***Philosophical Inquiry in Education*, Volume 32 (2025), No. 1, pp. 85-89**

Review of

Philosophical Foundations of Education

Edited by Winston C. Thompson, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023

SARA HARDMAN
Teachers College, Columbia University

Philosophical Foundations of Education (2023), edited by Winston C. Thompson, offers readers an insightful overview of the philosophical questions, texts, and thinkers that speak to some of the most central contemporary educational topics. It is the first volume in the *Educational Foundations* series, edited by Bruce Maxwell and Lauren Bialystok, which also comprises volumes on history, sociology, policy, economics, and law. Despite the fact that this series addresses educational foundations from disparate academic disciplines, each volume speaks to the same topics – such as curriculum, teaching, and assessment – in the same order. As such, the series can be read either "horizontally or vertically" – that is, either horizontally across a singular book or vertically, reading the same chapter theme across multiple volumes. This is a clever way to construct a series. While I have read only horizontally, beginning with *Philosophical Foundations of Education*, I admit that this construction has instilled in me a desire to read along a vertical orientation as well.

When I do begin this vertical pursuit, I have no doubt that I will be grateful to have begun with *Philosophical Foundations of Education*. This is because Thompson and the other authors of this volume clearly articulate how a philosophical perspective not only offers responses to the designated topics but informs how we should think about and question these topics in the first place. Perhaps, however, Thompson says it best in his excellent introduction when he writes, "This book is a gentle invitation to the field of philosophy of education, simultaneously provided as a description and a demonstration of the very same" (p. 6). And I, myself a philosopher of education, very much see this dynamic at play in each of the seven chapters of the volume.

The overarching aim of this book is to demonstrate how the field of philosophy of education responds to contemporary educational issues. The authors have taken great care to include many diverse voices in this text. As Thompson admits in the first chapter, the field has historically maintained a primarily Western focus. This is changing, however, as the discipline itself grows more globalized, and the authors demonstrate this well by depicting "a global view of philosophy of education" (p. 1). Through reading this volume, I learned for the first time about several thinkers, including the group Ikhwan al-Safa and N'Dri Assié-Lumumba, from different times and parts of the world who have something worthwhile to offer philosophy of education.

Philosophical Foundations of Education is a useful resource for scholars at any stage of their career. People new to the field will find this a comprehensive and accessible introduction to philosophical engagement with education. They will learn how contemporary educational topics and debates can be informed by philosophical discourse, and they will feel better equipped to enter into this conversation

themselves. New scholars will also get to witness how the authors of this book, each a notable scholar in the field, take a philosophical approach to addressing disparate educational topics, which attend to both the "wider conceptual and institutional contexts of schooling" and "matters closer to pedagogy and instructions" (p. vii). More seasoned scholars will also benefit from reading this volume, for several reasons, including the fact that it offers useful literature reviews on specific educational topics. In addition, such scholars will surely benefit from the global approach to this book; they will come away from the text with an increased recognition of diverse voices that can contribute to their own scholarship and pedagogy. I expound upon this further in the following paragraphs, where I explain each chapter in more detail.

The first chapter, titled "Mapping the Field" and written by Thompson, seems well suited for people completely new to philosophy of education, as it provides an overview of some foundational aspects of the discipline. This includes an explanation of philosophical methodologies that researchers within the field typically use, as well as a discussion of philosophical movements across history that have contributed to the conversation of philosophy of education. In addition, Thompson informs the readers of topics that contemporary scholars in the field return to consistently, such as moral education and civic education. He ends by providing information on professional societies and academic journals dedicated to philosophy of education.

In the second chapter, "Purposes of Education," Liz Jackson examines how philosophers across time and place have responded differently to this fundamental topic. Because this topic has been so widely discussed for so long, Jackson addresses why it is necessary to continue discussing the purposes of education. Simply put, philosophers of education, Jackson says, regard it as essential to return to this question as educational contexts change and tensions between competing values arise (p. 36). In Jackson's comparison of various responses, she takes care to include many diverse perspectives. For example, she examines how the purpose of education has been discussed in Indigenous philosophy, Confucian philosophy, and religious philosophies, including Islam and Christian philosophies.

In chapter three, "Curriculum," Lynda Stone and Daniel P. Gibboney, Jr. take a "histories of ideas" approach to the topic (p. 56). In other words, the authors present philosophers from three different historical periods who have contributed to our understanding of educational curriculum, including its sources, forms, and reforms. I appreciated how Stone and Gibboney's contribution interwove seminal thinkers in the field as well as important, yet less discussed, philosophers. For example, their chapter addresses popular thinkers such as Plato, Rousseau, and Dewey alongside the Ikhwan al-Safa, Friedrich Fröebel, and Ivan Illich. Including such diverse voices provides a rich philosophical response to the question of educational curriculum. The point of this chapter is not to dictate curricula as such, but to allow readers to critically question the sources and functions of curriculum, particularly as it is situated at the crossroads of society and schooling.

Yusef Waghid provides a philosophical discussion of schooling in the fourth chapter, "Schools and Education Systems." In this ambitious chapter, Waghid examines the dialogical relationship among philosophy of education, schools, and society. He takes seriously the notion that "schools reproduce society and simultaneously also explain it" (p. 79) as he addresses this topic from a global perspective, touching upon Anglo-Saxon, African, and Muslim philosophies of education. Waghid's central focus is to think about how various philosophies have impacted, or led to the creation of, actual schools, such as the Beacon Hill School, Hull House, and the Waldorf schools, to name just a few. He also considers the

way that philosophy of education speaks specifically to civic education and civic action across a range of global contexts.

In the fifth chapter, "Learning and Human Development," Paul Standish and Naoko Saito examine the relationship between the two titular concepts as understood throughout history. In their discussion of classical and modern conceptions, they touch upon the ideas of Confucius, Plato, Descartes, and Rousseau. Moving into more contemporary conceptions, the authors discuss developmental psychology, progressive education, childhood, and *Bildung*. They end by discussing the language-oriented account of development put forward by Stanley Cavell, who echoes Ralph Waldo Emerson, and they suggest that this account might better respond to "the natural disturbing passages of experience" we undergo as humans than traditional linear notions of development (p. 120).

In the sixth chapter, "Teaching and Teacher Education," Carrie Winstanley and Janet Orchard discuss how philosophy can play a multifaceted role for teachers: it can be "harnessed as a lens for considering [educational] issues and also it can provide tools for tackling questions raised" (p. 126). Many issues in teaching are inherently philosophical, the authors argue, and thus teachers can potentially benefit from using philosophy to reflect upon specific issues that inevitably arise in their profession. The authors assert, for example, that philosophy can help educators think through teacher identities, concepts of the "good teacher," and the ethical, moral, and political responsibilities inherent in the role. For this reason, Winstanley and Orchard argue that philosophy is useful for teachers at all stages of their career, and would thus be a welcome inclusion to teacher education programs.

Finally, in the seventh chapter, "Assessment and Evaluation," Andrew Davis critically examines the function of testing within education and considers whether it improves or detracts from learning. Davis incorporates contemporary perspectives both in support of and critical of standardized assessments in schools, although he makes clear that he is personally skeptical of the benefits of testing. After examining standardized testing in relation to concepts such as justice and fairness, Davis ultimately uncovers a dissonance between these ideas. He asserts that "testing cannot pinpoint learning precisely" (p. 158) and concludes by arguing that in contemporary democracies, it is not obvious that "using assessment for accountability is in the interest of those being educated" (p. 168).

While there are many reasons why this book is an excellent resource for anyone interested in the philosophy of education, there are two that I take to be most significant. One, mentioned previously, is the fact that the authors throughout this volume include many diverse voices, which they put into conversation with some of the most longstanding and prevalent Western philosophers within the field. The latter category includes thinkers such as Plato, Rousseau, and Dewey, whose work is discussed in multiple chapters throughout this text. Yet by examining these thinkers in relation to less referred to and understood philosophers from the global context, even scholars most familiar with their writings might consider them in a new light.

I particularly appreciated the recurring consideration of Confucian philosophy, such as in relation to the purposes of education, human development, and teaching, as well as Muslim philosophy, elaborated on in relation to the themes of curriculum and schooling. Also considered are African philosophies, Indian philosophies, and Indigenous philosophies. It was elucidating to read about the ideas of thinkers such as Martianus Capella, the group known as Ikhwan al-Safa, and Rabindranath Tagore in relation to questions central to the field. Not only do the authors incorporate diverse philosophers, they also include many examples from the global context, rather than a mostly Western-centred context. In his chapter on schooling, for instance, Waghid puts forward accounts of citizenship education in schools

across the Middle East, Russia, Turkey, China, Africa, Europe, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

While, as Thompson notes, the field of philosophy of education has primarily included voices from the Western cannon, the authors in this volume demonstrate that the most central questions in the field have been considered across time and place – from the ancient world to the contemporary one, and from every continent. Moreover, it is worth noting that the authors themselves hail from many parts of the globe, including Asia, Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This makes them well positioned to speak to such perspectives. As scholars of the field, we would benefit from better understanding more global perspectives on these issues, which readers of this book will certainly glean. Speaking for myself, my own understanding of philosophy of education has been expanded as a result of reading this book.

In addition, this volume accomplished what Thompson noted in his introduction: it offered both a "description and demonstration" of the philosophy of education. Winstanley and Orchard demonstrate the art of philosophical questioning in relation to the profession of teaching, and Jackson uses this to critically reflect upon the purpose of education. Standish and Saito, Waghid, and Stone and Gibboney all demonstrate philosophical comparison and synthesis in their respective discussions on human development, schooling, and curriculum. In his chapter on assessment, Davis puts forward an incisive philosophical critique of standardized testing. The use of philosophical methods found in the book will be particularly helpful to new scholars of the field. They will learn about philosophy while witnessing it in action. They will recognize that philosophers of education have an expansive intellectual tradition upon which they ground their thinking. And through engaging with this philosophical methodology, readers will expand their own ability to enter the conversation.

That said, while the book did well in highlighting a diverse set of voices from a global perspective, I thought a couple of philosophical disciplines were conspicuously absent. In particular, critical educational theory was specifically addressed only in Chapter 4, and feminist philosophy was not specifically addressed at all except in passing reference to some feminist thinkers such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Nel Noddings. These are important and increasingly popular disciplines within contemporary discourse of philosophy of education. New scholars in particular would benefit from understanding the ways these disciplines are used within the field and how they contribute to the conversation within the history of philosophy of education.

In addition, while many different philosophical methods were employed throughout, at times this made it difficult to put the chapters into conversation with each other. As mentioned, some chapters provided a survey of various philosophical texts related to the topic, while others used philosophy to interrogate a subject. Still others put forward a specific philosophical argument. For this reason, even though some chapters naturally spoke to one another, other connections were more difficult to forge. For example, due to their differences in method and content, I found the chapters on curriculum and assessment – which drew from a history of ideas and contemporary scholarship perspectives, respectively – difficult to put into conversation with one another, despite the fact that in actual teaching practice they are inherently connected. I detected a similarly disconnect between the potentially overlapping chapters on schools and on learning and human development. It could have been helpful for the authors to speak to one another more explicitly in order for readers to easily trace the cohesive thread throughout.

Finally, this book has raised some questions regarding my own understanding of the field. These questions primarily relate to the relationship between the roles of philosopher and educator. For example,

how can an educator use the philosophical methods demonstrated in this text to inform their teaching? How can a philosophical understanding of assessment or curriculum inform one's role as an educator, constrained by the particular demands of their educational system? How can educators learn from and attend to global perspectives in their practice? In short, how porous are the roles of "the philosopher" and "the educator," and can understanding this relationship elucidate a foundational idea within education?

I appreciate that this volume has inspired my own philosophical thinking as it has expanded my understanding of education. Ultimately, this book is an invitation to engage philosophically with education, and I think it is one worth taking for scholars at any stage of their career.

About the Author

Sara Hardman is a lecturer in the program of Philosophy and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University.