

Wittgenstein's Impact on the Philosophy of Education

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Abstract

Clarifying the nature of the philosophy of education, this paper offers a critical overview of Wittgenstein's impact on the field. The focus is then narrowed to give attention to Wittgenstein's claim that "Nothing is hidden" (*Philosophical Investigations*, #435) in relation to current concerns with transparency. The discussion extends and challenges familiar readings of this passage, making connections with Wittgenstein's late writings on psychology. Imagination and pretence are, thus, shown to be essential to the development of mind and world, from the child's first entry into language. This reaffirms the significance of the humanities, suggesting particular importance for drama and film.

Impact is an equivocal but intriguing starting-point for any consideration of Wittgenstein. It is a source of wry, ironic amusement amongst enthusiasts and critics that, were Wittgenstein to be applying for a university position today (that is, in a culture that places great importance on impact), he would be simply unappointable. Setting aside the ways in which his teaching would fall foul of the requirements of teaching quality assessment (however inspiring that teaching may have been to some of his students), his lack of publications would clearly be damning. Yet if we consider him today in terms of the impact he did in fact have, during his lifetime and since, a very different conclusion is reached. While, on the negative side, it is the case that philosophy departments today have turned away from Wittgenstein in so many respects, there is, by contrast, the outstanding evidence of recognition and influence cited by David Stern: "In an end-of-the-century poll, professional philosophers in the USA and Canada were asked to name the five most important books in philosophy in the twentieth century. The *Philosophical Investigations* came first, and the *Tractatus* fourth" (Stern, 2004, p. 1). There is no doubt that Wittgenstein would have been appalled by contemporary bibliometrics and measures of impact. Yet he would have been pleased if his work had not spared these many readers the trouble of thinking but had rather stimulated them to thoughts of their own. How likely is it that they were not thus spared?

Any account of Wittgenstein's impact specifically on the philosophy of education must expect to run into problems. To begin with, what exactly is being asked for here? Is the question an empirical one, to do with what impact Wittgenstein has in fact had? Or is it inviting instead some speculation about or assessment of the ways in which Wittgenstein's thinking might have a bearing on the matter—that is, on philosophical enquiry into the nature, purposes, and problems of education?

The problems get worse when it comes to what is meant by the "philosophy of education". First, there is the familiar ambiguity in the term "philosophy"—between, on the one hand, philosophy as an academic subject and form of enquiry and, on the other, that more popular sense of the phrase where it expresses simply the favoured view of someone over some relatively broad principles of living ("My philosophy is that you should have a good time while you can"). In the latter sense, there is no great irony in speaking of the philosophy of Donald Trump. This sense needs to be taken seriously because it could indeed be asked what impact Wittgenstein has had on the philosophies (preferred principles, etc.) that as a matter of fact characterise policy in schools or universities. Given the

overwhelming dominance of the economic imperative, of instrumental reason, and of what has come to be called “performativity”¹ in prevailing philosophies of education, thus understood, and making the fairly safe assumption that Wittgenstein would have been appalled by all of this, it seems appropriate to conclude that his work has had no impact at all!

But, of course, the question of impact admits of a different approach, precisely if attention is turned to the philosophy of education as an aspect or element within philosophy as an academic subject. Now the equivocation here, between aspects and elements, is intentional because the relationship of the philosophy of education to mainstream philosophy is contested. Two familiar conceptions present themselves.

The first is that the philosophy of education is *a branch of philosophy*, akin to the philosophy of science or the philosophy of music. Branches address a field of concern that is relatively easily circumscribed, and they involve concepts and ways of reasoning that, although not entirely discrete and although derivative in some degree from the broad trunk of philosophical thought, are in some measure distinctive of that field. They are branches in that they grow from more fundamental and more central elements in philosophy—including, presumably, ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, and ontology. Branches sometimes relate to professional fields of practice and enquiry, and this would be so with the philosophy of education. Hence, it is not surprising that it is often seen in this way.

There are, however, serious problems with this view. In the first place, it would seem to be the case that there is no branch of philosophy that is *not* relevant to the philosophy of education in some way. The philosophy of science is relevant to teaching and learning in science, just as the philosophy of music has significance for music education. Indeed, probably the connections are wider than this observation implies, having a bearing, for example, on how the question of what might constitute a balanced education should be conceived. Furthermore, these branches, like all forms of enquiry, themselves involve education—the pursuit of learning within the subject—such that any separation of them *from* education must be artificial or at least unwieldy. A more important consideration, however, has to do with the nature of philosophy itself. If one thinks of central elements in the mainstream of philosophy, such as ethics and epistemology, for example, it is reasonably clear that they are concerned not just with the nature of the good or the nature of knowledge but with how one comes to live a good life and how one comes to know. In other words, questions of education, of teaching and learning, are already there at the heart of philosophy, as Wittgenstein’s work amply testifies, and as is testified also at the start of philosophy, in the work of Plato himself. Given the reach and intensity of philosophy’s concern with what it is to be a human being, how could this not involve questions about how we become what we are, which is to say questions about our education? In the light of this the puzzlement that is sometimes expressed by those in the mainstream of the discipline about the very idea of the philosophy of education is difficult to fathom.

The second common assumption regarding the philosophy of education is that it is *an applied field*. In some ways this is an attractive way of thinking, especially at a time when philosophy and the humanities more generally are under pressure to show their practical importance. Indeed, there should be no doubt about the desirability of considering central questions in education in a philosophical way. Yet there is also every reason for caution here about the idea of philosophy as something “applied”. The term is apt to be understood in relation to the pairing of “theory” and “practice”, with the implication that there is a clear separation between the two. This generates further a somewhat mechanistic conception of

what the work of philosophy might be: philosophy does the theory (conceived perhaps as conceptual analysis or theory-building), and then this is applied in practice. An extreme version of this view in relation to education was provided by John Wilson, who argued that the only thing that philosophy could do in respect of education was to clarify such basic concepts as teaching, learning, indoctrination, authority, and education itself—that is, to reveal their essential components—such that these would then provide the foundation for the development of educational policy and practice.² Proponents of such a view are inclined towards two vices. One is a kind of denial of responsibility—after all, it is simply the logic of education that is being revealed, and the philosopher is scarcely responsible for the way things are. The other is a characteristic *hauteur*: here is the philosopher doing the serious theoretical work, and there the practitioner—the teacher, the administrator—whose job will be to apply these ideas. It is obvious that this is to fall short of the practical reason that was advanced by Aristotle, just as it is to miss the inherent philosophical interest in teaching and learning as essential aspects of the human condition. The mechanistic response to the world encouraged by this dichotomisation of theory and practice generates confusion around both.

My own view, then, is that neither characterisation of the philosophy of education is sound. Philosophical questions are stubbornly there in educational practice, however much they may be veiled or blocked by the supposed assurances of “evidence-based” policy and practice, by rhetorical moves based on the whims of politicians, and by innovations identified and hyped by researchers over-eager to make their mark. Conversely, there is no getting around the fact that education raises questions at the heart of philosophy. The looseness of fit between the educational questions and the tidy categories of academic philosophy today has a parallel in contemporary failures of reception of Wittgenstein: his work plainly cuts across the boundary between ethics and epistemology, as with metaphysics and philosophy of mind, all of which is unpalatable to a professionalised philosophical culture bent on specialisation. So where does this leave us in considering Wittgenstein’s reception in the philosophy of education?

Wittgenstein’s influence on enquiry into education has been present for at least the past sixty years, and the work produced as a result has been diverse. A convenient starting-point for surveying this is provided by the publication in 2016 of a substantial volume, *A Companion to Wittgenstein on Education: Philosophical Investigations*, edited by Michael Peters and Jeff Stickney. The collection comprises some fifty chapters, grouped under the headings of “Biographical and Stylistic Investigations”, “Wittgenstein in Dialogue with Other Thinkers”, “Training, Learning and Education”, and “Religious and Moral Education”. These headings, however, give only a vague idea of the variety of papers the volume contains. The editors introduce the collection with a survey piece entitled “Journeys with Wittgenstein: Assembling Sketches of a Philosophical Landscape”. Mindful of the danger of omission, they provide a set of snapshots designed to give readers a sense of the regional lie of the land. Amongst the earlier developments described, beginning in the 1960s, there is the reference to Wittgenstein in the work of R.S. Peters and the “London School” (especially Robert Dearden and Paul Hirst)³, as well as currents of thought emanating in part from Swansea, encouraged particularly by Ieuan Lloyd.⁴ The influence of C.J.B. Macmillan in the United States is acknowledged, as is that of James D. Marshall in Australasia. The snapshots give way to a more sustained series of images, reflecting perhaps both the editors’ own entry into the field at that time and changing technologies of publishing that have affected the academic scene more generally. They refer especially to work by Nicholas Burbules, Michael

Peters, Paul Smeyers, Christopher Winch, and myself, and then, as it were, offer thumbnail sketches of the many authors writing about education who have taken up Wittgenstein's work in one way or another over the last two decades.⁵ Their ensuing introduction to the chapters extends this sense of widespread take-up of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

In the course of their discussion, connections are also made with other developments in thought, including pragmatism and poststructuralism. The connections with poststructuralism that the editors describe had little to do with the fantasies of postmodernism (a problematic term at its best) but related rather to common commitments and themes—in, for example, their anti-foundationalism, their insistence of the central importance of language, and their qualified relativisation of meaning to the language game. But in making these connections, there was some scope for a romanticisation of Wittgenstein's thought, and this was not always avoided. The alignment of Wittgenstein with liberal education was more credible and robust, yet not in the way that had been imagined by R.S. Peters and his contemporaries.

Peters had left a Readership in Philosophy at Birkbeck in 1961 and was to take up the Chair in Philosophy of Education at the London Institute of Education in 1962, spending the intervening year at Harvard working with Israel Scheffler, also a highly influential proponent of liberal education. He arrived at the Institute with a mission. What had passed as philosophical enquiry into education up to that time came now to be seen somewhat disparagingly as “the ideas of the great educators”, and this was to be contrasted with the rigour of the analytical methods that Peters was to introduce. It was partly under the pressures of criticism concerning the essential contestability of central terms in education that this methodology became modified. In fact, it was always mixed with influence of a quite different sort—the refashioning of a vision of liberal education, heavily inspired in part by Michael Oakeshott, but with connections to J.S. Mill and Immanuel Kant. This restatement gained purchase especially as a response to the enormous influence of progressivism (child-centredness) in the UK during the 1960s and early 1970s.⁶ Although the actual effects of progressivism in schooling were less systematic and more muffled than is sometimes imagined, this did not prevent it from becoming a virtual orthodoxy within teacher education and from gaining a significant political profile – initially as an emblem of the forward thinking of the 1960s but as the whipping-boy for a more reactionary politics a decade later. The restatement of the idea of a liberal education was levelled in part at what its proponents took to be progressivism's somewhat sentimentalised view of the child, the sloppiness of its conceptions of happiness, imagination, and growth, and, most centrally, its tendency to concentrate on the manner rather than the matter of education, in Peters' phrase. Central to the position of Peters and his colleagues was the view that the most important questions of education are to do with what it is that is to be passed on – in other words, with the content of the curriculum.

In the development of this defence of liberal education by the London School, Wittgenstein's philosophy was taken up in some degree, but it was understood primarily in terms of its contribution to concept-clarification, which in turn tended to be taken to involve the finding of necessary and sufficient conditions. There was a tendency to intellectualise his thinking such that the practical nature of language games and their diversity were misunderstood. There was an affinity, it was suggested, between the idea of the language game and that of a school subject. Moreover, the heavy emphasis on the importance of rational autonomy fell short of an appreciation of Wittgenstein's philosophy of mind. Commitment to some version of a liberal education certainly does not entail these

misinterpretations of Wittgenstein, as work undertaken within some of the other channels of reception named above demonstrates.

The substantial Foreword to *A Companion to Wittgenstein on Education*, written by David Bakhurst, amounts to an essay in its own right, and it merits consideration here. Bakhurst begins by asking what place education has in the human condition, taking this to be clearly an important matter for philosophy but also of more than theoretical significance: philosophers of education want to illuminate and advance the *practice* of education. How far, Bakhurst asks, does Wittgenstein help in this respect? Certainly, he avers, it is the case that Wittgenstein's work abounds with examples of learning and teaching, and interesting discussions have arisen as to how central this is to his philosophy. Thus, while David Hamlyn has argued that Wittgenstein's real interest is not so much in the learning but in the nature of what is learned, Meredith Williams has claimed that reflection on teaching and learning is internal to Wittgenstein's conceptions of language, of concept mastery, and of the distinction between the grammatical and the empirical. Bakhurst acknowledges the salience of these debates, but his conclusions are cautious, even somewhat negative. Wittgenstein cannot be "parlayed into a theorist of teaching and learning" (Bakhurst, 2017, pp. vi). The hint of animus in the expression here reflects, I suspect, the sense of a tendency within philosophy of education to take up practical issues and then to seek to legitimate the preferred line of argument by reference to a philosophical authority—a role for which Wittgenstein's philosophy, with its distinctive expression and memorable, if sometimes enigmatic aphorisms, may seem to some to be well suited. But the phrase "theorist of teaching and learning" is also to be called into question. Bakhurst's own work has drawn richly on Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner, both of whom can reasonably be considered theorists of this kind. It would indeed be a mistake to see Wittgenstein in those terms, but that is by no means the only way in which his relevance to enquiry into education can be conceived.

Bakhurst does go some way towards identifying contrasting views about how this might be done. Thus, David Hamlyn, he explains, takes the view that Wittgenstein's value for education lies in the dispelling of the Cartesian picture. For Michael Peters, its crucial element is its wholesale rejection of modernity, with the result that, following the lead of Richard Rorty and Jean-François Lyotard, Wittgenstein can be brought into dialogue with postmodernism and poststructuralism, in a questioning of knowledge, reason, and the self. Paul Smeyers and Al Neiman are cited as representatives of a Wittgensteinian critique of scientific rationality and defence of the spiritual against the technocratic excesses of the age, while my own work is described as opposing the systematic accounts favoured by psychologists of education and curriculum theorists in favour of perspicuous description of limited segments of practice.

On Bakhurst's own view, the most important aspects of Wittgenstein's legacy for education are two-fold. First, there is his account of following a rule, which lays the way for ideas of second nature, as developed especially by John McDowell. Second, there is the "existential drama" in Wittgenstein's philosophical writing and its manner of drawing the reader into the "movement of his thought—the unstinting struggling, questioning, doubting, proposing, conjecturing, agonizing—in a way that is profoundly authentic and unaffected" (p. xi). At one level it would be churlish to take issue with Bakhurst's emphasis on the importance of Wittgenstein's treatment of rule-following, but the point is put unduly under the spotlight here as the only substantive feature that is emphasised. Moreover, it might be argued that McDowell's development of the idea involves a degree of concentration or

narrowing that is not entirely in keeping with Wittgenstein's more multifarious purposes. The more stylistic second point, which is admittedly not without some substantive significance, is well taken, but it is made in terms that are suggestive and broad-brushed—perhaps inevitably in the context of what is after all a Foreword.

In what follows, I want to suggest further ways in which Wittgenstein's thought is important for education. To this end, and by way of illustration, I shall take forward a line of thought that has preoccupied me recently. This touches on the second of Bakhurst's points of emphasis.

Wittgenstein's importance for education

There is no question here of advancing theories, so perhaps an initial approach can be made by taking a *via negativa*. This will be a matter of considering what, in the light of Wittgenstein's work, should *not* be done. Where might this lead?

In the first place, Wittgenstein's work provides a critique of behaviourism. This is to target the kind of reductive behaviourism that was promoted in the psychology of learning, of which B.F. Skinner's influential work was exemplary. At an early stage this was attacked vehemently by R.S. Peters and his colleagues (Dearden, Hirst, and Peters, 2010). The psychology of learning has moved on from then, but reductivist tendencies now abound in conceptions of assessment mired in confused notions of objectivity. The debasement of the language of educational policy, the scientistic tendencies in theories of learning, and the dominance of performativity are all vulnerable to critique mounted on this basis. Naturally, this extends also to the debased vocabulary of standards and criteria (Standish, 1991, 2017). In recent years, behaviourism of a kind has been newly incarnated in simplistic adoptions and inflated expectations of neuroscience (Williams and Standish, 2016; Standish, 2013). There is reason also to advance Wittgensteinian arguments in criticism of the scientistic tendencies within educational research itself (Standish, 1995). Wittgenstein's images of thought that spins in mid-air or slides across the ice, as well as the idea of language going on holiday, are expressions of his suspicion of philosophy of a certain kind but also of the tendency towards misleading or bogus theorisation in other fields (Dunne, 1993). Obviously, this is pertinent to the exposure of jargon and to the identification of ways of thinking that have become ideological.

Wittgenstein's philosophy also opens the way to contributions of a more positive kind. Much has been written in service of better conceptions in education of knowledge and understanding, of language and the philosophy of mind, and of ethics and what it is to be a human being. There are important questions that have been raised, though they are still to be further pursued, regarding the complex ways in which Wittgenstein disturbs notions of subjectivity and objectivity— notions consolidated in the modern period but, in some respects, rendered more intractable in postmodernity, especially with the effects of new technology and social media. While the most entrenched subject-object dichotomies have mostly faded within philosophy itself, their trail-effects persist in everyday parlance, no less than in the languages of social science, therapy, and education itself (Smeyers, Smith, and Standish, 2006). A better articulation of the relations between subject and object, and subjectivity and objectivity, would provide more coherent ways of thinking about the nature of academic subjects themselves, the values inherent in them, and the means of assessment of learning within them, as well as dispelling some of the confusion around these matters in educational research. Indeed, this would bring with it a better sense of the idea of world itself, a notion so generally present and taken for granted yet peculiarly resistant to analysis.

It is partly in the light of these concerns, and in order to examine these matters more closely, that I propose now to narrow the focus, perhaps somewhat dramatically. In the remainder of this discussion, I shall draw on work I have undertaken recently that emanates from a consideration of Wittgenstein's remark "Nothing is hidden" (*Philosophical Investigations*, #435) and its surrounding context. In the end this will lead back to wider considerations.

Transparency and the relation of the inner to the outer

In many respects the phrase "Nothing is hidden" encapsulates the rejection of the idea of inner workings of the mind and adverts to the justifiably behaviouristic aspects of Wittgenstein's thought. Certainly, this is a mainstay of his opposition to the Cartesian picture, and there is every reason to endorse this. But what has interested me is the way that the phrase might easily be misconstrued as lending support to contemporary preoccupations with transparency in the public realm. Of course, there is good reason to expect transparency in public administration, but there is reason also to question how this is understood and its effects, especially perhaps in relation to education. Transparency is a feature of the culture of accountability and of performativity. The problem here is that formulaic statements of purpose and crude behavioural measures of outcomes are taken to demonstrate efficient and effective performance when in fact these sometimes obscure what matters most in the activity in question. In education, for example, it is a nostrum of some policy and inspection regimes that no teaching is taking place unless there is a behavioural outcome that is measured. Without formal assessment of this kind, no teaching can occur. This latter-day verificationism, a philosophy discredited long ago, installs or reinforces a misunderstanding of educational practice. It invites the dominance of technical reason and effects a displacement of judgement.

That Wittgenstein's position is more complex than my initial gloss has indicated, however, can be seen through closer attention to the paragraphs leading up to the remark—paragraphs, incidentally, that demonstrate something of the existential drama to which Bakhurst refers. Consider, then, the interlocutor's words here:

#431. "There is a gulf between an order and its execution. It has to be filled by the act of understanding."

"Only in the act of understanding is it meant that we are to do THIS. The *order*—why, that is nothing but sounds, ink-marks.—"

The voice is assertive, imploring the reader to hear the apparently obvious truth of what is claimed, and initially the response is withheld. The temptation to think that the words used must be accompanied by a mental process, an "act" of understanding, is amplified by the speaker's sense that an intense mental concentration, accompanied perhaps by a squinting of the eyes, is required in order to capture this: as the emphatic "THIS" implies, mere words could not do this. But this is followed, in the next paragraph, by a different, less imploring, and quieter tone:

#432. Every sign *by itself* seems dead. *What* gives it life?—In use it is *alive*. Is life breathed into it there?—Or is the *use* its life?

In the multifarious, dynamic mini-dramas of human practice, the sign is given context; without such use, it seems dead. Wittgenstein entertains the thought that use “breathes” life into it, only to disperse this in an alternative possibility: that the use *is* its life.

The longer paragraph that follows this one moves from the example of the giving of orders into a consideration of the nature of gesture. Wittgenstein seems to be thinking first of the kind of gesture of the hand that might accompany the speaker’s emphatic (and artificial and forced) utterance of “THIS”. But an implicit question lies in the background here of how gesture figures in ordinary life, of what importance it does assume:

#434. The gesture—we should like to say—*tries* to portray, but cannot do it.

Wittgenstein’s interlocutor is afflicted by the negative thought that gestures and words alike are doomed to a kind of inadequacy, existing only in a precarious relation to the grasping of inner meaning. But a more positive suggestion immediately ensues: this is that it is not exactly the purpose of words or gestures to “portray”, as if there must be some other mental operation with which they correspond, for the meaning is already there in their use.

In the next paragraph it is specifically the preoccupation with representation that comes into focus:

#435. If it is asked: “How do sentences manage to represent?”—the answer might be: “Don’t you know? You certainly see it, when you use them.” For nothing is concealed.

How do sentences do it?—Don’t you know? For nothing is hidden.

But given this answer: “But you know how sentences do it, for nothing is concealed” one would like to retort “Yes, but it all goes by so quick, and I should like to see it as it were laid open to view.”

Easing the anxiety, Wittgenstein leads the reader away from the question of representation and the characteristic way in which this is addressed. To abstract and isolate, say, the “general form of the proposition” is to adopt a methodology that will become the source of our problems. To imagine that there must be something concealed, something hidden, will be the cause of metaphysical confusion. This is not just the exorcism of ghostly aspects of his earlier vision, for the problems he exposes are endemic in the Western philosophical tradition, leaving their effects in popular consciousness. Wittgenstein tells us more:

#436. Here it is easy to get into that dead-end in philosophy, where one believes that the difficulty of the task consists in our having to describe phenomena that are hard to get hold of, the present experience that slips quickly by, or something of the kind.

Philosophy, then, has recurrently encouraged the all-too-human thought that reality lies just outside our ordinary grasp, that something lies hidden beneath the surface of our experience and language, and hence that ordinary language is too crude for our purposes. About a century earlier, Ralph Waldo Emerson had remarked, in his essay “Experience” of 1844: “I take this evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers then when we clutch hardest to be the most unhandsome part of our condition” (Emerson, 1983, p. 473). Emerson’s “clutch” and “slips through our fingers” anticipate Wittgenstein’s “hard to get hold of” and “slips quickly by”. And Emerson’s wilfully inelegant use of “unhandsome” would suggest “un-beautiful” but this in the manner of being clumsy,

implying that we do not handle things well or lose touch with the world. Emerson's cautionary remarks about clutching too hard align with Wittgenstein's suspicion of philosophy's dissatisfaction with ordinary language: both are at some distance from the presumptions of transparency characteristic of a scientific culture of accountability and performativity.

The task then is not to deny Wittgenstein's exposure of the mythology of the "inner process"—"Ever and again comes the thought that what we see of a sign is only the outside of something within, in which the real operations of sense and meaning go on" (*Zettel*, #140)—but to find the means to elucidate ways of thinking of the hidden, as of the outer and the inner, that do not succumb to the rejected metaphysics. As Sandra Laugier has argued, Wittgenstein does not deny the existence of an "inner", but rethinks and de-metaphysicalises this inner-outer dualism. He is interested in

the way inner and outer are, grammatically speaking, *articulated*; that is, the way we speak of an inner only if there is an outer, and vice versa. This . . . does away with the notion of an inner as something hidden, an inner with no outer, a *private* inner; as also with the notion (which could be attributed to him) of an inner "on its own" (Laugier, p. 2 of MS copy).

Elaborating on the point, she refers helpfully to the following passage from the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*: "But if we dispose of the inner process in this way,—is the outer one now all that is left?—the language-game of description of the outer process is *not* all that is left: no, there is also the one whose starting point is the expression" (*Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, Volume 1*, 659).

In his last writings, Wittgenstein develops his preoccupation with expression in new ways, and what he has to say opens avenues for thinking of the inner-outer relationship, and of the senses in which something can be concealed, in a manner that is not beleaguered by any lapse into the mythology that is under attack. Consider, then, the following thoughts. "When mien, gesture, and circumstances are unambiguous," Wittgenstein writes, "then the inner seems to me to be the outer; it is only when we cannot read the outer that the inner process seems to be hidden behind it" (*Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology, Volume 2*, p. 63). One sees the emotion or the thought in the surface of the signs, not as something that lies behind them. But the reading of the signs is itself something that can go awry: it is in the use of signs that ambiguity and deception, no less than clarity and sincerity, are realised. The deception lies within the range of signs and their use, not in something behind them. Hence, an education in signs opens the way not only to refinements of expression but to possibilities of thought and experience that would otherwise be closed. The signs are less the medium of expression than its element. Thus, "there is no such thing as outer mediated and inner unmediated evidence for the inner" (p. 67). Uncertainty does not at all refer to "what goes on in the inner: even if it does refer to the mental, the mental finds its expression in the bodily" (p. 68). In a sense, then, the mental does not precede the expression but rather is realised in it: that is, it is in the signs that the mental comes into its human form.

The mythology of the inner evokes a theatrical metaphor: that the signs are what the audience sees on the stage, while the backstage is the arena of mental operations; it is here that one finds thought itself, in relation to which what happens on the stage is nothing more than an outward show—and, of course, an arena of deception *par excellence*. Developing

similar thoughts, Wittgenstein also draws explicitly upon theatrical motifs. “That an actor can represent grief”, he writes, “shows the uncertainty of evidence, but that he can represent *grief* also shows the reality of evidence” (p. 67). The brilliant symmetry of the remark shows, first, that human signs are inherently available to pretence and deception of various kinds, without which the theatre would be inconceivable, and without which human life would not be what it is. The second clause suggests, I think, the inseparability of grief from its expression in the signs—that is, the signs that human beings use, *with* their availability to pretence and so on. The reality of human life depends upon this; it is part of the substance of what matters in that life, part of what grief is. Consider, then, also Wittgenstein’s striking reversal of the Cartesian image in the following: “The ‘inner’ [understood in terms of the mythology of the inner described above] is a delusion. That is: the whole complex of ideas alluded to by this word is like a painted curtain drawn in front of the scene of the actual word use” (p. 84, parenthesis added). Here the reality lies not in the back stage but in the surface play of signs, of the actors on the stage. The jargon of psychology might be, then, that painted curtain, hiding what we ordinarily say and do; belief in the mythological “inner” veils the reality of our life in those signs. And what other (human) life is there?

If this is right, it seems clear that what is at stake in those paragraphs of the *Investigations* that have been under attention here goes well beyond the exposure of the mythology of the inner. What is said there could not be construed as any unqualified assertion of transparency. The drama of the lines itself tests possibilities of expression, without which the refinement of what we can say and mean is scarcely conceivable.

How could the advent in a human life of those possibilities of expression *not* be central to education? The point here is certainly not blindly to endorse an education for creativity and the development of the imagination along the lines that were promoted in the heyday of progressive education. On the contrary, it is to recognise the opening of possibilities of expression that schooling can offer, especially in the initiation into diverse traditions of critical thought and practice—in short, a liberal education. Such traditions, if they are worthy of their name, are far from static: they depend upon criticism for their vitality, they depend upon their rival factions and disputes, as they do upon their avant-garde. And this variety of practices extends well beyond academic subjects as narrowly construed, certainly crossing any familiar academic-vocational divide.

It is important that such traditions are themselves constituted by signs, with those possibilities of expression described above. But a distinction can be drawn between those practices whose object of study is the natural world—that is, the physical sciences—and those whose focus is the lives and actions of human meanings—that is, above all, the humanities. The crucial difference consists here in the fact that the latter essentially involve attending to the meaning-making that constitutes human life and practice. As Peter Winch puts a similar point in *The Idea of a Social Science* (1958), the objects of study are self-interpreting and, let it be said, meaning-making beings. Sensitisation to the possibilities of meaningfulness and emptiness, to authenticity and pretence, and to reality and make-believe, can be developed in the humanities in especially intense ways.

It was said above that the availability of human signs to pretence and deception of various kinds was essential to acting in the theatre, and the significance of this is rather more far-reaching than is apparent at first blush: in fact, these factors are essential to the possibility of action at all. On the strength of this, it may be that there is a special importance to the exploration of meaningful expression that is provided by drama. Is this

not what Wittgenstein's distinctive exploitation of dramatic form might be taken to suggest? Contrary to the prevailing image of drama as an extra to the main curriculum (as not really serious, as a kind of play), it may be the case that, in an unparalleled way, it provides first-hand exploration (and potential acquisition) of a vocabulary of verbal and gestural expression, where this is not the outward manifestation of an already existing thought but the experience through which the grammar of such thoughts is discovered.⁷ Moreover, a similarly strong, related case can be made for education in film. The crucial thing about film, in this respect, is the manner in which the camera can attend to the behaviour of the actor, in a way that is far more intense than is the case with the theatre—where the flexing of a facial muscle, in close-up, can realise the difference between a smile of pleasure and a smile of amusement, of embarrassment or fear, capriciousness or contempt. It is this familiarity with the range of human expression and experience that great film acting and directing demonstrate, and it warrants the attention that film study can provide (Gibbs, 2017).

More important than all the above, however, is the way in which the line of argument pursued here might lead to a reappraisal of the initial acquisition of language, precisely Wittgenstein's starting point in the *Investigations*. His last writings draw out themes that are intimated in that text but often recessive. The small child's entry into language is not merely into a functional means of communication, nor adequately understood in terms of their coming into the awareness that they can say things about the world (cf. Rhees, 2006). It is also an entry into a circulation of signs that are available to multiple nuanced inflections of phrasing and gesture. Children learn to pretend as early as they learn to say and do things truly; indeed this might be definitional for what the entry into language entails. It is in the light of this that it is possible not just to lie or speak truthfully but to be evasive or defensive or forthright or indirect. And it is in such expression that human experience is realised and that the reality of the world comes to light.⁸

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¹ “Performativity” is the term coined by Jean-Francois Lyotard, borrowing J.L. Austin’s term but using it to narrower ends. Lyotard’s term denotes ways of thinking that prioritise efficient procedures to the neglect of the substance of what is done. Since his identification of the phenomenon, it has become amply evident in policy and practice in many fields, with the jargon of efficiency and effectiveness, and performance management. It is a feature of what has come to be known as “the culture of accountability”.

² See John Wilson (1979, 2003). For criticism, see Standish (2006).

³ The phrase “the London School” is one that has been applied in retrospect. In fact, Dearden and Hirst took up chairs respectively in Birmingham and Cambridge.

⁴ The Gregynog Philosophy of Education Conference, organised by the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain, was established by Ieuan Lloyd in 1981, and it has run every since, maintaining a partly Wittgensteinian orientation.

⁵ It is perhaps worth acknowledging that much work in the philosophy of education is thematic in style and sometimes more directly policy- or practice-related. As a result, it may well be the case that Wittgenstein or other philosophers appear in the course of argument rather than as the direct focus of concern or the main topic of the paper. This may sometimes escape the search engines.

⁶ For a range of socio-economic and political reasons, the rise of progressivism came later and more dramatically than in some other countries, but the reaction against it, again for similar extraneous reasons, also came quickly. Hence, the context of the UK shows some of the issues involved in interestingly sharp relief.

⁷ I have been helped in thinking about these matters by numerous conversations with Adrian Skilbeck. See his “Wittgenstein, Cavell, and the Register of Philosophy: Discerning Seriousness and Triviality in Drama Teaching” (Skilbeck, 2017).

⁸ An expanded version of the ideas developed in the final part of this paper is to be found in my ““Nothing but sounds, ink-marks”—Is nothing hidden? Must everything be transparent?”, *Danish Philosophy Yearbook*, 2018. Suzy Harris is thanked for comments on a draft of the present text. A version of this paper was presented at the British Wittgenstein Society Annual Conference, held at the University of Hertfordshire in July, 2017. I am grateful for comments received on that occasion.