
Introduction

DOING OUR JOBS

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This is a collection of just a few of the papers presented at the Ohio Valley Philosophy of Education Society's 2015 annual conference. OVPES President Greg Loving, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Chapter President of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) at UC Clermont College, developed this year's theme—*Teaching as Labor, Learning as Work: Educational Ideals and the Factory of Knowledge*—to attend to the privatization, anti-labor attacks on university faculty and the questioning of tenure and union rights to collect dues so prevalent in the last two decades. Contributors to this volume have responded as philosophers of education. Our jobs are to think and question in dialogue with our communities, including those in the broad field of philosophy and those in education. Often we connect the work of past philosophers and educators to present problems. Always, we run educational ideals, policies and practices through the perennial questions: what is good, right, true, just, or loving, in a particular context and given our stated goals?

President Loving invited Rudy Fichtenbaum, professor of economics at Wright State University and President of AAUP, to deliver the Phil Smith lecture. Fichtenbaum spoke about the corporatization of higher education, focusing on diminished faculty governance with the growth of full time administrative positions. Occupants of those positions are making decisions in response to external market forces, moving in tandem with the elimination of full-time tenure track positions and the unprecedented growth of non-tenure track, part-time instructors. He emphasized the effects of this transformation on students: those at public universities, which are struggling under deep funding cuts from their states, are paying more for an education, and being taught by under-resourced and time-poor itinerant faculty.

In his call for proposals, Loving marked the 50th anniversary of both the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Higher Education Act as part of Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. For the first time, the federal government was directly involved in regulating education through a collection of categorical grant programs. Such legislation positioned education as an avenue for economic justice. Yet, much has been lost in equating education with job training, where the corporate capitalist logic has been subsequently installed as the federal philosophy of public schooling. Where did equality go when efficiency stepped in? Some contributors to this collection address themes of labor, and most connect to economic structural critiques of schooling in some way, while a few

accepted the invitation to write “off-theme,” to speak directly to philosophers of education about internal tensions in our field.

To begin, Greg Loving’s presidential address advances a thesis that higher education is undergoing a transformation from an elitist to a populist structure. Where higher education was once only for a hereditary or meritocratic chosen few, the credentialing function, if not the experience alone, is now seen as necessary for all. More pointedly, a college degree is necessary for instrumental purposes: to get a “good” job or advance in some remunerative career. As a consumer good, a commodity, higher education becomes devalued as more of it—in varying forms and at different price points—is available to a wider market. Loving uses the work of sociologist Martin Trow to explain commodity theory of higher education, while calling on Foucault to explain the usefulness of critiquing (resisting) such a system. The good news, if the reader would like to see it this way, is that under a populist paradigm, higher education faculty move away from elitist attitudes that have kept them from identifying with labor groups and interests; that have kept them separate from secondary and elementary education and forms of non-formal education; and that created oppositional role relationships between faculty and students. Rather than students being in a course to work for the professor, the professor is moved closer to the role of customer service for the students. And that is the point where this new structure is read as bad news. However, as Loving suggests, “faculty may decline in social prestige, but not necessarily in trust and respect. Despite losing perceived value, higher education itself will never be unimportant.”

In her response, Sheron Fraser-Burgess challenges Loving’s elitism-populism dichotomy. Because democratic forces shape the educational marketplace as much as supply and demand (perhaps, as discourses in tension), complete commodification of education is not a necessary conclusion, or at least not a final one. Referring to Fichtenbaum’s lecture, Fraser-Burgess points to the federal investments in education to diversify enrollment and expand its research functions that were made from ethical positions as much as economic ones. She chides Loving for not attending to the “role that race and gender have played in the transition between elitist and populist education.” Low income and minority students still view higher education as a necessity (not as a right, as Loving says) for a good life, which counters, to some extent, the devaluation of a college degree for many people. Students’ growing rejection of the all-online college experience hints at the enduring appreciation of higher education as a means for developing relationships and having embodied experiences. And faculty have many ways to resist the consumer-populist conversion of higher education through how and what they teach and what they say and write publicly. Using the phrase *caveat venditor*, Fraser-Burgess reminds us that if corporate-led universities are using democracy and inclusivity to sell their products, they must

be ready to provide them when the (internal and external) consumers call for their realization.

Caitlin Howlett's unique interpretation of the conference theme, relates sex education (learning) to sex work (labor). Using Sara Ahmed's concept of "straightening devices," Howlett positions federally funded sexual education programs as part of the structure of normativity that creates and sustains a hierarchy of value for ways of being, with heteronormativity at the top. In "Sex Education, Sexual Labor, and Education," she recounts how the U.S. government took interest in sex education after World War I to help protect soldiers, men who were to later be husbands and family breadwinners, from "evil" (foreign, non-white) prostitutes who were contaminating them with venereal disease. Howlett notes that sex education in the Reagan era and beyond, with an emphasis on abstinence until marriage, was also advanced as a social program to prevent poverty and strengthen the economy. In both versions, sex is related to labor, with a value orientation toward women providing sexual labor in exchange for the support of marriage (to a man). The messaging of sex education is aimed at women, to create a marriageable women who is "pure, ideally white, innocent, and unscathed by the diseases her husband may or may not carry." This normalization automatically dehumanizes the prostitute, the sex worker, and at the same time, those who are in some way queer from the norm. Howlett suggests that simply shifting to more comprehensive sex education, which may start proliferating considering that Obama did not renew abstinence only programs in 2016, will not change its dehumanizing or straightening functions unless those programs question the "epistemological relationship between sexuality and education itself."

The first pair of themed essays examines structural racism in educational institutions and the criminal justice system, which have become inextricably linked. The authors employ two deadly ideologies. The first is explicit: minority students fail because teachers have low expectation for them. The second is psychologically suppressed yet still obviously potent: Black/Brown lives are not as valuable as white.

In "'High Expectations' Discourse as an Epistemology of Oppression," Morgan Anderson urges educators to refuse to accept that low teacher expectations (prejudices related to assumed abilities or attitudes) are the reason for academic failure for low income and minority students. Where policy discourse places high expectations as the remedy for whatever challenges all students, when paired with a pro-privatization agenda, this vapid mantra hurts some student more than others. For example, English language learners and students with trauma-related stress defensibly need customized, reasonable, and pedagogically supported expectations for all aspects of their well-being. Many students would be better served by changes in social policies that improved "out-of-school factors"¹ that affect their life chances as well as academic achievement.

¹ David C. Berliner, "Effects of Inequality and Poverty vs. Teachers and Schooling on America's Youth," *Teachers College Record* 115, no. 12 (2013).

Laudably, Anderson acknowledges the documented social-psychological effects on teacher-student relationships from the phenomenon of teacher expectations. She also astutely points to how the high expectations discourse hijacks this now “common sense”² belief that teachers’ expectations alone create student success or failure.

Using Judith Butler’s work, Lisa Perhamus and Clarence Joldersma recognize the #BlackLivesMatter movement as a form of public education that exposes the differential “mattering” of lives: white and Black/Brown. As BLM founders have articulated, the statement is meant to call attention to the mattering of queer, female, disabled, and otherwise disempowered and dehumanized groups of people. The loss of lives that matter is grievable because they are socially valuable. In “Interpellating Dispossession,” Perhamus and Joldersma use the too-numerous examples of the disparate and deadly experiences of Black people in the criminal justice system, highlighted by the protested killings of Treyvon Martin and Michael Brown in particular. The authors say that bringing these real people to our awareness allows their spirits to “haunt” the discourse on systemic racism throughout all structures. Educators can use this public education to help our students challenge the norms of social value, as well as to unlearn the unconscious, socialized identification of those who are Black/Brown not as lives, but as threats to life. Indeed, our white students are so much more aware of, or at least receptive to hear about, institutional racism these days because of publicized examples of fatal injustice and the public teaching of BLM.

The next two contributions to this collection engage the theme of vocational education, using John Dewey’s idea of educating through the vocations, not for them. Nicolas Eastman conceptualizes neoliberal vocational education programs that serve primarily “at-risk” students as “Dropout Factories,” emphasis on “factories.” He provides an example of a public-private partnership program, a structure favored by the Obama-Duncan administration, which replaces in-school coursework with under-paid factory work and industry-related training “classes.” The rationale is that they are providing students who are bound to drop out anyway with a way to stay in school and transition into low-skilled factory work. This, after all, is practically better than letting them drop out and end up in the criminal justice system, and is framed as a poverty reduction initiative. Eastman compares the new vocational education to the efficiency-obsessed McChoakumchild school from Charles Dickens’s *Hard Times*. The celebration of job training in place of education can be understood once one accepts that all schooling is preparation for the wage-earning workforce—John Dewey’s nightmare. If the U.S. wants to advance a democratic system and reduce poverty, Eastman pleads that we “stop training students to

² Michael W. Apple, *Official Knowledge: Democratic Education in a Conservative Age* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

adapt to the existing economic system and begin educating them to imagine a new one.”

Continuing with Dewey’s vision of vocational education in “Bringing Adult Learning to the University,” Mark Keitges describes a strategy for higher education teachers to encourage their “globally mobile” adult students to have “a liberal understanding of vocation.” Keitges uses Dewey’s idea of multiple vocational activities to contrast his students’ imagination of vocations as occupations (jobs), which are attainable via a plotted path and super specialization through individual effort. In simply preparing students for the world of work as it is, education reproduces professionals as obedient technicians. Referencing Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*, Keitges states that “educational institutions should seek to transform industrial society rather than slavishly follow its lead.” Because these adult students also resist an overt challenge to their way of thinking, Keitges suggests using “case experiences” such as field experiences, films, and guest speakers who can reveal, document, or embody the lives of liberally educated, competent, and autonomous professionals. In so doing, teachers perform Dewey’s ideal task in providing multiple views of vocational fields as diverse, open, and creative pursuits of social contribution and personal interest fulfillment.

The next four essays exemplify the diversity of work roles and responsibilities taken on in the job of educational philosophy. These include an application of liberal philosophy to media pedagogy, a call to revisit the ideal theories of our field, an argument for more (Deweyan) pragmatism in narrative research and an appeal for more (Foucauldian) subjectivity in educational research.

Dan Mamlok considers how the concepts of “Negative and Positive Freedom” in liberal philosophy might be used to inform educators about their students’ use of digital technology. Neither limiting the use of digital technology for the sake of what is best for the individual student and the common good, nor allowing complete and unchecked liberty in its use seem appropriate for education aimed at democratic ends through democratic means. A Deweyan pragmatic balance is needed so that teachers might provide critical literacy instruction using digital technology—revealing the corporate interests and use of media to shape desire and drive consumption—while directly teaching students how groups have used digital technology for social justice ends. I am reminded of the *Frontline* documentary “Generation Like,”³ which addresses how technology uses and is used by youth, and Mamlok reminds us of the Arab Spring and Occupy movements, which were overwhelmingly grassroots, plural, and justice-oriented.

Gabriel Keehn writes that philosophers of education should continue working on ideal theories rather than engaging in practical theorizing (nonideal theories). Keehn says that educational philosophers have rushed to nonideal theory out of capitulation to the marginalization of the humanities within

³ On PBS, February 18, 2014, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/generation-like/>.

neoliberal ideology and education policy, or from guilt over coming to the educational party without being teachers—the center-stage status category in the democratic struggle. We need a “Roots Redux,” as he names his essay, because our field never underwent the productive clash between ideal and nonideal theories that happened in political philosophy. He uses Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice*, and critics of this work, as an example. Keehn reviews a brief history of the philosophy of education to show that at least in the timespan of modern schooling, ours has been only an applied field (philosophy of education), and one that is adopting actionable, practical, nonideal theories before having fully worked out, and then critiqued and revised, ideal theories of its own.

Next, we have an argument in favor of more pragmatism in the philosophy of research, titled “Insufficiency of Entitlement Criteria as Justification for Knowledge Claims in Narrative Research.” Here, Justin Christopher argues that the criteria for warranted knowledge claims in narrative research are not sufficient without evidentiary reasons for acceptance—that is, without validating the correspondence to material reality of both the collected narratives and the researcher’s interpretations of them, the most that could be claimed is narrative truth. His solution is to add a pragmatic framework to narrative research in order for something close to historical truth to be claimed. Christopher acknowledges that narrative researchers may not aspire to standards of historical truth, yet he asserts that problems result when the conclusions of narrative research are picked up and reported as research “fact.” He offers that pragmatism as methodology, as in John Dewey’s *The Theory of Inquiry*, rescues narrative work from this potential fault.

Journeying away from concerns for “the practical” in educational research, David Roof and Elena Polush contribute their essay, “Parrhēsia and a Consideration of Humanism, Subjectivity, and Ethics within Educational Research.” The authors note that the term parrhēsia, as used by Foucault, is typically read as truth-telling in the discourse on free speech. The authors develop a more specific translation for educational research, “which serves as a mode to engage subjectivity and involves interrogation of self-understanding,” so that research becomes an ethical practice. Foucault’s critique of humanism and subjectivity are described as bringing the critical back to the Enlightenment project, mostly through an examination of his lectures at the Collège de France. The authors hope to interrupt the “procedurization” of educational research in favor of more self-reflexive practices.

The final two contributors critique and update Amy Gutmann’s democratic theory in speculating on the best path toward educational and social equality in an inequitable and pluralistic democratic society. Tony DeCesare delivers “A Capabilities Based Critique of Gutmann’s Democratic Interpretation of Equal Educational Opportunity.” He specifically questions her minimum “democratic threshold” as an outcomes-based assessment of equality. Gutmann requires that all children receive enough inputs to ensure that they are able to participate in democratic deliberation and the political process. As long as the

threshold is demonstrated, according to DeCesare's reading, Gutmann ignores the differential conversion factors (Senian capabilities) that enable or prevent a child from actually using her democratic knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Outcomes-focused measures always ignore non-assessed factors, inside the school, in the child's special social and cultural contexts, and in the society at large. Yet, here is where inequality exists. DeCesare proposes that rather than satisfy ourselves with meeting Gutmann's threshold, educators should use Robeyn's "mapping tool for capabilities" to make visible the circumstances that "shrink" children's capabilities to be educated for democracy. He describes this as a community-developed list of "capability inputs" (good nutrition and health care, safe passage to and from school) and "capability obstacles" (stress, learning disabilities, insecure housing) along with a list of who may be able to develop or limit each.

However, Kessa Roberts makes good use of Gutmann's "democratic threshold" in finding a just compromise between parental liberty and societal equality in "The Ethics of Conferring Parental Advantage." Roberts critiques Brighthouse and Swift's argument for state limitation on social advantages bestowed on children by their parents where such advantages exceed: what is done to strengthen the bond between parent and child; what is given directly by parent to child; and what is done in the private sphere. Roberts suggests that publicly resourced institutions should attempt to mimic—though not to the exact degree or kind—the advantages bestowed by affluent parents and direct them to students who receive fewer advantages. Employing Warnick's update to Gutmann's democratic threshold, Roberts's solution calls for "equal distribution of state resources once the threshold has been met." Doing so may interrupt the reproduction of societal inequality, while not interfering with the rights of parents and the pursuit of familial goods.

Starting with the analysis of the popularization of higher education and its implication for educational labor set by the first two essays, through the theorizing of policy, pedagogy, curriculum, and research, the authors in this collection are *doing their jobs*. The work of educational philosophers is to think and rethink the taken-for-granted processes and products of educational systems and continually question how well they match the sometimes competing values and beliefs of the larger society. As this collection demonstrates, philosophers of education labor over what constitutes a good education, how it may be known, and how well it serves social aims.
