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See table of contents

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Review of

Critical Reflections on Teacher Education: Why Future Teachers Need Educational Philosophy

by Howard Woodhouse, Routledge, 2023

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In November of 2021, at the Glasgow COP26 (the United Nations Climate Change Conference), youth climate activist Greta Thunberg gave a speech that reverberated around the world. She spoke to the need to be critical of global leaders and the "beautiful speeches" and "fancy commitments and targets" coming from a "greenwashed" gathering, one that bends to the desires of the Global North to continue the established patterns of "doing nothing" and pursuing growth at the cost of the planet (Thunberg, 2021). For Thunberg, the pomp and pageantry of COP26 was a distraction from the efforts by those in power to "actively [create] loopholes and [shape] frameworks to benefit themselves" and to continue "business as usual and blah blah blah" (Thunberg, 2021). According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), to have any hope of addressing the climate crisis and its "threat to human well-being and planetary health," we cannot continue with business as usual; the "window of opportunity to secure a livable and sustainable future for all" is rapidly closing (IPCC, 2022, p. 33). Howard Woodhouse's new book, *Critical Reflections on Teacher Education: Why Future Teachers Need Educational Philosophy*, acknowledges this closing window and proposes a philosophical framework for climate change in teacher education. He argues that we (primarily in the English-speaking Global North) cannot continue with business as usual in teacher education. Woodhouse relates the need to teach educational philosophy to future teachers to the problems they face in their daily practice, but also the oncoming challenges that will imbue a field that calls on practitioners to raise critical participants in democratic, pluralistic societies. Teachers need a skill set that can empower critical and reasoned engagement, as well as "the necessary autonomy of qualified judgment defining their profession" (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 1). Without an education that prepares them to respond to the "anti-educational undertow" and to cope with challenges such as the climate crisis, business as usual will maintain the status quo and bow to the market and late-stage capitalism, and teachers will simply be technicians supporting dehumanizing goals that further disconnect us from "all that lives" (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 127).

Woodhouse's concerns about the decline of philosophy of education in teacher education programs are not unfounded. Colgan and Maxwell catalogue the "marked rise and fall in prominence" (2020, p. 1) of the formally essential area of study, and the impacts of its impoverishment. According to a survey of teacher education programs in Canada, as of 2013 only 10%, or 12 out of 124 programs, still require a course in philosophy of education for graduation (Maxwell, Tremblay-Laprise, & Filion, 2015). Woodhouse takes up this demise in his first of the book's five chapters, in which he asks, "how is it that educational philosophy, which was once considered a foundational discipline in teacher education, has been so severely marginalized?" (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 11). His approach is a blend of storytelling and a discussion surrounding the "market model of education" (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 12) in Canada, the United

States, and the United Kingdom, followed by an examination of its impacts on teachers that dips into one of the book's heroes, British mathematician and philosopher Bertrand Russell, and his call for educational philosophy. Russell's humanism is central to Woodhouse's argument for reflective and reflexive teachers who do more than fill an empty bucket with water or a mind with information. Without a meaningful and robust approach to the discipline of philosophy of education in teacher education programs, *and* a strong counter to the "market model"—an approach in which "government control and market imperatives exert pressure over teachers" (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 26) to maintain systems that reward compliance over critical engagement—teaching as a profession will fall further into the realm of the unexamined technician. Woodhouse elevates Russell's appeal for educators to engage in philosophical reflection so that they can nurture "the humanist conception of man [*sic*]" (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 36).

Philosophy is not just talk; it also requires action. Critical thinking is not simply discussing what is problematic; it also involves challenges to the status quo. Teachers need to be prepared and capable of questioning, in Hare's words, "unexamined assumptions about indoctrination" (Chinnery et al., 2007, p. 114). Teacher education should include a "particular interest in raising questions about policies that undermine the humanistic goals of education" (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 10), and educational foundations, including philosophy, have a critical role to play in providing the development of these essential skills. Throughout the text, Woodhouse relies on a conceptual framework strongly influenced by the educational philosophy of Bertrand Russell as well as the significant writing of Dora (Black) Russell. The second chapter dives into the Russells' humanistic educational philosophy and the ways in which it can "revivify teacher education" (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 27). Woodhouse poses the question: "to what extent can Bertrand Russell's educational philosophy reinvigorate teacher education, liberating it from government control and the market model of education?" (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 33). At the core of Woodhouse's interpretation of the Russells' work on education is the metaphor of growth or the "growing principle of life" (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 34), which requires nurturing, and at its base is the idea that the internal life of children should be honoured. He argues that the growing principle of life "provides a crucial moment in the development of an educational philosophy capable of renewing teacher education and instilling a love for the planet among future teachers," but also "independence from the influence of the world state," thus ensuring peace (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 34).

For Woodhouse, what is required for what Russell called "healthy growth" is not just any philosophy being taught in teacher education but rather one that promotes a "humanistic conception" and "a sufficient freedom from oppression" through a more thorough understanding and resistance to certain "political institutions" (Woodhouse, 2023, pp. 34–35). John Dewey, Alfred North Whitehead, and Paulo Freire, as well as contemporary philosopher and linguist Noam Chomsky, also make appearances in the book, as Woodhouse demonstrates that the principle of growth relates to teaching democracy, "revolutionary character," a value and reverence for all life (human and non-human), and a propensity for hope (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 38). Chapter 2 becomes more apropos—and more meaningful—when Woodhouse reminds the reader that Russell dabbled in behaviourism and the "practice of correct habit formation" but ultimately rejected this theory and practice (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 51). This issue of whose version of "correct habits" should be pursued and what is deemed palatable behaviour relates to the underlying and prevalent requirement for "classroom management" and has been argued to do more to dull democratic values than to guide student behaviour toward compliance (Harvey, 2020; Kohn, 2006; Leafgren 2009; Purpel, 1999; Shanker, 2019). How to increase, teach, and maintain desired behaviours and decrease undesired behaviours can undermine humanist teaching goals; the goal of compliance aligns with the market model of education against which Woodhouse is arguing. Russell's philosophical examination of behaviourism and its shortcomings are an example of critical engagement in teaching and parenting and a demonstration that it is "not a sign of weakness or surrender to change your mind on the basis of new information or changing circumstances" (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 56), but rather an example of philosophy in action.

Woodhouse's third chapter asks whether the philosophical skills of teachers would be strengthened if they were called upon to introduce philosophical thinking to students, and if this practice would have

the effect of challenging the market model of education. He explores this question through a discussion of the philosophy for children (P4C) movement in its variations and effects in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, as well as the influence of two philosophers of education associated with P4C: Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp. How do students become "reasonable beings in a community of inquiry" (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 58)? Woodhouse employs Freire's problem-posing education to develop a critique of P4C, arguing that critical pedagogy goes beyond developing critical thinking skills. P4C employs a "problem-solving method inherited from Dewey" that can critique the status quo, but Woodhouse is seeking a philosophical approach that would "explicitly challenge oppressive conditions" (Woodhouse, 2023, pp. 75 & 76). The chapter concludes with a call for teaching philosophy politically because "thinking critically means thinking politically" (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 75).

Throughout the book, Woodhouse explores the role of storytelling in teaching and learning philosophy, but also in establishing a community of inquiry, and this leads to the crux of the book: philosophy of education has a role in preparing teachers in an era of climate crisis. In the fourth chapter, Woodhouse's call to resist the non-life-sustaining approach of the market model of education through philosophy of education, Russell's humanistic growing principle of life, and a Freirian lens of critical pedagogy and inquiry culminate in praxis and proposed action (Woodhouse, 2023). Woodhouse argues that an adaptation of Russell's work, combined with attention to the climate crisis, creates a strengthened concept of "life-value" and the ability for future teachers to better "understand the climate crisis now facing humanity" and to "impress upon their students a love for the planet" (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 85). The chapter includes an analysis of the threat of the climate crisis and what the majority of experts, Indigenous authors, educators, and average citizens have come to understand about the issue. Woodhouse braids "educational interludes"—stories reflecting his own growing understanding of the climate crisis—and the connections to John McMurtry's concept of life-value, along with examples of "educational *praxis*" from Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 107).

In the final chapter, Woodhouse takes on the question of "how?" As previously mentioned, philosophy is not just "talking the talk" or simply theoretical for Woodhouse: "the climate crisis demands immediate solutions if humanity and many other species are to survive" (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 116). How can philosophy of education prepare teachers to undertake the most pressing existential issues of our time? Woodhouse returns to the key concepts in previous chapters to outline a philosophical framework that he argues can contend with the climate crisis in a systemic way. He offers an analysis of "pedagogical strategies for climate change education consistent with the framework, advocated by a variety of authors both Indigenous and non-Indigenous" (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 117), which is evidence of his effort to resist the status quo and "business as usual and blah, blah, blah" (Thunberg, 2021). Woodhouse offers his own awareness of his limitations as a White settler with a colonial perspective when he says that even though he includes "Indigenous strategies for systemic climate change teacher education, their epistemic value may be undermined" by his own positionality, and he leaves it to "the reader to decide" the extent to which his framework and questions are impacted by his social location (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 117).

According to this reader, the text is dominated by Western philosophy or thinkers who are accepted, palatable, and celebrated within the West. Woodhouse draws on his deep knowledge of the Russells' writing and the work of McMurtry, demonstrating their strengths within a White and Western conceptual framework. Although the book offers a meaningful critique of philosophy of education as it is taught in Canada, its inclusion of non-Western, Indigenous, queer, and others is noticeably deficient. If we want to walk our talk, and politically infuse the cannon and the teachers we teach in a way that promotes democratic resistance, we need to seek out more diverse and inclusive voices. This is not just for the purpose of representation, but also for the purpose of systemic change; we need varied and contrastive thinking. In the fight to bring about system change that will protect all life, human and non-human, dismantling the master's house requires tools from Indigenous perspectives and practices, as well as a queering of theory to decentre traditional academic approaches and make space for alternatives. This is not to say that the impact of Woodhouse, especially with the weight of his privileged social location, is

unimportant to the cause to which he is committed; undoubtedly, his voice is helpful. But when we are talking about educating new teachers, their identities also need to be considered.

In conclusion, the book is structured in a way that is accessible, with chapter outlines, clear headings, and chapter summaries. The writing is blended with stories, personal anecdotes, and approachable language. The alarm surrounding the lack of philosophy of education has been sounded by others before Woodhouse, but this book connects the warning to other dire circumstances and a sense of hope for pedagogical resolutions. As noted in the final chapter, greater climate education is necessary, but more than that is needed. Woodhouse remarks that "'System change, not climate change!' is a favorite chant of youth activists, and demonstrations across the world during COP26 in November 2021 made this abundantly clear" (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 117). The time for an intersectional, interdisciplinary, and anti-oppressive approach is now. Woodhouse's framework and related pedagogy sees children as capable of experiencing "themselves as unified beings with a purpose to life rather than lacking any sense of identity" (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 126). This is because the "activity of philosophy is itself life-promoting," and the experience of philosophy can empower the learner to lead and make change (Woodhouse, 2023, p. 126). Woodhouse's conclusion echoes Thunberg's (2021) own final words at COP26 when she says, "They cannot ignore the scientific consensus [on climate change], and above all they cannot ignore us the people, including their own children. They cannot ignore our screams as we reclaim our power. We are tired of their blah, blah, blah. Our leaders are not leading. This is what leadership looks like!"

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