

REPLY

Meditations and mediations: A centrefold reply to Robert Mackie

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Introduction and apology

I offer this reply to Robert Mackie's "Teachers, Classes and the Crisis" with some legitimate embarrassment since it was at my invitation that his paper appeared in *Access* (Vol. 3, No. 1). The fact is, Mackie's paper addresses issues within philosophy of education which echo concerns of my own: concerns which three years ago motivated me to collaborate with Jim Marshall and cofound *Access*. At that time I hoped (somewhat egocentrically) that one of the outcomes of *Access* would be to stimulate discussion around some of these concerns. This has not really eventuated - suggesting, perhaps, that what are for me key issues in philosophy of education are not at all key issues for anyone much else, apart from Mackie. Almost certainly I will never have a more convenient opportunity than the one available here to present my concerns, test the extent to which they are (not) shared by others, and elicit comment on my own response to these concerns.

Personal concerns

Until recently my academic work - teaching and research - was located almost exclusively within analytical philosophy of education. The end of this road came with the completion and eventual publication of *Freedom and Education* - in effect, my Ph.D. thesis. In this I attempted a 'modified' approach to conceptual analysis, abandoning any pursuit of the essential meaning of "freedom" and any pretensions to neutral analysis. Instead, I took seriously MacCallum's point that dangers lurk in trying to establish some single view of freedom as the true, real or genuine concept of freedom (MacCallum, 1967, p. 312). Such attempts run the risk of confusing substantive issues with conceptual inquiry. Where this occurs attention may be drawn away from "precisely what needs examining if the differences separating philosophers, ideologies, and social movements concerned with freedom are to be understood" (ibid.), with the consequence of prejudging substantive issues about freedom and constraint by appeal to conceptual argument. My approach was to regard the notion of freedom as being more in need of construction and subsequent justification on normative grounds than of essentialist analysis.

I completed *Freedom and Education* against the background of a burgeoning 'new' marxist philosophy of education, much of it emanating from Sydney. Nevertheless to the time of publication, and even for some time beyond that, I believed that such an exercise as *Freedom and Education* could, if well-performed,¹ serve a (small but) useful purpose within contemporary philosophy of education. It might, for example, contribute to a more flexible and profitable approach to concept analysis than was hitherto the norm. Alternatively, it could be beneficial to demonstrate that within the paradigm of analytic philosophy of education we are not necessarily restricted to a single view (a 'rationalist' view) of what is involved in promoting freedom in education. Unfortunately it rapidly became apparent that even such modest hopes as these were unwarranted. Insights that had for some years been taken for granted by marxist philosophers of education gradually made an impact on my thinking. In particular I came to feel the force of Harris'

argument that work such as my own comprises so much internal criticism and supportive rhetoric (see Harris, 1979, esp. Ch.3).² If, by chance, it did draw some attention from other analytical philosophers, its effect would be merely distractive rather than progressive - assuming the marxist point to be sound. Furthermore, such projects as mine yield at most an attractive picture of what education might or ought to be like, devoid of any basis for developing an effective agenda directed at change or reform. (At worst they present an unattractive ideal - in which case there is no real problem over an agenda.) Abstracted from any adequate view of the material context of education - and the total social formation in which education is located - my philosophy of education and freedom was, in a crucial sense, cognitively adrift. And because of this it was 'praxically' adrift as well. Put simply, the understanding of educational reality necessary for plotting any effective course (however long term) of educational reform - not to mention mapping out an acceptable ideal of freedom in the first place - was absent.³

Not surprisingly, this situation produced a major problem for my teaching. While research activity can go into hibernation waiting for a new Spring of ideas, teaching must obey the academic calendar. I found myself in a position of being employed to teach philosophy of education courses whilst caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. The methodology and literature available to me and which I felt competent to teach was by now, on my own recognition, seriously flawed. I could not teach it authentically. At the same time I was not 'on top' of the obvious alternative paradigm: viz., marxist philosophy of education.⁴ There were two main elements in my response to this situation:

1. collaborate and launch Access, in the hope that it might hasten the emergence of a viable post-analytic philosophy of education;
2. get to grips as quickly and thoroughly as possible with the 'new' marxist philosophy of education. Insofar as I was entitled to do so I shared Walker's hunch that, if there was to develop a philosophy of education "systematically, clearly and productively related to concrete educational conditions (among other things)", it would be marxist (Walker, 1979, p. 171). An important part of this process involved establishing a third year course, "The Nature of Educational Theory", around Harris' Education and Knowledge - in the belief that collaborative learning with senior students would enhance the process (which it did).

As far as my own progress toward identifying and embracing a coherent, viable, post-analytic philosophy of education is concerned, the outcome has been considerably less than I had hoped for. I have elsewhere (1983) described my response to the marxist programme in educational studies as "manic-depressive". On the one hand the theoretical framework of marxism offers what appears to me to be genuine and exciting penetrations of educational (not to mention the wider social, political and economic) 'reality'. On the other hand, however, there are tendencies within the programme which I have found confusing and frustrating - in part because they seem to repeat errors similar to those identified by marxist critiques of analytical philosophy of education, and in part because they impede the process of contributing to effective educational reform through practical engagement in philosophising about education. These tendencies include the following.

(a) The possibilities for fragmentation of knowledge within marxism generally and marxist philosophy of education in particular seems no less apparent than in liberal bourgeois knowledge production. As a matter of fact, considerable fragmentation has already been 'achieved'. The editors of Thesis Eleven observe that marxism

now exists within a severe fragmentation of knowledges: knowledge is not only separated from practice, but also internally compartmentalized. As the product of and the response to bourgeois society marxism can hardly be unaffected by the extreme specialization which is functional to it. Marxism now involves at least philosophy: epistemology, method, ethics; political economy, history, labour history, class and world-systems analysis, theories of and studies in ideology and culture, hermeneutics, psycho-analysis, semiology, anthropology, modes of production, philosophy of history, critique of 'actually existing' socialism" (Editorial, Thesis Eleven, number one, 1980, pp. 2-3).

(b) Marxist theory - not to mention marxist practice - is divided internally to a tremendous degree. There are so many 'schools', factions, schisms. There are Leninists, Stalinists, Trotskyists, Maoists, Syndicalists, a traditional left and the New Left. We find an entire series of publications devoted to discussion of various 'marxisms': e.g. Althusser's Marxism, Gramsci's Marxism, Pannekoek and Garter's Marxism, Sartre's Marxism, Trotsky's Marxism (all Pluto Press).

Not only is there a degree of theoretical dispute within the 'research programme' of historical materialism having the potential to keep academics and other Left theoreticians employed for generations without much hope of producing an effective unified theoretical front but, in addition, there is much evidence that thoroughly counter-productive internal criticism is alive and well on the Left. (See here, for example, *Telos*, Winter 1900-1981, pp. 81-111. NB. The dispute documented in this reference pertains to a single conference gathering of a single group within the New Left.)

With regard to analytic philosophy of education Harris has commented, accurately enough, that

philosophers speaking 'more or less the same language' turned out a plethora of books and papers analysing concepts as a necessary preliminary to answering philosophical questions about education. It became the height of orthodoxy to analyse the necessary and sufficient conditions of the concepts 'teaching' and 'indoctrination' and to write counter-papers politely attacking other people's analyses in the attempt to improve on them (1979, p.80).

But the situation is decidedly similar within contemporary marxist educational theory. How many accounts have we seen in recent times of "ideology", "hegemony", or "culture"? Indeed a lot of work pertaining to marxist educational theory is still being done at a level prior to that of critical/evaluative interchange. Some is purely expository: Gramsci on hegemony, Trotsky on strategy and tactics, etc. Still more theoretic production is being generated in apparent isolation from other on-going work in the field: compare the work of Kevin . Harris and Rachel Sharp on "ideology" in their respective books (Harris, *ibid.*, Sharp, 1980). What I'm trying to say here is, I think, that contemporary marxist theory pertaining to education falls short, paradoxically, of anything approximating to a genuine dialogue. As such it may effectively produce its own social atomism hostile to shared diagnosis and collective action (c.f., Mackie's like criticism of analytical philosophy of education, *op. cit.*, p.33).

(c) There is (for me) a depressing imbalance between the confident critiques of liberal theory and capitalist education advanced by marxist philosophers of education and the tentative, almost apologetic, suggestions for (revolutionary) educational practice they advance in accordance with the theory underlying their critiques. This imbalance is especially marked in Harris' first book, *Education and Knowledge*. Harris will offer us neither false promises nor comforting delusions - which is honest and laudable. Given a marxist analysis, the way ahead - the struggle - is without doubt difficult and, for a good part, unknown. Considerable revolutionary strategy cannot be determined in any detail in advance but, instead, will have to emerge as concrete responses to consequences of on-going attempts by human beings to transform their own lived practices (including educational practices). Furthermore, as Harris argues, to have a viable critique is not necessarily to have a worked out improved alternative. Indeed, as has been intimated, the logic of the situation may well entail that much of the (revolutionary) alternative will unfold only as a praxis. Even so, to commit oneself to such a praxis involves courage, faith, trust, and the hope of at least some dependable enlightened support when the going gets tough. It is easy to withdraw from making such commitment when the best suggestions available from those considerably further down the road than oneself are as vague, general, and 'undirecting' as the following.

Revolutionary practice does require the overthrow of existing social relations, but force is not necessary on the part of the revolutionaries... What is required, however, is that new social relations be created and lived, or, in the terms used in this work, that we create new lived-ideologies. With education, then, we must create new lived-ideologies, where the lived process of education especially is changed, and changed in such a way as to remove all those factors that bring about and produce a distorted mis-representation of reality... The only possibility is to

begin... with a general social praxis, and from that standpoint begin to create, and attempt to have legitimated, new lived-ideologies of anti-education which can compete with the prevailing education ideology. And just as education is linked with all other aspects of society, anti-education must also be so interlinked, so that it too might have possible correspondence with the workplace, the family, etc... Anti-education can hardly be defined precisely at this point in time; but it would be a matter of people talking, acting and working informally among themselves; discussing their lives, their freedoms, their constraints, their situations, their visions and their knowledge of the world; discovering the world for themselves through experiences and with authorities, and linking up with movements in other areas of society, in a gradual process of changing themselves, education and society. It would seek out new forms, new goals, new directions, new processes and new social relations for the transmission and assimilation of knowledge; and in so doing it would have to continually recreate its research programme as it sought, adopted and promoted new and (hopefully) undistorted ways of seeing the world. Anti-education would consist of people disinterestedly, and in community, trying to learn what they need to know in contrast to people having to accept as knowledge a distorted and misrepresentative picture of the world. One should not realistically expect a rush on anti-education" (Harris, 1979, pp. 187-188).⁵

These tendencies within the emergent marxist philosophy of education, and especially the last mentioned, led me to consider seriously and at length the following (connected) questions.

1. Given the apparent force of the marxist critique of analytical philosophy of education and the difficulties attaching to marxist philosophy of education, what in this context would count as doing good educational philosophy - from the standpoints of both teaching and research?
2. What are the responsibilities of the educational philosopher as educator - and here I assume that the philosopher plays an educative role in teaching and writing alike. The more I considered this question in the light of my difficulties with marxist philosophy the more I felt the force of two moral imperatives.
 - a) We must strive as educators to be the best possible models of the educational values we espouse. Therefore, espousing 'revolutionary' values in our educational philosophy commits us to modeling these values as best we can in our educational practice.
 - b) We are accountable for any 'existential dissonance' or 'existential tension' we promote in educatees.⁶ (At the same time I assume that any educator worth the name inescapably promotes some degree of existential dissonance among educatees - certainly Socrates would have agreed with this.) This, I believe, obliges educators to assess their own ability and willingness to help educatees confront productively any dissonance they are instrumental in creating, before entering learning situations likely to promote such dissonance. This does not commit the educator to resolving successfully any dissonance which arises. It does, however, commit them at the very least to sharing the experience/burden of existential dissonance with a degree of sensitivity and concern in keeping with being instrumental in promoting it in the first place.
3. Given what I see as the current state of the art in educational philosophy, how can I solve the problem I face teaching courses in this area? This problem has the following dimensions:
 - a) I cannot authentically (and so cannot enthusiastically) teach a model of philosophy of education (viz., analytical) which I believe to be seriously flawed;
 - b) am not clear as to how the challenge of accountability for existential dissonance can be met by the educational philosopher. How does one shape the activity of philosophising about education in order that existential dissonance can be faced productively? This, I suggest, is especially pertinent to philosophers working within some overtly critical framework such as marxism.
 - c) What constitutes legitimacy for courses in philosophy of education at the present time? If capital in general and education in particular are indeed in crisis, is the legitimacy of philosophy of education courses dependent in part on their potential

to contribute to resolving this crisis? If it is, then what kind of course will be equal to the task, and could I construct such a course?

“Teachers, Classes and The Crisis”

This, with hindsight, is how I recall the position I had reached as a professional philosopher of education at the time I first encountered Mackie’s paper (August, 1982). For some time prior to that I had wondered whether my reservations, doubts and confusion about marxist philosophy of education were anything more than a defensive reaction to a philosophical model which moved my own work “to ‘any other business’” (c.f., Mackie, op. cit., p. 35). Consequently, I took seriously Mackie’s appraisal of the current state of Australasian educational philosophy - particularly in view of the fact that he had worked through the ‘new’ alternative much more systematically and deeply than I had. His claim that marxist philosophy of education is in crisis is a much stronger and more penetrating charge than the doubts and reservations I have raised above. “Teachers Classes and The Crisis” provided much of the impetus and Focus for my thinking about philosophy of education during the past. two years. The ‘course development’ which I have undertaken in this period and describe below is a direct consequence of this thinking - although Mackie must not be held responsible for this outcome!

I responded to three elements in particular of Mackie’s case:

- his claim that marxist philosophy of education and, indeed, marxism generally are in crisis;
- his argument that marxist philosophy of education (like analytical philosophy of education) is unlikely to (re)solve the current educational crisis;
- his suggestion as to how we must set about solving the current educational crisis.

Let us take these in turn.

Marxism, says Mackie, is in crisis. It has not and is not delivering the revolutionary and emancipatory possibilities its theorists and adherents desire. Six brief comments accompany these claims, four of which I believe are directly and especially relevant to marxist philosophy of education. viz.,

- a) Marxism “has to go beyond its initial critique of political economy and engage additionally in a critique of extant socialism”.
- b) “Marxism in the West has gradually become sequestered within universities and consequently removed from much of the practice of revolutionary politics”.
- c) “A fragmentation of knowledge has occurred within marxism that in a way reflects the extreme division of labour found in bourgeois discourses generally... Since marxism aspires to an holism it will need to get beyond the intellectual fragments”.
- d) While through their critique of analytical philosophy of education marxist philosophers have politicised theory, they need also to theorise politics. They have generally ignored this latter task in their accounts of education “by retreating into a bleak pessimism” (see *ibid* for each of these comments).

This part of Mackie’s argument clearly affirmed, crystallised and transcended my own concerns, prompting me to ask whether and how a marxist philosophy of education might overcome such charges.

In my ensuing inquiry I was helped more than a little by the way Mackie argues that marxist philosophy of education seems unlikely to solve (or resolve) the current educational crisis. He assumes that any viable, successful marxist philosophy of education must be interventionist: it must provide methods and strategies, in accordance with marxist analysis, for intervening in educational practice in a (genuinely) revolutionary way. He then takes Harris’ second book, *Teachers and Classes*, as a good presentation of the marxist viewpoint (c.f. *ibid.*, p. 35). In so doing he assumes that Harris’

strategies and solutions stand good a chance as any thus far provided by educational philosophers (or that are likely to emerge out of the present marxist programme in educational philosophy) of resulting in successful intervention. Having (apparently) assumed these things Mackie argues that while Harris' revolutionary strategy is necessary it may not be sufficient. Given the circumstances prevailing in societies like our own it is doubtful that advancing the sort of strategy Harris suggests will have any material effect. The point here is not that the strategic advice offered by Harris "is in any way worthless, or should not have been given, but simply it is unlikely to be taken" (ibid., p.36). In short, Mackie suggests that Harris' strategies and solutions seem unlikely to be taken up in the absence of "a deeply entrenched socialist movement" (ibid.). That is, they are unlikely to be taken up.

This leads quickly to the third element in Mackie's argument with which I am concerned; namely, his suggestion as to how we must attack the current crisis in education (and, for that matter, the very source of all such crises - capitalist social relations). At the very end of his paper Mackie is left with Lenin's question: "What is to be done?" Mackie's description and analysis of the current educational (and wider economic) crisis, along with his critique of *Teachers and Classes* and his juxtaposition of the 'careers' of Left and Right theory, lead him to his answer. To those on the Left seeking a solution to the current educational crisis (and, by implication, to capitalist crises in toto) he says - and it's all he says -

my solution starts with the famous injunction of U.S. labour leader Joe Hill - 'don't. mourn, organise'. After all, as the conservatives have shown, if you don't fight you lose". (ibid., p. 37).

Philosophy of Education as Praxis?

Mackie's paper had two immediate consequences for me. First, I was satisfied that my own questions and concerns regarding marxist philosophy of education were at least shared. More importantly, they were shared by someone committed to marxist theory and practice. Second, and as a consequence, I took the view that such concerns should prompt a constructive attempt to contribute to the development of marxist philosophy of education rather than rationalise abandoning the field.

"*Teachers, Classes and the Crisis*" is rich in clues as to how such an attempt might proceed. Consider, for example, the following claims advanced in the course of Mackie's argument.

- i. Marxist theory has become removed from much of the practice of revolutionary politics.
- ii. Marxist philosophers of education need to theorise politics - a demand they have generally ignored.
- iii. Harris' advice (in *Teachers and Classes*) is unlikely to be taken. It could well be that his revolutionary strategy fails for the want of a deeply entrenched socialist movement.
- iv. Don't mourn, organise. After all, if you don't fight you lose.

I want to suggest that these claims collectively point in one direction if taken to heart by marxist philosophers of education. This is in the direction of developing educational philosophy as praxis. Furthermore, if educational philosophy is developed as praxis, solutions are provided for certain problems identified above as facing marxist philosophy of education.

The question of what exactly constitutes praxis or a praxis can be addressed as an issue in its own right. I do not, however, propose to take this up as an issue here. Instead I will present a view of praxis (derived largely from Freire) and adopt it without argument. The general position I am arguing for will, I believe, stand or fall independently of argument defending my particular view of praxis. Praxis is a fusion of theory and practice, a unity of theory/reflection and action. In praxis people come to know their world in the process of acting upon it, and to act upon their world in the process of coming to know it. That is, praxis involves action upon the world - intervention in reality

- based upon theory/reflection where this theory has been generated in the first place not for the purposes of understanding (in a passive way) some given, static, 'objective' world, but in order to guide action intended to transform the world.

Praxis, then, must be clearly distinguished from finite acts of applying theory or research to the practical world - as when the accommodation needs of a given community are researched in order to decide whether or not to build high-rise dwellings. In such cases once the theory has been applied the process of uniting reflection and action is at an end. Unlike this, praxis involves an ongoing dialectic of theory/reflection and action/transforming intervention in reality. This is because the 'problem' to which praxis is addressed is not a finite one or one posed by a static world - e.g., the problem of whether or not to build a particular kind of dwelling. Rather the problem is a 'going-on-forever' one: namely, the problem of knowing one's reality, conceived as an infinite process since reality is accepted as dynamic. Knowing the world is inseparable from (re)creating the world, hence praxis is an on-going rather than a finite pursuit.

Furthermore, on a Freirian construction praxis has an evaluative dimension. Knowing the world is tied to an ideal of humanising the world, of transforming it in a way that enlarges the possibility for all humans to engage on an equal basis in the process of self-creation and (in that same process) creating history. Implicit in praxis is the assumption that there is progress to be made a 'direction' to be pursued. Consequently, "true reflection must entail 0 action but action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its results are subjected to further critical reflection" (Connolly, 1980, p.72). This further critical reflection in turn yields a basis or direction for further action on the world. And so on and on. Clearly, then, the model of knowing (or knowledge) as praxis is perfectly attuned to the marxist philosopher's vision of humans actively intervening in their reality to overthrow limiting structures and relations (e.g., structures and relations of capital) and replace them with alternatives that are progressively humanising.

In working toward a view of how (marxist) philosophy of education might actually develop as praxis let us take up my earlier point that the four claims extracted from Mackie's argument collectively point toward educational philosophy developing in Just this way. The claims (a) that marxist theory has become removed from much of the practice of revolutionary politics, and (b) that marxist philosophers of education need to theorise politics, can be addressed with reference to dialectical process. For a marxist, historical transformation and revolutionary strategy are quite unintelligible if divorced from the notion of dialectical process. Harris makes this perfectly clear. Historical transformation, he says,

is a dialectical process, a tension-filled participatory transformation of existing conditions rather than a mighty explosion triggered off from some external point (1982, p.143).⁷

People effect historical transformation from inside (historical) situations. They respond to these situations (which each comprises the current state of balance between contradictory elements in dynamic tension with each other) with the 'resources' - ideas/theory, consciousness, tools, support systems, lived experiences, information, predictions, etc. - available to them. (NB. These resources and the current 'state' of the agents themselves comprise part of the internal dynamic of the situation itself - hence, they form part of the dialectic.) Where these response result in some change to, say, a relationship or a structure, this change in turn transforms to some extent the human subjects themselves: e.g., their ideas, lived practices, beliefs, etc. Harris also claims that:

since it is continually transforming human agents who achieve (and constitute) goals through the long-term interplay of theory and practice, future historical transformation has to be lived and experienced in order to be understood" (ibid., p.142).

This brings us back to Mackie's claims. The implication of these comments about dialectical process for historical agents within education - such as marxist philosophers of education - is that the development of revolutionary theory is dependent on dialectical interaction with practice, with lived material situations. Suggestions about revolutionary strategy are the more authentic - the more 'real' - the more they reflect engagement with actual historical situations. Surely it is because

Harris has participated in processes of historical transformation that he has suggestions to make about strategy, while at the same time making it clear that although

the general direction can be pointed to, neither the path to the goal nor the actual nature of the goal itself can be mapped out in fine detail in advance (ibid.)⁸

Marxist philosophers of education will generate insightful, effective theory - including productive strategic suggestions - to the extent that this emerges in dialectical interaction with practice. This, I suggest, points the marxist philosopher directly to engagement in revolutionary politics - where "politics" is not so much party politics, although it may include that, as systematic struggle for progressive change within either formal or informal structures. If, as Mackie suggests, marxist theory - and marxist philosophy of education in particular - has become removed from much of the practice of revolutionary politics, it is clear that this trend must be reversed. It is equally clear that marxist philosophers of education need to theorise politics, otherwise their theory lacks revolutionary authenticity. And this, it seems to me, is to talk about praxis; although not necessarily (or yet) about philosophy of education as praxis.

Turning now to the claim that Harris' advice is unlikely to be taken, and that his revolutionary strategy may fall for want of a deeply entrenched socialist movement, two comments seem in order. First, it seems clear to me that the degree of success with which agents implement Harris' immediate strategies (c.f., *ibid.*, pp. 150-153) will relate closely to their level of 'critical I consciousness. This in turn will reflect their lived experience of "Future historical transformation". Obviously, a crucial role performed by genuine socialist structures is to provide a context for such necessary lived experience. The structures of a deeply entrenched (formal) socialist movement are not the only structures facilitating the quality of lived experience in question. But they are certainly among them. And for many people the absence of established socialist structures may effectively mean the absence of any available structures affording this lived experience. To this extent opportunities for attaining the consciousness necessary for sensitively and successfully implementing the sorts of strategies advanced by Harris are absent. Indeed, as Harris implies, the opportunities for even understanding the point and significance of such strategies would be absent in such cases c.f., "future historical transformation has to be lived and experienced in order to be understood". *loc. cit.*, p.142, emphasis mine).

Second consider teachers in the situation of actually deciding whether or not to employ revolutionary strategy. The risks involved in employing such strategy in schools of a capitalist society are plain. The risks are, however, greatest in the absence of protective associations for teachers. Mackie's point that Harris' advice is unlikely to be taken is especially forceful in the New Zealand context where there does not even exist an industrial union of teachers. The extremely vulnerable position of New Zealand school teachers became abundantly clear under the previous Minister of Education. While the existence of an (effective) industrial union of teachers scarcely constitutes a deeply entrenched socialist movement impinging on education, it is at least a step in the right direction. With the achievement of an effective industrial union, teachers in New Zealand might look toward the further dimensions of collective activity mentioned by Harris (see *ibid.*, pp. 148-150). Better still, the struggle to build a strong industrial union might proceed alongside teacher involvement within the trade union movement generally and the building of an organization concerned with "the politics and ideology of schooling, and...open to all affected by schooling - teachers, students, pupils and parents alike" (*ibid.*, p. 150).

All of this restates Mackie's call to organise, not mourn. Or, to put it the other way round, the call to organise simpliciter may be the ultimate abbreviation of such invitations as Harris' to engage in collective revolutionary activity. Whichever way we look at it the call is to build structures supporting future historical (i.e., progressive) transformation. And this, surely, is a call to praxis - since the kinds of structures we endeavour to build will be guided by 'theory'; and the theory on which they are built will itself be assessed and developed in view of the functioning of the structures (their success or failure, new issues and information they promote, new problems that arise, etc.).

Given that it is a call to praxis, the bottom line for marxist philosophers of education, is, I believe to develop educational philosophy as praxis. What do I mean by this?

At the very least, developing educational philosophy as praxis involves constructing our teaching and research activity as a genuine interplay of theory/ reflection and action on the world. In this we - educators and educatees⁹ involved in educational philosophy - organise the learning and application of philosophical skills and (resultant) production of theory and knowledge around problematised aspects of educational reality (compare Freire, 1972, and Shor, 1980), with a view to applying the ideas we develop to the aspects of educational reality we have problematised. Existing works in marxist philosophy of education provide ample leads as to how we might problematise educational reality.

Consider, for example, Harris' brief reference to assessment in education in *Education and Knowledge* (pp. 81-83). We are invited to consider the allegedly critical debates concerned with the mechanics of assessment as instances of supportive rhetoric. This is a theme which is central to the reality of teachers and students and provides a most promising point from which to focus on some aspect of educational life as a problem in need of clarification and resolution. The process by which a group works toward problematising assessment in education, clarifying the dimensions of the problem, investigating the problem and confronting it in the material context of their own paper/course, is pregnant with possibilities for philosophical development. It opens the way to mastering and applying skills of an analytical nature - identifying and assessing claims, formalising and assessing arguments, clarifying usage, etc. - as well as to wrestling with the logic of supportive rhetoric and the 'world view' which gives rise to the idea that a body of criticism functions as supportive rhetoric. Educational philosophers have often observed a "practical implications of the analysis" component in their work. Problematising assessment in education offers abundant opportunities for applying arguments and analysis in a practical manner - e.g. inviting the Faculty to consider the arguments, presenting the ideas developed in inquiry to student Forums, working through the implications of the argument for the paper or course the group is involved in, etc. On the basis of the outcomes of/responses to such activities the group may be forced to reconceptualise the argument in various ways. Alternatively it may be encouraged to take further practical steps toward challenging existing attitudes and practices concerning assessment - e.g. organise workshops, sample opinion on certain matters via a questionnaire, lobby sympathetic staff to consider practical ways of 'humanising' assessment, etc. A good example of the problematising process in operation, although originating from the study of English rather than Educational Philosophy, is described by Ira Shor (op. cit., pp. 162-166, And 181-182). In this example students worked toward co-operativising the College cafeteria after problematising an important aspect of daily reality Around the distinction between "junk food" and "health food".

Other concepts and themes from the literature of Marxist philosophy of education¹⁰ which offer similar possibilities include more general notions such as ideology, hegemony, consciousness, liberation, oppression, social reproduction, etc. Such themes as peace, racism, and sexism focus in on a host of educational problems which, with a little imagination, could be worked through as a philosophical praxis in the minimal (and, admittedly, sketchy) manner I have described.

Ideally, however, I would envisage educational philosophy courses and the research activities of educational philosophers effectively becoming sites of unified theory and practice in a rather more comprehensive (revolutionary?) sense than I have sketched so far. For this to occur at least the following conditions must be met.

1. Theory and practice are fused around the theme of "problematised educational reality", as already described.
2. Genuinely democratic relations - as typified by Freire's notion of dialogue (compare Freire, op. cit.) - are lived as far as possible in the dialectic of theory production and action on the world.

3. The group engages in organisation built around the issues, problems, or situation begin addressed. Optimally this would involve two levels of organisational activity: (a) acquiring experience in establishing new structures arising organically out of the problem situation and affording lived experience of democratic/'dialogical' relations; and (b) linking with existing structures sharing similar concerns and/or engaged in a similar learning process (praxis, dialogue).

I will try to justify this more stringent model of educational philosophy as praxis before describing my own early attempts to clarify and employ such an approach. The three conditions just mentioned are, in my view, called out by a combination of principle and pragmatics. The principle in Question concerns the authenticity of marxist theorising which, I have argued, demands a dialectic of reflection/theory and action/practice. This on its own, as acknowledged above, does not require the Marxist philosopher of education to unify theory and practice within educational philosophy itself. Authenticity and coherence may effectively be achieved in some other (wider) context. Compare, for example, the philosopher who achieves such a praxis in family life, in community-based action, or as a union delegate. Other considerations, however, suggest the importance of achieving unity within educational philosophy.

To begin with, the marxist ideal of historical transformation is toward structures which enlarge the possibility of all humans engaging on an equal basis in the process of self-creation and creating history (In short, humanising themselves and the world). Given that future historical transformation must be lived and experienced in order to be understood, and understood in order to be further refined, developed, and extended, it is perfectly consistent and desirable for Marxist educators to promote as far as possible dialogical relationships/structures in the educational situation. It seems to me quite inconsistent and unreasonable to expect teachers, parents, and other educators to 'revolutionise' their learning interactions with children, if the very values in question are absent in the setting where these educators (in all likelihood) first encounter them.

The pragmatics of daily life suggest the importance of developing educational philosophy as praxis if we are to take seriously Mackie's call to organise. Organisation requires time, energy, creative insight, and collaborative support – among other things. Typically these are all in short supply, for academics and students alike. It is not just the (platitudinous) 'pressures of modern life' that erode the supply of these values and attributes. The quality of everyday experience – fragmented existence, individualism, competition, acceleration (see Shor, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-66), the logic of 'divide and rule', etc. – compounds the effect of the pressured routing. The setting of a university course can become an oasis offering some relief from these debilitating forces. It may provide the only genuine possibility in the combined lives of the people involved in the course for experience and practice of collective activity and organisation centred on a critical theme. Certainly it offers one of the few possibilities likely to be available in an explicitly educational context. Universities and colleges where educational philosophy courses are taught are (still) relatively blessed with academic freedom. They present near-unique opportunities to incorporate creative exercises in organisation into formal educational/academic engagement. In my view they provide opportunities which Marxist theorists – including educational philosophers – can scarcely afford to ignore. The more I consider the notion of marxist philosophy of education as praxis the more I see it as a comprehensive response to many of the issues and challenges identified by marxist theorists.

I am mindful that my view of educational philosophy as praxis requires rather more explanation and justification than I have been able to provide for it here. This shortcoming must, however, await a further occasion to be met more satisfactorily. In concluding this reply to "Teacher, Classes and the Crisis", I want briefly to sketch my own efforts thus far to envisage and develop academic activity as some kind of praxis.

Early Efforts

In “Ideas of Functional Literacy”¹¹ I take up the question of whether and how we might build into our philosophising about education a dimension of actively intervening in educational reality, where this experience of intervention informs our further reflection with a view to further intervention. Furthermore, I ask whether this can be done in a way that takes cognisance of Mackie’s claims that the strategies suggested by marxist philosophers may fail for want of an entrenched socialist movement and that rather than mourn we should organise.

Very briefly, I argue as follow. While an entrenched socialist movement is indeed absent in Australia and New Zealand, there nevertheless exist significant pockets of socialist consciousness and practice: e.g., certain Trade Unions. In addition, there are organisations, like the W.E.A., with an historical tradition of socialist sympathy and concern. Given this, are some of these existing organisations already engaged in forms of educational activity which present issues or problems ripe for philosophical involvement, and where the philosopher might aspire to unify theory and practice in a way that transforms educational practice (albeit to a small degree) in accordance with socialist values? In arguing a positive reply to this question I address adult illiteracy: an increasingly evident educational problem in our society. Dominant trends in British and American responses to adult illiteracy, in the form of functional literacy programmes, are described. I argue that the ideological consequences of such programmes are anathema to anyone who genuinely seeks progress toward a socialist society. Consequently, if we hold such values we have an interest in resisting the possibility of functional literacy programmes resembling those abroad becoming the official response to adult illiteracy in New Zealand. Indeed we have an interest in trying to promote an alternative response in accord with socialist values. The educational philosopher, I suggest, can play an important role in this process, by developing a professional interest in adult illiteracy which unfolds as a philosophical praxis.

Thereafter I attempt to capture some of the dimensions of such a praxis. A critical analysis of functional literacy programmes is attempted and their underlying conception of functional literacy rejected. Much of the critique focuses on the capacity of functional literacy programmes to (further) immerse participants in ideologies and practices that promote sectional interests - “employers, social service agencies, and authority generally” (Levine, 1982, p. 261) - at the expense of the participants’ own interests. In place of this domesticating model of functional literacy an alternative, ideal, ‘socialist’ conception is advanced, based squarely on Freire’s theory and practice. It is suggested that this theoretical (socialist) ideal of functional literacy could form part of a praxis. The theorist would bring this ideal of functional literacy to the practical situation of helping illiterate adults learn to read. This practical engagement in a problem situation from everyday reality would offer the possibility of dialectical interplay between theory and practice. Furthermore, if the pedagogical exercise was undertaken through the W.E.A. Literacy Scheme, some attempt would have been made to engage in organising activity with a view to promoting the eventual reality of an entrenched socialist movement.

I have not carried this idea for a possible development of educational philosophy as praxis through to effective action. There are two main reasons for this. First, I received no direct comment whatsoever on my paper from W.E.A. Literacy personnel, to whom I personally conveyed a copy. Moreover, it was made clear to me - although not with reference to “Ideas of Functional Literacy” - that the W.E.A. Literacy Scheme is intentionally ‘a-political’. Coupled with the fact that any intervention grounded in my argument as it stood would be essentially individualist, the W.E.A. (non) response encouraged me to go back to the drawing board. Consequently, “Ideas of Functional Literacy” merely represents my early view of the kind of thing that might be undertaken in developing educational philosophy as praxis. The second (more positive) reason is that I have attempted to develop a course, although not in educational philosophy, which better meets the values of praxis argued for above than would an intervention based on “Ideas of Functional Literacy”. I will end my discussion with a brief account of this course.

In 1984 I offered a third year special Topic paper called "Education and Revolutionary Change". The aim of the course is to investigate the nature and role of education in three countries - Cuba, Nicaragua and Guinea-Bissau¹² - which have (comparatively recently) undergone revolution. Such an investigation plainly involves getting as far as possible 'on the inside' of the world views which inform social change in these countries. It also necessitates examining their colonial histories in trying to understand something of the process by which revolutionary values and activity emerged. An important part of the academic rationale for this paper is my belief that such an investigation can provide an illuminating standpoint from which to consider the role of education within the wider social process in our own country. In addition there was a personal agenda. During the three years prior to offering the course I had developed considerable sympathy for what I understood was being attempted in Nicaragua. I sought an opportunity to study Nicaraguan reality more closely - in order to test the validity of my sympathies. This, I thought, could be much better done in a group than alone.

From a pedagogical point of view one important comment is in order. On matters of detail and empirical fact concerning the nature and role of education within the process of revolutionary change in these societies, I went into this course on much the same footing as students. I could authentically claim no expertise over student members of the group on matters of content. Furthermore, my preference was that the learning process approximate as closely as possible to dialogue. I was clearly less experienced in such a process than a number of the group who had participated in women's groups. Where I was (I believe) in a position of some (academic) 'superiority' was with respect to understanding different theoretical frameworks and how to work within these in a tolerably scholarly manner, and having some appreciation of competing world views and ideologies. This put me in a position where I could suggest a coherent organising structure within which the learning process could proceed.

To what extent and in what ways did this course approximate to praxis in the sense I have outlined? The following sketch will do little justice to the quality of learning and involvement that emerged. Hopefully, however, it will be suggestive: We faced a major challenge of obtaining up-to-date information on developments in these countries relating to education and social change. While some participants engaged in considerable library research - running computer scans of available information, sifting journals for relevant articles, compiling bibliographies, getting material translated from Spanish and Portuguese others (also) pursued contacts within the three countries concerned and obtained up-to-date information from these sources. All material was shared throughout the group and a spirit of co-operation quickly developed.

Two members felt very early on that some attempt at reciprocity between ourselves and people in the countries being studied should be made. Their assistance in our attempt to understand aspects of their reality should be balanced by us offering them some basis for understanding ours - if they so wished. This resulted in most of the group assisting the two members in question with producing a video to be forwarded to the Cuban Ministry of Education. In this video events and themes from contemporary New Zealand reality were outlined and the group members discussed what these events and themes meant to them. For example, in one section footage of a confrontation between riot police and protestors focused on the 1981 Springbok Tour of New Zealand as an important episode in recent New Zealand history. In another section a long-serving executive officer in the Auckland University Students' Association sketched some of the major changes he has observed in our university during the past decade the structure of the student population, patterns of assessment, political attitudes on campus, employment prospects for graduates, etc. We described our personal perceptions and impressions of several such events and themes in an attempt to communicate a little of our own understanding of aspects of New Zealand reality. With the video goes an invitation to Cuban students to develop an on-going exchange with Auckland students doing the course in subsequent years.

Approximately halfway through the course two concerns surfaced. One was that some students felt they (meaning the students as a whole) had not taken sufficient control of their learning process. In their view the group was more passive than it ought to be; too willing to accept direction and initiative from a single source (namely, myself). Secondly, several members of the group were developing a very strong sympathy for the Nicaraguan struggle and sought some way of contributing to this struggle. These two concerns were solved, on student initiative, in a single stroke. It was suggested (and agreed) that one viable way of helping the Nicaraguan cause would be by giving New Zealanders a chance to become more aware of what has been happening in Nicaragua. The specific avenue chosen was to produce a curriculum package on Nicaragua, suitable for use in the Forms 3 and 4 Social Studies syllabus, and find secondary school teachers who would use the material. Sixteen of the twenty group members adopted this as a collective group project. This provided the focus for their investigation of Nicaragua, and effectively brought the process of 'knowledge production' under their own direction and control about as far as is possible in the context of a university-examined inquiry. Several teachers have agreed to use the material and CORSO - a local organisation involved with Third World Development programmes - has expressed interest in marketing and distributing the material to schools. Production of the package is well under way, and the group intends to work on it until it is successfully completed - despite the fact that the course 'ended' some months ago.

Following the visit to New Zealand of Guillen Zelaya, Vice President of the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples, several of our number were active in helping establish the N.Z. - Cuba Friendship Society. This society is actively involved in promoting social, cultural and trade exchanges between New Zealand and Cuba, and with promoting awareness of Cuban development among New Zealanders. The recent (November, 1984) display of U.S. aggression against Nicaragua heightened concern among many New Zealanders over the prospect of direct invasion and the continued drain on Nicaraguan resources by the U.S. backed activities of Nicaraguan Contras. This resulted in (among other things) a public meeting at which a Nicaragua Support Group was formed. Once again several of our number were active in forming this group, which is committed to raising funds for medical aid to Nicaragua, lobbying the Government to oppose vigorously threats to Nicaraguan self-determination, and to help promote awareness among New Zealanders about events in Nicaragua.

With regard to more explicitly academic matters (in the traditional sense of "academic"), my impression is that the issues addressed in this course were researched and discussed at a level of scholarship and enthusiasm considerably higher than I have seen before in undergraduate courses. Particularly impressive was the manner in which 'fragments' produced by individuals - e.g., on aspects of the colonial legacies, education in pre-revolutionary Cuba and Nicaragua, the philosophy and practice of day care, the nature and role of women-'s organisations, education as study-work, the nature and success of the literacy crusades, 'informal' educational organisations, the arts in revolutionary Cuba and Nicaragua, revolution and censorship, ideology and doctrine in revolutionary education, education and economic development, etc. - were welded together into an overall conception of education and the wider process of social change in Cuba and Nicaragua. A common 'complaint' was that involvement in "Education and Revolutionary Change" was taking more time than the rest of their papers combined - a matter reflected in the depth of research, quality of class discussion and the written material produced, length of bibliographies and appendices to assignments, and the overall coherence attained in people's understanding of education's place in the process of revolutionary change.

It was also commented that, having considered a remote educational and social reality in such an active manner, it would be beneficial to engage in a like process dealing with our more immediate reality. Subject to approval from colleagues I propose to offer a further Special Topic paper in 1985: namely, "Aspects of Peace Education in the South Pacific". This will hopefully provide an opportunity to 'problematise' aspects of our own educational and social reality and, thus, to draw closer still to an ideal of academic activity as praxis.

Notes

1. NB. I am not implying that my own exercise was well-performed.
2. Other criticisms advanced by marxist philosophers of education doubtless apply as well - e.g., ontological and epistemological problems arising out of my approach to conceptual analysis. The criticisms I took most to heart, however, are those with more direct 'political' implications: supportive rhetoric, internal criticism, no foundation for a practical agenda, etc.
3. In this context note also Mackie's claim that the sterility of APE discourse derives in part from "an assumption of theoretical individualism which leads to a social atomism hostile to collective action" (op. cit., p. 33). This criticism is valid for *Freedom and Education*.
4. Mackie (ibid.) and Walker (op. cit., and 1984) both acknowledge the existence of other tendencies besides the analytic and marxist paradigms with Australasian philosophy of education. None of the remaining options - e.g., Ismism, natural history of philosophical ideas, principles of education, etc. - constitutes, in my view, a viable approach to philosophy of education.
5. I use Harris as an example here because he has subsequently faced squarely this gulf between bold critique and vague - hesitant even - suggestions for a practical agenda. His second book, *Teachers and Classes* (1982), is considerably more explicit and directive in suggesting strategies for teachers based on a marxist analysis of education under capitalism - about which more, shortly.
6. By "existential dissonance" I simply mean the experience of conflict tensions, or unease within a person over what they are - what they represent (or do not represent), what they are doing (or not doing), 'where they are at' - vis à vis some ideal, standards, challenge, etc. which they take seriously or are committed to. For example, a conscientious teacher within the compulsory education system will almost inevitably experience (some) existential dissonance if they take seriously the views of an Ivan Illich or a Paulo Freire. Similarly, the person who takes seriously the claim that s/he is a bearer of (interest-serving) ideology, or a mere unit of reproduced labour power, and not the autonomous agent they had previously perceived themselves to be, may face existential dissonance. Failure to resolve such dissonance can have serious consequences for a person's psychological and emotional well-being, and their ability to function. I also have in mind here the (less serious?) state of disillusionment or pessimism experienced by some students who grasp and accept a marxist critique of capitalist relations but see no way out of the reality it depicts.
7. It is difficult describing dialectical process. The more important task is to enter it, knowingly.
8. I have lifted this quotation out of context to make a different point from Harris. I take it, however, that his point and mine are closely and crucially connected.
9. Freire, of course, collapses this dichotomy. He is concerned with an uncompromised emancipatory pedagogy of the oppressed - not with university courses. How far such a contrived situation as the teaching-learning of educational philosophy in a university can aspire to the status of an emancipatory pedagogy and collapse the teacher-taught dichotomy cannot be determined here. Insofar as the lived experience of future historical transformations requires genuinely democratised structures, the object must surely be to eliminate the dichotomy as far as possible - certainly in respect of authority and power differentials (see text below).
10. There is no need to limit it to marxist philosophy of education. The work of such people as John Ahier, Michael Apple, Robin Blackburn, Sam Bowles, Martin Carnoy, Paul Corrigan, Herb Gintis, Henry Giroux, Madan Sarup, Rachel Sharp, Ira Shor, Michael Young, M. F. D. Young, and Paul Willis, to name but a few, generate abundant educational themes that can be worked up in a 'praxical' manner.
11. A paper presented to the Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia Annual Conference, Massey University, August, 1983. This is not to be confused with my forthcoming "Ideas of Functional Literacy: critique and redefinition of an educational goal" *N.Z. Journal of Educational Studies*, May, 1985. The latter does not address the theme of philosophy as praxis, but merely critiques the dominant 'official' conception of functional literacy and advances an alternative view based on my reading of Freire.
12. In the event we spent very little time studying Guinea-Bissau, because of time pressures.

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