

Introduction

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Introduction

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The philosophers of education represented in this collection constitute a generation whose most productive period began in the late 1960s and ended in the last decade.¹ All are now retired, though most remain active in their field in one way or another. As one might expect, many of them share similarities in their backgrounds and approaches to the subject. However, it is also worth reflecting on their differences.

Their early formative education experiences varied. For example, Daniels' father was for a number of years a school superintendent so interest in education was part of family life. Entwistle attributes a church discussion group for an early introduction to the Socratic method. For Cochrane, discussions on serious subjects with his father, a Presbyterian minister, had a lasting effect. Hare attributes his commitment to critical and independent thinking to the influence of one of his history teachers at Wyggeston Boys Grammar School.

For several, the early influence of religion played a role in the direction of their professional lives.² Bogdan attended a Roman Catholic elementary school that was attached to a basilica where the architectural and musical environment profoundly stimulated the development of her artistic sensibility, so much so that as an adolescent she "anguished that [her] religious ardour was more aesthetic than spiritual." To this day, despite being a "lapsed Catholic", she admits she is trying to work out the interdependent relationship between religious and aesthetic experience. Religion was part of Cochrane's family life and the questions raised in that setting early in his life were certainly reflected in a graduate course he developed late in his career entitled "Education, Wisdom, and Nature." Stewart at one time contemplated entering the ministry.

How did these academics find their way into philosophy of education? Only two of our contributors started down another career path but then switched to philosophy.³ Their routes were varied, but in almost all cases, a teacher or professor played an important role in intriguing them with the sorts of questions that philosophers ponder. Most were deeply influenced by very senior philosophers of education working at that time.⁴ They saw philosophy as meeting a wide range of needs. Beck admits that

¹ Contributors to this special issue have retired, had been active in CSSE/CAFÉ/CPES, contributed to *Paideusis*, or had had a major impact on graduate studies and students in a Canadian university. Several others were invited to participate, but for one reason or another, declined.

² Beck recounts that had had a "strong religious upbringing", but that he left it behind at an early age.

³ Reminiscent of Wittgenstein, O'Leary and Stewart first tried their hand at engineering. Neither got as far as securing a patent for a propeller as Wittgenstein did in 1911!

⁴ For Daniels, it was Harry Broudy; for Boyd, Kohlberg, Rawls, Firth, and Scheffler; for Beck, Scheffler (at least in his influence on Beck's coming to the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education); for Hare,

...being something of an optimist, I had accepted (naively, I think now) the general Western notion that “the truth will make you free,” that getting to the bottom of things leads rather quickly to personal and societal transformation. I saw philosophy not only as enjoyable but as potentially very useful.

By contrast, Misgeld was attracted to philosophy from the other end of the emotional spectrum:

I think something that did draw me to philosophy, maybe unconsciously at the time, was a certain pessimism. Something that does come through with Heidegger and his resistance to modernity is the sense of despair, that there may not be a good solution. There is a rejection of expectations of progress, of “a better world.” This willingness to suffer through the disillusionment with various great projects of modernity drew me to philosophy because one could not really be very hopeful about the future of human beings . . . I was drawn to philosophy not because it would have explanations where other disciplines did not, but it would allow us to express our fundamental sense of things being out of joint, and without necessarily having a remedy.

Cochrane’s quest was somewhat more personal. As an adolescent, he was puzzled by how a life might be thought to be meaningful given that death was inevitable. His undergraduate studies in philosophy and English literature allowed him to pursue this inquiry intensively. He also loved teaching and saw philosophy of education as way to combine these twin passions.

Coombs entered philosophy in a more traditional way:

I was much taken by Wittgenstein’s view that the traditional philosophical puzzles I had been studying as an undergraduate were simply confusions occasioned by taking words out of the contexts of the language games from which they gained their sense . . . Austin’s work impressed upon me the fruitfulness of carefully investigating the distinctions built into our ordinary language as a first step in understanding our more theoretical conceptual problems. Taken together, these philosophers convinced me that at least one purpose in doing philosophy was to attempt to resolve problems by carefully examining the meaning and use of the language in terms of which we think about them.

Philosophy of education for Coombs was essentially practical:

The point of philosophy of education of the sort I practice[d] [wa]s to improve the conceptual apparatus or conceptual resources that may be brought to bear on educational problems and issues . . . [M]y general approach to philosophy [wa]s problem centered.

In the 1960s, newly-minted philosophers of education had little difficulty securing employment. Faculties of education were expanding and they were demanding high levels of academic preparation. A doctorate from Harvard, the Institute of Education University of London, or Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) pretty well guaranteed them a tenure-track position. Hare put it this way:

I was in the right place at the right time. Canadian universities were in an expansionist mood in the 1960s and business was brisk with respect to hiring. It was in full swing

Kemp, Holland, and Allan White; for Misgeld, Gadamer, Heidegger, and Habermas; for Coombs, Komisar, Burnett, and B. Othanel Smith; and for Cochrane, Stewart, it was Peters and Hirst. Boyd and O’Leary were influenced by Peters by the latter’s visits to Harvard and the University of Western Ontario.

when I entered the Ph.D. program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in 1968 and, fortunately for me, had not quite petered out by the time my two-year residency was drawing to a close.

By the time Bogdan was ready to look for a position in the early 1980s, the employment picture had changed drastically—something that recent graduates in philosophy of education will readily recognize.

Working conditions varied radically from one university setting to another. In most faculties of education, the number of philosophers was small and the demands of undergraduate core courses in teacher training programs were heavy. By contrast, their colleagues at OISE experienced conditions they could only dream of. Beck explains:

At OISE/University of Toronto, we had for thirty years perhaps that largest contingent of philosophers of education in the world. We taught only at the graduate level, not being involved in any aspect of pre-service teacher education until the mid-90s.

Boyd recalls a very positive academic environment in his early years there. OISE was more like a research institute where you worked with graduate students exclusively and could form a small class around your own interests.

Many philosophers of education in Canada worked in considerable isolation within their own colleges and were often separated from other colleagues in their discipline by great distances. As a result, they valued their professional organizations highly. All of our contributors benefitted greatly from meeting their colleagues in their professional organizations and supported them generously.⁵ Coombs acknowledges his indebtedness best:

Another factor that enhanced my academic experience was being able to attend several Philosophy of Education (PES) conferences each year to meet and discuss ideas with like-minded philosophers of education such as Tom Green, Bob Ennis, Jim McClellan, and Paul Komisar.

He adds this interesting observation:

Even here, however, there was a schism between the older philosophers of education, and the younger, analytically-oriented ones. Nor was there much tolerance between these groups. Analytic philosophers, complaining that they were unfairly excluded from the program, sometimes held their own sessions independently from the official program, advertised only by word of mouth.⁶

⁵ Our contributors took leading roles in professional organizations and journals. In addition to Coombs, Beck and Boyd became presidents of PES (in 1986, 1992 and 1997 respectively). Boyd (1989–1992) and Misgeld (1994–1995) served as presidents of the Association for Moral Education (AME) and the former acted as AME’s program chair in 1985 and 1992. Boyd also carried the demanding responsibility of associate editor for the *Journal of Moral Education* from 1981–1996. In recognition of his long service, he is one of two who have been honoured with the title of “Honorary Associate”. Cochrane was the co-founder of the Association for Moral Education and the founder of the California Association of Philosophy of Education. He also proposed the creation of *Paidensis* and served as its managing editor for fourteen years. Hare was president of the Canadian Philosophy of Education Society from 1984–1986, Entwistle from 1992–1994, Daniels from 1994–1996, and Stewart from 2002–2004. O’Leary was editor of *Paidensis* from 1987–1992 and Hare from 1992–1996.

⁶ Coombs’ observation is ironic because eventually the analytically inclined became the dominant force in PES at which time feminists and post-modern philosophers complained that they were marginalized and had to meet in “special interest groups” or in hastily arranged nighttime meetings. Subsequently, they

Though their backgrounds varied, all of these philosophers were committed to elucidating the value dimensions of education. Beck, whose dissertation was titled “Values Statements in Educational Discourse”, spent much of his career teaching courses that highlighted these concerns.⁷ Misgeld and Entwistle made major contributions to our understanding of the political-values dimensions of education. One of the two enduring lines of Coombs’ research was the nature of value reasoning.⁸ Most of Boyd’s work concentrated on moral and political education and how these illuminated the problems of racism and sexism. Bogdan describes music and aesthetics generally as the “bedrock of [her] intellectual universe”, but later in her career she extended her interests to include feminist literary criticism and pedagogy. For several years, Cochrane taught a compulsory course entitled “Educational Thought and Values” and later developed two electives that reflected a broadening of his interests—“Gay and Lesbian Issues in Education” and “Education, Wisdom, and Nature”.⁹

Over their careers, these philosophers pondered—even agonized—over the relationship between their discipline and practice. Hare has remained adamant:

I remain convinced that philosophy of education is vitally important and immensely useful for teachers. I have tried to offset the growing pressure to reduce teacher education to mere training—that way, as Dewey warned, lies intellectual subservience... I published an article in 2000 showing how philosophers of education in the 20th century have helped us to think about teaching differently and, thereby, to teach in a different way... More recently... I [have] argue[d] that there are numerous outcomes resulting from the study of philosophy that connect with good practice. Quite apart from its intrinsic interest, philosophy is of great practical value to teachers, principals, and educational administrators.

The issue was not just a theoretical one for some, but about preserving their place—and their own positions—in teacher preparation programs in their faculties. They needed to persuade their colleagues in curriculum studies, school administration, and school counseling of the relevance of their work. Because their role was often critical of current practice, winning friends and allies was problematic. But what were they to do in the face of the onslaught of the values clarification movement that swept through education for several years? Or the rush to adopt whole language approaches to teaching language in elementary education? Or the commitment by some in social studies to a shallow relativism that characterized popular approaches to the discussion of “controversial” issues?”

Reflecting on his own work, Coombs puts this dilemma tactfully:

...because it is problem focused, [one’s work may] actually persuade educational decision-makers to rethink their conceptualizations. This is not to say decision-makers will welcome such philosophical examinations. Usually they will not for philosophy of this sort tends to be critical of prevailing conceptions and theories.

became a major force leaving those with more analytic interests complaining that PES was a gated community and that they were now left on the outside.

⁷ His courses at OISE included “Values and Schooling”, “Values Education”, and “Value Inquiry and the Study of Education”.

⁸ The other was the logic of the concept of teaching.

⁹ Most of his major publications also reflect this orientation—for example, with Tasos Kazepides and Cornell Hamm, *The Domain of Moral Education* (1979); with Michael Manley-Casimir, *The Development of Moral Reasoning: Practical Approaches* (1980); and with John Schulte, *Ethics and School Counseling* (1995).

Whether trained in an analytic mode or less restrictive methods of philosophizing, all expanded their conception of what it was to do philosophy or what they would theorize about.¹⁰ In some cases, these transformations were brought on by external pressures and, in others, it was the result of a natural evolution.

Bruneau describes Entwistle's process of broadening the scope of his endeavours:

In order to be practical, Harold found that it was necessary for him to step outside a strictly philosophical approach to engage in education problem-solving. Psychological, sociological, economic, historical, and other factors, he reasoned, must be considered along with philosophical analysis. In retrospect, Entwistle recognizes that he used philosophical analysis mainly to address the conceptual issues integral to the practical problems he investigated.

Bogdan describes in vivid detail the expansion of her interests from her early focus on aesthetics in education to being enriched by new developments in the "isms"—feminism, racism, classism, and post-colonialism.

Cochrane questioned common views about our relationship with nature and our treatment of other animals. In this context, he explored the role that wonder and wisdom might play in education and in our lives. He also explored beliefs about sexual orientation and the widespread indifference to homophobia by teachers and students in classrooms.

Boyd traces the development of his interests this way:

...my academic focus has been almost entirely on problems in moral and political philosophy as manifested in educational contexts. For approximately the first half of my career, the emphasis was clearly more in the moral arena, with...much of the educational context being that of moral education. For the rest, political concerns became much more salient to how I thought about all education, especially its moral aspects, and particularly as reflected in problems of oppression such as racism and sexism.

Beck became sufficiently disillusioned with what he saw were the limiting preoccupations of his philosophical colleagues to the practical challenges faced by teachers in classrooms that he transferred into OISE's Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning (CTL). Here he could concentrate on practical issues without apology.

Misgeld's disenchantment with philosophy was the most radical. Not only is he critical of the analytic mode, but by implication, the phenomenological approach in which he had been so deeply immersed:

Philosophy leaves everything as it is. That certainly used to be a tendency in analytic philosophy. They would ask: why do you want philosophy to have an impact? It has nothing to do with that; it's a second-order inquiry. You can say that analytic philosophy is fairly honest, and it downplays the importance of philosophy. But then why would anyone want to stay with philosophy if its human impact is so marginal—unless they like intellectual games

The problem Misgeld saw with so many global or comprehensive philosophical concepts is "that they have no purchase on reality" and so he says,

¹⁰ This is hardly a surprising development for those influenced by R.S. Peters who always held that conceptual analysis was a propaedeutic exercise that should illuminate and not be isolated from larger ethical and epistemological issues in education.

I don't want to work on developing "a theory" of anything anymore. I want to work on realities, realities of human beings. Sometimes some theorizing is useful, but I wouldn't privilege it, let's put it that way . . . When I look for remedies for the problems, I don't look for foundations. I would look for ways of life that are sustainable for people which are not harmful.

No doubt when Misgeld seeks to find ways that are sustainable for people, his philosophical training is engaged, but he has abandoned philosophy as an academic pursuit. Boyd comments wryly on this transformation:

[F]or the first fifteen years when Dieter arrived in the philosophy of education group, he continually berated us for not being philosophical enough. For the last fifteen, he accused us all of being too philosophical . . . We were intrigued by how someone who had received such an exceptional education from thinkers who have shaped much of 20th century thought could eventually turn away from philosophy and describe it as no longer useful.

None of our contributors is optimistic about the future of philosophy of education in our universities. Stewart and O'Leary are most graphic about the possible demise of our discipline. Whatever struggles and challenges we faced in our careers, we might now see ourselves as having worked in something like a golden era. Many faculties of education have undergone radical reorganization in attempts to integrate teacher preparation studies more tightly with perceived social, community, and classroom needs and interests. Gone are the days in most institutions when philosophy of education could be protected in discrete departments bearing names like "social and philosophical foundations of education" or "social and policy studies in education". But in this new environment we can see some interesting philosophy beginning to emerge in areas such as gender studies, ecological education, social justice programs, and Aboriginal education.

In preparing our graduate students for their careers, we need to encourage them to study philosophy in a broader context than we experienced in our training. They need to be examining concepts of masculinity, the significance of our connections with nature, the distribution of resources to schools, and the claims made about alternative ways of knowing. Such studies will necessarily draw on theories of social constructs, metaphysics, ethics, empirical methodology, and epistemology. There is no shortage of areas in need to critical attention. The landscape will be different, but philosophy might once again take root and blossom.