

Review of

## *Educational Foundations in Canada*

by Alan Edmunds, Jodi Nickel & Ken Badley. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2015

## *Case Studies in Educational Foundations: Canadian Perspectives*

by Shelley Hasinoff & David Mandzuk. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2015

## *Foundations of Education: A Social, Political and Philosophical Approach*

by Jason C. Robinson. Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2015

---

ILHAM REDA  
McGill University

ERIN REID  
McGill University

### Introduction

In the midst of current educational shifts toward competency-based learning, skill-specific training such as financial literacy, and industry-led technological trends, the place of foundations in educational research and teacher preparation has been increasingly questioned (Christou, 2010). Foundational subjects of history, philosophy, and sociology are represented in declining numbers in both teacher education programs and as areas of specialization among education professors themselves (Kerr, Mandzuk, & Raptis, 2011). It is therefore both interesting and heartening to see a renewed interest in the foundations of education in the three following textbooks: *Educational Foundations in Canada* by Alan Edmunds, Jodi Nickel, and Ken Bradley; *Case Studies in Educational Foundations: Canadian Perspectives* by Shelley Hasinoff and David Mandzuk; and *Foundations of Education: A Social, Political, and Philosophical Approach* by Jason C. Robinson.

For philosophers of education, the importance of including foundational studies in teacher training has always been central. As far back as 1895, John Dewey wrote “it is ... advisable that the teacher should understand, and even be able to criticize, the general principles upon which the whole educational system is formed and administered” (Broemmel, Jordan & Whitsett, 2016, p. 8) and pointed

to the inherently philosophical nature of teaching. As educators, we cannot escape ethical questions: What should we teach? What is the goal of education? What is considered appropriate knowledge to be imparted? Indeed, the welcome call to greater teacher autonomy and self-reflexivity by growing numbers of teacher training programs is one that is philosophical at heart. This kind of philosophical inquiry gives teachers the tools to think critically and reflexively about their vocation, benefitting not only the teachers themselves, but also students and the entire education system. However, Hasinoff and Mandzuk point out that, as evidenced by declining numbers of foundational courses in university teacher preparation programs across Canada (p. xxiv), the value of the educational foundations, including philosophy of education, is far from obvious to many in the field. Although they take different approaches, these three books converge in seeking to bring the foundations of education into a more central role in teacher training. The purpose of this review is to (1) provide an overview and comparison of the contents of these three books and (2) provide a more detailed discussion of some especially valuable features of each book and as well as address minor shortcomings.

## Overview

*Educational Foundations in Canada* by Alan Edmunds, Jodi Nickel, and Ken Bradley is a comprehensive introductory textbook of key educational concepts, issues, and strategies for pre-service teachers. The book covers key topics such as classroom management, curriculum design, and assessment, but also has chapters devoted to each of the disciplinary foundations of education, namely history, philosophy, and sociology. Throughout, teachers of educational foundations as well as teacher candidates will appreciate the large number of practical applications in each chapter. The breadth of material covered and the attention to complex issues such as diversity and funding in a uniquely Canadian context are impressive. Perhaps most importantly, this is not simply an American publication adjusted to meet the needs of Canadian students. Rather, this is a book for Canadian educators by Canadian educators. Not only is it extremely thorough in both its theoretical presentation and contextualized applications, but students and teachers will also appreciate its thoughtful discussion questions, case studies, reflective activities, and glossary of key terms. The book is what every educational textbook should hope to be: an example of good pedagogy in practice. As such, it is easy to read and presents key concepts and information in multiple modalities, with plenty of space given to diagrams, charts, dialogues, and definitions.

The first chapter presents the concept of teaching as a reflective practice. In focusing on reflective practice, the authors build a solid framework from which students will develop themselves as teachers. The chapter is comprehensive and clearly defines what is meant by reflective practice, providing both a well-developed theoretical framework and extending the theory by way of realistic examples. Among the most useful characteristics of the chapter is the space dedicated to outlining the qualities and common practices of exemplary and highly effective teachers, backed by relevant research.

The following three chapters deal with the more practical aspects of teacher education one can expect to find in any educational textbook: classroom management, curriculum design, and assessment and evaluation. The authors do a fine job of balancing seminal theorists in the field with specific, Canada-based research and examples.

Chapter 5 takes on the substantial task of mapping the history of education in Canada. The authors are careful to situate key movements, approaches, and figures in their appropriate contexts,

including the Canadian context, and encourage readers to continually reflect on historical movements from multiple perspectives. The final discussion of contemporary educational movements could benefit from a more detailed discussion of digital literacy but is effective overall.

Of particular interest to readers of this journal will be the sixth chapter which introduces the philosophical roots of education. Though limited in scope, the authors offer a quick, accessible and helpful summary of key movements in philosophy of education. Beginning with the main philosophical branches of metaphysics, epistemology and axiology, the authors create a base from which to explore the major philosophical systems before turning to a brief explanation of the normative philosophies of education: perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, and social reconstructionism. The authors do a fine job of making complex subject matter accessible to readers who may be unfamiliar with the field, and provide a number of useful references for further exploration. Throughout, the chapter is geared to capture students' interest, whether by creating reader-friendly comparative charts or by contextualizing the ways in which these philosophies may impact teaching in meaningful case studies based on "real-life" teacher experiences.

The authors give careful consideration and attention to issues of diversity and sociocultural influences on teaching in Chapter 7. From a sociological perspective, this chapter does not disappoint, beginning with a discussion of social class and moving on to providing solid theoretical frameworks of critical race theory and antiracist education to explore racial issues in the classroom. Moreover, it is genuinely refreshing and heartening to find that First Nations and Aboriginal issues are sensitively highlighted as the starting point for the section on cultural diversity in Canada. The entire discussion of diversity is underpinned by a critical analysis of Canada's multicultural policies and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Chapter 8 investigates legal, economic and political aspects of education. One example of the many useful practical applications in the chapter is found on page 313: "Seven tips to ensure a successful induction into teaching." The tips include building professional relationships, finding a mentor teacher, and becoming a role model for your own students. Student-teachers will also likely find useful the information on provincial standards for teacher certification and salary scales.

All of the chapters in *Educational Foundations* serve to provide pre-service teachers and teacher educators with a solid introduction to the wide range of issues impacting teachers today. However, in separating the chapters on the foundations into the discrete domains of history, philosophy and sociology, there is a danger of encouraging the view that these are "stand-alone" disciplines. In particular, a more robust attempt to demonstrate throughout the text how history, philosophy and sociology impact each other would more fully achieve the aims of the educational foundations. Encouraging students to examine pedagogical issues with the tools that the foundations of history, philosophy and sociology provide can only be achieved when students fully understand the ways these disciplines intersect and influence each other. Along with an overarching concern about this shortcoming of the text, the following points can also be made.

*Educational Foundations* devotes an entire chapter to exploring diversity issues of great importance, such as Aboriginal student issues, linguistic diversity, religious diversity and gender roles and biases; unfortunately, attention to LGBT issues are accorded only two sentences in these forty-one pages. Given the prominence of LGBT recognition in both public discourse and academic discussions around teacher training, and the prominent role Canada has played in legalizing same-sex marriage, the failure to adequately address LGBT issues in a chapter devoted to diversity is curious. A broad-based

2015 study on LGBT-inclusive education in Canadian K–12 schools reports that almost two-thirds of pre-service teachers stated they were not at all prepared to deal with gender diversity, affirming the pressing need to address this knowledge gap in their training (Taylor et al., p. 40). Moreover, with estimates that they comprise between ten and sixteen percent of the average school population, LGBT students are very likely to be present in any Canadian classroom (p. 27). The failure of Edmunds et al. to explore LGBT issues and inclusive practices, such as creating safe spaces for LGBT youth, is disappointing to say the least. Equally disheartening is the complete absence of discussion about challenges that may arise for LGBT teachers. In discussing teachers' self-identity and how it may impact others, the authors ask pre-service teachers, "How do we overcome those blindspots?" (p. 273). It seems that the authors' cursory approach to LGBT issues could be just such a blindspot. On this point it must be said that Hasinoff and Mandzuk treat the subject much more thoughtfully in their book, *Case Studies*.

No textbook can be expected to cover every aspect of teaching, but it is nonetheless worth noting that the book also largely neglects to address the burgeoning world of classroom technology and online education except for a brief mention (p. 203). Considering that online education and online curriculum development are currently among the most rapidly growing fields in education (Barbour, 2013, p. 22), this is an area that surely deserves a closer examination. Moreover, with increasing pressures to incorporate more technology in the classroom, it is more important than ever that pre-service teachers have the chance to reflect deeply on these issues before they encounter the challenges they will face in their own classrooms.

Although a more integrated approach to the presentation of philosophy of education would have been welcome, *Educational Foundations* packs a great deal of content into 300 pages. Professors in teacher education programs will appreciate the discussion questions and case studies in each chapter that will undoubtedly serve as useful classroom tools. Likewise, pre-service and novice teachers will appreciate the summaries and useful references provided at the end of each chapter. In short, *Educational Foundations* is a comprehensive, practical and straightforward textbook that will be of great value to teachers and teacher educators working in the Canadian educational system.

*Case Studies in Educational Foundations: Canadian Perspectives* by Shelley Hasinoff and David Mandzuk also addresses prospective teachers and current practitioners. It attempts to familiarize its targeted audience with real-life cases of the unfounded attitudes they encounter throughout their professional life. The authors "take a deeper look at some of the unwarranted certainties in education and demonstrate how readers can draw on the rich traditions of the history, philosophy, and sociology of education to avoid succumbing to faulty first impressions or beings blinkered by long-held beliefs and unexamined assumptions" (Hasinoff & Mandzuk, 2015, p. xix). With real-life scenarios faced by practicing professionals, the book differs greatly from *Educational Foundations* in content and structure. *Case Studies in Educational Foundations* focuses on teacher practice preparation and thus can be a useful complement to *Educational Foundations*, as the latter is richer in theoretical depth but provides less ethnographic information. Used in conjunction, these two books can offer both pre-service and in-service teachers the epistemological tools to analyze their own practice.

The first chapter of the book *Case Studies in Educational Foundations* briefly introduces the disciplinary foundations of education and their importance in the creation of a comprehensive philosophy of education. The authors argue that more exposure to educational thought, as exemplified in foundational disciplines, is needed in teacher education since current restructuring emphasizes

practice over theory. The book is distinctive in enabling educators to deal with professional challenges of two types, labeled by the authors as *inevitable uncertainties* and *unwarranted certainties*. Unwarranted certainties are defined as the unexamined assumptions and beliefs that include myths, bandwagons and moral panics. According to the authors, teachers interpret their own teaching based on these unwarranted certainties and unsupported theories which need to be overcome. The following three chapters each start with a definition of one type of unwarranted certainty and explain how it pervades the four commonplaces of education (students, teachers, content, and context). The certainties are then exemplified by ten cases inspired by real-life events faced by contributors with extensive teaching experience. The fifth and last chapter offers a conclusion and overview of the certainties and uncertainties covered in previous chapters. It summarizes the trends of inevitable uncertainties in education in the four commonplaces of education and advocates the importance of focusing on educational theory by arguing that the foundations of education are major components of teaching.

*Case Studies in Educational Foundations* has a great deal to offer pre-service teachers and those training them. There is not much to dislike about this thoroughly contemporary textbook. However, as is so often the case, the book's strength may also be considered its weakness: The creative organization of the book into its three sections of myths, bandwagons, and moral panics may be confusing for some. Certainly it is a unique way to present the different cases, and may require a bit more thought into how to best use the book in class, but this is hardly a detractor. The authors acknowledge that there is not always a direct sequential relationship between the categories, but explain that simply being aware of how the categories may intersect can be beneficial. We would heartily agree. The only possible inclusion that might have added value to this otherwise excellent book would be key resources at the end of each section, perhaps one for each of the foundations. Nevertheless, this is a minor issue, and if used in conjunction with *Educational Foundations* the book would be an excellent choice of text to bring the lived experience of teaching, with all its messiness and uncertainties, to life. In short, the book presents a unique, refreshing and welcome approach to investigating hot-button issues in education.

*Foundations of Education: A Social, Political, and Philosophical Approach* by Jason C. Robinson focuses on the work of five influential figures in philosophy of education: Plato, Aristotle, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Dewey. It attempts to set the foundations for a philosophy of education and poses as the most insightful book on philosophy among the three reviewed. In the introduction, the author provides a basic definition of philosophy based on the Greek origin of the words *philos* and *sophia*, which mean "love" and "wisdom," respectively (p. 4). The definition is followed by short overviews of four approaches to philosophy (speculative, analytic, existential, phenomenological), four major categories of philosophy (metaphysics, epistemology, logic, value theory), and four features of being human (reason, creativity, emotion, free will). The introduction is concluded by highlighting the importance of philosophizing about education and explaining why the theories of the prominent philosophers covered are essential to the creation of practitioners' own personal philosophy of education.

The first chapter reviews Plato's concept of the Good, his foundation of the first institution of higher learning named the Academy, and his pioneering work that continues to differentially shape the intellectual landscape of contemporary Western philosophy. Plato, being Socrates's pupil, followed the Socratic method of reasoning and inquiry, and is believed to have written and documented Socrates's dialogues. Excerpts from two of Socrates's conversations, one with Theodorus from *Theaetetus* and another with Glaucon from *The Republic*, are included. Each section concludes with a list of insightful

questions that instigate readers to reflect and consider different directions and perspectives on what defines good education.

The second chapter briefly introduces readers to Aristotle's contributions to philosophy, science, and politics. Aristotle attended the Academy, was one of Plato's pupils, and has philosophical similarities to Plato. However, the author highlights the major distinctions between the two philosophers: Although they both grounded their philosophies of education in metaphysics, their conclusions greatly differed. The author portrays their differences by stating Aristotle's stand and immediately juxtaposing it with Plato's viewpoint to highlight the antagonism. Robinson also summarizes Aristotle's metaphysics and virtue ethics in a rather reductive and oversimplified fashion to offer readers an accessible overview of Aristotle's work. As a result, Aristotle's philosophy of education is portrayed as based on the endorsement of moral virtues, intellectual virtues, social norms, laws, civic participation, a good life of happiness and human flourishing.

The third chapter briefly introduces five major components of John Locke's theory of knowledge: (1) Ideas and knowledge are gained through our senses; (2) The human mind is a *tabula rasa* (blank slate) at birth; (3) Knowledge is a relationship among simple and complex ideas; (4) Ideas include primary sensations; (5) Secondary sensations are the result of primary sensations. Classical empiricism is covered by portraying the works of other classical empiricists such as George Berkeley and David Hume. Locke's empiricism and philosophy of education are linked by the question of whether nature or nurture create and determine a person. Locke's major influence on philosophy of education was his theory of child development. According to Locke, the central goals of education are to encourage both virtue and reason, and to promote liberty.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of "natural man" and his notion of human nature as being in conflict with society structure the fourth chapter. Short excerpts from Rousseau's *The Social Contract* display his disagreement with his predecessors and expose his alternative propositions for the creation of a more comprehensive philosophy of education that fosters emancipation and encourages further civilization. The concept of the general will as the major tool for creating social authenticity is extracted from *The Social Contract* and relates to obedience, natural liberty and laws. Rousseau complemented his theory by drawing the distinction between self-love and love of the self. Robinson's presentation of his novel *Émile* is oversimplified and only major points such as living according to natural inclinations and the role of nature in educating children are discussed.

The last chapter introduces John Dewey's philosophy of education based on philosophical pragmatism. Dewey challenged both traditional and progressive education and argued that the foundations of education are healthy experiences of a scientific and democratic nature. Excerpts from Dewey's book *Democracy and Education* pose as expansions of Plato's and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's conceptions of social and democratic educational philosophies presented earlier in the book.

The book is instructive in offering a succinct and selective introduction to philosophy of education. However, it does not take into account certain major educational theories and philosophical traditions. The book focuses on the ideas of individual philosophers and the broader philosophical implications of their views, but other authors of equal historical and influential importance should have also been discussed to provide more breadth of content. The exclusion of Cicero as a major figure in setting the foundations of education, alongside Plato and Aristotle, hints at the author's selectiveness and brevity in content. Moreover, with respect to John Locke's empiricism and educational theories, the book draws more attention to classical empiricists such as George Berkeley and David Hume than

to Locke's rationalist and liberal approach to education and its links to the vast and relevant current work on liberal education. Concerning the humanistic tradition and person-centered education, only excerpts from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's books *The Social Contract* and *Émile* are discussed while other major contributions such as Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi's educational reformation, Maria Montessori's scientific pedagogy and Carl Rogers's book *Freedom to Learn: A View of What Education Might Become* (1986) are overlooked. Last, John Dewey is certainly one of the most visible pragmatists and representatives of the progressive tradition. Nevertheless, philosophy of education has widely developed since *Democracy and Education*, with prominent, holistic and more comprehensive traditions such as the liberal democratic one endorsed by Harry Brighouse in *On Education*, or the post-structuralist tradition with figures like Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault and their profound thinking on educational matters. Post-structuralism poses as a useful analytical lens through which to deconstruct the historical, social, cultural, and political factors that make up one's conceptions. Its omission represents a major limitation of the book because it reduces the extent to which practicing teachers can critically and comprehensively reflect on and analyze their own teaching.

### **What Do These Books Have to Offer Teacher Educators?**

We are both PhD students in education who have previously earned degrees in this field, and throughout our reading of the text, we found ourselves wishing we had had access to a book like *Educational Foundations* in our undergraduate education courses. As noted earlier, it succeeds on many fronts and serves as a solid choice for a comprehensive foundations textbook. While there are too many noteworthy features of the text to discuss in depth in this review, we wish to draw attention to its unique approach to situating the foundations of education in teacher education. Instead of beginning the book by arguing for the central place of history, philosophy and sociology in education, the authors have chosen to begin by introducing the notion of reflective practice. By focusing on the central role of reflective practice, they set the tone for each subsequent chapter to promote philosophical inquiry by asking readers to reflect deeply on their reasons for teaching and the values of education. This approach is never heavy-handed but always followed in an accessible way, complete with checklists, charts, text boxes and discussion questions. And while we remain convinced of the need for more connections to be made between the different foundational disciplines, readers of this journal will surely approve of the more central role that philosophy of education plays throughout the text. In adopting this book as a course textbook for a group of pre-service teachers, teacher educators should be able to convince their students of its worth as well.

As a complementary text to *Educational Foundations*, *Case Studies in Educational Foundations* offers both teachers and students the opportunity to contextualize the questions posed by the foundations of education. While the broader textbook, *Educational Foundations*, offers plenty of down-to-earth advice in its practical application sections, *Case Studies* delves into the kinds of touchy issues that the former book does not address in depth, such as LGBT teacher identity for example. Repeatedly, we were struck by how "real" these cases were, and how much they reminded us of the issues faced in our own teaching careers. Using their unique framework of myths, bandwagons, and moral panics, the authors engage the historical, philosophical, and sociological foundations to encourage pre-service and novice teachers to challenge their deep-seated pedagogical assumptions. The book does not attempt to provide answers to

the unsettling questions the cases bring up, or present a formula for dealing with ambiguity; rather, they use critical questions to explore the implications and insights the foundations offer for each carefully situated scenario. As students delve into each case, they will surely begin to appreciate the range of moral and ethical complexities they will face as teachers. As Crocker and Dibbon note in their 2008 study, there is an unfortunate tendency for courses on foundations of education to rank low for education students who describe philosophy, history, and sociological foundations as irrelevant, or too theoretical. In combination, these two books will go a long way in addressing this problem by helping teacher educators create education courses that make these foundations accessible, meaningful, and deeply relevant to teacher candidates.

The book *Foundations of Education: A Social, Political, and Philosophical Approach* by Jason C. Robinson could also serve as a supplement to *Educational Foundations* in expanding on the sections pertaining to philosophy of education and providing more thought-provoking discussion questions. Among the commonalities between the two books are their discussions on the major philosophical underpinnings that form educational foundations, their focus on the positive correlation and interconnectivity between theory and practice, and their attempts to “explain how research-based knowledge can augment teaching” (Edmunds et al., 2015, p. 9). The two books are also complementary in their approach to teaching as reflective practice. For instance, Robinson concludes each chapter with discussion questions and learning activities; these sections aim at triggering pre-service teachers and practitioners to reflect on their conception of the educational foundations that guide their teaching philosophy. For teachers, framing their own educational philosophy is ultimately one of the major components of their teaching career as it serves as the source of the values that guide their understanding of educational aims, direct their approach to practice and indicate their adherence to a specific school of thought and philosophical tradition.

## Conclusion

Philosophy of education is responsible for setting the educational aims and foundations that dictate educational methodologies, approaches, and policy frameworks. Similar to other fields of education, it is deeply rooted in historical socio-political movements and trends. These trends create the current narrative that guides pre-service and in-service teachers’ analysis of their own practices and the teaching philosophy teachers opt to endorse. Present undergraduate and teacher training programs tend to neglect the importance of the societal and contextual factors that surround and pervade teaching. The reviewed books succeed at countering this neglect by eliciting reflective philosophical questions and providing a deeper understanding of the foundations of education. Concluding questions in the books *Case Studies in Educational Foundations* and *Foundations of Education* are also relevant to contemporary issues in philosophy of education. Current debate in the field revolves around reliance on mere theory and subsequent questioning of the efficiency of philosophy in solving real-life challenges and problems that practicing teachers may face. As a result, the purpose and value of including case studies that pose ethical theory and practice have become topics of interest for philosophers of education. Considering the textbook *Educational Foundations in Canada* as a central text and *Case Studies in Educational Foundations* and *Foundations of Education* as providers of supplementary content in the form of practitioners’ ethnographic information and the work of influential philosophers, the reviewed books serve as

antidotes to the problems evoked by relying solely on theory. The books reconstruct and nourish an academic platform for the foundations of education by concentrating on foundational subjects, namely history, philosophy and sociology, and promote reflection, discussion and consideration of implications for practice. Although minor shortcomings and excluded material are evident, all three books manage to provide a high level of academic content leading towards the development of a more holistic, enlightened and reflective philosophy of education.

## References

- Broemmel, A., Jordan, J., & Whitsett, B. M. (2016). *Learning to be teacher leaders: A framework for assessment, planning, and instruction*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Barbour, M. K. (2013). The landscape of K–12 online learning: Examining what is known. In M. G. Moore (Ed.), *Handbook of distance education* (pp. 574–593). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Crocker, R., & Dibben, D. (2008). *Teacher education in Canada*. Kelowna, BC: Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education.
- Christou, T. (2010). Recovering our histories: Studying educational history through stories and memoirs. *Education Canada*, 50(4), 64–67.
- Kerr, D., Mandzuk, D., & Raptis, H. (2011). The role of the social foundations of education in programs of teacher preparation in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 34(1), 118–134.
- Nicgorski, W. (2013). Cicero on education: The humanizing arts. *Arts of Liberty Journal*, 1(1). Retrieved from <http://artsofliberty.org/cicero-education-humanizing-arts>
- Rogers, C. R. (1986). *Freedom to learn: A view of what education might become*. Columbus, Ohio: Merrill Publishing Company.
- Taylor, C., Peter, T., Campbell, C., Meyer, E., Ristock, J., & Short, D. (2015). *The every teacher project on LGBTQ-inclusive education in Canada's K–12 schools: Final report*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Teachers' Society.

## About the Authors

**Ilham Reda** is a doctoral student at the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University. A former philosophy and theory of knowledge school teacher, the author is currently an instructor at McGill's School of Continuing Education. Her research focuses on citizenship, multiculturalism and religious education in faith-based schools. She can be reached at [ilham.reda@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:ilham.reda@mail.mcgill.ca).

**Erin Reid** is a doctoral student at the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University. She is an ESL professional with over 10 years of diverse teaching experience at top tertiary institutes including McGill University, University of Toronto, Ryerson University and George Brown College. Her current research interests are religious literacy, TESOL and learning and teaching in higher education. Ms. Reid can be reached via e-mail at [erin.reid@mcgill.ca](mailto:erin.reid@mcgill.ca).