To Be of Use: Resisting Entrepreneurial Subjectivity

Kathy Hytten

University of North Carolina Greensboro

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

with your one wild and precious life? [1]

Mary Oliver, *The Summer Day*

Ever since I received the distinct honor of being invited to serve as the president of PES, I have been thinking about what I wanted to talk about for this address. I knew I wanted it to be something about what being a philosopher of education means to me, what I love about our field, how much I have learned from others who have shared this role—including many of you in this room, and what most challenges me (and philosophers of education more broadly) in this current era. I knew I would talk about both enchantments and disenchantments, and about possibilities for recovering joy in deep thinking and meaningful engagement with others. I also knew I wanted to reflect on the idea of allocating time and being of use, especially as I increasingly think much of what I feel pushed to do as an academic—specifically in terms of productivity, publishing, and "marketing" my worth—is, ironically, making me feel less and less useful. Moreover, this pressure is compromising the very things that brought me to philosophy in the first place: wonder, conversation, passion, imagination, presence, connection with others, and even joy. While it may be paradoxical to talk about joy and usefulness at the same time, I think they are related; we are most useful when we are engaged with others in doing work that is suffused with meaning, and even better, pleasure.

In describing the lure of philosophy, what he called a noble and misunderstood profession, Irwin Edman offered over seventy years ago that "philosophy is a conversation in which the soul catches fire."[2] Even though I make a living in this profession, the moments when my "soul catches fire" are fewer and further between, while the soul crushing moments are increasingly common: seeing students too busy, burdened, and over-extended to take any joy in learning, coming to the classroom almost exclusively for the credential it can provide; watching my peers (especially the non-tenured ones) toil over articles and books that few will ever read, yet which keep them away from their families, from other passions, and from any semblance of work life balance; arguing for the importance of service while more and more of my colleagues believe any service work (reviewing essays, chairing committees, writing promotion letters) should be compensated since it takes away from their scholarship, at the same time coming to believe teaching and advising are distractions if not detriments to their research; sitting in meetings where we are asked to assiduously judge the performance of others, ranking them on finer and finer metrics, rewarding some while sending others into spirals of self-doubt as we articulate all the ways in which they can and should continuously improve; defending the value of the humanities against the seemingly common sense calls for accountability, impact, and job preparation; the list goes on.

Yet I don't want to dwell too much on the soul crushing moments as I suspect they are all too familiar to many of you, and it is too easy to let them consume my energies. Moreover, in moments of disenchantment, I am reminded that I always bear some responsibility for the communities of which I am a part, including the community of scholars in general, and this community of philosophers of education in particular.[3] This understanding of account-ability prompts me to reflect on how I can be of use in pushing back against the soul crushing and making space for the wonder and joy that initially drew me to philosophy as a teenager, when my mother gifted me with books and questions to ponder; then to the idyllic rolling hills of the Chenango Valley as an undergraduate studying philosophy and religion; and ultimately to Chapel Hill, where as part of uncovering the whiteness of my philosophical world, I

developed a passion for inclusivity, openness, diversity, and social justice that has centered me throughout my career.

I begin my argument in this essay by reflecting on what it means to think philosophically, and specifically philosophically about education. In doing so, I pay homage to the philosophers of education who have most shaped my thinking while exploring what they have taught me about the usefulness and potential of our vocation. Here I reflect on what unites those of us in this field and consider some of our distinctive contributions to the world. I describe the philosophy of education that I am most drawn to, which has helped me think critically, listen openly, and act ethically. While I locate myself within a pragmatist tradition, the allure and value of philosophy transcends any one tradition. This section is the enchantment part of my essay, as thinking in these ways opens up genuine possibilities for making the world a better place, not to mention helping me personally live a more connected and purposeful life. From there, I discuss what I see as the contemporary challenges to this vision, including tensions about what counts in our field and where we ought to direct our energies. However, I focus mostly on external challenges: the changing nature of academia and the ways in which we are pushed to become entrepreneurial, rather than philosophical, subjects in the world. As entrepreneurs, we are asked to account for our work in quantitative terms, to show the measurable impact of our labors, and to always be doing more: more publishing, more grant writing, more competing for accolades and financial rewards, more self-promotion. Concurrently, we become, however consciously, competitors rather than collaborators in the perennial quest for a good, just, and meaningful life. This is the increasingly disenchanting aspect of the academic life (and really, life in a neoliberal era). Finally, like a good Deweyan, I try to carve a hopeful path through these extremes, articulating one vision for philosophy of education (certainly not the only one) that can help me to survive and subvert within these neoliberal times. The vision I have, loosely grounded in pragmatism, is of doing work that fuels my passions, keeps alive a sense of wonder and joy, and puts me in meaningful connection with others. It is an engaged and activist vision that enables and necessitates resistance to the instrumentalization of my

efforts. Doing this kind of work is how I think I can be of most use.

ENCHANTMENT: ON DOING PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Like many philosophers, I was drawn to this field because I was full of questions, full of wonder.[4] Growing up, I was always curious about the world and our place in it, even if my public-school experience too often caused me to forget the joy of learning in favor of the more immediate rewards of being a good student. The difference between these two perspectives is significant. As a good student, I learned to comply, get the right answers, worry primarily about grades, and do the minimum amount needed to get the maximum rewards; as a good learner, I might have spent more time pushing back against a narrow curriculum, questioning my teachers, and following my own interests and passions. Nonetheless, the philosophical questions loomed. Where did humans come from? Why are we here? Is there a higher power? Is there such a thing as human nature? How can I be a good person? What is truth? How do we know what we know? What is beauty? What is the meaning of life? Obviously, these are some of the enduring, quintessential questions of philosophy, even if I didn't know that at the time. Fast forward, studying philosophy as an undergraduate offered a space for deep thinking and reflection and offered an invitation to play with ideas and possibilities. I learned to see the boxes that framed my worldview, as well as how to think outside of them, and to imagine other ways of being. I learned how to explore ideas with others, and developed some of the most important habits of inquiry: deep reading, listening, patience, open-mindedness, humility, vulnerability, care, hospitality, and responsibility. Perhaps most importantly, I learned important lessons beyond the classroom walls, notably that I should prioritize making a meaningful life, and trust that making a living would eventually follow.

Within philosophy, I was drawn to existentialism and pragmatism; existentialism because it compelled me to take ownership over my life and find a sense of purpose or calling, and pragmatism because it showed me that philosophical distinctions matter (and should matter) to how we live our lives. I

initially struggled with the posturing and abstraction in many of my philosophy classes, where too often the goal seemed to be to win an argument but not to understand why the arguments even mattered, especially to peoples' actual lives in the here and now. This changed with my study of John Dewey, who argued that one of the most important roles for philosophy is to understand contemporary social, political, and moral struggles and participate in addressing them. He maintained that "ideas are worthless except as they pass into actions which rearrange and reconstruct, in some way, be it little or large, the world in which we live."[5] Similarly, Dewey says one of the best tests of the value of philosophy is whether it ends "in conclusions which, when they are referred back to ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments, render them more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful."[6] The quest for a philosophy that mattered led me to the study of education, and to questions about what we need to learn, understand, experience, know, and do in order to live fulfilling lives and to share spaces in community with diverse others. Like Dewey, I have come to see how the sphere of education is where philosophical assumptions, beliefs, and visions often matter most, especially as schools are always passing on implicit and explicit lessons about what constitutes a good and meaningful life. I agree with Dwight Boyd that "to be concerned about education is to be engaged, ultimately, with the question of what it means to be fully human."[7]

I take great pleasure in learning how to become, in the words of Ann Diller, a "philosopher of my own education," and in turn, I enjoy teaching others to do this as well.[8] Thinking philosophically helps me to understand the world around me differently, to listen more openly, and to engage others more generously. It has also fueled my desire to make the world a better place, where oppression and suffering are diminished and there are more and more genuine possibilities for human flourishing and the cultivation of just relations. In this world, we name white supremacy, patriarchy, homophobia, and similar systems of privilege explicitly and work tirelessly to disrupt them. Of course, philosophers are not the only ones who are working to build this world, however, we do bring some unique tools to these efforts (the methods of philosophy), as well as a

rich tradition of thinking through important questions (the historical content of philosophy). Learning to use the tools of philosophy, exploring the ways in which others have done so over time, and developing and experimenting with innovative new tools, all enable ways of seeing and being that are both useful and at times enchanting.

So, what is it that philosophers do?[9] This may seem like a simple question with obvious answers, but yet it is worth reminding ourselves, especially since we are often so lost in the philosophical "doing" itself, that it is hard for us to take a step back and describe philosophical work, and its value, or at least potential value, to others.[10] It is even challenging to describe the work of philosophy to our colleagues in schools of education, where it is increasingly common that we have to sneak philosophy into courses on social foundations because stand-alone philosophy of education classes are a thing of the past in many institutions. Rest assured, I am not going to try to describe the history of philosophy here, or argue that there are some essential and unique characteristics of philosophical activity that are the most important. Rather, my thoughts here are no doubt idiosyncratic and reflect my own pragmatist sensibilities. While there are many different ways of doing philosophy and many ways to characterize its usefulness, I focus on three contributions that I find particularly compelling, and especially important for doing engaged, social-justice oriented philosophical work in the education field. These three contributions are helping us to think clearly, to listen openly, and to act ethically, all of which I find valuable in the quest to be of use.

One of the most important things philosophers do is uncover, unpack, explore, and trouble fundamental assumptions, studying where our beliefs and worldviews come from and identifying keys points of divergence among different perspectives. That is, we help others to think clearly. Dewey describes philosophical thinking as a form of systematic questioning: "inquiry, investigation, turning over, probing or delving into, so as to find something new or to see what it already known in a different light."[11] At the same time, philosophers help us to productively navigate uncertainty and complexity. Nick Burbules likens philosophical thinking to working through doubt, problems,

and puzzles, suggesting "it is less about stacking up truths to build a temple of certainty, and more about revisiting familiar, troubling problems again and again, seeing in them each time something different."[12] Studying philosophy makes us particularly adept at asking good questions, exploring implications of ideas, and thinking deeply. We learn about how to make careful arguments, as well as to dissect, analyze, and evaluate the arguments of others. We practice assessing whether arguments make sense, if claims follow logically from each other, if there are gaps, and if conclusions are consistent with assumptions and premises. We also look for silences and trouble certainties. Describing philosophy of education, Cris Mayo writes that it "is about holding concepts and movements in tension, bending the implications of commonplace, commonsensical ideas about education, and carefully examining all of these maneuvers for the exclusions they wittingly and unwittingly produce."[13] While others around us sometimes find our questioning and analyzing annoying, we nonetheless help to trouble taken-for-granteds, distinguish facts from values, define terms, uncover propositions, identify flaws in logic, and trace implications or consequences of ideas. Philosophers of education apply these critical thinking skills to a range of issues, asking, for example, about the purposes of schooling, the nature of teaching and learning, the goals of various curricula and pedagogical practices, and the ethical treatment of students and teachers alike.

In addition to learning to become a more careful and systematic thinker, the philosophers of education who most inspire me have also taught me to listen openly to diverse perspectives, and not to simply (albeit often unconsciously) filter them through my own limited world view. Audrey Thompson calls this "listening at an angle," which entails being receptive to difference in embodied ways, as well as vulnerable to disorientation, while always recognizing our own inadequacy in the task of fully understanding others.[14] Over twenty years ago in the presidential address that has most stayed with me over time, and which invariably becomes a touchstone for my students (especially when grappling with issues of privilege), Ann Diller suggested one of the most important habits to cultivate as a philosopher of one's own education is "the capacity to be torpefied."[15] Here Diller draws from Plato's metaphor of a torpedo fish, used

by Meno to characterize the ways in which Socrates asks questions that are so challenging and unsettling that he constantly feels torpefied, or shocked by the realization of all he doesn't know. Listening openly to others is much harder than it might initially seem. As Diller writes, "it takes considerable courage, self-knowledge, a brave heart, and honest openness to face one's own ignorance and stay present to the concomitant experiences of discomfort, perhaps feeling horrified as well as torpefied."[16] Similarly, Lisa Delpit suggests such engaged and open listening requires that we "learn to be vulnerable enough to allow our world to turn upside down in order to allow the realities of others to edge themselves into our consciousness."[17] Yet this capacity to be vulnerable is essential to understanding the ways our social positionality affects what we can and cannot see in the world around us, to collaborating across lines of difference, and to engaging in the work needed to sustain democracy and build more just social conditions.

Consistent with the theme of being of use, I am particularly inspired by philosophy of education that helps me to act ethically and responsibly in the world, enabling the kinds of openings and possibilities that Barb Stengel invites us to approach with the words, "therefore, we can."[18] These words can inspire us to act on injustice in community with others, rather than become mired in fear, cynicism, and apathy. These are philosophers who "adopt a forward looking perspective on taking responsibility" in the face of problems, acknowledging those problems and asking what we can and will undertake.[19] Here I am reminded of the powerful social-justice oriented work of many philosophers of education, for example, Barbara Applebaum's development of a pedagogy of complicity, which can help us to disrupt systems of privilege while at the same time reminding us that we are always also complicit in these systems; or Sarah Stitzlein's work to defend public schooling and provide a compelling vision of citizenship education and pragmatist hope; or Mike Gunzenhauser's engagements with educational leaders to illustrate the everyday moral dimensions of educational practice and create a framework for an active and ethical professional, which he describes as "a grounded educator who is able to resist unreasonable demands placed upon him or her, to protect students from the

worst of the normalizing pressures of accountability, and to create educational systems and structures that work against normalization."[20]

Obviously, I could add many more examples to this list of philosophers who help us to understand various dimensions of justice so that we can better work to bring about the ends we desire. This activist, social justice-oriented, pragmatist philosophy of education inspires me, provides me tools for acting ethically in the world, and reminds me that the work we do in the everyday can matter in ways that are often hard to see and certainly hard to measure. This kind of work helps to create what Myles Horton calls "islands of decency," or the seeds of a better, more humane society, that are "contagious and can spread."[21] The idea that philosophers of education can play a role in creating pockets of decency, democracy, compassion, and justice that can grow is certainly what enchants me about our vocation. Yet at the same time, I find all too many forces in contemporary life, especially academic life, conspiring against the potential enchantment of doing educational philosophy.

DISENCHANTMENT: THE PUSH TOWARD
ENTREPRENURIAL SUBJECTIVITY

Thus far, I have painted what I think is a compelling vision for philosophy of education, at least I hope I have. However, the ideal rarely matches the actual, and there have always been both internal and external challenges and tensions in our field. We have never dwelled on "cloud nine," despite D.C. Phillips' invocation of that idea in his presidential address to our society twenty-eight years ago.[22] In that talk, he creatively reflected on a perennial problem we face as philosophers of education, which is that we don't quite fit in among either philosophers or educators. Among philosophers, we are accused of not being philosophical enough, worrying too much about the practical significance and implications of our ideas, while educators rarely find the intellectual light we attempt to throw on educational issues to be at all useful.[23] Similarly, there is little interdisciplinary work across these two fields, a worry which prompted René Arcilla to ask the question of why philosophers and educators weren't

speaking to each other in a 2002 *Educational Theory* essay.[24]

Philosophers of education have always seemingly dwelled in some kind of limbo, navigating between more speculative and more applied forms of philosophy, and regularly revisiting what is often characterized as a dilemma of relevance.[25] We have also troubled over what even counts as philosophy of education, recognizing that while we want to maintain a spirit of openness, if the aperture is too wide, if anything counts, there may be no reason for us to even exist as a discipline. These challenges can no doubt be disenchanting; if philosophers don't value our efforts, and educators find us to be too distant from the realities of practice, is anyone really benefitting from our labors? Adding to these problems, we dwell in an academic climate where pressures to publish can sometimes lead us to focus on narrower and narrower topics and problems in our efforts to carve out a unique niche for our work. This can result in even more troubles, as John Clark argues that philosophers of education have "recently moved beyond the study of often quite practical problems in education to encompass the most abstract forms of thought about educational theories, policies and practice," raising the question of to whom or to what audience we are even writing.[26] Despite the good, engaged work many of us do, too often the answer to this question is that we are mostly, and primarily, talking among ourselves.

The existence of internal tensions is not always bad, however. Rather, they are also markers of a healthy field. That we regularly debate what it is that we do and how we can be most useful are signs that we are good stewards of our discipline, attentive and responsive to ongoing challenges. These internal disenchantments are much less worrisome than the external ones which affect both academia and the culture at large, often attributed to the growth of neoliberal ideology. Increasingly, what seems to matter most is that which we can count, measure, and comparatively assess. These neoliberal pressures push us away from a philosophical subjectivity, where we reflect with others about questions of value, purpose, and meaning, seeking to identify answers to the most important normative questions about how to make a life, toward an entrepreneurial subjectivity, where we try to maximize our value in a world

of competition, judgement, and performative pressure. Scholars have used many different words to qualify the current culture of academia (and the world of work more generally): neoliberal, measurement, performative, consumer, competitive, market, hyperrational, audit, evidence-driven, and accountability-based. While there are differences among these qualifiers, they all point to the increasing individualization of our labor, and a push for us to focus on our production more than the range of our potential contributions to the world, as if the two were equivalent.

The push towards an entrepreneurial subjectivity is a logical outcome of prioritizing performance and performativity above all else. Stephen Ball describes performativity as "a technology, a culture and mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change—based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic)."[27] In this culture, outputs such as articles published, awards, grants received, and impact factor ratings, come to represent almost the sole measure of our worth, while the things that are hard to assess—relationships, quality, resonances, long-term impacts, time spent with students and colleagues—are devalued. New scholars increasingly become more like free-agent entrepreneurs, judging the worth of activities in relation to how much they can be counted on annual evaluations and in tenure and promotion decisions, which consequently means less willingness to engage in complex service tasks, less time for students and teaching, and less everyday stewardship of the multiple academic communities of which we are all a part. In this culture, scholars are "encouraged to think about themselves as individuals who calculate about themselves, 'add value' to themselves, improve their productivity, strive for excellence and live an existence of calculation."[28] This push toward an entrepreneurial subjectivity is by far one of the most disenchanting and even soul-crushing aspects of academic labor in our current era. It is especially damaging to doing philosophy well, as philosophical thinking requires careful and deliberate attention to ideas, exploration of multiple paths and possibilities, and the kind of contemplation and dwelling that is fundamentally at odds with a culture fixated on speed, production, competition, and winning. As Stephanie Mackler argues, philosophy "is meant

to help people live better," which is not at all the same as producing more as part of a never-ending quest to illustrate one's worth.[29]

While there is much to be concerned with in the push towards entrepreneurial subjectivity, among the most troubling consequences are diminished community, narrowed scholarly pursuits, selfish striving, and ontological and existential insecurity. As the pace of our lives change, we come to believe that we should be continuously improving in some kind of infinite growth model. We feel the need to speed everything up: to do more, to be more efficient, to maximize our value. Audit cultures reduce what matters to that which can be compared, counted, and measured. They incentivize us not to ask metaphysical questions about what we study and teach, but rather to ask technical questions: does it attract students and prepare them for future jobs? Does it bring in grant dollars? Does it have clear applicability and relevance to the "real world?" Does it lead to high-impact publications? In audit culture, we can easily start losing sight of whether our scholarship makes any difference at all in the lives of others, for example, or whether it can help people think differently and develop habits conducive to living meaningful lives, such as responsiveness, empathy, wonder, and reflexivity.

I don't have the space here to outline how and why the scholarly vocation seems to have changed so much, but I do know these changes are fundamentally damaging our ability to be philosophical subjects in the world: people who ask questions about purposes and the good life, and who value questioning, contemplating, imagining, and engaging with others. Moreover, for many of us the loss of meaningful scholarly vocation has led to stress, anxiety, and disillusionment, particularly when we find ourselves falling into existential malaise, questioning, for example, if something we are writing adds anything new to ongoing scholarly conversations, or if our work has any value when almost nobody cites it (which has been normatively defined as the only sure way of knowing if anyone has read our work, or at least some of it). It also ensnares many of us in what Tim Kreider calls the "busy trap." When productivity is the measure of our value, there is no limit to how much we can and should be working. Constant busyness becomes a response to ontological insecurity about

whether we are doing enough and consequently worthy enough. It "serves as a kind of existential reassurance, a hedge against emptiness; obviously your life cannot possibly be silly or trivial or meaningless if you are so busy, so completely booked, in demand every hour of the day."[30] And yet many of us do feel that our academic efforts are often meaningless. We crave a scholarly life that brings more fulfillment, significance, passion, and joy; possibilities that are particularly elusive to those still seeking secure academic positions, tenure, and promotions. In terms of scholarly endeavors, more meaningful work might entail what feminist scholars have called "slow scholarship," which they describe as "engaging different publics … refining or even rejecting earlier ideas, engaging in activism and advocacy, and generally amplifying the potential impact of our scholarship rather than moving on to the next product that 'counts' to administrators."[31] For philosophers of education, slow scholarship would certainly involve taking the time to articulate thoughtfully the goals that matter to us and to engage ethically with others and their ideas. And yet, we currently inhabit the disenchanting world of pressure, performance, and productivity. Invoking a favored question of pragmatists: Is there a way out of, or through, this dilemma?

A PATH FORWARD: RESISTING PERFORMATIVITY

A first step in pushing back against entrepreneurial subjectivity is to reframe the problem so that we can both recognize and claim our own agency in relation to academic culture and take better ownership over our disciplinary labors as philosophers of education. While it often feels like we are victims of neoliberal audit cultures, we also contribute to creating and sustaining them. For example, we serve on the committees that establish academic norms, policies, and expectations, often unwittingly assenting to, and consequently reproducing and reifying, the very practices that trouble us. Our resistance and philosophical questioning in these spaces matters.[32] Philosophers of education can play important roles in foregrounding quality rather than quantity in our own work and in advocating for the same kinds of quality within the various communities in which we are located. For me, pragmatist sensibilities of exploration, critique, collaboration, social intelligence, and hope fuel this work, though there are many

other philosophical traditions we can draw upon in resisting entrepreneurial subjectivity.[33]

As I mentioned in the beginning of this essay, the vision I offer here in closing points to one way of doing the kind of engaged, communal, and activist work that keeps alive the things that drew me to philosophy in the first place: passion, wonder, joy, and hope. Pragmatism is certainly not the only philosophical tradition to look to for inspiration for resistance and reclamation of intellectual fulfillment. For me, I am compelled by pragmatists' call for open-mindedness, whole-heartedness, and responsibility as important habits of inquiry, experimentation, and living.[34] I believe in the value of targeted ameliorative action that creates openings where our presence, including in our capacity as philosophers of education, "can make a difference" and "enable alternate possibilities."[35] In navigating a path between enchantments and disenchantments, there are any number of ways in which philosophers of education can resist performativity while enacting and sustaining a philosophic, rather than entrepreneurial, subjectivity. The work of resisting performativity starts by doing an honest assessment of what we truly care about and value in our own lives, including how we want to spend our time, what legacy we want to leave, and how our personal interests are "intertwined with the lives, careers, and happiness of others."[36] It also requires that we think more expansively about our work, especially in relation to things like impact, audience, voice, and potential collaboration. For the senior members among us, it may mean we use our power to push back against unhealthy, competitive, and performance driven academic norms, initiating conversations about how less (including less publication) might actually be more. Two strategies that I think hold great potential for re-enchantment are to advocate for careful and "slow" scholarship and to identify specific problems that matter to us and then build communities with others to act on these issues, bringing our unique philosophic skills and gifts to bear on the concrete problems in the world.

Philosophers of education are naturally positioned to argue for slow scholarship. Deep and careful thinking are among our perennial concerns. We want to understand ideas in all their complexity, which requires reading and

rereading, reflecting, speculating, asking new questions, and being in conver-
sation with others. It entails contemplation and mindfulness, revisiting old
thoughts and analyzing them in the light of new insights. While I think many
of us would be well served by slowing down our own efforts on a personal
level, more importantly, I suggest we advocate for the value of slow and careful
scholarship more broadly, describing what it might mean, why it is important,
and the possibilities it enables.[37] Slow is less about pace and time than it is about
attention and care. It is about arguing for quality above quantity, meaningful-
ness above measurability. It is about articulating what we mean by quality, and
reminding others of the value in the seemingly ineffable. Surely it matters, for
example, when we become different kinds of people because of something we
read, even if this can't be measured by counting citations. For example, much
of the work I have cited in this talk has helped me to think differently, treat
others and their ideas more respectfully and openly, to reflect more often on
my own values, and to shift my priorities away from always trying to be the best
and toward working with others on issues that matter beyond my own career.[38]
Notably, this scholarship has this impact in ways that are hard to count and
assess, for example, in the everyday contexts of my work and my relationships
with students and colleagues, where formal citation would not make much sense.
Becoming a philosophic subject requires the time to step back from routines, to
allow space for inspiration and wonder, to make unexpected connections, and
to nourish imagination. Philosophers of education are ideally situated to argue
for the importance of time and care, joining our peers in other disciplines who
are also challenging the culture of speed in the academy.[39]

Given our location betwixt and between disciplines, philosophers of
education are invariably bridge builders. We are well positioned to bring people
together to work on shared problems. We are typically adept at identifying key
issues at stake in any dilemma and helping to clarify assumptions, values, and
priorities. While philosophers often are accused of obfuscation, we are also
often gifted at translation, a skill which we can use to identify common inter-
ests and shared passions. In responding to Arcilla's lament that philosophers
and educators rarely talk to each other, Barb Stengel sees an agenda for action

instead of a cause for worry. Perspective in this case, is everything. Rather than troubling over whether others value what we do, she suggests we reach out to them and simply do good work, finding the myriad ways we can be of use.[40] For example, we can use our skills as philosophers of education to mediate across lines of difference. We can invite people to come together, guide them in identifying shared interests and motivations, listen to what each person has to say, and record the issues that they are passionate about in a clear and accessible fashion. From there, we can then create a new text to bring back for discussion, working with our colleagues to facilitate conversation, identify unique skills and talents, and plan strategies for action and resistance.[41] Simply put, when we act with others on the issues we are passionate about, we can best push back against the disenchanting forces in our worlds. Here it is important to acknowledge that thinking, imagining, reading, speculating, dialoguing, pondering, and wondering are important forms of action. In fact, we ought to fight for time and space for deep thinking that is not immediately or obviously applicable to tangible problems. More speculative philosophical traditions add value to the world, helping us to think beyond boundaries and explore human potential. Whatever problems we seek to address, we need people who think deeply and critically, listen attentively, and help us to act ethically.

In his book *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging,* Sebastian Junger writes that "human beings need three basic things to be content: they need to feel competent in what they do; they need to feel authentic in their lives; and they need to feel connected to others."[42] Sadly, so much of modern life, including academic life, conspires against fulfilling these needs, especially when we swim in world of numbers, metrics, impact factors, measurement, and competition. In the end, it is up to each of us to find spaces to disrupt our complicity in the instrumentalization of our labor and to engage the world as philosophical subjects. Every obstacle, every disenchantment, is also an opportunity to summon our best selves. For me, philosophy has always been about passion, wonder, joy, and community. It is still about this, especially when I remember that I have greater ownership over my academic identity (and life) than I sometimes recognize. There are many ways I can be of use. Marketing myself in a world

of free-agent entrepreneurs is not likely to be one of them.

While working on this address, one of my favorite poets, Mary Oliver, passed away. I have always been drawn to her poetry, infused as it is with deeply philosophical and existential sensibilities, as well as wonder and reverence. The epigraph to my talk comes from her poem "The Summer Day," in which she describes wandering on a summer day, attending to and relishing in everything around her, being amazed. She then responds to an imaginary interlocuter who questions how she is idly spending her time. She asks: "Tell me, what else should I have done? Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon? Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"[43] It seems to me that this is a good question for us to ask ourselves regularly as part of reflecting on how we might do work that fuels our passions, keeps alive wonder and joy, and puts us in community with others while we work to be of use. For me, this entails becoming a philosopher of my own education and life; and a subject who acts in the world to become my own best self, all the while supporting the ability of others around me to do the same.

---

1 Mary Oliver, "The Summer Day," *House of Light* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992), 60.

2 Irwin Edman, *The Philosopher's Quest* (New York, NY: The Viking Press, 1947), 4.

3 Donald Hall, *The Academic Community: A Manual for Change* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2007), 86.

4 While I only briefly mention my own foray into philosophy of education here, I appreciate Barbara Stengel's invitation to philosophers of education to think about the experiences and forces that led us each to this field in her presidential address to the society several years ago: Barbara S. Stengel, "'So Open it Hurts:' Enabling 'Therefore, We Can …' in the Dangerous Secure World of Education" in *Philosophy of Education 2013*, ed. Cris Mayo (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 2013): 3.

5 John Dewey, *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953, Volume 4*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 111.

6 John Dewey, *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953, Volume 1*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 18.

7 Dwight Boyd, "The Place of Locating Oneself(Ves)/Myself(Ves) in Doing Philosophy of Education," *Philosophy of Education 1997*, ed. Susan Laird (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 1998), 3-4.

8 Ann Diller, "Facing the Torpedo Fish: Becoming a Philosopher of One's Own Education," *Philosophy of Education 1998*, ed. Steven Tozer (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 1999): 1-9.

9 Given space constraints, I focus on philosophical methods here, though I realize there is a risk in doing this since I may give the impression that there is not a long, rich, disciplinary history in philosophy that is important to our work. Too much emphasis on methods can be reductive and lead to the problematic (populist) view that anyone can do philosophy or the suggestion that it involves little more than critical thinking. Lauren Bialystok thoughtfully reflects on this danger in "Philosophy Across the Curriculum and the Question of Teacher Capacity; Or, What is Philosophy and Who Can Teach It," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 51, no. 4 (2017): 818-836.

10 It is also worth reflecting on this question because PES members come to philosophy of education from so many different backgrounds, many without significant (or even any) coursework in the discipline of philosophy. There is not one agreed upon description of philosophy, rather as Bialystok suggests, there are important shared features or landmarks that characterize philosophical work. For example, philosophers explore multiple perspectives and standpoints and interrogate fundamental assumptions in service to engaging philosophical questions. Philosophical questions cannot be resolved empirically, hold interest across space and time (even as their manifestations reflect local conditions), and can be made clearer with analysis.

11 John Dewey, *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953, Volume 8*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 330.

12 Nicholas C. Burbules, "2001: A Philosophical Odyssey," *Philosophy of Education 2001*, ed. Suzanne Rice (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 2001), 7.

13 Cris Mayo, "Philosophy of Education is Bent," *Studies in Philosophy of Education* 30, (2011), 473.

14 Audrey Thompson, "Listening at an Angle," *Philosophy of Education 2010*, ed. Gert Biesta (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 2010): 1-10.

15 Diller, "Facing the Torpedo Fish," 7.

16 Diller, "Facing the Torpedo Fish," 8.

17 Lisa Delpit, *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2006), 47.

18 Barbara S. Stengel, "'So Open It Hurts': Enabling 'Therefore, We Can…' in the Dangerous Secure World of Education," *Philosophy of Education 2013*, ed. Cris Mayo (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 2013): 1-15.

19 Barbara Houston, "Taking Responsibility," *Philosophy of Education 2002*, ed. Scott Fletcher (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 2003), 7.

20 Barbara Applebaum, *Being White, Being Good: White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility, and Social Justice Pedagogy* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010); Sarah M. Stitzlein, *American Public Education and the Responsibility of its Citizens: Supporting Democracy in the Age of Accountability* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017); Michael G. Gunzenhauser, *The Active/Ethical Professional: A Framework for Responsible Educators* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2012), 10.

21 Myles Horton, as cited by Eliot Wigginton, *Sometimes a Shining Moment: The Foxfire Experience: Twenty Years Teaching in a High School Classroom* (New York, NY: Anchor

Books, 1985), 319.

22 D.C. Phillips, "Philosophy of Education on Cloud Nine," *Philosophy of Education 1991*, ed. H.A. Alexander (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 1992).

23 John White discusses this dilemma thoughtfully. He writes that practice-oriented philosophers of education, "caught up in educational issues of the day, can sometimes lose touch with their parent subject. Conversely, in an endeavor to show that they are not second-class philosophical citizens, but genuine members of that community, some may turn too far inwards, trailing brief but unexciting 'educational implications' from their in-depth studies" of philosophers or philosophical theories. John White, "Philosophy, Philosophy of Education, and Economic Realities," *Theory and Research in Education* 11, no. 3 (2013), 297.

24 René Vincente Arcilla, "Why Aren't Philosophers and Educators Speaking to Each Other?," *Educational Theory* 52, no. 1 (2002): 1-11.

25 Nick Burbules' essay on this very topic still reads as surprisingly timely and relevant. Nicholas C. Burbules, "The Dilemma of Relevance," *Philosophy of Education 1989*, ed. Ralph Page (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 1990).

26 John A. Clark, "Does Philosophy of Education Have a Future?," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 47, no. 9 (2015), 867.

27 Stephen J. Ball, "The Teacher's Soul and the Terrors of Performativity," *Journal of Educational Policy* 18, no. 2 (2003), 216.

28 Ball, "The Teacher's Soul," 217.

29 Stephanie Mackler, "Learning to Live Well: Re-exploring the Connections Between Philosophy and Education," *Philosophy of Education 2004*, ed. Chris Higgins (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 2005), 297.

30 Tim Kreider, "The Busy Trap," *The New York Times Opinion Pages*, June 30, 2012, available at: https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/30/the-busy-trap/, paragraph 6.

31 Alison Mountz, Anne Bonds, Becky Mansfield, Jenna Loyd, Jennifer Hyndman, Margaret Walton-Roberts, Ranu Basu, Risa Whitson, Roberta Hawkins, Trina Hamilton, and Winifred Curren, "For Slow Scholarship: A Feminist Politics of Resistance through Collective Action in the Neoliberal University," *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 14, no. 4 (2015), 1245.

32 One example I am thinking about here is serving on the promotion and tenure committee at my college and pushing back on the unqualified celebration of the quantity of publications of faculty going up for third year review and promotion. The volume of productivity of my colleagues is increasingly staggering, and at the same time, I also know several who are suffering physical and mental health problems because of working excessively to meet some kind of elusive standard where more is always better. To the extent that our committee lauds unrealistic and unsustainable levels of publication, we create new (albeit unwritten) norms and expectations for those who follow. I pushed us regularly to think also about issues such as quality, sufficiency, and meaningfulness in publications, as well as overall well-roundedness and sustained engagement in teaching and service.

33 Sarah M. Stitzlein's work on pragmatism, democracy, and hopefulness has been particularly influential in my thinking about these issues. I draw some of these habits

here from her essay "Habits of Democracy: A Deweyan Approach to Citizenship Education in America Today," *Education and Culture* 30, no. 2 (2014): 61-86.

34 John Dewey writes about these habits in *How We Think*, located in *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953, Volume 8*, 136-8.

35 Stengel, "So Open it Hurts," 11.

36 Hall, *The Academic Community*, 36.

37 I wrote about the value of slow scholarship more extensively in Kathy Hytten, "Ethical Scholarship and Information Overload: On the Virtue of Slowing Down," *Philosophy of Education 2017*, ed. Ann Chinnery (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, University of Illinois, 2019): 149-161.

38 Perhaps ironically, my citation strategies are a form of the kinds of surviving and subverting I allude to in here. Citing the work that moves me, makes me think differently, and compels me to become a more careful scholar and hopefully a better person, enables it to also count in metrics that matter in the academic world, even as I critique those metrics.

39 See, for example, Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber, *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

40 Barbara S. Stengel, "Cause for Worry or Agenda for Action?" *Educational Theory* 52, no. 3 (2002): 281-290.

41 This strategy is adapted from Stengel, "Cause for Worry or Agenda for Action."

42 Sebastian Junger, *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2016), 22.

43 Oliver, "The Summer Day," 60.