"Assembling Reminders for a Particular Purpose": The Nature and Dimensions of Educational Theory

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This article should be read as prolegomena to the development of a Theory of Education. In it I argue that the term "educational theory" is multiply ambiguous as it may refer to a theory of schooling (which is a non-starter), to a theory *of* education (which is general and philosophical in nature), or to theories *in* education (which are specific and empirical). The article points out the logical primacy of a theory *of* education in the context of which we ought to develop specific theories *in* education. It emphasizes the importance of a clear and defensible concept of education for educational theory and practice and argues against the view that education is some kind of activity or process.

Cet article présente les prolégomènes à une théorie de l'éducation. L'auteur soutient que l'expression "théorie educative" est ambiguë à plus d'un titre, car elle peut être comprise dans le sens d'une théorie de la scolarisation (qui normalement doit venir après une théorie plus générale), ou d'une théorie de l'éducation (qui est de nature générale et philosophique), ou de théories sur l'éducation (qui sont plus circonscrites et empiriques). Dans cet article, l'auteur met en évidence la primauté logique d'une théorie de l'éducation dans le contexte de laquelle devraient s'édifier des théories précises sur l'éducation. Il souligne en outre l'importance d'un concept clair et justifiable de l'éducation pour une théorie et une pratique éducatives, et s'oppose à l'idée que l'éducation est une sorte d'activité ou de processus.

Few educational debates are characterized by as much confusion and theoretical barrenness as the one on the nature and function of educational theory. Despite repeated criticisms, the prevailing view among most educationists is largely an *architectonic* one. Just as architecture (or medicine, or engineering) draws on several disciplines to solve problems related to human habitat, educational theory draws on the disciplines of psychology, philosophy, sociology, history, *inter alia,* to deal with problems concerning the education of human beings. What is never made clear, however, is the place of each of these "foundation disciplines" within the theory; the constraints imposed on these disciplines by the nature of the enterprise; the relationship among the disciplines; and the character of the resultant educational theory. This article deals with these questions and sketches an alternative to the prevailing view. The intention here is not to deal with these questions in detail — that would require book-length treatment — but to provide the general framework for their answer.

THE MANY USES OF "THEORY" AND "EDUCATION"

Unless we are dealing with incurable reductionists of the extreme logical positivist type, we should expect any sensible discussion on educational theory to begin with the recognition that the word "theory" has many uses, all of them legitimate, useful, and important in their respective contexts. We do not talk only or primarily about the theory of relativity or the theory of evolution, but also about the theory of numbers, music, knowledge, education, value, and politics. The meaning of the word "theory" in these examples is parasitic on its subject; if we want to discover the character of a particular theory, then, we should move our eyes away from the word "theory" and pay attention to what the theory is about. A long time ago Aristotle remarked wisely that "it is the mark of an educated person to seek after that degree or exactness in each kind of inquiry which the nature of the particular subject admits."[1] It is a depressing fact that his admonition has often been ignored in this debate. It appears to me naive and primitive in the extreme to confuse the nature of educational theory with scientific theory simply because both are called theories. It is equally crude to maintain today that one of the aforementioned uses of the term "theory" is more central, paradigmatic, or fundamental and must, therefore, occupy a more privileged position among theories. Neither etymology nor the ordinary uses of the word lend support to such claims. If Aristotle's distant voice can no longer be heard through the centuries, Wittgenstein's repeated exhortations most certainly must not be ignored.

Yet, for example, D. J. O'Connor (1973) has reiterated his old claim that "the word 'theory' as it is used in educational contexts is generally a courtesy title" (p. 48). If that claim was already unjustified even in 1957, reiteration after 25 years must be considered hubris. His strategy is the familiar persuasive one; he seeks naively to define "theory" generally, that is, outside its various contexts, and of course he fails. He then offers his Procrustean "stipulative" definition of "theory," which arbitrarily rules out educational theory or renders it inferior.[2]

A similar problem exists with regard to the word "education"; we do not always know in which one of its several senses the word is used when people speak about *educational* theory. In his last statement on the concept of education, O'Connor gave only one reference to work related to the subject and that was to his own views on the concept of education in his *Introduction to Philosophy of Education* published 35 years ago — completely ignoring the very significant work of R. S. Peters and others on that concept! Thus, although he recognizes that the word is *used* ambiguously (he wrongly says that "the term 'education' *is* multiply ambiguous"),[3] he repeats his 1957 view on the concept, which is a kind of conceptual stew consisting of socialization, training, and education (1982, p. 137).

There are two reasons why I refer to O'Connor's views. First, even his critics do not always manage to escape his paradigm of what constitutes an educational

theory, and second, the theory all these writers are arguing about is not one of education but of schooling.

There is one notable exception. John Wilson has argued consistently and candidly against the prevailing paradigm but he seems to be ambivalent about the appropriateness of even talking about educational theory. In his criticism of Hirst and the standard thesis, Wilson begins by arguing that "anything *properly* called 'educational theory' is a non-starter," but later he suggests that "the nature of educational theory must surely be connected with, indeed a function of, what education is taken to be: and about this Hirst says virtually nothing."[4] Let us then begin at the beginning, that is, with an examination of the concept of education.

WHAT IS EDUCATION?

I would like to suggest that this is a potentially misleading question because it may give the impression that "education" refers to some kind of an entity which we can identify, discover, or locate somewhere. In ordinary language "education" is often used to refer to schooling or to the education system of a country (as in "Education in Canada") as well as to all the things that a person has acquired or learned (as in "The Education of Henry Adams"). Educationists talk about education as a field of study whereas sociologists talk about education in a very broad sense as "the socialization of the young" — an all-embracing technical concept of questionable value to educators. Although all these uses of "education" are legitimate in their respective language games, they are not the ones central to educational policy and practice. The three important uses of the word are to be found in the participial adjective ("the educated"), the verb ("to educate"), and the adjective ("educational"). Thus, in ordinary language we ask whether somebody is an *educated* person, whether the teacher is *educating* her students, or whether an activity or program has *educational* value. It is not uncommon to come across educational writings where it is unclear in which sense the term "education" is employed, or worse, where the writer slides from one sense of the word to another. In which of the foregoing senses, for example, is "education" used in the claim: "All education is political in character"?[5]

The verb "to educate" may give the impression that education is some kind of activity, but a brief comparison with activity verbs shows that it is not. All activities have a beginning, take time, and have an end; educating does not. I started writing this section of the paper half an hour ago, but I did not educate my students for two hours yesterday. Educating, then, is not an activity, although some activities may be educational, others miseducational, and still others non-educational.[6] Although claims that education is an activity are sometimes merely infelicitous with no serious conceptual consequences, more often they are misleading because such claims are about teaching or, more commonly, about educative teaching. Matters are different, however, with the claim that education is a process.

It is a much more interesting, important, and complex task to decide whether education can in any of its uses be described as a process. The word "process" is widely used in educational writings. Perhaps there is no book in the field of education that does not talk about "the process of education," "the process of teaching," "the writing process," and "the learning process," or about "the process of understanding" and "the process of critical thinking." Even one of the most profound educational thinkers of our times, R. S. Peters, entitled one of his earlier essays "What is an Educational Process?" (1967). Well, in which sense of the word "process" could we say that there exist educational, teaching, or learning processes? I believe it would facilitate our discussion and would enable us to evaluate the various claims about processes if we classified them into appropriate categories.[7]

Legitimate Uses of the Word "Process"

We talk of (a) natural processes (e.g., the process of digestion), (b) human-made natural processes (e.g., the process of manufacturing a car), and (c) conventional processes (e.g., the due process of law). For obvious reasons we cannot use the verb "to process" in the first of these senses but we do use it in the second sense (e.g., to process a certain material) and in the third (e.g., to process an application). We also use the idiomatic phrase "in process" to suggest that, in the last two senses, something is being made, constructed, or accomplished. What natural and human-made processes have in common is that they are governed by *causal* relationships. Conventional processes, on the other hand, are determined by human-made *rules* that may vary from one society or period to another. Although conventional processes are established to secure order, efficiency, humane treatment, and so on, they may degenerate into unnecessary, cumbersome, and senseless "red tape." Now it seems clear that in none of these senses can we say that education, in the important three aforementioned senses, could be a process. In the sentence "In the process of cleaning my room I found my lost book" we have another legitimate, innocuous, and harmless use of "process" which we might call the merely durational sense (d). In the context of education we can say: "In the process of teaching history I learned that . . . ," or "In the process of learning to fly I discovered something important about myself." In all such examples the phrase "in the process of" can be replaced by the word "while." All that these locutions suggest is that human activities, such as teaching the Pythagorean theorem, and attainments such as learning or understanding the theory of evolution, require time and effort. One does not become an educated person miraculously or instantly; that is part of the human predicament. I mention this innocent use of "process" because with a slight twist it leads to the next category.

Slovenly Uses of the Word "Process"

Although not nonsensical, it is pretentiously academic to say that "in the process of educating the young we must do X and Y," but it is potentially dangerous talk if it leads us into the conceptual quagmire of "processes of education," "the process of learning," "the process of understanding," "the process of teaching," and the nebulous stages of educational development that presuppose such processes. All this talk, of course, can be just sloppy, careless, slipshod educational jargon. When in his early essay R. S. Peters asks "What is an Educational Process?" he is in fact asking "What is an educational activity?" And those who talk about the processes of learning or educational development may mean nothing more than that in order for the young to acquire worthwhile learning and understanding they need time, effort, and a lot of care. In other words, the word "process" might be used in all these examples in its *durational* sense. And the stages of educational development may mean nothing more than that a lot of our concepts presuppose other concepts which must, logically, be taught and learned first. Unless, of course, they are not using the word "process" in that sense, and in that case we are dealing with the following category.

Pernicious Uses of the Word "Process"

The belief that there is some order in the world is, very much like the law of non-contradiction, presupposed by all our other beliefs and all our actions; it is what Wittgenstein called a river-bed proposition. And the quest for the discovery of those laws, regularities, patterns, or tendencies constitutive of that order is as old as humanity. In the physical sciences the quest has been spectacularly successful, whereas in the "human sciences" it has resulted at best in confirming the obvious or the common-sensical. And yet, the temptation to explain human thought and action as if they were the same kind of physical phenomena as photosynthesis seems irresistible to many students of human behaviour even today. Thus, psychologists and educationists continue to talk about "thought processes," "processes of knowing or understanding," and "processes of learning" as if they were natural processes; but can there be such processes? Wittgenstein (1953) points out that here we have a

Misleading parallel: psychology treats of processes in the psychical sphere, as does physics in the physical. Seeing, hearing, thinking, feeling, willing, are not the subject of psychology *in the same sense,* as that in which the movements of bodies, the phenomena of electricity etc., are the subject of physics. You can see this from the fact that the physicist sees, hears, thinks over, and informs us of these phenomena, and the psychologist observes the *external reactions* (the behaviour) of the subject. (no. 571)

Learning, knowing, and understanding do not refer to any kind of overt or hidden processes, neurophysiological or of any other kind. "The grammar of the word

'knows' is evidently closely related to that of 'can,' 'is able to.' But also closely related to that of 'understands' ('Mastery' of a technique)" (Wittgenstein, 1953, no. 150). Neither do these words refer to any kind of mental states. "Depression, excitement, pain are called mental states" but not knowledge and understanding (p. 59, [a] and [b]).

Those terms, then, that are central to the educational engagement, such as knowing, learning, and understanding, are all *achievement* words; they suggest that the person has come up to certain standards, is able to perform certain tasks. This is the reason why our concept of education in its important uses mentioned earlier is a normative one. Our ideal is the *educated person* whose pursuit of worthwhile understanding presupposes the procedures, virtues, and standards of excellence embedded in the various disciplines of thought and action as we know them today. It is on the basis of those standards that we can decide whether an activity has *educational value* and the extent to which a person, an institution, or a form of life is *educating* or miseducating.

To be able to have the kind of explanatory and predictive scientific theory of education that O'Connor and others envisage, education must be some kind of process. But in the three aforementioned central senses education cannot be any kind of process. First, there are no natural processes of desirable human unfolding or development — even the greatest educational romantics were unable to discover such processes. If there were, they would make all our efforts to educate unnecessary. Second, there cannot be causally determined educational developmental processes invented by human beings the way there are such processes for manufacturing cars, washing machines, and the like. If such processes existed they would render education a form of naive social *engineering* and our educational institutions would become real factories! Like virtue, however, education is neither natural nor yet unnatural; it refers to an ideal of human development whose standards are social. The special character of educational theory, then, cannot be determined by the scientific study of human nature; it can be revealed only by philosophical inquiry.

Finally, can education be conceived as a conventional process? It is unfortunate that in the English language the word "education" is used to refer to both "schooling" and "education." This often results in a cross-eyed view of education, because people usually talk about education while keeping one eye on the schools. Those who have been talking about educational theory have, in fact, been talking mainly or exclusively about *schooling* and the appropriate or desirable *conventional institutional processes* that must prevail in schools. To the degree that this is happening in philosophy of education it is, in my view, a very unfortunate development for our society. Among other evils, it reinforces the belief that the other institutions in society can continue to be, as many of them largely are, on a permanent vacation from education. This is surely a development that must be resisted by all educators because it abandons the idea of the

educating society, wherein the whole community, with all its institutions, laws, customs, political order, media, and so on, educates (or miseducates) its citizens. Pericles of ancient Athens knew that when he boasted that his city had educated all the Greeks; at our great peril we seem to have forgotten it. I believe the abandonment of the idea of the educating society is one of the greatest dangers for civilized life. Even our public schools and universities, which are supposed to function as educational institutions, have become to a large extent centres of mere professional training and socialization. Perhaps what our society needs today, in order to remain open and civilized, is a clear and defensible theory of education.

An example of a confused and distorted view of education can be found in O'Connor's "Two Concepts of Education" (1982). The source of the confusion lies partly in his misdiagnosis of the problem. He begins by claiming that "the term education is multiply ambiguous and that this multiple ambiguity is one of the main obstacles in the way of a satisfactory theory of education. Indeed, it is an immovable obstacle to a unified theory" (p. 137). This claim is simply false. As I mentioned earlier "education" is not ambiguous, although it can be *used* ambiguously, as it is in this essay by O'Connor. Like many other terms in our language "education" has various meanings, according to the various contexts in which it is used. Just as one does not confuse "sharp cheese" with "sharp knives" or "sharp minds," one ought not to confuse "education" with "training," "social-ization," or "schooling," or with a field of study, simply because we use the term "education" to refer to all of them. If one does, then one is responsible for the confusion and for the ensuing consequences. O'Connor (1982) begins by talking about "the aims of education" but since some find that phrase "unacceptable on philosophical grounds" he is prepared to settle instead for the phrase "the functions of education" or even "the effects of education" (p. 137). The reason he doubts the appropriateness of talking about "the aims of education" (although he does not state this) is a good one, because "education," unlike "schooling," is not in the category of things that could have aims; only human beings and (derivatively) human actions, programs, or institutions can have aims, and, as we noted earlier, education in its important senses is not any of those things. But then, if he is truly talking about "education" proper, he cannot talk about its "functions" either. So by "education" O'Connor must mean "schooling." But then why does he find it inappropriate to talk about the aims of the school as a social institution? Furthermore, if he is talking about the functions of the school, he should not confuse those with the aims of the school. The aims of an institution are those things that an institution ought to pursue or professes to pursue, whereas its functions are what it in fact does (Kazepides, 1989). It has been said that clarity is not enough; I agree, but it is necessary.

Although Paul Hirst disagrees with O'Connor on some major issues regarding the nature of educational theory, it is clear from his writings on the subject that

he is also talking about schooling, not about education. The major shift in his thinking is that whereas in his earlier writings he maintained that the principles of educational practice should be derived from the "disciplines of education," he now (1983) thinks they ought to be "abstracted from practice" (p. 12).

One major problem in assessing Hirst's views is that they are couched in abstract language; in typical Hirstian fashion, no examples of educational principles are given, as if the nature of these principles was *sui generis* and obvious to everyone. But the nature of these principles is not obvious at all. Are they moral principles or rules of logic? Are they common-sense practical beliefs or are they discoveries of the "disciplines of education"? Or does educational practice (i.e., schooling) generate *sui generis* principles different from the principles of informed and civilized life? More importantly, how can one discover or recognize *educational* principles or "abstract" them from the practice of schooling without clearly articulated and defended criteria of education? If they are involved implicitly in all educational (i.e., schooling) practice, what is the point of making them explicit? Are the same educational principles regulative of schooling today in Iran and in British Columbia?

It appears to me that the search for "principles" is a leftover from the old superstitious belief that educational thought must be scientific to be respectable; I cannot explain this craving for general principles in any other way. What Hirst (1983) says about the nature of these principles and the methods for their development reinforces this belief:

I would now argue that the essence of any practical theory is its concern to develop principles formulated in operationally effective rational discourse that are subjected to practical test. (p. 19)

The best methodology for the development of rational educational practice is, I think, in large measure an empirical matter. (pp. 20–21)

As I try to show in what follows, this view is misleading in a serious way. Perhaps the best way to characterize the nature and purpose of building a theory *of* education is by borrowing a familiar phrase from Wittgenstein: "we are assembling reminders for a particular purpose."

IS EDUCATION A CONTESTED CONCEPT?

O'Connor must be one of those who believe that "education" is a contested concept. To make his definition of education less contentious he opted for a wide and vague definition that includes also socialization and training. He says:

The programme is no doubt a fairly vague one. I have deliberately made it so in order to command as wide a provisional agreement as possible. And the areas of imprecision that

make it vague will be filled out in different ways depending on the society to which it is related and the tastes, values and social background of those who interpret it. But at least it is true that *educational processes* [italics added] as we know them in contemporary society have some of these effects on some of the people who are *processed* [italics added] by our educational system. . . . (O'Connor, 1982, pp. 137–138)

It is clear now that O'Connor is talking about the aims of schools in the Western world and not about the concept of education. Those aims, like the aims of any social institution, can always be contested. For example, which closed or theocratic society would accept O'Connor's (1982) fourth aim, which proposes to make the young "critical of the information and values conveyed by authority and tradition"? (p. 137). There have been and still are societies whose public policy regarding its public schools includes only systematically training, socializing, and indoctrinating their young. Could we say today that such societies have an *educational* policy? Well, when and why might somebody be tempted to answer this question in the affirmative? So long as schools exist as public institutions, their aims will continue to be contested even within the most homogeneous societies; these aims are not matters of definition but of argument, based on the information, aspirations, priorities, commitments, and the level of education of the contestants. Can the criteria of our concept of education be contested in the same manner?

Our conception of education is ours—that is a tautology worth remembering. The Native peoples of Canada did not have that concept 100 years ago, and for the same reasons we could not say that Homer's cunning Odysseus was an educated person. Our concept of education presupposes differentiation among the various forms of understanding through which we make sense of the world today; it also presupposes those complex intellectual achievements within each form of human inquiry. Outside of or without such traditions we cannot talk about education, unless of course we are using "education" in one of its other senses. Our ideally educated person recognizes the demands of reason within each form of human experience and has his or her mind disciplined by the standards of excellence in each universe of discourse. The fact that the demands of reason are not always clear or easy to articulate does not mean that we can abandon the search for them; it simply makes our educational task more difficult or less certain. The search for understanding has a single direction; one is allowed to take alternative paths, to follow different signposts, to slow down, or to speed up, but one cannot go back and still claim that one is engaged in education.

The knowledge and value criteria of education serve to remind us that the intellectual achievements of humanity that constitute the substance of education are forms of knowledge and understanding—not mere skills of knowing how to get along in life, nor doctrinal, superstitious, or mythological accounts of the world and human experience. Whatever the epistemological status of scientific

theories, historical explanations, or mathematical or moral claims, the truth is that no one can get an education without engaging in a conversation with some of the existing traditions of thought, including the controversies within these forms of human discourse. Does it make sense, then, to say that the knowledge and value criteria of education are contestable? Could one become an educated person without acquiring some worthwhile understanding? Is there an alternative way to get an education, that is, outside such traditions?

One might argue that although the knowledge and value criteria of education are part of the logical grammar of that concept they do not enable us to make all the important educational decisions. Well, they assist us in making the most fundamental educational decisions; they help us to exclude from educational programs and from public life all doctrinal beliefs, superstitions, prejudices, unsupported claims, mere opinions, and non-rational methods of dealing with the citizens — and a concept that enables us to distinguish between civilization and barbarism should be considered the most valuable concept in our language. Of course, the criteria of education do not tell us which specific disciplines, programs, and books to include in our educational programs and which methods or organizational structures to use to educate the young. But then why should they do that? Countless activities and experiences have educational value and one can choose many combinations of these worthwhile pursuits in designing an educational program. Likewise, there is a great variety of ways one can teach children successfully, so long as the teacher is knowledgeable, imaginative, caring, and committed to a vision of the good society. Our educational paradise, then, is a *pluralistic* one. There are many ways one can save the educational souls of citizens, young and old — unless, of course, one is an orthodox Procrustean who assumes that all young people should have exactly the same educational diet, that there is only one set of activities that should be included in every educational program, or that there are only certain methods, procedures, and institutional arrangements, and, therefore, only one *process of education* (i.e., schooling). Paradoxically, it is usually the same Procrusteans (who want to impose their educational programs on others) who claim that the concept of education is a contested one! Our concept of education, which lies at the heart of an open society, does not require predetermined objectives, specific programs of study, or official curricula — that is what training and indoctrination require. Education requires only justified principles, canons of inquiry, and standards of excellence that are embedded in countless worthwhile human achievements.

I believe that the talk about *the process of education* is the outcome of a pernicious form of "scientism" that has permeated our thinking and has contributed to the unfortunate *institutionalization* of the concept of education — education has become confused with the institution that is supposed to promote it and *the conventional processes of schooling have become the processes of education*! Thus, being educated has become synonymous with being processed

by our education system! The result is that those who have been talking about theories of education are in fact talking about theories of schooling. The confusion of "education" with the institution of schooling is as serious as would be the confusion of the concept of justice with a particular legal system. Without a clear and defensible concept of justice we cannot ask how just a legal system is; without a clear view of education we can no longer ask what is the *educational* value of a system of schooling. We know what sorts of things would count as theories of education and justice and what would be the nature of such theories; we do not know what could be the character of theories that would deal with a host of heterogeneous problems of schooling or a legal system, theoretical and practical. It appears to me that John Wilson's statement is appropriate here, namely, anything properly called a theory of schooling is a non-starter.

A THEORY OF EDUCATION AND THEORIES IN EDUCATION

It follows from the preceding that a theory *of* education is necessarily philosophical in character. The central task of an educational theory is to establish clear and defensible criteria of education that will demarcate the character of our educational ideal and the scope of educationally worthwhile activities. These criteria are implicit in the ordinary ways we use the term "education": we talk about educational, *mis*educational, and non-educational practices, programs, goals, functions, and institutions; we give educational reasons, grounds, and arguments; we dispute the educational value of certain activities; and we characterize people as educated or uneducated. Educational engagements are normative, implying both knowledge and value criteria. A theory of education that cannot give a clear, accurate, and defensible account of these criteria will be unable to distinguish education from mere training, socialization, miseducation, indoctrination, and propaganda and should therefore be considered primitive and worthless; it cannot guide our thoughts, judgments, and decisions when we engage in educational policy or practice. The reasons why discussions on the nature of educational theory have floundered are the lack of a perspicacious view of education, the tendency to confuse education with schooling, *and* the bewitchment of our intelligence by the scientific paradigm of theory.

Our view of education as an ideal of human development is inseparable from our idea of human nature and human flourishing and is, thus, constitutive of our view of the good life. Consequently, a theory of education must be informed by sound theories of knowledge, value, language, and mind and must be an integral part of sound political theorizing. Since knowledge is one of the criteria of education it is necessary that a theory of education be well informed about the conditions of knowledge as well as about the various forms of understanding through which we make sense of the world and of human experience. Without a clear view of what constitutes a knowledge claim we cannot distinguish education from indoctrination, propaganda, and other forms of miseducation.

Equally important to a defensible and useful view of education is the determination of the value criterion of education. The great danger that threatens education today is the almost exclusive emphasis on the instrumental value of educational activities and the hedonistic ethic prevalent in our society and in the public schools. Particularly problematic are some technocratic and pseudo-scientific perspectives on human nature and behaviour which, as I argue later, have distorted our view of the learner, of the nature of learning and teaching, of education in general, and particularly of moral education.

Similarly, our theory of education will be as sound as is the theory of mind embedded in it. Our ordinary views of the mind, however, seem to be necessarily metaphorical, with each metaphor giving a certain perspective on it. Some views of mind that have survived in the language of teaching are more or less primitive and have misled generations of educational thinkers, policy makers, and practitioners. "To *furnish* the mind with knowledge" implies that the mind is similar to a passive room, "To *transmit* knowledge" gives the impression that the mind is a passive receiver, and "To *instil* or *inculcate* certain beliefs" suggests that the mind is a *tabula rasa.* "To *exercise* the mind" or "To *train* children's reasoning or memory" suggests that the mind consists of some kind of mental muscles. The horticultural metaphor of mind conveys the idea that it is like a field that has been lying fallow and must be *cultivated.* Some of the most influential metaphors in education, namely, *moulding, growth,* and *development,* are not without their severe limitations.

Although it could be said, with appropriate qualifications, that education is the *development* of mind, it would be a mistake to consider education as being responsible for its genesis; we acquire our minds through early socialization, not through education; education is the (further) development of mind. And yet, little attention has been paid by philosophers of education to those *acquisitions* that constitute the *prerequisites* of educational development.[8]

These, then, are some of the dimensions of a serious and coherent theory of education. They provide the philosophical background against which we should make all the decisions regarding educational institutions, policies, programs, activities, methods, and so on, and they give us the criteria of what is to count as relevant and worthwhile empirical research for educational policy and practice. A theory of education, then, should not be confused with specific psychological or other theories concerning conditions of learning, motivation, methods of teaching, institutional arrangements, and the like. A theory *of* education puts severe constraints on all such theories and to the extent that they meet such constraints they could be considered theories *in* education, that is, theories relevant to educational policy and practice. Theories *in* education will inform us on what is conditionally possible and thus they will provide the boundaries of realistic, effective, and informed educational policy and practice. Nothing I have said so far suggests that a theory *of* education is carved in stone; it must be constantly

enriched by the most sophisticated and refined philosophical thinking and must reflect our self-awareness and our humanity. When educational policy is conducted in the absence of a theory of education it is usually in the service of non-educational objectives; vague slogans of various kinds are used then in place of a theory of education. It is sad but I think true that the history of schooling is a history of educational slogans replacing one another rather than a history of the development of a theory of education.

BY WAY OF ILLUSTRATION

I would like to illustrate the importance of the distinction between a theory *of* education and theories *in* education by referring to the way many North American educationists, for the last two decades, attempted to solve what they have (mis)described as lack of discipline in the schools. In typical American fashion they *have developed a course,* usually entitled "Discipline and Management in the Classroom," for all future teachers in faculties of Education. My view is that both the identification of the problem as one of lack of discipline and the strategy of addressing it are wrong and they suggest the absence of a coherent theory of education. We might question, first, the appropriateness of describing the problem as one of discipline. That is, if schools are to operate as educational institutions and not merely as barracks, then the problem is not simply that students do not follow certain rules — assuming that the rules themselves are justified — but that they do not understand and do not follow the fundamental principles of civilized life. In other words, the problem is not simply one of lack of order, but one of lack of moral order — a much more complex and difficult problem to study and solve.

Although various authors are included in these courses (e.g., Rogers, Dreikurs, Glasser, and so on), the dominant approach is based on the "educational technology" model which is a child of Skinnerian behaviourism. The incompatible assumptions about human nature behind these various approaches are never examined and the theory of education implied by them is completely absent. In fact there cannot be a coherent theory of education that would sanction the eclecticism practiced in these courses. Because the problem is perceived as one of lack of discipline, however, the strategies usually taught to student-teachers are manipulative knowing-hows that aim at making their students conform to those rules that would guarantee the desirable order within public schools. In other words, in the absence of a clear and coherent theory of moral education, all sorts of techniques for controlling human behaviour, developed for non-educational purposes, are taught for use in the schools.

The misdiagnosis of the problem is clearly the result of not having appropriate criteria of educational relevance that would guard against allowing inappropriate theories developed in laboratories with animals to be used as theories *in* educa-

tion. Discipline or the lack of it presupposes certain rules that one considers legitimate or important. The desirability of discipline depends logically on the desirability of the rules being preserved. Thus, although lack of discipline is not necessarily a bad thing for those who violate the existing rules in the school, it suggests that there is a moral problem in that institution: either the students have not learned to live in accordance with certain principles, or the institution is trying to impose on them arbitrary rules that they do not understand and to which they are not committed.

The exclusive emphasis on the behaviour of the students, then, suggests that the primary concern of those who want to maintain discipline in the classroom is to control the students rather than to help them live their lives as thoughtful and responsible moral agents. The former is simplistic and relatively easy but of questionable educational value. The latter, on the other hand, is complex and involves re-examining every aspect of the school as an educational institution. Teachers must be exemplars of the virtues, attitudes, and form of life they want to maintain, and the fundamental principles of morality must regulate all school life. The problem in preparing teachers is not merely to teach them certain skills and strategies that will enable them to control the students so that the students conform to established rules of behaviour but to enable teachers to guide the young so that the young can live their lives intelligently and with understanding and commitment to the fundamental principles of civilized life.

This very brief sketch of a rather complex problem illustrates, I hope, the very serious consequences of the lack of a shared coherent theory *of* education against which important educational decisions must be made and theories *in* education chosen. To put it simply, there can be no theories *in* education in the absence of a theory *of* education. And just as we cannot talk about churches without theology, we cannot talk about educational institutions without a theory of education.

NOTES

[1]   Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics,* I. ii. 8 (my translation).

[2]   "My stipulative definition is that a theory is a logically interconnected set of hypotheses confirmed by observation and which has the further properties of being refutable and explanatory" (O'Connor, 1973, p. 50). Notice, however, that this definition is not stipulative but a definition of scientific theory, which is programmatically taken to be the paradigm case of theory; by comparison all other theories are considered defective copies or poor relatives. See Scheffler (1960) on programmatic and stipulative definitions.

[3]   One reviewer of the manuscript of this article says: "The author is pedantic in saying that it is incorrect to talk of words being ambiguous. One definition in the on-line OED is 'of words or other significant indications: admitting more than one interpretation, or explanation; of double meaning, or of several possible meanings; equivocal. (The common use.)' The OED reports that what the author says is a mistake is in fact very common. . . ." Well, I agree with the OED but I disagree with the reviewer's conclusion. Unlike vagueness, which is a *feature* of language, ambiguity is *created* by the users of language, it is *our* failure and if we are more careful we can and should avoid it; if we do not we are sinners! This is a simple but very important point that

most introductory books in philosophy make today. Words can *be* vague but they are *used* ambiguously; we are not responsible for the former but we are definitely responsible for the latter.

[4]   The view that "theory" in education is merely a "courtesy title" is the result of superstition, which maintains that all human problems can or should be understood by the methods of the natural sciences, whereas the view that "anything properly called 'educational theory' is a non-starter" ignores the fact that the word "theory" has many uses. See also Wilson (1975).

[5]   The same reviewer mentioned in note 3 claims that I "privilege one sense of 'education'" at the expense of another legitimate use of the word, namely, schooling; that in his province "the Minister of Education is concerned, to use Green's phrase, that education enable people to stay out of jail and off of unemployment insurance. That is, education is a matter of socialization and training. The Minister would probably be mystified by the author's concept of education. But the author dismisses the Minister's concept." I feel here that this reviewer and I are like dark ships passing in the night! I am confident that no minister of education in Canada could be so uneducated as to confuse education with training and socialization. But let us get the logic of educational planning straight. There are no inherent reasons why schools should function as educational institutions. They could be, as they often have been, mere centres of training, indoctrination, propaganda, socialization (whatever that means), and so on. When we talk about public schools as *educational* institutions we say something about the character of these schools that separates them from military academies, religious seminaries, and professional schools. We send our children to school so that they can get an education. The important question, then, is what we mean by education. In the absence of a stated purpose it is logically impossible to talk about any institutions. So, what is the reviewer's view of the purposes of schooling? Is he satisfied with his minister's alleged view? Should the schools educate or simply train the young? I have argued elsewhere (Kazepides, 1982) that public schools have various legitimate functions: to provide the prerequisites of education, to educate, to train, and to socialize. Does the reviewer suggest that we ought to return again to an undifferentiated conceptual stew like the one O'Connor recommends? It appears to me that those who are involved in education in any capacity ought to use a more refined, coherent, and useful conceptual framework when they talk about the purposes of schools; that is a sign of education.

[6]   Characterizing education as an activity is a very common mistake that many first-rate philosophers of education make. Consider, for example, the following statement from Paul Hirst (1983): "In *activities* [italics added] like education, the complexity of the elements is greater than in the case, say, of technology . . ." (p. 14). John Wilson (1975) manages to characterize education both as an activity and as a process: "We retain the idea that education is centrally concerned with educa*ting,* that is, of education as a characteristically intentional *activity* [italics added] conducted by human beings on other human beings, involving a certain kind of *process* [italics added] and having a certain kind of point" (p. 35). I suspect that both authors are talking about teaching as an enterprise, not about education.

[7]   As far as I know, James McClellan (1976, pp. 14–17) was the first to suggest a similar classification of the various uses of "process" and I am indebted to him.

[8]   For the necessity of distinguishing between education and its prerequisites, and the importance of that distinction, see Kazepides (1991).

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