



PHILOSOPHY AND EDUCATION

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Not very long ago, philosophy of education concerned itself mainly with the history of educational ideas only. The current trend,¹ however, is characterised mostly by the new concern with the meaning of concepts which are so often used to express views on and about education. This leads further on to the logic of the justifications which are offered in discussions on educational issues, The change in approach has been necessitated by the realization that:

- a) philosophy has a basic role to play in educational theory and practice;
- b) Educational parlance has become sufficiently involved and complex to need an exercise in concept-clarification; and
- c) There is no in-built mechanism within the sphere of education which may play the role assigned to philosophy.

The new Scenario necessitates a fresh look at the educational problems in the light of old Socratic queries: 'What do you mean?' and 'How do you know?' These questions very acutely impinge upon such relevant educational concepts as freedom, equality, indoctrination, the individual needs, abilities, knowledge etc, even in a practical context. Gilbert Ryle makes the point amply clear when he remarks: " It is one thing to know how to apply such concepts, quite

another to know how to correlate them with one another and with concepts of other sorts. Many people can talk sense with concepts but cannot talk sense about them; they know by practice how to operate with concepts anyhow inside familiar fields, but they cannot state the logical relations governing their use"² In Ryle's view, the task is not to increase the knowledge but to rectify the logical geography of the knowledge which we already possess. I would venture to add that philosophy plays a crucial role in educational practice as well.

EDUCATION AS A DISCIPLINE

Israel Scheffler has raised an interesting basic question i.e. 'Is Education a Discipline?'³ Apparently, education operates as a field subject rather than as a basic discipline. There are no distinctively set, 'educational' ways of thinking, In studying education, one is all the time employing psychological or sociological or philosophical ways of thinking to shed light on, or to solve some problem in, the domain of human learning.

This brings up the problem of distinction of education as a subject of study, The subjects we are familiar with in the school and college curricula are well-differentiated. They are not only different from each other but are also different in different ways. Some are distinguished by virtue of their distinct forms of thought and different logical structures. They formulate different sets of concepts (terminology) whose relationships determine what meaningful propositions can be constructed. They employ different modes of testing procedures to establish the validity of the propositions. Consequently, e.g., if one moves from, say, physics to history, the difference is quite obvious. The same, however, cannot be claimed with regard to education *viz a viz* philosophy, psychology or sociology,

It is, therefore, but natural that other disciplines play their legitimate roles in filling up the gaps and make up the deficiencies which are found in the educational sphere. The fact of the matter is that even the basic ingredients have to be provided from other

sources. Actually, nobody denies the role other disciplines play in the formulation of educational objectives, methods of teaching, formulation of curricula, etc. This is also true of philosophy which operates at various levels within the educational spheres and augments educational activity in more ways than one.

EDUCATIONAL THEORY AND PRACTICE

The term 'educational theory' is often used as a synonym for educational philosophy. But no one is likely actually to claim that educational philosophy is all there is to educational discussion. Indeed, psychology, religion and sociology are highly relevant to the formulation of a theory of education. Obviously, we need to apply well-established experimental findings in psychology or sociology to the practice of education, but, here also, philosophy plays a crucial, evaluative role to provide justification to the educational practice. For example, psychological and sociological considerations are crucial in the construction and use of intelligence tests in educational selection. Sociological evidence to the effect that middle class children have an advantage over lower class children in their performance on intelligence tests needs to be weighed against psychological evidence that intelligence tests are the best available discriminators of I.Q. at certain ages. But the whole issue is required to be judged in relation to arguments of a philosophical kind about the desirability of using such tests in educational selection.

Philosophy, on a broader spectrum, infiltrates all the areas of education. For example:

- a) General aims and the principles of curriculum construction, general education versus specialization or vocational education. General aims such as those of self-realization, character development, the education of the emotions, autonomy and growth. Whether the curriculum is to be thought of as differentiated in some way, for instance, into subjects, or as

'integrated' around 'life themes' or projects chosen on the basis of personal interest;

- b) Teaching methods-content of what has to be learned and social control. Teaching concepts such as indoctrination, training, conditioning, instruction, etc;
- c) Organization within a class-room or school, such as streaming children by ability, practices at administrative levels of education system, justice, social and educational efficiency, freedom of choice equality of opportunity and democratic control. In a more systematic order, the philosophy is relevant to educational theory and practice in the following areas:

- (i) Ethics as a study of both social morality in particular and of personal values more generally.

- (ii) Social philosophy, or the application of ethics to social institutions, relevant to the organisational structure of education system.

- (iii) Epistemology: a study of the nature and scope of knowledge, belief and truth and its impact on educational theory and practice.

- (iv) Philosophical psychology: intelligence, thinking, creativity, concept formation, activity, interest and imagination.

Even more important is the role of philosophy in the designing of principles for educational practice. Such questions as 'What ought children learn?' 'How have educational institutions developed in the

past and how ought they develop in the future? 'Should they be allowed to develop on autonomous lines?' 'Whether academic autonomy proves to be vital to academic excellence or administrative and financial ones?' 'In what direction does privatisation of education lead in a given socio-cultural set-up?' 'On what lines have the curricula evolved and in what direction ought they evolve?' 'What standards of taste and culture do we want to pass on to the next generation?' 'On what lines do we want to mould the lives of people through the educational process?' 'What do we ultimately mean by learning and knowledge?' Such philosophical questions frequently arise in the course of an educator's work and the attempt to answer them systematically in philosophy of education and history of education is surely a part of the theory of education. These disciplines, according to James Gribble, "are often crucial components of the hybrid arguments which lead to the educational principles"⁴ and to their application in the practical sphere.

Peter Hirst has very pertinently remarked: "If we can begin to understand more accurately ... the way in which such fundamental disciplines as history, psychology, sociology and philosophy can in fact contribute to the rational determination of educational practice, there is serious hope that the study of education by intending teachers will in future bear much greater practical fruit"⁵

PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS IN EDUCATION

Let us now come back to the place of philosophical analysis in education and Ryle's mapping of logical geography of concepts. Analysis, indeed, is sceptical of large scale theorizing. For, most educational theories such as those of Pestalozzi, Froebell and Montessori have been dubbed as no more than mere rationalization of successful practices. These theories combine metaphysical claims (e.g. education is improvement of the soul) with value judgments (education according to nature) etc. However, it is also a fact that problems usually arise against a background of theory, and that

experience becomes problematic just when it contradicts some theory of what experience should be like.

Philosophical analysis in education is carried out with a clear-cut goal, that of clearing the ground for arriving at a wide variety of practical decisions about, and for, the conduct of education. Consequently, it has brought clarity and conciseness to educational thought and rigour to educational parlance. It has helped in making sharp differentiations, exposed hidden assumptions, detected flaws in reasoning and rigour to educational parlance and removed logical fallacies from educational thought. Analysis has underscored harmful conceptual muddles of behaviourism and has improved curriculum design by distinguishing among various modes of knowledge. Conceptual analysis of many key concepts and educational notions such as education, intelligence, equality, authority discipline etc. has helped to clear " the jungle of unanalyzed verbiage which has for so long made the study of education an academic wilderness."⁶ It has brought out clearly for the first time the full range of meanings in precise terms for the educationists to fully comprehend the real educational scene.

THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY

The above discussion has also outlined, in general , the role philosophy can and must play in the field of education. Besides formulation of a comprehensive theory of education for the purposes of policy planning and providing aims of education, it has to its credit the significant role of clarifying the confusion plaguing the educational debate. Moreover, philosophy of education, as a linking discipline, can and does play a crucial part in providing answers to many problems of educational theory and practice.

As pointed out by David Stenhouse, " Philosophy can, in fact, be used for a kind of 'psycho-analysis' of public institutions and official policies and this psycho-analysis analogy can help us to understand the potential value to a society of having its unconscious

presumptions brought out for public inspection and discussion"⁷ Such an analysis is required as presumptions if allowed to prevail at the level of policy planning lead to incorrect identification of educational objectives which vitiates the whole process of educational activity.

At the implementation level, the most important sphere is the preparation of teachers for imparting instruction at various levels. Without having arrived at a comprehensive understanding of the total educational scene, the teacher can be severely handicapped in performing his functions effectively, but the fact is that at primary, secondary and higher levels, prospective teachers are not suitably groomed and equipped with the required expertise. Neither the Universities nor the teacher-training colleges include work in philosophy or philosophy of science. A course entitled educational philosophy (of a very preliminary nature) may have been of limited value. Very few educationists and scientists do any real philosophy as part of their formal education. Philosophical training remains virtually restricted to philosophers. Those with a teaching career in mind at primary and secondary levels are usually actively discouraged from doing any philosophy at all: it is not a school subject! It is never realized that the teacher is not merely a transmitter of teaching subjects but is supposed to be involved in a highly complex exercise of imparting knowledge through intricate communication techniques.

If philosophy is able to do anything even approximating to what have been suggested in the above discussion, it might be expected that it should have had a beneficial effect on the capacities of teachers to sort out conceptual confusion and to map and deal with educational presuppositions and misunderstandings which underlie most of our educational policies and practices. This means, of course, that educational philosophy as taught in colleges of education and university departments of education (I.E.R. etc) must incorporate the essential features of true or 'pure' philosophy. Further, all those planning to take up teaching career (art or science) at the higher level or those involved in educational policy making and planning activity

may be fully equipped with necessary grounding in philosophy to be able to comprehend the complex issues involved in educational activity.

REFERENCES:

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