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Book Review

Deo H. Poonwassie

University of Manitoba, poonwass@cc.umanitoba.ca

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Coulter, David L. and Wiens, John R. (Eds.) 2008. *Why do we educate? Renewing the conversation.* 107th Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education. Vol. 1. Mass.: Blackwell Publishing. 314 pages.

Perhaps one of the most significant questions ever asked about education is Herbert Spencer's (1859) "what knowledge is of most worth?" The question is as relevant today as it was 150 years ago and we are still struggling to find suitable answers to shape and guide our destinies! Arguably the question is equally or more important than the answer: the answers will vary according to the time, context, culture and the forum where the question is posed, but the question itself is everlasting. Such is the nature of the question posed by Coulter and Wiens.

Why do we educate? Do we educate for the purpose of practice? Do we educate for the purpose of intrinsic satisfaction? Do we educate for the enjoyment of the "good life" (however defined)? Is there a universal answer to this philosophical question? Why do we need to renew this conversation? Was this conversation not happening all along? Or have the contributors to this volume detected that we have somehow wandered away from the mainstream?

This book contains 21 chapters with a Foreword by series editor Gary Fenstermacher, a Prologue (Chapter 1) by David Coulter and John Wiens and an Epilogue (Chapter 21) by John Wiens and David Coulter. There are four parts: Part 1--Joining the conversation; Part 2--Creating common and uncommon worlds; Part 3--Horizons of significance; Part 4--Imagining and becoming: Education as lifelong and lifewide.

In a carefully crafted prologue, the editors ask a series of significant questions, not the least of which is to construct an image of the "educated person". They delve into (ancient) philosophy which they contend is relevant today. Indeed this question was addressed more recently by Alfred N. Whitehead (*The aims of education and other essays*) and R.S. Peters (*Ethics & Education*). The answer is illusive, wise, and respectful of others: there is no universal definition of an educated person. Peters states that while education itself defies a general definition, there are criteria which must be satisfied for us to claim that it is education; and the conversation continues.

The editors provide an excellent introduction to each part of the book; they invite the reader to join the discussion, not necessarily to agree with the authors, and to give serious consideration to the pervasive question: "why do we educate?" in all its manifestations. For example, are democracy and education symbiotic concepts? (as they claim, p. 16).

The highlight of this yearbook is Part 3--Horizons of significance--which contains 9 out of the 21 chapters. Contributing authors to this part are Sonia Nieto, Martha Nussbaum, Ian Winchester, Deborah Loewenberg & Hyman Bass, Nel Noddings, Randall Nielsen & Janice Kinghorn, Joannie Halas & Jeanne Adele Kentel, Ray Barnhardt & Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley, and Ursula Franklin. No edited book contains chapters of equal significance or quality, and this part of the

book is no exception. This section of the book brings us to the present problems and configurations of education with insights into universal problems and possibilities. For example: with the increase in population movement across the globe, cross-cultural education is taking on significant roles in understanding how to live with each other. Are schooling and education processes instructive enough for us to appreciate each other? (Nieto). Is understanding spirituality and other religions important for us to promote and maintain a necessary dialogue for the enhancement of humanity? (Noddings). How does the promotion of indigenous knowledge assist us to practise social justice and human rights? (Barnhardt & Kawagley).

While it is not possible for any education yearbook to include all the critical issues that have influenced educational practice and thought, selection of chapters clearly depends on several considerations, some of which are availability of authors, importance of topics, politics of education, and preferences of editorial committees. Since the NSSE focuses on North American issues and includes other topics of universal significance, it may have been helpful to include such issues as: education of the whole child, and literacies especially in relation to immigrant populations.

This issue of the NSSE yearbook will certainly stimulate thought and debate on education--its directions and circularity. It can serve as a textbook or a resource for graduate students on issues in education. It definitely serves to renew the conversation about why we educate. And the debates will continue!

Deo. H. Poonwassie is Professor Emeritus of the University of Manitoba and can be reached at poonwass@cc.umanitoba.ca or poonwass@shaw.ca.