Mummy, Mummy! What's the philosophy of education?

Be quiet, dear, and eat up your beef-flavoured soya burger. Mummy's trying to find her diazepam for OFSTED's inspection tomorrow.

But what is it?

Well, dear, it's an intellectual pursuit that's been going on for thousands of years which asks fundamental questions about the nature of education.

But *daddy* says that it's about defining words.

Daddy's still strapped into his armchair babbling about the meaning of 'pedagogy', and the doctor says he may never snap out of it. Daddy's right though, insofar as that's all it seems to do most of the time.

And what do they say 'pedagogy' means?

Usually they either try to define it finally and never do, or end up saying it depends on the context. But there are other conceptions of philosophy, such as the 'underlabourer' idea.

What's that?

It sees philosophy as a means of clearing away obstacles to progress, unknotting the mind like an intellectual massage. A Greek philosopher called Socrates - he was in that Bill and Ted film I let you watch last night - said he was like a midwife: rather than giving birth to ideas about the world himself, he helped others to give birth to their ideas and to avoid complications along the way. So, rather than trying to finally define 'pedagogy' or saying it just depends on the time and place, this kind of philosophy tries to point out and help when people are being contradictory or muddle-headed. So, in education it has plenty of work to do!

Isn't that what daddy's doing?

Well, he would be but he strapped himself into the armchair in his study and won't come out to talk to anybody.

Is anybody doing it?

Well, there's critical realists like Roy Bhaskar, who showed how many people's understanding of what science does is completely wrong and so debates over whether other disciplines should be 'scientific' or not were arguing over the wrong thing ... there now, you've got me going and it's time for bed. Run along now...

Mummy, makes a subject into a 'discipline'?