
A SECOND WIND FOR THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION:
THE APPLICATION OF WILLIAM JAMES'S *THE ENERGIES OF MEN* TO
THE FIELD OF PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Julia T. Novakowski
The Ohio State University

In 1906, William James stood in front of his colleagues and implored them to study the phenomenon known as a “second wind” in his essay *The Energies of Men*.¹ James was known as the “grandfather of American psychology,” producing the seminal text *The Principles of Psychology*, and is best known for his work in philosophy titled *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*.² In *The Energies of Men*, James challenges his younger colleagues to examine and measure where energy reserves come from and how to tap into them. To this end he begins by stating that a “topography” is needed of the range of human power (energy) similar to that of an “oculist determining the field of vision.”³ He believes that examining this energy known as a second wind could hold the key to the problem of “individual and national education.”⁴

The problems of “individual and national education” that he alludes to at the end of his lecture are not elaborated upon. What is clear is that he lived during the Progressive era when the field of philosophy and psychology were still in their adolescent stages within American universities. Also during this time, education as a field of study emerged as a serious academic discipline that was hotly debated and contested. Although his lecture was delivered in 1906, over one hundred years later there may still be lessons to learn and use in the field of philosophy of education, a field that faces its own challenges today.

In the changing landscape of modern academia, philosophers of education also face systemic challenges in individual and national education. Nationally, humanities departments (which include philosophy of education) have been shrinking. Federal data circa 2013 shows that nationally “the percentage of humanities majors [students enrolled] hovers around 7%—half the 14% share in 1970.”⁵ This declining trend has been taking place since the 1970s. However, the urgency of this number increased with the recession of 2008 and the “profound shift toward viewing college education as a training ground” in

¹ William James, *The Energies of Men* (New York: Philosophical Review, 1907), 1–38. The lecture was originally presented December 28, 1906.

² William James, *Principles of Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt, 1890); William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1907).

³ James, *Energies of Men*, 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵ Tamar Lewin, “As Interest Fades in the Humanities, Colleges Worry,” *The New York Times*, October 30, 2013, <https://nyti.ms/2l1x65h>.

contrast with goals of humanities, which include educating the “whole person.”⁶ Individually, philosophers of education try to work against this neoliberal beast, but many “burn out” (and “burn-in”) through additional work requirements.⁷ It is the job of the philosophers of education not only to teach and do research, but also convince both students and college administration of their value without losing energy and focus.

In this essay I propose that the field of Philosophy of Education is in search of its own second wind and can find guidance in the work and life of William James. This paper is meant to invite conversation on the challenges faced and provide potential solutions in the field. The goal is to find the “cash-value” of our own field within the changing academic landscape through the concept of the second wind.⁸ In this paper I suggest that in order for philosophers of education to find their second wind, we as a field must be willing to engage in more discussion and public intellectualism, as James had done throughout his life, and find the “regenerative properties” that exist in these processes that push us from the first wind to the second wind.⁹

This paper is structured in three parts. In the first part I create an exigency for this piece by considering the following questions: “Does the field of philosophy of education need a second wind?” and “What are the challenges faced within the changing landscape?” The next part attempts to dissect the metaphorical or perhaps ontological unit of a “second wind” within James’s essay. The final part attempts to connect the ideas set forth in *The Energies of Men* and to discover their practical application within the field of philosophy of education. The guiding question throughout this paper is: “How can the field of philosophy of education find its ‘second wind’ in the changing landscape of academia and how might William James provide guidance or an antidote to these challenges?”

⁶ Ibid. Quotation is from the president of the American Council of Learned Societies.

⁷ Chris Higgins, *The Good Life of Teaching: An Ethics of Professional Practice* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 159. “Burn-out” is a feeling of exhaustion in K–12 teaching, but also present in higher education, that often leads to teachers leaving the field. “Burn-in” is a term used by Chris Higgins and will be described later on in the paper.

⁸ James, *Pragmatism*. “Cash-value” is a famous term James uses. Business scholars interpret it literally. Within philosophy it is used more figuratively to explain the value of an idea. An idea (or question) has “cash-value” if it leads to a discernable difference in one outcome versus a different outcome. It is used with metaphysical disputes and other philosophical questions. Using “cash-value” may be ironic in the larger conversation related to neoliberalism, but ultimately, something with “cash-value” really means an idea that is practical and practicable; and the goal of a second wind predicated on a reinvigoration of public discourse and democratic dialogue may oppose economic logic, but may also be unrelated to economics altogether.

⁹ Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1950), 267.

PART I: DOES THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION NEED A SECOND WIND?

Philosophy of education as a field faces many obstacles and challenges in an academic landscape that has been changing from the 1970s to the present. These include: shrinking departments, diminishing funds, fear of job security, and the ethical dilemma of training the next generation of scholars. In addition to structural and macro problems surrounding the field in academia, educators also face the individual challenges of burn-out and burn-in.¹⁰ Considering these obstacles in two categories, first, systemic and structural challenges, and second, individual challenges, a case can be made that the field of philosophy of education is in search of a second wind and that James may hold solutions to at least some of these challenges.

STRUCTURAL AND SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES IN ACADEMIA

Systemic and structural challenges in the field of philosophy of education include the changing university, funding, and considerations in training the next generation of scholars. At the Philosophy of Education Society's annual conference in 2016, there was a session that was centered on the ethical dilemmas in training future scholars in the field.¹¹ Tenured professors discussed the challenges of enrollment in their courses and funding for their graduate students as they compete with other departments. One new professor mentioned their gratitude in finding a job considering the hundreds of applicants vying for one position (sometimes as an adjunct). Another professor discussed the ethical dilemma in training a new generation of philosophers of education when they watch their graduates struggle to find a placement in higher education. In this same session, others reminisced of the "heyday of academia" in the 1970s as a counter narrative to the shrinking departments today, and recent articles corroborate their stories with data.

In an article on the changing academic landscape, Tamar Lewin explains how "humanities are being eclipsed by science" at Stanford and many other institutions.¹² At Harvard University there has been a 20% decline in humanities majors over the last decade.¹³ The author mentions indirectly the impact of neoliberalism as a cause for the shift in interest away from humanities and towards science and STEM fields, which offer more lucrative job prospects. Before the recent economic recession, the role of the university was to educate

¹⁰ Higgins, *The Good Life of Teaching*.

¹¹ Bryan Warnick, Leonard Waks, Nakia Pope, Gert Biesta, Katariina Holma, and Jane Blanken-Webb (chair and commentator), "The Ethics of Preparing Graduate Students: Considering the Future of Philosophy of Education," (alternative session panel, Philosophy of Education Society 73rd Annual Meeting, Toronto, Canada, 2016).

¹² Lewin, "As Interest Fades." The author provides many examples from multiple universities in the article.

¹³ *Ibid.*

the “whole person,” but now colleges are simply places for “job preparation.”¹⁴ As students and faculty alike try to grapple with the challenges in the changing landscape of academia, for the fortunate few who attain the status of professor in the humanities, there exist individual challenges requiring attention.

INDIVIDUAL CHALLENGES IN ACADEMIA

Professors (and future professors) in the field of philosophy of education also face emotional and physical challenges. One challenge is burning out or becoming emotionally and physically exhausted from the work of teaching. In *The Good Life of Teaching: An Ethics of Professional Practice*, Chris Higgins describes the concept of “burn-out.”¹⁵ Higgins explains that the self-less act of teaching is hard to sustain for long periods of time and that “if the activity [the lesson or teaching] fails to feed the self [the teacher] in some more direct way, the energy for the activity will be spent sooner rather than later.”¹⁶ He writes about energy being drained from outside sources such as the classroom, students, and curriculum, which lead to burn-out, but also explains how teachers can drain themselves from within and that this can lead to a new concept he describes as “burn-in.”

Burn-in implies an inner energy and morality that can drain a teacher. Higgins explains burn-out as an exterior drain to the teacher, and burn-in as a moral component that comes from within that exhausts a teacher or professor, shifting from a hypothetical progression of “altruism to asceticism, from idealism to burn-out and burn in.”¹⁷ Examining Higgins’s argument and the challenges that teachers and professors face with burn-out and burn-in, the fundamental question in this paper is “how can teachers tap into this energy source and push forward to reach their second wind?” James’s *The Energies of Men* seeks to answer this question.

CONCLUSION TO PART I

In *The Energies of Men*, James speaks to academics in a year when universities were facing their own unique challenges. Although the challenges faced during the Progressive era and today are slightly different, both demonstrate how the fields (philosophy and philosophy of education) are trying to prove their value and worth to universities. In the next section, I will unpack the concept of James’s second wind and connect it with Erik Erikson’s ideas around moving from “stagnation” (or a type of burn out) to “generativity.” Ultimately, the hope is to empower people in the field of philosophy of education to find their “second wind” and share their passion with others through public intellectualism.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Higgins, *The Good Life of Teaching*, 159.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

**PART II: WHAT IS A SECOND WIND
AS EXPLAINED IN *THE ENERGIES OF MEN*?**

In *The Energies of Men*, James considers the origins of the phenomenon known as a second wind. He asks: where does this energy come from and how can one harness it? He posits that examining this occurrence could have positive impacts on the field of psychology, philosophy, and American society. In this part of the essay there will be three sub-sections. In the first subsection, the philosophical “guts” of *Energies of Men* will be exposed and analyzed. Next I will consider how James’s work might provide guidance to philosophers of education today by introducing Erik Erikson’s idea of generativity and suggest that a concrete, practicable connection can be made. In the third section, ideas from the previous sections will serve as a foundation to build the argument that philosophy of education is in search of a second wind and that strategies may be applied in finding a solution.

James structures his lecture first with an argument for the real presence and relevance of a second wind and then uses examples of people who have found their second wind to bolster his argument. He does not explicitly determine where the second wind comes from, but suggests ways that others have accessed it through habituation and evolutionary spontaneity, both physically and mentally. He concludes by telling his listeners that we need to continue studying the various types of people who have been able to tap into their “energy reserves . . . and set that energy loose.”¹⁸ In that same vein, this paper is meant to continue the conversation in the hopes of finding our energy and second wind in the field of philosophy of education today.

THE ONTOLOGICAL “GUTS”
OF *THE ENERGIES OF MEN* AND THE SECOND WIND

James begins his essay with the familiar scenario of sitting down to write and feeling “stale” or fatigued. This is similar to challenges faced in the field of philosophy of education. It is not that philosophers of education feel stale, but that they are working harder than ever to prove their value and relevance in the academy. They are pushed to write and conduct research endlessly, but may be exhausted and experience burn-out. James then discusses miraculously warming up and feeling a second wind. He explains that there is an “unusual necessity” or “energy”¹⁹ that forces us to press onward. It surprises us, and then the fatigue vanishes and is replaced with a new energy that we have tapped into. How can we as philosophers of education have our own second wind and where does it come from?

Contemplating the origins of this energy, two potential options present themselves. The second wind could be considered physical or mental. This energy could come from a place outside or inside of us. Echoing his earlier work,

¹⁸ James, *Energies of Men*, 38.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

in *Principles of Psychology* published in 1890, James writes about the power of habit as a source of pushing from a first wind into a second wind. He writes that, on the mental and psychological level, “any sequence of mental action which has been frequently repeated tends to perpetuate itself,” and in this sense, habits are useful in focusing our attention and thereby allowing us to develop “our higher powers of mind.”²⁰ This habitual process can be done mentally or physically. James believes that we should develop these good habits as early in life as we can.²¹

As philosophers of education, it is important to practice positive habits that can help perpetuate the field and demonstrate its intrinsic value. In the field of education, James writes, “Education . . . [is] *the organization of acquired habits of conduct and tendencies to behavior.*”²² He continues that when starting a new habit—such as incorporating public intellectualism into the field of philosophy of education—one must “seize the very first possible opportunity to act on every resolution you make, and on every emotional prompting you may experience in the direction of the habits you aspire to gain.”²³ In finding a second wind for the field of philosophy of education, we must also seize first any opportunities to engage in public intellectualism. James discusses the process of habit and finding one’s second wind as originating from within oneself and also coming from external forces.

EXTERNAL FORCES THAT LEAD TO A SECOND WIND

James considers the physical and external forces that bring forth a second wind and tap into energy reserves. He considers the nature of a diet to make his potentially metaphysical claim more concrete. James explains that when dieting, individuals may reach “nutritive equilibrium.”²⁴ This means that first people may be compelled through interest and a desire to lose weight (a first wind), and then reach a weight-loss plateau. In order to push forward and reach into the energy reserves needed to continue the process, they may have to habitually push themselves to reach the second wind and reach the weight loss they desire.²⁵ However one cannot lose weight forever, and we as philosophers of education need to find a balance in how we find our second wind through engaging in public intellectualism.

Within the field of philosophy of education, we need to tap into our first energy reserve through interest, and then through habit building we might be able

²⁰ James, *Principles of Psychology*, 116.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

²² William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology: And to Students on Some of Life’s Ideals* (New York: Henry Holt, 1899), 29, emphasis original.

²³ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁴ James, *The Energies of Men*, 9.

²⁵ The caveat is: we cannot and should not attempt to lose weight forever and we cannot and should not attempt to build institutions centered on the work of philosophers of education. There are limitations to second winds regardless of the application.

to find our second wind. Habit as an internal process may lead to a second wind, but there are also external processes that may help. James continues,

the problem is then, how can men be trained up to their most useful pitch of energy? And how can nations make such training most accessible to all their sons and daughters. This, after all, is only the general problem of education, formulated in slightly different terms.²⁶

To answer this question, I turn to a contemporary of James in the field of psychology: Erik Erikson.

ERIK ERIKSON'S THEORY OF GENERATIVITY AS RELATED TO A SECOND WIND

Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial stages may help elucidate James's starting point. James writes, "Everyone feels that his total *power* rises when he passes to a higher *qualitative* level of life."²⁷ Erikson, in his seventh stage of psychosocial development, explains generativity versus stagnation in his book *Childhood and Society*. In adulthood, he suggests that people begin to situate themselves in the "bigger" picture and consider their contributions and the process of giving back, which may lead to caring for and fostering the growth of others. He writes, "generativity, then is primarily the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation . . . [which may include] productivity and creativity."²⁸ Indeed, the method by which James delivered his work *The Energies of Men* in lecture form to the future generation of scholars in a semi-public space represents in itself a form of generativity and may have inspired a second wind of energy in his audience to push forward in their own respective works.²⁹

APPLYING GENERATIVITY: MOVING FROM THE ARM CHAIR TO THE LECTERN TO THE CLASSROOM

In order for the field to find its Jamesian second wind, we must be willing to recognize our own "blindnesses" and challenges within our field.³⁰ Philosophers in general have been granted the negative connotation of the "arm chair" philosopher, one who sits alone, thinks alone, and writes alone. In the field of philosophy of education, that negative vision of philosophers may shift slightly by having them get out of their "arm chair" to speak about Socrates and Aristotle to students. However, the problem remains that there is still a lack of

²⁶ James, *The Energies of Men*, 11.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, emphasis original.

²⁸ Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 267.

²⁹ There is something special about the community space that promotes generativity and giving back that is uniquely different from simply submitting and reading papers.

³⁰ James, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," in *Talks to Teachers*.

connection from theory to practice. This current problem also existed during James's time. He writes about a disconnection and combative nature between different "camps" of thinkers, philosophers, and psychologists during the Progressive Era.³¹

Rene Arcilla wrote a paper on a similar problem that exists between theory and practice titled, "Why Aren't Philosophers and Educators Speaking to Each Other?" In this article, Arcilla writes "that 'philosophy of education' may be a contradiction in terms."³² Similar to how James explains the challenges between philosophers and psychologists (in his writings), Arcilla begins his article by explaining the internal challenges that exist with the singular field of philosophy of education as a combination of two separate disciplines.

By and large, the philosophical community expresses no interest in thinking about education. The educational community does not seem to care about philosophy. The few books or articles that link problems and concerns in one discipline to those in the other tend to address only an increasingly marginal and shrinking community of other philosophers of education.³³

Arcilla ends his article explaining that one of the reasons that the marriage of philosophy and education as a field is "on the rocks" is that the "spouses are not speaking to each other" and that there is an "eroded" confidence in the others' appreciation.³⁴ Those "camps" of philosophers, as James discusses, and the two disciplines, as Arcilla discusses, have come together more over the years, but in order to make the "marriage" work, I believe public intellectualism and generative processes could further unite the fields and provide a second wind.

While James is unable to find THE origin of a second wind, he does attempt to make generalizations and find themes through examples. His examples, such as yoga and dieting, suggest a physical aspect (yoga also suggests inner work) of the second wind. James also describes the power of the mind guiding us first with interest and the "inner work" that it takes to tap into this energy. The question is, if our first wind is motivated by interest, how can we find our second wind and apply this energy to the field of philosophy of education?

³¹ James, *Pragmatism*. In this piece he mentions the two camps: the "tough minded" and the "tender minded."

³² Rene Arcilla. "Why Aren't Philosophers and Educators Speaking to Each Other?" *Educational Theory* 52, no. 1 (2002): 1.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

PART III: THE APPLICATION OF *THE ENERGIES OF MEN* IN FINDING A SECOND WIND FOR PHILOSOPHERS OF EDUCATION

When “fatigue” sets in, philosophers of education can find inspiration from James in finding their second wind. James uses the term “regenerate” when discussing how some pupils find their first wind through interest and then attempt to tap into energy reserves and find their second wind. One method may be to focus on unlocking our hidden energies through a process of questions, perceiving ideas as live or dead, reflecting and choosing from these ideas, and then continuing the process all over again. Truth be told, there does not exist a robust argument that I can make about finding the second wind. Instead, I provide examples and processes (similar to how James provides examples).³⁵

MOVING FROM INTEREST TO ACTION THROUGH QUESTIONS AND REFLECTION

The potential processes for tapping into this energy reserve can be divided into two parts. For James, one can interpret the first wind to be interest-driven. Meaning, when one is motivated to do something, then their energies are narrowed into the interest-driven action. The second wind is more difficult to locate, yet scholars may be motivated through reflecting on their first wind and the interest that led to those initial actions. One might reflect and ask, “What inspired you to study philosophy of education and where did that interest come from?” After that reflection, the second wind may be tapped into through a process of generativity as explained by Erikson.

I believe that in order to truly tap into the second wind within the field of philosophy of education, we must be willing to open up the field to more public lectures and debate and move from theory to practice. We must replace our arm chairs with lecterns, ignoring the mantra of “publish or perish” and instead adopting that of “publish and prosper only if you engage in public intellectualism.” Will this create larger humanities departments or combat shrinking departments? Not immediately. However, with a heightened awareness of the value that philosophy of education has to offer to multiple fields through public lectures, there could be a gradual change and shift away from the neoliberal trends that have impacted humanities departments over the past several decades.

James uses examples of stories of people overcoming great feats in their life through their ability to tap into their reserve of energies, in fighting cancer, depression, and addiction. Yet, it is his last example that rings truest within our field. He talks of the bookish, erudite scholar with whom all are afraid to engage

³⁵ In this essay, I choose to focus on a select few works for the sake of space. If interested, seek out *On The Varieties of Religious Experiences*, where he discusses “elevated spiritual self,” which could also be connected to a second wind and energy reserves.

in discourse: “An intellect thus tied down by literality and decorum makes on one the same sort of an impression that an able-bodied man would who should habituate himself to do his work with only one of his fingers, locking up the rest of his organism and leaving it unused.”³⁶ We as philosophers of education should push to not be the “one-fingered” person. Meaning, we should engage with the public on the topics that we are passionate about in a format that is accessible and applicable.

CONCLUSION: JAMES AS SECOND WIND

Although William James wrote extensively on the mind and was fascinated with the human ability to make choices, he himself was undecided on almost everything in his life. I believe that James found his second wind in life when he began teaching and sharing his ideas. A man so undecided would never do something like teach college students for over thirty years, unless there existed a second wind and unique energy within him.

In one of the first biographies written about James, Emile Boutroux attempts to define James’s philosophy: “The philosophy of James is essentially free. It goes boldly forward with experience as its only guide.”³⁷ Using this philosophy, perhaps we as philosophers of education can find a second wind built on experience, the power of sharing, and Erikson’s generativity. For James it is also important that ideas can bridge theory and practice. He believed that “the whole function of philosophy ought to be to find out what definite difference it will make to you and me, at definite instants of our life, if this world-formula or that world-formula be the true one.”³⁸ Our job as philosophers of education is to share scholarship that makes a definite difference to the lives of others.

Boutroux also wrote that the “first remarkable trait of James’s philosophy [is that]; it is anti-academic, anti-official, anti-scholastic; it is addressed to all, it speaks the language of all.”³⁹ Perchance we as scholars can find the metaphorical unit known as a second wind within us through our desire to share as public not private intellectuals. We can create spaces for public discussion on philosophy of education in practice and promote the interest that we have found in ourselves with others, so that university departments are not asking *why* we exist, but instead *how* we can increase and expand the scholarship.⁴⁰

³⁶ James, *The Energies of Men*, 37.

³⁷ Emile Boutroux, *William James*, trans. Archibald and Barbara Henderson (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1912), 119.

³⁸ James, *Pragmatism*, 18. Connecting back to cash-value, the “cash-value” is the “world- formula” that makes a difference and is meaningful in life. It is not hypothetical nor is tethered to the neoliberal agenda. James believes it is important that our ideas have practical meaning and importance outside of the world of theory.

³⁹ Boutroux. *William James*, 116.

⁴⁰ I do not believe that James would want scholars to write for the general public exclusively or the academic population exclusively. He was known for writing in a way

that was not “watered down” in content, yet challenged the general public and his colleagues in the academy. The topics that we write on are up to us, they can relate to other fields or not, but we must ask ourselves what value our writing or lectures have and what practical difference our words make in the larger conversation related to education in and outside of the academy.