consisted not just of rational truth-seeking capacities—essential as these are—but a whole range of other capacities and feelings central to becoming persons more fully. I went on to illustrate what I took these in the main to be. For the first time, too, I consciously drew on some of Michael Oakshott's (1962; 1967) notions such as the "inheritance of human achievements", the "conversations" of humankind, and the teacher as "an agent of civilization" to inform my work. These ideas seemed to me to point to more sensitive and richer ways of conceptualizing the development of humanness than did a more complete reliance on the forms of knowledge and understanding view with which I had been greatly taken.[17]

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[16] These critiques—which kicked up quite a stir in some educational quarters—could not have been completed without some very useful input by a then recently retired elementary school teacher.

[17] It was gratifying to see this article selected for reprinting in an anthology (2001) as well as being used by a number of colleagues across Canada for discussions with students in their classes.

Administration

In 1990, I agreed to be Chair of Graduate Programmes in the Faculty of Education knowing full well that, even with a reduced teaching load, plus a then-unforeseen personal and family loss, my research and writing would be curtailed.[18] I accepted the position because I was convinced the overall quality of graduate work in the Faculty, and the perception the University Faculty of Graduate Studies had of graduate work in Education, could and should be improved. I was prepared to do what I could to help. At the time, our Faculty offered the M.Ed. and a postgraduate diploma in curriculum and instruction, educational psychology, and educational administration; and a masters degree in vocational-technical education.[19] The overall enrolment was around 350 and most students were studying part-time. I vowed to read carefully every "final" draft of a thesis or project that crossed my desk—a commitment that had not been consistently undertaken by some of my predecessors—and, if necessary, to return manuscripts for "further work" that had been submitted as "ready for oral defence". Predictably, this ruffled more than a few feathers among colleagues especially during my first year as Chair. But a standard had been set and, by and large, faculty adhered to it. I remained in the position until 1995.

Perhaps it was due to my earlier Guelph experience, but I enjoyed committee work for the most part, and over the years participated on many committees in both the Faculty and the wider University—some two dozen in all, as well as taking turns at Chair of Foundations. During the latter 1990s, when the *Journal of Educational Administration and Foundations* was housed at Regina, Rod Dolmage and I teamed up as Editor and Associate Editor respectively. Before that, I had served as "regional editor" of *Scrutiny*, a sometimes saucy but serious monthly publication on education in Saskatchewan that Don Cochrane had launched in 1987.

The Canadian Philosophy of Education Society

It was only after doing the "math" recently that I realize my association with the Canadian Philosophy of Education Society (CPES) extends over a good thirty years! And an enjoyable association it has been. I had served in every formal capacity in the Society from Program Chair on up as well as on the first board of our journal, *Paideusis*, when Paul O'Leary was Editor. In 2002, I had the honour of being nominated and elected President at the annual meeting that year in Toronto. The first topic to arise for debate during my term was whether *Paideusis* should remain a hard-copy publication or become wholly electronic. Arguments were advanced from both sides, unsurprisingly, but from where I sat the pendulum seemed to be swinging towards the latter option, as in due course it did.

The other matter that came to the fore was precipitated by an extended period during which *Paideusis* did not publish. This was certainly not the first time a respected academic journal had run into production problems though it was the first, I believe, in the history of *Paideusis* and the situation was serious. Subscribers were becoming concerned, and authors whose manuscripts had been accepted for publication, worried and frustrated. In attempting to get a rather complex situation resolved in as timely a manner as possible, I had consulted with the Executive of CPES—Daniel Vokey and Sharon Bailin—on numerous occasions and had called on one or two other members of the Society for specific assistance. When the time came to give my final report as outgoing President to the annual meeting (2004) at the University of Manitoba, I felt confident enough to say: "While it has taken some time to turn the situation around, I think that is now accomplished and I'm pleased to announce *Paideusis* is once again on the move. Volume 15 (1 and 2) should be out momentarily while the materials for Volume16 are all in hand."

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[18] In 1991, our family was rocked with the diagnosis of my wife's terminal illness. Mari died in March 1992. It was a difficult period for all of us.

[19] The Ph.D. was not available until 2001.

My confidence turned out to be premature. It was not until Heesoon Bai, sensing the growing urgency of the situation, and with what we have come to know as her very considerable generosity of spirit and efficient work ethic, stepped forward at the 2005 annual meeting to offer her services as the new editor—an offer immediately accepted and greatly appreciated by the Society. A year later, Volume 15 was published in electronic format for the first time, and *Paideusis*, once again, was flourishing.

Looking Ahead

Having devoted the better part of my life to education and the academic study of it, I find it sad to say that educational foundations at the University of Regina has all the appearance of being in its death throes. The classes in philosophy and sociology have been dormant for some time and are likely to disappear entirely. Only Patrick Douaud remains in the Subject Area that formerly had three to four people; and he is halftime only. Patrick, an anthropologist, joined the Area in 1990 to teach the multicultural class and subsequently the classes in history and comparative education. Under a recent pretence of "programme renewal" and "restructuring", he is required to sacrifice some of his Foundations teaching to participate in a new interdisciplinary course to be team-taught with colleagues in educational administration and psychology that all education students will take. In two years, he retires at which point his Foundations classes will likely go the way of philosophy and sociology. Michael Tymchak, now Director of the Saskatchewan Instructional and Developmental Research Unit, continues to offer the moral education class, but chances of it continuing when he retires seem bleak.

In my own retirement, I have been working on the notion of "interpersonal forgiveness" and on what role forgiveness might play in schooling insofar as the latter is, or should be, concerned with the well-being or humanization of children and adolescents. The topic of forgiveness was one my second wife, Mary Cronin—a colleague and kindred spirit—and I often discussed. Sadly, these conversations came to a premature end.[20] My work on "forgiveness" continues.

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[20] Mary had been a valued member of the Faculty of Education working in the areas of Reading and Family Literacy for which she had been well recognized in Saskatchewan—especially among Aboriginal communities—and beyond before succumbing to cancer in March 2006.

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