

# Diverse Senses, and Six Conceptions, of Education

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## 1. The concept of education

The aim of this paper is to revisit the fundamental issue for educational philosophy and theory of how we might or should understand or define the term 'education' itself. I believe that this task needs further attention, for –although past analytical and other educational philosophers may seem to have said all there is to say on this question– there can be no doubt that this basic conceptual question continues to be the prime source of the deepest and most persisting confusions in contemporary educational theorising and policy making. To this end, I shall in the first part of this paper identify and examine what I take to be the key analytical issues. In the second part, however, I shall say something about the nature of educational controversy and the sources of such controversy.

So what, then, do we –or should we– mean by the term 'education'? In his own writings, the late distinguished post-war architect of British analytical philosophy of education, R.S. Peters, precisely set out to identify a notion of education sig-

nificantly distinguishable from other processes of human learning, development and/ or socialisation (see, especially, Peters 1966, 1973). His account is complex, but we may for present purposes identify a few key features. First, education should involve acquisition of knowledge or skill of some general or agreed human significance or value: we should not regard as educational, any learning that had generally made a person worse rather than better. Secondly, such learning should be a matter of 'broad' (cultural) initiation: we would not normally consider 'educated' someone who possessed even a high level of knowledge or expertise of only one kind. Thirdly, such broad initiation should be a matter of depth as well as breadth: it should not be a matter of shallow acquaintance with 'inert' facts, but of some understanding of the 'reason why' of things. Fourthly, educational learning may be distinguished from such other forms of human development as general socialisation, vocational training or (psycho) therapy. Fifthly, the learning in question should be a matter of voluntary engagement on the part of the learner.

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ner –or, at least, it should not be disruptive of learners’ powers of free reflection: in short, education should seek to avoid any indoctrination, conditioning or other mind-control of learners.

Peters’ attempt to give a distinctive account of education –one that marks it off from other processes of human development or socialization was rightly influential. All the same, finding fault with Peters’ account has since been something of an industry in educational philosophy. So what exactly is supposed to have gone wrong with his account? There are more and less radical, milder and more severe, forms of such criticism. At the milder end, the objections seems to be not so much that Peters was wrong to try to identify a definitive account of education, but rather that his analysis was not accurate. At this level, it has been common to argue that Peters was just wrong to identify education with the pursuit of intrinsically worthwhile knowledge (whatever that means) and in particular to distinguish education sharply from vocational or other training (see, for example, Pring 1995; Winch 2000, 2002). But, of course, even such milder criticism eases open the door to regarding somewhat different processes of human learning –the more ‘academic’ learning of Peters’ ‘education’ or the vocational learning with which he contrasts this– as (equally) ‘educational’. So even on this view, Peters’ analysis of education may not seem quite philosophically disinterested or ‘neutral’, but perhaps rather reflects some bias towards ‘elitist’ academic learning. (In this regard, Peters’ view was sometimes roundly derided as ‘middle class’).

However, on a more radical view, often influenced by one or more of a range of neo-idealist or social constructivist ‘post-this or that’ perspectives (‘post-structuralism’, ‘post-Marxism’, ‘postmodernism’, post-empiricism, post-analytical philosophy’, ‘post-foundationalism’, and so on), Peters was simply mistaken to suppose that there was only one definitive concept of education to analyze. To the extent that the concept of education (unlike that of ‘cat’ or ‘dog’) refers to a humanly constructed set or system of institutions and practices that may be expected to have evolved differently in different socio-cultural locales, any attempt to offer some once and future context-free definition or meaning of ‘education’ must itself be futile or meaningless. Thus, so the objection runs, while Peters’ conception of education may well express or capture some of the features of the term as used in this or that location –perhaps in middle-class Britain– it fails to appreciate that it may be used in quite other ways in other places and at other times. It seems to be this point that lies at the heart of the now common and widespread claim among educational philosophers –even those of stubborn and persistent analytical temper– that ‘education’ is an ‘essentially contested’ concept of no very stable or fixed abode (see Carr 2010b).

Perhaps the most extreme recent version of this claim has been advanced by the British educational philosopher and theorist Wilfred Carr. Drawing substantially on the neo-idealist ‘rival traditions’ moral and social theory of Alasdair MacIntyre (1981), Carr (1997, 2006) has argued that since all conceptions of education reflect different socially-constructed cultural tra-

ditions of thought about the value of human learning, there can only be ultimately irresolvable normative disagreement as to whether the aims of education should be conceived as ‘emancipation’ or ‘socialization’, ‘liberal’ or ‘vocational’, or concerned with ‘fulfilling individual potential’ or ‘meeting the needs of society’ (see, especially, Carr 1997). Indeed, following MacIntyre, the point seems to be not just that we should not look for any culture or tradition-neutral conception of education, but that –since the very forms of rationality, appraisal and justification usually mustered in support of such rival perspectives and traditions are also inevitably relative to social context– there can be no perspective-neutral criteria in terms of which any such disagreements might be rationally resolved. In fact, this extreme perspective seems set to draw the teeth of any serious educational philosophy or theorising, since it leaves little basis upon which to evaluate or criticize any educational viewpoint to which we might be inclined to object. Indeed, Carr (1997) has explicitly argued that in a post-modern age, an educational professor can have nothing to profess, since there are no secure grounds of rational knowledge or expertise on the basis of which he or she might profess it.

Whatever the defects of Peters’ account of education, however, I believe that the most charitable view of such radical critique of this and other attempts to analyse the concept of education is that it is something of a sledgehammer to crack a nut. It is simply not necessary to engage in such wholesale ‘post-whatever’ constructivist suspicion of objective knowledge or rational analysis to explain why people

use the term ‘education’ to refer to diverse processes of human learning and socialization. Indeed, I have previously argued (for example, Carr 2010a, 2010b) that the trouble here seems to turn largely on confusion of different concepts or conceptions of education, with different senses of the term ‘education’. To be sure, Wittgenstein (1953, section 43) notably argued (perhaps elaborating a point of Frege (1978) that in searching for (the) meaning of a term, we should look to its use in ordinary discourse. But, of course, this should not (primarily) be taken to be a counsel of conceptual or cultural relativism. The fact of the matter is that we do not need to look to other societies to discover different or diverse (if not conflicting) uses of the term ‘education’ (or its nearest foreign equivalents) of the kind identified by constructivist sceptics, since –given the ‘open-textured’ nature of this and related terms– it is just inherently liable to loose and variable usage in any and all social contexts.

Thus, for a start, the (English) term ‘education’ is often loosely used to describe any learning experience at all, or some particularly vivid or exciting learning experience: so, the university freshers’ week student might say, ‘I got leglessly drunk for the first time last night: that was a real education’. More seriously, however, it is evident that the term ‘education’ is also commonly (if not actually most commonly) used in contemporary educational discourse, theorising and policy-making as a synonym for that process of institutionalised human learning otherwise referred to by the term ‘schooling’. But there is clearly a case or distinguishing both of these or other senses of the term

'education' from what seems to be implied by the adjective 'educated' in 'she's an educated young woman' –which is evidently closer to the sense of education in Peters' account. For whereas the first sense of education might be used of any particular memorable experience that an agent might have had, speaking of someone as 'educated' invites attention to the particular quality of experience or achievement of those we call 'educated', as distinct from uneducated. Likewise, while most people in developed western societies are likely to have attended school, it may be that we would not call all of them educated in the more evaluative 'educated person' sense: in this sense, indeed, it has been pointed out that (institutionalised) schooling is neither sufficient nor necessary for education. Still, in this light, one might complain that the problem with Peters' account was just that he identified a somewhat rarefied sense of 'education', which –though it certainly reflects some aspects of usage (such as its sense in 'she's an educated woman')– hardly reflected all common senses of the term. That said, there is also much room for doubt that a philosopher of Peters' stature and ability was unaware of these other senses: he may only have thought that they were of less interest to professional educators.

But it should also be clear that anyone might simultaneously employ these diverse senses of the term 'education' without the slightest whiff of inconsistency. Thus, if I say that the trouble with 'education' –referring here to schooling– is that it doesn't teach enough vocational skills, I am not obviously contradicting myself when I also judge someone who has high

levels of vocational skill, to be poorly educated in Peters' sense of the term. Indeed, it is important to see that liberal and vocational learning need not be considered rival educational approaches or traditions, in so far as I can and perhaps should want my offspring to be exposed –as they have been in most past British schools– to both sorts of learning. In consequence, however, it should be no less clear that neither of these kinds of human learning needs to be regarded as especially 'contested' either, since most 'educated' people with whom one might discuss these matters are likely to agree well enough on the general distinction between liberal and vocational learning. In short, all that is needed for conceptual clarity on such matters is awareness that the term 'education' is often used with diverse senses in different contexts of discourse. Hence, recent 'post-this or that' claims that these different senses of education are to be construed in terms of exclusive disjunctions of 'emancipation' or 'socialization', 'liberal' or 'vocational' learning, or 'fulfilling individual potential' or 'meeting the needs of society' –as, in short, mutually exclusive socially constructed educational rivals– do not bear serious scrutiny. Far from advocating one of such developmental educational aims –as opposed to others– for their children, most sane and sensible people are likely to desire all of them.

## 2. Are there different conceptions of education?

But does this mean that there is or cannot be any serious disagreement or controversy about the nature and aims of education among right-thinking people?

How can this be so, when we know that politicians, educational professionals and ordinary interested citizens argue bitterly and endlessly about the proper form and direction of valuable human development and learning? So they do: but such disagreement is not obviously about the sense or meaning of the term 'education' in any of the narrower or wider uses lately considered, since these are all mostly clear enough and have legitimate application in context. Moreover, while we need not also deny that acrimonious debates do often rage between supporters and opponents of (for example) of RE or sex education in schools, disagreements are less often over whether this or that form of human development or learning is worthwhile or valuable, more often about the proper balance and/or distribution of agreed educational goods in formal schooling. Precisely, much controversy seems to be about the optimum ordering, ranking or distribution of generally agreed developmental goods in the curricular fare of the institutionalised educational contexts of schooling. We may now therefore take a brief look at four such 'educational' controversies.

First, some difficulty has been observed in reconciling the important role of schools in the basic socialisation of individuals with an equally proper desire to develop and promote those qualities of independent critical and creative thought that are indispensable to the progressive development of (particularly) liberal-democratic polities. While it is clearly vital for social cohesion to develop a common and stable set of values and rules of civil association conducive to harmonious co-existence and co-operation, including some common

sense of citizenship, it is no less important to develop the critical independence of mind that may enable society to move beyond stale traditions and hidebound customs –even at the cost of occasional social disquiet or disruption. Such tension is often expressed in a distinction between so-called 'traditional' and 'progressive' education –or (perhaps less accurately) subject or teacher-centred and child-centred education. I have previously argued (Carr 1998, 2003) that a common tendency to interpret this distinction in terms of different educational methods –traditional 'formal' versus progressive 'discovery' pedagogy– is mistaken. Some famous progressive educators, such as A. S. Neill (1968) had no interest whatsoever in innovative educational methods and many so-called traditionalists have been much interested in these. The key difference between traditionalists and progressives lies in their very different attitudes to past social and cultural inheritance. Whereas traditionalists put a fine point on social and cultural initiation into received traditions of knowledge and value, progressives –and this is what generally brings together thinkers as otherwise diverse as Rousseau, A.S. Neill and Dewey– are all more wary of the potentially stultifying or indoctrinatory effects of such initiation.

Secondly, there is a related, but different, tension between the desire to promote individually, socially and economically useful skills and capacities and the goal of so-called 'liberal education' –the kind of higher cultural refinement that Matthew Arnold, Michael Oakeshott, Richard Peters and others have been anxious to defend– that is less (if at all) fo-

cused upon the instrumentally useful and more upon these personally formative modes of knowledge and understanding, valuable (as it is said) for their own sake. In this regard, a distinction may be drawn between educational instrumentalists or utilitarians who are wont to stress the social and economic importance of vocational and other skills, and non-instrumentalists or (perhaps) liberal educationalists who emphasise the intrinsic educational value of history, poetry or music—even where these may have no obvious practical pay-off. Famously, Matthew Arnold defined education as ‘the transmission of culture’, and culture as ‘the best that has been thought and said in the world’ (Gribble 1967). Likewise, as already noticed, Peters distinguished education sharply from vocational training as the basic aim of schooling. It is not that he does not regard vocational training as a significant form of human development or learning; it is rather that he regards the proper cultivation of civilised sensibilities, understanding and values as educationally central to any flourishing human life. For non-instrumentalists in the mould of Arnold and Peters, man does not live by bread alone and there is more to a flourishing life than getting and spending.

Thirdly, however, there is a time-honoured issue about the extent to which (natural or innate) intellectual abilities or powers for the kind of education envisaged by Arnold and Peters are evenly distributed across any given human population. In fact, as any student of educational philosophy and theory should be aware, the first western educational thinker to have questioned the even distribution of intellectual

abilities and to have made differences of intelligence the virtual cornerstone of educational policy was Plato. For Plato (1961), there were men of gold, silver and bronze whom nature had cut out for different mental, social and economic roles and functions and who therefore needed to be educated or trained accordingly. Ever since Plato the idea that since there are fairly clear individual differences of ability and aptitude people may need to follow different educational or vocational routes, has been a hardy perennial of educational theory and policy-making. Thus, in terms of relatively recent British educational policy, the 1944 Education Act prescribed that while all pupils were entitled to secondary education (schooling) up until the age of fifteen, such education (schooling) should be tailored to differences of ability and aptitude, variously provided by a segregated state system of grammar, technical and secondary schools. But such educational apartheid has also coloured the educational theorising of many distinguished latter day thinkers such as D. H. Lawrence, T. S. Eliot and G. H. Bantock (1973).

Fourthly, however, there is an issue about whether the custom-built educational institutions of state or private schooling are really appropriate sites for education or training. Some modern educational theorists such as Ivan Illich, Everett Reimer and Paul Goodman (see Barrow 1978) have called into question the very idea of formal schooling—arguing that such educational institutionalisation is inevitably coercive and indoctrinatory—and have advocated alternative forms of community apprenticeship. Such theorists have regarded schools as agents of social control

rather than education; have questioned the value of the (predominantly academic) content of traditional school curricula; and have been sceptical of both the motives and competence of the professional class of teachers that has arisen to prosecute the suspect goals of schooling. While such so-called 'de-schooling' has to date had little or no wide influence or systematic political support in western contexts of educational policy, aspects of such thinking may be observed in theoretical and professional reflections on further and higher education.

It is of some present interest that the various distinctions and differences implicit in such tensions and/or controversies seem to cut across each other in fairly complex ways. Thus, it seems possible as a traditionalist to be either an instrumentalist or a non-instrumentalist about the aims or purposes of education –and this may also be the case of progressives. Likewise, although Plato seems to have been a traditionalist who thought– and has been followed to the present day in such thinking – that certain kinds of study were beyond the ken of many if not most folk, not all traditionalists have regarded lack of innate ability as an impediment to the benefits of an academically focused liberal education. But if this is so, then differences between some traditionalists and others, as well as between particular progressives, may be as theoretically or normatively significant as any general differences between traditionalist and progressives. In this light, we may now distinguish between six conceptions of education –three broadly traditionalist and three broadly progressive– as (or as not) conceived in terms of approaches to formal state schooling.

### 2.1. *Platonic or elitist traditionalism*

This conception begins from the idea that although certain forms of knowledge and understanding are of intrinsic (perhaps liberal educational) value, individuals are unequally placed to acquire or learn them. Sometimes it is held that individuals may not benefit insofar as they are of inferior intelligence or ability: at others it seems to be because they hail from different castes or classes. D. H. Lawrence and his influential disciple G. H. Bantock (1973) seem to have held a mixture of both positions. Generally, however, the position may be 'half-way' instrumentalist –for whereas the liberal learning of the elite is seen as of intrinsic value, the vocational learning of the masses is regarded as of more instrumental value.

### 2.2. *Liberal egalitarian traditionalism*

In post-war Britain and elsewhere, a more egalitarian brand of liberal education was developed by a new generation of analytical educational philosophers. Philosophers such as R. S. Peters, Paul Hirst and R. F. Dearden regarded a liberal education as of intrinsic worth and the knowledge associated with it as of benefit to all. John White has also argued that 'ability is a goal not a given' (White 1973): it is the task of educationalists to create capabilities and interests in the young that they may not have previously possessed. Such liberal egalitarianism undoubtedly influenced the development of comprehensive educational curricula in the UK and elsewhere.

### 2.3. *Instrumentalist or utilitarian traditionalism*

Instrumentalist or utilitarian educational thinking, robustly opposed by the nineteenth century founding father of modern liberal educational thought Matthew Arnold (1967), regards education (schooling) as effectively a means to extrinsic individual, social or economic ends or purposes and has little time for the notion of intrinsic value. Such utilitarianism is arguably the default position of much if not most latter day educational policy-making.

### 2.4. *Psychological (psychoanalytic) progressivism*

Under the influence of Freud, educational theorists and practitioners such as Homer Lane (1928) and A. S. Neill (1968) and their many followers, developed a form of progressivism to which the promotion of individual freedom from authoritarianism control or restraint is central. On this conception of progressivism, the key educational goal is personal happiness construed as psychological wellbeing. Such wellbeing would appear to have intrinsic value, although it may be realised in different ways in recognition of individual differences.

### 2.5. *Pragmatist (instrumental) progressivism*

In the wake of home-grown American pragmatism, John Dewey (1916) and his many followers developed a constructivist epistemology that greatly influenced the educational academy of the US and more widely. Although Dewey was overtly critical of child-centred theories, his

'instrumentalism' exhibits some progressive distrust of received conceptions of knowledge and enquiry and traditional methods of instruction. However, unlike psychological progressivism, Deweyan progressivism is more concerned with social (democratic) progress than individual mental health and much interested in the development of innovative (integrated) curricula and pedagogy. To this extent, it may also be more utilitarian and egalitarian than its psychoanalytic counterpart.

### 2.6. *Educational radicalism or 'de-schooling'*

Since the radicalism of such so-called 'de-schoolers' as Illich, Reimer and Goodman rejects the very idea of institutional state educational provision, it obviously cannot be regarded as a form of education as schooling. However, for present purposes, it may be counted as a form of progressivism – since there is a strong emphasis on rejection of traditional modes of socialisation (construed as indoctrination and/or social control) in the name of liberation or emancipation. Radicalism is also probably a predominantly instrumentalist perspective – since it emphasises the value of the useful over the 'useless' academic. It may also be broadly politically egalitarian, while reconciled to individual differences.

## 3. The status as 'rival' of competing accounts of schooling

But might it not now be complained that I have just replaced one set of 'rival' educational perspectives or dichotomies – the liberal versus vocational, the per-



sonally versus socially formative, the socialising versus emancipatory that I earlier argued to be rather different senses of education— with a rival and contested set of my own? On reflection, however, we should soon see that this far from so. In fact, the educational positions that I have lately identified and distinguished are clearly far more complex and nuanced than the more basic types or levels of human learning, acculturation and development —elementary socialisation, schooling, vocational training, liberal learning and so on— earlier identified with different ordinary usage senses of education. Indeed, it should also be clear that the complex positions lately identified could not even be articulated without appreciation of more basic distinctions between different types or levels of learning, socialization and development expressed in different senses of education. From this viewpoint, to be sure, it is preposterous to the point of calumnious to suggest that architects of such thoughtful accounts of education —of the cultural and intellectual stature of (for example) Matthew Arnold, D.H. Lawrence, T.S. Eliot, G.H. Bantock, A.S. Neill, Michael Oakeshott and R.S. Peters— have failed to appreciate basic distinctions between different aspects or levels of valuable learning and development or (worse still) have dogmatically asserted the claims of one dimension or aspect of human growth over another. On the contrary, it should be clear that all such theorists have been much concerned to balance and reconcile different dimensions of human development —socialization and autonomy, discipline and freedom, liberal and vocational learning— in terms of some more comprehensive and considered view.

That said, must I not at least concede that the six positions I have identified (which could easily be multiplied) are significantly at odds with or opposed to one another —so that I surely cannot deny the possibility of educational contestability? Well, I can't and I can— for there is real need for caution here. The trouble is that the philosophical concept of contestability has been liable to different —weaker and stronger— senses. In the weaker sense, it often means little more than 'liable to dissent': on stronger views, however, it has come to mean prone to rationally irresolvable dissent or disagreement. I am, of course, bound to agree that the educational perspectives I have distinguished are contestable in the weaker sense. However, it could not be clearer that educational theorists of the post-modern, post-foundationalist or rival traditions persuasion of (Wilfred) Carr hold —under the influence of neo-idealist moral and social philosophers as Alasdair MacIntyre— that education is contestable in the strongest possible sense. For Carr (2006) it seems to be not only that rival educational perspectives are socially constructed all the way down, but —following MacIntyre— that the very canons and standards of rational debate in terms of which such educational differences might be evaluated or critiqued are also locally constructed. This has the awkward and disturbing consequence that no educational or other social perspective can be open to external (or perhaps even internal) criticism: thus, those who hold that (in perhaps the liberal west) that education is about promoting freedom are entitled to their view, and those (such as perhaps the Taliban) who believe that it is about religious indoctri-

nation are entitled to theirs. This, effectively, marks the demise of all serious and useful educational philosophy and theory.

In the weaker sense of 'contestable' that admits only the possibility of dissent, however, it is surely more reasonable to suppose that educational perspectives of the sort lately identified and distinguished are significantly open to objective rational appraisal and critique. Indeed, by way of brief conclusion, I shall suggest that all the perspectives I have identified are either wholly or partly mistaken –though not for reasons relating especially, if at all, to considerations of diverse or rival social provenance. So, first, while the main challenge encountered by elitist traditionalism may seem to be that of that it is guilty of promoting social inequality, I believe that this position is at heart bedevilled by some confusion of intelligence with rationality. Briefly, people may be intelligent but not very rational, or rational but not (especially) intelligent. It is not the task of education to make agents intelligent, but to help them become rational, and to this extent all human agents would seem morally entitled to some initiation into the forms of knowledge that liberal educationalists have insisted are necessary for such rationality. Perhaps by token of a related confusion, however, liberal egalitarians have failed to recognise the human worth of more practical activity –'handwork' as opposed to 'mind-work'– and neglected the educational value of much vocational learning. That said, liberal and elitist traditionalists have importantly recognised the intrinsic 'personally formative' value of some kinds of learning and have avoid-

ed crude 'utilitarian' reduction of education to the largely instrumental purposes of much institutionalised schooling.

While the forms of progressivism are also variously insightful, they are no less theoretically or conceptually problematic in their own ways. Thus, while the 'psycho-analytic' progressivism of Neill and others does seem to appreciate the intrinsic value of much human learning, its interpretation of educational benefit in terms of psychological well being or 'happiness' arguably blurs an important distinction (to which R. Peters was acutely sensitive) between education and therapy. On the other hand, despite its no less valuable curricular and pedagogical insights –particularly into the cross-disciplinary nature of much meaningful learning– it is arguable that the pragmatist progressivism of Dewey and his legion of disciples rests of an ultimately problematic neo-idealist or constructivist epistemology that has encouraged some highly suspect views about the nature of knowledge acquisition in latter day educational theory and practice. Finally, the trouble with the radical perspective of 'de-schooling' is that it generally confuses schooling with education and tends to reduce what it regards as more educationally worthwhile to what is of direct practical (vocational) relevance or utility.

Still, the main lesson for now is that what is needed for theoretical clarity and progress on these issues is a robust combination of old-fashioned conceptual analysis, normative argument and serious intellectual effort. The key educational issues here are not at all helped by irresponsible and careless abdication of such argument

and analysis in favour of a crude socio-cultural relativism that leave us stranded in this or that Platonic cave of inherited, and allegedly rationally non-negotiable, local customs, conventions and prejudices.

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## Resumen:

### Diversos sentidos y seis modos de concebir la educación

El objetivo de este trabajo es volver a revisar una cuestión fundamental para la Filosofía y la Teoría de la Educación: cómo podríamos o deberíamos entender o definir el término «educación» en sí mismo. Entiendo que esta tarea requiere que se le dedique una mayor atención, porque –aunque pueda parecer que los recientes filósofos analíticos de la educación y otros filósofos han dicho todo lo que cabría decir sobre ello– no hay ninguna duda de que esta cuestión conceptual básica sigue siendo la principal fuente de las confusiones más profundas y persistentes en la investigación teórica y en la política educativa contemporánea. Con este fin, en la primera parte de este trabajo se identifican y examinan los aspectos clave; y en la

segunda parte se desarrolla una hipótesis acerca de la naturaleza del debate actual sobre estos temas, y las fuentes de dicho debate.

**Descriptores:** Educación, filosofía de la educación, escuelas filosóficas, escuelas pedagógicas.

## Summary:

### Diverse Senses, and Six Conceptions, of Education

The aim of this paper is to revisit the fundamental issue for educational philosophy and theory of how we might or should understand or define the term ‘education’ itself. I believe that this task needs further attention, for –although past analytical and other educational philosophers may seem to have said all there is to say on this question– there can be no doubt that this basic conceptual question continues to be the prime source of the deepest and most persisting confusions in contemporary educational theorising and policy making. To this end, I shall in the first part of this paper identify and examine what I take to be the key analytical issues. In the second part, however, I shall say something about the nature of educational controversy and the sources of such controversy.

**Key Words:** Education, philosophy of education, philosophical traditions, educational traditions.