

Building Bridges within the Field of Philosophy of Education*

Construyendo puentes en el campo de la filosofía de la educación

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Resumen:

En este ensayo, introducimos los diferentes contenidos de los que se ocupa este número monográfico dedicado a la filosofía de la educación que edita *Bajo Palabra. Revista de Filosofía*. El proyecto pretende introducir la filosofía de la educación como una nueva sección en esta publicación y dar a conocer en el ámbito de trabajo más estrictamente filosófico qué temáticas y aproximaciones circulan en el área de la filosofía de la

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educación. Se ha buscado, además, establecer el perfil de la filosofía de la educación con respecto, en primer lugar, a los trabajos que se han venido haciendo en su nombre y, en segundo lugar, a lo que queda aún por hacer. Estas preguntas son respondidas por los diferentes colaboradores a lo largo de tres secciones. En la primera se ofrecen diferentes visiones de lo que es la filosofía de la educación, en la segunda se presentan varios trabajos representativos de lo que se está investigando actualmente en la filosofía de la educación y en la tercera, se ofrecen tres reseñas críticas sobre publicaciones recientemente aparecidas en tres contextos lingüísticos diferentes relativas a la filosofía de la educación. Esperamos que los lectores de este número monográfico, disfruten de la riqueza de pensamiento y las inesperadas relaciones que aparecen cuando se inicia una conversación en el campo de la filosofía de la educación

Palabras clave: Filosofía de la educación, área de conocimiento, líneas temáticas, enfoques filosóficos.

Abstract:

In this paper we introduce this special issue of *Bajo Palabra. Journal of Philosophy*, devoted to philosophy of education. The project marks the introduction of philosophy of education as a new section within the *Bajo Palabra*, and aims to present to a broader philosophical audience those themes and approaches which are circulating within the field of philosophy of education. It has been our intention to raise the profile of philosophy of education in respect of both the work which has been done and is being done in its name on the one hand and the work that ought to be done in its name on the other. Happily, these intentions have been addressed by the various contributors. We have arranged the contents of this edition into three sections. The first offers different visions of what the philosophy of education is and ought to be, the second presents several papers which are representative of what is currently being investigated in the philosophy of education, and the third offers three book reviews of recent introductions to the philosophy of education, each from a different linguistic context. We hope readers of the present volume will be stimulated to further reflection by the fruitful thoughts and unexpected relations that emerge when a conversation within the field of philosophy of education starts up.

Keywords: Philosophy of education, area of knowledge, research lines, philosophical approaches.

1. Introduction

This special issue of *Bajo Palabra* is devoted to the field of philosophy of education. This field is very often described as one of the applied areas of philosophy. However, even though education can be located at the very heart of what means to be and to become an individual person, there are very few philosophy departments in which educational processes are attended to, discussed and researched. Rather, most academic philosophical inquiry regarding educational issues takes place in faculties of education. Gradually however, through timid advances, with ups and downs, it appears that philosophy of education has grown as rather an autonomous academic field within pedagogical research. In effect, today the field has its own academic stars, its own journals, and its own national and international conferences, discontinuous from the rest of philosophy. Most faculties of education still hire professors from the field to teach courses and supervise post-graduate students. Some faculties even have departments in the field of philosophy of education; these, however, are often administratively linked to other, related disciplines such as sociology of education and history of education.

Notwithstanding philosophy of education's growth, these efforts to shape it into a solid and coherent field seem more and more useless, as faculties of education are more and more dismissive of the importance of philosophy of education within their walls. We find different examples of this in the different geographical contexts in which we currently work: increasing closure of philosophy of education post-graduate programs; lack of study of philosophy in teacher education programs; misrepresentation of philosophical inquiry within educational research projects due to the difficulty of securing funding for theoretical research. Actually, in spite of the many problems the field can find in developing and transmitting its interests through our campuses, philosophy of education still interests both students and academics from faculties of education. We believe it could also stimulate the interest of students and academics from faculties of philosophy, into whose hands this volume will hopefully come. So partly as an expression of this belief, and partly as a reaction to the aforementioned situation, we have here sought to provide a platform where professors and students from many different geographical contexts and philosophical perspectives, may share their current research interests and express their views of the field, of where it seems to be going and where next it ought to go.

The "method" we followed to make that platform possible was very simple: We thought the best way to help the field organize itself is to let it speak, with its many different voices. The rich variety that we have tried to include in this issue has been organized it into three parts: 1) Raising philosophy of education's profile; 2) Current lines of work in philosophy of education; 3) Book reviews of three recent introductions to the field.

2. Raising philosophy of education's profile

The first section consists of short essays written by some prominent academic philosophers of education, in which they were invited to describe their personal understanding of the field. Rather than provide statistical accounts of academic positions and student uptake for philosophy of education in university departments or in teacher education, they have tried to account of the subject in more perspectival terms. They were asked to write short pieces of about 500 words in response to three guiding

questions: (1) What is philosophy of education? (2) What is happening in the field now and where is it going? (3) What is its rationale and what kind of work ought it to do?

We warmly thank the following people for kindly agreeing to contribute their views: Fernando Bárcena (Spain); João Boavida (Portugal); Silvio Gallo (Brazil); Gonzalo Jover (Spain); Denis Kambouchner (France); Jan Masschelein (Belgium); Bruce Maxwell (Canada); Andrés Mejía (Colombia); Paul Standish (United Kingdom); Barbara Thayer-Bacon (United States) and John White (United Kingdom). What came out is the enormous diversity of their perspectives and terms in which they couch them. For the purpose of maximising their audience, we have translated into English those which were not written in that language.

The first three authors, Fernando Bárcena, Jan Masschelein and Paul Standish, discuss philosophy of education as somewhat epistemologically autonomous and producing original ways of thinking, each offer a rather existential conception of the field. The next two authors, Silvio Gallo and Denis Kambouchner, describe critically the field of philosophy of education in relation to their own geographical context, Brazil and France, and point towards new fruitful directions accordingly. The next three, João Boavida, Barbara Thayer Bacon and Gonzalo Jover, all offer engaging accounts of the useful role of philosophy for reflecting on the norms and practices of teaching and translating them in a practical language. In a similar way, the last three contributors of this section, Andrés Mejía, Bruce Maxwell and John White, discuss the crucial role of philosophy of education to critically appraise and meaningfully influence educational practices and policies.

To start with one of the most critical voices present in this section, Fernando Bárcena begins by problematizing the question “what is philosophy of education?” itself. He answers that the field in question has more to do with what he calls a “poetic production” focused on studying the specificity of those moment-events of becoming where education comes to be present. Thus philosophy of education should be developed as is an essay (through exercises of thinking) about what subjects involved in educational acts experience within them, an essay that would seek to do justice to “the complexity of reality” by the articulation of speculative thinking and daily experiences. Jan Masschelein’s contribution can be seen to take a similar approach. Against the traditional-critical way of doing philosophy of education, Masschelein invites us to consider education from within the ascetic tradition. From this view, philosophical inquiry devoted to educational issues should take the form of Arendtian exercises of thought, of “open existential questions” for what, in the present time, it could mean to educate, to be an adult, to be a child, to raise a school, and so on, in order to reinvent their meaning, and reconnect with what “a truly human life” is. Paul Standish also discusses the existential aspects of teaching and learning experiences. He contends that philosophy of education is at the very heart of traditional philosophy, especially when it comes to reflect on “philosophy as a way of life”. Although Standish does recognize the epistemological influence of the professionalization and establishment of philosophy of education, he rejects relations of opposition, application, and ramification between the philosophical tradition, or the practical educative arena, and the field of philosophy of education. On the contrary, he advocates a truthful and engaged inquiry within the field of philosophy of education as the best way to contribute both to education and philosophy.

Beginning with a description of how philosophy of education has been academically established in Brazil, Silvio Gallo presents his personal account of what ought to become of the field in the near future. In the early 90's, Brazilian philosophers of education sought to produce ever purer philosophical research so as to consolidate both the identity and the professionalization of their field. This epistemological approach, mainly focused on the study of philosophical authors, has proved to be effective. However, Gallo thinks that the field is living in "a decisive moment", and would enhance its creativity and productivity by moving away from an author-based philosophy. Then Denis Kambouchner offers us a critical account of what is currently being done in philosophy of education. He sees this field as a "normal discipline" in which it is rare to find novel results, and that is, nowadays, too interested in fashionable insights produced outside the field. Thus, Kambouchner calls for a new epistemological "gesture" that would mediate between contemporary conditions of education and the richness of our classic philosophical tradition. That will turn philosophers of education's interest from, the current "*name-dropping* competition" which he claims that it has become, into more solid and refined philosophical constructions.

On João Boavida's account, it is "the analysis of what education is today, and the awareness of its major problems, especially at the level of principles and purposes" that justifies, the existence of philosophy of education. Its relevance among sociological or empirical approaches to the study of education consists in its capacity to establish the normative features of pedagogical processes. When, as is the case, education is understood as a process of transformation for "the better", there is always an important philosophical work to do. Barbara Thayer Bacon offers us an interesting first-person approach to the proposed questions. As a philosopher she did not engage in philosophy of education until she became a mother and began to worry about her children's education. She is sure that there is a future for the field since she knows "societies will always have the need to renew themselves and pass on their knowledge to their young". Since, like many other philosophers of education, Bacon is involved with teacher training programmes; she argues that her job is that of a translator of philosophical ideas, the deepest possible ones, for improving teachers' practices. For his part, Gonzalo Jover considers a central educational preoccupation the teacher-pupil's "peculiar relation of mediation". In the course of that mediation, he claims, it is the former who projects the world to the latter, but the centre of attention should be the latter and not either the teacher or the object of transmission. Jover calls attention to some of the risks of too circumscribed a conception of philosophy of education focused around the question "what is philosophy?" instead of the more crucial question, "what is education?". He recommends that the field engage with the task of shedding light on action, and not to delight in its own self-contemplation.

Following a similar line of argument, Andrés Mejía recommends a progressive pragmatization of philosophy of education, in order to, firstly, bring it closer to contemporary educational issues and, secondly, to influence decision-making processes affecting education. However he asks us not to forget the relevance of the more traditional role of philosophy of education; that is to question by systematic reflection, the "meaning, sense, importance, significance, relevance, purpose, [and] the ought-to-be" as well as "topics, concepts, issues and programs" that have to do with education. As for Bruce Maxwell, he thinks that philosophy of education offers a unique perspective on educational policy, research and practice, that of the "professional critic". Philosophy of education is foundational, (in asking basic questions about values and meaning), humane (in helping us to know how to live well), and promiscuous (in being intrinsically open to philosophical inquiry). This activity "pervades [the] educationalist's work" as it questions what is normally taken for granted about education. He states that "when informed,

insightful, constructive and humane, the interrogation of what we think we know about education is valued in practice and policy circles”. Lastly, John White sees a different scenario to the one pictured by Andrés Mejía. Looking at the last fifty years of dynamics within the field of philosophy of education, he observes that it first operated as a “handmaiden to public education systems”. That role basically consisted, he says, in bringing light to current educational problems so as to help teachers in schools, parents in homes and policymakers in government. White notices, as Gonzalo Jover also pointed out, a certain degree of self-contemplation in current philosophy of education debates, one exemplified in a particular philosophers-based approach. However, he contends that those new lines of research and the internationalization which they have brought to the field, have contributed to its enrichment.

3. Current lines of work in philosophy of education

The second part comprises 13 articles on a wide variety of topics, from a wide variety of philosophical perspectives. As well as the editors, the authors come from various geographical contexts, thus providing an interesting cross-section of the possibilities being explored within the field. We must admit however, that there is a strong presence of continental and critical approaches. We are sorry that our call for papers did not attract many researchers of a more analytical kind.

The contributions reveal three main approaches of inquiry in the field of philosophy of education. 1) Critical perspectives on contemporary educational policies and practices. 2) Epistemological reflections on the nature of knowledge and education. 3) Educational relevance of major philosophers.

3.1. Critical perspectives on educational policies and practices

One role of philosophy of education is certainly to question the meaning and legitimacy of contemporary educational practices and policies. Researchers in education are usually concerned with questions of efficiency regarding specific classroom practices or institutional settings, which are, needless to say, very legitimate concerns. However, the stance of the philosopher of education is more often the one of the sceptic. The authors in this section examine modern, educational realities such as the penetration of entrepreneurial world into schools, reductive conceptions of achievement, weak intercultural policies, and conservative practices with a critical distance.

Florelle D’Hoest analyses the film *Le fils* by French directors Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne so as to help rethink education in terms of “critical balances”. The film serves as pretext and context for a fruitful conversation between some philosophers, writers and fictional characters. D’Hoest argues that in terms of learning experiences, trying to eliminate distances and difficulties as the ones confronted by the characters of *Le fils*, implies instituting a new kind of distance between the subject and his own personal experiences. We should not see distances in educational relationships as a problem which we must confront by abolishing, decreasing, or enhancing these distances, but by choosing the best possible place in which to situate ourselves within the relationship itself, looking for the critical balance at every unique event. Sometimes, what happens to us is so unexpected that we are forced to give unique responses. That can be also be the case in educational situations.

Tom Falk reflects on the meaning of ‘academic achievement’ in popular educational rhetoric today. Since the early 19th century, he shows, Western cultural critics have identified an irrational pursuit of success as a major ingredient of the modern malaise. His article examines the way in which that irrational pursuit infuses the institution of the school and blinds our culture to the urgent task of formulating worthy educational aims.

Alberto Sánchez Rojo examines recent policies promoting interculturalism in schools. His article points out a contradiction regarding the way diversity is conceived in recent Spanish legislation on intercultural education. More precisely, interculturalism is presented in the relevant Spanish legislation, as a strategy of “attention to diversity” where the diverse ones are the others; the strangers, the group of people displaced from the “common way of life”. Taking up Raimon Panikkar’s ideas, he shows the possibility of a new way of responding to multiculturalism at schools, in which nobody would be rejected and everyone would be truly “welcome”.

Victoria Vázquez Verdera and Inmaculada López Francés defend an ethic of care as a tool to question traditional practices in school. They present “caring pedagogy” as an innovative philosophical and educational perspective that proposes creating a curriculum without the bias of sexist dichotomies. The basic trend of this approach implies the fact of acknowledging the need for interdependence and emotional bonds as part of human life and moral identity. To that end, Victoria and Inmaculada propose that educational systems should include curricular content which teach the value and practice of caring as a public good.

3.2. Epistemological reflections on the nature of knowledge in education

Some very interesting research being done in philosophy of education is epistemological. Philosophers interested in epistemology ask themselves questions like “What is knowledge?” and “How does knowledge develop?” However, because education is first and foremost a practice, philosophy in this field very often unfolds with a practical stance. Knowledge, in education, cannot be seen as a simply detached phenomenon. Very arguably, the teacher always teaches a situated knowledge, which is not purely descriptive and objective, but presupposes specific forms of life. His major role is to bring the learner into knowledge, into the human world of meaning and thus, into a particular way of living. As contributors to this issue (namely Paul Standish and Koichiro Misawa) have argued, the very nature of education makes it philosophically interesting.

In a more historical approach, Ángel Casado Marcos de León presents the Spanish journal *Revista de Pedagogía* as a salient example of “epistemological collaboration” between philosophy and theory of education with the practice of teaching. Though it was a “pedagogical” publication, founded in 1922 by Lorenzo Luzuriaga, for an audience of professional educators, the “philosophical perspective” was acknowledged as an indispensable dimension in educational theory and practice at that time. The significant presence of well-known Spanish and non-Spanish philosophers as habitual collaborators constitutes an exemplary collaboration between theoretical and practical dimensions of inquiry.

Kevin Currie-Knight argues that despite the many differences between Michael Oakeshott and John Dewey, these two thinkers offer very similar visions of how education should operate. By way of their parallel critiques of Rationalism, both thinkers advocated similar methods of active education. Dewey and Oakeshott's similar educational views problematize two oft-heard associations: first, that active pedagogical methods are exclusive to leftward political advocacy, and second, that liberal education correlates with the advocacy of passive, book-centred pedagogy.

Koichiro Misawa observes that philosophy of education is less well regarded and appreciated than any other philosophical discipline. His article critically analyses Wilfred Carr's attempt to address this situation, which urges that the discipline take a new shape which is different in character from academic disciplines. Misawa's central argument is that the social and educational nature of knowledge forms the centrepiece of philosophical enquiry into human knowledge.

3.3. Educational relevance of major philosophers for education

Although, philosophy of education seeks recognition as a distinct and autonomous field, it would evidently be nothing without the inheritance of traditional philosophy reflection on the educational possibilities offered by the philosophers of the past, or present.

Michael Dwyer, Yasushi Maruyama and Haroldo Fontaine examine some projects for philosophers of education found in the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger. The authors consider these thinkers' projects—viz., Wittgenstein's method of *Übersicht* and Heidegger's *solicitude* and *deconstruction of the history of ontology*—as being of particular importance to philosophy of education. Their promise lies in opening channels of communication and creating the possibility for dialogue.

Jordi García Farrero draws on the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean-Jacques Rousseau to establish a suggestive relation between biographical-educational processes and the physical-philosophical movement of walking. His purpose is to vindicate the act of walking as a genuine intellectual adventure and also an opportunity to initiate a self-educational and autobiographical process. Both philosophers were enthusiastic walkers and the action of walking nurtured, in ways which Farrero explores, their philosophical work and their self-understanding. Farrero ends by outlining the possibility of an "autobiographical pedagogy".

Anna Kouppanou argues that technology, through its manifold and ubiquitous nature, constantly re-enters and reshapes our experiences, thoughts and modes of learning. Philosophy of technology can offer us an enhanced sensitivity to this matter. However, as a field it has many different perspectives to offer. She presents some of these perspectives, but argues that Heidegger's philosophy of technology, one which is considered 'essentialist', brings a special philosophical depth to the discussion concerning learners and the world from which they learn.

Miriam Prieto Egado presents Rousseau's approach to education as taking identification with the suffering of others to be the way to building a good-compassionate relationship. However, Egado shows that compassion, understood in Rouseaunian terms, does not necessarily lead to the recognition of otherness, but may in fact contribute to its denial. For true recognition to be achieved, she thinks that compassion must be mediated by distance, and this distance arises from identifying the suffering other not with oneself, but with others who are close to us and who act as mediators and add the distance we need for the other's suffering not to nullify any chance of action. Thus an exploration of the possibilities for compassion in the educational relationship could be a path to full recognition of otherness and more authentic relationship with others.

Ana Sánchez-Gey Venegas brings us a highly instructive view of what some of the most salient Spanish philosophers of last 20th Century thought when they turned their attention towards education. The three masters of contemporary Spanish philosophy, whom she discusses, are Miguel de Unamuno, José Ortega y Gasset, and María Zambrano. In all three authors, Venegas observes an appreciation of the educational sense of philosophy and a concern for experience-based knowledge. In her analysis, she introduces the most outstanding contributions each author made to the philosophy of education.

4. Book reviews of three recent introductions to the field

This section is devoted to reviews of recent important books published on the philosophy of education in France, Spain and the United-Kingdom. Continuing with the "methodology" employed to help the field organize itself, we wanted to show not only what salient professors think about philosophy of education, or what researchers are currently interested in, but to let the field speak through its publications. So we decided to work on the review of three salient books of philosophy of education lately published in French, Spanish and English editions.

The first, reviewed by Marina Schwimmer, is *Relativisme et Éducation* (Relativism and Education), published in 2008 in Paris at L'Harmattan, and edited by Anne-Marie Drouin-Hans. The different contributions within it reflect on the fact that education seems to be touched by relativism both in practices and inquiry about its foundations and aims. It questions the possibility of a theory where everything would have the same ethical or epistemological value. In this book, different philosophers specializing in education, relate educational issues to current conceptual debates. Their aim is not to give warnings to educators, because that would presuppose theoretical solutions' having already being decisively established. Rather, their aim is to examine what happens to education when it comes to confront the fragility of certitudes. 'In what sense is a post-modern education possible?' and 'How should we understand concepts of truth, universals, interpretation, culture, or freedom?', amongst many other, related questions, are raised in the book.

The second, reviewed by Bianca Thoilliez, is the volume devoted to philosophy of education of the Iberoamerican Encyclopedia of Philosophy. The book *Filosofía de la Educación* (Philosophy of Education) was published as well in 2008 in Madrid at Trotta, and edited by Professor Guillermo Hoyos Vasquez. The book offers readers a journey passing through different philosophy of education paradigms, paying attention to current educational issues. The variety of topics is large: the validity of thinking about

education in terms of classic *paideia* or liberal education, Anarquist approaches to education of the last two centuries in Spanish-speaking contexts, the challenges of new technologies of information, moral education and human rights education, critics of communicative-instrumental aspects of language in learning situations, and more.

The third, reviewed by John Tillson, is *The Philosophy of Education. An Introduction*, published in 2010 in London by Continuum, and edited by Richard Bailey. It is presented as essential reading for education students and for trainee teachers on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Its different contributions are presented as appealing to practising teachers and educationalists who would like to engage with philosophical approaches to contemporary educational issues. Each chapter focuses on a particular area of debate and explains the main concepts and arguments found in it. The book's aim is to engage the reader critically and actively with the text and the issues which it discusses. Furthermore, the book guides the reader towards further readings and suggests next steps and more challenging sources of counter-pointed arguments.

We find the reading of these three books shows interesting common points and objects of reflection, and a large variety of positions defended. Since they are salient, collective publications, the voices of many authors currently writing and publishing in our three languages would thus be present in this special issue.

5. Building bridges

Bridges are structures built to span obstacles such as rivers, valleys, and roads, for the purpose of providing passage over these. Designs of bridges vary depending on the particularities of their function, the nature of the terrain where bridges are constructed, the material used to make them and the funds available to build them. Addressing the debate of what an academic discipline is or what an area of knowledge is, goes far beyond the aspirations of this special issue, despite a real need for clarification. What we have tried to do here is to enhance the communication between philosophers of education working in different contexts, and with a broader audience of readers, interested in other branches of philosophy.

By allowing the philosophy of education to speak in its many and diverse voices, this special issue surely testifies to the disagreement on fundamental questions to be found between practitioners. Qua philosophy however, disagreement on fundamentals should not surprise or discourage practitioners or others interested in the field, for educators cannot evade the philosophical significance and presuppositions of their practice by merely ignoring them, and the contested nature of fundamentals does not render them unimportant. The philosophy of education is not of a piece with 'big science', in which large numbers of individuals must agree on fundamental questions in order to proceed with a joint research. Rather, philosophy of education develops as a conversation between many disagreeing parties, in which each participant's presuppositions are more fully uncovered and their beliefs more clearly articulated. We must not take this to be a bleak picture however, for it is precisely from the emergence of disagreement, through speaking, arguing and listening – in forms such as this present volume – that bridges can be built between islands of thought and practice.

Building these bridges represents an exercise of productive conversational relationships that are plotted along the various contributions, with all its convergences and many differences. The juxtaposition of different traditions in the philosophy of education presented in the issue can contribute to develop a wider perspective on the general state and direction of the field. We hope readers of the present special issue will take advantage of the fruitful thoughts that emerge when philosophers of education start up a conversation and will contribute their own voices to it.

