

Book Review

Philosophical, Ideological, and Theoretical Perspectives on Education, 2nd edition

Gerald L. Gutek

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In this carefully revised edition, Gutek shares recent “trends in philosophy of education,” including “the cultural foundation of education, especially the interrelationships between philosophies, ideologies, and theories of education” (pp. iv-v). To do so, he has included 17 chapters in three parts: *Philosophies and Education*; *Ideologies and Education*; and *Theories and Education*. Parts 1 and 3 have six chapters and Part 2 has five. This second edition has been updated by including revised chapters on idealism, realism, existentialism, pragmatism, and postmodernism. The book demonstrates a close reading of philosophy of education and there is a general overview of philosophy, ideology, and theory followed by a discussion and identification of each principle and “its implications for education, schooling, curriculum, and instruction” (p. v). Throughout the book, text is supported with figures, tables, photographs, notes, project suggestions, and the author’s reflection on philosophy of education. Overall, it is a coherent book informed by the growing scholarly work on various themes in philosophy of education such as the importance that readers construct their own philosophy of education, reflect, and form their own conceptual frameworks. The chapters are written so that each one can stand alone or be used in a different order if the instructor wishes.

Part 1, *Philosophies and Education*, discusses major areas of philosophy, such as metaphysics, epistemology, axiology, and logic. Chapter 1 focuses on their relevance for education especially for informal and formal learning, schooling, curriculum, methods of instruction, and relationships between students and teachers. Metaphysics relates to educational theory and practice and tries to describe certain aspects of reality to students in various subjects, such as history, physics, and geography. Epistemology is closely related to methods of learning and teaching and considers the methods appropriate for imparting knowledge. Axiology is concerned with value theory, which encompasses ethics, aesthetics, and social and political philosophy, and provides a sense of identity, purpose, and community to society. Finally, logic is concerned with how instructional materials are organized for better teaching and learning experiences.

Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 respectively introduce readers to idealism, realism, pragmatism, existentialism, and postmodernism. An idealist educator advocates for “a subject-matter curriculum that emphasizes truths gained from enduring theological, philosophical, historical, literary, and artistic works” (p. 42). Realism is a belief in universal truth and values. According to realists, curriculum consists of “conceptual systems organized into subject-matter disciplines”

(p. 70). Pragmatism rejects idealism and emphasises issues such as how we think, what we know, and how we use our hypotheses as tentative plans to control and direct change. Existentialism argues for an authentic education. In this tradition, students construct their identities through relationships with their teachers. Finally, postmodernism frees our thinking about gender, race, sexual orientation, and ethnicity, and postmodernists tend to warn against “allowing one frame of reference to dominate education” (p. 163).

In Part 2, *Ideologies and Education*, Gutek discusses “how groups use a selective interpretation of history to construct their identity” (p. 190). He demonstrates, in Chapter 7, that although similarities exist between ideologies and philosophies, ideologies are contextual and action-oriented while philosophies are more general and abstract. Chapter 8 discusses topics such as nationalism, American exceptionalism, and ethnonationalism with respect to collective consciousness, collective national memory, history, and myth. Gutek warns educational researchers against the strident ethnonationalism and extreme nationalism in school systems and suggests developing “multicultural sensitivity and pedagogical skills to educate diverse groups” (p.211).

Chapters 9, 10, and 11 are dedicated to discussion of ideologies of liberalism, conservatism, and Marxism. In Chapter 9, liberalism and education thinkers such as John Locke, Herbert Spencer, and John Stuart Mill along with their conceptual contributions to liberal education are presented. For Gutek, liberal thought manifests itself in education through processes, procedures, and gradual, moderate, and incremental changes. Gutek shows his fear of the tyranny of the majority in his reflections as a school board member. He reflects upon how he, along with other board members, tried to solve the school district’s problems, and many of their “decisions were based on votes of four to three” (p. 244). Chapter 10 showcases Edmund Burke as an originator of conservative cultural civility, which focuses on the preservation, maintenance, and reproduction of the cultural heritage in education. This chapter also reflects upon how contemporary neo-conservatism, “a protective ideology that reacts against attacks on its core beliefs and values, especially from a counter-theory and ideology, such as Liberalism or counter-theory such as Critical theory” (p. 265), has been influencing the revival of “academic subject matter curriculum” and testing in the United States (p, 270).

Dialectic materialism, historical materialism, analysis of capitalism, and Marxist educational implications are the topics of Chapter 11. Gutek provides an overview of Karl Marx’s philosophy and examines Marxist concepts of dialectical materialism, the means and modes of production, production of commodities and alienation, class struggle between the capitalists and the proletariat, false consciousness, and the role of the vanguard of the proletariat. Although Marx was directly concerned with economic and political themes, he focused on polytechnical education and tried to expose false ideology constructed to support and defend capitalism through it. Gutek argues that a Marxist-influenced educator considers school as a place “where contending groups struggle for power and control” (p. 291). Gutek also introduces the role of teachers as agents in raising students’ consciousness and the impact of economic conditions and class on society and school. He concludes by suggesting that there are other ways of looking at life, culture, society, and education, in addition to the economic lens.

In Part 3, Chapter 12, *Theory and Education*, Gutek considers theory as a bridge between philosophy and ideology and practice, stating that any “philosophy of education inevitably brings you to theorizing about education” (p. 299). Chapter 13 focuses on essentialism. Adherents assert that education’s primary mission is to transmit the civilized cultural heritage by teaching essential skills and subjects to students. The remaining four chapters deal with

perennialism, progressivism, social construction, and critical theory respectively. Gutek illustrates how progressivism has continued “to exert an ongoing influence on contemporary education” (p. 384), as it promotes social and educational change and reform in society. Perennialism offers an alternative to more process-oriented approaches to education and has appeared as the “Great Books curriculum” in American Education (p. 341). Social construction was originated as a response to social and economic crises and it has continuing relevance for education in that it emphasises how that culture’s viable elements are to be reconstructed in school curriculum.

Chapter 17, the final chapter of this edition, examines the ideological and philosophical influences of Marxism, liberation pedagogy, and postmodernism on critical theory. Gutek states that “Marxist concepts such as the economic base of society, class struggle for control of the means and modes of production, and alienation” have influenced critical theory and critical theorists have used these “concepts as tools to analyse society, education, and schools” rather than creating a revolutionary society (p. 423). Liberation pedagogy, on the other hand, is concerned with economically disadvantaged people and empowerment and influences critical theorists to think of the struggle to empower dispossessed and marginalized groups in the United States. Postmodernism influences critical theory in giving insight to the ability of language in constructing and deconstructing texts and canons. Gutek argues that by “deconstructing the canon or text, it is possible to get to the motives and purposes of those who constructed them” (p. 425). Critical theorists argue that “political, economic, and educational institutions, including schools, in a capitalist economy, maintain and reproduce inequitable and exploitative conditions that favour one group or class” (p. 443). Gutek describes strategies for liberating schools from the control of dominant groups and ways to make the schools into agencies of human liberation.

On the whole, the second edition of *Philosophical, Ideological, and Theoretical Perspectives on Education* is well written. Each chapter is followed by a set of questions for reflections and discussion, topics for inquiry and research, and a select list of references. Gutek encourages teachers to construct their own philosophy of education. He suggests that “professors might want to use this book as a structural framework that relates philosophies, ideologies, and theories of education” (p. v). This is also an excellent introductory book for baccalaureate education students or pre-service teachers, however, anyone interested in philosophy of education could start with this book, and researchers will find it useful for finding references.

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