

## Book Review

# Philosophy of Education: Introductory Readings, 4<sup>th</sup> edition

William Hare & John P. Portelli, editors  
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With its collection of 18 accessible essays, the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of *Philosophy of Education: Introductory Readings* is a welcome addition to the canon of edited philosophy of education textbooks. Although the editors emphasize its purpose as a text for undergraduate or pre-service students in faculties of education, the typical time constraints on foundations courses make it unlikely that the 472-page volume would be read in its entirety over a semester. Although written for undergraduate students of education, *Philosophy of Education* would be entirely appropriate for graduate students, and each of its six sections could be stand-alone readings for in-depth, rather than survey courses, both within education and across disciplines such as law, philosophy, and sociology.

Demonstrating a more balanced gender ratio than many similar texts, 15 out of the 33 contributors are women. All the chosen authors are well suited to usage in Canadian postsecondary classrooms, with 18 of the contributors listing a Canadian institutional affiliation. Each of the six sections features an introduction by the editors, which stresses how a deep consideration of theory and solid grounding in philosophy underpin meaningful K-12 classroom teaching and are important for beginning teachers to consider. Indeed, applicability to practice and getting readers comfortable with big questions and unresolved ideals is central to all four essays in *Part 1: Philosophy, Theory, and Practice*.

*Part 2: Classroom Discussions and Controversial Issues* is especially well suited for aspiring social studies teachers, whose subject matter is the assumed home of controversies, ethics, and debates. Ruitenberg's essay on relativism and judgment can be taken up not just in navigating classroom discussions on subject matter but in professional discussions outside of the classroom. The authors in *Part 3: Democratic Education and Social Justice*, and Noddings and Conway in particular, introduce concepts of caring and compassion that are not typically acknowledged in these topics. This slant is especially welcome for pre-service teachers aspiring to join a caring profession.

In terms of readability and coherence, the order of *Part 4: Standards, Efficiency, and Measurement* and *Part 5: Rights, Freedoms, and Conflicts in Education* might have been better reversed, as the section on rights and freedoms flows much more naturally from earlier sections on controversial issues and social justice. With testing and standards increasingly making headlines in Canada, particularly when the Fraser Report's annual grading of all the nation's schools is released (Bennett, 2013; Mason, 2012), Part 4 is a timely collection, encouraging

beginning teachers to reflect on what standards are, who designed them, and for what ends. Part 5 might well have been titled *legal* rights, freedoms, and conflicts in education, as three of its essays hinge on analyses of important Canadian legal cases with regard to educational policies and practices. The remaining two offer careful considerations of morality and include faith-based morality within public education.

Finally, *Part 6: Conceptions of Education and Teaching* is a tidy bookend to the introduction of theory and the foundations in Part 1. It is a minor quibble that none of the four authors in this concluding section are affiliated with Canadian postsecondary institutions. However, ending the collection with influential and internationally known thinkers such as Maxine Greene and Jane Roland Martin provide a strong finish to an enjoyable and beautifully curated text.

The 4<sup>th</sup> edition of *Philosophy of Education: Introductory Readings* boasts a number of merits that make it attractive for students and scholars alike. The work of seminal theorists such as John Dewey is comprehensively covered across the essays, which is especially important for undergraduate students who may not read it in its original format. Similarly, influential educational policy discourses such as neoliberalism are taken up from various angles by a number of the contributors, particularly in Parts 3 and 4, leaving readers with a rich sense of how competing ideologies jostle for dominance among educators.

A number of the essays also explicitly address the professional rights, responsibilities, and considerations that teachers will grapple with throughout their careers. Clarke and MacDougall's essay, *Crossing the Line: Homophobic Speech and Public School Teachers*, is one of several essays that sets a precedent for Canadian legal cases and provides an overview of how teachers can balance their rights to free speech and religious belief with their professional obligations as public school teachers. In so doing, the book provides adequate grounding for pre-service teachers to participate fully in conversations and decision-making pertaining to the state of their profession, both within professional settings like teachers associations or unions and private settings with colleagues and non-teachers.

*Philosophy of Education*, like any text, has some limitations. Authors Forrest and Simpson and Hull have a tendency to promote concepts such as democracy without really substantiating what they mean. Pinto's essay, titled *The Case for Critical Democracy*, explains the concept but feels unbalanced. With all of Pinto's examples sandwiched at the end, the opening three-quarters of the essay is difficult to digest for those readers without a background in political science. Given that many of the contributors unreservedly conceive of schools as places for the promotion of democracy, the absence of a chapter on actual democratic schools or the mention of places like Summerhill in the United Kingdom or Windsor House in Vancouver, British Columbia, seems like an oversight.

Similarly, there is no essay on childhood theory or children's subjectivities. These concepts are not taken up in any meaningful way throughout the volume. While the collection does an excellent job explaining the purposes and aims of education, it does not take up the question of education *for whom?* in any substantive way. Gereluks and Bai's essay hints at the unique subjectivity of the child but this tends to position the child as a future citizen rather than a citizen now. Including an essay on the children purportedly being educated with a focus on the social contexts of childhood, such as the roles of families and communities in children's lives and their education, would round out the volume.

Overall, the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of *Philosophy of Education: Introductory Readings* more than accomplished its goal of introducing the foundations to pre-service teachers in a practical and

cohesive way. Hare and Portelli struck a fine balance between older and well-recognized pieces with newer scholarly work, as well as a healthy proportion of essays that reflected on the unique peculiarities of the Canadian education system. It is highly recommended to anyone teaching undergraduate or graduate philosophy, history, and sociology of education, as well as readers who are interested in the philosophy of education more broadly.

### References

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