

A CRITICAL DICTIONARY
of Educational
Concepts

An Appraisal
of Selected Ideas and Issues
in Educational Theory and Practice

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Preface

In our Introduction we explain more fully the nature of this dictionary and the criteria whereby we selected entries. However, since the use of the word 'dictionary' may otherwise mislead some readers, it seems prudent to stress here, briefly, certain distinctive features of the book.

We have called this a dictionary because it contains entries arranged alphabetically for a number of key educational concepts, and because it is designed as a reference book. This seems to us a legitimate use of the term, and it is hard to find a more appropriate one.* However, we have carefully qualified the term in our title, in order to guard against various reasonable, but in this case misplaced, connotations that the word 'dictionary' may have for particular individuals. In particular, it should be noted that this dictionary does not purport to be exhaustive, definitive, or free from any view of the nature of education and educational theory. On the contrary, it is based upon a particular view that is, we hope, clearly articulated, consistently adhered to, and coherently argued for in the course of the various entries.

Given that educational theory does not at present amount to a fully explicated and uncontentious body of principles commanding widespread assent, it seems to us inevitable that a dictionary that is going to advance beyond the uncritical level of reporting the various meanings that different groups attach to different words, and that seeks to explore and make sense of conflicting and sometimes confused or obscure ideas, should involve a particular view or perspective. That being so, we have thought it best to reveal and argue for our position overtly.

There will be those, we imagine, who will take exception to the fact that in some measure we have selected entries by reference to what we think important, rather than, for example, by reference to the most often cited terms in educational textbooks. But this is not designed as a compendium of frequently used terms. It is designed as a dictionary of ideas that, for various reasons explained in the introduction, we believe to be worth contemplating and examining.

* O.E.D. Dictionary. 2. 'A book of information or reference on any subject or branch of knowledge, the items of which are arranged in alphabetical order.'

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Introduction

I. THE NATURE OF THE DICTIONARY

There are several dictionaries of education already in existence. To our knowledge, this is quite unlike any of them, for they are all, in their different ways, concerned only to define and describe, whereas the prime purpose of this book is to probe and critically assess some of the key concepts in education. It is designed for those concerned with a broad perspective on education, on the grounds that even the specialist researcher or teacher should base his activity on a complete and coherent understanding of the educational enterprise as a whole. This introduction is largely concerned with explaining how we came to select our entries and why they take the form they do.

To put it simply, this is a dictionary of words, ideas, and issues in education that we think people ought to be familiar with and to think about. To some extent it is a dictionary of contemporary educational discourse: it sets out to provide comment and discussion on expressions that crop up a lot and that seem to have some significance for, or emotive impact upon, people, whether for good or bad reason. People talk about **creativity**, **developmental theory**, **ideology**, **subjectivity**, **curriculum design**, **feminism**, and the relativity of **knowledge**, with a gusto and frequency that they don't show in respect of mind, clear argument, authority, and the pragmatic theory of truth. Accordingly (although this will be more fully explained as we proceed) there are entries here relating to the former set of concepts but not to the latter.

The reference to what 'people talk about' should be understood to cover professional educators of all types, and what is written as well as said. The language and concepts of classroom teachers, faculties of education, and educational journals are our prime concern, rather than the substantive issues that currently preoccupy newspaper editors or parents, in so far as they differ. We should also stress that we are interested both in concepts that loom large in the context of school practice and those that belong primarily to educational theory. We have entries, for example, under **mainstreaming**, **programmed learning**, **behavioural objectives**, **multiculturalism**, and **stereotyping**, all of which have clear relevance to practitioners, and under **correlation**, **systematic observation**, and **metaphor**, which might seem mainly of interest to the researcher or theoretician. Most entries are of potential interest to both groups (e.g., **needs**, **core curriculum**, **readiness**, **skills**, and **intelligence**). However, because this is a dictionary set out in terms of the exploration of ideas, its treatment tends to the theoretical rather than the practical: it

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is concerned with questions such as what might the arguments for and against a core curriculum be, rather than with outlining a specific core curriculum; it is concerned with what **critical thinking** may be and whether so-called exercises in critical thinking truly develop it, rather than with delineating a critical thinking programme.

We have avoided matter that we regard as being of essentially specialist interest. We do not have an entry under the teaching of mathematics, for example, nor do we have entries for specialist theoretical interests such as adolescence. We have tried to concentrate on matters that we think all educationalists ought to be apprised of in order to set their own work in a truly educational perspective. Therefore, we do not offer a breakdown of every psychological concept such as perception and dysfunction, and we do not provide resumés of research into anxiety, motivation, and so forth. On the other hand, there are entries relating to key methodological issues in **research**, and on concepts that we think have a wider educational significance. There are, for example, entries under **operant conditioning** and **behaviourism**, as well as on **indoctrination**, **interests**, and **understanding**. There are also a number of entries relating to various types and areas of research (e.g., **ethnography**, **teacher effectiveness**). We do make reference to substantive issues such as anxiety, self-esteem, and motivation under some of these other headings. But another reason for excluding separate entries for them is revealed in the entries relating to research: we are concerned that research has not reliably established much of educational importance in relation to such concepts. Perhaps we may summarize this paragraph by saying that our interest is less in cataloguing unquestioned the claims of researchers about motivation, anxiety, etc., than in critically examining the nature of the research behind such claims.

Given that the pattern adopted is to provide a critical entry examining the sense of, say, **learning** theory, rather than to have entries describing particular theories in detail, or to discuss the value of **models** of curriculum theory rather than to describe the various models that have been proposed, one might say this is a philosophical dictionary. We might even have so entitled the book, had we not feared that many people with but a hazy idea of what 'philosophical' means would have been frightened off by the word. What is meant by describing it as philosophical is little more than that it has the emphasis that has been explained: it is interested in clarifying **ideas** that are often referred to but are none the less somewhat obscure, **questioning** assumptions that may be widely taken for granted but are **not** necessarily reasonable, and considering arguments for and against various practices (actual and proposed) in relation to the school or research and theory.

We are not interested in providing merely verbal synonyms which

ignore any question of what we really have in mind, or what we really think we are talking about, when we use a term. Thus we do not say, as a dictionary of the English language would do, that 'education' is 'the bringing up of children'. We examine what kinds of condition have to be met for something to count as **education**, for, whatever an English language dictionary may say, education is fairly obviously a rather special kind of bringing up. One is not educating one's child if one 'brings her up' in a locked room on bread and water and terrifies her into stealing. Similarly, we do not just list or describe views and claims, whether about practice or theory. We question them. Our object is to provoke a degree of reflective, critical examination of educational practice and theory in our readers, by probing the clarity, sense and coherence of prominent ideas and claims ourselves. (On this important matter, see further the entries under **analysis** and **concept**.)

II. METHOD OF SELECTING ENTRIES

Having said something about the nature of the book, we turn now to the question of how entries were in fact selected. The main point to note is that the entries are of various different kinds.

A few entries may be classified as jargon. These terms may provide genuine but straightforward puzzlement to one not familiar with them, as the French word for 'dog' puzzles someone who doesn't speak French, without being inherently complex. But they may also, of course, turn out to refer to complex or even incoherent ideas. An example of the first type is '**lateral thinking**'[†]: it may be an unfamiliar term to some, but, whatever we might choose to say about claims made about it, it is not difficult to explain what it means. An example of the latter type, some would argue, is '**brainstorming**', for, critics might suggest, this term has been coined to describe an idea that veers between being complex, empty, and nonsensical, depending on who is using it.

The distinction between jargon and technical terms may be a fine one in practice, the latter being a less pejorative phrase but likewise implying a special meaning in a special context. For example, some might regard 'lateral thinking' as a technical term rather than as jargon. None the less, there are some clearly technical terms, such as '**validity**' and '**reliability**', which have quite specific meanings in empirical research that differ from their meaning in everyday discourse. Or again, '**summative**' and '**formative**' **evaluation** may be judged technical terms, since, typically, people do not consciously engage in such activities or think about them: they belong to the world of the professional evaluator (and by extension, educator).

[†] Throughout this book we follow the convention of using quotation marks to indicate reference to a word (e.g. 'education' has nine letters) as opposed to a concept (e.g., education is desirable).

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The initial question about both jargon and technical terms is a verbal one: 'What does this term mean?', asked in the same way as one might ask what the Latin word 'nauta' means. Sometimes the answer to the verbal questions will lead to a conceptual question; that is to say to a request for further elucidation of the idea in question. ('I see. You tell me that "brainstorming" means "the generation of ideas involving free flowing creative thought and spontaneous non-critical expression of ideas". Now tell me what *that* means? What does it amount to? What are you actually trying to convey by that description?') The majority of our entries have been selected on the grounds that they are conceptually interesting or complex. And a great many of them have been chosen on the grounds that they are central to the enterprise in which we are engaged—namely schooling and education. Thus, **schooling** and **education** themselves, **knowledge**, **intelligence**, **moral education**, **socialization**, **culture**, and **language** are examples of concepts central to the practice we are concerned with. While other concepts (such as **objectivity**, **reconceptualists**, **research**, and **necessary condition**) are central to the theoretical study of education.

The remaining entries will be seen to be concerned with specific issues of educational theory or practice that invite discussion and argument, if not outright disagreement: Should we **deschool**? What are the problems associated with teacher **accountability**? What forms of **assessment** are desirable? What are the respective merits of **quantitative** and **qualitative** research?

All our entries will be found to belong to one or more of the above categories. But we still had to select. What, apart from our preferences, limitations of knowledge and competence, and partial judgements—restraints too familiar to be worth dwelling on—determined our final choice of entries? What criteria did we use to select amongst the jargon, the technical terms, the concepts central to theory or practice, and the substantive issues?

The overriding criterion has been our judgement as to the importance of a proper understanding or consideration of the idea, issue, or argument in question, for rational practice or theorizing. Such judgement is admittedly both partly subjective and complex, in that criteria for importance may themselves vary. But we have tried to bring together those concepts that we regard as constituting the essence of schooling and the essence of educational theory and research, and those that we recognize other teachers and theoreticians would make similar claims for. Thus, it seems to us clear that **education**, **knowledge**, **culture** and **autonomy** are central concepts, and we recognize that, regardless of our views, many others would make the same claim for **creativity**, **emotions**, and **communication**. So there are entries under each of those headings.

A second criterion is provided by the dominance of an idea, issue, or argument, in contemporary debate. In some cases such dominance will of course be a matter of the importance of a concept. But in others it may rather be a matter of passing fashion (e.g., **child-centred education**, **sex education**) or the continued openness or debatability of a topic as, perhaps, with questions to do with **aesthetic value** and **class**. The basic point is that for one reason or another some potential entries have more immediate topicality or currency than others, and we have tried to pay due attention to this point.

Some terms and concepts invite confusion more than others, and this provides us with a third, probably more significant, criterion for including one at the expense of another. Such confusion may arise from a variety of sources: some words are confusing because they are used in different ways by different people (e.g., '**creativity**', '**objectivity**'), some words refer to confused ideas or concepts (e.g., '**critical thinking**'), while some ideas are confusing because they are inherently complex and difficult to comprehend (e.g., **knowledge**). We have attempted to include entries for concepts that have a tendency to cause confusion, whatever the reason, even if they do not seem to meet our other criteria. Conversely, concepts that, though perhaps important and dominant, seem to us to be relatively unproblematic and clear, have often been ignored. For example, we do not have a main entry for play or competition.

To summarize, we have tried to provide entries for those concepts and issues that we regard as being fundamental to the enterprise of schooling and education or to educational theory and research, and for those that are currently in vogue, especially where they are inclined to cause confusion. We would not pretend that the above criteria always make it easy to decide whether an entry merits inclusion, nor that others would have made the same selection in the light of these criteria. None the less they indicate the manner in which we have proceeded.

III. REFERENCES

The dictionary is arranged alphabetically, containing some 120 main entries, and a number of others that merely refer the reader to one or more of the main entries. For example, there is a main entry under **ethics**, but the reader looking up extrinsic value will be referred to the main entries under **worthwhile** and **value judgements**. Cross referencing within main entries has been kept as simple as possible: a word that has its own separate entry is distinguished by bold print once (usually but not always on its first appearance) in any other entry in which it appears. In addition, cross references are sometimes added in brackets and marked with an asterisk at the end of an entry, paragraph, or sentence. Occasionally we

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have had to distinguish cognate forms of a word rather than the word as it actually appears at the head of an entry. For example, **educational** or **educated** should be understood as referring to the entry under **education**, **creative** to **creativity**, and **emotional** maturity to **emotions**.

Many entries are followed by one or more references, consisting simply of author's name and date of publication. Full references will be found in the bibliography at the end of the volume. The bibliography in no way purports to be comprehensive or fully representative of published work in education. We have confined ourselves to noticing some works that are relevant to the argument of most of the more substantial entries, and for the most part we have limited ourselves to citing books rather than articles.

IV. PURPOSE OF THE DICTIONARY

In our experience one of the most glaring and paradoxical weaknesses in students of education at all levels is their lack of education, in the sense of a broad and critical understanding of various disciplines, different kinds of question, and distinct theories and claims. Too much educational philosophy proceeds in a vacuum, without reference to practical constraints, to sociological challenges to some philosophers' perception of their activity, or to psychological claims relating to the phenomena under scrutiny. Too much sociological research is conducted without reference to psychological research in the same field, and vice versa. Too much empirical work generally is conducted without an adequate feel for conceptual and logical points. Above all, too much work in educational theory, research, and practice, is undertaken without any attempt to set the particular project in some wider coherent educational context.

Our main intention has been, by scrutinizing some of the key concepts in educational theory and practice, with an emphasis on probing their coherence, clarity and implications, to provide an antidote to the over-narrow specialist interest of so many educationalists. It is hoped that by referring to this book, the philosopher can conveniently apprise himself of much that is going on in the field of empirical research and the arguments surrounding various practices; that the psychologist and the sociologist can broaden their repertoire to engage with other than merely technical questions about the coherence and educational value of aspects of their research; that classroom researchers likewise can come to focus on wider issues concerning their work than its validity and reliability, such as, most notably, its appropriateness to a specifically educational setting. We hope to have made a small contribution to the attempt to enable all educationalists to think rather more carefully about the meaning, implications, and sense of such notions as the educationally

worthwhile, relevance, natural, accountability, evaluation, logical order, giftedness, and skills. Above all, we hope that this dictionary will help students to formulate a clearer conception of the nature of education and educational theory and research, that does justice to the complexity of the enterprise as a whole.

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worthwhile, relevant, natural, accountable, evaluation, logical order, giftedness, and skills. Above all, we hope that this dictionary will help students to formulate a clearer conception of the nature of education and educational theory and research, that does justice to the complexity of the enterprise as a whole.

Accountability

The demand that **educational** institutions (particularly publicly-funded elementary and secondary schools) should become more accountable for what they do (that is, provide evidence that they are providing acceptable service in return for tax support) has become a prominent feature of political debates in recent years. The reasons for this demand are varied, but not necessarily consistent. Some critics were anxious to ensure that schools were efficiently managed in a technical sense, and that educators' 'secret gardens' were opened to public scrutiny. Others seemed convinced that academic and personal standards within state-supported school systems had plummeted to such depths that severe remedies were needed (for example, that teachers should be held responsible for what Johnny learned). Members of the public were puzzled by the fact that educational costs did not behave in the way they had expected in a period of declining enrolment. In some countries, the counsel of educational experts was subjected to the same type of cynical scrutiny as the arguments of commercial hucksters for any big business. In a general malaise of declining economic performance, the school systems were obvious targets, even if the causal link between schooling and an economic down-turn was never clearly established. While questions of coherence persist in respect of all of these arguments, their general effect cannot be mistaken: schools in many countries are being asked to provide evidence to justify the sums being spent upon them. This request is often backed by the threat of withdrawal of financial support.

It is easier to list reasons for regarding accountability as desirable than to establish what the nature of such accountability should be. First, it is sometimes difficult to identify what schools are supposed to be accountable for. Given the neglect of national goals, it is not easy to make a plausible case that schools should be held accountable for reaching specific goals. Even in those jurisdictions in which specific goals are stated, they are often phrased in such vague terms that discussion of attainment is rendered impossible. Secondly, it is not clear who should be judged accountable. Are local authorities to be accountable? Principals? Teachers? Students? Parents? Although, in principle, it would not be difficult to argue that each one of these important constituents of the schooling industry ought to take responsibility for its success or failure, few political systems have tackled the political difficulties that would arise from any attempt to lock any one of these parties into a system of strict accountability. Thirdly, even if it were decided who should be accountable, it is far from clear to whom these persons should be accountable. To the national government? Local authorities? Principals and headmasters? Professional associations? Parents? Students?

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Finally, there seems to be little agreement on how accountability is to be measured. Some politicians argue that the achievements of students ought to be measured on standardized tests, while others recommend the assessment of a variety of features of the programme under study.

Many of those demanding greater accountability seem to overlook the formal and informal means of accountability that already exist within educational systems. In many jurisdictions, the quality of schooling is assessed by visiting experts or supervisors. Teachers are expected to report to their heads of department or principals. Some schools in some countries use the results of competitive examinations to assess school performance. While these informal methods are far from being as all-inclusive or certain as some critics require, they provide a rough-and-ready means of gauging the quality and effectiveness of educational programmes (***assessment, measurement, research, teacher effectiveness**).

Two countries that have gone furthest in introducing accountability procedures are the United States and England. In the former, the principal method used is the checking of student performance against pre-specified objectives by means of standardized tests. This process, however, has been widely criticized. Some scholars have argued that use of this type of measurable objective is extraordinarily limiting if not actually anti-educational (***aims, behavioural objectives**). In England the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) was established in the late 1970s to monitor student performance across the curriculum by examining six 'lines of development' that transcend particular school subjects: mathematical, language, scientific, physical, and personal and social. Although seemingly much broader than the American practice, APU has been subjected to significant criticism concerning such matters as the validity of the 'lines of development' on which it is founded, and the relationship between curriculum content on the one hand and general qualities of thinking on the other (***critical thinking**). Others have pointed to the limiting effect that national testing programmes have upon the curriculum. In addition, some important statistical problems have been identified in the types of tests used in the APU monitoring programmes. Given the complexity of the educational process, any attempt to introduce a simplistic model of accountability is almost certain to be fraught with difficulties.

That is not to say, however, that all accountability measures should be abandoned. Some researchers, for example, have been attracted by the process criteria characteristic of such self-governing professions as medicine and law. From such examples, they have extracted notions of principles of practice that depend upon the logic of reflective self-government and the provision of expert services rather than upon pre-specified

success measures. Such alternative models of accountability stress the delivery of more varied types of information to a wide range of authorities or constituencies. The task of developing the special **skills** required to identify these measures, however, appears to be in its infancy (*teaching).

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Barbee and Bouck (1974), Becher and Maclure (1978b), Becher, Eraut, and Knight (1981), Eraut (1981), Lawton (1980), Lello (1979), MacDonald (1978, 1979), Pring (1981), Sockett (1980).

Achievement/task words

A distinction is made by the philosopher Gilbert Ryle between words that logically imply success in an undertaking, e.g., 'finding', 'arriving', 'killing' (achievement words), and those that logically leave the question of success or failure open, e.g., 'searching', 'travelling', or 'fighting' (task words). (N.B. The success implied by achievement words relates to completion of a task rather than quality, moral worth, wisdom, etc., of an activity. For example, 'marrying' is an achievement word.) The interest of some words may lie in the fact that they are hard to classify in these terms, e.g., 'torturing', 'loving', or 'forgiving'.

Peters (1967) argued that 'just as "finding" is the achievement relative to "looking", so "being educated" is the achievement relative to a family of tasks which we call processes of education'. He acknowledged that "education" is of course different in certain respects from the examples of achievements that Ryle gives. To start with "education" like "teaching" can be used as both a task and an achievement verb.' But none the less, he maintained, 'if I talk of [people] as educated there is an implication of success'. That is surely correct. The question of importance now becomes 'What are the criteria of educational success?' (***aims, analysis, education, teaching**).

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Peters (1967), Ryle (1949).

Aesthetic value

How does one determine aesthetic value or quality within the arts? Various responses have been given to this question, ranging from the view that emphasizes the instructional or didactic value of art to that which stresses the essentially aesthetic and locates artistic quality in pure form.

As in the case of other types of **value judgement**, it seems mistaken to deduce from the undoubted fact of cultural and temporal variations in