

Course: Introduction to Education Research; **Lecture:** *Philosophy of Education*

Date: 17 September (Tuesday 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM)

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Overview

What is education? Education, in the sense of its etymological roots, is all about bringing into figural salience---[in a nurturing spirit](#)---for all to see that which is within the collective consciousness of a student body, plausibly unarticulated. We all begin to gather ordinary, scientific, and mathematical ideas early in childhood. Note that science is [ever-proper alignment of reason with experience](#), while mathematics, in the sense of its etymological roots, is [learnable-and-teachable](#).



[Natural-born Scientist](#): A child discovering the match between her two hands (long before learning to count).

Answering: ‘what is education?’ depends on the purpose of our investigations (cf. Bengaluru’s population). From a functional perspective, education is what education does, which is help secure a livelihood (hopefully). A relatively refined answer is: education is what education is good for. Equivalently, education is that which wouldn’t be but for education: memory! Every day, denuded of memory, is Groundhog Day. Time, the shape of memory, loses its ‘[urge to move](#)’, and karma (action-consequences cycle) ceases to be, along with the memoryless Being (obliterated from [its] Becoming), be it that of an individual or that of a collective. Simply put, societies unmindful of education disappear into dark matter in a dissolution of now-here; having to ‘reinvent the wheel’ is cool breeze compared to sloshing swirling solar storms pulverizing societies-sans-education out of deep history. Hence: [In Education We Trust!](#)

The epic story of education is a mere two-word phrase: educational reform. Beginning with Professor Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan’s 1926 paper (with that very two-word phrase as its title), after almost 100 years, we find Professor Manjul Bhargava, who authored our relatively recent Indian National Education Policy ([NEP 2020](#)), call for the exact same thing: emphasise conceptual understanding instead of rote memorization. Notwithstanding the near universal consensus regarding the diagnosis of what ails education, none of the uncountably one too many pedagogical experiments that students’ education has been subjected to across space, time, and rings of definitions of education claimed to have found a treatment protocol that can or may (forget will) bring about the desired change for better. This incessant stream of failures calls for a rethink about education and / or educational reform.

What exactly is the purpose of education? Freud provides a hint: “[mastering stimuli](#)”. But how? Here Buddha comes to our rescue: “[let reality reflect itself in us and modify our very being.](#)” Simply put, [get real!](#) It’s the disconnect between school textbooks and the world that they pretend to describe makes education a time-tested means to contain students in a straightjacket of consensual knowledge; resting in peace in the intellectually constricting democratized reality of textbooks is rewarded with the added value of handholding in [taking academic selfies](#).

Next, what is philosophy? Verily, philosophy is not what philosophers do to pay bills and / or food on their families. Philosophy has a purpose: [the most fundamental social purpose of philosophy, according to Professor F. William Lawvere, is to guide education.](#) Surely, [philosophy is not philosophers’ pathological obsession with permutations of the thesis that no knowledge is actually possible and going evangelical on unsuspecting students with sermons on unknowability.](#) Certainly, without any doubt, [mystifying laypersons with spent-paradoxes and spreading unfounded rumours is not philosophy.](#) [In particular, proper assessment of the relation between reality and its reflective parts, i.e., thinking \(individual, schools of thought\) is philosophy.](#) As Grassmann, who invented linear algebra and applied it to colour vision, plausibly by virtue of being a high school teacher, readily recognized that [philosophy is needed to provide an orientation to help the student form for herself the proper estimation of the relation between general and particular at every stage of the learning process.](#) (There’s more on Grassmann’s general vs. particular below.) Philosophy of education is not a spectator-sport: [abstracting general concepts of education requires conscious participation in pedagogical practices; thus abstracted theories can then be used to guide the practice of teaching.](#)

Next, what exactly is the relationship and / or, more specifically, the contrast between education and research? In consciously participating in the practice of studying and teaching, many serious scientists recognized, “[the need to teach, to explain, and to respond to students’ probing is often the genesis of problems taken up in ‘pure’ research.](#)” That this not an ideological position can be readily seen in historical examples, where [the struggle to teach in an understandable manner led to profound discoveries](#). No less significant in this educational / scientific endeavour is the struggle to [unify seemingly disparate disciplines of study](#) (e.g., Maxwell’s electromagnetic theory). Needless to note, all that you read in this overview is but an invitation to discuss and debate, so that you may adopt, discard, and / or treat as you see fit, which is to say: it’s no divine condemnation that you have to endure.

Thinking about education and experience, we find an apparent contrast, with experiences being that of particulars, while education appears to be all about generals. In a seeming cosmic conspiracy to compound the problems of an already troubled education, [our collective consciousness seems to become more and more particularized](#) (to the point of me and you becoming unrelatable). Be that as it may, there is hope: [we are used to dealing with experiences, which never come equipped with unifying generals](#). There’s also William James and his ilk who subscribe to: [particulars make us wiser more so than generals](#).

Lastly, but most important of all, speaking of pedagogy, what is teaching? [Teaching is learning-with-students](#). In this context, we will discuss the relative merits of beginning with familiar examples vs. unfamiliar theories. [Grassmann’s emphasis on developing a proper understanding of the relation between particulars and generals at every stage of learning is of great pedagogical significance](#). It might help in developing a proper understanding of [Grassmann’s theory of pedagogy](#) to draw parallels between the generic contrast: particulars

vs. generals and relatively specific corresponding contrasts: proper nouns vs. pronouns, constants vs. variables, ideas vs. words, theories vs. models, and arithmetic vs. algebra, among others.

More importantly, as has been long known to design students, [designing for the least-abled enhances the usability for all](#); so is the case with [learning / teaching](#) (see Figure below).



Our National Education Policy ([NEP](#)) 2020 clearly recognizes the significance of developing a declarative conceptual understanding beyond that of procedural knowledge memorized, and yet [the very author of NEP](#) has no satisfactory answer (other than the scripted: we need to train teachers) to a simple question: Why do we continue to teach:

$$\underline{1 + 1 = 2}$$

when we know full well that the sum of numbers depends on what those numbers are numbers of (cf. [1 meter + 1 litre = cardinal sin](#) ;) What is the difficulty in ceasing to [abuse mathematics](#) to generate dubious [educational rankings](#)? Why aren't we acknowledging that [numbers / quantities are at best a zeroth order approximation of objective qualities](#)? Is the

myth: [science is a miracle machine](#) a machination to evade the responsibility of science:
deliver?

In closing, with growing public distrust of academia / scientists, the high priests of science have been resorting to prescribing all sorts of pills, including [teaching philosophy](#).; unfortunately, [philosophy is in decline](#).

Pop Quiz:

- What is a pedagogical change that parallels the contemporary attentional shift from generals to particulars?
- Concept is primary and truth is secondary. (False or True?)

P.S. The ‘[category](#)’ that you come across in the linked articles refers to the fact that, not unlike our everyday experiences, wherein the objects of our experience belong to one or another [category](#) (e.g., the cat on the wall next to my window that never looks at me belongs to the category of cats, all of which partake in the essence—catness, whatever it maybe—that characterizes the category of cats), mathematical experience, by virtue of being an abstraction of the everyday experience, is also categorical.

I eagerly look forward to learning with you!