
INTERPRETING THE SEVENTIES, OR,
RASHOMON MEETS EDUCATIONAL THEORY

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In the Oscar-winning 1951 movie, *Rashomon*, the great Japanese director Akira Kurosawa presented four different accounts of a violent murder committed by a bandit. The philosophical impetus behind the film, no doubt, was to raise issues about the inevitability of subjectivity and the impossibility of objectivity. The articles in the volumes of *Educational Theory* from 1970 to 1979 — while less dramatic — raise similar thorny issues when a reviewer turns to make a historical assessment. Following Kurosawa's lead, I shall give a number of different accounts of the philosophy of education of that decade, but I shall depart from his admirable example in one crucial respect: While the four accounts of the crime that he gives are incompatible (hence raising the dilemma of locating the "objective truth"), I shall attempt to finesse the issue by giving accounts that are *different* but *compatible*. (Also, the accounts to some degree will be *overlapping*, for some writings of the period that fit into one account readily could have fitted into others.)

Before embarking on this daunting agenda, it will be as well to provide the bare descriptive statistics. The ten volumes (forty issues) published in this decade contain 372 essays and responses, plus 52 essay reviews; the individual mentioned most frequently in the essay titles (a somewhat misleading feature, as the titles are not always fully revealing of the contents) is — not surprisingly — John Dewey, who is named twenty-six times; distant runners-up include (in no particular order) Kohlberg, Piaget, Plato, Locke, Hegel, Scheffler, Wertheimer, Heidegger, Buber, Nietzsche, and many other philosophers, philosophers of education, and theorists who also were mentioned once or twice at most. Moral education, rights, and values are quite often referred to in titles (fifteen times or more); teacher education, curriculum, the structure of knowledge, and educational research and evaluation are referred to less frequently; and — of course — there are a few essays on the nature of philosophy of education itself. Philosophical analysis and ordinary language philosophy are represented (both in titles, and in the style of many of the essays), as is the broad existentialism-phenomenology axis; a handful of essays were written by intellectual historians or historians of American education (reminding us that the journal is not devoted solely to philosophy of education). But the contents of the journal covered a huge terrain: Hindu philosophy was the subject of one essay, as was the sex act as a metaphor for teaching; perhaps the most unusual essay of the period appeared in Winter 1977 — a mathematical treatment of the "golden rectangle" pattern exemplified in the (then) cover of the journal, which was a spiral arrangement of rectangles (which almost had the dimensions of squares) of descending size.

As to be expected, the bulk of the contributions came from the United States and Canada, but there is some representation from Australia and New Zealand (including Antipodeans who were pursuing doctorates in the United States or Canada); an almost vanishingly small number of essays came from Europe, Great Britain, Asia, and Africa. No one author dominates the ten volumes, but a dozen or so have two contributions (neglecting some minor "responses"), and about the same number have three or four contributions: Donald Arnstine, LeRoi (L.B.) Daniels, William Doll, C.D. Hardie, Christopher J. Lucas, Jane Roland Martin, James McClellan, Nel Noddings, David Nyberg, Hugh Petrie, Francis Schrag, Ken Strike, and Donald Vandenberg. I was surprised to find myself among this latter group, but — appealing to the principle that conflict of interest should be avoided — I shall make no reference to my own work in the discussions that follow. One phenomenon struck me so forcefully while perusing the early volumes that I was drawn into the following statistical exercise: In the two volumes (eight issues) covering 1970 and 1971, by my count there were a total of 79 essays and responses (I exclude essay reviews as these did not always indicate the institutional affiliation of the author), and of these 25 were written by individuals whose affiliation was outside of Schools of Education — and of these, 18 (almost 23% of the total essays for the period) were written by scholars who held positions in Departments of Philosophy, a number not approached in recent years.

What is to be made of this diverse scene? Does it indicate a healthy breadth of interest, or is it indicative of a lack of focus? Did issues of central educational importance get aired? Were the great social issues of the day teased out and discussed? Do the essays indicate that the philosophers of education of the 1970s (who, in numerous cases, also are among the philosophers of education of the new millennium) were at the cutting edge, philosophically or educationally speaking? Do the various essays constitute a legacy upon which contemporary philosophy of education is building? It is to issues such as these that the analysis must now turn, and as indicated above, I shall present a number of different accounts or narratives about the work produced during the 1970s.

THE FIRST NARRATIVE

The task of future philosophy is to clarify men's ideas as to the social and moral strifes of their own day. Its aim is to become so far as is humanly possible an organ for dealing with these conflicts (John Dewey).¹

The decade of the seventies saw momentous social and political events, even if our attention remains focused upon only the United States; many of these had significance for both philosophy and education (whether or not this potential was realized). Just before the decade began, humans landed on the Moon. The early years of the period saw the Vietnam conflict, the attendant widespread student "unrest"

1. John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, enlarged ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948), 26.

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at universities, the infamous My Lai massacre and subsequent trial of Lt. William Calley, the Watergate break-in, and the fall of Richard Nixon; it was also the period of "Nixon in China." Chile was rocked by the coup that led to the bloody Pinochet dictatorship — an event with which the United States seems to have been heavily involved. The "Women's Movement" and the "Gay Liberation Movement" continued to gather strength, and the "American Indian Movement" became militant. In the middle of the decade the death penalty was reintroduced; and shortly before this the first international oil crisis occurred, and also the Yom Kippur war. Divorce, crime, and drug use were on the increase throughout the decade, and the threat of nuclear extermination was ever-present. Finally, the end of the decade saw a very high rate of inflation, with attendant economic and social and political consequences (arguably, the inflation rate led to the election of Ronald Reagan and the imposition of "Reaganomics" with its massive social impact during the subsequent decade).

According to Dewey's desideratum cited above, the philosophers of education of the period (including yours truly), were abrogating their professional responsibility — for these tumultuous events left little trace on the essays published in *Educational Theory* during the decade. There were a small handful that started out in a promising way, but which quickly lapsed into irrelevancy (as judged by Dewey's remark); only another small handful would pass his muster.

One essay — it will be a "placeholder" for several that I came across — took as its point of departure the pressing social problems of the age; it was co-authored by a professor of philosophy and a professor of social foundations of education, and it was titled "Missing: A Viable Aim for American Education."² The opening lines are promising enough:

Never have America's problems been so numerous and complex and grave, and never have so many thoughtful people felt so helpless and hopeless in the face of their problems....Now that we are engulfed by problems which threaten to overwhelm us — now that we are in the throes of an extremely serious ecological crisis, that we have the Bomb, that the population increases at a rate which spells disaster, that approximately one-half of one percent own a full third of the national wealth (while more than twenty times this number starve), that we are living in a period of unprecedented collective violence, that we find ourselves entangled in one war after another — we are finally realizing that technology-aided, capital-induced industrial growth has been at least as menacing as benefiting.³

Here the promise ends. The authors go on to assert, without any justificatory argument or analyses of these considerable problems and their root causes, that the present crisis is at bottom due to the fact that "we" do not share a common humane outlook. For the "common or democratic faith" has proven to be inadequate, largely because so many groups in American society have been excluded from participation in the mainstream.

The solution they offer, again without what would seem to be the necessary argument or analysis, is that educators should adopt a "humanistic, individual-oriented conception of education." Influenced by the work of Abraham Maslow

2. A. Berry Crawford and Warren R. Brown, "Missing: A Viable Aim for American Education," *Educational Theory* 21, no. 4 (Fall 1971): 407-17.

3. *Ibid.*, 407.

(which they discuss for some pages), they say that "We believe that the ultimate aim of education should be this: to provide a full and an equal opportunity for all persons to lead self-actualizing lives."⁴

There follows a brief discussion of the importance of granting a certain degree of freedom to the preschool child, and of the necessity for individuals to adopt two important principles of social morality, namely the principles of beneficence and egalitarian justice. How all of this is to be achieved is not addressed, nor is it shown that — in a world where all this was achieved — the problems with which they opened would be alleviated!

Note that I am not arguing against the importance of the principles that they enunciated; the problem is that there is an immense gap between the problems and the proffered solution — the difficult details, of which there are (or were) an overwhelming number, are never considered. But one might ask, of what worth is a "solution" whose mode of application in the prevailing concrete conditions has not been addressed? The reigning "strifes" of the day *are* rooted in the concrete conditions, and a "solution" that is abstract — as Dewey constantly reminds us — is not likely to capture many imaginations. As he put it in *The Quest for Certainty*,

Experimental knowledge [as opposed to the purely theoretical] is a mode of doing, and like all doing takes place at a time, in a place, and under specifiable conditions in connection with a definite problem.... Thinking, carried on inside the head, can make some headway in forming the *plan* of the building. But it takes actual operations to which the plan, as the fruit of thought, gives instrumental guidance to make a building out of separate bricks.⁵

Philosophers of education who wish to live up to the spirit of the desideratum quoted at the outset of this section cannot afford to ignore the difficult details of application, a moral that I daresay we have not sufficiently internalized thirty years after the appearance of this particular essay in *Educational Theory*. And, just as crucially, we need to warrant our claims that the solutions we offer really are solutions, and are not merely the equivalent of snake oil.

Another essay that takes as its starting point one of the "strifes" of the day is Walden Crabtree's "An Age of Irrelevancy."⁶ It is one of several works appearing in the journal about this time that focus upon the issues facing institutions of higher learning as a result of the student militancy that arose largely in connection with opposition to the Vietnam war and the draft. The essay's title nicely captures the author's main focus, which he elaborates more fully as follows:

Currently, man's search for relevancy is strident and ubiquitous. Ontologically, relevancy is sought but apparently does not exist in sufficient amounts to satisfy those who seek nor to diminish demands for relevance. Thus, it is not surprising that writers are turning to problems of relevance and cognate concerns — student unrest, campus upheaval, and the search for meaning in general.⁷

4. *Ibid.*, 410.

5. John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*, in *The Later Works*, vol.4., ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 82, 91.

6. Walden B. Crabtree, "An Age of Irrelevancy," *Educational Theory* 21, no. 1 (Winter 1971): 33-41.

7. *Ibid.*, 33.

In the essay the author “examines the language of relevance” and attempts to uncover “the logic-in use” [sic] in the hopes of bringing

a better sense of direction to the search for relevance as well as a diminution of anxiousness to students, teachers, parents, and priests who in some way or another struggle to avoid being subjected to irrelevancy or derided as irrelevant.⁸

Thus, this essay certainly is “relevant” to Dewey’s desideratum — in the light of this, it is precisely the sort of thing that philosophers should be writing. My criticism of the essay, then, is not what it attempts to do, but with how it does it and with the conclusion that it reaches; in other words I exercise the philosopher’s prerogative to disagree with the arguments of other philosophers! Crabtree argues that relevancy is a particular type of meaning, and from there it is a short step to the conclusion that it is a personal thing — one person’s relevance, like one person’s “meaning,” is another person’s irrelevance. No one can give another person answers to his or her most pressing personal questions, rather, “Today it is a teacher’s job to teach that there is no absolute relevance and that if relevance is found, it will be the individual seeker that selects it for himself or remains without it.”⁹

This seems a little too easy, and it allows teachers at all levels, but particularly those at universities, to get off the hook a little too readily. To use a more recent example with which my own institution was prominently involved, I can imagine what would have happened if university faculty had said to students demonstrating about the cultural one-sidedness — and hence “irrelevance” to many — of the “Western civilization” requirements common in the 1980s, that “relevance is a matter for students to worry about and that it should not concern faculty!” The point is, the intellectual goals of the faculty can often be achieved by using material that is also quite relevant (in a comparatively straightforward sense) to the sociopolitical environment in which students find themselves; it is setting up a false dualism to assert that faculty interests and student demands for relevance are at odds with each other, a matter about which Dewey waxes lyrical — or as lyrical as he ever gets — in “The Child and the Curriculum.”¹⁰

The problem with Crabtree’s essay is that he makes no effort to clarify the “problematic situation” (to stick with Deweyan terminology); he does not discuss the precise criticisms that militant students made of the university curriculum of the day, and whether these were well-founded. For it is arguable that the students were demanding a curriculum that brought forward for examination important ethical, political, and social questions with which, it is not unreasonable to expect, a university education would equip them to grapple. Crabtree’s essay is, in effect, turning the blame for unrest back on those who were protesting — they were protesting because, as individuals, they were not thoughtful or responsible enough!

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., 41.

10. John Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum* and *The School and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

A similar stratagem is detectable in several other essays published in *Educational Theory* during this decade; political militants were threatening the university from within, and it was entirely *their* fault, as the university was — and should be — an “ivory tower.” The fact that this itself was a sociopolitical position was unrecognized by the authors concerned, who seemed to believe that the mission of institutions of higher education was some sort of Platonic absolute that was not up for negotiation; nor does it seem to have been questioned whether the universities — even accepting for the sake of argument that the ideal of neutrality and disengagement was unproblematic — were *actually* neutral in their stance, or whether in fact they were in some subtle way supporting one political position over others. (In other words, the postmodernist issue of the politicization of all knowledge was not “on the screen” for these authors, although it was certainly nascent in the position of many militant students.) Another striking representative of this position is, in fact, the very essay that follows the one by Crabtree, namely, “Thinkers and Quacks: The Class Interest of the School” by Harry Neumann.¹¹ The author does not mince words:

By nature an “ivory tower,” a true school is the most unpolitical institution imaginable.... The contemporary disintegration of schools in liberal democracies springs more from internal, academic politicization than from the usual external threats.... The main threat to academic freedom comes from academic militants prepared to disrupt and even kill in their crusading zeal.¹²

In the contemporary world, this threat comes from “Leftist quacks on our campuses.”¹³ Nowhere in this essay, however, does Neumann address the validity of the concerns of the “quacks” — concerns that were literally life or death matters in the context of the time.

THE SECOND NARRATIVE

In keeping with the very limited meaning given in this paper to the term philosophy, it will be sufficient to answer the question of its proper content by pointing to logic, epistemology, metaphysics, aesthetics, ethics, and value theory in general. The problems taken up in these disciplines are philosophical problems. This means that a philosophy of education to be genuinely philosophical must at one stage or another study, talk about, or refer to these problems as they are formulated in the philosophical disciplines.... The important point to be reiterated here is that this requirement — which entails a rather thorough competence in philosophy — cannot be evaded (Harry Broudy).¹⁴

It does not follow from Harry Broudy's criterion that philosophers of education must slavishly follow the lead of “pure” philosophers; indeed, it can be argued that applied fields such as education might, indeed, throw up issues that lead the traditional branches of philosophy (such as moral and political philosophy, or epistemology) in new and very fruitful directions. This is certainly illustrated in our own time, where phenomena related to schooling throw into stark relief the disputes over individual versus collective or communal rights, and the rights of parents over

11. Harry Neumann, “Thinkers and Quacks: The Class Interest of the Schools,” *Educational Theory* 21, no. 1 (Winter 1971): 42-49.

12. *Ibid.*, 43.

13. *Ibid.*, 49.

14. Harry S. Broudy, “How Philosophical Can Philosophy Of Education Be?” in *What is Philosophy of Education?* ed. Christopher J. Lucas (London: Macmillan, 1969), 115-16.

and above those of children (which is not to say that only educational contexts raise such issues), disputes that are extremely rich philosophically and to the elucidation of which some philosophers of education have made notable contributions.¹⁵ But Broudy is suggesting that philosophers of education ought to be doing *good philosophy*, and philosophy that is *relevant* to the issues judged as important in the “home” discipline.

It is my impression that the ten volumes of *Educational Theory* in the 1970s earn a fair, but not stellar, grade when judged according to this criterion. Consider what was happening in the professional philosophy of the period: The key books and journal articles are, literally, too numerous to mention, on top of which English translations of key contemporary works from the Continent — as well as French, German and Greek classics — were appearing with regularity; in a real sense Plato, Hegel, and Nietzsche were as much a part of the intellectual landscape of the 1970s as were Popper, Rawls, and Habermas. Even to give a partial list of the philosophers who were actively working (or who were actively discussed) during this decade is breathtaking — Adorno, Barthes, Bernstein, Dennett, Derrida, Dworkin, Feyerabend, Fodor, Foucault, Gadamer, Gellner, Goodman, Habermas, Heidegger, Husserl, Kuhn, Lakatos, Marcuse, Nozick, Popper, Putnam, Rawls, Rorty, Searle, Quine!

What, then, was the state of play in *Educational Theory*? Another statistical exercise might throw some initial light here; focusing on the four issues of the last volume of the decade (1979) — a choice I hoped might maximize the number of philosophers of the decade who were referenced — I counted the number of essays (but not book reviews) in which the philosophers listed above, and other major philosophers I did not mention there, were cited at least once. (To allay the reasonable suspicion that I might have “cooked the books” here, I should stress that this minor piece of empirical research did not occur to me until after I had produced the actual list of names.) There were 33 essays and responses in this volume, of which five (15%) were written by authors from philosophy departments. The results are as follows: From my list above — Adorno, 1; Bernstein, 1; Derrida, 1; Goodman, 1; Habermas, 1; Heidegger, 1; Husserl, 1; Marcuse, 1; Rawls, 4; Searle, 1; and the remainder, zero. Others not on my initial list — Althusser, 1; Apel, 1; Aristotle, 1; Black, 1; Chomsky, 1; Cranston, 1; Dewey, 12; Emmet, 1; Flew, 1; Frankena, 2; Giddens, 1; Gouldner, 1; Gramsci, 1; Harman, 1; Hart, 1; Hobbes, 1; James, 1; Kant, 1; Laudan, 2; Lewis, 1; Marx, 1; Merleau-Ponty, 1; Mill, 1; Passmore, 1; Polanyi, 2; Russell, 2; Sartre, 1; Scheffler, 1; Sidgwick, 1; Toulmin, 1; White, 1; Williams, 1; Wittgenstein, 2. (A very small number of relatively minor philosophical pieces were not counted.) The lists are interesting, and one feature about the numbers is quite informative: only four of the essays published in this year account for just over half of the results (one of them cited about fifteen of the individuals named above), which means that philosophers are cited rather sparsely in the remaining twenty-nine essays (an average of a little over one per essay, as seven essays or responses contained no philosophical references at all)!

15. See, for example, Eamonn Callan, *Educating Citizens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Broadening attention to the whole decade of the 1970s, apart from the issue of which philosophers were or were not cited, a feature of the essays that stood out for me was the different approaches to philosophy that were adopted by the authors — in other words, the philosophical allegiances of the authors. The divisions among the contributors to *Educational Theory* that struck me as I revisited the seventies paralleled those that I came across at the annual meetings of the Philosophy of Education Society, which I attended regularly after my migration from Australia in late 1974. The “folk lore” of the Society at that time was that in the early 1960s Continental philosophy had dominated, and analytical philosophy was pursued in a semi-clandestine way, after-hours in hotel rooms when small groups of like-minded folk gathered to read and discuss papers. By 1974 the situation had changed; analytic approaches seemed to dominate, but an uneasy truce had been worked out so that papers representing both traditions were given a place on the program. But the groups had little overt contact, and generally “talked past” each other. It struck me that this situation was reflected in the journal, as I revisited it after all these years. I discovered that there were lively — even sometimes rather intemperate — exchanges in print, but they were “within group” rather than “between-group” exchanges (showing that sometimes one has more to fear from one’s friends than from one’s enemies). I shall give a brief account of one series of encounters from each group by way of illustration.

To start with the Continental tradition (this, I realize, is a somewhat unnuanced label, but as I am far from expert in this field of philosophy, it will have to suffice): In 1973, J. Richard Wingerter, then a graduate student in Educational Foundations in the University of Calgary, published a long essay with the fighting title “Pseudo-Existential Writings in Education.”¹⁶ His charge was serious, and his essay attempted to back it up with numerous citations both from the primary as well as the secondary sources:

A review of so-called “existential” writings in education periodicals leaves one with a felt need to point out some very serious flaws in what self-styled existentialist philosophers are attempting to do. In every one of the articles I looked at there is blatant misuse of existential terminology that accompanies the claim of authors to be applying existential thinking to education, a misrepresentation of the views of prominent thinkers, as well as a general lack of understanding of what existential thinking is about.¹⁷

Several issues later, Donald Vandenberg replied, and later Wingertner replied to him.¹⁸ The next contributions that I tracked came from John Scudder, Jr. (whose 1968 essay had been one of those criticized by Wingerter),¹⁹ and from Vandenberg again — the opening of his second response is worth quoting both to convey something of the tone, as well as the content, of the exchanges:

16. J. Richard Wingerter, “Pseudo-Existential Writings in Education,” *Educational Theory* 23, no. 3 (Summer 1973): 240-59.

17. *Ibid.*, 256.

18. Donald Vandenberg, “Who is ‘Pseudo?’” *Educational Theory* 24, no. 2 (Spring 1974): 183-93 and J. Richard Wingerter, “Not Who, But What, is ‘Pseudo?’” *Educational Theory* 24, no. 3 (Summer 1974): 291-96.

19. John Scudder, Jr., “Why Buber Would Not Endorse a Pseudo-Existentialist,” *Educational Theory* 25, no. 2 (Spring 1975): 197-201.

In his rebuttal in the Summer 1974 issue of this journal to my rejoinder in the Spring issue to his earlier critique of "pseudo-existential writings" in education, J. Richard Wingerter made the following statement: "Vandenberg's talk about Heidegger's lower case 'b' and the ontological surely misses the point. Heidegger simply avoided the traditional approach to the ontological with his small letter 'b' but he didn't use it to deny the reality which is Being" (p. 292). Because the translators of Heidegger invariably use an *upper* case of "B" to translate Heidegger's *Sein* as *Being*, I assume Wingerter's source for his statement of Heidegger's approach was *my* statement in the rejoinder: "Heidegger's *Sein* should be translated with a lower case 'b' to maintain his intent" (p.187).²⁰

A few months later, Irvin Rice published a defense of David Denton (who had been another of Wingerter's "victims").²¹ In the midst of all this, there also appeared a fairly long essay aimed at clarifying the nature of phenomenology (whether this effort had been stimulated in part by Wingerter's account of existentialism is not clear).²² What is clear, however, is that all of these authors were steeped in the scholarly philosophical sources, and were engaged with questions of exegesis that clearly deeply mattered to them.

My example from the other tradition also illustrates the intensity with which issues were pursued, as well as giving a sense of what preoccupied the minds of many analytic philosophers of education. Just before the start of the decade, the Australian philosopher of education, James Gribble, published a textbook with Allyn and Bacon, *Introduction to Philosophy of Education* (1969).²³ The book was designed, so the author said, "in order to get students *doing* philosophical analysis of educational concepts and arguments rather than merely reading *about* the activity."²⁴ The work was marked by a clear and lively style, and it covered the essential ground of the analytic philosophy of education that was emerging at the time — the concept of education; teaching versus instructing, conditioning, and indoctrination; the "logic" of forms of knowledge; needs; intelligence and creativity; authority; equality; and moral education. (Most of these topics also are discussed in the journal during the seventies.) Gribble's text had, significantly for the exchange that followed, a section on a distinction that had been under relatively intense discussion during the sixties, namely "knowing how" versus "knowing that" — this distinction had been brought to attention by Gilbert Ryle's important philosophical book *The Concept of Mind*, an extract from which had appeared in one of the earliest volumes of readings in analytical philosophy of education edited by Israel Scheffler in 1958.²⁵ "Knowing how" covers such cases as knowing how to juggle, and "knowing that" covers things such as knowing that the square root of nine is three. Chief among the matters discussed at the time was whether one side of the distinction collapsed into the other

20. Donald Vandenberg, "Reply to Wingerter," *Educational Theory* 25, no. 2 (Spring 1975): 202.

21. Irvin K. Rice, "Pedagogic Theory and the Search for Being: Denton's Direction in the Epistemology of Education," *Educational Theory* 25, no. 4 (Fall 1975): 389-96.

22. Russell Dennis, "Phenomenology: Philosophy, Psychology, and Education," *Educational Theory* 24, no. 2 (Spring 1974): 142-54.

23. James Gribble, *Introduction to Philosophy of Education* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1969).

24. *Ibid.*, Preface.

25. Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson, 1949) and Israel Scheffler, ed., *Philosophy and Education: Modern Readings* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1958).

— did “knowing that” the square root is such-and-such reduce to “knowing how” to arrive at the square root? (Or, could you “know how” to calculate it, if you didn’t “know that” something-or-other?) I have not seen much discussion of this issue in recent years (perhaps decades!) but in the late sixties and early seventies, the universe seemed to revolve around this and similar issues (as many of the essays in *Educational Theory* bear witness).

Gribble thought that Ryle had not been clear enough on whether the distinction collapses, but he noted there were passages that suggested that “knowing how” was the key aspect. Ryle’s work was blameworthy, for it had misled philosophers of education, and Gribble spent a few pages discussing an essay by Jane Roland (later better known to the philosophy of education community as Jane Roland Martin) who, he said, mistakenly developed an account of “knowing that” in terms of dispositions to behave:

Our objections to Roland’s dispositional account of “knowing that” go further than this, however. Not merely does she want to reduce “knowing that” to “knowing how,” her most serious error is to translate “knowing that” sentences into a very *limited* range of “knowing how” sentences — into “knowing how to answer a question or state a fact.” It is this restriction which leads her into errors very similar to those which we have described in Bloom’s *Taxonomy*.²⁶

In 1971, the journal published a brief essay by the philosopher Michael Martin (who did not reveal his relationship to Jane Roland), who gave a spirited defense of Roland and who claimed that Gribble had misrepresented her position — she was chiefly discussing, not Ryle, but another philosopher’s position on this distinction and in fact her own view was close to that enunciated by Gribble (as a careful reading of her essay would have indicated). So once again the issue at stake in the dispute was one of exegesis, although it is also clear from the tone of Michael Martin’s piece that to be accused of reducing “knowing that” to “knowing how” amounted to a philosophical insult. The degree of heat in the dispute is readily apparent in the ending to Martin’s essay: “One may conclude, I believe, that Gribble’s criticisms are wide of the mark because of serious misunderstandings and distortions. One can only wonder whether the other philosophers discussed in Gribble’s book have been so ill-handled as Jane Roland.”²⁷

Gribble, of course, felt compelled to reply to this, and his “Professor Martin and Professor Roland” appeared in Winter 1972.²⁸ He correctly noted that “no philosophical issue” seemed to be at stake, for Martin had not challenged his account of “knowing how” and “knowing that.” But he counterattacked by saying that “Upon examination Professor Martin’s paper may be found to be riddled with mistakes and distortions far more culpable than my own.”²⁹ There followed his own exercise in exegesis, but he seemed to acknowledge that Roland’s view was a little more nuanced

26. *Ibid.*, 63.

27. Michael Martin, “Gribble on Roland’s Analysis of Knowledge,” *Educational Theory* 21, no. 1 (Winter 1971): 104.

28. James Gribble, “Professor Martin and Professor Roland,” *Educational Theory* 22, no. 1 (Winter 1972): 109-14.

29. *Ibid.*, 109.

than he had previously indicated — although he also restated his view that it is deeply inadequate to hold that “knowing P is reducible to knowing how to state P” (something more is needed — such as the offering of relevant evidence for P — for otherwise correctly stating P could be merely a lucky guess).³⁰

So much for the “within group” philosophical disputes during the decade; below I shall turn to an assessment of the contribution of the analytic movement to the clarification of *educational* issues. But several things remain to be said about the philosophical standing of the essays published during the seventies.

First, I should report that I came across a number of essays that I found to be philosophically interesting, including ones on such topics as Aristotelean thought, the dispute between Bertrand Russell and Boyd Bode, a comparison of John Dewey and Bertrand Russell, Hegel as a philosopher of education, children’s rights, and equality of opportunity. Second, insofar as the life of philosophy is marked by discussions and exchanges between individuals, its life during this decade was quite vibrant — for replies or rebuttals (including some “counter-replies”) frequently appeared in the pages of the journal (although most exchanges were not quite as charged as the ones discussed above). According to my analysis, of the 372 contributions to the journal during this decade (excluding book reviews), some 53 (a little over 14%) were responses although not all of them were identified as such in their titles.

The third and final issue here can also serve as a segue into the following section; I raise it in a slightly circuitous fashion. During the decade under examination, chinks in the armor of analytic philosophy of education started to appear. A group of young philosophers from the antipodes of Leftist disposition (not, I hasten to add, including the present writer) coined the rather disrespectful acronym “APE”; in Britain, Richard Peters was criticized by radical students who argued that his so-called “neutral” analysis of the concept of education was in fact laden with class-based value assumptions, and his ordinary-language approach was also vigorously critiqued by “pure” philosophers.³¹ In the pages of *Educational Theory* the critique is best represented by a philosophically prescient essay by Abraham Edel, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy in the City University of New York; the piece was written for a conference in 1971 but appeared in the issue for Spring 1972 (although arguably the defects he pointed to were not generally appreciated for a decade or more). In essence, Edel raised the issue of the sterility and lack of practical impact of analytic philosophy of education, which he argued had become “a ‘school,’ with all the philosophical disadvantages of hardening lines of division, attack and counter-attack.”³² He wrote:

30. *Ibid.*, 111.

31. See the exchange between Peters, Woods, and Dray, reprinted in *The Philosophy of Education*, ed. R.S. Peters (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

32. Abraham Edel, “Analytic Philosophy of Education at the Crossroads,” *Educational Theory* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1972): 132.

The basic diagnosis lies deeper. Analytic method was given a certain cast by the dogmas it inherited from logical positivism. There was a sharp separation of philosophical analysis from empirical inquiry, the sharp separation of the analytic from the normative, and the sharp separation of the analytic from genetic-causal accounts....Analysis here can call its own tune without being brought to account till it is finished. The risk it runs is having a beautiful elaborate formal system that serves no purpose after it is built!³³

Edel argued that the remedy was for a "fuller integration of the empirical, the normative, and the contextual (especially the sociocultural) *within* the analytic method"³⁴ — a position that strikes the present writer as strongly reminiscent of Deweyan pragmatism's dislike of dualisms, and the later work of Richard Rorty.³⁵ And there is ample evidence in the pages of the journal during this decade — although I shall refrain from citing specific instances — that Edel's charge of irrelevance was on the right track. But there were points of light that should not be overlooked, as I shall attempt to illustrate in the following section.

THE THIRD NARRATIVE

The Annual Conference of PESGB...should be an annual reinforcement of our common endeavour. It should remind ourselves, and show those joining our company, how philosophical reflection can illuminate important educational issues. The issues come first. They are what gives us our distinctiveness among fellow-philosophers (John White).³⁶

From an educational perspective, the 1970s were packed with material that provided potential grist for the philosophy of education mill. To merely scratch the surface: It was an era still marked by forced busing, and near the middle of the decade there was the "Lau Decision" from the Supreme Court concerning bilingual education. There were debates over behavioral objectives and mastery learning, and over fair selection criteria; Skinner was still widely read, and the fallout from Jensen's work on heritability of IQ (and possible racial differences in IQ) continued; the structure of knowledge was still discussed, as were the curricula that were (roughly) based on Bruner's views about this; Kohlberg's work on moral development was stimulating great interest; open education was "on the screen," as was the education of the urban poor. The decade also saw a rising tide of interest in the methodology of evaluation of educational and social programs, and information-processing models of human cognition were receiving attention.

The journal fares moderately well, at best, on White's criterion, for during the 1970s by my estimation there were somewhat less than a score of essays whose focus was upon one or other topic of this general ilk, and the reading of which might have helped to clarify the thinking of non-philosophically oriented colleagues in education (although I hazard the guess that, unfortunately, this corpus of work did not in general come to their attention). Once again I excluded book reviews from this tally,

33. *Ibid.*, 133.

34. *Ibid.*

35. I have in mind, of course, John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1966); the last chapter of Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); and the papers on pragmatism in Part 1 of Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

36. John White, "The 1999 PESGB Conference: A Suggestion," *Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain Newsletter*, 1998, 16.

although often I found these to be of great interest and written in a lively style. (Books selected for review covered a fascinating variety of subjects — quite often non-philosophical — and I wondered about the editorial policy that had led to their selection.)

I have selected two of these essays for further (although brief) discussion, in order to indicate the kind of contribution that philosophers of education were making — and how they made it. I suggest that these works show that not all works of analytic philosophy of education are guilty of the charge made by Edel (although it is important to note that he was careful not to claim that *all* analytic works in education suffered from irrelevance or from decontextualization). Needless to say I do not necessarily agree with the conclusions reached by the authors I select for discussion here. (I should also stress that several other essays that fare quite well on White's criterion, and which could have been discussed here, also do well when judged in the light of some of the other desiderata I have made use of in this essay.)

The first came from the pen of Robert Ennis, and it was on the widely discussed topic of equality of educational opportunity (discussion of which has continued to the present).³⁷ Ennis opened his discussion in an extremely interesting way: he presented five cases for consideration by his readers, each of which involved two individuals whose background or education differed in some way. "In which of the cases," he asked, "do we find the educational opportunity of one member of the pair equal to that of the other?"³⁸

He reported that the people with whom he had discussed the cases "vigorously disagreed" about most of them. Ennis briefly discussed, and dismissed, the hypothesis that the cause of the disagreements lay in the fact that different people have different definitions of "equality of educational opportunity." Instead, he suggested, the disputes "are often about the value judgments required for the application of the concept."³⁹ To make this case, he offered an analysis according to which equality is "a dyadic relationship" (and he indicated how this would apply when not two individuals, but two groups, were being discussed).⁴⁰ He went on to show that in making a judgment about whether the members of a pair have equality of educational opportunity, value judgments need to be made about what constitutes an education, and also about what constitutes an opportunity. On this latter issue, he distinguished between positive and negative aspects of having an opportunity, he argued that only "environmental, as contrasted with personal, factors are constitutive of having an opportunity," and he showed that the concept of causation was relevant.⁴¹ In a set of detailed but clear arguments he applied these distinctions, and others, to his original cases, and he reached the following conclusion:

37. See, for example, Kenneth Howe, *Understanding Equal Educational Opportunity* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997).

38. Robert H. Ennis, "Equality of Educational Opportunity," *Educational Theory* 26, no. 1 (Winter 1976): 3.

39. *Ibid.*, 4.

40. *Ibid.*, 5.

41. *Ibid.*, 9.

Although most people I know are in favor of equality of educational opportunity, there is much disagreement among them about how to implement this goal. To explain this phenomenon I have offered an analysis of the concept, *equality of educational opportunity*, which locates the problem not in our concept of *equality*, but rather in our conceptions of education and of having an opportunity. Determination of these two conceptions requires the making of value judgments; that this is generally so for a conception of education is fairly obvious, but that it is so for a conception of having an opportunity is not so easy to see. Judgments about opportunity, I suggested, are in part responsibility judgments, which are dependent on empirical fact judgments about what environmental changes would have made a difference and what the consequences of such changes would have been, and on judgments about the appropriate focus for change. The latter judgments, since they are about appropriateness, incorporate value judgments.⁴²

Ennis went on to suggest that his analysis, if correct, would enable us better to know where to focus our attention in the disputes about whether, in particular cases, equality of opportunity exists. I cannot help but think that he was being a little disingenuous here, for even if we do *not* agree with the details of the general argument he has made, he still has been successful in moving us in the direction of clarifying our thought about this complex and important issue. A philosopher of education cannot wish for more than this!

Like the essay by Ennis, the second essay I have selected for attention, "On the Possible Meanings of 'Back to Basics'" by Christopher J. Lucas, illustrates that philosophers of education, by pursuing their craft, can produce work that is (or could be) of interest outside of narrow professional circles.⁴³ This particular essay also nicely illustrates the useful clarificatory service that the "ordinary language" analytic philosophy of education of the decade could give in "problematizing" terms or phrases that had become (and which in this case still remains) quite important in popular educational discourse (which is not always marked by clarity, lack of ambiguity, or by the presence of logical precision).

Lucas was writing under the influence of a corpus of work that had been done on "the language of education" in the prior couple of decades; Israel Scheffler had published a groundbreaking book with this very title in 1960, and this had been followed shortly afterwards by a collection of essays edited by Smith and Ennis that covered very similar ground.⁴⁴ These and other related works had dealt with such topics as the logic of slogans, the types of definitions that could be offered of educational terms, and the nature of metaphors in educational discourse. Lucas was focusing on a slogan, "back to basics in education," which, according to Scheffler's analysis of such expressions, was not itself a meaningful premise that could usefully be the subject of independent analysis; Scheffler saw slogans as "shorthand" expressions that in effect were placeholders for oftentimes quite complex positions or arguments, but which nonetheless could come to have a certain emotional attractiveness of their own. Lucas writes of "back to basics":

42. *Ibid.*, 17.

43. Christopher J. Lucas, "On the Possible Meanings of 'Back to Basics,'" *Educational Theory* 28, no. 3 (Summer 1978): 231-37.

44. Israel Scheffler, *The Language of Education* (Springfield: Charles Thomas, 1960) and B.O. Smith and Robert H. Ennis, eds., *Language and Concepts in Education* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1961).

Even a cursory inspection of popular literature, however, suggests that oftentimes the slogan is taken as a premise of a formal argument. Under rough handling, the phrase "back to basics" appears to have assumed an independent life of its own, so to speak, at least insofar as it is made to serve ostensibly as the expression of a *position* subject to intelligible discourse.⁴⁵

Lucas says that his program in the essay is to "give a preliminary analysis of...what the phrase could mean as an argument and to characterize its current practical purport as a slogan."⁴⁶

He starts by examining the first problematic term, "back." There is obviously a possibility that "back to basics" could be construed as a "kind of historical statement" (along the lines that once upon a time certain things were emphasized, then they lost this status, but now it is time to go back to them). This construal involves some empirical ("factual") claims about the past, and also embodies some value premises about the worth of past practices. But there is another construal: The educationist asserting that we should go "back to basics" might be doing something analogous to what an evangelist is doing when he or she asserts we should "go back to God"; this is not meant as a historical claim but rather should be regarded as an "attempt to redress an imbalance, to attend to something heretofore neglected." Lucas suggests that these two senses in which the expression "back to basics" could be used need to be kept separate, for each requires a different line of supporting argument.

He then turns to the other crucial term, "basics." He shows that what is considered as "basic" is context-dependent — he discusses the sense in which the term is intended to refer to "survival skills" (clearly a context-dependent matter) and he discusses the "three Rs" as supposedly "basic" and makes the important point that this is not a satisfactory position unless it is accompanied by a more in-depth analysis:

For example, it is insufficient to claim "reading ability" as a basic skill. For the term "reading" we need to be able to discriminate the level of discourse involved, which might range from a capacity to identify diagraphs and vowel diphthongs all the way to proficiency in recognizing and appreciating style, theme, mood, inference, characterization, use of figurative language, and so on. Without a sense for the logical geography of unbounded terms like "reading" ...the referent in conjunction with "basic" is so obscure as to be practically meaningless.⁴⁷

In connection with this point, Lucas gives what is probably the most engaging quotation I came across in essays from this decade in *Educational Theory*; it is from a report of the State Reading Council of Missouri in 1976:

If we have criticized students' writing because words were misspelled rather than because of specious arguments and misstated facts, then we deserve to read correctly spelled nonsense for the rest of our lives. If we have insisted that students say every word they read errorlessly but are only given token criticism when they miss the author's point, then we deserve to listen to people pronouncing and declaiming inanities as if they were words of wisdom. By all means, let's go back to basics.⁴⁸

Lucas concludes by returning to "back to basics" as a slogan. As mentioned earlier, slogans can stand in place of more complex positions which, as Scheffler

45. Lucas, "On the Possible Meanings of 'Back to Basics,'" 231.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*, 235.

48. *Ibid.* The quotation comes from a paper included in the report, and written by Peter Hasselris.

demonstrated, are not self-evident but which need to be warranted by relevant argument. Aided by his previous discussion, Lucas delineates twelve different positions that might be being held when it is asserted that we must go back to basics. His final words are ones that ought to be taken to heart by all educationally concerned individuals: "Questions of its formal inadequacy aside, when the injunction to get back to basics fails even to conjure up a common universe of discourse within which debate can proceed, it is difficult to imagine the point of its further employment at all."⁴⁹

THE FOURTH NARRATIVE

It is difficult to avoid reading the past in terms of the contemporary scene. Indeed, fundamentally it is impossible to avoid this course. With a certain proviso, it is highly important that we are compelled to follow this path. For the past as past is gone, save for esthetic enjoyment and refreshment, while the present is with us. Knowledge of the past is significant only as it deepens and extends our understanding of the present (John Dewey).⁵⁰

In presenting my fourth and final account of the contents of *Educational Theory* in the 1970s — unhappily a short discussion — I shall interpret "the present" as being "the present situation in philosophy of education." After all, the essays from that decade are part of the history of this field, and therefore it is not unreasonable to evaluate the contribution they have made to what we are presently doing. But the passage from Dewey also refers to "esthetic enjoyment and refreshment," and this prompts me to make a personal declaration: I faced the task of revisiting the essays of the 1970s with some trepidation, regarding it as a kind of service I owed to the "profession" but not expecting it to be enjoyable! But I must admit to having gained an unexpected degree of "enjoyment and refreshment" from the assignment; there were many interesting pieces, and it was fascinating to see the early works of some of the contemporary giants of the field as well as to re-acquaint myself with the work of some of the giants of the past. I conclude that we all ought to revisit our past more often! (To pursue this theme a little, many presidents of the Philosophy of Education Society are represented by pre-presidential, and some post-presidential, essays. But to focus for a moment on younger versions of those who were to become presidents of PES in the decade of the 1990s — to use this perhaps dubious criterion as a basis for selection — Nel Noddings, Harvey Siegel, Ken Strike, Mary Anne Raywid, and yours truly, all have "juvenilia" appearing; I apologize if I have missed listing any recent presidents here. I hazard the opinion that the early work of all of us is quite recognizable, except that of Nel Noddings, whose essays in the seventies were written in the dominant analytic style and have typical "analytic-type content" that is far removed from the groundbreaking work — in both content and style — that started with the appearance of her book, *Caring*.⁵¹ She is perhaps the only one of us in the reference group above who underwent truly dramatic development in the intervening years.

49. *Ibid.*, 237.

50. John Dewey, "Renascent Liberalism," in *John Dewey: The Political Writings*, ed. Debra Morris and Ian Shapiro (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 145.

51. Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

To return to the final desideratum: Precisely how does knowledge of the essays of the 1970s “deepen and extend” our understanding of the present? This, as might be anticipated, is an extremely difficult question for a commentator to grapple with, largely because it involves the commentator’s own assessment of where current philosophy of education stands. I shall try as far as possible to finesse the difficulty, but in a sense the history itself has made my task a little easier: Insofar as contemporary philosophy of education is dominated by critical, postmodernist, and feminist concerns (I use the recent issues of the journal as the benchmark here), the 1970s are largely irrelevant — the issues that captured attention during that period are noticeable for their absence today, and there appears to be a gap of several light years between the things of interest then and now. (This is not to say that all of the essays in the most recent volume, that for the year 1999, would appear foreign to a visitor from three decades ago — there are essays on Dewey’s ethics, on critical thinking, on George Herbert Mead, and on two or three other topics, but clearly these are in the minority.) To illustrate this, I shall refer to a final piece of quantitative research! I examined the complete list of references for this last volume of *Educational Theory* — the four issues of Volume 49 (1999). There were thirty-six essays published here, and in these there was only a *single* citation of any paper published in the journal in the 1970s (this was a passing reference to Harvey Siegel’s 1978 comparison of Kuhn and Schwab); there were a couple of “near misses” in the form of a citation of an essay from 1969 and another of one from 1980.

But not only is there general silence about the 1970s, and a change in the topics of professional conversation, the way in which the conversation is carried out has undergone dramatic transformation — in general the style of writing is one that is quite unfamiliar to one who reads with the eyes, and tastes, of a “seventies-year-old.” For example, there are few (some perhaps, but very few) essays in recent years that remind one philosophically and stylistically of the essays discussed earlier by Ennis and Lucas. How are these changes to be interpreted? Were the 1970s irrelevant? Has philosophy of education really undergone dramatic transformation?

My own view is that these questions require complex answers that I can only sketch here. Part of the story is that academic fields undergo change, and new frameworks emerge while old ones fade (as Kuhn pointed out with respect to old paradigms, they fade from current interest rather than get “refuted”). And, again as with paradigm change, in the course of this transformation there are “Kuhn gains” and “Kuhn losses” — issues that once were important move from center stage, and sometimes are lost (often this is a genuine loss), while others move to center stage (and constitute a genuine gain). The intellectual balance sheet is not always “in the black.” Sometimes, however, the things that appear to be lost are not lost at all, but rather have been taken to a new venue, or they surface in other arenas. Thus, some of those who wrote in the 1970s are still very productive, but do not contribute often to *Educational Theory*; essays that bear the stamp of philosophical analysis, for example, often appear in *Educational Researcher*, *The Journal of Philosophy of Education*, and other journals in such fields as teacher education, curriculum, and evaluation, that directly communicate to a wide educational audience. Books that

bear some affinity with the concerns and style of the 1970s are to be found that contribute to contemporary discussions of critical thinking, the rights of parents and children, autonomy, equality of opportunity, liberalism and communitarianism, applied ethics, and educational research methodology. Maybe it is *Educational Theory* that has changed, rather than the field — which might be as diverse and vibrant as it ever was, or perhaps it is even more healthy than before. In 1972 Abraham Edel said that analytic philosophy of education was at the crossroads; maybe the whole field is now at the junction of a number of major freeways. I know which one I am on — but it is not the only one that can be taken. Which ones lead to heaven, and which to limbo, remains to be seen.

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