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editors: gene v glass gustavo e. fischman melissa cast-brede

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Canestrari, Alan S. & Marlowe, Bruce A. (2010). *Educational Foundations: An Anthology of Critical Readings* (2nd edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

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Reviewed by Sudi Kate Gliebe
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“To help teachers develop habits of critical reflection about schools and schooling before entering the classroom” (p. x) is the premise of *Educational Foundations: An Anthology of Critical Readings*. This powerful tome is not a “how to” book; it is not meant to provide instruction. In fact it denounces the notion that teachers are merely high-level technicians and that teacher-training only requires methodology. The mission of the book is to stir up prospective teachers with a collection of superbly written and thought-provoking essays. The urgency of the authors rests on the fact that “Without thinking teachers, we do not have thinking schools. Without thinking schools, we do not have thinking students or future citizens who think” (p. 211).

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Educational Foundations is a collection of twenty-five essays included within six sections. Each section presents an introductory vignette designed to invite teachers into the reflection process. The first section addresses the question, “Why Teach?” Chapter two is a touching memoir written by a teacher who left a lucrative career in search of a meaningful profession. Early on in his teaching career he received a short note of appreciation from one student confirmed his calling to teach. The note read, “[a] teacher like you cannot be found” (p. 14). Chapter three contrasts this account with an example of how a mean-spirited and punitive teacher can destroy the soul of a child. Chapter four provides ten questions that all prospective teachers must answer before they enter the profession. The questions could be used as prompts for personal journaling and small group discussions.

The second section addresses the question, “Who Are Today’s Students?” The landscape of today’s classroom is not homogeneous. It includes children from different racial backgrounds, children whose first language is not English and children with disabilities. Chapter six declares “failure to discuss racism, unfortunately, will not make it go away” (p. 55). The author believes that institutional discrimination (as opposed to individual) is powerful and harmful. The topics in chapter eight are differentiated learning and constructivist pedagogy. The goal of teachers is to create a welcoming atmosphere where all children belong, learn and thrive.

The third section addresses the question, “What Makes a Good Teacher?” Chapter eleven declares, “memorable teachers [are] skillful, enthusiastic, caring, and perhaps even idiosyncratic” (p. 115). Good teaching is about students’ learning, not about standardized testing. A challenge for brave teachers is found in chapter twelve. Assign an A to every student at the beginning of the term and free them to focus on learning. “If you think that students, given such condition, will not do any work, you are wrong. Most will” (p. 125).

The fourth section addresses the question, “What Do Good Schools Look Like?” The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (Met) is presented in chapter fifteen as an example. The author writes from a parent’s perspective. The Met’s pedagogical genius rests on

“Personalized Learning Plans” which focus on students’ strengths and learning experiences. The Met encourages family involvement, it welcomes accountability and it gives students an opportunity to shape their own future through the “Learning through Internship” Program.

The fifth section addresses the question, “How Should We Assess Student Learning?” Most teachers would like to have a recipe to follow when it comes to evaluating students. This section establishes that those recipes, known as standardized tests, grades, rubrics and exams, must be carefully evaluated and perhaps even challenged. How is learning measured? How can assessment provide feedback and motivation to students? Chapter twenty declares that assessment must be individualized and personal. It must identify students’ interests and strengths. Lastly, assessment ultimately informs teachers on how to become better educators.

The sixth section addresses the question, “How Does One Develop a Critical Voice?” This section is a call to leave behind the notion that prospective teachers are “passive recipients” (p. 199) of knowledge and to embrace a new identity as “transformative intellectuals” (p. 201) and thinking practitioners. “Activist teachers ask big questions” (p. 225). Teaching requires “that you create within *yourself* the kind of learner that reflects your aspirations for your students” (p. 227).

Even though *Educational Foundation*’s intended audience is novice public school teachers, the provocative essays can benefit experienced teachers as well particularly those that feel stifled by the system’s entrenched policies and methodologies. The book can also benefit school principals who might be inspired to start the conversation. It might also be highly enlightening to professors in higher education as it provides insights that apply to teaching college students effectively. Lastly, it is a must-read for teacher-trainers. Every faculty member who trains teachers in America should wrestle with the wisdom found in this book. It is worth noting that even though the reader may not agree with a particular essay, the simple act of engaging with the subject will prove to be a profitable endeavor for all who consider teaching their calling. After all, the underlying theme of *Educational Foundations* is that “any teacher who cannot or does not develop and

speak in critical voice needs to be in a different profession” (p. 213).

About the Reviewer

Sudi Kate Gliebe is a doctoral student in Child Development at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Her areas of interest are children’s spiritual and emotional development, parenting, learning and teaching methods.

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Editors

Gene V Glass

glass@edrev.info

Gustavo Fischman

fischman@edrev.info

Melissa Cast-Brede

cast-brede@edrev.info
