

# **Philosophy of Education: Introductory Readings (William Hare and John Portelli (Eds.)) and Teaching, Schools and Society (Evelina Orteza y Miranda and Romulo F. Magsino (Eds.))**

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**William Hare and John Portelli (Eds.), *Philosophy of Education: Introductory Readings* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1988).**

**Evelina Orteza y Miranda and Romulo F. Magsino (Eds.), *Teaching, Schools and Society*. (London, New York, and Philadelphia: The Falmer Press, 1990).**

Reviewing a collection of readings is never easy, and reviewing two together is a formidable task. I shall approach the task by examining each of the two collections (both edited by Canadian philosophers of education) in light of several criteria which such collections should reasonably be expected to meet.

In general, a collection of readings should meet the demands of the following questions:

1. Does the collection have a clearly stated and useful purpose? Do its contents adhere to this purpose?

2. Is there reasonable coherence between the different readings? That is, are they compatible enough with one another that they do not appear to be strange bedfellows?

3. Does the collection represent an interesting but manageable scope in terms of topic and point of view? Scope must be balanced with coherence. A collection should not be so narrowly focused that the reading of it becomes humdrum and without surprises. Moving from one chapter to the next should lend the reader the pleasant sensation of shifting gears in a sports car on a hilly highway -- noticeable but smooth, bringing each time the small thrill of a new, speed with which to meet a curve or the crest of a hill.

4. Are the readings in the collection well sequenced? If I may prolong the sports car metaphor a moment longer, imagine the discomfort of starting the car in third gear, downshifting to first and then jerking into fourth. There must be a logical movement up and down the gears to give a comfortable ride.

5. Are each of the chapters in the collection well-written and interesting?

Hare and Portelli, editors of *Philosophy of Education: Introductory Readings*, state that the book's main purpose is use in initial teacher education philosophy of education courses. Secondly, it may be used in teacher in-service courses and as a resource for graduate students. For any of these purposes, it should serve well, since it is a coherent but wide-ranging compilation of thirty articles, many of them classics in philosophy of education. Introductory philosophy of education professors need scurry no more to the photostat machine to copy selections from diverse dog-eared books. The job is done nicely here.

The book has seven sections, each with from three to six readings, and after each section there is a list of suggested further readings.

The first section is called "Theory and Practice." The readings here explore some fundamental questions about the nature and role of philosophy of

education, and, in Entwistle's classic article, about the relationship between theory and practice. This acts as a good grounding for the sections that follow. In the second section on "Needs, Interests and Relevance," students are introduced via Dearden's piece on needs to the business of conceptual analysis, and led to explore the ways curriculum decisions are justified in terms of needs, interests, and relevance. Looking at these notions opens for students the whole business of educational jargon and catch-phrases which often remained unexplored and unexplained.

Section three, "Open-mindedness, Critical Thinking and Indoctrination," asks about the nature of critical thinking and open-mindedness, and contrasts these with indoctrination and dogmatism. The point is made in the introduction to this section that such negatives as indoctrination and dogmatism exist "not because the school system is shot through with miseducation, but ... as a result of critical faculties which are dormant." The editors are consistent in selecting and commenting on articles with a critical, but not a cynical, eye turned to education. The purpose of philosophy of education is not analysis for its own sake, nor is it the exposing of weaknesses for the sheer joy of exercising one's own cleverness. It is "a critical inquiry into educational concepts, values, and practices, and ... such reflections have an important bearing on educational decisions." This stance makes the book accessible to its intended audience.

In the fourth section, "Controversial Issues and Neutrality," we look with Dearden, Mary Warnock, and Maxine Greene at how hegemony operates through the curriculum and through teachers. The fifth section, "Approaches to Teaching," moves further into some specifics about how and why teachers might discuss philosophy with children, the relationship of the Socratic approach to today's classroom, and what feminism has to contribute to classroom discussion. It is here and in the sixth section, "Moral Education," that we look in the most focused way at day to day life in classrooms. Strangely, this is somewhat unsettling at first, perhaps because, through attention to analysis and the building of arguments, much philosophy keeps more distance from what teachers and children might actually do together in classrooms.

The seventh and last section, "Ideals, Aims and Rights," is well placed. While one might argue that talk of these should precede all else since a clear sense of one's position in these areas should underlie educational decisions, in fact, students may be better able to reflect on ideals, aims, and rights after doing some conceptual work and reading debate on specific approaches to practice.

The Miranda and Magsino collection, *Teaching, Schools and Society*, takes as its theme the "tasks, processes, and context" of schooling, and seeks, in its seven sections, to view schooling through the different lenses offered by the foundational disciplines. The stated purpose of the volume is to help educators, educational critics, and laypersons "understand what schooling is all about and how it can attain its legitimate aims." This is an ambitious goal, and while Miranda and Magsino have done a good job of grouping and sequencing the chapters, the book is too broad in scope to really work as a collection. The fact that there is something here about everything -- the history of schooling, the tasks of the school, curriculum, the classroom, teaching and learning, the school and society, the teaching profession -- is both the strength and the weakness of the book.

On the one hand, the reader is certainly enlightened by looking at educa-

tion via history, philosophy, sociology and psychology, the articles are for the most part good ones, and it is handy to have one volume which offers quick reference to a bit of everything. This is something like having a convenience store down the block: you can nip in at any time and know you will find an item or two from each of the food groups. However, if you're really interested in a good selection of fresh vegetables or baked goods, you are likely to go to a specialty store.

Given a more narrow focus, some of these articles might have been combined more successfully. For instance, there are chapters on teaching in two different sections of the book covering teacher education, instructional psychology and teaching, and the authority, rights and obligations of teachers. A smaller volume, looking specifically at teaching through different disciplines might have effectively combined these articles and several others. But here the cumulative effect of reflecting on teaching is somewhat lost because the articles are separated and because there is so much else to reflect on. Looking at the different topics in the book through one discipline, or looking at one topic through several disciplines would have been more useful. We have in this book different disciplines *and* different topics, and the result is a collection useful as a set of references but too broad to have real coherence.

As the purposes of these two books are somewhat different, they are not really comparable, but as a collection, measured against the criteria listed earlier, the Hare and Portelli book is the more successful.

Reviewed by Deborah Court

**Clive Beck, *Better Schools: A Values Perspective* (New York: The Falmer Press, 1990).**

At a time when "the starry heavens above" are easily mistaken for anti-aircraft and missile fire, I read Professor Beck's recent book as one which exhorts us to look again at "the moral order within" -- specifically within the embodiments of ourselves that are our schools and society -- and to ask whether we, as teachers, philosophers, administrators, and parents, are not also mistaking the ultimate purposes of our educational acts. *Better Schools* is a very clearly thought-out and elegantly written book by an accomplished philosopher and writer who has devoted decades to the study of its topics and concerns. I believe the book will, or at least should, become a standard text and reference for a wide variety of issues, and a wide range of graduate and under-graduate courses, within the areas of "Foundations," "Administration," and "Curriculum Studies."

The book asks and addresses two fundamental questions. First, if we are not to myopically view the teaching of concepts, skills, and values as if these were ends in themselves, then what ultimately should we take the genuine goals of schooling to be? Second, what is to be the actual form and means which the direction of educational reform requires if we are to realize these goals? Both questions are motivated by and consistently address Beck's two-fold assessment of the present performance of schools. On the one hand, Beck contends that "the performance of schools might well be described as scandalous. ...