
THEORIES OF
EDUCATION
STUDIES OF SIGNIFICANT
INNOVATION IN
WESTERN EDUCATIONAL
•THOUGHT•

BOWEN • HOBSON

SECOND EDITION

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Preface to the First Edition

This book aims to provide an introduction to philosophy of education and to educational theory in general for the beginning student who has had no previous training in philosophy. Such students often have trouble in coming to grips with courses in educational theory which rely purely on a philosophical treatment of the issues, either through the examination of systematic philosophical theories and their relevance (if any) for education, or through the application of the techniques of contemporary philosophical analysis to educational questions. For those students who are taking philosophy of education as only one component in their educational studies, there is generally not sufficient time to acquire the necessary expertise in philosophical thinking to enable them to gain the full benefit of such courses.

We try to avoid this problem by making educational *thought* rather than educational *philosophy* the focus of attention, while at the same time covering the major philosophical viewpoints concerning education. Under the heading "educational thought" we include all general and systematic approaches to the aims, methods and content of education, whether these come from philosophers, psychologists, sociologists or actual practising teachers. "Education" itself we take in its broadest sense, covering all deliberate attempts to shape or transform man and society.

From our experience with teaching large numbers of students in introductory courses in philosophy and theory of education over the past few years, we have found one very useful way to simplify and systematise the vast body of thought about education. This is to present it in terms of a continuing historical debate. Such an approach enables us to highlight the fact that educational theory is never static, that it is constantly evolving and changing in response to our efforts to understand the process itself and to adequately meet the problems it presents. This in turn obliges us to take into account the continuity of education and the fact that, at any particular moment, current practices and beliefs are often carried forward from the past.

To further simplify this complex field we have introduced the concept of "significant innovation". The rationale behind this is set out in the Intro-

duction which follows, but we may briefly point out here that this book presents what we regard as nine major significant innovations in Western educational thought, structured according to their position in the fundamental educational debate between traditionalists and progressives. Part I gives the four classic figures covering both sides of the debate up to the twentieth century. Part II provides five modern variations and reactions to the two basic positions. At this stage in the continuing development of educational thought we cannot say which of these five thinkers will become classics in the same way as those in Part I. Only time will tell, but in the meantime their theories are presented here as some of the most significant innovations in Western educational thought produced since the publication of John Dewey's *Democracy and Education* in 1916.

We recognise that our concept of significant innovation itself may create a degree of controversy; certainly some will disagree over the choice of the particular thinkers selected. It is of course possible to make out quite strong cases for the inclusion of other thinkers. For example, Augustine and Aquinas in the Christian millennium were very important educational thinkers, but in terms of the basic educational debate between traditionalists and progressives, we believe that their innovations were not as significant as those of the particular theorists selected in Part I. Similarly, contemporary radical viewpoints on education could have been represented by Paul Goodman or Paulo Freire, but we consider that the idea of deschooling society is the most significant contemporary radical contribution to educational thought in the broad sense considered here, and that Illich has been the most explicit and influential exponent of this viewpoint. Nonetheless, if the discussion of the adequacy of the criterion of significant innovation develops, and the thinkers illustrated here are compared against others, some of the purposes of this text will already have been met. For we hope that students of education will come to see that its philosophy is an essential element which must constantly be examined, debated and assessed if we wish to understand and continue to improve the practice of education itself.

As this book is written for beginning students in the subject, we have included along with each set of readings a stimulative and explanatory commentary, sufficiently detailed, we believe, to lead the student into an interested and informed reading of the thinker represented. These commentaries also aim to highlight the contemporary relevance of each thinker's ideas and to raise questions designed to provoke the student's own thinking on the basic educational issues facing the world today. A detailed index has been provided so that the reader will be able to locate easily the various discussions of fundamental educational problems as they occur throughout the book.

This work has been a conjoint venture throughout and both authors have shared responsibility, although at the same time each has brought his own particular emphases to bear: James Bowen is primarily an historian of educational ideas; Peter Hobson is primarily an analytic philosopher of education. For the reader who is concerned to distinguish the individual

contributions, James Bowen did the major part of the writing of the Introduction and wrote the commentaries on Plato, Dewey, Makarenko, Neill and Illich; Peter Hobson did the bulk of the work in selecting the readings and organising the overall structure of the book, and wrote the commentaries on Aristotle, Rousseau, Peters and Skinner.

Finally, we would expressly like to thank the publishers for their support and encouragement, particularly William Douglas and Carol Buck, and for the invaluable assistance of our wives, respectively, Margarita and Roswitha.

University of New England
Armidale, New South Wales
January, 1974

J.B.
P.R.H.

Preface to the Second Edition

It is now twelve years since the first edition of this book appeared in 1974. That was a time of considerable ferment in education which had been going on for a decade against the background of the Vietnam War and student protest movements, the violence of the Cultural Revolution in China, heightened tensions resulting from international confrontation and the arms race, the rapid increase in world population, pressures on resources and threats to the safety of the environment. In education it was a time of rapidly growing school, college and university enrolments, of rising expectations by all of the population, accompanied by an urgent need to improve the quality of public education.

The past decade, however, has seen major changes in the world scene which have exercised a profound influence upon education. In 1974-75 came a profound downturn in the world economy leading to a widespread, and continuing economic recession. This was accompanied, in Western industrial nations, by a new political and economic conservatism, and, given the rapidly falling infant populations, a reduced demand for teachers. At the same time there came a demand for higher quality in the teaching profession.

So arose the question: does this text have continuing relevance? Information from students and lecturers, and a sustained demand for new printings has convinced us that it continues to meet an important need. Yet we have not felt justified in offering simply another reprinting; careful revision is obviously required. We remain convinced that the original format of the study of major educational theorists, in terms of the concept of significant innovation, is sound, and we see no reason to change the nine persons selected. Regardless of current events, Plato and Aristotle are still the twin foundations on which the traditional model of education has been built; Rousseau and Dewey remain the two great historical innovators of progressive thinking in education. The theories of Makarenko, Skinner, Neill, Peters and Illich, although giving rise to a good deal of controversy, continue to be distinctive and significant contributions to the debate about the nature and aims of education.

There have been developments, however, in the thinking of two of these theorists since 1974. R. S. Peters was the most articulate and widely-known representative of the liberal-analytic approach to philosophy of education, which exercised a profound influence in the period of the mid-sixties to the late seventies, and no other like-minded theorist has really surpassed him. He has continued to refine his thought and to moderate it to accommodate changing social developments as well as to respond to criticisms from other theorists. Ivan Illich has lessened his specific demands for “deschooling” but has developed a broader range of social criticisms, still reflecting a similar anti-institutional, anti-authoritarian viewpoint. Meanwhile the thought of his one-time colleague, Paulo Freire, has become more educationally conspicuous. Illich’s educational position, none the less, remains stimulating and highly distinctive, and continues to provide a provocative challenge to our conception of the role of school in society.

The nine thinkers originally covered thus continue to provide a firm basis for grappling with the educational issues of the 1980s and beyond. We have, however, attempted to deal with the new trends in education and society by modifying the original text with careful editing, and by the addition of a new final chapter, which appears as Part III of the present edition. In that new section, we present an outline of major developments in Western educational thought over the past decade, taking account of the social context in which such developments occurred; Peters and Illich are brought up-to-date, and the new significance of Freire is discussed. We examine, moreover, the current position of traditional theory in its various manifestations, as well as emerging theories advanced by challenging radicals, Marxists, and Humanistic thinkers. We maintain the term “Western” in the title of the book, using it in its wider cultural sense, rather than its more narrow political sense, as pointed out in the Introduction.

In preparing this new edition we have attempted to revise the commentaries in non-sexist language wherever possible. In order to avoid fatuous periphrasis we have kept “man” as a generic term and the associated pronouns when used in the same context, of “he”, “him” and “his”, since it sometimes distorts meaning to resort to plurals or passives. At the same time, there are places where we have kept the sexist language which the theorists under discussion employed as giving a more faithful reflection of their style of thought. This has been particularly so in the case of Aristotle, Rousseau, Makarenko, Skinner and Peters.

A valuable feature of this edition will be found in the completely revised, extensive and up-to-date bibliographies of all the thinkers previously covered, which includes relevant new works written by them (included in the Select Bibliographies at the end of the appropriate chapter) as well as new material written about them (included in the new General Bibliography at the end of Part II). There is also a detailed bibliography attached to the new chapter covering the various positions and thinkers discussed there.

As in all such enterprises, many persons have assisted us in our work, and we are particularly grateful to colleagues in other institutions as well

as to our students over the past twelve years, for many helpful comments and suggestions. It is a pleasure to acknowledge the assistance of Max Lawson and Anthony Welch in our own Centre for Social & Cultural Studies in Education, and of John Barrie of the Northern Rivers C.A.E., Lismore, in commenting upon the final chapter. In particular we have benefited considerably from the thorough knowledge of Tom Moore in the area of developments in Humanistic and psychologically-grounded educational theory, and to him we extend our deep appreciation. We also owe a considerable debt of gratitude to Dianne Hill who has been unfailingly supportive and exact in the preparation of this script. We welcome, moreover, continuing suggestions from our many colleagues and students.

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January, 1986

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Contents

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION	v
PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION	vii
INTRODUCTION	1

PART I THE GREAT DEBATE

THESIS: THE TRADITIONAL VIEW

1. PLATO	
Commentary	19
Selections from (1) <i>Theaetetus</i>	30
(2) <i>Republic</i>	31
2. ARISTOTLE	
Commentary	80
Selections from (1) <i>Posterior Analytics</i>	89
(2) <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>	90
(3) <i>The Politics</i>	107

ANTITHESIS: THE PROGRESSIVE VIEW

3. JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU	
Commentary	118
Selections from <i>Emile</i>	132
4. JOHN DEWEY	
Commentary	162
Selections from (1) <i>School and Society</i>	171
(2) <i>Democracy and Education</i>	173
(3) <i>Experience and Education</i>	205

PART II VARIATIONS ON THE DEBATE

SOME RECENT INNOVATIONS

5. ANTON MAKARENKO AND THE NEW SOVIET MAN	
Commentary	215
Selections from <i>Problems of Soviet School Education</i>	228
6. B. F. SKINNER AND THE PLANNED SOCIETY	
Commentary	261
Selections from (1) 'The Science of Learning and the Art of Teaching'	272
(2) <i>Beyond Freedom and Dignity</i>	283
7. A. S. NEILL AND THE FREE SCHOOL	
Commentary	306
Selections from (1) <i>Hearts Not Heads in the School</i>	313
(2) <i>Summerhill</i>	324
(3) <i>Talking of Summerhill</i>	335
8. R. S. PETERS AND EDUCATION AS INITIATION	
Commentary	340
Selections from (1) 'Education as Initiation'	358
(2) 'Form and Content in Moral Education' ..	377
9. IVAN ILLICH AND THE DESCHOOLED SOCIETY	
Commentary	389
Selections from (1) 'The Alternative to Schooling'	399
(2) <i>Deschooling Society</i>	410
GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY (FOR PARTS I AND II)	432

PART III THE DEBATE CONTINUES

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

Introduction	441
Recent Developments of the Traditional Approach	442
Recent Developments of the Progressive Approach	453
Education and Contemporary Social Issues	460
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY (FOR PART III)	465
INDEX	469

Introduction

The Concept of Education

The concept of education is difficult to define since the word “education” is used in so many ways. In its most common use it is synonymous with schooling, and brings to mind the whole range of activities that takes place in kindergartens, schools, colleges, institutes and universities. Its meaning in this sense is very loose, for it can designate learnings of almost every kind, from those of specific instrumental skills, usually linked with the attainment of vocational competency, through to the most abstract and symbolic forms of knowledge, which have little apparent practical application and are acquired for their own intrinsic value. Again, in this context, education can also refer to the actual behaviour of the students in the school quite apart from the content of instruction; we can talk of education being the acquisition of attitudes, beliefs and values learned by participation in the general social life of the school.

Yet this is only part of the concept. We also speak of life itself as being educational, and in this sense we usually have in mind the idea that if school-room activities are educational, then there are many similar ones taking place outside the school that have the same kind of influence on us. Again, however, the same sorts of ideas are present; life in the wider social environment outside the school has a “hidden” curriculum of knowledge, attitudes and skills to be learned, and there is usually pressure upon us to acquire them so that we are able to participate effectively in the social life of the community. Education in this sense, then, designates the broader process whereby we come to accept the goals and values of our society. And for this reason, we can talk of education being a lifelong process. We do not care to restrict the term to the activities of school-type institutions, and indeed to make a distinction here we often refer to the process of schooling as “formal” education, and to that in the wider community as “informal”. This latter designation has been applied because the influence of the wider community usually comes through direct encounters with specific situations that occur

more or less randomly, and not in a fixed, planned sequence as schooling usually does. Yet these two areas are not mutually exclusive and it is also true that socialisation proceeds within the school as well as outside it.

So far, then, we can say that the term "education" designates that basic social process whereby individuals acquire the culture of their society; we call this the process of socialisation. Now all societies do this, but they set about it in different ways, and it is this that is largely responsible for variations in culture. Some societies rest content at the point, so that education is more or less limited to the process of socialisation acquired through both formal and informal means. Yet this does not exhaust the meaning of the term, for if education is equivalent to socialisation it is a wholly conservative activity. In the intellectual history of our own society (known generically as the West because of its origins in western Europe following the fall of the Roman Empire), this conception has always been criticised because of its narrowness, and attacked because it provides no wider goals for man. Indeed, Western civilisation has developed a third level of meaning for the term education that accepts the processes of formal and informal education just outlined as two necessary aspects but goes on to suggest a higher and more ideal kind of attainment.

No society can be absolutely conservative and maintain education as a purely socialising activity; some degree of adaptability to varying circumstances must occur if it is to survive. So we can distinguish two necessary aspects to any culture: conservation and creativity. When we speak of a static or primitive society we mean one in which conservative practices predominate, while creative ones are kept at a minimum and are adopted only with difficulty. By contrast, one of the important characteristics of advanced societies is a concern to provide for creativity and change and the recognition of the ideal of humanity in itself and of human potential for excellence, independent of social pressures. Western society, in particular, has always taken pride in its concern with creativity and its particular intellectual history is one of continued searching for challenges and of attempts to conquer them. This has given rise to the ideal of the life of intellectual adventure, and our civilisation places a very high value on people who are able to produce new ideas, new conceptions, innovations of every kind. If these can be translated into practical applications which appear to benefit society, so much the better. Not, of course, that all individuals in Western civilisation have been involved in this process of creative endeavour. On the contrary, it has been maintained by a small minority, and the majority has had no significant participation. So we come to the concept of education as one of heightened awareness and intellectual curiosity concerning everything that takes place on earth, and the quest to satisfy this curiosity. Through education in this sense, man can get beyond the limitations of conservative practices to creative thought and action; the concept of education is enlarged from one of socialisation to one that includes the idea of transcendence. By this we mean that education in its most ideal sense provides us with a wider vision, one that transcends the restrictive boundaries of our own particular

society. This process is really independent of institutions, yet it has always been regarded as the highest goal of the school, in the generic sense, and in fact from the time of the ancient Greeks to the present day efforts have been made to attain this goal through the formal process of education.

Now although there has always been a general agreement on education as encompassing a range of activities from simple skills to the highest forms of intellectual vision, there has not been agreement on how these activities should be pursued. On the contrary, in the history of Western education there has been constant argument about the content of education, about who should be educated, and about how this education should be conducted. Throughout most of this history, education has been pursued in this threefold way: the majority of the people have been illiterate and unschooled and their education has been of the informal, direct, community-learning kind; a minority has had superimposed upon this some degree of formal schooling; and a miniscule number has achieved the highest flights of the intellect. Quite a literature has been written to justify all of this, chiefly on the grounds that it accords with the purposes of nature. But it has not been universally accepted and in recent times, because the advent of industrial democracy has made it possible, the school has been extended to ever-increasing proportions of the population.

At present we have reached the point where in most Western societies education in the sense of schooling has been in the ascendant and from an early age children are enrolled in schools — whether they like it or not — and attempts made to stimulate their minds. They are taught to read, write and reckon, they are given some kinds of vocational training and, if they are judged sufficiently able, their mental boundaries are enlarged through an introduction to the human experience in literature and history, the current ongoing range of human activities via such social studies as geography and economics, and to man's efforts to change present conditions through the experimental method of the laboratory sciences.

At the same time, there has been a tremendous movement to formalise and institutionalise many kinds of learning that previously occurred in community contexts. Consider, for example, the way in which, by public demand, we are currently developing formal programmes that run the entire spectrum of a person's life: infant care, preschooling, outdoor activities, driver training, sports training, sex instruction, drug counselling, pregnancy and mothercraft courses, marriage guidance, adult education and continuing right through to the worthy use of geriatric leisure. And this is not restricted to the able; the infirm and handicapped suffering from nearly every kind of disability are increasingly being involved in various programmes of "special" education. We are relentlessly institutionalising most of the learnings required of us in life.

Crisis in Education: Historical Background

This world-wide movement towards a mass, public, institutionalised education is now creating a virtual crisis situation, and as a first step towards

understanding this crisis it is necessary to look briefly at the main historical features of its development. We begin with the striking fact that Western civilisation up to the time of Rousseau in the eighteenth century had developed only one fundamental conception of the process of education, although there were inner variations. This conception was first set out by the Greeks, gained almost total acceptance in the ancient world and, despite the opposed theories of Rousseau, Dewey and other progressives from the eighteenth century onwards, has remained the pre-eminent model of educational practice right down to the present day.

It was the ancient Greeks who developed the notion that the only activities worthy of the name of education are those that enable us to transcend the limitations of time and space imposed by our finiteness; the limitations, that is, of a biological basis that tie us to a particular moment and place in which to live our lives. Man, conceived in the generic sense, has the capacity to make this transcendence through a properly organised set of experiences, and the Greek position was that these should be concerned firstly with heightening sensitivity to, and facility in, language (both speech and writing); and, secondly, through this instrumentality, with exploring the realm of the timeless and placeless; that is, the realm of ideas. Following the persuasive arguments of Pythagoras, and then Plato, these experiences were generally believed to be best expressed in mathematical form, and it is significant to note that the early Greek word for knowledge, *mathesis*, later became restricted to mathematics alone. Because they were held to be the means by which we can be liberated from our limitations, these studies, based on language and mathematics, were therefore called the liberal arts, and this distinguished them from the "illiberal" crafts, which were the customary activities of menial workers.

In the early Christian centuries this approach to education lent itself admirably to a religious view of life because the whole purpose of transcendence into the realm of ideas is to reach their ultimate form in a single overarching unity, a concept that already existed in Greek philosophy as the "*arché*" and that Christians very readily identified with their own concept of God. Not that this composite philosophy was quickly or simply achieved; on the contrary, the way in which the accommodation between the Greek and Christian views became worked out had a complex and tortuous history. However it remains true that down through the past two thousand years some version or other of this original Greek view has constituted the dominant theme of acceptable education. It has of course had periods of changing emphasis; but whether it be that intended by Charlemagne in the late eighth century (to make Europe a reborn empire of Christ), or that of both Erasmus and Luther in the sixteenth century (to make education, through the study of pious literature, the vehicle for reaching God), the view has always been evident. So, as late as the nineteenth century, the study of the classical liberal arts through the sequence of elementary or preparatory school, grammar school, and the arts faculty of the university remained

dominant, and any other approach to education struggled for existence, much less for acceptance.

This attitude is easily illustrated by contrasting it with that towards vocational preparation, at whatever level. We are never deeply troubled about what "being educated" means in a practical context; one is educated if one is fit to meet the needs of daily life. So, in ordinary speech we have no difficulty in understanding what is meant by "physical education", "sex education", "driver education", "technical education", "vocational education", "education for leisure" and the like. And we are never under any illusions that our meaning is global; on the contrary, our understanding accepts implicitly the limitations of the relevant range of operations.

Our difficulties come from the nagging awareness that these are limited goals that fall short of a grander and nobler ideal of education. The Greek notion that genuine education is wholly disinterested and autonomous, for example, survives fully in our concept of the truly educated person. Implanted firmly in us all is the belief that each of us has an unfulfilled "potential" and that only "genuine" or "true" education will ever develop this. Although we may try to ignore the intuition, we suspect that inside each of us is the void of unrealised excellence. We always set the simpler descriptive definitions of education against a wider frame of reference; we are aware that these operational definitions are partial, transitory and derive from a greater concept that is ultimate and universal. "Of course he's a clever engineer (or doctor, or whatever), but he's certainly not an educated person". How often have we heard or used such a phrase to refer, not only to engineers or doctors, but to any occupation or activity we care to consider?

At the same time the West has only really developed one institutional model for education, the school with a corresponding rather narrow range of teaching procedures or "methods". To the ancient Greeks, the word "school" (*scholé*) meant leisure or recreation, and was used by them to describe those groups of leisured thinkers who gathered to pursue their "mathematical" (the term was later supplanted by the Pythagorean coinage of "philosophical") enquiries into the nature of universal ideas. But schools very quickly came to be formalised and conducted according to rigid routines, and down through the centuries we can trace this process in relentless operation. The early Greeks sat the pupil on a bench with tablet on lap and writing stylus in hand; the Hellenistic Greeks formalised the chanting of multiplication tables and paradigms of verbs; the Romans added the method of question-and-answer teaching by recital. By the fifteenth century paper notebooks and the necessary correlative of the desk appeared; a century later, with the invention of printing, came the uniform textbook for the pupil's own use and, because of it, stricter grading could be employed. So Jacob Sturm in Strassburg developed the nine-grade sequence of instruction and later on in the sixteenth century the Jesuits, who became known as the "school-masters of Europe", extended this theory and practice of education not only throughout the Catholic regions of Europe but carried it later into much of the New World.

The seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries saw a great upsurge of educational improvement, implemented by a tremendous number of enthusiastic reformers of whom Comenius, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Herbart and Froebel are the outstanding names. In general, however, virtually all of the activity of these centuries continued within the established traditional framework: most of the reformers, with the obvious exception of Rousseau, sought to modify, improve and upgrade existing practices. This reforming period was itself stimulated by the increasing industrialisation and urbanisation of Europe, which required the improvement of the instrumental skills of ever-growing numbers of the population, and it was only natural for the notion of education to be evoked as the relevant process. At first this proved to be adequate, especially since, as transmitted through the ages, it always rested upon a preliminary basis in the elements of literacy: reading, writing and reckoning. So education began to be provided for an increasing percentage of the population and to meet this need the number of "schools" multiplied proportionately. But with this increase, the situation became more complex for, as new needs arose, they were usually rationalised in such a way that they could be met in terms of an organised curriculum taught in conventional schoolrooms. Although the ideology of education as a "liberalising" activity remained dominant, it was misunderstood and often ignored, and as increasing numbers of teachers were trained at minimal expense in the rapidly established, primitive teachers' colleges (often called "normal" schools) to teach the burgeoning school populations, the dissonance between theory and practice became correspondingly greater. By the middle of the twentieth century, more than a quarter of the total populations of advanced societies attended school, and in many ways this institution is still little changed from that which had evolved centuries before, for quite different purposes.

Crisis in Education: The Rhetoric of Concern

The advent of mass education has, at the same time, been responsible for creating a much wider public awareness of the process, and throughout the recent decades of this century there has been a growing public concern that is being expressed increasingly in a need, and a demand, for ever-better provisions. Interest in education in all of its senses has ceased to be an affair of the schoolroom and reflection and writing upon it is no longer restricted to a minority of scholars within the vocation. Particularly over the last decade or so, education has become a world-wide public preoccupation, not only in the advanced technologies but also in the under-developed and developing countries.

Such universal attention has been promoted by a number of factors, all arising from wider provisions of education, and stemming generally from an earlier and almost universal belief in the power of education to advance man's welfare. This belief too has a long history, but it first began to become increasingly evident in the early nineteenth century. Since then it has progressively accelerated to the extent that by the middle of the twentieth