

Mary Warnock: No, I wouldn't, because learning how to do a specific thing is itself an expansion of your powers. Even if it is just producing a note on the flute that you have not been able to produce before, this can give you a new outlook on what you can do, on what lies within your power, and you may even begin to think of all the things you can do with the instrument as a kind of expansion of yourself. At the same time, I think it is very dangerous to say that you have got to teach people how to use a word-processor or computer at school because it will be useful. Technology changes incredibly quickly, so what they learn in school today probably won't be very much use to them the day after tomorrow. I don't believe in very specific tasks, so that pupils can slot into a job when they leave school, or indeed university; but if they can do something at the end of the lesson they couldn't do before this gives them some confidence to go on, which can be tremendously beneficial.

Cogito: Do you think that a philosophy A-Level course can help develop individual potential?

Mary Warnock: I am very much against having philosophy A-Level courses. The study of philosophy ought to be based on the history of the subject, it shouldn't be taken very fast, and it's awfully difficult. What I do believe in greatly is putting a powerful philosophical element into every course, whether it be science or literature or history; but you don't have to call it philosophy. To be critical of the language in which a text is written, and to raise constant questions about whether it means what it says - this is an essential part of any course. It is philosophy but it doesn't have to be called that.

Cogito: One of your central claims has been that the content of the curriculum is a more important issue than equality of opportunity to study the curriculum.

Mary Warnock: I still believe that. Let me say that I am a great believer in comprehensive schools, but when people try to decide what children ought to be taught on the grounds of what is equal or just, then we have moved away from educational considerations and into political considerations that are irrelevant here.

Cogito: But do you believe that education is a political issue?

Mary Warnock: Certainly it is because it is so expensive. But I don't think that all the decisions within education should be taken on political grounds.

Cogito: You said earlier that one question in the philosophy of education is where power is located - whether with the Secretary of State,

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