

# Re-thinking the relevance of philosophy of education for educational policy making

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## Abstract

*The overall question, ‘What kind of ‘philosophy of education’ is relevant to educational policy makers?’ is addressed by focussing on the following four themes: What meanings are attached to the term philosophy (of education) by philosophers themselves? What meanings are attached to the term philosophy (of education) by policy makers? What difference does place and time make to these meanings? How do these different meanings affect the possibility of philosophy (of education) influencing policy? The question is addressed using both philosophical methods and also some empirical evidence from conversations and conversational interviews with some philosophers of education and other educational researchers. The argument begins with an investigation of different ways of understanding philosophy and philosophy of education in relation to education and educational policy. It then examines first the current policy context and secondly some evidence about the practices of policy makers in relation to ideas and to research. It goes on to present some of the findings from the conversational evidence. The paper is drawn together in the penultimate section where I make some suggestions about possible fruitful relationships between philosophy and policy making. Finally, in the concluding section, I point out some further – thorny – questions that are raised by my analysis, especially in relationship to ethics and social justice.*

## I Introduction: Questions and themes in the paper

Philosophers of education rightly want to influence educational policy makers (among others). But are they doing so? And, if so, how? The overall question addressed in the paper considers what kind of ‘philosophy of education’ is relevant to educational policy makers. The question arose after reflection on failures of communication during an attempt (by myself and my colleague, Gale Macleod) to find policy makers who were knowledgeable about, or interested in, philosophy and philosophy of education. I have now identified four central themes for exploration:

1. The meanings attached to the terms ‘philosophy’ and ‘philosophy of education’ by philosophers themselves.
2. The meanings attached to the terms ‘philosophy’ and ‘philosophy of education’ by policy makers and educators in other disciplines. Especially in the UK, but mindful both of the rest of Europe.
3. The difference place and time may make to these meanings, especially across Europe, and particularly in relation to changes in funding policies for Higher Education.
4. How these different meanings affect the possibility of philosophy and philosophy of education influencing policy.

I sketch the contours of this exploration but a thorough mapping would be far beyond the scope of a single paper.

## II Context, summary and method.

I was invited to investigate the question of the influence of philosophy of education on policy at the 2009 British Educational Research Association Conference as part of a plenary panel, ‘The voice(s) of philosophy in the conversation of the educational community’. For that presentation, and throughout this project (and an earlier, allied one) I have worked closely with my colleague, Gale Macleod and this paper draws extensively on one of our joint presentations (Griffiths & Macleod 2008; 2009).

When we began the investigation we had expected it to be largely empirical. To our surprise, our enquiry turned out to be largely philosophical in character. We had begun by trying to identify key informants among educational philosophers and in policy circles who would be willing to be interviewed. However, we immediately ran up against a number of problems related to the variety of meanings attached to the term ‘philosophy’ by policy makers, philosophers of education and educational researchers from other disciplines. We noticed how the term ‘philosophy’ in general English usage has very different meanings from the more technical ones preferred in academia. So we were forced to address the non-empirical question: When we look for evidence of the influence of ‘philosophy’ in policy making what are we looking for?

This question is difficult enough. But there are further complications when considering education. Philosophers and philosophies of the last 2000 years remain influential and many well-known philosophers have regarded education as a significant issue in their work. Moreover, the question of how to have a philosophically-informed policy is necessarily a contingent one and so partly empirical: what is possible for us, here and now, is not the same as was possible for, for example, Plato, Rousseau or Dewey. Place and culture must affect how policy might become philosophically informed. At the same time, the concepts of ‘place’ and ‘culture’ themselves require philosophical analysis before they can be investigated empirically.

Section III is an investigation of different ways of understanding philosophy and philosophy of education in relation to education, particularly educational policy. Section IV summarises some social science research evidence about the *actual* practice of policy makers in relation to research findings and scholarship – as distinct from the *beliefs* of either policy makers or education researchers. Section V presents some evidence using conversational interviews with philosophers of education and other educators. Section VI, concludes with suggestions about relationships between philosophy and policy making. A coda in Section VII points out some remaining thorny issues of ethics and social justice.

### **III Philosophy and philosophy of education in relation to education**

This section addresses the character of philosophy itself, as understood by philosophers and by non-philosophers. I have divided this complex topic into three sub-sections: Non-specialist views of what philosophy is and of its relation to education; what philosophers take philosophy to be; and philosophy of education in relation to educational practice and policy.

#### *Non-specialist views of what philosophy is and of its relation to education*

The question of what counts as ‘philosophy’ is contentious. ‘What is philosophy?’ is itself a philosophical question. There are some well-known answers. Whitehead’s comment is famous (Whitehead 1979, p.39): “The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.” Indeed, Plato’s comment in the *Theaetetus* on the nature of philosophy is itself often quoted: “The feeling of wonder is the mark of the philosopher; philosophy has no other beginning than this.” This was not a view of philosophy that we have found well represented among non-philosophers however. Nor was another often quoted remark (attributed to various philosophers) that philosophy is what is found on the bookshelf in a philosopher’s study.

At the start of the investigation we had asked policy makers, and educational researchers who worked closely with them, if they could help by putting us in touch with policy makers who had studied philosophy or who were interested in it. However we failed. This was largely because we came up against a continued misapprehension about what we could mean. Some took us to be asking about ‘philosophy in schools’. It quickly became apparent that there was a wide range of understandings about what it means to be influenced by, or knowledgeable of, philosophy or philosophy of education. For some it meant a clear set of aims, values or principles (almost an ideology) as in ‘a collaborative philosophy views learning as inherently social’<sup>1</sup>, and for others it seems to be about being reflective or thoughtful. Other meanings in general use are less approving. One group of established researchers thought of philosophy and philosophising as

obfuscation, or attention to tiny, unimportant details. They went so far as to say to one person that she was a thinker rather than a philosopher, that being, for them, a more complimentary description.

These different meanings are familiar to anyone who teaches philosophy. A discussion on a philosophers' listserv, PHILOS-L, focused on a blog (McKibben 2010) which used the word 'philosophical' several times. It was pointed out that the term was used in senses (PHILOS-L April 2010):

that convey (or imply) 'not at all concrete', 'not concretely practical or concerning', 'not important or immediate', 'somewhat unreal', 'entirely speculative or imaginative without end', 'merely theoretical', and so forth.

As we looked for evidence of the influence of philosophy of education, we found these misapprehensions of our meaning were a continual frustration for us. The frustration lasted for some months. We felt we were no further forward in our investigation. It is not that we – or indeed the contributors to PHILOS-L – felt that the common uses are wrong. As one typical post said (PHILOS-L April 2010):

I don't at all think that we should be or feel 'proprietary' regarding use of the term 'philosophical'. As I hope most of us do, I think that the term should be freely and widely and helpfully used.

It was pointed out that the various different meanings in common use have their counterparts in academic schools of philosophy, for instance medieval speculation (or *theoria*) on the one hand or various forms of 'practical philosophy' on the other.

After some months we came to realise that, far from being an impediment, the question of the different meanings attached to 'philosophy' is centrally relevant because it has a bearing on the purpose of this exploration, namely to consider how and how far philosophy of education does and should have a voice in educational policy. The answer must depend on how philosophers and other players in policy networks communicate what they are about. In short we cannot follow Deleuze and Guattari in the luxury of only asking the question (1994, p.1): "in a moment of quiet restlessness, at midnight, when there is no longer anything to ask," or to have a youth in which:

There was too much desire to do philosophy to wonder what it was, except as stylistic exercise [and to wait for old age as a time when] one can finally say, 'what is it I have been doing all my life?'

For us, in educational philosophy, we have to have more understanding of what we are doing, at least insofar as we understand what we are doing as educational. We want to educate and to influence others. That is the nature of education. It is a worthwhile activity (however much we may differ among ourselves about *how* it is worthwhile and *what* is worthwhile about it), and it is one which is meant to be influential on others (students, policy makers, colleagues, etc). There is an ethical difference between doing educational research in a School of Education and doing research on education within another School of Social Science or Humanities (Griffiths 1998).

*What do philosophers take philosophy to be?*

Necessarily, I must be highly selective when presenting a range of 20 and 21<sup>st</sup> century philosophical views about what philosophy is and, where relevant, its relation to education. My choice of who to include is, then, personal but, I hope not eccentric.

Different answers to the question, 'What is philosophy?' seem to reflect a number of tensions within the discipline. These tensions are by no means simply one-dimensional. They are better described as multidimensional. Two, three, four or more different tensions all need resolution in any particular approach. One of the most obvious tensions is between philosophy as process and as product. It is reflected in the following two quotations from university websites explaining their philosophy courses. The first, from the

Open University in the UK, emphasises the process. Philosophy is, first and foremost, the act of doing philosophy (Open University 2010):

Philosophy is different from many other Arts subjects in that to study it you need to do it. To be an art historian, you needn't paint; to study poetry, you needn't be a poet; you can study music without playing an instrument. Yet to study philosophy you have to engage in philosophical argument (reasons or evidence leading to a conclusion). Not that you have to operate at the level of the great thinkers of the past; but when you study philosophy, you will be doing the same sort of thing as them.

In contrast, Dartmouth College in the USA emphasises outcomes (Dartmouth College 2010):

Philosophy's goal is nothing less than a systematic world view. Other fields study particular kinds of things. Philosophy asks how it all fits together. For example, if you want to learn about bodies, take a course in physics or biology. If you want to learn about minds, take a course in psychology. But if you want to learn about how minds are related to bodies, or how physics is related to psychology, then philosophy (of mind) is for you.

Other dimensions occur because the resolution towards product or process is only one of many philosophical tensions. The resolution towards product is itself subject to further tensions. The product may be considered to be a matter of the true or the good. Or it may be considered to be a matter of creativity. Deleuze and Guattari's answer to the question, 'What is philosophy?' is the creation or formation of concepts (Deleuze & Guattari 1994). Concepts created by the great philosophers may survive for centuries. Similarly the resolution towards process is subject to further tensions. One of these is about what might count as a dialogue: for instance, questions arise about the role of imagery and about criteria for rational discussion. (For instance, see Le Doeuff (1989) and Lloyd (1984).) There are, of course, many other tensions and dimensions, such as those deriving from the role of the tradition from (at least) Socrates, and the relevance of political stance. However a full discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.

Another significant tension for education is related to actions in and on the world. Is the system to be contemplated or applied? Is the process a contemplation or an engagement in the world? In either case, what is the role of the philosopher's own actions that inform their philosophy? Simone Weil may be a good example of a philosopher who felt the pull of both, while mostly working with a resolution in terms of engagement. She says (Quoted in Cameron 2003, p.250):

The proper method of philosophy consists in clearly conceiving the insoluble problems in all their insolubility and then in simply contemplating them, fixedly and tirelessly, year after year, without any hope, patiently waiting (*First and Last Notebooks*).

This from a woman who was known for her tireless activism, both in education and in labour politics, in which her philosophy and philosophising was an integral part.

Consider the views of philosophy taken by three philosophers whose philosophies were formed in relation to each other: Heidegger, Arendt and Jaspers. They take up very different views in relation to these tensions. For instance, Heidegger, like Plato, developed systems of thought while also teaching. Jaspers, on the other hand, thought it more important to teach and to engage politically, rather than to create a philosophical system. Arendt's resolution in *The Human Condition* (Arendt 1958) was to create a system which was embedded in the world (in '*amor mundi*'), but to call it 'political theory' rather than philosophy. However, she is generally taken to be doing philosophy in that book as much as in her self-avowed philosophical writing.

*Philosophy of education in relation to educational practice and policy.*

As a philosopher of education myself, I can, provisionally at least, place myself along the different dimensions. I acknowledge this, reflexively, because how I do so must influence my understanding and

presentation of philosophy of education. I align myself with engaged, dialogic, process-oriented approaches, always embedded in some specific context. For me, doing philosophy is less coming up with a series of outcomes and more a way of understanding, of being in the world, including being aware of a number of relevant distinctions that might be drawn when making sense of it and of the self as part of it. These distinctions may be found in plain propositional terms and also in imagery of various kinds. So with respect to the outcomes plane, I am towards the creativity end; with respect to the process plane, I am of the view that imagery has a place in rational argument.

It is in this context that I want to highlight some challenges currently facing the discipline, especially in relation to educational policy. The call for papers for the European Education Philosophy Conference in Basel in October 2009 set out the concern:

Educational philosophy presently appears to stand insecurely within disciplines and discourses of education and scientific policy. It seems questionable what role philosophical analyses in education should take within the – at times, dramatically appearing – transformations of the educational systems in Europe.

Tensions about where philosophy of education should be placed along the dimensions of process, product, engagement, truth and rationality remain unresolved. There is very little agreement about the nature of a philosophical analysis in education. Recent collections of papers within the English language tradition demonstrate a high level of diversity (Blake et al. 2003; Carr 2005; Curren 2006), as is remarked in all the introductory sections. For example (Carr 2005, p.2): “Any claim that the chapters included in this Reader convey a universally accepted view of the discipline is unlikely to receive anything remotely resembling unanimous assent.”

Chambliss in his review of recent collections says (Chambliss 2009, p.250):

There remains a distinct sense that philosophy of education is what those who write it and teach it say it is. No doubt future writers and teachers will construe it in even different ways, and thereby will continue to raise questions concerning its nature that will remain unsettled.

There has been an increasing number of articles on the relationship between philosophy of education and educational policy recently, including (just from the UK) McLaughlin (2000), Fielding (2000), Bridges (2003a; b), Carr (2004), Bridges et al. (2009), Oancea and Bridges (2009). Many of them focus exclusively on why policy makers *should* take note of philosophy of education. Some of them refer more to the processes of philosophical discussion, others to specific outcomes. Only a small minority consider promising contexts of engagement. Terry McLaughlin points to the possible influence of the series of policy focused pamphlets produced by the Philosophy of Education Society in the UK. He also remarks on two examples of philosophers being members of policy-related groups in the 1990s. Bridges (2003b) describes being a member of various research groups working closely with policy makers during the course of his career.

#### **IV Evidence about the practices of policy makers in relation to research**

In this section I summarise some research evidence about the practices of policy makers in relation to research, including theoretical research. It draws heavily on a recent, influential overview and critical discussion of the use of social science research evidence in policy and practice (Nutley et al. 2007). It focuses on four areas, one of which is education, and it does not take a narrow view of ‘research’. One typology the authors find useful is a matrix with a continuum on one axis of concrete to ‘conceptual’, and on the other axis of ‘substantive’ through ‘elaborative’ to ‘strategic’.

Three features of policy making are identified which are particularly significant here. Firstly, contrary to the ‘two communities’ theory of links between policy and research, Nutley et al. approvingly outline more nuanced models, such as Lomas’s linkage and exchange model which focuses on not two groups but four (policy makers, managers, service professionals and researchers), and in which (Nutley et al. 2007, p.101):

all of these groups are not seen as homogeneous but diverse ... researchers might comprise in-house employees, management consultants, stand-alone centres, applied research institutes and academics.

Going beyond Lomas, Nutley (2009) remarks that there are many active players in policy networks including, as well as the ones Lomas mentions: think tanks and knowledge brokers; professional bodies; lobbyists and advocacy groups; audit, inspection and scrutiny regimes, and the media. She also points out (2009) that 'policy makers' include: politicians, civil servants, local government officers and political advisors.

The apparent division between the so called 'two communities' is further blurred because as Cooper et al. (2009) point out, many individuals and institutions combine the roles of research, policy making and practice. Further, researchers, academics and policy makers may move from one role to another in the course of a career, taking previous perceptions and understandings with them. A third of the papers in Lesley Saunders's (2007a) collection, *Using Evidence*, are by people who have moved between universities and policy making bodies. Others are by people who have changed roles among the four groups Lomas identifies.

Secondly, policy making is 'a sophisticated process that involves multiple steps ... within a wider policy context' (Nutley et al. 2007, p.101). It takes place over a period of time, and there are many stages of policy formation and implementation. These may or may not be rational-linear, when viewed analytically. They are certainly not chronologically linear (Nutley et al. 2007; Sanderson 2009). While the rational model portrays the process as clearly defined, involving known actors and defined policies, more often policies emerge piecemeal and accrete, becoming shaped by dialogue with many actors and through a process of implementation (Nutley 2009). The process seems to favour personal engagement rather than written publication at all stages.

Thirdly, a range of kinds of knowledge are both usable and used. This finding runs contrary to a widely held view that only one kind of knowledge (information) is wanted, and that it is needed for implementation or, just possibly, for evaluation. Both Nutley et al. and Saunders affirm that 'research' or 'evidence-base' includes conceptual resources as well as empirically generated data. Indeed Nutley et al. say that it seems as if 'research is mainly used by policy makers in indirect, conceptual ways' (2007, p.36). This situation might appear to be good news for philosophers, but it needs to be understood in context. Very little research of any kind is used directly, and ideas seem to be picked up from a range of sources, rather than from commissioned conceptual research (Percy-Smith et al. 2002; Saunders 2007b).

## **V Interviews and conversations with philosophers of education and other educators**

There is very little empirical evidence on how research is used in policy in any subject, let alone in philosophy of education (Boaz et al. 2009). So I took advantage of my attendance at two conferences in Spring 2009: Philosophy of Education of Great Britain (PESGB), and the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP)<sup>2</sup>. I held conversational interviews with philosophers and other educators who were aiming to influence policy. The educators at the TLRP were all from the UK but at the PESGB conference I spoke to philosophers from the Netherlands and Malta as well as the UK. Over the following months there were further opportunities to speak to philosophers of education in the UK who were trying to influence policy, and to other educators from the UK and from Italy. At same time, Gale Macleod and I reflected on our own experiences. Conversations were recorded in written notes. In the case of the conversational interviews these were taken at the time. Chance encounters were recorded afterwards in a research journal during 2009-10. As already explained, we had failed to find any philosophically minded policy makers. However at the PESGB conference I attended a talk by the experienced educational policy maker, Tim Brighouse<sup>3</sup>.

There were a number of different ways in which philosophers perceive themselves to exercise some influence in the current context. *Firstly*, many philosophers of education become involved with wider educational research intended to influence policy, especially through participation in research teams of various kinds. Most often, philosophers become part of research teams because of their specific expertise in some educational area. David Bridges' (2003b) account of several forms of participation in research by himself (as a historian) and by John Elliott (as an action researcher) has already been mentioned. Richard Pring headed the six year Nuffield Review of 14-19 education. The same is true of Gale Macleod and myself who have both been involved in a number of research teams to which we brought our philosophical sensibilities as well as other expertise.

How far research or other involvements of this kind bring change is more complex. There are strong perceptions that policy makers do not want to engage with complex ideas when making use of educational research: Carmel Gallagher<sup>4</sup> was advised 'to keep it brief; keep it simple'. Or as Judy Sebba<sup>5</sup> put it, 'Policy makers want hard evidence by 4 o'clock this afternoon in three bullet points' (Attwood, 2009). But the situation is not as bleak as this might indicate. Pring's final report is clearly structured by his philosophical approach – and although it was rejected by the government there was a continuing dialogue with policy makers throughout. Reflecting on my own influence on research teams, I am struck by how much I draw on my philosophical work, for example on social justice or on collaboration/partnership, to introduce new ways of seeing these ideas, to problematise and clarify concepts such as 'standards' or 'dissemination' and in the design of the research programme itself. Similarly, Gallagher describes how funding an educational researcher to work *in* the Department of Education meant that over time dialogue towards an alignment over moral purposes could develop. Historian Gareth Parry<sup>6</sup> found an equal resistance to, as he put it, injecting historical and comparative findings (a 'policy memory') by carrying out policy research. However he found that as a result of carrying out the research he had a number of invitations to carry out projects or be a member of seminars in which he felt he had far more purchase on the policy process through continuing dialogue, conversation and insinuation of an historical/comparative perspective. (Also see Bridges (2003a).)

*Secondly*, it is possible to become one of the policy makers. Tim Brighouse commented in his presentation that academics are seen by policy makers as 'hostile witnesses'. He suggested that it would be better to have philosophers as visitors and/or as 'in residence'. Kenneth Wain in Malta described his experience of being a philosopher of education as part of an influential and powerful policy making team. He describes the experience as conflicted because of the competing demands of critique and construct.

When you are on the inside you can't go public with your critique. It's always within four walls. Once decisions are taken and they're taken by the minister, and even when you disagree a lot, you have to shut up. (Wain, conversational interview, April 2009)

However he said he had few regrets, in spite of the difficulties, because it allowed him to influence policy, as an educator and as a philosopher.

My final evaluation? It was worth being in the policy. I don't want to be entirely negative. I got some things done, even though I did not get my way all the time. (Wain, conversational interview, April 2009)

A *third* way of exercising influence was described vividly by both Kenneth Wain and by Bas Levering in the Netherlands.

Why shouldn't I stay on the outside and lambast them in the media? – Which works. A few months ago at a business breakfast with the Press, there was a presentation about the state of State schools. The prime minister said, 'Any comments?' I took the mike and lambasted him. Next thing it was on the News. What I said was in editorials. And it worked. It generated a whole charabanc. I was invited on the most popular programme, with a panel of experts, and the public. There was a programme dedicated to the issue. The Education Division and the Minister

were there. It becomes more effective. People are talking about it. (Wain, conversational interview, April 2009)

Similarly Bas Levering:

I am doing a lot in the media. Next Monday I am on a news network. At 6.15 p.m. they have an educational subject. They phone me... I speak three sentences or I explain and they edit it nicely....Yes, I think I have an influence on policy. They have to react to me. When they interview the minister he knows they'll interview me. (Levering, conversational interview, April 2009)

As a result, he is often asked to advise on government policy.

## **VI Conclusion: The relevance of philosophy of education in educational policy making**

In this section I identify some ways in which philosophy of education and educational policy making can connect. To do so I summarise what has been said so far first about ways of doing philosophy of education and secondly about practices of policy making. I argued that the diverse practices of philosophy can be understood as a series of resolutions to tensions inherent in the subject. There are at least four dimensions along which individual philosophers (and philosophies) can be placed in relation to these tensions. One of these dimensions is loaded for philosophers of education: contemplation / engagement with the world. Philosophers of education are all engaged with the world of education. They do not intend only to describe it but to influence it in some way. This may be through teaching, through contributing to the ideas circulating in a culture (e.g. in the media) and through direct engagement with other educators. The next most significant tension is process / product. This is a model in many dimensions. Process is itself two dimensional (at least): plain, strict logic / allusive, using imagery. As is product: right and true / illuminative new concepts.

In reviewing research about the practices of policy makers in relation to researchers, including philosophers, I noted that the terms 'policy makers' and 'researchers' are ambiguous and misleading because they imply that these are homogeneous, bounded groups of people (the 'two communities' theory). Research indicates that both groups are diverse, overlapping with one another and with other active players in policy networks. Individuals move between and among these different social spaces in the course of their careers e.g. moving backwards and forwards from universities to government institutions. The process of making a policy happens over time, in a chain of steps, but only occasionally in a series of explicit decisions in a process of conscious deliberation. More often it is an on-going, chancy, piecemeal process, shaped by implementation and often accurately describable as 'muddling through'. This process draws on a range of kinds of knowledge, including both the more conceptual and the more empirical.

It is now possible to see some ways which the philosophy of education can be of relevance to policy makers. If the 'two communities' theory was more accurate it would be more difficult. But, like Greenham women, philosophers of education are everywhere (Seller 1985)<sup>7</sup>. We embody our discipline, its processes and its products, and we embrace our complex identities as, at the very least, philosophers and educators. We are found in research teams, inside institutions of policy makers, working for and in the media, and we also teach people who will be influential as policy makers, journalists, editors or teachers. All of these groups are influential in policy networks. Moreover we can be active during all the steps of policy making. We may take part in dialogues as trusted colleagues or, in the honourable Socratic tradition, as gadflies. Or we can combine those roles. Finally, our different practices of philosophy of education provide different forms of knowledge with which to infuse, inject or impact on policy making.

The conversational interviews with Ken Wain and Bas Levering accounts show how it is possible to intend influence and to use it in a variety of ways. Wain described how he has worked both as an insider and as an outsider to policy making institutions, sometimes in tune with the dialogue and sometimes as a gadfly. Levering similarly takes on both roles, as a gadfly from the outside using the media, and as an advisor



engaging in dialogue as an inside. In a recent review of Arts and Humanities in Cambridge University Levitt et al. (2010) comment that philosophical influences on policy tend to be contingent, accidental: more about old colleagues going in different directions, and about chance meetings or encounters than about 'knowledge transfer' or dissemination strategies. The authors suggest putting oneself into a position to find chance encounters, something that Wain and Levering have both done.

In conclusion, I began this paper by posing the question, 'What kind of philosophy of education is relevant to educational policy makers?'. Now, at the end of the paper it can be seen that the question is not well formed. The short answer is that every kind of *philosophy* of education is relevant to educational policy makers. But the significant question is, 'What kind of *philosophers* of education are relevant in educational policy making? The short answer to this is, 'Those who by good luck or good management engage with policy makers in some form of extended dialogue.'

With regard to its influence on policy, philosophy of education is best understood as embodied in philosophers of education who have developed a philosophical sensibility and approach which is particularly oriented to educational issues, dilemmas and problems. That is, philosophy of education is influential insofar as philosophers of education are influential whether or not they present themselves as philosophers.

## VII Yes but... Some thorny issues

The last section ended with what might be taken to be an optimistic conclusion. However critical issues of ethics and social justice remain unresolved. A full discussion would need another paper but in the final section, I outline two of the most pressing ones.

One pressing and thorny issue is ethical and also requiring immediate practical action. This is a question of integrity similar to the one raised by Socrates in the *Apology*. In order to stay alive in universities, philosophy of education needs to be funded by government. However European HE policy may mean that staying alive is incommensurate with leading a philosophical life. The HE policy agenda in Europe is driven by what European Commission calls 'modernisation of universities' which they see 'as a core condition for the success of the Lisbon strategy' and also 'as part of the wider move towards an increasingly global and knowledge-based economy' (Commission of the European Communities 2006, p.2). In a paper for the EU Directors General for HE, Maasen remarks (2006, p.4):

The traditional underlying idea of the European HEI as a public, democratically run, social institution is clashing with the instrumental vision of the HEI as a professional managed, autonomous 'enterprise' operating in various markets as a service industry.

Papers from across Europe bear out this view (Boulton & Lucas 2008; Delauré 2010; Geschwind & Larsson 2008; Maasen 2000). In my own context, the UK, the government has imposed a strong 'impact' agenda on all university research, including both philosophy and education. It is proposed that future funding for research will depend on being able to demonstrate case-study evidence of impact *other than* through teaching or publication (Higher Education Funding Council for England 2009). The ethical question depends on what kinds of 'impact' count. For instance, will critique in the media be allowable? How can complex embodiment be taken into account? How will a slow infusion of influence be demonstrated (measured?) in the short time-span demanded? Of course different ethical issues will arise depending on how countries develop their policies in response to pressures of the global knowledge economy. Marginson (2009) interestingly points out that there are a number of different strategies that nation states and world regions can adopt, and that previous predictions about futures in this regard have not proved accurate. So the ethical dilemmas that will be faced by e.g. Chinese or Indian philosophers of education in relation to educational HE policy are likely to be different from the ones that pertain in e.g. Europe or the USA.

A second issue is seldom debated by philosophers of education. How far is it desirable for philosophers of education to influence policy? This is an issue of social justice. It turns on the socialities required for philosophical influence, given the gendered, classed, racialised character of any social space, and particularly

those where power and influence are concentrated. As Jean Barr (2008) comments, the sociology of philosophy remains significant in gender terms. Drawing on arguments by Randall Collins and Michele Le Doeuff, she argues that the likelihood of knowledge being taken seriously is highly dependent on attitudes to gender. This will be as significant both for philosophers who act as trusted colleagues and also for Socratic gadflies. We may note that Socrates was taken seriously, while the criticism of Thales by 'a maidservant from Thrace' was not (Cavarero 1995). Similarly, surely, for class and race. Thus privilege will guarantee undue influence. The forms of reasoning, the imagery, the concepts of the right and the good, and creative conceptualisations will therefore be a particular, biased subset of possible philosophies of education.

Finally, there is ethical question which faces the author of this paper, as it does any philosopher of education, that is, a philosopher whose purposes are educational. This question is how to live a philosophical life in the fast changing world of educational practice and policy.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This quotation is used only to point to one meaning in use. It is taken from: Taylor, M., Evans, K., Abasi, A. (2006). Towards a teaching and learning model in adult literacy programs. In *Proceedings of the 25th Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education* (pp. 263-268). Toronto.

<sup>2</sup> The TLRP is a £30 million coordinated research initiative (2000-2011). Its aim is to support and develop research which leads to improvements in outcomes for learners of all ages and in all sectors of education, training and lifelong learning in the UK.

<sup>3</sup> Chief Education Officer for over ten years in Oxfordshire, five years in Birmingham and then Commissioner for London Schools for five years.

<sup>4</sup> Carmel Gallagher, then Manager for Curriculum Development, Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), in Northern Ireland

<sup>5</sup> Professor of education at Sussex, who worked for years in the Education Department in England

<sup>6</sup> Professor of history at Sheffield

<sup>7</sup> The slogan, 'Greenham women are everywhere' refers to the women's peace camp at Greenham Common, part of wide network of women activists that was difficult to police. An contemporary account by a philosopher includes the following anecdote: "The Queen regularly holds garden parties each summer. An invitation is a reward for contributions to the establishment. At a recent one, guests found themselves holding calling cards that said, "Greenham Women are everywhere." (Seller 1985)

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