Welcome

PESGB information

From the Chair, by James Conroy 2
From the Newsletter Editor, by Ian Munday 3
Secretary’s notices, by Ben Kotzee 5

Articles

To tweet or not to tweet: some thoughts on philosophy of education in the digital age, by Andrew Davis 7
What does the referendum reveal about Scottish education today?, by James MacAllister 9
Philosophy as education and understanding other cultures: the SPIRITS project, by Naoko Saito 11
Who is afraid of the body?, by Joris Vlieghe 13
Teacher education – philosophy of education, by Janet Orchard and Ruth Heilbronn 15
‘New Critical Conversations’: PESGB-funded seminar series, by Andrew Davis 17

2014 conference reports

PESGB Annual Conference 2014, by Ian Munday 20
PESGB Pre-conference 2014, by Ruth Heilbronn 21
PESGB Gregynog Conference 2014, by Plamena Pehlivanova 21
IOE–KU Leuven Philosophy of Education Colloquium, by Ido Gideon 23
PESGB Reading and Writing Retreat, by Carrie Winstanley 24
Reflections on an academic writing retreat, by Caroline Wilson 25
PESGB Summer School 2014, by Carrie Winstanley 27

PESGB news and announcements

The new-look PESGB website, by Mary Richardson 28
PESGB 50th anniversary announcements, by Naomi Hodgson 29

Future events

PESGB Annual Conference 2015 30

Members’ section

Members’ publications 31

PESGB subscriptions 2015

How to join the Society  back cover
Welcome to the annual Newsletter of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain (PESGB).

The Society was formed in 1964 to promote the study, teaching and application of the philosophy of education. The Society holds an annual three-day national residential conference, other regional conferences and local branch meetings. The Society’s primary publication, the internationally renowned *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, is published four times each year.

Administrative enquiries concerning the Society and its activities should be addressed to Stephne Graham at pesgb@sasevents.co.uk Contact Stephne at this address if you have a notice you wish to circulate to the membership.

Readers might like to pass this Newsletter to education students and professionals, or direct them to the Society’s website at [www.philosophy-of-education.org](http://www.philosophy-of-education.org)

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Edited by Ian Munday
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In a previous Newsletter, former Chair Richard Smith opined that we shouldn’t be too gloomy as to the future of philosophy of education.

Now that the REF results are out, with all that that particular exercise entails, we are in a position to stand back a little and take stock. While it will be some time before we have a detailed sense of how philosophy fared, what is clear is that well-theorised and subtly conceptualised work (the stock-in-trade of good philosophy of education) is as valued by – and as valuable to – the educational community as it has ever been. No doubt the fields of our endeavours have been complicated by the advent of impact in the assessment of scholarly quality, but this need not be the bête noire that many educational theorists imagine.

While many in the field in the UK harboured (and continue to harbour) anxieties about the impact of ‘Impact’ on the sustainability of their considered philosophical musings, I want to suggest that this fear is, or at least may be, misplaced. After all, who in education does not want to make a difference? Philosophy of education is a practical endeavour.

For students of my (sadly ageing) vintage, reading Richard Peters was both core and compulsory. It was so, not because it represented some kind of dilettante delight, remote from the everyday concerns of teachers, students and administrators. Rather, I would suggest, it was mandatory because we were confronting important social change affecting the everyday concerns of teachers and students, including curriculum construction, appropriate pedagogies, what should count as important to teach, the nature and appropriate shape of authority, punishment, discipline and so on.

Then, as today, the question of educational purpose loomed large. Why shouldn’t it? After all, young men and women themselves face formidable challenges in a globalised economy where normativity has been displaced by productivity, and where the employer–employee relationship has been fractured by the flight of capital into tax evasion havens. Given the challenge to the historic link (at least back as far as the mid-nineteenth century) between educational capital and economic goods, those in full-time education (as teachers and students) need to have some sense of why we should conduct our endeavours in the ways that we do.

Those legislators who compel young people to attend school need to offer some account of why these social activities remain important at both the individual and social level during an era where this is not entirely self-evident. They also need some normative account of why we might continue as we have, or indeed, why we might wish to consider the evolution of new social forms of educational entailment.

Well-argued, carefully considered and empirically connected philosophical work has never been more important in shaping and supporting optimal educational practice. Indeed, as we enter this momentous 50th anniversary year for the Society, we should plan carefully, in the ways that our predecessors did, to influence and shape educational policy and practices in ways that are conducive to individual and social well-being.

In our 50th year, as in our first year, impact remains salient for philosophers of education. The very existence of our own Impact series (avant la lettre) is testament to the far-sightedness of previous executive committees and an indication of our collective desire as a Society to influence educational practice beneficially. As we join together this year to celebrate and remember, let us recommit ourselves to the challenge of making an Impact.
A message from the Newsletter Editor

Given the significance of this 50th anniversary year in the Society’s history, readers may be forgiven for expecting a heavy dose of nostalgia from the Newsletter.

Anyone hoping for tales of pipes, comfy chairs, etc., will be disappointed. Nobody sent me anything like that, so you’ll have to make do with articles on current issues and concerns in philosophy of education and the Society more generally.

The past is not a foreign (happier?) country for the contributors to this year’s Newsletter. Rather, it is something to be mined and/or sublimed as we look to the future. In this spirit, the editorial from Comrade Conroy (see page 2) gives a nod to R.S. Peters, while insisting that ‘impact’ may not be as ghastly as some of us might think. Jim maintains that “carefully considered and empirically connected philosophical work has never been more important in shaping and supporting optimal educational practice”. Celebrating the success of the society’s Impact Series, he asks us to “recommit ourselves to the challenge of making an Impact”.

Andrew Davis’s account on pages 7–8 of the reaction to his phonics pamphlet might make us wonder whether ‘impact’ is something we ought to be pursuing at all. Having an impact can result in becoming a target. Though he offers a cautionary tale of sorts (particularly in relation to the pros and cons of engaging with digital media), Andrew maintains that: “‘real’ philosophers need to be out there even more than they are already...attempting to engage with intelligence, humour and restraint”.

In his article, James MacAllister invokes the rich history of “intellectual democracy” in Scottish education to provide a critical take on the Scottish Referendum. He bemoans the amount of “noise and rhetoric” that surrounded the debates, and notes that “those Scottish educators in any way sympathetic to the idea that education should still aim to foster intellectual democracy may have found the referendum process rather revealing about just how far away public debate in Scotland has veered from the ideals depicted by MacIntyre and Davie”. But hope regarding the future is not entirely “forlorn”. Read the article on pages 9–10 to find out why not.

Translation has emerged as a significant theme in the philosophy of education. Naoko Saito summarises on pages 11–12 the way in which she has taken this up in her SPIRITS project, funded by Kyoto University. Here, the understanding of translation is unconventional. Translation is not simply about the “transposing of meanings between different language systems. Rather, translation “points towards a more fundamental aspect of language, in which the self and the other are dynamically related in a way that inhere in culture itself”. Translation is also understood as “the art of dialogue” and as a more “receptive-responsive, ‘feminine’ mode of thought and language”.

continued on page 4
Joris Vlieghe’s meditation on the role of the body in education (see pages 13–14) attempts to drive liberal educators “up the wall”. While Vlieghe is critical of the liberal educator’s dismissive approach to the body, he is equally suspicious of Merleau-Ponty’s followers, who regard the body “as educationally important because it is capable of performing precisely the activities that for a long time were supposed to be reserved for the mind”. Instead we should consider the educational possibilities of viewing the “body as body, the body in its plain bodiliness”.

Reporting back on their teacher education project, Janet Orchard and Ruth Heilbronn detail the impressive number of recent seminars, workshops and publications that arose from it. Check out their article on pages 15–16 to discover the intriguing things that go on at a Quaker retreat centre in rural Oxfordshire.

On pages 17–19, Andrew Davis reports some findings from his PESGB-funded ‘New Critical Conversations’ seminar series. The project has involved meetings between philosophers of education, representatives from university departments of philosophy and educational researchers from other disciplines. Its principal aim was to promote a healthy and open dialogue between representatives of contrasting philosophical and intellectual traditions. Andrew takes us through some of the key themes that emerged from the sessions. Luckily, these meetings were untainted by physical violence and nobody walked off in a huff.

Let me extend my warmest thanks to those mentioned above for their contributions to this year’s Newsletter.

Thanks also to Plamena Pehlivanova, Ido Gideon and Ruth Heilbronn for their vivid and evocative conference reports. The writing retreat seems to have been a great success, and thanks to Caroline Wilson for her moving account of its benefits. Thanks to Naomi Hodgson for her work in collating conference reports. I’d also like to thank Carrie Winstanley for her reports on this year’s summer school and the writing retreat. Thanks to Ben Katzee and Naomi Hodgson for their notices and Mary Richardson for her update on the rather spectacular new website. Thanks to all those who sent pictures and publication lists.

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**How to contribute to the 2015 PESGB Newsletter, including items for the Members’ publications section**

Items for the Members’ publications section should follow precisely the style of the examples below, including order, format and punctuation.

**Book**


**Book chapter**


**Article**


Please email your contribution to pesgb@sasevents.co.uk

**The deadline for the 2015 issue of the Newsletter is 31 August 2015.**
**Secretary’s notices**

**PESGB Officers and Executive Committee**

The Society’s affairs are managed by an Executive Committee of President, Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Conference Programme Chair, Conference Organiser, Editor of the *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, six elected members and up to six co-opted members.

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**PESGB Annual General Meeting 2015**

The 2015 Annual General Meeting will be held at 9.15am on Saturday 28 March at the Society’s Annual Conference at New College, Oxford.

**Branch Secretaries**

The Society currently has 22 regional branches. The list of branches and secretaries is as follows:

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continued on page 6
In 2015, the PESGB has special events planned to celebrate the Society’s 50th anniversary at many of our branches. Please get in touch with your local branch secretary to find out about planned events in your area. Support for branch meetings and regional events is greatly appreciated.

Have an idea for an event to celebrate PESGB@50? Please contact your branch secretary.

If you live in an area without an active branch, please consider starting one. The Society has money available to help set up and run branches. Contact the Secretary, Ben Kotzee (h.b.kotzee@bham.ac.uk), for advice.
To tweet or not to tweet: some thoughts on philosophy of education in the digital age

The brief outbreak of publicity early in 2014 associated with my pamphlet *To Read or Not to Read: Decoding Synthetic Phonics* shocked me.

Never before had I encountered such a combination of hostility and the deliberate and radical departure from the norms of civilised rational debate. I was accused of lying (I didn’t!), of comparing phonics teaching to child abuse (I really didn’t!) and of (indirectly) bringing the previously wonderful PESGB into disrepute. Well... perhaps that’s not for me to judge.

All this made me think hard about at least three things:

- the role of social media in contemporary society and whether or not philosophy should embrace it;
- whether individual philosophers of education are likely only to succeed in communicating to small numbers of people – most of them like-minded academic colleagues; and
- whether most of the public, together with many educators, hold that all issues can be settled by appeal to empirical evidence.

As I began to explore social media, I found I was very late for the party. To embarrass a few by naming them, David Aldridge, Robert Price, Darren Chetty and others were already there blogging, tweeting and so forth with the aim of bringing philosophical illumination to conversations about education. I noted that such exchanges are potentially open to huge audiences.

Three long-running threads on the TES Opinion Forum resulted from someone posting extracts from my 2012 PESGB conference paper ‘A monstrous regimen of Synthetic Phonics’.

Many thousands of responses piled up, some of them distinctly unfriendly. Related Twitter activity continues.

Robert Price (@Informutation), an English teacher based in London, is a prolific tweeter and blogger. He began a series of (largely supportive) commentaries about the issues. The first, as far as I know, was ‘The Empiricist and the Philosopher: A modern unromance’.¹

A well-known education blogger (who, I believe is a former secondary physics teacher) styled ‘OldAndrew’ (OA) developed a series of attacks on *To Read or Not to Read*.² Many read his postings and some responded. I would never have given OA more than a moment’s attention, had I not learnt that he actually might be influencing education policy and was sometimes mentioned in Parliament. OA had been quiet for a while (at least, about my contributions), when, at the end of June some of us published an open letter to Michael Gove, urging that the Phonics Screening Check should be abandoned. David Aldridge wrote a clear, sophisticated and measured commentary around this time, entitled ‘On “phonics denialists”’.³ This, in turn, provoked more onslaughts from OA and others.

And I haven’t yet mentioned a veritable multitude of postings from Debbie Hepplewhite, who calls herself an ‘independent consultant’ on phonics. Her inputs can be found both inside and outside the closed electronic portals of the Reading Reform Foundation. For some time after the publication of *To Read or Not to Read*, the latter enjoyed themselves rehearsing what they called “the nonsense in Davis’s paper”.

¹ http://informutation.blogspot.co.uk/2014_02_01_archive.html
² The first one is at: http://teachingbattleground.wordpress.com/2014/01/03/phonics-denialism-and-rational-debate/
³ You can find this at: http://davealdridge.brookesblogs.net/2014/06/29/on-phonics-denialists/
Some of the online reaction to my pamphlet is, deep down, non-rational and destructive. Have a look for yourself if you’ve nothing better to do, but allow yourself enough time to penetrate below the surface of what is taking place. Some of it looks like philosophy, and a small proportion actually is.

Anyhow, if people such as OA are actually influencing policy and media, then ‘real’ philosophers need to be out there even more than they are already, or so I believe, attempting to engage with intelligence, humour and restraint. It is far from easy, partly because what Bob Davis called ‘blogocrats’ have spent some years sharpening their skills in the kinds of interactions to which I am drawing attention.

My second issue relates to the first. During the phonics episode, I was organising a series of PESGB seminars hosting conversations between different intellectual traditions in philosophy of education. A particular theme has been that of ‘accessibility’ or ‘clarity’. Does philosophy of education have any kind of obligation to be accessible or clear, not only to fellow academics but also to empirical researchers, policy-makers and classroom practitioners? Up to now, no seminar participants accept such an obligation. Unsurprisingly, they ask some good questions about it. How would the obligation be met? What purpose might it have? Which audience? In what senses could philosophical activity be made ‘accessible’? I cannot answer such challenges here, but only encourage PESGB to do more on social media. The Impact team needs no lessons on this point, having recruited a small team to participate philosophically on social media. A number of members, including Naomi Hodgson and Richard Davies, have been there for some time.

If you ask what social media involvement actually achieves, I have to put up my hands and acknowledge that I just don’t know. Wiley now offers Altmetric scores for some of its publications – these broadly relate to associated media activity, including social media ‘impact’. Altmetric has tracked 2,506,330 articles across all journals so far. They report that compared to these, To Read or Not to Read has done particularly well and is in the 99th percentile.

As I write, David Aldridge’s score for Impact 21 is shooting up too. Should philosophy of education rejoice? You tell me.

I’ll follow others in labelling the third issue ‘scientism’. This is hardly new. Yet I still managed to be taken by surprise. Of course, I have long understood the prestige of science in popular culture. Yet little of To Read or Not to Read was ‘justified’ by appealing to empirical evidence and it never occurred to me that it would therefore be found wanting. Dissecting the relationship between ‘decoding’ words and reading for meaning was a matter of conceptual analysis and careful scrutiny of examples. That the very idea of clear, specifiable teaching interventions, necessarily assumed by empirical research into early reading, was a myth, involved analytical and conceptual discussions. Whether research favouring a particular kind of teaching intervention would actually justify requiring all teachers to implement it was a normative question, and therefore (obviously, I thought) not a matter for empirical investigation.

Many of my critics accused me of making claims without evidence. The nearest thing to an evidence-based claim in To Read or Not to Read was the point that a few children, who could read on arriving at school, might be damaged by rigid phonics programmes. Many have been in touch with me over the last few months supporting this concern, so I now have at least anecdotal evidence for that tiny quasi-empirical element.

There is an urgent need to improve the public understanding of philosophy, let alone of philosophy of education. Many of our ultimate beliefs, concerning personal flourishing, the good society and the meaning of life, cannot be supported with empirical evidence. Even some of the criteria to be found in current Ofsted frameworks fall into the same category.

At Gregynog in the summer I was delighted to hear Angie Hobbs, who is Professor of the Public Understanding of Philosophy from the University of Sheffield. What about the public understanding of philosophy of education? What does the PESGB think about this?
What about the borders between Scotland and England? If formal passport checkpoints were not to be introduced, could Scotland be used by persons from other countries in the Eurozone as a backdoor into England and Wales?

Could Scottish universities retain the controversial policy of charging English students tuition fees, while admitting Scottish and other European students without upfront fees?

The referendum has been lauded in some quarters as a victory for democracy in view of the generation of such questions and in light of the historically high turnout of voters in Scotland. It has been suggested that the prospect of independence put Scotland on the global map again and offered the Scottish public the first prospect of genuine political change in decades. The notion of independence, it has been suggested, has truly got people in the country talking politics.

However, what was most surprising in all the public talk was the lack of informed talk about issues vital to Scotland’s future. The first televised debate between the (then) first Minister Alex Salmond and the defender of the Union, Alistair Darling, can be taken as a case in point. During this debate, Alex Salmond repeatedly evaded questions about what the Scottish National Party plan would be if the UK Treasury did not agree to the forming of a ‘Scottish pound’. Instead of trying to engage in debate about a crucial economic question that the viewing public wanted to hear about, Salmond attempted to jest about aliens and the prospect that independence would lead to motorists driving on the other side of the road. It is perhaps unsurprising that his refusal to engage in any, let alone detailed, discussion about future currency options did not generally go down well with the public in Scotland. There is, after all, a long tradition of ‘intellectual democracy’ in...
Scotland, of the general public, that is, being encouraged and able to participate in debate about matters of collective social importance in an informed and reasoned manner.

In his book *The Democratic Intellect*, George Davie charted the rise and fall in influence of moral philosophy in Scotland’s universities in the nineteenth century. It was not just that philosophy was the core subject on the university curriculum in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scotland, he asserted, but also that other subjects were studied in a peculiarly philosophical way. Davie maintained that Scotland’s philosophical approach to education favoured breadth of focus over narrowness and specialization. Scottish education was thus distinct from English, which was, Davie claimed, much more utilitarian in purpose and less concerned with encouraging students to think philosophically about matters of public importance.

The idea that Scottish education in the eighteenth century encouraged students to think in an informed and reasoned manner about common texts and the common good was taken up by Alasdair MacIntyre in his lecture on the educated public. MacIntyre’s famously gloomy conclusion that Western educators can no longer generally hope to establish or maintain publics populated by persons able to engage in detailed and rational debate about matters of social importance is perhaps verified by the lack of actual debate in the ‘debate’ between Salmond and Darling. Indeed, the lack of detailed and informed discussion between persons from opposing parties and perspectives was generally characteristic of other exchanges between those for and against independence up and down Scotland during the referendum process. There was a lot of noise and rhetoric but little in the way of detail and substance.

The lack of any sustained or widespread informed public debate about Scottish independence is by no means only an educational failing; far from it. However, those Scottish educators in any way sympathetic to the idea that education should still aim to foster intellectual democracy may have found the referendum process rather revealing about just how far away public debate in Scotland has veered from the ideals depicted by MacIntyre and Davie. *The Democratic Intellect* has indeed been read by some as a lament over the loss of a national tradition—a tradition that saw philosophy placed at the centre of the education system and where the purpose of philosophy in education was profoundly social and democratic in focus.

Others have rightly questioned the historical accuracy of Davie’s account, suggesting that the democratic intellect is a mythological rather than historical narrative. However, it has also been claimed that aspects of the national educational ‘myth’ retain the potential to mobilise policy and practice, ruling out some developments on the grounds that they are inconsistent with the national tradition. There may be some truth in this. For example, the notion that teachers should be educated at universities, where such teacher education continues to cultivate a concern for ideas and theory as well as practice, arguably still holds more mobilising force in Scotland than in England. The idea of a broad general education also still animates the Scottish school curriculum.

However, what is less often articulated in Scotland is that the very union that a near majority of Scots wanted to break from may well have been the central driving force behind the creation of the nation’s philosophy of education, regardless of how mythological or distinctive that philosophy may be. For without the union in 1707 and the ceding of powers to Westminster on all matters apart from law, church and education there very probably would have been no national need or opportunity to construct a narrative of distinctiveness from England about Scottish education. Nor could this narrative of distinctiveness have been sustained for long without being passed on to students within Scottish educational institutions. Thus the union with England provided philosophers in Scotland with the motive and opportunity to create a philosophy of education that still resonates in diluted and attenuated form today.

The union with England helped to create a narrative in Scotland whereby higher education was regarded as being necessarily philosophical. While the centrality of philosophy in university curricula has long since dissipated, this narrative myth may also have helped to create conditions where the philosophy of education remains more viable today in Scotland than in England, not only as a topic of research within faculties of education in Scottish universities but also as a tradition of thought that is deemed valuable for the next generation of Scottish educators.

The referendum process may well have highlighted how remote the possibility is of today establishing an educated public able to conduct its debates in a genuinely informed and reasonable manner. However, the continued presence of theory and philosophy of education within Scottish universities perhaps gives some reason for thinking that the efforts of any Scottish educators inclined towards cultivating the national ideal of democratic intellectualism may not be entirely forlorn.
Philosophy as education and understanding other cultures: the SPIRITS project

Education is lifelong, transcending borders and generations, and philosophy is a process of mutual learning, deepened by translation between different cultures.

I lead a project called SPIRITS (Supporting Program for Interaction-based Initiative Team Studies), funded by Kyoto University. Kyoto University has initiated its new ‘International Strategy’ to promote globally competitive top-class research, and launched SPIRITS in 2014. Its aim is to create an international team through the collaboration of researchers at Kyoto University with researchers at foreign universities and research institutions, and to conduct research projects through international collaboration. My research project, ‘Philosophy as translation and understanding other cultures: Interdisciplinary research in philosophy and education for bidirectional internationalization’ (2014–15), was selected as one of its international programmes.

On the one hand, in the tide of globalisation and with the dominance of English, there tends to be one-way traffic (Standish, 2011) in dispatching and receiving ideas: language is taken as merely instrumental, boundaries and hierarchies are reinforced, and cultural identities are consolidated. On the other hand, as a reactionary move against the dominance of English, an egalitarian and multiculturalist view on native language is proposed.

In this debate, the way of facing the other by disturbing the framework of one’s own culture is obliterated, and so is the perspective of education that addresses the possibility of self and other transformation through such destabilisation of one’s own framework of thinking. In order to realise cultural identities in authentic, liberating and bidirectional ways, there is a need for research into the understanding of other cultures that enables us to reconsider the nature of human being and the nature of language from philosophical and educational perspectives.

What is ‘philosophy as translation’?

So, what is ‘philosophy as translation’?

First, it is broader than a conventional notion of translation understood as the transposing of meanings between different language systems. ‘Translation’ in this project points towards a more fundamental aspect of language, in which the self and the other are dynamically related in a way that inheres in culture itself.

Second, translation is conceived to be the art of dialogue, inspiring the crossing of cultural boundaries.

Third, philosophy as translation is characterised by a receptive-responsive, ‘feminine’ mode of thought and language. This requires a degree of self-abandonment, where one is open to the arrival of otherness and the disturbance of boundaries that it brings: it is typified by the imperfectability of translation.

Fourth, philosophy as translation is inseparable from the perspective of education, where this is taken to involve the possibility of dynamic transformation of oneself and of the other. Hence, philosophy becomes “the education of grownups” (Saito and Standish, 2012). Translation in this broader sense has relevance not only to foreign language education, but also to citizenship education, political education and education for critical thinking (see Figure 1).

continued on page 12
Exploring the educational implications of philosophy as translation

With the idea of ‘philosophy as translation’ as the framework of analysis, the project aims to convert ways of thinking, so that we can re-encounter different cultures as other from the peripheral standpoint of border-crossing. It tries to explore the educational implications of philosophy as translation in terms of the art of dialogue, where one exposes oneself to the other by releasing oneself and one’s own culture towards the possibility of further growth.

To achieve this, the project aims to:

- conduct interdisciplinary research in philosophy and education that aims to convert the mode of thinking towards understanding other cultures through the perspective of ‘philosophy as translation’;
- propose a way towards liberal arts education that will contribute to the cultivation of global leaders who have the command of high-level foreign language for authentic, bidirectional internationalisation; and
- expand the network of international collaborative research with top-notch research centres in Europe and North America.

Through these aims, the project attempts to enable Japanese researchers both to receive foreign ideas and philosophies creatively and to be actively engaged in presenting their own ideas to the world. By so doing, it crosses boundaries of knowledge through the bidirectional exchange of ideas, so that mutual transformation can take place between oneself and others.

This is a dialogical and interdisciplinary research project among researchers of different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. Its dynamic, active approach crosses boundaries of philosophy and education, and bridges the diverse fields of American philosophy, Japanese philosophy (Kyoto School of Philosophy) and European poststructuralism (see Figure 2). As practical-philosophical research, it includes field research from the perspective of philosophy as translation on the imperfectability of translation in multicultural environments and methods of language teaching.

I am currently (in 2014–15) a visiting fellow at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies (HCAS) and have been pursuing this project in Finland through international dialogue and networking between philosophers and philosophers of education at the frontiers of their research fields. In November 2014, in collaboration with HCAS (with Sami Pihlström) and the Nordic Pragmatism Network, I organised an international symposium, ‘Philosophy as Translation – American Philosophy in Cross-Cultural Settings’ (17–18 November 2014). In non-American contexts, what would ‘American philosophy’ signify and what kind of role would it play? Through the international dialogue among European, American and Japanese philosophers and philosophers of education, the reception of American philosophy in different cultural contexts was discussed. At the same time, its distinctive American aspect was considered. American philosophy was understood in the light of the thematic of translation.

I am planning to organise a final conference for the SPIRITS project in London this year. I hope to keep working as a mediator, and hence, as a translator in cross-cultural settings.
In his provocative plea for a ‘cosmopolitics’, the French sociologist Bruno Latour recalls the ardent debate that took place at the beginning days of the colonisation of the Americas in Valladolid.

During this debate, the question was raised as to whether or not the recently enslaved Amerindians possessed a soul. While this so-called ‘Valladolid Controversy’ is often considered to have laid the basis of the cosmopolitan belief that, in spite of the many differences that divide us, we all share a common humanity, Latour reminds us (Latour, 2004) of a part of this story that is usually forgotten: one of the parties involved, the Amerindians, framed their encounter with the Westerners in quite opposite terms. They wondered whether the conquistadors had bodies or not. Of course, they hadn’t had the chance to read Moore’s proof that Western people have two hands, and therefore a body.

For the indigenous people of the new colonies it went without saying that everything, humans, animals, plants and even inanimate objects, possessed a soul – one and the same soul. Differences between species and things were believed to result from differences in bodies: palm trees and piranha fish are all part of the same spiritual realm (in which for them, obviously, the Spanish also shared), but fundamentally have other sorts of bodies. In other words, “entities all have the same culture but do not acknowledge, do not perceive, do not live in, the same nature” (Latour, 2004: 452). Hence the controversy was way more complex than usually conceived.

Now, these opposing views regarding the most basic ontological assumptions of Western and Amerindian people are not sufficient to explain why the latter would doubt whether or not their oppressors had bodies. It is, of course, an understatement to say that since the dawn of civilisation the Western world has always had a rather problematic relation with the bodily side of life. More often than not we behave as if our corporeal hardware is not really part of who we are. Being at most a vessel for our minds, the body is seen as a nuisance that makes us grow old and sick, or that burdens us with appetites and cravings that interfere with the cultivation of our intellectual powers. As such, we should take care of it, and try to prevent bodily decay. Also, we should find strategies to avoid thinking about food and sex all day long. The name of this solution is education. As a recent book by Ansgar Allen (Allen, 2014) shows, the whole history of schooling can be read and unmasked as an attempt to discipline the body, and to bring it to obedience and silence.

This is, of course, a well-known story and, in a sense, it is already an old story, as in recent times the body has increasingly attracted the attention of educationalists. Such attention has been positive. The body is not treated as an inconvenient part of the human condition we have to deal with, but as a dimension of existence that is in and of itself valuable. It is not seen as something that remains external to education (something we might use for education), but as intrinsically educational. This would imply that we pay enough attention to physical education (an oxymoron according to the defenders of liberal education) in our schools, and moreover that we come to regard physical education as a wonderful opportunity for learning how to co-operate with others, how to cope with winning and losing, how to be merciful and magnanimous, and so on. One could speak here of developing physical literacy. Driving the liberal educator a bit further up the wall, the body could be said to be a constitutive part of the world of meaning. At least that is what Maurice Merleau-Ponty claims, an unavoidable reference for the educator who is good friends with the human body.
Even the most abstract ways of relating to the world, for example on the basis of mathematical concepts, presuppose concrete embodied practices. We prefer, for instance, a decimal system, because mathematics originated in the embodied practice of counting on ten fingers (although for purely mathematical reasons it would be much more efficient to work with a system based on eight or sixteen numbers, just like computers do). The body is itself a source of meaning, and moreover the most fundamental source of meaning. Therefore we should engage with it in all fields of education – even in mathematics or chemistry.

And yet, there remains something deeply troubling about the way in which the body is recovered by the Merleau-Pontian body of scholarship. As Jean-Luc Nancy remarks, these scholars “turn the body into a soul in the traditional sense: the signifying body, the expressive body […] In saying this, [they] put the body in the place of the soul or the spirit” (Nancy, 2008: 133). The body is thus solely regarded as educationally important because it is capable of performing precisely the activities that for a long time were supposed to be reserved for the mind. In other words, the body as body remains absent from view. In the end, the body is again regarded as an instrument for achieving efficiently established goals of education and not as something that is truly and intrinsically of educational significance.

As Maria Carozzi (2005) argues in a most witty criticism of poststructuralist approaches towards corporeality (which reduce the body to a mere effect of discourses on the body), this forgetfulness towards the bodily dimension of our existence – Leibvergessenheit – is perhaps the result of the absence of the body in daily academic practices and routines in the human and social sciences.

Looking at what scholars actually do (sending an email to a colleague rather than just walking to the office next door), one might wonder, like the Amerindians did, whether or not the scholar really has a body. However, the negligence towards our bodies might be explained in another way. We should perhaps acknowledge a profound truth behind the reticence towards corporeality displayed by liberal educationalists. In a sense, they take the body far more seriously than the Merleau-Pontian scholar usually does. Rather than turning the body into an instrument, they take the body as body into account (in that they want to restrain and domesticate it), because they profoundly dislike – or even fear – our embodied nature.

There is, I would say, a deep fear of the body in Western educational culture. Just consider one of the things that teachers fear most: on a hot summer’s day sweat stains start to spill out from students’ armpits. This is a common, if not banal, physiological occurrence. It is mostly felt as a cause of embarrassment, and it might easily be exploited by pupils as an opportunity to topple over the classroom order. The Merleau-Pontian scholar will not take phenomena such as this into consideration, because it concerns an aspect of the body that is beyond intentional control. The body is no longer a source of meaning, but a source of disarray – an invalidation of the hierarchical order. However, taking these phenomena seriously might also be the starting point to think in completely different and new ways about the role of the body for education. This might start from the often neglected fact that, indeed, teachers and pupils have bodies. Such bodies sweat, smell, menstruate, respond to the presence of others and burst out in laughter and tears.

Perhaps these moments in which we are gathered with other bodies in classrooms, moments in which we lose control over our bodies, might offer occasions for important educational things to happen. More precisely, these might be called democratic moments (cf. Vlieghe, 2014). Further exploration into these dimensions might allow for a non-instrumentalist approach towards corporeality that acknowledges the body as body, the body in its plain bodiliness.

References


The Society’s initiative to support engagement between philosophers of education, teachers and teacher educators continued to develop throughout 2013–14, with publications and a new event.

Our 2011–13 seminar series ‘Philosophical Perspectives on the Future of Teacher Education’ has contributed to the publication of two books:

- *Learning Teaching from Experience* (editors Viv Ellis and Janet Orchard), published by Bloomsbury in February 2014; and
- *Philosophical Perspectives on Teacher Education* (editors Ruth Heilbronn and Lorraine Foreman-Peck), Wiley Blackwell, due in April 2015.

Chris Winch, Alis Oancea and Janet Orchard developed ideas stimulated by the series in their paper ‘The contribution of educational research to teachers’ professional learning – philosophical understandings’ as part of *Research and Teacher Education: the BERA-RSA Inquiry*.

Teacher education also featured as the subject of the keynote symposium at the PESGB Oxford Conference in March 2014. Tom Hamilton (GTC Scotland), Padraig Hogan and Alis Oancea each contributed thought-provoking papers and presentations.

**ITE engagement**

This year, building on earlier work undertaken by the PESGB on the ethical dimensions of teacher education, we collaborated with the University of Bristol and the Higher Education Academy on two 24-hour workshops, facilitated by Steve Bramall. These enabled student teachers to think ethically about dilemmas that they may face in the classroom.

The workshops took place in a Quaker retreat centre in rural Oxfordshire. Each blended theoretical perspectives on, and systematic ways of thinking about, education at an introductory level in response to frequently cited examples of complex and potentially difficult classroom situations. The project was conceived out of a concern that initial teacher education in England is focused too narrowly on the development of beginning teachers’ technical competence and expertise at the expense of developing their capacity for critical reflection and the exercise of judgement.

The aims of the workshops were to:

- create space and time for critical reflection away from the ‘busyness’ of schools through the creation of communities of practice in a residential space conducive to this kind of work;
- explore the value of such a space;
- develop independence and confidence among student teachers on how to manage examples of ethically complex and potentially challenging classroom situations;
- address existential concerns that arise typically among beginning teachers when dealing with challenging behaviour by their pupils, including burnout and sustaining motivation and a sense of ‘moral purpose’; and
- offer teacher educators a form of professional development in the methods of dialogic teaching.

Small groups of up to eight participants from higher education institutions attended, along with an accompanying tutor.

continued on page 16
Participants came from a range of educational settings. Early years trainees and practitioners, post-16 teachers, and undergraduates in Education Studies who had previous school experience were gathered together in one workshop. This diversity contributed positively to the dynamics and the professional learning of all members of the group.

The workshops focused on moments of ethical discomfort in the classroom/educational settings and provided opportunities to position these as moral matters rather than purely psychological/behavioural ones. These were framed as stories. Participants worked together to develop a focus from the stories on ethical concepts including fairness, respect, trust and equity. These were ‘stretched’, that is, interrogated slowly and deliberately through debate, and their depth and complexity were appreciated.

Towards the end of the workshop, tutors and students worked in separate groups to consider ways in which they might follow up the forum and discuss what they had learnt from it that might inform future practice and lead to further workshops at their home institutions.

Key findings

- There is a need and a demand for ethical deliberation among teacher educators and student teachers. Participants valued the space and time for critical reflection away from the ‘busyness’ of their regular programme and reported being able to talk widely about education in a way that they had not felt able to do in school.

- Participants felt that talking across phase and across institution in particular gave them a good insight into common issues.

- A form of ethical deliberation with an experienced facilitator, based on real experiences in the workplace, yielded fruitful and enlightening learning experiences. The particular pedagogic model was identified by participants as one that they might use themselves in their future classroom practice.

- Making space and time for reflective activity of this kind is difficult but possible. Participants identified imaginative solutions in the ‘leaky spaces’ to be found in existing provision, in which they might develop dialogic teaching within their classroom practice across a range of educational settings.

We have plans to build on this initiative in the coming year. If anyone would like further information about our work in teacher education or wishes to make a contribution, please contact Janet Orchard (janet.orchard@bristol.ac.uk).
Three seminars have been held so far in the PESGB-funded ‘New Critical Conversations’ seminar series.

The series promotes conversations between philosophers of education, representatives from university departments of philosophy, and educational researchers from other disciplines. The focus is on mutual understanding and education in the context of dialogue between representatives of contrasting philosophical and intellectual traditions.

In contemporary philosophy of education there ‘are many mansions’, and some inhabitants are neither willing nor able to gaze from their own and appreciate the existence and nature of others. Some feel that philosophy of education urgently needs to communicate its nature and value to empirical researchers, practitioners and policy-makers, lest it fail to survive. Others question the very existence of this concern. Here is a summary of the discussions so far, given under a series of question headings.

How far, if at all, should philosophy of education aspire to be ‘accessible’?

People responded: Accessible to whom, and for what purpose?

People were concerned that a focus on accessibility may impoverish intellectual content. Someone commented: ‘There is no shallow end in philosophy’. Philosophy teachers do students a disservice if they oversimplify. Students often hate being confused, but teachers need to support them in coping with some levels of confusion. In our attempts to ensure that they can cope with complex material, we may imply a deficit in them, while in fact we are helping to create that very deficit.

How far, if at all, should philosophy of education aspire to be ‘clear’?

It was felt that ‘clarity’ could characterise a number of different things, including the character of reasoning, a philosophical question as such and subject matter or content. All of these are interrelated. Today’s ‘clarity-mongers’ are not attacking metaphysics, as did past empiricist/analytical philosophers in the Anglophone tradition. Now, crudely, they don’t like what they can’t understand.
Someone noted that philosophers’ ‘clarity’ might not be clear to others. This comment was made in the context of conversation about ‘analytic’ philosophy in particular. Well-known analytical philosophers of the last century, such as A.J. Ayer, were said to be ‘deceptively clear’. The clarity was superficial and, on deeper examination, many key assumptions and concepts were very far from clear.

In his classic 1945 article ‘Clarity is not enough’, Price claimed that some very important things cannot be said clearly. Accordingly, the relationship between philosophy and poetry was explored. Plato’s ‘quarrel’ between philosophy and poetry lurked in the wings. T.S. Eliot’s ‘Wasteland’ cannot be made ‘clear’. It was noted that Levinas aims to draw attention to matters that exceed comprehension in some sense. In any case, ambiguity itself can be productive and can act as a stimulus for deeper thought.

A form of philosophical dialogue was defended, in which neither participant knows fully what they think, but where they want to entice others into sharing some reflections about the topic concerned. At the same time, it was felt that philosophy in general is often rightly concerned with robust and clear reasoning and strong critical thinking. These achievements are prized by employers.

**Is there any kind of moral obligation for philosophy of education to be ‘accessible’ or ‘clear’?**

Arguably, a necessary condition for an affirmative answer is this: ‘clarification’ and ‘making accessible’ must be open to multiple interpretations. For, given the legitimate range of different audiences and purposes for which philosophy of education may be intended, no moral obligation for ‘accessibility’ or ‘clarity’ in just a single sense of these terms could possibly exist.

An empirical researcher claimed that all researchers have a responsibility to enable their potential audiences to understand. Thus, according to this perspective, anyone should be able to explore anything. Yet it was acknowledged that there were serious tensions between this position and the legitimate role of the poet, for instance.

The ‘evangelical’ approach of those (me in particular) supporting a moral obligation to be clear and accessible was strongly contested. After all, philosophers of education sometimes write ‘for themselves’ and some participants said that this is perfectly legitimate. In any case, such an obligation to be accessible would have to be expressed with great subtlety, lest it were self-evidently impossible to meet and thereby discredited from the start.

The existence of moral obligations of a kind – in respect of at least some philosophy of education – was defended, on the grounds that education itself is a normative practice. Even those opposing communication obligations per se might concede that they could be triggered in philosophy of education, if circumstances suggested that someone should speak out in an educational debate. But what, if anything, does this imply for individual philosophers? Who might incur such an obligation? Why and how?

Where philosophers of education have written in an inaccessible fashion, they may well have fallen short of some requirement or standard, but it was not felt that in general they had failed to meet a moral obligation.

Teacher education is gradually excluding philosophy of education. A familiar question for philosophy of education is how it should respond. A couple of seminar participants felt strongly that this is indeed a moral issue for various reasons. One reason relates to the vision of teachers as ‘intellectuals’ in a good sense. Without the contribution of philosophy, this vision could never be achieved. It should be noted that the argument here would need supporting by the claim that there ought to be such people as teacher ‘intellectuals’.
The role of imagination in putting a problem before a reader or listener was emphasised – many philosophers are very good at this, and they are not restricted to any one tradition.

What issues should philosophy of education address?

A ‘practical conception’ of philosophy of education would address problems rather than texts. An extreme ‘practical’ version might expect the discipline to be grounded in the work of practitioners. One of the problems with this is that it would cast philosophers of education in the role of those who must wait until called – they would then act as janitors, clearing up the mess.

This picture is reminiscent of the philosophical plumbing or under-labourer role, going back at least to the time of John Locke and challenged many decades ago, in particular by Peter Winch in *The Idea of a Social Science*. It suggests that philosophers of education are not themselves allowed to initiate challenges or to introduce problems for educational debate. It was felt that there is a danger here of fossilising the distinction between thinkers and deciders – Marx claimed that philosophy interprets the world rather than changes it. Yet some seminar participants felt that the interpretive acts sourced in philosophy of education had at least potential for changing the world.

It was noted that when problems ‘out there’ are tackled by philosophy of education, everyone can join in the debate. However, certain kinds of focus on texts exclude those who have not read or cannot read them, or are unable to interpret them in the ways emphasised by certain groups of text-based scholars. Nevertheless, it was felt that a text-based approach to the discipline could involve the creation of ‘good’ problems by the reader as they read the text.

We hope to run a fourth seminar in 2015, this time involving an audience.

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Philosophers and temperament: Margalit

The ‘accessibility’/’clarity’ issue was explored in a particular way, by drawing on ideas about philosophical temperament developed by Avishai Margalit. He distinguished between explicators and illuminators, between those who appeal to definitions and those who appeal to examples, between “i.e.” philosophers and “e.g.” philosophers. Most participants favoured the “e.g.” approach, but emphasised that it was appropriate to employ both, as and when appropriate, and also that the temperament distinction failed to correspond to alleged distinctions between philosophical traditions such as continental and analytic. The “e.g.” style, in particular, seemed to manifest the writer’s or speaker’s attempt to ‘draw in’ the audience and readers.

There was some investigation of the character of the “e.g.” philosophers. These could be real-life examples – such as a problem of a certain kind in a classroom, provoked by a certain kind of government policy.

The highly stylised and ‘unreal’ instances beloved of analytical philosophy were also mentioned, such as Davidson’s ‘Swamp Man’ and Wittgenstein’s ‘Slab’ language game.

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A fellow delegate and I decided to arrive in Oxford a day early, to catch a bit of the literary festival. On the way to attending an interview with Hanif Kureishi, we stumbled upon something much more interesting: what looked at first like an animal rights protest turned out to be the filmset of *Lewis* (an inferior but entertaining sequel to Inspector Morse). This sort of thing doesn’t happen in Stirling and was a reminder of what a weird, fantastical place Oxford is, something one can easily forget when one has gone there every year for the best part of a decade.

Things were, of course, a bit different in Oxford from last year – nice weather and dinner in a Portakabin. Oh, but what a Portakabin! If Las Vegas suddenly developed an interest in replicating Oxford, it couldn’t do a better job. I think I might prefer the current box to the real thing!

The conference was as much fun as it always is. Saturday night singing went on for a long time (probably to the chagrin of those who like dancing) and seemed to be much more organised (to the chagrin of those who like lots of bits of paper floating about).

As regards the content and substance of the conference (which I’d probably better mention), there were plenty of interesting things to attend.

As for action in the Holywell Music Room, where the invited speaker sessions took place, Barbara Stengel nearly ruined the mood by arguing that we are all capitalists, Michael Hand did a particularly good job of responding to a paper that he hadn’t been given the opportunity to read and Tom Hamilton made Scottish education sound a lot better than its English equivalent.

I attended a number of interesting papers and symposia. Personal highlights included: a symposium on Emerson and Bildung (with Claudia Schumann, Heikki Kovalainen, Paul Standish and Naoko Saito); Naomi Hodgson’s dark paper on Open Access publication and visibility; and a workshop on Andrew Davis’s ‘Critical Conversations’ project.

Andrew is trying to generate a dialogue between representatives of contrasting philosophical and intellectual traditions. Having been involved with the first of these dialogues (at an event in Glasgow), I was keen to see whether or not a similarly generous spirit was on show. At one point a fellow delegate (possibly the chair) declared that Derrida was “not a philosopher”. I’m sure he was joking. On the whole, the session was conducted in the manner that Andrew had hoped for.

From talking to fellow delegates, there seemed to be a general sense that the conference was a great success. People were pleased with both the new system for providing feedback on papers (overseen by Morwenna Griffiths) and with the variety of philosophical perspectives on show (not that such variety was missing in the past).

As usual, the event itself was brilliantly organised by Carrie Winstanley. David Aldridge will eventually take over from Carrie in this leviathan of an administrative task. Good luck, David.
How important is a constant intercourse with nature and the contemplation of natural phenomena to the preservation of moral and intellectual health!

(Thoreau, *Journal*, 6 May 1851)

In the midst of the beautiful Welsh countryside awaits Gregynog Hall. After a five-hour train ride, window sightseeing, lots of chatter and a bit of dozing-off, our team arrived – the organisers, the regulars and the curious novices.

Walking through the creaking wooden halls of Gregynog, it felt like being in a living museum. The furniture, the musical instruments, the paintings and etchings by Monet, Cézanne and Van Gogh, and the hand-printed books from the Gregynog Press enveloped our sight. Like Alice in Wonderland we followed the labyrinth up and down, discovering doors big and small. I was surprised to find that my room neighboured an ‘antique toilet’. This part of the tour certainly felt like Lucy Worsley’s ‘1000 years of toilet history’. The lavish green lawns were waiting outside, the sun was refracting its rays on the window, and we were ready to immerse ourselves in the coming days of papers, discussions and exploration.

As a novice Gregynogarian, I was surprised by the breadth of themes covered by the presentations – from the remembrance of war, to conceptions of thinking, to the aesthetics of educational discourse and philosophical inquiry.

After a warm-up chat over dinner, the conference kicked off with David Aldridge’s paper ‘How ought war to be remembered in schools?’. As 2014 marked the centenary of the First World War, David problematised the annual participation of state schools in remembrance, as it is far from clear that ‘gratitude’ is an appropriate sentiment to foster with regard to those who have died in war. While he accepted that we might all have a duty to learn from historical events, he specifically challenged the idea that expressing critical sentiments entails ‘dishonour’ to the memory of the dead. While his presentation dealt with historical events, it definitely raised questions about current events and ongoing wars. Though our minds...
were preoccupied, we realised our privileged position to be in this beautiful place and time, while most of the world is in ongoing turmoil.

The following morning started with a refreshing presentation by **Christine Doddington**, who spoke beautifully about ‘The aesthetics of educational relationships: Sculpting education differently’. Christine emphasised the power of everyday aesthetic awareness as a significant part of our life and educational experience. Her metaphor of ‘sculpting’ education was particularly powerful in a time when the terminology of performance and accountability has hardened our language and perhaps stifled imagination. Christine challenged us to rethink how children should experience education. John Dewey would have agreed with her that the living classroom should engage in an aesthetic experience, where reason and emotion are not separate.

**Emma Williams** followed with an engaging presentation drawn from her paper ‘Sound not light: Levinas and the elements of thought’. As a recent PhD graduate, Emma has been interested in revealing what makes thought happen and what happens when we think. She opened up new ways of understanding human thinking, by drawing on Levinas’s conception of thinking that is conditioned by sound (speech, language and sign) and not solely by the medium of light (theoria, contemplation). Her insightful presentation left us with a challenge: to consider what this shift in thinking might mean to educational and everyday contexts.

The theme of thinking that is conditioned by sound interestingly intertwined with **Adrian Skilbeck’s** attention to the nature of the seriousness expressed in our natural language. In his presentation ‘Raimond Gaita and the language of moral seriousness’, Adrian pointed to the inadequacy of the critical vocabulary in academic moral philosophy when it comes to providing any kind of moral account of the extremes of suffering and depravity. He gave a vibrant account of Gaita’s theory of moral seriousness, manifested in non-theoretical language and human practices, and cautioned against it becoming overworked and clichéd. He provided a lively illustration of this by reference to the film *12 Years a Slave*.

**Angie Hobbs’** witty and vibrant character always lightens up the room, so we were excited to have her as a conference member and guest speaker. Her talk, ‘Can you step into the same river twice? The role of ancient Greek philosophy in education today’, inspired many tweets with quotes such as: “Give pre-Socratic dialogues to children before they go clubbing and they’ll have a fantastic psychedelic trip”. She brought ancient Greek philosophy to life and unveiled it as one of the richest resources of paradoxes, puzzles and aphorisms – a treasure trove for philosophical inquiry with pupils in both primary and secondary schools.

The final paper intertwined many of the themes that emerged throughout the conference, and especially resonated with the ideas of inquiry, ways of thinking and aesthetic experiences that had already been touched on. **Viktor Johansson**, Assistant Professor at Stockholm University, was our special international speaker. He passionately presented his paper ‘Beyond words: Passion and desire in children’s philosophizing’. Building on Angie’s philosophising with children, Viktor focused on the beauty of children’s expressions and scrutinised the notion of performative utterances as a passionate dimension of philosophising. With his sweet four-month-old baby in the room, Viktor engaged our attention as a philosopher and dad who had systematically explored aspects of children’s philosophical expressions. He argued that, in order to see the philosophical aspects of children’s questions and expressions, we need to look beyond mere words to how their expressions are used in context and place.

The breadth of these intellectual discussions enlightened and sometimes puzzled us. There was plenty of food for thought and there were lively discussions over tea and cake. And, while there is a common misconception that philosophy conferences tend to be rather dull, you should have seen how our PESGB Show Choir (PES-Glee-B?), accompanied by our talented pianist, John Marshall, sang the night away.

We are grateful to Naomi Hodgson and Paul Standish for organising another year of mind-body-world experience at beautiful Gregynog Hall.

We look forward to again engaging with mind and nature through our philosophical contemplations, so do join us for the 2015 Gregynog conference on 27–29 July.
Despite the long daily schedule, the two days spent together under the auspices of the Laboratory for Education and Society at KU Leuven and the Philosophy Section at the Institute of Education seemed to fly by, and soon enough we were all on our way home with a substantial portion of food for thought (and a slight hangover).

For a first-time participant like me, what was most striking about the colloquium was the good-natured seriousness. Everyone, from Professors Jan Masschelein, Paul Standish and Stefan Ramaekers (who facilitated the discussions), to recent PhDs and graduate students, was generous and engaging in their comments. The only time I felt reluctant to make a comment was in the closing session, when we considered which movie should be screened at the next colloquium – I wish I had had the courage to suggest that we wait for the forthcoming new release in the Star Wars franchise!

As a graduate student, immersed in what seems an endless lonely road towards a PhD in philosophy of education, participating in the colloquium was a welcome change. It allowed me a peek into other graduates’ work, their dilemmas and inspirations, as well as a chance to present some of my work to an audience who were surprisingly attentive (I presented last on the second day) and who offered comments and suggestions that were as creative and challenging as they were supportive.

I would think that any student, at any stage of their research, would benefit immensely from participating in these colloquia. Also, they’re really fun.
We held the first-ever PESGB Reading and Writing Retreat at Madingley Hall, Cambridge, in early September.

Eight people attended, having had their applications reviewed by a panel of PESGB Executive Council members. All the participants very much appreciated the opportunities for reading, writing and discussing work and also chatting about academic life in an atmosphere that was both congenial and collegiate.

Madingley Hall is a lovely location. It is quiet, comfortable and relaxed and there is a lot of space for working alone, or with a colleague or two. The food and refreshments were delicious and the tea and cake breaks were a super opportunity to take some time out from reading and writing and to have a chat. Occasionally, when someone really hit their stride with their work, they would forgo the break and emerge at dinner with some completed tasks and a sense of achievement!

Was it useful?

Here are a few comments from the participants:

“The Writing Retreat was a real success in all ways. The setting and the relatively small number of people attending gave the event the intimate feel of a seminar. Because those in attendance had overlapping but distinct research interests, the conversations were incisive yet friendly, often very helpful, and felt to me very much like the sorts of ‘deep’ learning experiences that one often hopes for but less often achieves.”

“It was an absolute joy to have those few days cut off from the rest of the world. The dedicated time away from the uni and the multitude of emails/meetings, etc. had a huge effect on the quality of piece I was working on. The difference that just a few days can make, with the support of colleagues to talk things through with, has made all the difference!”

“I was able to complete outstanding work for a deadline that had passed. It was very satisfying finally to push the ‘send’ button on this, and that work would certainly have dragged on longer without the focused period of effort.”
Caroline Wilson reflects on her participation in the PESGB Reading and Writing Retreat (see opposite).

I arrived at Madingley Hall for the start of the PESGB writing retreat, held in early September, accompanied by my parents. We could not help but reflect on the memory of them delivering me to university in Scotland almost exactly 28 years earlier. In fact, the circularity of this experience led me into quite a profound reflection upon those last decades, my love affair with the life of the mind and my relationship with academia.

The PESGB had sent out a call for eight participants to join an academic writing retreat, stating its desire to offer support to people working in the academic world, some way into their careers, who might not be receiving many institutional resources to aid them in their research. I work as a part-time lecturer at Duoda, the Women’s Research Centre at the University of Barcelona which, due to the draconian cuts in Spain in the last few years, practically runs on a shoestring. Also, since the reshaping of the MA programmes and my return to Scotland three years ago, my role has become almost entirely an online one.

This has meant that the connections made with the PESGB, its intellectual openness, the sheer friendliness of its members and its very supportive stance have been, and are, invaluable. So I sent in an application with a proposal to look at a text written by a nineteenth-century Scottish woman, Marion Reid. Reid is a seemingly forgotten figure in that century’s history of developments in women’s struggle to be both educated and considered political subjects in their own right. I wanted to compare this with a Spanish woman’s work at a similar point in time.

One of the things that the two-day retreat brought home to me was that I may have taken on too broad a topic. I saw that

continued on page 26
I needed to refine the perspective from which to look at these texts in order to write an article for publication, which had been the aim of my proposal. This, in itself, was an invaluable realisation that, without the intense focus of the retreat, might have taken some time to sink in.

Near the beginning of our time there, the eight of us had a discussion, led by our very able co-ordinator, as to what kind of support, if any, we might like from each other. It had been made very clear that the starting point of the retreat was that, apart from sharing mealtimes (very pleasant affairs and made even more so by the friendliness of the staff at Madingley), we were free to use the time as we felt best. Obviously we were all there with very different projects at different stages, but as we went round the group, each of us articulated something of how we aimed to use the time. All members of the group, as I recollect, indicated that we would value the chance to explain our ideas to the others – both with the aim of receiving any supportive feedback and just appreciating the chance to put our work into words in a non-threatening environment.

Given that we were coming from some quite different areas of practice and research, it was not so much a question of giving specialised feedback as creating a nurturing atmosphere for one another. By the same token, it was clear that this time was short and precious. As the hours passed, each of us retreated more and more into our own spaces, trying to find the balance between reappearing for mealtimes and other social moments and using our time to the maximum in order to go deeper into our own work.

Speaking for myself, this experience provided quite an insight into the extent to which my own writing and research are conditioned by other commitments: teaching, other related work, family needs, belonging to a community. When I arrived at my university hall of residence those 28 years ago to begin a degree in a higher education context that has changed considerably since then, I had to learn how to allow myself the luxury (even there) of reading, thinking, writing; allowing myself to sink into and accept an environment that actively sought to nurture me in the use of my mind.

This time round, ensconced in my room, all I needed was within reach. I think I was not alone in observing the temptation to attend to external demands and communications via my internet connection, and the need to be quite strict with myself as to how often I looked at email. I could only marvel at the freedom of those first student days, and my relative inability to use them really well.

Learning how to live, work and be with others is one of life’s richest lessons and journeys, and I would have no desire to return to that 19-year-old self.

Indeed, finding that balance between using one’s mind freely and well (something no woman could necessarily take for granted until even relatively recent times, and still cannot in many cultural contexts) and being in the world with others seems to me to be one of the most important things we can aspire to – both for ourselves and for those we teach.

What was quite fascinating about how this retreat evolved was the way in which, as we became less and less social, we used the time that we did share together to listen to one another quite carefully with, dare I say, some tenderness. This was something that led to some very valuable exchanges and perhaps a deepening of thought. It led me to wonder about nurture in the usual academic context and about whether this is often absent in the pressurised lives of modern-day academics. If it is the case that this nurture tends to be conspicuous by its absence, then how can – or should – we aspire to nurture those whom we teach?

So, thank you PESGB. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to reinforce habits that can slide away so easily in the face of a busy life. More than this, thank you for reminding me that thinking comes about as a consequence of our relationships to others.

The quality of those relationships and what they seek to do (or not do) are not incidental to the work that we do and the lives that we lead; rather, they are quite central to our abilities to do things well. ■
As with previous undergraduate Summer Schools, we invited a range of distinguished guests to present over the three days. We made use of postgraduate students and Roehampton staff to act as facilitators, who ran small discussion groups after each speaker’s presentation.

The speakers were:

- Andy Stables (Roehampton University): ‘Realism and relativism in education for citizenship’;
- David Kerr (Bristol University and Citizenship Foundation): ‘What is active citizenship and can it be taught effectively in schools?’;
- Susan Ogier, Fiona Collins and Mary Richardson (Roehampton University): ‘Creative connections workshop’;
- Patricia White (Institute of Education): ‘Compromising situations for young citizens’; and
- Michael Hand (Birmingham University): ‘Should schools promote patriotism?’.

In addition to the formal sessions, we also used film on a controversial topic as stimulus for discussion work. Students were encouraged to think about how to portray their philosophical ideas in different ways by, for example, creating artistic responses and storyboards for short films of their own.

As usual, we took advantage of the lovely campus and some fine weather for social events, some of which lasted late into the night!

The organisation was undertaken by Dr Carrie Winstanley, Dr Mary Richardson and Dr Mary Healy, and thanks are extended to other Roehampton University staff (academic, conferencing, maintenance and catering) for their ongoing support. We are also grateful to all the speakers for their stimulating presentations and the postgraduate mentors for their engagement throughout the event. The willingness of guests and mentors to continue discussing issues with the undergraduate delegates after sessions and over meals is much appreciated and it really added to the exciting ambience.

The PESGB funded the event. Details of the Society can be found at: www.philosophy-of-education.org/ These include how to enter the film competition ‘What’s the point of school?’.

In 2015 the PESGB celebrates its 50th anniversary and we hope that the Summer School will be bigger and better than ever. Come and join the philosophy party!
What a year it has been. We started with the frustration that accompanies all significant changes to an organisation’s ‘brand’ and engaged in discussions around how we look to our external audiences. The logo was discussed for quite some time and as this was integral to the whole new look for the PESGB online, we wanted to get it right. Eventually a colour scheme and a font were agreed and set as our new look.

Then we had the development of the site itself. With some changes at Wiley, certain aspects of the plans had to change. But it has all been positive and on Monday, 15 December 2014 we launched the new site for the Society. It will be easier to navigate, easier to use and it looks so much better! But, perhaps most importantly, it provides a new channel for discussing and promoting philosophy of education at both local and global levels.

With Twitter/Facebook dialogues feeding directly into the site, there is a constant flow of news, ideas and comment. The ‘Resources’ sections provide unique, free ideas for teaching, learning, personal interest, policy development and much more.

You can access Impact and JOPE online via the website, and we have linked to the Wiley pages of publications also linked to the Society and its members.

I hope you will agree that the new site is excellent and we are very grateful to Wiley for its support in the process of redeveloping our digital presence.

This is not a solo effort – I could not have led the redesign of the site without the constant help, support and good humour of Naomi Hodgson, Ruth Heilbronn and Steph Graham. It has been fascinating and frustrating but, most of all, very fulfilling to see the site emerge from many, many meetings and discussions about the ‘meaning of the PESGB’, integration of social media and how things should look.

We welcome comments, ideas and further suggestions for development of the site. It is not meant to be a static object. It will need to change and adapt to keep up to date with contemporary digital advances, but what we have now is much more user-friendly and demonstrates the Society’s commitment to online media. Please add it to your ‘Favourites’ and ensure that you check it regularly for all the updates and exciting events that will be part of the 50th anniversary celebrations in 2015.
PESGB 50th anniversary announcements

Naomi Hodgson

Throughout 2015, the Society will mark its golden year with a series of events and competitions and, the centrepiece of the celebrations, the extended Annual Conference at New College, Oxford (see page 30).

Anniversaries always, and rightly, come with a good dose of reminiscing and nostalgia. The conference and the new website will both provide space for this, including exhibitions of memorabilia and kindly volunteered photos of our esteemed colleagues in their youth. But in the grand scheme of philosophical thinking on education, 50 years is a relatively short time. The PESGB is young, and so should look to the future, to what the Society, and philosophy of education more generally, can be for the present and the next generation.

Film competition

The PESGB@50 Film Competition recognises the educational value of film and its potential for exploring questions of the value and purpose of school, and of education more broadly. As the Newsletter goes to press, strong entries are anticipated from children and young people across all sectors of education.

New website

The website itself, launched just in time for Christmas 2014, is the result of two years’ work by the Web Steering Group (Mary Richardson, Ruth Heilbronn and me) and Wiley – see Mary’s report on page 28.

The redevelopment process required us to think carefully about who the site is for, what PESGB members want it to do, and how the Society communicates not only to its members but also to a wider academic, teaching, policy-making and general public.

As well as providing the information that existing and potential members need, the site enables the Society to contribute free, open access resources and content, making philosophy of education more accessible and (like the term or not) ‘discoverable’.

This is, arguably, essential to the development of the field in a future in which its presence in university curricula cannot be taken for granted.

Upcoming branch events

But this is no time for pessimism. The PESGB@50 events planned throughout the year attest to the vibrancy of the field today.

For example, in June, David Lewin and Alex Guilherme host the ‘Second International Conference on Critical Pedagogies and Philosophies of Education’ at Liverpool Hope University, UK, featuring keynote presentations from Sharon Todd, Barbara Thayer-Bacon, Hanan Alexander and Nicholas Burbules. (The Call for Papers is open until 30 April.)

The Birmingham Branch also hosts an international programme of speakers at its ‘Metaethics and Moral Education Conference’, also in June.

Details of these and other events, including seminars hosted by the Society’s branches across the UK and in continental Europe, can be found on the ‘Upcoming Events’ page of the website.

50th anniversary conference

Just before Christmas, the winners of the PESGB@50 ‘4 places at £4’ competition were drawn by Stephne Graham and her team at SAS Event Management. Four students of education will be attending the 50th Anniversary Conference at New College for the 1964 price of £4.

No doubt they will all have signed up for the Student Pre-Conference Session, this year focused on ‘50 Years of Philosophy of Education’. The session takes place on Thursday this year, as the Conference has been extended from three days to four in 2015, to enable space and time to celebrate the occasion of the Society’s and the Conference’s birthdays.

In addition to the wine-tasting-city-touring-river-cruising-reminiscing fun of ‘Celebration Saturday’, the conference will provide a full programme of concurrent papers and workshops, including keynote presentations by Catherine Elgin, Bob Davis and Gayatri Spivak, and a keynote panel, ‘Education Without Why’, featuring presentations by David Lewin, Anna Strhan and David Aldridge.

It would be indiscriminate of me to mention other 50th celebrations that might take place around the time of the conference, but it would be remiss not to say that this year’s conference will be Carrie Winstanley’s last as Conference Organiser. That the conference is such a success each year, and such a firm fixture in many diaries, is due in no small part to Carrie’s organisational prowess. Thank you, Carrie. And good luck to her successor, David Aldridge.

Special celebratory issues of JOPE

The Oxford conference always provides a rich and stimulating programme. To mark not only the conference anniversary but also the 50th anniversary of the Journal of Philosophy of Education in 2016, the best papers from the 2015 conference will be gathered in a special celebratory issue.

In addition, the journal’s rich back catalogue will be celebrated by a ‘special virtual issue’, a compilation of the best of the last 50 years. Those papers that have defined or changed the field will be selected by Bob Davis and Patricia White on the basis of recommendations by members of the PESGB Executive Committee and the JOPE Editorial Board.

So, Happy 50th Birthday, PESGB. I look forward to toasting your health in Oxford.
Delegates are warmly invited to register for the 50th anniversary conference of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain, to be held at New College, Oxford.

The Annual Conference will run from Thursday 26 March until Sunday 29 March 2015 and is usually attended by around 200 people, including academics, students, teachers and interested professionals from related disciplines. Many members contribute papers, workshops, posters and symposia.

The conference is lively and friendly, and we are always keen to welcome new guests as well as old friends. Papers and discussions consider a wide range of issues within the field of philosophy of education, linked to issues such as current educational theory, research, policy or practice.

We look forward to seeing you in March 2015!

Pre-conference Workshop for Graduate Students
Thursday 26 March 2015
New College, Oxford
1.00pm–3.45pm

Students can register for a pre-conference workshop, which takes a different focus each year. In our 50th anniversary year, presenters will focus on the theme of 50 years of philosophy of education. Patricia White (UCL Institute of Education) will introduce some hot topics, as well as some neglected ones, in philosophy of education. Stefaan Cuypers (Institute of Philosophy, KU Leuven) will talk on different conceptions of philosophy of education.

The session will be chaired by Ruth Wareham (University of Birmingham) and will provide an opportunity for both small-group and whole-group discussion.
Members’ publications


continued on page 32


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*continued from page 31*
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