

Philosophy of Education: Texts and Traditions

J.J. Chambliss, ed., *Philosophy of Education: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996) and Nel Noddings, *Philosophy of Education* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995).

TWO TEXTS IN PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Steve Tozer

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The purpose of my remarks is to interpret each of two important new books in philosophy of education in terms of their distinctive features and uses, and then to examine what that interpretation suggests about the various activities we call philosophy of education.

Before turning to what makes these volumes so different from one another, a word about what they have in common. Both are ambitious, wide-ranging representations of the field of philosophy of education. Both are intended to edify, to leave the reader more informed about that field. At the general level, these volumes are comparable because they treat the same subject matter and share a similar purpose. In addition, each was written or edited by a respected leader in our field, and each book should only enhance the reputation of its author or editor. I should say, incidentally, that I have read no reviews of either volume, so I am coming at this task innocent of how each has been received in the field more generally.

Any fair reading of these volumes, or any fair comparison between them, should recognize how very different they are in their purposes. Their different contexts of use give these volumes their separate meanings. That they share the same title, *Philosophy of Education*, should not lead us to assume too much about their similarities.

Nel Noddings's *Philosophy of Education* is in its fundamental character a pedagogical text. Several of its important qualities support this portrayal. First, as Nel makes clear in her references to "students" in the introduction and throughout the text, she has in mind the classroom as a primary context of use for the volume, though the publisher informs us that the volume is also useful for the general reader. Second, the book is developmental in its discourse and in the demands it makes of students. That is, the volume begins with the most elementary of claims and descriptions, assuming very little or no prior knowledge of philosophy of education on the reader's part, then builds toward later chapters that depend on a reader's cumulative acquaintanceship with a great many philosophy of education concepts, thinkers, and relationships among them. (I would say, in fact, that for novices who will comprise most of the book's readership, the volume depends for its success on a *pedagogical context* for that developmental approach to succeed. Consider that each of the ten chapters deals with major philosophical and educational themes and thinkers, and that each chapter is less than twenty pages in length. To do justice to the complex topics concisely, many passages in the volume are conceptually dense, requiring opportunities for reflection and discussion such as are typically available only in group instructional contexts.)

A third clearly pedagogical feature of the book is that its developmental approach is designed to induct novices into the activities and dispositions of philosophy of education by engaging the reader in thinking through interesting dilemmas within the text of each chapter, and by posing a series of philosophical questions about education at the end of each chapter. Each chapter is an occasion for the student to experience *doing* philosophy of education in a particular way, not simply to read about this approach or that. Fourth, the volume sets up a distinctly pedagogical *relationship* between the author and the reader by having the author speak with a personal voice. This voice at various times encourages students by expressing confidence in the students' familiarity with, or ability to understand, a difficult concept; or it acknowledges the difficulty of an idea and offers an example with which students might be familiar; or it weighs in with its own ways of resolving a difficult dilemma, leading by personal example through a conceptual thicket. In doing so, the author turns from representing the views of others to representing her own take on things, and she is clear about it when she does so. One good case of this, as you might expect, is the final chapter on Feminism, Philosophy, and Education, though there are many other examples — such as when she wrestles with the ambiguities of Dewey's conception of growth as an ideal and offers her own take on how to make sense of that notion.

These, then, are some of the distinctly pedagogical features of Nodding's *Philosophy of Education*. Before turning to how these differ from the characteristics of the *Encyclopedia*, two more observations seem warranted. First, in contrast to what the publisher claims twice in "About the Book and the Author," this is not really a "survey" of the field at all. I do not think it is intended to be. A survey attempts a more or less comprehensive, systematic mapping out of a given terrain in terms of its major features. If I can be forgiven for using a relatively overused metaphor, and forgiven further for using one that purposely contrasts one gendered activity to another, this volume much more resembles a tapestry than a survey. The chapters, like the warp and woof, represent not just different threads but different kinds of threads. The first two are on historically significant philosophers, focusing on the thinking of Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Dewey, and others. The next two chapters treat methodological schools of philosophy and philosophy of education—Analytic method, Existentialism, Phenomenology, Critical Theory. In chapters 6, 8, and 9, whole branches of philosophy, not philosophers or schools, become the focus in such chapters as Epistemology and Education or Social and Political Philosophy. What interweaves these various categories is the constant cross-referencing of ideas and individuals. Once introduced, most major terms or thinkers reappear again and again in different contexts, so students can see the connectedness of these various ideas to one another.

This is pedagogically important and pedagogically demanding, I think, for the student and the teacher. By the latter half of the volume, it is not at all unusual for students to have to understand allusions to a half dozen different thinkers and specialized concepts in a single page, and these might be brought together in a way that another author might not think to bring them together at all. (An illustrative exercise would be for several scholars each to write one page of text using the

following names and terms, as Noddings does on page 132: Kohlberg, Lakatos, progressive and degenerating paradigms, formal logic, critical thinking, Dewey, epistemology, constructivism (Piagetian biological/individual, social, and radical), Ernst von Glaserfeld, Wallis Suchting, and cooperative learning. If these scholars were to compare their pages to see what sense each had made of the relations among these terms and names, we would expect to find that they had written very different things.) If the fabric has been woven well, all of this holds together; but it is still demanding for students to move through the relationships among these concepts adroitly.

This weaving approach is different from a survey approach, in part in the way it chooses to focus on specific connections among selected ideas rather than to provide a comprehensive map of the terrain. This is in large part why, for example, Noddings's chapter on John Dewey differs so much in character from the treatment of Dewey in the *Encyclopedia*, as does her treatment of "Feminism, Philosophy of Education." While her chapters on these two topics are significantly longer than the corresponding entries in the encyclopedia, her treatment is less comprehensive with respect to the full terrain of discourse usually associated with each topic. She selects specific points of focus, then spends time weaving in a variety of other issues that connect each chapter with the rest of the volume.

This book is a pedagogical act in another sense. Like teaching, it is temporal. Nel may wish to comment on this, but I am guessing that this book, like an act of teaching, is not written "for the ages" except to the degree that it will have long term impact on its readers. Some may be familiar with Native American sand painters who construct intricate designs with colored sand and then make no effort to preserve them as permanent artifacts. One Native American artist recently interviewed on public television compared such art to a song that one sings in the moment — and then the song is gone. Most teaching is like that. We do not try to preserve an act of teaching for the ages, except when someone boldly puts her teaching into a book for all to see, as Noddings has done. We can see her pedagogy exposed, treating many issues in which no one author is as expert as are her colleagues, taken collectively. Few of us have the range to teach as deeply and widely across such a vast expanse of philosophical/educational literatures. The text deserves to be widely used, and I would expect it will be. It does not try to make the enduring statement, however, that the *Encyclopedia* seeks to make. Rather, it speaks from the particularity of an insightful scholar making sense of her field in a way that invites others to join in.

The Chambliss volume, in contrast, is a comprehensive survey, one that does seem to be written for the ages. That is, like other encyclopedias, it invites maintaining for many years to come, as long as there is a field of philosophy of education. The order of the title seems apt to me: *Philosophy of Education-An Encyclopedia*, emphasizing its association with a disciplinary field first and with a genre of texts second. The book is a survey in that it does attempt to map out the terrain of our field. While it makes no claims to definitiveness, it clearly seeks comprehensiveness, both in its selection of 228 articles and in the tendency of each article to treat the major features of the literature on that topic. This volume, at over

half a million words, is some six times the length of the Noddings book. Its comprehensiveness and quality together mark this as a volume of enduring significance: it fills a need in the field for such a comprehensive collection, and it does it so well, with such well selected authorships, that it would seem very strange for someone else to mount a similar effort. With this volume, most of the work that needs doing has now been done.

The *Encyclopedia*, like Noddings's text, is meant to be edifying, but it is not structured as an instrument for developing a learner's capacities in a cumulative way. Its character is that of a reference book, to be reached for again and again in a variety of different contexts over a long expanse of time — a career, even. Its primary context of use is not to be read together as a whole by groups of novices, but in fragments, as particular entries are needed by teachers preparing lessons for college students, by students writing papers, by researchers, by participants in educational policy making who need to clarify a term or concept — and so on. It is written for more independent study than is Nel's book — that is, each selection assumes enough prior knowledge on the part of the reader that each passage can be understood independently from the rest of the book, and independently from a classroom process of dialogue and support.

The fragmented nature of such a volume, organized by alphabet, rather than by how any topic might inform the next, is part of its appeal as a book to browse, incidentally. I find myself choosing to read some topics because I am familiar with them and wish to check my understanding against the author's; some topics because they are so unfamiliar that I am curious about what they are about. I choose some selections because I recognize and am interested in the author, though the topic might not have drawn me itself; other topics regardless of author, and still other selections because of an inviting interface between the author and the topic. I might not have read the Comenius selection, but was curious about how a scholar from Prague would interpret the great Czech educator.

This volume, like Noddings's, cross-references other entries within the treatment of each topic, and a select few of those are listed at the end of each entry, encyclopedia-fashion, to help us track the subject into related areas. Such browsing is particularly rewarding because none of us has command of all, or even a high percentage, of these topics. Part of the appeal of this volume is that it could only have been assembled through the collective expertise of many, many people (over 180 authors), and we are given a single, readable location through which to become acquainted with knowledge and ways of knowing outside our own. Thus, while its central character is that of a reference book rather than an instructional text, it offers an opportunity for learning that will probably be embraced not by novices, but by people who have already developed at least an interest and probably some expertise in philosophy of education. The most knowledgeable among us will find something here to pursue.

The volume instructs in another sense, as well. It teaches any reader something significant about how the vocabulary of the field of philosophy of education might be constructed. The volume tells us what topics the editor and an eminent editorial advisory board, who know the field well, count as contributive to the "core" and the

“scope” of the field (p. vii). In so doing, they cause us to think about the core and scope of the field — what has been included and what left out. While I am grateful for the entry on Social Reconstructionism, for example, I would have liked to see an entry on the social foundations of education, or at least the philosophical foundations of education, to address a distinctively important pedagogical project in the history of a field that has contributed much to the education of educators.

One illustration of the *Encyclopedia's* approach to instructing us about the nature and scope of the field is in its longest single entry, the plus-8,000-word treatment of “Philosophy of Education, History of.” Interestingly, it contains one brief sentence on Dewey. Yet, the index lists over sixty other references to Dewey made in other treatments throughout the book.

Because of the different contexts of use for these two volumes, one text's treatment of a given topic cannot be substituted satisfactorily for the other's treatment of that same or a similar topic. I mentioned earlier the topic of feminism, for example, which Noddings embeds in a chapter titled “Feminism, Philosophy and Education.” She announces her purposes for the chapter as to (1) review and revisit problems raised in earlier chapters, (2) elaborate some feminist themes only hinted at earlier in the book, and (3) extend a particular feminist view, the ethic of care, using it to examine some basic ideas in education. The author is teaching, here, something of what she thinks students need to understand in the context of this particular text. It is in only a most limited and selective sense an effort to survey the terrain of feminist thought. Instead, it is more clearly an effort to help students understand what feminist perspective brings to enduring issues in philosophy of education as they have been presented earlier in the book. “Now that you understand something about philosophy of social science, or epistemology,” she seems to be saying, “look what feminist philosophy does to these ideas.” In particular, through her discussion of the ethic of caring, Noddings illustrates here a Deweyan point she later raises in the epilogue: that philosophy of education, more necessarily than philosophy generally, focuses on “philosophic problems where they arise and thrive, where they are at home, and where acceptance or rejection makes a difference in practice.”¹ One inference that might be drawn from Noddings's treatment is this: that the concern for making a difference in practice is characteristic of philosophy of education, of feminist philosophy of education in particular, and still more for the ethic of caring.

Barbara Houston's entry on Feminism in the *Encyclopedia* shares with Noddings's treatment a concern for the relationship between philosophizing and practice. It is framed, however, not as a pedagogical essay for students, but as a condensed, comprehensive survey. It begins with a provisional conceptual introduction, moves into a four column treatment of the history of feminism, turns to a discussion of theory and postmodernism, next addresses feminist activism at some length, and finally concludes with a brief consideration of feminist perspectives on education. In this treatment, she reminds us specifically that the work of Jane Roland Martin and Nel Noddings have made fundamental contributions to the literature — so much so that “these and other publications have changed the face of philosophy of education.”²

One passage from Houston's treatment of feminist theory suggests a telling comparison with the field of philosophy of education. The passage concerns both the fragmentation of feminist theory and the construal of theory as political activity, both of which, Houston suggests, may have the potential for weakening feminist influence on serving the interests of women collectively.

The test for a feminist theory used to be: Does this help in the liberation of women. Now it seems to be: Does this reflect female experience? When one combines the second criterion with postmodernists' emphasis upon differences, it is easy to understand Virginia Held's concern that postmodern feminism is in danger of being caught in a "fragmentation that may dissipate the concentrated effort needed to strive for liberation." Furthermore, when postmodernists emphasize the belief that theorizing is political activity, many feminist activists become wary. They worry that the idea of theory as politics might replace other kinds of activism. Feminist activists point out that redescribing and creating new meaning in theory is not enough to stop battering, promote reproductive freedom, or end child abuse.³

Houston's cautious framing of this thought suggests an equally cautious analogy to the field of philosophy of education: that philosophy of education may be in danger of too much fragmentation and the substitution of theory for the kind of philosophizing that, in Dewey's words, "makes a difference in practice." If offered as a familiar caution, not as an attack on the field, the analogy offers an occasion to reflect on what our field is accomplishing. Just as the feminist criterion "liberation of women" is grounded in a commitment to the development of human capacities, so does the modifier "of education," when applied to "philosophy," signal a similar concern for human growth. On the one hand, it seems clear to many of us in the field today that the diverse discourses that now characterize philosophy of education are intellectually enriching to the field. In the *Encyclopedia*, J.J. Chambliss says it differently:

In the last decade of the twentieth century, philosophy of education scarcely resembles a discipline with a distinct purpose and a clearly established agenda....From an interest in analysis of concepts to the various concerns for human social problems, we can see a wide and colorful array of projects addressed by philosophers of education. At the same time, the variety of projects is evidence for an individuality of effort that exists in the absence of a community of philosophers who search for the nature of *arete*. Missing in the present world of diversity of interests is the classic sense of a quest for philosophic unity (p. 472).

To postmodernists who eschew unity as a self-evidently positive aim, it is not clear that J.J. Chambliss's description is necessarily an indictment of the field. Feminism, too, is enriched by its diversity of theoretical enterprises. However, it is interesting to test our field against the concern expressed by Dewey, by Noddings and again by Houston, for making a difference in practice. In her treatment of feminism, Houston was able to illustrate in considerable detail that "women worldwide have found through feminism a language for redefining the scope of politics." Houston describes the world-changing impact that feminism has had in the United States and abroad in all areas of social, economic, and political life. These are clearly instances of a body of ideas making a difference in practice, and being shaped in turn by that practice. If we look for ways in which philosophy of education

has had similar impact in how people conduct their lives, or how institutions operate, the evidence is much more sparse. This may not be a function of the “fragmentation” or the “diversity” of the field, but it may well signal a need for discourse within the community of philosophers of education about what “making a difference” and *arete* mean.

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1. From John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: MacMillan, 1916), 328, quoted in Noddings, *Philosophy of Education*, 200.
 2. Barbara Houston, “Feminism,” in Chambliss, *Philosophy of Education*, 219.
 3. *Ibid.*, 218.

LOOSENING ONE’S GRIP:

REVISING CONCEPTIONS OF CENTER/MARGIN AND TEXT/TRADITION/IDENTITY

Kal Alston

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

When one is asked to offer critical analysis of “heavy” texts (in both the literal and metaphorical sense) which are themselves the products of the efforts of even “heavier” personages (“heavy” here only in the metaphorical sense), one is faced with the obstacles of one’s own respectfulness and sense of fairness. In my own case, I was also confronted with the temptation to do exactly what I suspected was expected of me: that is, to stake firmly my position as the “outsider within.” To offer up a critique as a feminist, as a woman of color, as a scholar who identifies professionally as a philosopher of education, but whose work is always suspect in its belongingness. Here instead I attempt to step back and to look at the purposes of these particular texts and these kinds of texts from a meta-critical perspective.

Nel Noddings and J.J. Chambliss have provided, in both texts, a valuable service to the profession — and in this context let us consider the boundaries of this profession of philosophy of education to be open as wide as we can imagine. Noddings’s book is deft and offers a map of a textual tradition which sometimes must seem ever so familiar to many of us. But it is helpful to come to such a map both when it is drawn with a fine and careful hand and when we have the opportunity to view even familiar terrain through new eyes.

For those of the more broadly conceived “us” whose teaching assignments or research, but not training, cajole us into the ranks of the profession, it sets up guide posts and milestones for teachers that are valuable not only in offering a cogent historical account but in insisting that philosophy of education is not a finished terrain: that *change* occurs and in fact may be the most durable tradition of all.

The encyclopedia, like all such projects, is a bigger and therefore easier target of charges that it sets out to contain a field and is always already failing. I suspect that anyone who looks at the encyclopedia will find one pet “missing” entry or will be insulted at the relative lengths of entries. If you want to play the “logic of significance” game, I invite you to use your rulers on a rainy afternoon when you have nothing to do or are dying to procrastinate. My own first impulse was to page

through the tome with a keen, vigilant eye, to ferret out the way that the center was being defined with me, languishing as always, on the margins. Right away, I'll confess my pet omissions in order to keep myself honest. I have three — one tradition and two people — since all the people were dead, I limited myself to looking beyond some contemporary figures of significance. The tradition is hermeneutics, and the two people are Michel Foucault and Alain Locke. I am not going to explain those entries or defend my choice of them here, because their naming has other significance for the argument I want to make in the rest of the paper.

Three points before leaving you to browse the *Encyclopedia* at your leisure: First, it was easy to find “myself” missing in this big text — insofar as I want to find myself identified with *any* particular text, tradition, or figure of history. This effort devolved into a parlor game, and I felt it as an emotionally, more than intellectually, satisfying experience. Second, I can only imagine the intense labor of conceiving and assembling this text. I, therefore, applaud the apparently indefatigable energies of Chambliss and the advisory board, laboring humanly at an inhuman task of selection, of inclusion, and necessarily, of exclusion. Also, the bane of the editor's existence is not having one's intentions for a text fulfilled for a variety of reasons. The text as we have it today is the product of the labors of so many that gaps in conception *and* in product are inevitable. Third, on my account, true absences will not diminish its use value for me since I am much more likely to need an encyclopedia entry on something about which I know little or nothing, such as the plethora of first millennium Middle Eastern/Northern African teachers and thinkers, than on those concepts or individuals I know enough about to miss. So before moving on to the next section of this essay, let me renew my gratitude to Nel Noddings and to Jim Chambliss for their most recent cartographic efforts.

I originally titled this essay “Border Patrols: Finding the Center and Margins of Practice.” I conceived it as a critique of what sometimes seems to be the endless construction of patrolling the borders of our professional interests and concerns. I was planning to stand at my place on the margins and say (challengingly), “If you were only standing where I am standing, you would see the error of your ways. You would know that this endless border patrolling is useless.” This need we have, as humans, much less as philosophers of education, to know ourselves by an endless process begun in infancy to define what is *not-us* means that we have not only to keep telling ourselves stories about ourselves — our ancestor myths as well as heroic tales of our own worthiness as preservers of those histories and traditions — but we have to create a geography of our identity, activities, and artifacts. We construct unspoken accounts of our culture and follow them with tests of authenticity. These impulses are problematic because the patrollers tend to forget that just as it is the belief of nationalists that preservation against malignant hegemonic forces depends on an often ruthless regime of self-definition and abandonment of the non-conforming, the trap that they consequently build themselves is that the destruction they seek to prevent is *begun* by the expulsion of the “unfaithful.” It is these twilight people then — lurking on the boundaries — who seem to pose a threat when it is not the “margins” that represent the phantasmagorical but the “center.”

Won't You Change Partners and Dance With Me

I want to suggest three arguments briefly — 1) that we need projects like the encyclopedia, but we also need to regard them as having multiple purposes; 2) that both the center and the margins need to be subjected to a de-romanticized historical geography; and 3) that a different vision of the economies of writing and reading may help us in our efforts toward strategic self-knowledge.

I. If I am suspicious of some of the consequences of the “nationalistic” impulses that propel projects like encyclopedias, I am simultaneously desirous of the metaphysical comfort provided by the embracing arms of delimiting love. In the development of identities, the insistence on boundary-making and border-patrolling is one antidote to calls for amalgamation and assimilation, which end in our disappearance. So we create texts and traditions that describe ourselves and our history, which simultaneously allow us to resist subsumption *and* enforce our territory. Encyclopedias are of course only one instantiation of the phenomenon. If we want to institutionalize our discipline or our projects we can look to texts and textbooks, listservs, histories, qualifying exams, graduate course offerings, introductory course syllabi, the job market, and our own enterprises in this Society. Some of those projects seem on their surfaces to be less fixed than a text like an encyclopedia whose revision may be far away in time. But I would suggest that all of these practices of identification are both rigid and flexible to a certain extent. I want to posit that the inflexibility of the forms is primarily found in our purposes for them. When we are seeking to use these texts and traditions in projects of self-definition, we are not very eager to look for the escape clauses; the by-ways and activities “over there” are not of interest to A except as they constitute not-A. Sometimes our goals suggest a bare bones/basics approach in which the center is described as pure and small and explicit; other times the center is encroaching and hungry and seeking to establish its presence over a wide field. Both strategies necessitate the solidification of the view-from-here. We can, of course, conceive of different purposes for these activities in addition to these self-affirming and identifying ones, but it is unlikely that we would ever give up our quests for specificity and identity found in “center” or the pursuits of “boundary” around it.

II. As I remarked above, the strategy of boundary maintenance has a tendency to create disputes among those “outsiders” closest to the border. What fun can you have after all in saying, “Flipping burgers at Wendy’s or practicing corporate law or doing quantum physics” is *not* philosophy of education. Most people who constitute their work in those ways are of course highly unlikely to submit papers to *Educational Theory* or to PES or to apply for jobs in philosophy of education. Even less are they likely to complain of exclusion from the “center” of the field’s practices. Instead it is those whose paths cross the field or encroach on it — those who share some commonality of interest who take up camp on those margins and borders who constitute a “problem.” There absolutely exist materially exclusionary practices on the parts of those in power, editorial boards, program committees, search committees, but there is also a system of dependent coexistence. That is, whatever location purports to hold the center at any time, its very centrality is dependent on those on the margins to give meaning to *The Center*. And those of us who are on the margins

are at once really outside of inclusion of some practices, but also contributing to the consolidation of the centering activities — it is partially through the struggles between centers and margins that the claims and practices of the center are reified and become socially dispersed discourses. These relations of struggle and interdependency are seriously contingent — a phenomenon we can see perhaps most clearly if we look at historical renderings of the field through a very critical lens. Accounts from the center relate sagas of begetting and patricide and battles to the death, of exploding and contracting centers — always maintaining the illusion of the center (the location of the field itself) as the unifying element in a story with tectonic shifts, surprise appearances from the primordial ooze, the Cro-Magnons v. Neanderthals, for example. And it is sometimes evident in accounts from the margin of how romanticized a position outsiders can conceptualize for themselves — tales of authenticity, experience, deepened phenomenal intelligence, resistance, and recognition — none of these are unusual strategies of validation. My complaint here is that battles over inclusion and exclusion laid out over these static geographies of center-margin fail to recognize that the claiming of these metaphorical strategies themselves give light only to certain kinds of histories and certain kinds of mappings.

III. Giving up the illusion of the center is not my contribution of a new absolutist doctrine. Rather it is a suggestion that while there may be very good political reasons at any given time for solidarity around such a concept, it is also far too easy to conceive of the “field” as the site around which all efforts must congeal (and this case leads to a mistaken natural history of a field like philosophy of education). My suggestion has two corollaries: first, that we should always be leery of histories that move our vision from battle to battle or from great idea to great idea — always presupposing that at the end of the day those battles were over the *same* terrain and the ideas were perspectives on the *same* monument. All along the terrain shifts; all along we leave behind places and texts that come to be outside of memory. Sometimes projects like encyclopedias serve something of a recuperative function. Yet a three-column entry on DuBois can only potentially pull him out of the *oubliette*. Unless philosophers of education read him without submitting to the impulse to inscribe him on the already written text that is philosophy of education, the significance of his works cannot be made manifest. Instead of recuperating DuBois, why not allow him to be a non-marginal reminder that writings and conceptions of education have always also been occurring just out of sight, out of the range of containment — and be satisfied by that. Secondly, related to this acknowledgment of activities outside our purview or abilities to write into our own stories, is the suggestion that we acknowledge that there are different purposes for philosophical writing than the institutionalization of the discipline.

In more rhizomatic economies of writing and reading philosophy of education, staking out one’s place becomes a different sort of cartographic exercise than measuring the distance between oneself and Mount Philosophy of Education. Rather it opens up the possibility of map-making as an expression of sense perception, recovered memories of significance, poetic imagination, re-reading of texts of all sorts — even or especially ones with no purposive claim — whether centered, decentered, or marginalized — to an essentializing history of practice. These

practices of reading and writing are *not new*. Many philosophers of education, including authors in this collection, have hailed the distant fields, taught and engaged in dynamic and catalytic practices, written and read outside the pressing necessity of the question, “But is it philosophy of education?” And that is precisely the point of my comments/argument here: these are practices that have always been here and there — whether forgotten through, or left unrecognized by, or incorporated into, the specifying histories of our field and its centers. And when we have the best kind of examples of “centering” texts, as we do with the texts at hand here, it is an opportunity to remind ourselves of both the pleasures and the limits of these enterprises and of our concomitant visions of ourselves.

None of my thinking bears any fruit in a vacuum. In this case I wish to acknowledge debts to Nel Noddings and Jim Chambliss, both of whose work was importantly present as I began my scholarship. Thanks are due to Susan Laird who made spaces for so many voices at the 1997 meeting of PES. Specific credit for tweaking my brain (and absolutely no blame for any consequent errors on my part) goes to the incisive Zelia Gregoriou and the always generous Ralph Page. Finally, I wish to dedicate this effort to a most beautiful muse, Maxine Greene.

TEXT, TEXTS, AND TRADITIONS IN PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

James S. Kaminsky
Auburn University

Introduction

This essay attempts to answer the question “To what extent do text, texts, and traditions contribute to our conjectures about educational philosophy’s present? And in a collateral voice it asks the further question: To what extent do new texts, text, and traditions contribute to said same present?”

One way to address the question and to save endless confusions and atavisms is to agree with Richard Rorty that the content of philosophy is best understood “as a kind of writing.” It is one brand of literature featuring a peculiar set of concerns, authors, and discursive structures.¹ In other words, “there can be no genuine discursive discipline which deals with those matters called ‘the problems of philosophy.’”² The problems of philosophy are, for the most part, the limits of language beyond which nothing can be thought or discursively said, as Wittgenstein reminds us. Philosophy as literature is a confluence of the stories (narratives) that Europeans assert about themselves and their world and self-descriptions we assert about ourselves and our world as North Americans.³

When philosophy as a special domain of literature is affirmed, then its text, texts, and traditions can be considered in a literary leitmotif. Michel Foucault suggests that texts, text, and traditions are at the junction of critical meditation and deliberation on our own history, just as they are part of our effort to invent ourselves when the humdrum effort to discover who we are is abandoned in the name of more exciting projects.⁴ In these more exciting projects the power of familiarity and strangeness—which texts and traditions contain—edify and help us escape the

description of ourselves that others have forced upon us, just as it helps us escape the description that time and history have forced upon us.⁵ Simply put texts, text, and traditions are part of the means through which we come to assert our self-description, just as they are part of the intellectual, cultural, and moral deliberation of our self-fashioning. They are the stuff out of which the world in which we live and our own self-assertion is constructed.

History

Once upon a time in the United States, text, texts, and traditions in philosophy of education were synonymous with the name of John Dewey. *My Pedagogic Creed*, *School and Society*, *The Child and the Curriculum*, and *Democracy and Education* are part of a textual stream and intellectual tradition that find their beginnings in Dewey's *Ideologiekritik* of an American laissez-faire liberalism.⁶ In a very real sense Dewey remains educational philosophy's "once and future king." His texts and the intellectual tradition he inspired "affirmed the eighteenth-century triad of liberty, equality, and fraternity. In a similar fashion Dewey's *Ideologiekritik* of the American common school became the core of educational philosophy's intellectual, political, and social discourse — namely, of its texts and traditions.⁷

By the second decade of the twentieth century Dewey had decided that his concept of philosophy was in need of amendment.⁸ The realities of World War I and the years of cultural transformation that lead up to it convinced him that the idea of philosophy required a re-thinking, in light of the consequences of organized capitalism and modernity itself.⁹ In 1920, just four years after the publication of *Democracy and Education*, his *Reconstruction in Philosophy* was presented to America's intellectual establishment. It was Dewey's first attempt — among many — to make philosophy respond to the demands of the twentieth century.¹⁰ The irony in all of the former is that Dewey never attempted the same task in education, in any systematic or extended fashion. He did not make philosophy of education confront organized capitalism and modernity in the same manner that he had made philosophy, itself, confront the twentieth century.

Compared to Dewey's *Ideologiekritik*, J. J. Chambliss's compendious *Philosophy of Education: An Encyclopedia* or Nel Noddings's summative *Philosophy of Education* are strangely detached academic and disinterested bedfellows in a world that is locked in an intellectual contest somewhere between classicism's utopian memories and the liberal neo-pragmatic fictive paradise of "experimental selves." Be that as it may, by considering both books in a literary leitmotif the classic distinction between *epic* and *lyric* offers strong insights into their potential contribution for understanding educational philosophy's present.

Chambliss's encyclopedia is best understood as an epic. It is an attempt to escape the intellectual dizziness found in the sheer number of texts and traditions that are part of educational philosophy. That is, like most epics, Chambliss's encyclopedia is formed out of the urge to seize hold of the objective totality of the discipline's story and then expose its various dimensions one by one, while simultaneously, displaying its *terra incognita* in negative relief. In taxonomic form its structure seeks to expose and sample the generative narrative of the discipline's texts and traditions.

In the objective gaze of his encyclopedia the de jure questions of educational philosophy are translated into de facto frames of reference and thus become benchmarks for educational philosophy's practice.

To his great credit, the encyclopedia's editor realized that the work had to assert educational philosophy's own description, not the description of philosophy. Like all epics the encyclopedia needed to seize hold of the discipline's story in objective totality — not the story of philosophy — and then expose its various dimensions. Thus, although it shares certain similarities with Paul Edwards *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, it is distinctly different in its structure, focus, and content. The structure and content of the encyclopedia is not as familiar or uniform as the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* nor as extensive as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

Still, it must be granted that the intellectual structure of the encyclopedia is a bit quirky. But the encyclopedia's irregular taxonomic structure, modest length, unfamiliar intellectuals, and odd topics only reflect the legitimate disagreements that exist in fact within the discipline — that is, disagreements as to educational philosophy's heroes, relevant intellectual ambitions and ideals, repertoires of concepts and explanatory procedures, methods of analysis, and clearly defined reservoirs of questions.

Be that as it may, it is a great success. It is constructed by a sound and well chosen editor. It is written by adroit authors. It is well executed by a good press. It is a credit to everyone who contributed to the project, just as it is a credit to the discipline. Most importantly it is an encyclopedia of educational philosophy, not an encyclopedia of something else. In being such, it announces the discipline's maturity and delivers it and our concerns over to history so that, perhaps, for the first time we can meaningfully ask how the project of educational philosophy is doing.

Professor Noddings's book, while trading under a similar name, is very different. In broad strokes it covers: the concerns of philosophy of education before the twentieth century, John Dewey's educational thought, analytic philosophy of education, continental philosophy, logic, epistemology and education, philosophy of social science and educational research, ethics and moral education, social and political philosophy, and feminism. It is readable, accessible, and tells a story that is consistent with many of the central concerns of educational philosophy. However Noddings's introduction does not accomplish the same sense of objective totality that pervades Chambliss's encyclopedia. For that matter it does not come into sharp focus until one abandons the requirement that it be read as an epic narrative of educational philosophy's past and present.

Noddings's text is best understood as a lyric opus. If her book is understood as a text in lyric form — as an expression of a self-revealing subjectivity — its content springs into sharp relief. Understood as a lyric opus, each chapter presents Noddings's intellectual archetype as a partial and partisan description of educational philosophy. Within it we can meaningfully and easily comprehend the history of her own intellectual narrative and its place within her works and the various works of educational philosophy. We can see the final vocabularies, poetic achievements, and

cultural resources out of which her opus was constructed and out of which it will continue to develop. In this context we find a partisan template of educational philosophy. It presents her personal intellectual journey—a self-revealing subjectivity.

Once rendered, her textual self-description — the realization of her own self-assertion — demands to be taken seriously on its own terms, not on the objective terms of narrative in which the question: “Has she got it right?” might be pertinent. In one sense the text is beyond criticism. That is, if one were to proclaim Noddings’s lyric work as one’s own, all that remains would be the further admission of a failure of authenticity and imagination. On the other hand, if one declares her work as false — an impossible task as lyric works are neither true nor false — little would be accomplished beyond the assertion that Professor Noddings’s self-revealing would not be one’s own.

Yet her text is made problematic by the fact that the summative presence of her lyric suggests itself to its readers as an epic narrative of the discipline. Because of the implied promise of an objective epic totality summatively encapsulating the various complete texts of Plato, Aristotle, Pestalozzi, James, Dewey, Russell, Wittgenstein, Sartre, Camus and many others encircled by her introduction — a task, perhaps, beyond anyone’s powers — the edifying promise found in her lyric introduction is partially unrequited. The summation of the entire discipline in one lyric opus generates a certain “hominess” to the unsophisticated reader just as it suggests a certain “ordinariness” to the sophisticated reader. Hominess and ordinariness in Noddings’s introduction are produced by its literary ambiguity. As a semiotic this lyric text presents itself as an objective totality without the usual pantheon of texts, disputations, arguments, and proofs. Its lyric grammar presents the final vocabularies, poetic achievements, and cultural resources out of which it has been constructed without the usual motifs of heroes, villains, Grail quests, struggles, and unexpected levels of meaning. Of course, it is entirely possible that the former merely accuses or commends, as you like it, Noddings’s book of nothing more or less than being an introduction, which is, of course, one of the definitions it claims for itself.

In the interpretation of her text in a literary leitmotif, the importance of her book for the profession should be only measured against its usefulness in reweaving the webs of beliefs we hold about ourselves as professionals and the requirements of our discipline’s continuous regeneration in the present and future days. As an introduction to students of educational philosophy the book will only be important to the degree they meet Nel Noddings, real and mystical, in the text and come to understand the beauty of human promise and human potential evident in this introduction and her various other works. Perhaps her book *Philosophy of Education* is neither lyric nor narrative; perhaps, her work is more like autobiography — more like Tristram Shandy’s thoughtful attempt to catch up with his own life and then secure it, in print.

Conclusion

But where does this leave us? What do both of these texts contribute to understanding educational philosophy’s present? The answer to this question is “I am not sure.” But I am sure that in this game of texts, text, and textualism

there is no surer way of telling the good guys from the bad guys than to note that the black hats, abetted by a brooding nostalgia, see the Western project as having exhausted its possibilities and would like to see it closed down. The white hats, on the other hand, want to open up the possibilities, to ring the variations of all the themes. And when those variations are exhausted, they wish to introduce yet other thematics, other genres, other twists in the plot.¹¹

Both of these texts, lyric and epic, alike have a great faith in the Western tradition. Both authors are convinced that the intellectual tradition of which we are a part has not exhausted its possibilities nor expended its potential. Chambliss's book marks out educational philosophy's concerns as part of the Western tradition. It lets us know what counts as educational philosophy and gestures, however opaquely, as its "undiscovered country." Noddings book suggests a path through the tradition and tells us what final vocabularies, poetic achievements, and cultural resources she brought to her intellectual labors and how we should do likewise if the construction of educational philosophy is to continue. They both remind us of our solidarity with Descartes, Cervantes, and Dewey, and the tradition within which their work dwells.

In this debate it is important to remember that more is at stake than self-description of educational philosophy. The textual traditions of educational philosophy are being contested within a powerful public debate between forces of counter-modernity and modernity. Within this public debate the virtue of intellectual tolerance and the very idea of public knowledge itself seems to be at risk. As educational philosophers we must publicly stand in this debate on the side of Descartes, Cervantes, and Dewey. "To take, with Descartes, the thinking self as the basis of everything, and thus to face the universe alone, is to adopt an attitude that Hegel was right to call heroic."¹² Descartes reminds us of the cost of the loss of intellectual courage — that is, the surrender of philosophy and science to the atavistic forces of counter-modernity. Cervantes reminds us of the cost of taking one final vocabulary too seriously. Kundera notes "To take, with Cervantes, the world as ambiguity, to be obliged to face not a single absolute truth but a welter of contradictory truths (truths embodied in *imaginary selves* called characters), to have as one's only certainty the *wisdom of uncertainty*, requires no less courage."¹³ Cervantes reminds us of what is at stake if we surrender poetry to the forces of intellectual bigotry and intolerance. And Dewey, Dewey reminds us that the measure of any community must be against "what is going on and how it goes on."¹⁴ He reminds us of our ethical responsibility as educational philosophers to all of our children, just as he reminds of us of our responsibility to the public and its problems.

Both Chambliss's book and Noddings's book are important because they help us in asserting our own description as educational philosophers and reminding us of our responsibility to the Western intellectual tradition. They are part of finishing the task that Dewey neglected when he failed to return to education in a significant and systematic fashion after completing *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. The importance of these texts, the intellectual traditions of which they are a part, and their interaction with literary criticism or philosophy is a matter of saying things about the timeliness of the stories that we tell about ourselves. These stories empower us to cope with the conduct of our professional lives as well as the unforeseeable questions and difficulties that, inevitably, beset us. Once these things are said about the texts of our

own self-description, they become the “problems of philosophy” depending upon how they solve the unforeseen difficulties of our discipline or how they do or do not move us to construct, reconstruct, or deconstruct new stories about our profession and others when our stories fail us.¹⁵

1. Richard Rorty, “Philosophy as a Kind of Writing,” in *Consequences of Pragmatism*, ed. Richard Rorty (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982), 92.

2. Richard Rorty, “Keeping Philosophy Pure,” in Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, 20.

3. Rorty, “Philosophy as a Kind of Writing,” 91.

4. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997).

5. Rorty Richard, 1980, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), 1980: 360, 369.

6. John Dewey, “My Pedagogic Creed,” In *Dewey on Education*, ed. Martin S. Dworkin (1897; reprint, New York: Teachers College Press, 1959); John Dewey, “School and Society,” In *Dewey on Education*, ed. Martin S. Dworkin (1899; reprint, New York: Teachers College Press); John Dewey *The Child and the Curriculum*, (1902; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1902; and John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Free Press), 1916.

7. Charles Leslie Glenn, Jr., *The Myth of the Common School*, (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press), 1988: 3-14; James S. Kaminsky, *A New History of Educational Philosophy*, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993), 3-102.

8. *Ibid.*, 117-94; 319-73.

9. James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 277-78; Also, Alan Ryan, *John Dewey* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995); Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*.

10. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*; and John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York: Beacon Press), 1920.

11. David L. Hall, *Richard Rorty* (New York: State University of New York Press), 1994: 124.

12. Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, trans. Linda Asher (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 6.

13. *Ibid.*

14. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (1927; reprint, Denver: Alan Swallow University Press, 1954): 21.

15. Rorty, “Philosophy as a Kind of Writing,” 91.