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EDUCATING FOR WISDOM RATHER THAN INFORMATION: A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

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Abstract

This article undertakes a philosophical inquiry into the aims of education by asking whether schooling should be oriented primarily toward the transmission and accumulation of information or toward the cultivation of wisdom. The article argues that information is necessary to education but insufficient for its purposes. It develops a heuristic progression from information through knowledge and understanding to judgement and wisdom, while rejecting the idea that these capacities form a rigid hierarchy or automatic sequence. The argument draws on philosophical accounts of education, practical wisdom, virtue, flourishing, and dialogue, while using contemporary research on wisdom and educational practice to clarify rather than replace the philosophical analysis. The article contends that the distinctive contribution of education is not simply to increase what learners know but to cultivate their capacity to interpret what they know, deliberate well in particular circumstances, recognise the claims of others, and act responsibly amid uncertainty. Artificial intelligence provides a contemporary illustration of the limits of an information-centred paradigm: when information and plausible answers become abundant, the educational importance of judgement becomes more, not less, apparent. On this basis, the article proposes a wisdom-oriented framework organised around intellectual humility, practical reasoning, dialogue, self-knowledge, civic responsibility, and reflective action.

Keywords: *education; wisdom; information; judgement; practical wisdom; philosophy of education*

Introduction

Contemporary education often operates as though its primary purpose were the transmission of specified content from curriculum to learner, with achievement demonstrated by the learner's capacity to retrieve that content under controlled

conditions. Such a model is not without value: learners require substantive knowledge if they are to reason, communicate, participate in civic life, and develop expertise. The philosophical problem arises when what is relatively easy to specify and measure becomes confused with what is educationally most important. In a digital environment in which data and information are produced, stored, circulated, and transformed at unprecedented scale, the assumption that educational quality is secured by increasing the quantity of information available to learners becomes increasingly difficult to defend (Van Meter, 2020; Peters & Besley, 2019). The issue is therefore not whether information matters. It plainly does. The deeper question is what information is for. A learner may possess extensive information without understanding its significance, evaluating its reliability, recognising its limits, or knowing how to act appropriately in a particular situation. Education, on the argument developed here, should therefore be understood as a form of human formation in which information is taken up into knowledge, knowledge is interpreted through understanding, understanding informs judgement, and judgement is progressively shaped by reflection, experience, and concern for the good. This progression is heuristic rather than hierarchical. The capacities overlap, develop unevenly, and sometimes operate in reverse: a practical problem may generate a need for new knowledge, while experience may expose a limitation in previously held understanding. The framework is useful not because it establishes a universal ladder of development but because it keeps distinct educational questions that are too easily collapsed into the single question of whether a learner knows something. The central claim of this article is consequently normative: education should treat the cultivation of wise judgement and responsible action as a central aim rather than as a fortunate by-product of information acquisition. This does not subordinate knowledge to an anti-intellectual ideal. On the contrary, wise judgement depends upon adequate knowledge and disciplined understanding. The argument is that

information becomes educationally significant when learners can place it within meaningful relations, test it against reasons and evidence, and determine how it should bear upon action. Wisdom, in this sense, names not a quantity of knowledge but an integrative capacity for judging and acting well under conditions in which rules, information, and competing goods do not by themselves determine what ought to be done.

Conceptualising Information, Knowledge, Understanding, and Wisdom

Information may be understood, provisionally, as data interpreted within a context in which it becomes meaningful or usable. Its value depends upon the quality of the underlying data, the processes through which it is produced, and the purposes for which it is interpreted. Van Meter's (2020) critique of the conventional data-information-knowledge-wisdom pyramid is important here because it rejects the assumption that greater quantities of data automatically produce knowledge or wisdom. The relationship among these concepts is better understood as overlapping and contingent. Information may contribute to knowledge, but it may also be inaccurate, irrelevant, decontextualised, or misleading. Knowledge represents a further epistemic achievement. It involves information that has been organised, examined, justified, and integrated into a field of understanding. Knowledge is therefore more than possession. It entails reasons for accepting claims and, in practical domains, some grasp of how to use what one knows. Contemporary philosophical work on practical wisdom emphasises that practical competence cannot be reduced to the possession of propositions; it concerns the ability to deliberate appropriately about action in concrete circumstances (De Caro & Vaccarezza, 2021). Nevertheless, knowledge remains limited when it is treated as sufficient for action. A person may know a rule and still fail to recognise when the rule is relevant, how it conflicts with another consideration, or what its application requires in an unusual case.

Wisdom can then be understood as an integrative form of judgement in which knowledge, understanding, reflection, values, and experience are brought together in the pursuit of appropriate action. Sternberg and Glück (2022) present wisdom as a multidimensional construct connected to knowledge, values, reflection, and the balancing of interests. Aristotelian accounts of phronesis similarly emphasise deliberation about particular action and its connection with virtue, while contemporary scholarship continues to debate precisely how these elements should be related (De Caro & Vaccarezza, 2021; Carr, 2023). It is a cultivated capacity to deliberate responsibly about complex situations, recognise relevant goods and competing interests, acknowledge uncertainty, and act in ways that can be justified to oneself and others. The distinction among the five terms is therefore functional rather than hierarchical. Information supplies material for inquiry; knowledge establishes justified and organised understanding; understanding discloses relations and significance; judgement determines what is appropriate in a particular context; and wisdom integrates these capacities with reflective and ethical orientation. No stage mechanically produces the next. A person may possess knowledge without understanding, understanding without courage to act, or practical experience without sufficiently critical reflection. The heuristic is valuable precisely because it shows why educational success cannot be inferred from information accumulation alone.

Education as Formation: Philosophical Foundations

The argument for wisdom-oriented education begins with a claim about what education is. If education is conceived simply as the delivery of content or the production of measurable competencies, then the accumulation of information will naturally appear to be its central achievement. If education is instead understood as the formation of persons capable of participating responsibly in a shared world, then epistemic achievement must be related to judgement, agency, and responsibility. Biesta's (2022) account of world-centred education is useful because it resists

reducing education either to learner preference or to curriculum delivery. Education involves an encounter with a world that places demands upon learners and calls them to respond. The language of flourishing helps clarify this point, although it must be used cautiously. Contemporary philosophy of education contains competing accounts of whether and how flourishing should function as an educational aim (Carr, 2021; Curren *et al*., 2024). D'Olimpio (2022), for example, argues that education for flourishing must include aesthetic and imaginative experience rather than restricting educational value to narrowly cognitive outcomes. Trask-Kerr *et al*.

Historical Philosophies of Wisdom-Oriented Education

The Socratic tradition provides an influential starting point for thinking about education as an activity of examination rather than mere transmission. Socratic questioning places the learner in a position in which apparently secure beliefs must be defended, clarified, or revised. Its educational significance lies not simply in the discovery of correct answers but in the formation of a disposition toward intellectual examination. Yet Socratic dialogue has limits. Zelinová and Bizoň (2024) show that different forms of Socratic dialogue involve different relationships between teacher, learner, authority, and knowledge, and that questioning does not by itself guarantee positive knowledge or moral development. The lesson for wisdom-oriented education is therefore not that dialogue should replace instruction but that instruction should create opportunities for learners to examine reasons and confront the limits of their own assumptions. Aristotle's conception of phronesis extends this educational concern into the domain of action. Practical wisdom is concerned with determining what should be done in particular circumstances, where action cannot be generated mechanically from general principles. Contemporary interpretations emphasise the importance of practical judgement while also questioning attempts to treat virtue as a psychological state that can simply be installed through education (Carr, 2023). The educational significance of phronesis consequently lies less in

transmitting a catalogue of virtuous behaviours than in developing the capacity to deliberate well about circumstances, ends, means, and consequences.

The Information Paradigm in Contemporary Education

Artificial intelligence provides a particularly clear contemporary illustration of this problem, but it should not be mistaken for the central subject of the argument. Generative AI makes plausible information and formulated responses rapidly available, thereby exposing an older educational assumption: that the possession or production of an answer is evidence of learning. Steele (2023) identifies problems of measurement, information accuracy, and skill devaluation associated with generative AI, while also arguing that such tools can be used to support critical engagement. Lee and Low (2024) emphasise the importance of critical thinking in educational engagement with generative AI, particularly as learners increasingly encounter AI-generated information and responses. The significance of AI for the present argument is therefore diagnostic rather than technological. If a machine can produce an apparently competent answer in seconds, the educational value of simply producing such an answer becomes less distinctive. What remains distinctly educational is the learner's capacity to interrogate the answer, identify its assumptions, judge its relevance, recognise uncertainty, consider its effects on others, and decide whether and how it should be acted upon. The rise of AI consequently strengthens rather than weakens the case for education directed toward judgement. It also reinforces the need to teach learners how to use informational technologies critically rather than treating them either as inherently educational or inherently harmful.

From Knowing More to Judging Better

The distinction between knowing more and judging better is central to the philosophical argument. Information can answer the question 'What is the case?' Knowledge can add justification and organisation. Understanding can clarify why

something is the case and how it relates to other matters. Judgement, however, asks what should be done in a concrete situation when several considerations compete and no available rule is completely decisive. Practical wisdom concerns this space of deliberation. This is why critical thinking, although indispensable, should not be equated with wisdom. Critical thinking helps learners assess evidence, detect inconsistencies, compare interpretations, and revise conclusions. These are necessary conditions for responsible judgement, but they do not exhaust it. A technically sophisticated decision can still be ethically careless. Judgement therefore requires attention not only to truth and evidence but also to context, consequences, competing interests, and the purposes that give action significance. Experience is important because wise judgement cannot be reduced to abstract rules. Sternberg and Glück (2022) emphasise that wisdom develops over time and is connected to reflection on experience. Education cannot manufacture the life experience from which all practical wisdom emerges, but it can provide structured encounters in which learners must interpret experience rather than simply undergo it. Reflection transforms experience into an object of inquiry, while dialogue exposes the learner to perspectives that may challenge an initial interpretation.

Educating for Wisdom: A Philosophical Framework

The preceding analysis supports a wisdom-oriented framework that is offered here as the author's philosophical synthesis rather than as a ready-made empirical model. Its purpose is to translate the central argument into educational commitments without pretending that wisdom can be reduced to a checklist. The framework contains six mutually supporting dimensions: substantive knowledge, intellectual humility, reflective understanding, practical reasoning, dialogical engagement, and responsible action. Wisdom-oriented education requires substantive knowledge. Learners cannot deliberate responsibly about matters they do not understand. The critique of information-centred education must therefore not be interpreted as an

argument for less knowledge. Rather, content should be selected and taught in ways that make its use, limits, relationships, and significance visible. Knowledge provides the material with which judgement works. Education should cultivate intellectual humility. Humility is not intellectual weakness or refusal to reach conclusions. It is the disposition to recognise the limits of one's knowledge, remain open to correction, and distinguish confidence from certainty. In conditions of information abundance, this disposition becomes particularly important because the availability of an answer can create an illusion of epistemic security. Learners require reflective understanding. Reflection asks what an experience, claim, or body of knowledge means and how it should change one's thinking. This dimension prevents learning from becoming a sequence of disconnected performances. It also creates space for self-knowledge, which contemporary research identifies as one important dimension of wisdom-oriented pedagogy (Jakubik, 2024).

Wisdom-oriented education must cultivate practical reasoning. Learners should encounter situations in which competing goods, incomplete information, uncertainty, and unintended consequences make mechanical application of rules inadequate. Practical reasoning asks what matters in the case, which options are available, whose interests are affected, and what course of action can be responsibly defended. Wisdom requires dialogue. Judgement is improved when learners encounter perspectives that they have not generated themselves. Dialogue is not simply classroom talk; it is a disciplined practice of giving reasons, listening, questioning assumptions, and revising one's position. Research on dialogic teaching shows both substantial interest in its educational value and continuing disagreement about how dialogue works across contexts (Asterhan *et al*., 2020). Wisdom-oriented pedagogy should therefore treat dialogue as a practice requiring careful teacher facilitation rather than as an automatic good. Wisdom must ultimately be connected to responsible action. A learner who can articulate sophisticated moral positions but

cannot translate them into responsible conduct has not fully achieved the educational aim defended here. This does not mean that teachers should dictate every moral choice. It means that educational activities should require learners to consider the consequences of their reasoning and to take responsibility for decisions within appropriate boundaries. The practical orientation of phronesis makes this connection between deliberation and action indispensable (De Caro & Vaccarezza, 2021; Carr, 2023).

The Teacher and Learner in Wisdom-Oriented Education

A wisdom-oriented approach changes the role of the teacher without eliminating teacher authority. The teacher remains responsible for selecting worthwhile material, designing intellectually demanding tasks, establishing norms of inquiry, correcting serious errors, and creating conditions in which disagreement can be productive. The teacher's authority is therefore not opposed to learner autonomy. Rather, authority is exercised in ways that enable learners gradually to assume responsibility for their own reasoning. Dialogical and inquiry-based pedagogies are especially relevant because they make reasoning public. A learner must explain a claim, respond to objections, interpret evidence, and sometimes revise a position. These practices develop capacities that are difficult to cultivate through recall-based instruction alone. At the same time, dialogue should not become an excuse for abandoning disciplinary knowledge. The most productive inquiry depends upon sufficient background knowledge and careful teacher guidance. Wisdom-oriented education therefore requires a balance between instruction and inquiry, authority and autonomy, knowledge and reflection (Peters & Besley, 2019).

Reimagining Curriculum and Assessment for Wisdom

A curriculum oriented toward wisdom would not begin by removing established subjects. It would reconsider how subjects are taught and what learners

are expected to do with what they learn. History, literature, science, mathematics, social studies, health education, and the arts can all contribute to wisdom when learners are asked to interpret evidence, examine assumptions, consider consequences, encounter alternative perspectives, and connect disciplinary knowledge with significant human questions. Jakubik's (2024) four dimensions—knowing ourselves, connecting to others, knowing the world, and connecting to the world—provide one useful contemporary point of reference for thinking about this broader curricular orientation. Assessment presents a more difficult problem. Wisdom cannot be assessed as easily as factual recall because wise judgement is context-sensitive, developmental, and often visible only across multiple performances. This does not mean that it is educationally invisible. Schools can assess the quality of reasoning through portfolios, extended projects, case analyses, reflective journals, oral examinations, deliberative tasks, and carefully designed performance assessments. Such approaches can examine whether learners identify relevant evidence, acknowledge uncertainty, consider alternative perspectives, justify conclusions, and reflect on the consequences of decisions. The purpose of these assessments should not be to produce a single 'wisdom score'. Doing so would reproduce the very reductionism the article criticises. Instead, assessment should generate evidence of developing capacities and provide feedback that supports further formation. Teachers might ask whether a learner can revise an argument when confronted with stronger evidence, distinguish a relevant consideration from a distracting one, recognise a conflict between legitimate goods, or explain why a particular action is proportionate to the circumstances. These are assessable performances even if wisdom itself remains too complex to be captured by one instrument.

Philosophical and Practical Challenges of Wisdom-Centred Education

The first challenge concerns definition. Wisdom is contested across philosophy, psychology, and educational theory, and different traditions emphasise different combinations of knowledge, reflection, virtue, wellbeing, spirituality, social responsibility, or practical judgement (Pishchanska *et al*., 2022; Sternberg & Glück, 2022). A curriculum that claims to teach wisdom must therefore make its assumptions visible. It cannot simply present one culturally situated conception as if it were universally self-evident. This challenge becomes sharper in culturally plural educational settings. Conceptions of a good life differ across communities and traditions, and even within a single tradition there may be disagreement about the relative importance of autonomy, relationships, achievement, virtue, spirituality, aesthetic experience, or social responsibility. Trask-Kerr *et al*. (2024) show that adolescents' accounts of the good life include important relational and achievement-oriented dimensions while giving less prominence to moral virtue than a strongly Aristotelian account might. A wisdom-oriented curriculum should therefore cultivate the capacity to engage plural conceptions critically rather than simply imposing a predetermined conception of flourishing. The second challenge is the danger of paternalism. If education claims to cultivate wisdom, who decides what counts as wise? Teachers and institutions possess authority, but that authority can become morally intrusive if it is used to prescribe a comprehensive way of life. The response should not be to abandon formation altogether, since every educational system already privileges some dispositions. A more defensible approach is to distinguish between cultivating capacities for responsible judgement and prescribing all substantive conclusions. Learners can be taught to reason about justice, responsibility, human flourishing, and competing conceptions of the good without being required to adopt one comprehensive worldview.

Conclusion

The article's philosophical contribution is to frame the relation among information, knowledge, understanding, judgement, and wisdom as a heuristic structure for thinking about educational purpose. The movement is not a rigid ladder and does not claim that one capacity automatically generates another. Rather, it clarifies a set of educational distinctions: information supplies material, knowledge organises and justifies it, understanding interprets its significance, judgement determines its bearing on particular circumstances, and wisdom integrates these capacities with reflection and responsible action. The implications extend beyond the classroom. If education is understood as preparation for responsible participation in a shared world, then its ultimate achievement cannot be measured solely by how much information learners can retain or retrieve. The deeper achievement is the formation of persons who can use what they know with discernment, humility, and responsibility. Education should therefore seek not simply to produce informed people, but people capable of making wise use of being informed. That is the sense in which educating for wisdom offers a fuller account of what education is for.

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