Book Reviews

Education, Work and Social Capital: Towards a new conception of vocational education
Christopher Winch, 2001
London, Routledge
220 pp.
ISBN 0-415-20434-8

Christopher Winch's new book tracks out the relationships between politics, economic well-being and education. He sets out to justify a place for vocational education within the established system of education in the UK and to assert its value. To do this, he advances an Aristotelian view of politics as the pursuit of the common good combined with a normative commitment to a non-foundational and contested liberalism. He entertains a broad view of economics as a form of political economy where consumption is given its place within the preservation and enhancement of society. Links between education and the health of a country's economy are conceptualised through a moral consideration of civil society. He subscribes to a political concept of education as a preparation for life, in the broadest sense, and definitions and understandings of work are explored before an examination of the relationships between education and work. The detailed and coherent way in which these conceptions are outlined to the reader, from the perspective of a teacher educator, to offer a breadth and depth of information and insight which could recommend this text as an authoritative source for student teachers. Indeed, the descriptions and explanations of a range of related aspects of education, politics and economics in a social and moral context, offer a valuable resource for educational professionals.

In defending and developing a view of vocational education as an area that must be taken seriously by philosophers, it is shown that it ought not to be discarded as venal or philistine because it is thought to contaminate education with matters of work and economy.

The main aim of this book is to show that ... our deepest concerns with moral and spiritual well-being are bound up with work, and that any education directed towards the well-being of the vast majority who are not going to live the life of the country gentry of yesteryear needs to concern itself with preparation for work in the broadest sense. (p. 1)

Winch is surely correct in this observation, although he does not trace the genealogy of this bias in British culture or western philosophy. He does, however, explore factors in recent history that appear to have caused vocational education to be relegated to a lowly position in the range of available educational opportunities.
Much of the currently perceived status of vocational education derives from the English public school context and the desirability of a classical education for the sons of the gentry, although this is not historically the case in Scotland where a tradition of vocational education was well established by the mid twentieth century.

A liberal vocationalism is advocated by Winch as a means of meeting contemporary needs of citizens, of government and of business, arguing that such an approach would continue to allow liberal aims to be met for those who so wish, and would also, alongside civic education, provide a balance of opportunity for members of a modern society. This conception of vocational education would require a more sophisticated view than that of merely training individuals for low-skill opportunities, but would seek to provide individuals with the means of making choices in their lives from what they might consider to be worthwhile options. In looking at the positioning of vocational education in existing practice, Winch explores the relative contributions of early compulsory schooling, secondary compulsory schooling and post-compulsory schooling. While recognising the distinctive input of each of these stages, he argues that, while school-based and even technical school-based education can achieve much, they cannot realistically reproduce the adult work context in the way that work-based education can. The catch in this, which is not explored by Winch, is that once entry has been made into work-based education, major decisions have had to be made and choices taken, prior to finishing formal schooling and in the pre work-based context.

In his build up of arguments to support recognition of the value of vocational education, Winch stoutly trounces some contemporary 'holy cows' of education, in the UK particularly, but also in other established industrialised economies. Some of these are the widespread use of competence-based education and training, the much-used phrase 'lifelong learning' and the currently popular 'end of work' thesis. Exploring the relationship between education and training, he claims that ‘... education is concerned with preparation for life, whereas training is concerned with the inculcation of technique, so training cannot at the same time be education’ (p 85), then proceeds to advocate that formation is a more accurate way of describing vocational education. Assessing and accrediting learning are important factors in attributing status to what takes place within education and training, in which case the widespread use of competence-based education and training is thought by Winch to be unhelpful, as it is only easily applicable to very low-level types of training and not to education, which is formation, and where the difficulty is in producing valid criteria.

[Competence-based education and training] is only suitable for occupations that require limited propositional knowledge, little variety in work tasks and little need for occupationally specific moral virtues. (p 93)

(A view which is food for thought for teacher educators who are constrained within competence-based courses while attempting to encourage reflective professional attitudes and dispositions in student teachers.)

Politicians, business leaders and educationalist have taken up the call for 'lifelong learning' with alacrity. Winch treats the phrase with cynicism, claiming that it could
have been coined to suit the changing purposes of politicians. ‘It is cleverly ambiguous’, he claims, suggesting autonomy by the use of ‘learning’ rather than ‘education’ or ‘training’, by being suggestive of opportunity when harsh reality may be decided by budget constraints, political priorities and economic needs and by promoting an ideal that may have little value to low-skill workers, who may not need or wish to extend their learning beyond what they achieved in general education.

... if ‘lifelong learning’ in the sense of constant retraining for new jobs is most associated with low-skill work, it is not, nor should be, an attractive prospect for most of the population. At its worst, therefore, the phrase ‘lifelong learning’ is an exhortation to low-skill workers to keep on their toes or be out of a job. When coupled with a refusal to take the steps necessary to create a high-skill economy, its promotion becomes hypocrisy. (p 190)

Several contemporary writers, e.g. Gorz (1999) and Rifkin (1995), are proposing a scenario where the end of work as we know it is inevitable. Changing patterns of global industrialisation and the impact of new technology mean that agencies for education and training are therefore persevering in obsolete practices that will be of no relevance to society within a short time. White (1997) proposes an alternative emphasis for educators, working towards more self-chosen activity as spheres of life undergo cultural shifts and the diminished status of ‘the job’ brings about a flattening of ‘status hierarchies’. While recognising that many industrial practices will become unnecessary, leaving less need for work and more time for leisure, Winch claims that the terminal impact of these shifts is not as imminent as the above writers would suggest. If there is a long-term decline in the amount of work available, he concludes that this is largely the result of political decisions rather than market effects. Winch cites evidence that the number of jobs is not declining, and although some traditional jobs are disappearing, the service sector and new types of industry are in fact on the increase. Interpretation of job statistics is however a complicated business. Winch’s justification for vocational education in this book depends on a recognition of the intrinsic value of work. He concludes that, however convoluted its development may have been, work has come to be considered as a ‘defining human characteristic’ and that it is perhaps thus unsurprising that an intellectual trend predicting the end of work has sprung up at this juncture.

The carefully laid-out arguments of this book lead Winch to conclude, in his case for vocational education, that in giving it a serious place in society, social capital, well-being and prosperity can be effectively promoted. These are enormously important considerations for politics, education and business but vocational aims should accompany civic and liberal aims and be part of a drive to develop high-skill, high-quality work opportunities for all. Those currently involved in, and those who advocate the expansion of vocational education, will find useful arguments in this book to support the furtherance of their cause.
References

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RIFKIN, J. (1995) The End of Work, The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the dawn of the Post-Market Era (New York, G.P. Putnam’s Sons).

WHITE, J. (1997) Education and the End of Work—A New Philosophy of Work and Learning (London, Cassell).

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Children as Philosophers: Learning Through Enquiry and Dialogue in the Primary Classroom
Joanna Haynes, 2002
London, Routledge Falmer
155 pp.
ISBN 0-750-70946-4

The Right to Learn: Alternatives for a Learning Society
Ken Brown, 2002
London, Routledge Falmer
201 pp.
ISBN 0-415-23165-5

If the British education system is broken, then these two publications provide rather different but strangely similar accounts of how teachers, parents and policy writers might like to fix it. Joanna Haynes examines how schooling and the curriculum can be augmented with a turn to philosophy as a doctrine and a subject while Ken Brown provides evidence of the likely failure of any such direction with an attack upon the false democracy of state education in Britain.

Children as Philosophers and The Right to Learn offer largely prescriptive arguments for directions in western education despite both Haynes and Brown framing their work as non-prescriptive research into the philosophy of education.

Children as Philosophers introduces philosophy as an emergent primary school subject. However the existence of any such emergence is not supported by evidence. And the nature of primary philosophy programmes is largely left to the reader’s imagination. While thinking skills may be a developing subject in many nations’ curricula, Haynes does not identify which nations, or examine domestic or international policies within a context of teaching philosophy to young children. One could equally argue, without evidence, that such a momentum is a gentle breeze in the hurricane that is the knowledge economy.

The knowledge economy and philosophy, or thinking skills, do have some relation. Haynes notes, ‘[t]wo of the most highly prized skills of business and commerce are problem solving and creative working in groups’ (p. 115). While such skills are valued as doing good philosophy, Haynes is sceptical about the value of thinking
skills taught as performance-related techniques for employability, and doubts any philosophy in the primary classroom will amount to much if it is to be regulated and assessed within the paradigms of the market.

In agreement with Brown's thesis, Haynes accepts that compulsory schooling can hinder free thought when teaching thinking skills involves a rationality of knowing facts rather than a philosophy of 'reasonableness'. However, the book offers guidelines for introducing philosophy into the classroom, based upon Haynes' own research in English primary schools, with anecdotes of pupils' perceptions of classroom philosophy, and of issues they have discussed. For a book that is not intended as a recipe, there are a lot of itemised directions that a teacher embarking on a thinking skills lesson plan might like to incorporate. In the case of encouraging overworked teachers in primary school, and in early childhood education, such direction may be required to open up critical discussion inside, and outside, the classroom.

Philosophy for children starts with 'changing the way [adults] ... respond when children express their ideas' (p. 15). Haynes frames ideal teacher behaviours for the integration of philosophy, and argues that philosophy in the classroom facilitates new relations between teacher and child, providing the teacher with insights into the child's lived experiences, and no doubt vice versa.

The process of philosophy in the classroom involves the internalisation of the rules of philosophical engagement within a group. Children are encouraged to express themselves orally without regulated curriculum constraints, experiencing the art of guided group conversation. Teachers add a resource to encourage open conversation, with tenable links to the children's experiences, and linked to other curriculum areas. Through the integration of classroom philosophy in the curriculum, children's development in most curricula subjects will be augmented—the hypothesising scientist, the problem-solving mathematician, the evaluating social scientist and the implementing engineer.

Preschool children are able to participate, using resources that are suitable, including picture books and videos. Philosophy for three-year-olds should provide relevant learning experiences for children to build upon existing knowledge through active discovery (p. 132).

Classroom philosophy should be practical and active, collaborative and individual, holistic, open-ended, promoting increased self-esteem and higher order thinking skills. It is no surprise that philosophy for children as a subject should be these things; such discourse earns much currency with curriculum writers. The issue is whether any of these admirable qualities are probable or possible within a context of education and schooling—Haynes herself acknowledges that national curricula generally restrict philosophical possibilities.

A similar discourse surrounds the introduction of computers in early education. ICT, like philosophy, is advocated as an integrative meta-discipline that will challenge traditional schooling hierarchies and empower the child (Papert, 1993). How might the computer further the development of philosophical enquiry? Haynes notes that the computer will be a permanent and far-reaching feature in education. Traditional pedagogies will have to adapt. Is it that such meta-discourses as
philosophy for children or ICT for children will modify traditional schooling? Maybe, if those children do not attend urban, low socio-economic schools, and have an experience of education that is arguably much less open-ended than those children who took part in Haynes' village school programmes. She does acknowledge that the children in her programmes are from a particular society, invested with that society's values, ideals and visions. It might be argued that with a patient, inquisitive and creative teacher, a small class size and a curriculum that did not require the teacher to legitimate every act as a technocratic procedure, then Haynes' classroom vignettes that indicate that critical thinking is taking place, would arguably occur with or without philosophy as a subject.

This criticism regards the relevance of *Children as Philosophers* and could equally be levelled at *The Right to Learn*.

*The Right to Learn* illuminates contentions and contradictions of contemporary education policy. It gives an account of the many challenges to state education and the often-curious government responses such as the propensity to provide annually ill-thought and superficial remedies to complex policy problems.

Perhaps most importantly, Brown recognises that without any alternatives to state education a discourse of the right to learn becomes superficial and, as this is arguably not a good thing, education policy that does not allow for such alternatives is therefore dangerous policy.

Brown posits his quest for the learning society between troubling the state and examining alternatives. His work is established within an acceptance of certain European Union covenants of universal human rights that can be seen to be derivatives of the Enlightenment philosophies and more recent exponents, in particular John Stuart Mill. He further establishes his epistemology in a turn to Karl Popper and Lev Vygotsky for a foundation in both the philosophy and pragmatics of universal rights through education.

Brown critiques Britain's education system, characterised by over-bureaucratization, top-down policy processes, and marginalisation of key stakeholders, such as the teacher and parent, whose combined lack of input into key policy areas is of great concern to Brown, despite his concomitant belief that both appear largely disinterested with policy issues.

As governments have very rarely shown that they know what is best for the child, Brown envisages a range of democratic alternatives to the authoritarian state system, particularly the home. And home schooling is Brown's champion of the right to learn. He outlines the developmental and social benefits of home schooling (p. 140).

With fewer children in state schools and less state spending, Brown argues targeted allocations increase—the middle class opts for home schooling and then feel satisfied that the money the government saves is directed to improve the opportunities of the working class. Broadly encapsulated, this implies that a child has a right to be educated according to his or her parents' beliefs unless they are poor and then they have a right to be educated according to the state's beliefs.

Brown confirms that home schooling is a middle-class nuclear family phenomenon, in a quarter of researched cases, one teacher as a parent. One might wonder whether this implies where all the 'good' teachers have gone. He acknowledg-
edges that there is some concern regarding the demographics, yet, as with Haynes' work, the book is not interested in emancipating the masses, heeding the cry of those middle-class children who are demanding their freedom from state control.

Brown's advocacy of home schooling is not simply based upon a discussion of the child's desire to circumvent peer pressure; it is a discourse in human rights and, more specifically, Great Britain's commitment to the EEC's charters relating to the rights of parental choice in education.

Brown elucidates a range of theories, particularly Popper's, of 'rolling back the state' (Kelsey, 1993) and examines a range of market-driven options linked to a discourse of liberation, choice, efficiency, and the pedagogical imperatives, lifelong learning, creativity, problem-solving skills and collaboration—the same imperatives central to education policy discourse in many western governments.3

Yet Brown remains pessimistic, what with the British Government's policy on home schooling and all. Enter the omniscience of the market, and the power of a "radical-right vision of a society liberated from centralised state control through the privatisation of all aspects of education" (p. 159). Brown re-emphasises well-worn descriptions of state-regulated safety nets, and the multifarious benefits of tax reductions.

These palliatives are 'on strong ground' (p. 160), not in the least because '... any principled resistance by governments to the wholesale commercialisation of education can only have weakened their deference to the international market economy (ibid.)'—governments want their cake and they want to sell it. Brown cautions that the strength of the market will [and it has in New Zealand] be diffused by the state's propensity to package markets in education with multiple 'independent' government agencies (pp. 160–1).

One answer, following John Adcock's 1994 thesis, would be to replace schools entirely with distance education and home tutoring (p. 152). Another is Denmark's education policy, especially the state's acceptance of its limitations in the policy process (p. 120).

In The Right to Learn, therefore, what are at stake are the parameters of the education market. Yet a discourse in rights that leads Brown to turn to the market, whether through private education, home schooling or distance education, raises questions as to whether this merely replaces vocationalism with vocationalism, managerialism with managerialism, and, importantly, false democracy with false democracy.

The aim to 'raise questions about the justifiability of state intervention in pursuit of what are deemed collectively desirable social ends' (p. 65) has been raised before, particularly in New Zealand, and the resultant government policy has been well documented and critiqued (see Easton, 1997).

That Brown believes a polymorphic education is possible in a market is reticent of the 'New Zealand Experiment' (Kelsey, 1997) and of Popper's historicism (Easton, 1997).

He argues for a 'dynamic ... that will lead to incremental accommodations between the numerous interested parties ... that will permit gradual and sensitive reallocations of resource in response to the emerging needs and established rights' (p. 161). This appears a Utopian solution, despite Brown's commitment to avoid
such prescriptions. It might be argued that if it were possible to conduct gradual and sensitive reallocations of resources in response to emerging need and established right then it would have been done already, without the market. Furthermore, Brown’s vitriol against the state raises a question mark as to whether he believes the state should be an interested party. He provides contrasting views on this, yet, despite an ardent exposition of Mill’s liberty, there is little recognition of Mill’s role for the state as a stakeholder in the education of children.¹

How are sensitive reallocations going to be administered through the market? Brown suggests that home schooling offers such a dynamic because it is diversified, and so diversified that he himself admits home schooling is a middle-class privilege, with its ‘sophisticated use of modern information technology’ (p. 161). Information and communication technologies blend well with markets in education. Just look at the market for educational software. Is this where Brown wishes education to be posited? He therefore seems unconcerned, or at least would be unconcerned by a private educational market serving only those able to compete in it and allowing the state to mop up the rest. However, Haynes is critical of such an outcome:

Some people of course believe that as technology advances, schools in their present form will disappear. If this is so, how will young people learn resilience, resistance and the will to challenge authority? Would people in Britain know how to resist a dictator? Do they know how to care for immigrants and political refugees? (Haynes, 2002)

Haynes’ answer is to reinforce the construct of the child as tabula rasa, and this flexibility is the platform from which to engage in critical enquiry. Yet, in Children as Philosophers, she recounts an interaction with a child who wanted to keep ‘thoughts’ in check, rather than ‘feelings’. Haynes interpreted the child’s rules of language as incorrect, based upon her knowledge of the distinction between thoughts and feelings, hence denying his right to express himself in particular ways. It goes to show that with all the best intentions, what characterises an adult is the belief that they know better.

Both authors appear cursorily aware that no one knows better, and that their role is to augment educational discourse rather than prescribe it. Yet their inclination towards middle England leaves the reader wondering how relevant a chat with the visiting village GP could be for the majority of educationally malnourished children.

Notes
1. The one exception being the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum Te Whaariki (Ministry of Education, 1996).
2. Any perusal of contemporary ECE training would confirm that these imperatives are established through both Vygotsky and Piaget.
3. Brown invokes a corporate metaphor: the history of computer technologies indicates that large institutions have limited capacity to problem-solve, collaborate or create in comparison to smaller independent companies—no one in the school system has any real idea what problem-solving is, and no one has the time to work it out, whereas the home school is an organic and continuous experience of creativity, collaboration and problem-solving beyond the grasp, and shackles, of the system.
4. See On Liberty.
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Aristotle on the Necessity of Public Education
Randall R. Curren, 2000
New York and London, Rowan & Littlefield Publishers Inc.
279 + xv pp.
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ISBN 0-8476-9673-1 (pbk alk. paper)

First, one might well anticipate some uncertainty on the part of librarians concerning whether they should classify Randall Curren's work as a contribution to Aristotelian scholarship, as a contribution to political theory or as a work of analytical philosophy of education. One can also sympathise with any such indecision to the extent that Curren's book may be regarded as an extremely rich and important contribution to all these fields of enquiry.

The work certainly offers fresh insights into the moral, social and political elements of Aristotle's work and into the connections between these—not least in the light of a rather more subtle exploration of the relationship of Aristotle to his predecessors Socrates and Plato than has often hitherto been given. Indeed, since Aristotle himself hardly ever seems to have missed an opportunity to register disagreement with his immediate philosophical forebears, modern scholars and teachers of Aristotle have perhaps been all too prone to emphasise the apparent contrasts between Socratic, Platonic and Aristotelian thought: Plato and Socrates were dualists, Aristotle was a kind of functionalist; Socrates held that virtue was knowledge, Aristotle thinks that it is more a matter of character; Socrates held that no one could be voluntarily wicked, Aristotle believed they could be; Plato was a totalitarian who believed that the individual should serve the state, Aristotle was more of a liberal democrat who held that the state should serve the individual; and so on and so forth. Curren's painstaking scholarship and careful argument greatly serves to undermine some of these rather crude contrasts between Aristotle and his greatest teachers by affirming—I believe rightly—some very significant continuities between them.

Indeed, Curren's main argument seems to be significantly constructed upon such
continuities. In brief, the case for which Curren purports to find either explicit or implicit support in Aristotle can be traced back to an argument of Socrates in Plato's *Apology*. In that dialogue Socrates responds to the official charge that he has corrupted Athenian youth, by pointing out that he could not have done such a wicked thing knowingly (since, on the Socratic view, there can be no voluntary evil), and that if he did so unknowingly he cannot be held responsible: if he has therefore acted in error, then it can only be the state's fault rather than his own for having failed to acquaint him better with his proper responsibilities. While Plato and Aristotle both (in their own ways) rejected the rather implausible idea that there can be no involuntary wrongdoing, it seems to be Curren's view that much of Aristotle's political writing is concerned to vindicate an important kernel of truth in Socrates' famous self-defence. The key idea is that insofar as civil society depends for the just distribution of burdens and benefits upon the observance of law—broadly construed as the civilised regulation of human projects and practices—the state has a clear responsibility to educate citizens in rational compliance with law thus construed: if the state does not fulfil this obligation, it is not well placed to blame any unwitting deviance from such compliance.

In making significant and substantial sense of any such claim, much hangs on finding a coherent route through some time-honoured puzzles about knowledge and responsibility—which, it has to be said, are negotiated (if not quite resolved) by Curren with impressive skill. Briefly, in the name of Aristotle, Curren rejects the Socratic notion that no one can knowingly do wrong, along with the sometime Socratic suspicion that virtue cannot be taught. Plato and Aristotle both seem to have held that wrongdoing can be a failure of character as much as a failure of knowledge. But character is a function of acquired or learned dispositions—and, far from absolving wrongdoers from blame, to have acted from such dispositions just is to be morally responsible: wrongdoing is precisely the sort of thing that agents of bad character *voluntarily* do. By the same token, however, moral character is not innate but a matter of significant social formation: although agents may have some role in shaping their own characters, their social environment inevitably plays the larger part in such shaping; virtue can and needs to be taught. So imputing wilful wrongdoing to bad characters is not at odds with recognising that such wrongdoers may not be primarily responsible for the corruption of their characters. In this respect, indeed, Curren indicates some suggestive connections between less plausible post-Augustinian conceptions of voluntary agency as pure existential choice, and/or liberal or libertarian notions of moral responsibility as the untutored grasp of an inner moral law, and modern conservative convictions that moral or criminal failure are ultimately matters of individual rather than collective responsibility.

In this regard, although much of Curren's work is concerned to put straight the exegetical record in the interests of excavating what he takes to be Aristotle's principal political arguments for state educational provision, it is also concerned to relate these arguments to contemporary political and educational trends and circumstances. The general drift of Curren's argument, for example, is very much against market-driven or consumer-orientated educational initiatives of the kind that have recently influenced mainly right-of-centre politics. I have long held that some of the
strongest arguments against such market conceptions are to be found in the Greeks—not least in Plato's *Gorgias* (a dialogue which is strangely not much noticed by Curren)—but Curren's reconstruction of Aristotle adds much weight to the anti-market case. To be sure, Curren's case could be regarded as socioculturally conservative—in the way that much contemporary communitarianism is conservative—but it is not at all right of centre. Indeed, reading this work during recent UK election fever, my attention was drawn to the rather different educational views of British conservatives—who, from a largely market-orientated perspective, argued for more powers of exclusion for head teachers, and a policy of longer incarceration for those who subsequently and perhaps consequently drift into adult crime. By contrast, Curren’s work is clearly driven by a deep and refreshing sympathy and concern for all members of the educational constituency—not least, those who have to date had the worst sociocultural or economic deal. However, despite Curren’s attempt to respond to all the possible educational objections to his arguments in the closing sections of this work, such responses are inevitably sketchy in the course of a short work, and there are inevitably remaining worries about the precise applicability of Aristotle’s arguments to developed democracies like our own: I suspect, for example, that there are issues about education in modern circumstances of cultural pluralism—problematic to the arguments of this work—which are not adequately confronted here.

To this, of course, the only reasonable reply may well be 'sufficient unto the day': Curren’s work certainly achieves as much as one might reasonably expect, given the scale of the task and the space available. His work aspires to standards of scholarship and intellectual rigour to which only the very best writers in the post-war analytical tradition of educational philosophy have aspired—standards which have also, I fear, been seriously declining over the past couple of decades partly under the influence of more freewheeling intellectual trends. From this viewpoint, although Curren’s work is written with great elegance and lucidity, it has to be said that it is also a work that demands considerable discipline, effort and concentration from the reader. Notwithstanding this, Curren’s book deserves to be widely read—both as a shining example of contemporary political and educational philosophy, and for what it adds to the growing general appreciation of Aristotle’s enormous contemporary educational relevance.

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