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Martin Heidegger

Challenge to Education

 Springer

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*This book is dedicated to my teacher
Bob Jones, who introduced me
to Heidegger many years ago.*

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Introduction

At the same time Plato seeks to avoid false interpretations; he wants to show that the essence of παιδεία [*paidia*] does not consist in merely pouring knowledge into the unprepared soul as if it were some container held out empty and waiting. On the contrary real education lays hold of the soul itself and transforms it in its entirety by first of all leading us to the place of our essential being and accustoming us to it. (Heidegger 1998, p. 167)

True. Teaching is even more difficult than learning. We know that; but we rarely think about it. And why is teaching more difficult than learning? Not because the teacher must have a larger store of information, and have it always ready. Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn. The real teacher, in fact, lets nothing else be learned than—learning. (Heidegger 1968, p. 15)

If the pose of teacherly omniscience and the authority that this pose articulates are disincentives to learn, then the question of education is the question not of how to transmit knowledge but of how to suspend it. The concrete teacher is one who temporarily stages the scene of resourcelessness. Education is not a passing on of knowledge and skills either in the medieval paradigm of master/apprentices or in the modern of seller/consumer. Rather call it a withholding, a delaying of articulation, in order that the student may attain an answer. (Heidegger 2002, p. 41)

What is education? Where has it come from, how is it changing and what is it becoming? By the middle of the twentieth century, the philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) could see that modern education was in the grips of a business ‘paradigm’ and argued that it needed to be more than an institution of knowledge transmission. Heidegger has been dead nearly forty years, but his insights continue to be relevant—maybe even more relevant?—to education. In the meantime education really has become a big business. Education is surely more of a commercial venture than ever, with learning, teaching and curriculum each engaged in a brisk trade in skills and knowledge.

Heidegger called for an education that radically disrupts the traditional practices of transmission that continue to dominate the institutions of the West. His call emerges from a quest to reconceptualise philosophy from the ground up. This effort produced insights into human being, history, the social world, science, and the arts that have been celebrated, critiqued and taken up in diverse fields. Some have argued that Heidegger was interested in reforming humans as well as philosophy. According to Ehrmantraught (2010), for example, Heidegger’s whole

philosophy can be understood as a pedagogy. But Heidegger never created a systematic philosophy of education, although his philosophy is replete with implications. It is the contention of this book that the implications of Heidegger's philosophy amount to a potent challenge to contemporary education.

Heidegger's long academic career revolved around a single question: the question of the meaning of 'Being'. He was interested in what we assume when we say simple things like (to use his examples) 'the sky *is* blue' or 'I *am* happy' (2010, p. 3). What do I really mean when I say something or someone or I 'exist'? A more traditional and puzzling way to put this question is to ask 'Why is there something rather than nothing at all?' For Heidegger, these questions and our responses to them are very revealing. They are revealing because the ability to ask them says something special about humans, that we have an inbuilt sense of Being. In Heidegger's philosophy the investigation of this special sense leads to a rich new way of understanding human being that was especially influential on 'existentialists' like Jean-Paul Sartre. The question of Being is also revealing because the answers we offer consistently reflect traditional understandings of the world. For example, if we think the answer to the question has something to do with an ultimate creator, or if we think the answer is simply that 'Being' is the most general concept of all, it can be shown we are unconsciously channelling age-old metaphysical assumptions. The question is also revealing because of the very fact that we easily forget that it is an extraordinary question in our busy lives. This 'forgetfulness of Being' is an important feature of human experience in Heidegger's eyes, and on close examination points to a troubling attitude modern humans have to the world and to themselves.

Heidegger never answers his big question as such, but along the way he generated startling insights, many of which are significant for education. Heidegger himself sketches some of the implications when, for example, he touched on the history and power of education or on the nature of teaching. Many scholars and researchers have joined in the task of drawing out the implications of Heidegger's philosophy, either directly—e.g. Michael Peters or Iain Thomson—or more indirectly—e.g. Maxine Greene or Bill Pinar. The purpose of this book is to trace major implications by surveying Heidegger's explicit remarks on education and reviewing the work of education scholars who have built on Heidegger's ideas in different ways. I will also try to fill some gaps to help clarify implications. The goal of this work is to make clear the ways in which Heidegger's philosophy presents a challenge to education. It should be noted that the book suggests implications without first subjecting Heidegger's thought to systematic criticism, a limitation dictated by the book's modest scope. Readers are encouraged to bear in mind that powerful criticisms of Heidegger's philosophy have been offered. If this book stimulates interest in Heidegger and the implications of his ideas for education, it is hoped that criticisms are considered such as those by Carnap (1978), Ayer (1984), Scruton (1984), Adorno (1973a, b), Lukács (1973) and Bourdieu (1991). While not all of these criticisms are necessarily valid, they need to be taken into account by any serious student of Heidegger's thought.

The book opens with two background chapters devoted to Heidegger's life and philosophy. Heidegger was a controversial German academic who, apart from

attempting to reform the Western philosophical tradition, was a member of the Nazi party and actively entered the political arena when he served as the Rector of Freiburg University in 1933. In this role he planned to reform the institution and perhaps all higher education in Germany, but he was only in the job a year. He had extramarital affairs and there is evidence that he acted in a tardy way to some people during his life. For instance, he dedicated his early work *Being and Time* to his teacher and mentor Edmund Husserl. But during the Nazi years Heidegger found it convenient to remove this dedication because Husserl was a Jew (Ott 1994). In the first chapter, we briefly review Heidegger's career and explore his early philosophy. The chapter looks at his question of Being and describes some of the ways he tried to answer it. Chapter 2 surveys his later philosophy. It introduces Heidegger's analyses of truth, language, art, poetry and 'thinking' as such. Both chapters indicate the critical dimensions of his thought, including his analysis of the ever-present 'They' of modern everyday life and examination of the instrumental mindset that shapes so many facets of contemporary life including education. Heidegger's analysis of this mindset he termed 'enframing' (*Gestell*) suggests that our instrumental attitude to the world and each other threatens to block off alternative ways of looking at the world and also leads us to treat ourselves and each other as mere means to technical ends.

The first two chapters serve as a background for the second part of the book which focuses on education as such. Chapter 3 examines Heidegger's views on the project and institutions of education. The Western educational tradition is implicated in the transmission of deep assumptions about the nature of humans and the world that deadens and distorts our sensitivity to the question of Being. Contemporary scholars such as Peters (2002) elaborate on the impact of 'enframing' on education, demonstrating the potential of Heidegger's philosophy for understanding the consequences of educational reform, while Thomson (2005) spells out a vision of an education freed from the shackles of enframing. Chapter 4 teases out meanings of learning using Heidegger's philosophy as a scaffold. Learning can be understood in terms of Heidegger's metaphors of entanglement and disentanglement. The major theories of behaviourism, cognitivism, situated learning, workplace learning and humanism are briefly examined in the light of Heidegger's ideas to present novel appraisals.

Extended treatments of teaching and curriculum are presented in Chaps. 5 and 6. The role of the teacher is both highly dangerous and central to overcoming the danger in Heidegger's understanding of education. It is a dangerous role because of education's crucial part in enframing the student and her world, threatening to convert them into 'human resources'. Within this framework, teachers can serve as highly effective resources for reproducing other human resources in conformity with an inconspicuous and near-irresistible logic. But teachers who understand the pressure exerted on them to implement a standardised education to produce effective graduates can confront the power of enframing. Teachers are thus central to the disruption of the reign of enframing in our world. In Chap. 5 stories about Heidegger's own teaching style are presented, revealing that his influence on students did not always promote freedom to think. In Chap. 6 it becomes clear that curriculum is crucial

for conveying ancient and contemporary ways of understanding Being. Different curriculum traditions are analysed and critiqued from a Heideggerian perspective, and the potential for curriculum to foster an education for Being is also explored.

Chapters 3–6 thus set out ways in which Heidegger’s philosophy can be regarded as a challenge to education, while Chap. 7 attempts to draw together the threads of these studies. This final chapter casts Heidegger’s challenge in terms of a series of ‘problematizations’ of education. The chapter also recounts the suggestions for addressing these problematizations. It is hoped that the book will show not just that Heidegger’s philosophy presents a challenge, but that it is a particularly powerful challenge and that against the background of educational reform on a global scale it is a challenge that needs to be met.

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