

Review of

Teachers and Philosophy: Essays on the Contact Zone

Edited by Cara E. Furman & Tomas de Rezende Rocha, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2025

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In a time marked by educational turbulence, democratic retrenchment, and philosophical marginalization, *Teachers and Philosophy: Essays on the Contact Zone*, edited by Cara E. Furman and Tomas de Rezende Rocha (2025), emerges as a thoughtful and necessary volume. Composed of fifteen chapters and a reflective coda, the book brings together educators and philosophers in a dialogic exploration of the “contact zone,” a concept first articulated by Mary Louise Pratt (1991) to describe spaces of intercultural exchange often shaped by power asymmetries.

Furman and Rocha’s editorial vision positions the teacher not as a passive recipient of theory but as an active co-producer of philosophical insight. Their introduction explicitly references the “fall from grace” of philosophy in teacher education (Colgan & Maxwell, 2019) and invites a renewed commitment to collaborative, democratic theorizing. Notably, the editors draw from their own divergent experiences—Furman in K–12 education and Rocha in higher education—to emphasize the structural and cultural barriers that divide academic philosophers from practicing educators.

Their framing aligns with an international context in which teacher professional judgment is under siege, not only in the United States but also across Europe, Asia, and Latin America. The book therefore holds considerable relevance for a global audience of scholars and practitioners invested in philosophical inquiry, democratic schooling, and educational justice.

Dialogic Encounters and Methodological Pluralism

One of the volume’s most compelling features is its structural commitment to co-authorship. Unlike conventional academic anthologies, *Teachers and Philosophy* frequently pairs philosophers with teachers in joint reflection, moving beyond the rhetorical gesture of “giving voice” to practitioners. In Chapter 1, for example, Rachel Seher and Alisa Algava explore Descriptive Inquiry as an equitable tool for antiracist pedagogy. Their methodology foregrounds collective knowledge-making and challenges the often hierarchical, individualistic model of teacher evaluation.

Chapter 2, authored by Vikramaditya Joshi and Melissa Rosenthal, introduces “portals” and “portraits” as pedagogical metaphors. Rooted in the phenomenology of classroom presence, the chapter resonates with aesthetic and dialogical traditions found in Reggio Emilia, the Japanese *jūgyō kenkyū*, and Paulo Freire’s (1968/1993) emphasis on dialogue as transformative praxis.

Similarly, in Chapter 5, Rocha, Jamila Silver, and Emily Silver provide a sobering account of the emotional labor involved in “contact zone pedagogy.” Their candid reflection on classroom resistance and institutional risk-taking offers a valuable counterbalance to the romanticism often found in dialogic pedagogy literature. Rather than celebrate the contact zone as inherently liberatory, the authors explore how intellectual safety and curiosity must be deliberately cultivated.

The contributors’ range of methodological approaches—including narrative inquiry, ethnography, poetic prose, and auto-theory—extend the genre boundaries of educational philosophy. This pluralism is not merely aesthetic; it serves to decolonize and rehumanize the academic form itself. In this sense, the act of writing collaboratively across teacher-scholar binaries functions as both a methodological and ethical stance—one that challenges the dehumanizing legacies of academic elitism and re-centers the humanity, vulnerability, and agency of all participants in the production of knowledge. Indeed, the very act of writing collaboratively across teacher-scholar binaries constitutes a methodological intervention.

Global Insights and Comparative Relevance

Although rooted in the U.S. educational context, the volume includes several chapters with transnational resonance. Chapter 15, by Kanako W. Ide, examines the concept of *Yuimabru*—a form of Indigenous Okinawan reciprocity—within the geopolitical complexity of American military occupation. The current mission statement of the Okinawa International Women’s Club is “to provide opportunity for International Friendship through social contacts and to further intellectual, cultural and welfare interests in the community” (this volume, p. 241). The term “Indigenous” here must be understood not merely as an ethnographic category, but as a distinctive epistemological and ontological orientation rooted in relationality, place-based knowledge, and cultural survivance. As such, Ide’s deployment of *Yuimabru* participates in a broader philosophical reclamation of Indigenous thought as a legitimate source of moral and educational insight, particularly in contexts shaped by the continuing afterlives of colonialism on the specific case of the Okinawa International Women’s Club (OIWC). Ide’s use of Indigenous epistemology to theorize peace and democracy offers a powerful example of what Santos (2015) terms “epistemologies of the South”. As Santos defines it, “a crucial epistemological transformation is required in order to reinvent social emancipation on a global scale” (Santos, 2015, p. 18). This transformation emerges from what he calls the global South, “not a geographical concept” but rather “a metaphor for the human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism on the global level, as well as for the resistance to overcoming or minimising such suffering” (Santos, 2015, pp. 18–19). Within this framework, the epistemologies of the South call into question the dominance of Western-centric knowledge systems, which are upheld by what Santos refers to as the “abyssal line”—“an invisible distinction sustaining all the distinctions we make between legal and illegal, and between scientific, theological and philosophical knowledges” (Santos, 2015, pp. 21–22). Moreover, Santos insists that “there is no global justice without global cognitive justice” (Santos, 2015, p. 18), linking knowledge production directly to questions of justice and emancipation. This idea resonates with Ide’s engagement with Indigenous Okinawan knowledge traditions, as they foreground relationality, reciprocity, and place-based wisdom as alternative foundations for imagining (See also Barreto, 2014).

In Chapter 9, Cristina Cammarano and Kimberly Arriaga-Gonzalez explore curriculum design through Mesoamerican short stories, drawing on precolonial knowledge systems to engage children and families in philosophical dialogue. Their work parallels efforts in Latin America, South Africa, and Indigenous Australian contexts to center cultural knowledge and storytelling in educational practice. Additionally, the volume’s critique of neoliberal accountability regimes echoes global concerns about the standardization and commodification of education (Biesta, 2015).

Philosophical Significance and Scholarly Contribution

Conceptually, *Teachers and Philosophy: Essays on the Contact Zone* makes three substantial contributions to the philosophy of education, each of which represents a vital shift in how philosophical engagement with teaching is conceived and practiced. First, the volume reconceives the contact zone not merely as an abstract or metaphorical notion, but as a lived, embodied, professional, and affective space. Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the contact zone—where cultures “meet, clash, and grapple with each other” under conditions of asymmetry—provides a framework, as Pratt (1991) underlines that:

I use this term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today. (p. 21)

The editors and contributors reframe this concept to illuminate the dynamic, often uneasy terrain in which teachers and philosophers engage in mutual meaning-making. This reframing is vividly evident in both the content and the collaborative structure of the book: many chapters are co-authored by teachers and philosophers, modeling what the editors call a “writing from the contact zone” (p. 6)—a dialogical practice that resists established divisions that privilege abstract theory over lived educational practice, and instead honors lived experience as a legitimate site of philosophical inquiry.

Second, the book offers a powerful challenge to entrenched epistemic dialogue by validating teacher knowledge as both philosophical and ethical. Rather than positioning teachers as passive recipients of philosophical insights, the volume foregrounds their voices as agents of conceptual thought and ethical deliberation. This is not a tokenistic inclusion; rather, the text insists that philosophical knowledge can emerge directly from educational practice—what Hansen (2021) calls “bearing witness” to teaching—and that teachers are already engaging in philosophical reasoning when they grapple with questions of justice, human development, and the aims of education. By doing so, the book pushes back against the marginalization of practitioner knowledge in academic discourse and contributes to an expanded conception of philosophy that is both rigorous and relational.

Finally, the book envisions a mode of philosophical inquiry that is simultaneously grounded and speculative. It is grounded in the realities of classrooms, the emotional labor of teaching, and the moral tensions educators navigate daily. Yet it remains open to the speculative horizons of what education could be—attuned to the imperatives of justice, futurity, and human flourishing. In this way, the book participates in a broader movement toward a public-facing, dialogical, and justice-oriented philosophy of education.

Together, these contributions mark a significant intervention in the field. They challenge not only the content of what counts as educational philosophy but also who gets to participate in it and how it is practiced. *Teachers and Philosophy* thus serves not merely as a collection of essays, but as a methodological provocation—an invitation to reimagine the contact zone as a site of collective philosophical labor, one in which the lived wisdom of educators is not ancillary to theory, but constitutive of it.

Importantly, the volume resonates with hooks' (2014) call for theory as a site of healing and transformation. The chapters consistently engage with theory as a lived, embodied practice—one that is attentive to grief, joy, rage, and hope. This is most evident in Chapter 4, where Stephanie A. Burdick-Shepherd and Michelle Johnson consider the pedagogical value of anger during times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In the Coda, several contributors reflect on the nature of their collaborations. This meta-level analysis provides critical insights into the affective and institutional dimensions of co-authorship, including the asymmetries of time, recognition, and labor that often characterize interdisciplinary work.

Critical Reflections

While the book's strengths are considerable, it does leave some areas underexplored. The absence of extended engagement with postcolonial theory—particularly thinkers like Bhabha, Spivak, or Glissant—represents a missed opportunity to deepen the contact zone metaphor. Similarly, digital technologies are scarcely discussed, despite their increasing role in shaping pedagogical and philosophical contact zones. Moreover, the predominance of contributors affiliated with U.S. institutions may limit the book's ability to fully address the variegated political and institutional conditions of teaching and philosophy across the Global South, Eastern Europe, or East Asia.

Nevertheless, these limitations do not detract from the book's overall value. They instead indicate promising directions for future scholarship particularly in expanding the philosophical geography of contact zones and exploring their manifestations in digital, ecological, and posthuman contexts. Notably absent is a sustained engagement with digital technologies and their entanglement with pedagogical and philosophical contact zones. In an era shaped by algorithmic governance, online learning platforms, and techno-mediated social relations, neglecting the digital overlooks a key domain in which power, identity, and knowledge are contested and reconfigured.

Conclusion

Teachers and Philosophy: Essays on the Contact Zone is a timely, ambitious, and intellectually generous volume. Its core strengths lie in its dialogic structure, methodological range, and ethical seriousness. For scholars, teacher educators, and practitioners worldwide, it offers a roadmap for reimagining educational philosophy as a collaborative, inclusive, and justice-oriented endeavor. The volume not only theorizes the contact zone—it enacts it. And in doing so, it challenges all of us in the field to rethink who gets to philosophize, where philosophy happens, and to what ends it is pursued.

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