

INTRODUCTION TO INPE SPECIAL ISSUE

Passion, commitment and justice in education

Chigger yellum. No problem. This Amharic idiom offers a window into this special issue, born as it is out of the International Network of Philosophy of Education's 13th Biennial Conference held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in August 2012. The expression itself gestures to an attitude of calm and generosity that stands in stark contrast to the anxious tensions that often accompany other approaches to difficulties experienced in the western and northern hemispheres. For instance, the hospitality offered by the local community in Addis and experienced by those who attended the conference from overseas echoed, in all its ease, this expression perfectly well. There was no problem that seemed could not be fixed, no difficulty that could not be met with graciousness, making this biennial meeting a wonderful success. However, what was also revealed is that it is more difficult to have an attitude of *chigger yellum* when it comes to the enormous challenges facing education globally, as the conference papers illustrated all too well. Highlighted were how issues of social justice, equality and peace play into current educational policies, practices and objectives, and the presentations revealed the multifaceted complexity facing the field of education in their philosophical responses to these issues. Although the conference brought into consideration problems which cannot be fixed so easily, the experience of *chigger yellum* in Addis Ababa acts as a reminder of how common human decency and the desire to ease the burdens of life for others exist alongside and not simply in the shadow of these weighty educational issues.

The theme of the conference, 'Passion, Commitment and Justice in Education', was meant to signal a common reference point that binds our philosophy of education community together across borders. It represents, I think, a shared spirit of seeing how education matters: how it is felt and experienced (passion), how politically and ethically driven it can be (commitment) and how it works (or not) for the betterment of the individuals who are engaged in it (justice). In light of this, the essays in this volume take different approaches to these thematic threads, not simply in terms of offering differing philosophical perspectives, but also in terms of their objects of study (e.g. policy, curriculum, and instruction) and their methods of investigation (e.g. epistemological, ontological, and ethical). Together, the essays here speak of contemporary educational issues, reflecting new and alternative responses to the questions they pose.

Three keynote sessions represented precisely this range of perspectives, along with the three paper presentations selected for inclusion in this special issue. Megan Laverty's address opens up this volume with a consideration of the 'world of instruction'. Here, Laverty takes an initial historical tour of the field of philosophy of education, pointing to the fascination and difficulty philosophers have had with education and its practices. Shifting her terminology from 'education' to 'instruction', Laverty seeks to put into relief

the ‘experience’ of education. Through a reading of Plato’s and Wittgenstein’s ‘instructional scepticism’, Laverty makes it clear that part of the impossible task of instruction is in fact related to bringing mystery into being and for that reason ought to be a task we undertake. My own response to her paper draws out some of the ‘subtle’ and ineffable aspects of our pedagogical relationships, and the ways in which these also need to find a place within our educational commitments.

The Terence McLaughlin Memorial Lecture was this year represented by two well-known scholars in our community, Hanan Alexander and Yusef Waghid, each of whom draws on his own religious tradition in order to think of the possibility of non-violence in education. Alexander’s piece focuses on the Talmudic study and form of reading in order to make a case for an education *in* non-violence. Here, he sketches an ethical commitment for education drawing specifically on the work of Emmanuel Levinas. Waghid’s discussion invokes a notion of education *for* non-violence as a form of democratic education and explores the Islamic notion of *jihād* in concert with this. Together, each one attempts to demonstrate how a singular religious tradition can indeed be mobilised to create conditions for non-violence across religious differences within the sphere of education. The response by Paul Smeyers draws out some of the implications and difficulties with education *in* and/or *for* non-violence, given the forms of violence that frame contemporary existence, including school shootings.

The third keynote paper by David Bridges tackles head on the complexities of global educational policy practices, and examines in particular the ethical and political dimensions of the spread of educational policy. The one-way trajectory that accompanies such spread through ‘policy transfers’ from the wealthy, minority countries of the North and West to the poorer, majority countries of the South and East characteristically carries with it acute problems, particularly concerning matters of social justice. Drawing on numerous examples, Bridges suggests that perhaps a way forward, given the seeming inevitability of this form of internalisation, is to view policy transfer as a form of pedagogy, one that builds in an educational dimension to the transfer itself. In response, Joseph Divala interrogates some of the assumptions underlying the various terminologies around the movement of policy around the globe and raises questions concerning the nature of ‘policy travelling’ from a cosmopolitan outlook.

The three paper presentations continue along the themes raised in the keynote essays. Kanako Ide links directly the disaster at Japan’s Fukushima nuclear power plant in 2011 to the aims and practices of peace education and offers a feminist response to what she sees as an inadequacy in the aftermath of the crisis to address democratically the urgent issues that faced the population at this time. Drawing on Jane Roland Martin’s concept of domestic tranquility, Ide argues for a commitment to peace as a democratic principle that should be acknowledged as readily as ‘housekeeping’ is in our daily lives. While Ide has her eyes on the larger social and political contexts that shape the educational agenda, David Lewin focuses on a different aspect of commitment, one that emerges in the context of learning itself. Lewin’s paper begins with a hermeneutical understanding of the structure of pedagogy which claims that interpreting and understanding lie prior to critical engagement. This leads Lewin to investigate what kind of commitment is made on the part of the student in order to reach understanding. Drawing on Eastern traditions, and particularly his own experience with Tai Chi, Lewin outlines the significance of reclaiming a notion of ‘submission’ as part of a commitment to learning.

Kai Horsthemke's essay takes us on a slightly different trajectory of commitment in outlining the connections between a commitment to truth and epistemological questions of justice. Indeed, unlike Lewin's paper in this regard, Horsthemke explores the importance of critique for promoting an education for understanding. In particular, Horsthemke uses the notion of 'outsider understanding' as a way of epistemically challenging prejudices and complacency in countering others' truth claims. Rather than taking a hermeneutical position that views commitment in terms of a pre-critical disposition, Horsthemke connects a critical attitude with a commitment to truth as providing means for just understanding.

As this collection of essays demonstrates, the entangled threads of passion, commitment and justice cannot be so easily unknotted – and I think they should not be. If educational practices and policies are to address the complexities of learning and teaching across desires, worldviews, cultural practices, religious traditions and inherited prejudices, then it behoves us as philosophers of education not to untangle it in the name of simplification, but to find ways of responding to these complexities with the same generosity of insight and responsibility to others found, I believe, in that most Ethiopian of attitudes: *chigger yellum*.

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