

# Looking Inward: Justice, Democracy, and Education

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In reflecting on the breadth and tone of the 77th volume of this publication, one would not be in error to locate this work within the trying times of its creation.

This volume contains scholarship that has been, in most cases, considered, proposed, written, discussed, refined, and published wholly within the disorienting circumstances of a global pandemic. Most attempts to easily articulate the scope of the losses and difficulties of this period fail to satisfy. It is, perhaps, easier to consider how our prolonged confinement shapes the focus and direction of our thinking. As the novelty of our shared situation gave way to adaptation, resignation, and/or frustration (perhaps as a progressive sequence or in recurring waves), many persons confined to their homes and distant from their usual social practices grew introspective, turning their attentions inward towards vistas still available for exploration. Philosophers of education do not seem immune to this introspective mood. Indeed, that abiding dimension of our disciplinary tendencies is very much on display in this, the first issue of our 77th volume.

The articles in this issue soberly explore core themes of the field of philosophy of education in recent years, returning to them with the characteristic contemplativeness of recent months. Questions of justice, democracy, inclusion, and the very practices of our scholarship itself are opened and laid bare for introspective analysis as philosophy of education, in a very real sense, quarantines itself in advance of an eventual reemergence. Reading the articles and responses of this issue in this way, we might find ourselves returning to seemingly settled assumptions and our remarkably unsettling practices in the service of redefining our field's foci and possible futures. Indeed, whether the current trying times created or, more simply, revealed the questions at the heart of this issue matters less than the fact that, in their

posing, the collected authors invite us, in true philosophical spirit, to look closely at what might previously have been taken for granted.

Nikolaidis begins this issue in careful consideration of the concept of educational injustice. In his work, he explores a core set of ideas in our field, suggesting that new conversations are possible on this front when we reframe some of the underlying premises of our thinking, especially as these relate to epistemic aspects of injustice. Kotzee picks up on Nikolaidis's prompts, suggesting that there is good and nuanced work to be done in further detangling the conceptual confluences that occur under the header of injustice in educational contexts.

Taylor and McDonough continue a focus on ethics and epistemic matters as they consider the epistemic agency of intellectually disabled learners. They demonstrate how misguided and arbitrary standards under-serve intellectually disabled learners in ways that are demonstrably unjust. Ahlberg takes seriously Taylor and McDonough's nuanced project and their suggested responses to the circumstances that perpetuate these injustices. In addition to this, Ahlberg offers the caution that educators ought to read their students with nuance and context, rather than hold only ideal views of their capacities. Ahlberg also calls for continued nuance in recognizing the conceptual complexity of epistemic agency amongst varied and, in many ways, dissimilar persons.

Relatedly, democratic educational projects often seek to accommodate the diversity of persons within a given social context. Ervin, Beisecker and Özel aim to refine our understanding of the Hegelian influences in American manifestations of that tradition by focusing attention to key formative moments in the wake of the American Civil War. Johnston appreciates the scope of their argument and offers a few challenges to their reading of the St. Louis Hegelian influence on John Dewey and the evolution of democratic educational theorizing in North America.

With a timely and stirring set of observations, Gordon focuses on the potential fragility of democratic discourses in a "post-truth" era. In

this, Gordon points to the ways in which a world overrun with claims of “fake news” requires democratic theorizing of the sort that philosophy of education is especially well-positioned to offer. Ruitenbergh shifts focus from truth to belief in highlighting the epistemic and political goals of education. Ultimately, the two pursue a compellingly introspective analysis of the very conditions of democracy and the education necessary to achieve it.

Similarly, Hudak, in painting a picture of education’s exhaustion, takes a cue from the realities of our world in asking whether ontological democratic or educational ideals can be achieved amidst a background of anti-black racism. In a focus on philosophy of education as a space within which probing questions might be pursued, Hudak ties together generative themes of black life, neurodiversity, and the creative potential of philosophy. Torrey provides additional context and analyses of these themes, asking the reader to consider what might emerge when philosophy is essential, rather than tangential, to the project of educational transformation.

Yosef-Hassidim also turns to fundamental considerations as he reads the provocative suggestion that education has been obscured by pseudo-educational discourse to be somewhat overdrawn. In this, Yosef-Hassidim explores the implications for (and possibilities of) a serious study of education. By Yosef-Hassidim’s account, very much hangs in the balance for our field. Kerdeman helpfully offers thoughts about the tension between ideology and ideals in a sustained educational discourse, pointing to a number of compelling implications in Yosef-Hassidim’s bold work.

As seen across a number of the articles in this issue, questions of pluralism surely sit alongside many of the democratic concerns populating our field. Masterfully, Wenneborg traces the contributions of a specific tradition, arguing that it offers much of significance to contemporary discussions of pluralism and its value. Blacker engages with this analysis to offer further questions which might provoke our field’s understanding of its relationship to truth and politics.

In pursuing similarly deep questions of value, Brust focuses

attention on an often-cited tenet of liberal education, namely, that it consists of “learning for its own sake,” suggesting that an account of valuing might reframe this description as “learning for the learner’s sake.” Martin artfully extends Brust’s concerns into a reengagement with liberal education itself, asking the reader to consider the varied topography of liberal educational accounts that have emerged within our scholarly field.

Finally, Kal Alston takes the very field of philosophy of education as the focus of her stimulating article. In her role as President of the Philosophy of Education Society, Alston asks whether the field can recognize the specificity of her identity as a Black woman as it wrestles with questions of American ideals, realities of racialized violence, and its very future. Fraser-Burgess provides a further meditation on the status and subjectivity of the Black woman in philosophy of education. The interplay between their articles is appropriate cause for introspection as our field appraises its past and potential. It is difficult to imagine a finer note on which to rest as we pause to consider the work we do (and the work we have tended not to do) under this most unusual set of circumstances.