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Special Issue: A celebration of the writing and professional work of Paul H. Hirst

Knowing and learning: from Hirst to Ofsted

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ABSTRACT

Hirst always highlighted knowledge when reflecting on the school curriculum. He replaced his early focus on liberal education, the development of mind and theoretical knowledge by emphasizing the practical and practices as a curriculum starting point and for the framing of educational aims. In this paper I explore links between Hirst's philosophical treatment of knowledge and some currently contested aspects of UK government education policies. I also note some ways in which his work relates to selected present-day debates in philosophy of education. Examples of UK government policy will include Ofsted's definition of learning as a 'change in long-term memory' and the ways in which they place 'logical sequencing' at the heart of teaching, learning, and curriculum. Their learning definition treats knowledge as an individual asset rather than something about individuals as embedded in the social world of practices, a perspective more in keeping with Hirst's later views. The critique of individualistic notions of knowledge and learning includes some explorations of how learners move into the 'space of reasons'. Where I draw attention to relationships between Hirst's thought and contemporary philosophy of education debates, I do not always draw any definite conclusions.

KEYWORDS: knowledge, curriculum, mind, practice, Ofsted, memory

INTRODUCTION

Throughout his philosophical life, Paul Hirst focused strongly on knowledge and rationality in the curriculum. In early works he concentrated on propositional or declarative knowledge, and he was sometimes accused of 'intellectualism'. Later, he prioritized practice and the practical both as a curriculum starting point and for the framing of educational aims: '…we must shift from seeing education as primarily concerned with knowledge to see it as primarily concerned with social practices' (Hirst 1993: 184). He began to place less emphasis on 'Liberal Education' as a pre-eminent educational aim. The latter had involved the 'Forms of Knowledge'

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and their involvement, as he saw it, in the formation of mind. He came to believe instead that education is concerned with 'developing the good life' (p. 195), and this does *not* primarily involve knowledge acquisition, even though knowledge still plays a crucial role. Yoo (2001) argues that Hirst's changed views do not amount to such a radical shift as is sometimes supposed, but the comments that follow do not depend on disputing this claim.

Recently the UK has made much of the so-called 'knowledge-rich' school curriculum. Nick Gibb, the former England Schools Minister, strongly supported this. He attacked the possibility of domain-independent skills, argued for the crucial role of knowledge in learning to read and appealed to Hirsch and others in support. Hirsch urged the importance of knowledge in enabling pupils to deal with online material, to resist indoctrination, and to be able, ultimately, to 'earn a good living' (Hirsch 2016: 2). He insisted that readers could not extract meaning from texts without a good deal of background knowledge. Michael Young notes the knowledge trend, for which he is partly responsible, and points out the increasing role of school practitioners here '…this fresh thinking about the curriculum is coming from curriculum leaders reflecting on their experience of schools. They have recognized, to paraphrase Bill Clinton, that "it's the knowledge, stupid" ' (Young 2018: 1). The UK school inspectorate Ofsted links knowledge to memory in a recent version of their inspection framework: 'Learning can be defined as an alteration in long-term memory. If nothing has altered in long-term memory, nothing has been learned' (Ofsted 2022: § 222).

This paper offers some philosophical reflections on both the idea of a knowledge-rich curriculum and Ofsted's conception of learning, in the light of Hirst's shifting views about knowledge and the overall aims of education. It notes how Hirst himself and subsequent philosophers of education offer accounts of how children attain rationality that seem to combine philosophical and empirical claims.

HIRST ON KNOWLEDGE, LEARNING AND RATIONALITY: A SUMMARY

From the beginning, Hirst criticized the idea of knowledge as something that the mind may or may not possess. Instead, he urged, 'to be without knowledge at all is to be without mind in any significant sense' (Hirst 1974: 24). Furthermore, he contended, knowledge acquisition is bound up with rationality. This is, apparently, as much a claim about the *constitution* of the mind as an empirical assertion that the mind cannot develop without acquiring knowledge.

At this point in his philosophical journey, Hirst sees knowledge as consisting of rational judgments. These feature types of propositions corresponding to his 'Forms of Knowledge', which include mathematics, the physical sciences, knowledge of persons, literature and the fine arts, morals, religion, and philosophy. Character developments and skills are dependent on 'possessing much relevant knowledge' (p. 27). These are treated as having equal status, for the most part, though he doubts the pretensions of the religious version.

Be that as it may, it would be a bad mistake, he believes, to offer less 'intellectual' curricula to less able students. A watered-down curriculum would limit the very development of mind. (As in a number of places in his writings, this contention has an empirical feel, yet it is supposed to continue the elaboration of a constitutive thesis.) He is equally emphatic that there is no one order in which knowledge has to be acquired, and that the logical character of any particular body of knowledge does not and should not determine the order in which that content must be learned. He comments, 'In a valid explanation the elements must fit together as if to establish the pattern of the puzzle: but there is no one temporal order in which the pieces must be fitted together to produce the pattern' (p. 126).

We might well agree with Hirst, but at the same time note that some putative learning sequences look self-evidently impossible. Examples are most readily drawn from mathematics: it would appear that a student cannot learn calculus before they learn to count; trigonometry cannot be learned before the student has learned what an angle is, and so on.

In any event, Hirst would be worried by Ofsted pronouncements in recent inspection frameworks: apparently, inspectors will seek to discover '…how leaders have broken down the content into components and sequenced that content in a logical progression, systematically and explicitly, for all pupils to acquire the intended knowledge and skills (Ofsted 2022: § 211). Ofsted may not believe in the existence of *one* unique best order in which curriculum content should be planned and offered; however, they certainly seem to hold that some sequences are 'logical' while others are less so. A 'sequential' approach is praised.

ORDERING LEARNING AND CURRICULUM

Hirst's point that the logical character of a body of knowledge does not imply any one order in which teaching and learning should take place is a philosophical/conceptual one. Nevertheless, could we investigate empirically whether some ways of ordering or sequencing teaching, learning, and the curriculum are more effective than others? This could turn out to be the case, even while Hirst's logical point about the disconnect between logical and practical order remains valid.

Yet how might these ways be discovered? A necessary condition for so doing is for it to be possible to teach definitively and comprehensively given knowledge at a given time. But is it possible? Does the idea even make sense? Matters might be relatively straightforward if teaching knowledge could be characterized thus: impart a given proposition, then the next, then the next, and so on. We could imagine empirical research investigating which propositions should be taught in what order. No one order might triumph, or, instead, given orders might be better for ensuring that the content is learned. The situation might even differ from one curriculum domain to another, *or from one student to another*. Of this type of thought experiment, at least one of Hirst's comments is apposite, 'What then are we after in teaching a subject? What does learning it involve? … [W]e do not just want the learning of a string of propositions. If that were all, we could quickly set out what has to be learnt and to

find by empirical investigation how best to teach it. But … we want pupils … to *understand*' (Hirst 1974: 117).

We need to focus closely on this understanding issue. For it threatens the very possibility of teaching a given piece of knowledge definitively at any one time. Understood knowledge involves items being linked or *connected* in the minds of the knowers. Much has been researched and written about this metaphor of 'connection'. One enduring account, due to Skemp (1989), links it with another metaphor, the 'cognitive map'. Learners' knowledge can be 'in' their heads as isolated stand-alone epistemic items, or, by way of contrast, it can be firmly and helpfully ensconced on learners' cognitive maps, with mental routes and connections between each knowledge item and other related items. It is the satisfactory functioning of the cognitive map that enables knowledge to be applied in a variety of contexts, something to be expected if the knowledge is 'understood'. Hirst himself seems always to have recognized this point very clearly. For instance, he comments, characteristically, '…the acquisition of knowledge in any area involves the mastery of an *interrelated* group of concepts…' (Hirst 1974: 25, my italics).

Newtonian physics offers us a familiar example: Force = Mass × Acceleration. These three scientific ideas are bound together. They are 'connected'. Or again, think of chess. The 'position' of, say the Queen in which a chess player may be interested in the middle of a game involves its relationships with other pieces—not only where they are, but the implications of this in terms of the rules of chess.

What might amount to *appropriate* connections is not always obvious and unquestionable. This is particularly evident when we are dealing with the humanities and social sciences. However, I do not think this important point affects my basic argument here.[1]

Let me now resume that line of thought. It is often not possible to declare that a learner has 'finished' learning something. Attempting to do so can be to commit Dearden's 'fallacy of perfected steps'. He asks, 'Does the logical structure of the understanding to be cultivated determine the order in time in which things are to be learned? Are there any necessary temporal priorities here?' To answer in the affirmative is, in his view, to commit the fallacy of supposing 'that one thing must be perfectly, and not just partially, understood before one can move on to the logically next thing' (Dearden 1968: 121). For instance, when we are committing the fallacy, we might think of a child beginning to learn about fractions having first 'finished' learning about whole numbers up to 100. But, of course, our thinking would be flawed. She would not have 'finished' with the whole numbers, since the knowledge about fractions rebounds on her previous number knowledge. It both changes and enriches it.

I have already noted that in mathematics, at least, there may seem to be plenty of intuitions about the 'logical' order of teaching and learning that are hard to resist. For instance, it would seem that addition should be taught before multiplication, basic

[1] My thanks to David Bridges for making this point, without which my line of thought could be open to misinterpretation.

algebra before calculus, and so on. However, surely such intuitions, other than the most blindingly obvious cases, would need to be checked in practice. Moreover, in other subjects, no logical order would appear to be present. Knowledge of Canada is not logically prior to knowledge of Germany, nor is knowledge of the Stone Age logically prior to knowledge of the Victorian era. Indeed, Hirst questions the notion of 'logical sequence' even in mathematics. '…the existence of alternative sets of axioms for any given system is now common knowledge' (Hirst 1974: 125). In my *The Limits of Educational Assessment*, I comment in similar vein:

> Even the verdict of logical priority is less than straightforward. If I think that arithmetic can be generated from set theory, then I might mistakenly think that it followed from this that children should learn set theory first. … A deeper mistake still might be to assume that there is some absolute sense in which set theory is logically prior to arithmetic. There is no such absolute sense. (Davis 1998: 113)

Why speak of a 'logical progression' at all? If it is to discourage 'illogical progressions', that hardly seems necessary, and in any case, in many subjects the notion of a 'logical progression' is unclear in principle. Moreover, it is less than obvious that what would be 'logical' for one student would necessarily be 'logical' for all their peers. Finally, what empirical research could establish it? Where is the justification for insisting on the kinds of 'logical progressions' that would suit every student?

Yet another way of characterizing this situation is to use the metaphor of the hermeneutic circle. I must grasp a topic as whole in order to understand any of its parts. Yet I also must grasp the parts to comprehend the whole.

Hence the very idea of teaching a given piece of knowledge at any one time definitively, conclusively, comprehensively, and successfully makes no sense in principle. This implies in turn that any attempts at empirical research into the effectiveness levels of given curriculum or learning sequences face fundamental obstacles. Accordingly, Ofsted's emphasis on planned sequencing is open to serious questions.

Now it is true that Ofsted nowhere claims that there is just *one* unique optimal sequence in which teaching and learning should be planned and delivered, and such a specific idea is not embedded in their inspection handbooks and inspections. In fact, it is reported that Ofsted deny that they believe this, and we have no grounds for doubting them. However, their confident inspection framework prescriptions in relation to curriculum and teaching ordering surely do require the possibility of the kind of empirical research we have seen fit to challenge in the light of Hirst's thinking.

Hirst's reflections about progression may have important indirect implications for a teaching style currently popular at least in the UK, known as 'Direct Instruction'. Boxer describes it thus: 'Direct Instruction is a specific programme with scripts, focused resources and teaching sequences planned to the most minute details' (Boxer 2019: 12). Sometimes the phrase 'direct instruction' is used. Its meaning without the capitals is vaguer, and tends to cover in a broader fashion, 'teaching from the front'. A previous government education minister probably

intended to refer to this when he said that teacher-led instruction is more effective than child-centred, enquiry-based approaches.

The concern is that such allegedly evidence-informed sequencing risks insensitivity to ongoing student responses as the teaching proceeds. Adherence to the planned sequence may persuade the teacher to overlook individual students' cognitive and motivational responses and needs. This danger is most acute at the level of individual lessons, while flexibility at the level of a lesson might be compatible with some degree of pre-planned sequencing at the level of a curriculum provided over several months. Yet we have already questioned any possible research authority for more definitive and detailed sequencing.

Could empirical researchers rebut this philosophical critique of 'logical learning order' claims? They might acknowledge connectedness, cognitive maps, and the rest. All they need to research, they might protest, is the relative effectiveness of sequences in which content should be *introduced* so that effective learning is promoted. Indeed, in practice, it is all that they could possibly do.

This assumes, however, that students are largely living in an epistemic bubble, penetrated from time to time by content from their teachers. The reality is that while the properties of most students' cognitive maps are likely to overlap in specific contexts, they will also differ to a degree, and one student's 'introduction' may well be another's addition to an existing store of connected knowledge and beliefs about any given content. Hence the idea of a research-informed helpful sequence for introducing content to students *in general* is open to serious question.

Hirst eventually came to believe that education can only be properly developed in practice, 'and that in relation to other social practices with which it is tightly interlocked … education can no longer be rationalistically planned' (Hirst 1993: 194). Working to putative 'logical' sequences when dealing with the school curriculum appears to be the kind of top-down rational planning that falls foul of such a perspective on rationality. Ofsted's wording directly implies that school leaders are expected to be planning content sequences *in advance*. In that sense, they are required to be 'rational planners' of education.

THE LATER HIRST ON KNOWLEDGE AND RATIONALITY

The later Hirst seems to challenge certain other contemporary educational policy trends. For instance, he would have been wary of the prominence recently being given in the UK and elsewhere to 'knowledge-rich' curricula. The latter has been influenced by Hirsch, who insists on a common core of knowledge including elements of literature, the arts, history, geography, maths, and science. He advocates an idea of 'cultural literacy', according to which extracting the full meaning from a text needs a significant amount of background knowledge. Shared knowledge is essential, on his view, if citizens are to be able to communicate with each other. Ideas about 'knowledge-rich' curricula also draw on the thinking of Michael Young. He elaborates on 'powerful knowledge'—that is to say, knowledge empowering students to think and act in ways key to their flourishing. It is not tied to

particular contexts, and enables students to move beyond their own experiences. Much of what both Hirsch and Young highlight consists of propositional or declarative as opposed to practical knowledge. Young emphasizes that he is foregrounding knowledge produced by disciplinary specialists. His views have strong echoes of the early Hirst's 'Forms of Knowledge'.

Hirst characterizes the main problem with his early position as 'seeing theoretical knowledge as the logical foundation for the development of sound practical knowledge and rational personal development' (Hirst 1993: 197). He now views practical knowledge as 'basic' to any clear grasp of theoretical knowledge, holding that worthwhile education for most cannot engage directly in the latter, though the work of theoretical experts remains vital for the welfare of all: 'if we stick with the notion that education is concerned with developing the good life then … we are mistaken if we conceive that purpose as primarily the acquisition of knowledge' (p. 195). His notion of Liberal Education is now about developing capacities to reflect critically on the 'basic practices' needed for a flourishing life, though Liberal Education itself has become less important for him than in his earlier work.

That practical knowledge is essential for theoretical knowledge could be construed as incorporating an empirical claim. It might concern timing, meaning that the practical must *precede* the theoretical. Many Early Years teachers believe that activities and experiences are essential for young children to develop more abstract and theoretical concepts. Accordingly, children need first to be counting with physical objects if they are to acquire concepts of cardinality. However, there is an empirical problem with the 'must' in 'must precede' above. Anecdotally, at least, some report that they acquired knowledge of general and abstract principles in mathematics while still having serious gaps in their understanding. For instance, they might know that in order to divide one fraction by another, you must 'turn upside down and multiply'. To divide 4/5 by 3/7, what you must actually do is multiply 4/5 by 7/3. They could do this very competently and apply it in a good range of contexts, but at the time they were taught this they had absolutely no idea why it 'worked'. It was only later on in their education that they gradually 'filled in the gaps' and came to acquire at least a measure of understanding of this method's success.

Hirst would have been unlikely to undergo such a radical change in thinking because of a mere empirical conjecture. He would have known very well that the latter could be tested and found wanting. As a result of philosophical reflection, he came to believe that reason could not be 'dissociated' from wants and desires (Hirst 1993: 188). The satisfaction of the latter is at the heart of human well-being, he now declared. Reason, knowledge, and understanding have practical aims.

Hirst's mature thinking about knowledge and his focus on the practical covers a number of strands. It does seem to incorporate the idea that activities and experiences should precede the introduction of knowledge expressible in declarative or propositional form, and indeed, he began to think that many students should not have very much in the way of the latter. 'I now consider practical knowledge to be more fundamental than theoretical knowledge … [I]t is in general impossible

for worthwhile education to engage directly in these theoretical pursuits' (pp. 197–8). Note that there may be a problem for some readers with the way Hirst uses the term 'theoretical' here. For some may associate it with high-level, abstract theory that might, for instance, be found in the sciences or even philosophy. This is not what Hirst specifically means by theoretical knowledge, though on his view the latter will *include* it. He actually means any knowledge expressible in declarative or propositional form that may be produced by the conventional disciplines.

What he is saying here need not favour particular positions in familiar educational dichotomies such as 'traditional' versus 'pupil-led' or 'discovery learning'. For teachers could offer direct instruction 'from the front' when seeking to teach pupils a practical skill such as how to use a compass to draw circles or how to use a pipette. They would be demonstrating equipment while pupils watched. Pupils would hear verbal instruction but would also be able to see what the teacher was doing; their experiences here would be a vital element in the teaching and as a contribution to whether they learned from this lesson. So 'practical' associated with the primacy of experiences need not always imply approaches to teaching other than 'leading from the front' by 'the sage on the stage', if, indeed, it ever does. It need not point to 'progressive' ideas about pupil-led learning or learning by discovery.

To sum up the discussion in this section, Hirst's focus on practice does not fit entirely easily with current ideas about the knowledge-rich curriculum, despite the fact that he has not, needless to say, abandoned knowledge as being at the heart of learning and education.

HIRST'S PRACTICAL TURN, LONG-TERM MEMORY, AND INDIVIDUALISTIC CONCEPTIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

Hirst's 'practical turn' is in tension with purely individualistic conceptions of knowledge, and I want to use his thinking to motivate a critique of such conceptions.

First, we need to hear more from Hirst about that 'practical turn'. 'The content of education', he asserts, must 'be conceived as primarily initiation in certain substantive social practices' (Hirst 1993: 195). He speaks of the existence of a complex of social practices 'with all the knowledge, attitudes, feelings, virtues, skills, dispositions and relationships that that involves' (p. 197). Reason is directed towards the practical because it is directed by our interests. The knowledge that is developed is 'know-how'—skill and judgment (p. 191). General practical principles that may be acquired can never 'even in principle capture the full character of practical situations' (p. 191). The personal significance of social relations is crucial; society is a network of individuals who can make choices from possibilities 'available within the traditions of the social groupings we do and can inhabit' (p. 194).

Ofsted's definition of learning 'as an alteration in long-term memory' posits knowledge as an individual asset. The practices that Hirst ultimately prioritizes are necessarily sustained by prevailing linguistic conventions, shared conventions about the character of certain concepts, social institutions of various kinds and aspects of the 'Division of Linguistic Labour' made famous by Hilary Putnam.

According to Putnam, what we are thinking about depends in part on experts 'out there' in our community. We defer to them in part for the contents of our thought. Hirst comments that 'it is only by … conceptualisations of practices in shared linguistic terms that … rational patterns of social life can be developed' (p. 192).

Suppose I learn the rules of chess, and so can play the game with others or with electronic devices. Assume, at least for the sake of argument, that there will be accompanying changes in my long-term memory. The chess rules are 'out there', so to speak, in my social environment. They exist in virtue of prevailing constitutive rules and collective intentions by means of which moving wooden pieces on a board count as chess moves.[2] My learning is *constituted* both by what is in me, and by aspects of relevant community-wide conventions and practices. Now imagine that in some way I come to absorb new content in the light of which I begin to misunderstand the rules or become simply mistaken about *en passant*, for instance. In this new situation I lack chess knowledge despite changes in my long-term memory. Admittedly, in our everyday use of the term 'learned', we might be tempted to say that I have learned something, but what I have learned is actually mistaken. This would help to preserve Ofsted's learning definition, but I would want to resist this usage and to confine talk of learning to those occasions when we actually acquire fresh knowledge. I recently read a report on aspects of medical education. It contended that half of what students learned would turn out to be wrong within six years. So the wording of this report implies that you can 'learn' what is not true. I accept, then, that in ordinary language we do sometimes speak in this way. However, in the context of how Ofsted seeks to define 'learning', I suggest that we cannot merely appeal to such everyday usage.

In a second thought experiment, the rules of chess are changed by worldwide agreement but I remain in blissful ignorance. Accordingly, the content of my long-term memory is unaffected. Yet there is a change for me. Certain elements in my long-term memory no longer constitute knowledge of chess rules. Again, this serves to distance my knowledge changes from my long-term memory changes. Hirst's reflections about practices along the lines sketched above encourage a critique of Ofsted's over-individualistic 'change in long term memory' learning definition.

In support of Ofsted, it might be objected that the socio-cultural environment and the practices, linguistic conventions, and institutions in which learning takes place are usually stable. Accordingly, what *does* change when learning occurs *is* the contents of a student's long-term memory. Surely, it might be contended, this favours Ofsted's definition of learning. The later Hirst's emphasis or even

[2] Rawls (1955) distinguished regulative from constitutive rules. Regulative rules include familiar everyday prescriptions such as 'Speed limit 30 m.p.h.' and 'Do not cycle on this footbridge'. Football rules are constitutive. Without them, kicking the ball into the net would merely belong to a physical category. With them, that same physical action may also be scoring a goal. Constitutive rules depend on appropriate collective intentions. We are familiar with individual intentions. I intend to eat lunch at 1.00 p.m. and to clean my teeth this evening. In addition, there are collective intentions. We (collectively) intend the road sign to signal a speed limit, and the £20 note to have a particular meaning and role. Constitutive rules exist partly because people in a society or culture share certain intentions.

priority given to practice might be thought compatible with this definition. In the end it is individuals who learn.

The problem with this move is that it allows UK's Ofsted to offer as a definition of learning something that might, at best, be a *necessary* condition for it. It is worth dwelling for a few more moments on this, despite the fact that some may feel that it is such an easy target, and that it has already been widely criticized. Unfortunately, Ofsted is still rolling it out as a notion of learning with which schools should be working.

If a pupil is taught a scientific concept badly and acquires some confused or false beliefs, she will certainly undergo long-term memory changes. Yet she will not have learned. The Ofsted definition is too true to be good. Arguably, we should *never* characterize acquiring untrue or confused beliefs as learning. Such a version, incorporating virtually *all* belief changes (because associated with alterations in long-term memory) would seem wholly unhelpful. For many of these changes would not be those sought by educators, whatever their particular values and educational aims.

THE 'SPACE OF REASONS' AND THE 'PARADOX OF LEARNING'

If mind development constitutively involves knowledge acquisition, as Hirst initially contended, must students come early to knowledge? Even if no particular order is essential in any kind of detail, perhaps even quite young children should be offered a 'knowledge-rich' curriculum.

The latter requires the possibility that knowledge can be acquired by a mind not yet 'developed'. Common sense suggests that this is obviously the case. Moreover, empirical research points to babies already 'knowing' on arrival in the world. Minai et al. (2017) contend that 'fetuses are sensitive to the change in language from English to Japanese'. Empirical research of various types going back many years indicates the possibility and the presence of fetal knowledge. For instance, Sharifian, Shahmahmood, and Haresabadi (2019) point to pre-birth language learning. The obvious question is whether this kind of research is really dealing with knowledge, and, if so, in what sense or senses.

There are conceptual and philosophical minefields lurking here. Learners must start somewhere, and babies certainly learn. Their minds are not yet 'developed'. There is recent philosophical investigation on how we gain our minds by entering into the 'space of reasons'. Sellars (1997) characterized the 'space of reasons' as one that hosts thoughts that are subject to the giving and taking of reasons. We are born animals, and only have minds when we inhabit this space, or so McDowell (1996) claims.

Bakhurst notes a distinction between learning by reasoning and learning by initiation. Learning by reasoning may be characterized as follows. A student with some existing competence with the concepts and modes of reasoning in some knowledge domain can now 'learn by understanding and evaluating what she is told or what she read about the domain, or by exploring the domain for herself in search of new

knowledge'. Bakhurst does not mention 'Forms of Knowledge' at this point, but his language here is suggestive of the idea (Bakhurst 2016: 80).

On learning by initiation, he comments: 'where students have yet to acquire the basic concepts and styles of thinking in the domain, they must be initiated into them if they are to get into a position where they can learn by reasoning' (p. 80). A student new to a domain must be initiated into its basic concepts and styles of thinking before she can learn by reasoning. For she cannot be *reasoned* into inhabiting it, at least in the very first stages of her progress into habitation.

Efforts to characterize how initiation is possible triggers thoughts of Fodor's 'paradox of learning'. Luntley comments,

> you can only learn a new concept if the space for it is already marked in the grammar of some system of representation that organises the discriminations needed to learn. But to possess such space in the grammar of such a system of representation is already to possess the concept. (Luntley 2008a: 2)

This is not the place to embark on a wide-ranging discussion of the paradox of learning, but the challenges it still poses to our attempts to give an account of the journey into the space of reasons are important and interesting.

To evaluate and criticize the practice, at least in its own terms, one must first be initiated into it. This is consistent with Hirst's later emphasis on practices, in contrast to his earlier view that theoretical rationality is *constitutive of having* minds. Bakhurst (2016: 81) invokes MacIntyre's idea of a practice as 'an activity that has ends and standards internal to itself so that only those who are "inside" the practice—those who have internalised those ends and standards—can fully appreciate its nature and value'.

Just how does a child come to inhabit a practice? Since at least the time of Wittgenstein, philosophers have offered verdicts which, on the face of it, combine empirical and philosophical elements. I can only gesture briefly at examples of this, including an interesting exchange between Stickney (2008) and Luntley (2008b). Stickney draws on a Wittgensteinian notion of training, characterizing it as an initiation into practices embedded in forms of life where we agree in our judgments about how to go on, not because we have been drilled or trained into following a formal explicitly codified set of rules, but rather because we have been helped to begin sharing in a form of life. We are thus enabled to act autonomously, holding many implicit values in common.

Luntley denies that Stickney's 'rich' conception of training could enable learners to reach a point where they can both give reasons and respond to them. On his view, we need instead a 'rationalist conception of the trainee as possessor of a prior set of reasoning skills' (Luntley 2008a, b: 706). He rests his position on Wittgenstein's insistence on the role of context in training:

> But how then does the teacher interpret the rule for the pupil? (For he is certainly supposed to give it a particular interpretation.)—Well, how but by means of words and training? And if the pupil reacts to it thus and thus; he possesses the rule inwardly. But this is important, namely that this reaction, which is our guarantee of understanding, presupposes as a surrounding particular circumstances, particular forms of life and speech. (Wittgenstein 1983: VII.47)

It is beyond the scope of this paper to offer detailed support either to Stickney or Luntley. Part of the difficulty in any attempt to do so would be the very general descriptions offered by each protagonist of how children attain the space of reasons.

At any rate, crudely speaking, the journey can only begin if the young are somehow exposed to it. Hirst refrains from committing himself in any detail to the nature of such 'exposure'. He talks of the necessity that a curriculum is 'organised in terms of significant practices' and insists that this is not 'merely a contingent matter' (Hirst 1993: 197). Yet he now believes that what matters is not specific knowledge content. Instead, individuals should 'be initiated into those practices that will at every stage of their history constitute the good life for that individual' (p. 195).

Hildebrandt and Musholt (2020) sketch one account of a human being's journey into the space of reasons. They defend what they call Sustained Shared Thinking, where the giving and asking of reasons is modelled for students by the adults around them. This is surely an empirical claim. Admittedly, it is difficult to see how else the move from being initiated into being an inhabitant of the space of reasons could possibly be achieved. The authors follow Bakhurst in holding that we are talking here of an 'essentially social process'. This has strong echoes of Hirst's emphasis on the role of practices. They refer to 'normatively structured interactions between adults and children' (Hildebrandt and Musholt 2020: 586). In the end, however, how human beings make progress towards reason is surely a matter for empirical research as much as for a priori pronouncements from philosophers of education.

CONCLUSION

Hirst's thinking about knowledge continues to have relevance for education policy today, and has interesting and important relationships with contemporary debates about knowledge and learning pursued by philosophers of education. His 'practical turn' is in tension with current fashions for a 'knowledge-rich' curriculum, though that is not to say that the tension amounts to an unbridgeable divide. Hirsch and Young emphasize the crucial nature of what Hirst called theoretical knowledge, while Hirst explicitly distances himself in later writing from the constitutive role of such knowledge in the formation of mind.

The position developed in Hirst's early writings, that ordering teaching and learning has no basis in 'logic', is robust and hence still can be applied to current educational policy. It can be coupled with a further argument that empirical research to establish effective sequencing faces serious obstacles in principle. That argument demonstrates that Ofsted's confident and authoritative focus on 'logical' sequences in teaching and learning is open to serious criticism.

Hirst himself and philosophers of education writing much later have a tendency to make claims about how reasoning is attained that combine philosophical and empirical elements. Recent reflections by philosophers of education about how children arrive at the 'space of reasons' are congruent with Hirst's 'practical turn'. Finally, Ofsted's individualistic conceptions of knowledge do not sit easily with Hirst's view of learning as a process where persons are inextricably embedded in

social practices. Consequently, educators' verdicts on Ofsted will be informed by, among other things, the extent to which they are persuaded by Hirst's 'practical turn'.

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