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Book review: *Hannah Arendt on Educational Thinking and Practice in Dark Times: Education for a world in crisis*, edited by Wayne Veck and Helen M. Gunter

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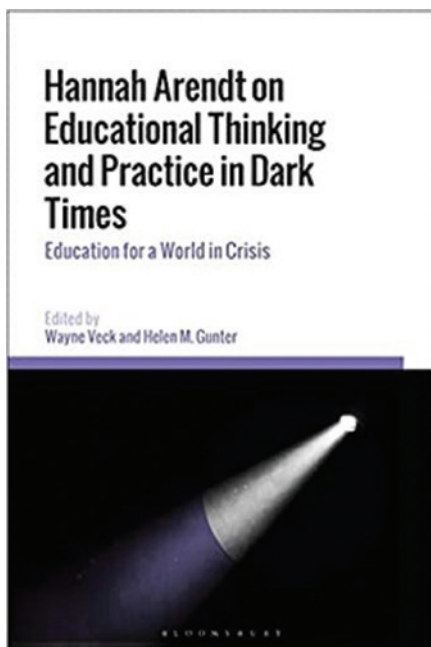
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Book Review

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Hannah Arendt on Educational Thinking and Practice in Dark Times: Education for a world in crisis, edited by Wayne Veck and Helen M. Gunter

London: Bloomsbury Academia; 2020; 200 pp.;
ISBNs: 978-1350-06911-4 (hbk), 978-1350-06912-1 (ebk)



This edited collection is a tour de force, shedding new light on Hannah Arendt's work. Following a comprehensive introduction by the editors, each of the chapters responds 'to the crisis, reality and potential exercise of adult responsibility' (2) in education. Each author, Wayne Veck and Helen M. Gunter explain, advances a new perspective on 'the significance of the inversion of adult-child responsibility to the subsequent loss of authority in education and beyond' (2). These are important issues, not only for Arendtian scholars, but also for the field of education more generally.

The book is structured in three parts. The first part focuses on the promise of education. To begin, Roger Berkowitz examines Arendt's work through the lens of authority. Next, Faisal Baluh offers an account of the importance of temporality in Arendt's writing. The final chapter in this section, written by Jon Nixon, looks at the ways in which the notion of worldliness is a major theme in Arendtian thought. He puts forward the view that Arendt's approach to thinking is important to think through how populist political ideologies harm our way of life. The activity of thinking, for Arendt, is an ongoing activity of the imagination that can help us guard against flights of fancy

or ideological ways of thinking that serve to narrow our understanding. Furthermore, Nixon contends that it is each educator's responsibility to help students understand the world not as we might wish it to be, but as it is. That is, it is our responsibility as educators to equip young people with the thinking tools to help them understand the world and their place in it.

The second part of the book considers different crises that affect education. Jo-Anne Dillabough considers identity. She argues that educational scholars have used identity in a normative way, sometimes making reductive arguments, such as boys do worse at school than girls. These kinds of reductive arguments, Dillabough contends, fail to comprehend identity in a shifting and multi-perspectival way. By comparing Arendt's work on narrative with that of Paul Ricoeur, Dillabough shows how we can guard against a simplistic understanding of identity. In her chapter, Helen M. Gunter details the dangers of privatization in schools, as well as how UK education policies have been depoliticized. By connecting depoliticization with privatization, she shows how many government reforms of public education have proved disastrous for students and teachers alike. In the final chapter in this section, Wayne Veck looks at the problem of assimilation in relation to the refugee crisis, not only in Arendt's time, but also in our own.

The third part of the book connects education to Arendt's call to love the world. First, Marie Morgan details some of the difficulties facing those educators who teach topics such as the Holocaust. She interrogates Arendt's ideas that education and politics should be separate. Instead, Morgan maintains that it is not teaching politics that is the danger, but rather not offering students 'an education that recognizes the educational significance of the political' (122). For that recognition to be meaningful, Morgan argues, teachers need to be at home in the world, so as to encourage students not to become estranged from it. Next, Aaron Schutz explores how educators can best teach citizen skills to students. He compares John Dewey's approach to democracy with that of Arendt, illustrating some of the insights each thinker has to offer for citizenship education. The final chapter is a fascinating essay by Eduardo Duarte. To understand Arendt's approach to education, he argues, we need to understand the Hellenic and Stoic threads underlying her approach. In doing so, we gain insight into why she rejects the care of the self in favour of the need to care for the world. Finally, there is a helpful conclusion by the editors that explores how each contribution can enrich the field of education.

The subtitle of the book is 'Education for a world in crisis'. Anyone purchasing this book in 2021 might assume that the book includes insights related to COVID-19 and education. This is not the case, no doubt because of the time lag in publishing a book. On the one hand, it is unfortunate to have a subtitle on a crisis in education that does not offer advice on how to deal with education in a pandemic. On the other hand, as the editors argue, their book is not about offering any ready-made solution to a problem. After all, that would be a very unArendtian thing to do. What this book does do, however, is demonstrate how prescient Arendt's ideas about action and natality are; namely, no one can predict the future. Whatever crisis we face now, we do not know what crisis will emerge to dwarf our present dilemma. That is why, Arendt tells us, we also need hope; hope in each other, hope for the world and hope for the future.

The editors have brought together an interesting group of contributors. Each contribution adds value to our understanding of Arendt's work in the field of education. Most contributors hail from education, besides which we have scholars from the disciplines of political science and philosophy. The authors' diverse approaches to Arendt's work are a major strength of this book. One weakness, however, is that the

majority of the authors are from the UK or the USA. Including contributors from the Global South would have enriched the collection. Nevertheless, *Hannah Arendt on Educational Thinking and Practice in Dark Times* is a fine book.

In conclusion, not only is this a must read for those new to Arendt's writing, it also has much to offer those of us who are more familiar with her work. There are no final answers here, but rather invitations to think with Arendt, which may offer hope for our collective future. And that, in my view, is an invitation worth taking up.

Notes on the contributor

Rita A. Gardiner is Assistant Professor in critical policy, equity and leadership studies, Faculty of Education, at Western University, Canada. A feminist theorist and Arendtian scholar, her publications include *Gender, Authenticity and Leadership: Thinking with Arendt* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), and articles in *Business Ethics Quarterly*, *Educational Administration and History*, *Leadership and Gender*, *Work, and Organization*. She is currently co-writing a book on questions of home and belonging in the work of Hannah Arendt.