

What is philosophy of education? Overlaps and contrasts between different conceptions

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ABSTRACT

Various conceptions of philosophy of education have been mooted over the last sixty years. The paper looks at five of these, associated particularly with R. S. Peters, D. W. Hamlyn, David Bakhurst, Philip Kitcher, and Harvey Siegel. It shows differences and sometimes overlaps among these, to do with whether or not philosophy of education should be seen as a branch of philosophy, as central to philosophy as a whole, or as a form of applied philosophy. The paper puts most weight on the last of these while recognizing the importance of work on the enculturation of young human beings as exemplified in Hamlyn's and Bakhurst's writings.

KEYWORDS: philosophy, philosophy of education, applied philosophy, Russian philosophy

INTRODUCTION

From the 1960s through to the 2020s different views have been expressed about what philosophy of education is and should be. This paper discusses five of the most important of these. A large part of it is about the third view: ideas recently put forward on the topic by David Bakhurst.

(1) The first view is Richard Peters' conception of the subject after he became Professor of Philosophy of Education at the Institute of Education in the early 1960s. Peters wanted to set philosophy of education on a new footing. In his view this meant establishing it as a branch of philosophy on a par with, for instance, philosophy of religion or philosophy of science. For this to be possible, it had to be shown that philosophy of education had its own central interrelated concepts—just

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as philosophy of religion involved the study of such concepts as God, sin, life after death, and predestination.

The first fruit of this approach was his edited collection of 1967 *The Concept of Education*, in which members of his own staff, as well as other, well-known, general philosophers—such as Gilbert Ryle, David Hamlyn, Godfrey Vesey, and Michael Oakeshott explored particular concepts relevant to education like teaching, training, learning, instruction, and indoctrination. He himself focussed on the most central concept in the field, education itself. He also mentioned in his preface that he would like to have included essays on ‘the crucial processes of imitation and identification’ (Peters 1967: vii).

The high point of Peters’ project was another edited collection of his, *The Philosophy of Education* (1973). This was included in the prestigious series *Oxford Readings in Philosophy* alongside books on the philosophy of mathematics, the philosophy of religion, the philosophy of science, aesthetics, moral concepts, and other areas. His introduction to the volume begins:

In the past decade the philosophy of education has been steadily establishing itself in Britain as a branch of philosophy. It is beginning to appear as an option studied in philosophy departments as well as one of the main disciplines contributing to educational theory as studied in education departments. (Peters 1973: 1)

All this was in the heyday of an approach to philosophy in general and philosophy of education in particular in which great attention was paid to the clarification of concepts under the rubric of ‘conceptual analysis’. Although some aspects of Peters’ project have proved of lasting value, the project as a whole had lost momentum by the end of the 1970s. This was for several reasons.

Debates about some concepts—*indoctrination*, for instance—ran out of interesting things to say as well as became too dependent in places on how terms were used in ordinary usage. Sometimes—as with the concept of education in the way Peters handled it—a philosopher’s own value-judgements seemed to be playing a part in what purported to be an objective analysis of a concept (see Dray 1973). In 1983 Peters himself wrote that philosophy of education had:

settled down to a rather pedestrian period of tidying up and trying to improve on existing analyses and arguments. Few fresh ideas came in from philosophy or elsewhere. ... Perhaps, too, the analytic approach brought with it a rather narrow, piecemeal approach. (Peters 1983: 33)

One reason why this conception of philosophy had run out of steam by around 1980 was that many in the field had long become more interested in looking at philosophical issues relevant to important developments in educational policy and practice, such as child-centred approaches to education, the school curriculum, civic education, selection and equality of opportunity. An excellent early example was Robert Dearden’s *The Philosophy of Primary Education* (1968).

Peters himself had contributed to work like this more relevant to what goes on in educational institutions. In his *Ethics and Education* (1966), he had written about punishment in schools, equality of educational opportunity, the authority of the teacher, the school as a democratic institution, the freedom of the child.

Although his first, early 1960s' way of seeing philosophy of education as a branch of philosophy was, as we have seen, focussed on concepts thought peculiar to the field rather than more practical matters, it had changed by 1973 to reflect the growing importance of the latter. His view of philosophy of education as a branch of philosophy now saw it as 'very much like political philosophy' (Peters 1973: 2).

Peters held to the idea that it was a branch of philosophy throughout his teaching career, but towards the end of it, this more practical way of interpreting this dropped away and concern with status became more pronounced. In his chapter on philosophy of education in Paul Hirst's edited collection *Educational Theory and its Foundation Disciplines* (1983), he wrote:

On the question of its philosophical standing, I think it can be said that it has established itself as a respectable, if lowly, branch of philosophy. Eminent philosophers have interested themselves in it such as Gilbert Ryle, Michael Oakeshott [and eleven others mentioned], and in 1973 a special conference on philosophy of education was organised by the Royal Institute of Philosophy at Exeter. In the early 1970s I was asked to produce a book on philosophy of education for the OUP Readings in Philosophy series. ... Philosophy of education now appears as an option in the philosophy programmes of many philosophy departments, and it is no longer regarded, as it used to be twenty years ago, as not proper philosophy. (Peters 1983: 35)

(2) The second view takes us further into the 1980s. It concerns David Hamlyn's thoughts about what the future of philosophy of education might be, as expressed in his paper 'Need Philosophy of Education be so Dreary?' (Hamlyn 1985). Echoing some points made in the last section, Hamlyn regretted that the sense of excitement associated with Peters' 'revolution in philosophy of education' had now evaporated and that the subject had now become 'so boring'. Looking for a way of promoting an interest in the subject in university philosophy departments, Hamlyn suggested two alternative models that it could follow: aesthetics or medical ethics. His own preference was for the former. Issues in medical ethics tend to be raised by medics concerned about moral dilemmas in their work who think that philosophers can help them to solve them. In fact, however, philosophers can often only show them how complicated these moral problems are. What makes medical ethics worth pursuing, however, is the urgency of decisions that have to be taken—a feature not nearly so prominent in the educational arena. Hamlyn preferred the aesthetics model because it is the locus of genuinely philosophical questions. Influenced by Kant, he calls these 'how possible?' questions. In education these include, for instance, 'how is it possible to come to understand things?'. With his then-recently published *Experience and the Growth of Understanding* (Hamlyn 1978) in mind, he thought it evident that 'the process of coming to a state may be as important and puzzling as the state itself. Education involves such a process.' Genetic epistemology, he went on to say, is a branch of philosophy concerned with processes of that sort. His main doubt was about whether philosophy of education can generate enough 'how possible questions?' to constitute a separate branch of philosophy on the model of aesthetics. As well as 'how is it possible to come to understand things?', he suggested 'how is teaching possible without indoctrination?', but left his tally there.

Although Peters' and Hamlyn's views on the nature of philosophy of education are very different, both writers see it potentially as a branch of philosophy. This distinguishes (1) and (2) from the next two sections of this paper (3) and (4), in each of which one finds a larger-scale claim about how philosophy of education should be conceived.

(3) Like Hamlyn, David Bakhurst (2023, see also the beginning of Bakhurst 2020) has a depressing perspective on philosophy of education: 'most philosophers are content to see [it] as a backwater, and are unmotivated to engage with it because they don't believe that education matters to philosophy'. He goes on to say that while studying philosophy at Keele and then Oxford, 'I don't remember philosophers at either institution staging lectures or seminars on philosophy of education the entire time'. In a longer passage he states that:

Admittedly, there was a brief period in the 1960s and 1970s when R. S. Peters, Paul Hirst, Robert Dearden and others at the Institute of Education in London brought the methods of analytic philosophy to bear on educational issues and encouraged a number of prominent philosophers, such as Gilbert Ryle, Michael Oakeshott and John Passmore to explore educational themes. And in the US, Israel Scheffler at Harvard produced significant writings on rationality and education. But while this 'analytic philosophy of education' inspired important work, its influence on the philosophical mainstream has been minimal, so that now the philosophy of education is often considered something no self-respecting philosopher need bother with (Paragraph 4).

Elsewhere Bakhurst (2020: 256) puts forward a similar argument, to the effect that 'matters of education were shunted into a philosophical siding, surviving largely through the work of thinkers in schools of education'. On the same page he somewhat qualifies this negative picture when he writes that 'on the present scene there are a number of prominent philosophers of education who have spent some or all of their careers in philosophy departments, including Scheffler's student Harvey Siegel, Randall Curren and Harry Brighouse'.

Like Hamlyn, too, Bakhurst (2020: 257) proposes a remedy. In his case, this is to underline that:

education is of general philosophical importance ... education enters into questions of the nature of knowledge, theoretical and practical reason, the formation of mind and its relation to the world, and the cultivation of moral vision and judgement. It is hard to see how we can do epistemology, metaphysics and ethics—that is to say, do *philosophy*—without having education in view.

... Teaching and learning is absolutely critical to the human condition. Each human individual is the beneficiary of a process of formation in which she assimilates part of the collective wisdom (and folly) of past generations. We do not each of us find the world anew. Rather, we are the recipients of a cultural legacy, the appropriation of which is a precondition of our standing in relation to the world as an object of knowledge.

Bakhurst's work in this area on the *Formation of Reason* (Bakhurst 2011), like Hamlyn's *Experience and the Growth of Understanding*, is about upbringing. Both provide a philosophical account of the young human being's coming to participate in a social world. As far as I can see, Hamlyn would agree with most—perhaps all—of Bakhurst's second paragraph. It would be helpful elsewhere than in this paper to

compare the two accounts in far more detail to see where they interconnect and where they differ. A starting point might be the second of two notes Bakhurst has on Hamlyn's book (Bakhurst 2011: 95 n13), where he distances himself from Hamlyn's 'contrast[ing] maturation, conceived principally as a purely biological process, with human enculturation and learning'. For present purposes, the main interest in considering them together is that they both see aspects of the philosophical exploration of human upbringing—of *Bildung* in a term favoured by Bakhurst—as potentially appealing to general philosophers. Both believe this is the route whereby the latter can come to take more interest than they do at present in philosophy of education.

Where they differ is that while Hamlyn's preferred conception of that subject is as a branch of philosophy on a par with aesthetics, Bakhurst's conception—as is clear from his comments just quoted that 'education is of general philosophical importance' and that 'it is hard to see how we can do epistemology, metaphysics and ethics—that is to say, do *philosophy*—without having education in view' is wider in scope. Referring to what he has learnt from Ilyenkov and other Russian philosophers, he writes that '[m]any representatives of the Russian socio-historical tradition considered questions of the nature of education to be philosophically central, so central indeed that they did not recognise a specific sub-discipline of philosophy of education' (Bakhurst 2011: 144 n1). This echoes the point he made in his earlier article on Ilyenkov, that 'Ilyenkov's ideas can be freed from the local context in which they were first articulated, and joined with congenial themes in the work of others, there may emerge a stream of thought that will refresh and rejuvenate the philosophy of education, so that it can take its rightful place at, or close to, the centre of philosophical concern' (Bakhurst 2005: 273). Over the past twenty years, and particularly in Bakhurst (2011), he has explored a closely related source of this stream of thought in the work of John McDowell and his followers on the necessity of being initiated into a culture for human beings to have minds and become rational animals.

I now discuss Bakhurst's position, looking first at his claim that education is of general philosophical importance and is close to the centre of philosophical concern. As he uses the term 'education' (something he also describes as 'education in the broadest sense'), it applies to human beings in general. Education 'occurs through the acquisition of natural language and the conceptual structures embodied therein, through initiation into styles of thinking and reasoning, and the assimilation of communal practices that structure the normative landscape in which children must learn to orientate themselves' (Bakhurst 2023). This sense of the term overlaps with but is different from the familiar use of 'education' to describe the family upbringing and later learning via schools, higher education, adult education, and mass media that we find in a modern industrialized or developing society (with no sharp borderline between this and earlier societies from, say, the Greeks onwards). It is important to emphasize that Bakhurst's sense of 'education' applies as much to Bronze Age and earlier human societies as it does to our own: in its pan-human perspective, it is again reminiscent of Hamlyn's work. It will be helpful in what follows to label these two senses of 'education' as 'education 1' (Bakhurst's

sense) and ‘education 2’. As I have implied, these terms are not mutually exclusive. Since ‘education 2’ applies to human beings, albeit only to those living in a modern society, it embraces, not least in references to early upbringing within the family, features applicable to the enculturation of all human beings. ‘Education 2’ is not a subset of ‘Education 1’, because it contains much that is not pan-human; but there is certainly an overlap between the two notions.

Is it true, then, that education in Bakhurst’s sense, that is, ‘education 1’, is of general philosophical importance, close to the centre of philosophical concern? Is it the case that we cannot do philosophy without having education in view? I suspect most philosophers of our time would accept some version of the thesis held by McDowell and his followers, as well as Wittgenstein and many others, that human beings are social creatures who have to be initiated via a shared language into common ways of acting, reasoning, and feeling. This would provide some grounds for claiming that philosophers today have by and large absorbed some such notion as part of their understanding of their subject. If this is what Bakhurst has in mind in the claims under discussion, it is defensible. But if he is referring not to this absorbed understanding but to philosophers’ more focal concerns, the case may not be so clear.

While it may be impossible to study, say, the nature of the virtues without attending to the way virtues are acquired, are there topics connected, for example, with the nature of truth, time, or negation where the kind of absorbed understanding of ‘education 1’ that I have mentioned does not come into focal awareness? Need an aesthete working on the intentional fallacy, have ‘education 1’ centrally in mind? Matters like these make Bakhurst’s central claim hard to substantiate.

I turn now to Bakhurst’s depressing picture of the low esteem in which philosophers tend to hold philosophy of education, seeing it as a backwater or siding. As we saw in the first paragraphs of this section, he excludes from this several philosophers in the 1960s and 1970s like Ryle, Oakeshott, and Passmore as well as several contemporary US philosophers like Brighouse, Curren, and Siegel, but he leaves the reader with the impression that, these apart, there has been next to no interest in philosophy of education shown by mainstream philosophers. But this impression should be challenged, at least in the UK context. While one cannot deny that philosophers from Hamlyn onwards (perhaps many of them—it is hard to tell) have had a low opinion of the subject, there has been more involvement in educational issues than Bakhurst’s negative assessment would seem to suggest. Since the 1970s there have been whole books on philosophy of education by Brenda Cohen; Stuart C. Brown (ed.); David Cooper (2); R. S. Downie, Eileen M. Loudfoot and Elizabeth Telfer; Glenn Langford; Anthony O’Hear; Onora O’Neill; Adam Swift, and Mary Warnock; and since 2000 *IMPACT* pamphlets have been written or co-written by David Archard, Matthew Clayton, Michael Luntley, Mary Midgley, and Mary Warnock. In addition, there were eighty-seven articles in the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* between 1966 and 2021, written by forty philosophers working in UK philosophy departments: Brenda Almond (Cohen), David Archard, Stephen Burwood, Matthew Clayton, David Cooper, Jonathan Dancy, Angela Hobbs, Nicholas Dent, R. S. Downie, Roy Edgley, Antony Flew, John

Haldane, D. W. Hamlyn, R. M. Hare, R. W. Hepburn, Elizabeth Hindess, Martin Hollis, W. D. Hudson, Glenn Langford, Stephen Law, Michael Luntley, Ruby Meager, Susan Mendus, Mary Midgley, Alan Montefiore, Howard Mounce, Stephen Mulhall, Richard Norman, D. J. O'Connor, Anthony O'Hear, Harold Osborne, D. Z. Phillips, John Plamenatz, A. M. Quinton, George MacDonald Ross, Gilbert Ryle, Anthony Skillen, Patricia Smart, Elizabeth Telfer, Alan R. White. There have been other such articles in other journals than *JOPE* but I have not explored these.

None of this shows, or is intended to show, that over this period *most* philosophers have been interested in philosophy of education, only that there have been many more of them than the meagre tally that Bakhurst suggests. Interestingly, nearly all of these have been interested in 'education 2', as can be seen from the topics on which they have written. These include, among other areas, sex education, children with special educational needs, family values, education in the arts, egalitarianism in education, moral education, education as a positional good, education and personal relationships, intelligence and the IQ, creationism in school science programmes, education in a multicultural society, the history curriculum, and faith schools.

Bakhurst's writings from the early years of this century onwards have come back again and again to the theses that 'education 1' is of central concern to philosophy and that philosophers have shown next to no interest in philosophy of education. The following passage from his 2023 article, which is largely about Kitcher's new book, is unusual in its departure from the second of these theses:

I have made the case that education should matter to philosophy by arguing that education, very broadly conceived (as formation or self-development), is central to the human life-form, and by exploring some of the metaphysical and epistemic questions that come into view when one recognises this. I have said very little about the philosophical dimensions of formal education—schooling and higher education—and of course a good deal of work in philosophy of education is devoted to such matters. Indeed, those mainstream philosophers who have ventured into the field have usually done so to address moral and political issues raised by formal education. One familiar theme is that schools and universities have a central role to play in any vibrant democracy, equipping students, not just with relevant knowledge, but with the tools to think critically, so that they can make informed choices about how to live and contribute to democratic deliberation.

Some have defended the humanities and, more generally, a broadly liberal arts education, not just for honing critical reasoning, but for opening up to students things of genuine value, educating them in what matters, and thereby giving them a chance to choose among ways of living that are genuinely worthwhile. Sadly, throughout the world, and conspicuously in the United States, the ideals of democracy are so beleaguered that such discussions look increasingly utopian. But they are all the more relevant for that. For what can protect us, our children and our children's children, from the post-truth world of alternative facts, the reduction of political discourse to lies, name-calling and abuse, from climate-crisis deniers, vaccine sceptics, and science-haters? What can inure us against conspiracy theories and the treacherous influence of social media? What can equip us to confront the injustices and evils of the past? Education—more and better—has to be a big part of the answer to these questions. That's another blindingly obvious reason why philosophers should take education seriously. (Bakhurst 2023)

As far as I am aware, this is a rare venture on Bakhurst's part into the world of 'education 2' and the need to approach it philosophically. He suggests in this passage that there are two reasons for philosophers to take education seriously: the by now familiar reason that 'education 1' is central to the discipline, and the reason that contemporary developments in 'education 2' cry out for philosophical investigation.

As I have suggested, the second of these reasons has influenced philosophers not only in the tumultuous world in which we currently live of threats to democracy, post-truth, and impending climate catastrophe, but over the last half century and more. The issues that have attracted philosophers in this period have changed as the socio-political scene has changed. In the 1960s and later in the UK, for instance, with the phasing-out of the 11+ and the move towards comprehensive schooling, issues to do with selection, intelligence, equality, and the shape of a common curriculum attracted much philosophical interest, while today one focus, as Bakhurst suggests, is the need for educational institutions to grapple with new threats to democracy and truth.

In (5) below I come back to Bakhurst's position when I explore his objection to the view that philosophy of education is to be characterized as an applied philosophy. In the present section, as well as discussing his claim that philosophy of education has been a philosophical backwater, I have examined his view that education is of central importance to philosophy and concluded that there is indeed a case for this, but only if education is understood as 'education 1' and if 'central importance' applies to what I have called philosophers' 'absorbed' understanding, and only sometimes to their focal concerns.

(4) Like Bakhurst, Philip Kitcher also sees philosophy of education not as a sub-discipline of philosophy as Peters and Hamlyn do, but as something more intimately connected with philosophy as a whole. In the preface to his recent book *The Main Enterprise of the World* (Kitcher 2022), he approvingly quotes Dewey's statement in *Democracy and Education* that:

If we are to conceive education as the process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, towards nature and fellow men, philosophy may even be defined as *the general theory of education*. (Dewey 1916: 383) (italics in original)

Kitcher goes on to say:

Conceiving each human generation as attempting both to foster the development of its successors, and to create for them an improved world, Dewey (and I think Emerson) saw the general understanding of education (of 'upbuilding' the young) as the central philosophical task. To discharge that task is to pose—and answer—some of the oldest and most recurrent philosophical questions. It is to inquire into the most important values and to try to understand how, given the circumstances and knowledge of the age, they may best be promoted. (Kitcher 2022: ix)

In line with this, Kitcher's monumental book discusses in detail a number of fundamental educational aims, to do with work, personal fulfilment, citizenship, morality, and religion, and how such aims can be realized via more specific curricular

proposals. In [White \(2023\)](#) I have provided an extensive exposition and critique of Kitcher's position and so will not go into further details here.

Is Kitcher right in adopting Dewey's view that 'the general understanding of education (of "upbuilding" the young) [is] the central philosophical task'? This depends on how one conceives philosophy. If one holds, with Dewey, that philosophical thinking arises out of the uncertainties found in widespread social conditions associated in modern times with 'the advance of science, the industrial revolution, and the development of democracy' ([Dewey 1916: 386](#)), this helps one, perhaps, to see the case for an understanding of education as the central philosophical task. But not everyone, by any means, shares this Deweyan conception of philosophy. For the many who do not share this, the Dewey–Kitcher position may well be unconvincing. In (5), however, we shall see a more promising way of conceptualizing Kitcher's book as a contribution to philosophy of education.

(5) The last perspective on what philosophy of education is sees it as an applied philosophy. This is a route I myself have followed. David Bakhurst has explicitly rejected my views on this in favour of the grander conception of the centrality of education to philosophy discussed in (3). He writes:

... some prominent philosophers of education, such as John White, came to represent the field primarily as a branch of applied philosophy. I do not share this view. Education is of general philosophical importance, and its significance is not limited to clarifying 'the aims, content, methods, and distribution of education appropriate to contemporary society'. ([Bakhurst 2020: 257](#), citing [White 1995: 216](#). See also [Bakhurst 2005: 262](#))

It is clear from Bakhurst's careful way of writing this that the two views of philosophy of education in contention are not either/or but can co-exist. He puts most of the emphasis on the central place of 'education 1' in philosophy, but still allows room for the applied philosophy perspective concerned with 'education 2'.

As my long quote in (3) from his 2023 article shows, Bakhurst has recently become more sympathetic to the view that philosophers should apply their expertise to elucidating urgent educational issues arising in contemporary society. This comes out, too, in his remark on [Kitcher \(2022\)](#):

This book is an exemplary contribution to the philosophy of education and deserves to be taken seriously. Kitcher combines a broad vision of the centrality of education in human life with discussion of many concrete questions about how schools should be organised, curricula designed and so on. The discussion is framed by the big question: what is education for?

I agree with Bakhurst on this, although it is worth pointing out that the 'centrality to human life' that Kitcher sees in education goes far beyond the 'education 1' on which Bakhurst chiefly focusses and is mainly about 'education 2'. For me, Kitcher's book is an outstanding example of philosophy of education conceived as an applied philosophy.

In (3), too, I listed the many UK philosophers who have written in the half century on educational issues, as well as specifying many of these issues. These 'mainstream' philosophers, like Kitcher, Brighouse, Curren, Siegel, and others in the USA, have brought general ideas in such areas of philosophy as ethics, political

philosophy, epistemology, and philosophy of mind to bear on practical educational matters like these. In this they have joined holders of philosophy of education posts attached to the ‘applied’ perspective. In the UK, a movement that began in the 1960s with Robert Dearden on primary education and Paul Hirst on the school curriculum has stretched across the decades to writers like Andrew Davis on assessment and Christopher Winch on vocational education, as well as many other excellent scholars whom it would be invidious to single out.

In this way, as Harvey Siegel (2007) has argued, philosophy of education is “Janus-faced”, looking both inward to the parent discipline of philosophy and outward to educational practice—‘like other areas of “applied” philosophy’. Among issues of educational practice he includes the aims of education, standardized testing (in the USA), critical thinking, equality and equality of opportunity, moral education, curriculum planning, feminism, and multiculturalism.

I would like, finally, to link this discussion of philosophy of education as applied philosophy to Hamlyn’s remarks on this in (2). As we saw, he preferred to see philosophy of education become a branch of philosophy on the model of aesthetics rather than an applied philosophy after the pattern of medical ethics. As I wrote there, his reason was that:

Issues in medical ethics tend to be raised by medics concerned about moral dilemmas in their work who think that philosophers can help them to solve them. In fact, however, philosophers can often only show them how complicated these moral problems are. What makes medical ethics worth pursuing, however, is the urgency of decisions that have to be taken—a feature not nearly so prominent in the educational arena.

I have three comments on this.

It would be good if educational practitioners looked for help to philosophers of education in solving *their* problems. In fact, in our subject the initiative has usually come from philosophers of education well acquainted with the educational world, not from teachers and administrators. More, arguably, could be done to redress this balance: this is a task for the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain (PESGB) and other agents.

In our field, too, we can hope to do more than reveal complexities in the disheartening way that Hamlyn suggests. As well as tackling central questions to do, for instance, with the purposes and content of school education, we can promote practitioners’ critical awareness of received ideas influential in the educational world like—in the past—notions of intelligence associated with IQ testing, or child-centred education; as well as—in the present—questionable policies on assessment and accountability, or fashionable nostrums like ‘powerful knowledge’.

Hamlyn’s final point is about the urgency of medical decisions as compared with educational ones. But in these days especially the distinction is not so clear-cut—if, indeed, it ever was, considering the crucial significance of some educational decisions, about selection and assessment, for example, for individual lives. In his 2023 paper quoted above, Bakhurst wrote about the need for philosophy of education to confront a world of post-truth, climate change denial, conspiracy theories, and the malign influence of social media.

CONCLUSION

This brings to a close my account of five perspectives on the nature of philosophy of education. I have looked at Peters' sometimes shifting, but always confident, view of it as a branch of philosophy; at Hamlyn's less-than-high hopes that it might become one in the way that aesthetics is; at Bakhurst's conviction that the nature of education is central to philosophy; at Kitcher's similar conclusion, but on different, Deweyan, grounds; and at the account of philosophy of education as applied philosophy favoured, for instance, by Siegel and myself. In doing so, I have drawn attention to overlaps between these five approaches: not only to that between Peters and Hamlyn with regard to the 'branch' view and between Bakhurst and Kitcher with regard to the 'centrality' view, but also to that between Hamlyn and Bakhurst in connection with their interest in 'education 1'—the pan-human perspective as distinct from the one to do specifically with the modern world that I have called 'education 2'. In addition, there are elements of the 'applied' view in some of Bakhurst's writings; and Kitcher's new book can be seen as a brilliant example of this same view.

In the confines of a single article, this survey has necessarily been sketchy and would profit by a fuller investigation, not least into the similarities and differences between Bakhurst's and Hamlyn's view of the enculturation of young human beings into a social world. There may well be other viewpoints on the nature of philosophy of education and I hope that my treatment of the topic may encourage those familiar with them to contribute to the discussion that this article has launched.

As is now very clear, my own inclinations have been towards the 'applied' view. This is because throughout my career my interests have tended to focus on 'education 2' rather than 'education 1'. Both have an important place in the philosophy of education, and practical issues to do with 'education 2' are especially important. PESGB, along with its journal, was set up in the 1960s in the heyday of British teacher education reform, the demise of the 11+ and the introduction of the comprehensive system. Those working in the field in those days, notably Richard Peters and those close to him, took it as read that the work they were doing was of wider importance to the national educational scene. In the late 1960s, the British Government, for instance, was aware of the work that Peters was doing in teacher education and funded a new course at the Institute of Education, the Diploma in Philosophy of Education, to teach the subject to schoolteachers converting to training college lecturers. It would be excellent if, sixty years later, philosophy of education could once again play a wider role in political and social life, including the institutional world of education, as it did then. Our Society and Journal could well make a helpful contribution to this project.

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