

Chapter 1

Educational Biography and the Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Education

Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Education: A Biographical Introduction is designed to introduce prospective teachers, in-service teachers, and other educators to the history and philosophy of education by examining the life stories, the biographies, of the leading individuals who shaped educational theory and practice. The book's theme is that insightful and innovative educators, by interacting with their cultural contexts, developed educational theories and practices that continue to influence teachers today. By examining the lives, ideas, and contributions of these leading personalities on the world scene, this book seeks to illuminate the connection between education and the great transforming events and trends that have shaped our world.

Educational ideas—philosophies, ideologies, and theories—are considered in their broader relationship to education in its formal and informal aspects and to schooling in its more particular institutional setting. The author believes that educational ideas need to be examined and juxtaposed with those found in literature, politics, history, philosophy, and other areas in the humanities. It is important to keep extending the educational frame of reference to the larger world of scholarly inquiry.

OVERVIEW

This book is a historical narrative that describes the context, times and situation, and biography of each world figure examined. It analyzes the educational ideas and practices that each person developed and considers their contemporary meaning and significance.

Setting education in a global perspective, the narrative begins in Chapter 2 with Confucius, an ancient Chinese philosopher and teacher whose ethical theory is highly significant in China and throughout Asia. Chapter 3 examines Plato, who in ancient Athens established the philosophical foundations of the Western cultural and educational heritage. Chapter 4, which discusses Aristotle's natural realism, examines its influence in shaping Western philosophy and education. Chapter 5 studies the educational theory and practices of Quintilian, the Roman rhetorician who elaborated on the ideal of rhetoric education that had originated in ancient Greece with the Sophists and Isocrates. The ideas of Plato, Aristotle, and Quintilian that illuminate the Greco-Roman contribution to the Western cultural and educational heritage establish the philosophical foundations for our ongoing study of educational history and philosophy.

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Chapter 6 examines Thomas Aquinas's construction of theistic realism. Using the context of the medieval synthesis, the chapter describes how Christian theology and classical Greco-Roman philosophy, especially that of Aristotle, were integrated in Western education. Chapter 7 carries the reader from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance by examining the Christian humanism of Erasmus of Rotterdam. In Chapter 8, the important events generated by the Protestant Reformation that stimulated universal education and literacy are examined as the backdrop of the life and ideas of the Protestant reformer John Calvin. Chapter 9 considers the life and educational ideas of Johann Amos Comenius, whose philosophy of pansophism sought to heal the wounds of religious intolerance and nationalist antagonism.

The origins of child-centered education are explored in Chapter 10 on Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Chapter 11, on Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, a nineteenth-century Swiss educational reformer, analyzes how he emphasized both children's cognitive and affective development in schools.

In Chapter 12, the discussion of Thomas Jefferson's concept of civic education in the new republic moves the narrative from Enlightenment Europe to the American social and political context. Chapter 13, on Mary Wollstonecraft, examines an early feminist who infused revolutionary thinking into her quest for equality between women and men. Chapter 14, on Horace Mann, explores his work in the common school movement as laying the foundations for American public education. Chapter 15, on the life and ideas of Robert Owen, an early nineteenth-century communitarian socialist, points up a new concept in educational theory—the use of education as a means of social change and reconstruction. Chapter 16 examines the development of early childhood education through the life of Friedrich Froebel, who used philosophical idealism as the kindergarten's theoretical foundation.

Chapter 17, on John Stuart Mill, examines the English philosopher's rendition of utilitarian liberalism and defense of the freedom of ideas. Chapter 18, discussing Herbert Spencer, examines how he constructed a new design for curriculum based on human activities and how he used Darwin's theory of evolution to develop social Darwinism, a social rationale based on survival of the fittest. In Chapter 19, the narrative focuses on Jane Addams, the pioneering social worker and founder of Chicago's Hull House. Addams's articulation of the philosophy of "socialized education" and the historical context in which she worked illustrates how urbanization and immigration transformed the United States from a rural-agrarian to an urban-industrial-technological society.

Chapter 20 examines John Dewey, the leading philosopher of education in the United States. By placing his philosophy in its broad historical and cultural context, Dewey's pragmatic instrumentalism, or experimentalism, can be seen as stimulating a major reconception of learning and teaching in the United States. Chapter 21 examines the ideas of William Chandler Bagley, an essentialist educator who worked to develop teacher education into a professional study that integrated academic subject matter with educational methods. Chapter 22 analyzes Maria Montessori's theory and practice of early childhood education as an international movement that broadened our understanding of children and the processes by which they learn.

The story of Mohandas Gandhi in Chapter 23 shows how one person challenged the might of a great empire to win freedom and independence for his people. In educational history, Gandhi's life and philosophy of nonviolent resistance to oppression marked the beginning of the end of colonialist exploitation. The discussion of Gandhi's educational ideas is particularly useful for portraying the foundations of education in a global context.

Chapter 24 treats the life, ideas, and significance of W. E. B. Du Bois, a sociologist and historian who was a determined activist for African American civil and educational rights and progress. Chapter 25, the concluding chapter, examines the life and work of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator who formulated the philosophy of liberation pedagogy. Emphasizing that education always takes place in an ideological context, Freire argued that genuine education

should strive to liberate individuals, especially members of marginalized groups, from exploitation and domination by ruling elites. Freire's liberation pedagogy has been especially influential on the contemporary educational philosophy of critical theory.

ORGANIZATION

I use four structural organizers in constructing my narratives about these 24 significant individuals and their influence in shaping education: historical contexts, educational biographies, the development of their educational philosophies and theories, and an assessment of significance.

Historical Contexts

Each chapter establishes the historical context in which the particular person lived and worked and then examines how the person's interaction with his or her historical context or environment stimulated that individual to reflect on education and to formulate ideas about education or, in some cases, to develop a complete philosophy of education.

Because people generate ideas within a cultural context, we examine the general historical context to present the setting and situation in which the educator, theorist, or ideologist lived. Each context illustrates how educational ideas in the past as well as in our own times were responses to challenges—political, social, economic, religious, and intellectual. For example, Plato was responding to the cultural and political decline of the Greek polis. Jane Addams faced the dilemma of dealing with new immigrant Americans in an urban and industrial society. John Dewey addressed the need for a new social consensus in a society where social and economic change was eroding the inherited foundations of democracy. W. E. B. Du Bois struggled against persistent racial discrimination that relegated African Americans to the status of second-class citizens.

Using the historical context as an organizing theme illustrates the point that educational ideas originate in particular situations and in a particular time and place. Even though these educational ideas may emerge from a particular context, they often have a larger meaning and value that we may apply in many other contexts. However, we are each our own historian and philosopher of education. The larger meaning that we can gain from studying the lives of educators depends on the challenges we face today. New challenges in different times create the need to revisit and study anew the shaping ideas of our educational heritage.

For students of the historical and philosophical foundations of education, the use of contexts is designed to develop a sense of historical perspective and continuity with our educational past. This past, however, is not to be viewed as completed or isolated from our educational present. Rather, the varying contexts in which leading educators, philosophers, and ideologists interacted with their environments are viewed as episodes in an ongoing educational experience. It provides us with a historical, philosophical, and ideological map or grid on which we can locate ourselves as educators today. Such a map of the mind helps us avoid the rootlessness and presentism that today often characterizes too much of the rhetoric about education, teaching, and learning.

Students of education—prospective teachers, teachers, curriculum specialists, administrators, and policymakers—can benefit professionally by becoming sensitive to the theme of contexts. What takes place in the school as a formal educational setting does not occur in a cultural vacuum. The world outside the school's walls determines much of the power—or futility—of the teaching and learning taking place within. Contemporary educators soon come to recognize that social problems, political issues, and cultural change affect the school's efforts to instruct children.

Although few question that the contemporary context of education affects schooling, professional programs for preparing educators have not sufficiently used the theoretical power of

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understanding educational contexts. Critics allege that many teacher education programs are intellectually shallow, lacking a sense of historical and cultural perspective. Without a historical memory, U.S. educators are often victims of an all-consuming “presentism.” Without this collective remembrance, they may be “culturally illiterate” to the great ideas and heritage of their own profession. In this book, I seek to contribute to restoring the memory of our educational past in a way that illuminates the present and points to the future.

Educational Biography

A second key element, or organizing theme, is the use of educational biography, an exploration of those events of an educational nature that helped form a person and shape her or his intellectual or educational worldview. Biographies consider how people confront and resolve the challenges of their lives. By focusing on important world personalities such as Calvin, Jefferson, Addams, and Gandhi, the narrative examines how a significant person, through contextual interaction and challenge, developed insights into educational theory and practice. It examines how they constructed educational philosophies by searching for meaning in their own experiences and their own interactions within the contexts of their lives.

A highly useful discussion of the interaction of an educator in relationship to her or his context occurs in Jay Martin’s excellent biography *The Education of John Dewey*. Reflecting on his interpretation of Dewey’s life, Martin found that he not only had to write about ideas but also needed to probe his subject’s mode of thinking, especially how Dewey’s thinking often originated “through his emotions.” Turning to context, Martin found that Dewey “actively responded to the character and condition of the time in which he lived.”¹ The interpretation of Dewey’s life requires the biographer to examine the inner resources of his subject in relationship to the problems and issues, conflicts and contradictions, and promises and possibilities of the context in which he lived. Martin’s reflections on writing biography can be used to guide us in our study of the lives and times of the world’s leading educational thinkers. For example, we can ask, What process did the person use to formulate her or his ideas about education? How were these ideas a response to the problems, issues, and possibilities of their historical contexts? We can also turn these questions to our own self-examination, asking, How do I formulate my ideas? How are my ideas a response to the problems and possibilities of my context—my own time and place?

Craig Kridel, a scholar on educational biography, argues, “Biographical inquiry provides a fresh perspective on and new possibilities and dimensions for education.”² Barbara Finkelstein, a highly recognized historian of education, finds biography useful to (1) “explore intersections between human agency and social structure”; (2) “stabilize or transform the determinancies of cultural tradition, political arrangements, economic forms, social circumstances and educational processes into new social possibilities”; and (3) “view the relationships between educational processes and social change.”³

Like Kridel and Finkelstein, I believe that the study of biography and autobiography, while providing fascinating insights into human behavior, is useful for educators. If we pause for a moment, we can reflect on and construct our own educational autobiographies. The primary sources of this autobiography are the formative influence of parents, siblings, friends, adversaries, peers, teachers, politicians, clergy, and others on what we have become and how we view the world. The curriculum—the skills and subjects—we studied in school and how our teachers taught them are also important sources for us. Our involvement with and participation in informal educational agencies, such as churches and the clergy, media and news commentators, libraries and librarians, workplaces, and employers and employees, are important in forming us and our attitudes.

In addition to those people and agencies that shape our educational autobiographies, key events in our lives have a special power over our interpretation. How we perceive these events shapes our perspective of reality in its various dimensions—politically, economically, religiously, socially, intellectually, aesthetically, culturally, and educationally. In particular, the key events of childhood and youth take on a special significance, becoming almost like lenses through which we establish a personally meaningful vision of our own lifetime. For those who came to maturity during the Great Depression of the 1930s, the stock market crash, the specter of unemployment, reduced family circumstances, and the personality of Franklin D. Roosevelt supply the lenses to interpret what has occurred to them. For the generation of the 1960s, the civil rights movement, sit-ins, freedom marches, Woodstock, protests over the Vietnam War, and the power and effect of John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., illuminate their vision of subsequent events. For those who come to maturity in the first decade of the twenty-first century, the war on terrorism, especially the images of hijacked planes crashing into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001, is likely to shape their view of the world.

We examine events in the childhood and youth of the key personalities in this book—Pestalozzi, Wollstonecraft, Froebel, Montessori, Addams, and Dewey—to try to find the lenses through which they glimpsed the sweep of history. Often these key events, those happenings of war and peace, affected the development of their educational philosophies.

From the interaction of context and biography comes the development of educational ideas. It is the body of educational ideas that forms what we can take from one time and situation to another. Although all educational ideas have contextual origins, some ideas are powerful enough to transcend their time and place. For example, Plato's idealism, Aquinas's Thomism, Erasmus's humanism, Rousseau's naturalism, Jefferson's republicanism, Owen's communitarianism, Spencer's social Darwinism, and Dewey's instrumentalism were powerful bodies of ideas that have shaped our worldview and our thinking on human nature and on education. Ideas come to constitute a philosophy of education to answer such questions as, How did the particular theorist conceive of truth, human nature, society, social change, education, schooling, the curriculum, teaching, and learning?

Significance

The book's final organizing device deals with the question of historical and educational significance or meaning. Significance is considered in the era, the historic period, in which an educator developed a theory and in terms of the contemporary educational situation.

The discussion of the individuals in the book begins with the historical context in which the educator lived and constructed her or his theory. For example, Jefferson is placed in the historical context of the transit of Enlightenment ideology to North America and the period of the American Revolution. The biographer's task as a historian is to develop inferences about the particular theory's significance for its own time—as a reaction for or against the period's prevailing ideas, forces, and institutions and a defense or a challenge to them. In developing this historical sense of significance, it is important that we understand the theory in the context in which it originated. We can make historical assessments and judgments about it, but first we need to situate it in its own time period.

In addition to a theory's significance in its time of origin, there is another important kind of significance: its meaning for us in the time in which we live, our own historical context. A theory's relevance, significance, or meaning depends to a large extent on our own educational context, or situation, and the challenges, issues, and problems that it presents to us as educators. As our educational problems and challenges change, so does the meaning we acquire from studying the lives and contributions of the great thinkers on education. When issues of early childhood education assume a large importance in today's educational context, then the careers and theories of

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Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Montessori assume a heightened significance for us. When contemporary critics allege that our schools no longer convey the Western cultural heritage to the young, then a reexamination of the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, and Quintilian and the essentialism of Bagley provide a useful perspective on our intellectual and educational origins. As U.S. schools assume the responsibility for educating new immigrants, reexamining Addams's ideas on assimilation helps us understand the current debates over multiculturalism. When ethnic and religious tensions erupt and bring violence to people merely because they are members of a particular group, then Comenius's call for ecumenical education takes on a new resonance. When acts of terrorism take the lives of innocent people, many of whom are noncombatant women and children, then Gandhi's plea for nonviolence becomes an urgent matter for all of us.

QUESTIONS, PROJECTS, AND READINGS

Each chapter closes with Questions for Reflection and Dialogue, Projects for Deepening Your Understanding, and Suggestions for Further Reading. The questions and projects are designed to encourage students to explore the following questions:

1. How did the context and the life of a particular theorist shape his or her ideas on education?
2. How did the people presented in this book either reflect or reconstruct the cultural and educational forces and trends that were present in their historical and cultural contexts?
3. Were the people examined in this book agents of educational continuity or change?
4. How did the ideas of key people influence educational policy formulation during their own time and in later history?

The suggestions for further reading includes autobiographies, biographies, and books of history and philosophy as well as education.

Questions for Reflection and Dialogue

1. Identify the key personalities such as political leaders, athletes, entertainers, commentators, religious leaders, and others of the contemporary cultural context. How do these individuals influence beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and values?
2. Accept the validity of the proposition that key events during one's childhood and youth provide the lenses through which one sees later events. What are the key events that shaped your vision of the world? What are the key events that have shaped the collective vision of the students in this course?
3. Discuss the concept of educational autobiography. If you were to write your own educational autobiography, what questions would you ask yourself?
4. Discuss the concept of educational biography and assume that you are planning to prepare an educational biography of another student enrolled in this course. What questions would you ask in an oral history interview?
5. Examine the current cultural context in which we live. What are the major issues, problems, and challenges that have an impact on education, schools, teachers, and students?
6. Identify one educational event in your life. Why is that event significant?

Projects for Deepening Your Understanding

1. For study guides, links, and resources about studying biography, access Bioclassroom at <http://www.biography.com>. Develop a list of items that may be useful to students in this course.
2. For guidelines about writing biography, access “Writing with the Writers” at <http://teacher.scholastic.com>. Use these guidelines to write a biography of an educator of your choice.
3. Write your own educational autobiography.
4. For information about the International Society for Educational Biography, access <http://blogs.yufe.co/iseb>. How does the Society encourage the writing and study of educational biography?
5. While you are enrolled in this course, keep a diary or a log of what appears to be significant international or national educational events. At the end of the course, prepare a summary that indicates which of them remain significant and why they are significant.
6. The following journals deal with biography: *Vitae Scholasticae: The Bulletin of Educational Biography* and *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*. Read several issues of these journals. Select and review an article on the nature or problems of biography.
7. Visit the library of an elementary school or high school and examine its collection of biographies. What types of biographies appear to be most prominent in the library holdings?

Notes

1. Jay Martin, *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 3–4.
2. Craig Kridel, ed., *Writing Educational Biography: Explorations in Qualitative Research* (New York: Garland, 1998), 4. See also Craig Kridel, “Biographical Meanderings: Reflections and Reminiscences on Writing Educational Biography,” *Vitae Scholasticae* 25 (2008): 5–15.
3. Barbara Finkelstein, “Revealing Human Agency: The Uses of Biography in the Study of Educational History,” in Kridel, *Writing Educational Biography*, 46–47.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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