

BOOK REVIEW

**Peter Neville Rule. *Dialogue and Boundary Learning*
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This book stimulates interest in deepening one's philosophy of education. I appreciate the way it was presented, organized, and written. Rule has incorporated his doctoral dissertation, and his previous articles on his teaching experience and pedagogical experiments into this book. Many will be able to relate to his learning experiences as a teacher, learner, or educator in different contexts. It has three parts. The first part, the general introduction, focuses on the foundations in understanding dialogue and learning. It has four chapters, one each on Socrates (470-399 BC), Martin Buber (1878-1965), Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) and Paulo Freire (1921-1997). Rule calls the four thinkers, the traditional philosophers. The second part has five chapters. Each chapter explores dialogue, teaching and learning in a range of contexts, situation and application. The third part, the concluding chapter of book, presents his notion of *diacognition*, a conceptual framework for understanding teaching and learning as moments of knowing.

Rule starts well by defining terms and setting book parameters and limitations. There are a number of definitions of dialogue that appears in many forms, depending on one's point of view. Rule presents six senses of dialogue namely: *dialogue as talk*, *literary dialogue*, *dialogue as mutual engagement*, *dialogue as being*, *dialogical self*, *dialogue and learning* (xvii-xix). Each definition has its implication to teaching and learning. Three important terms are worthy to mention: *dialogic space*, *boundary learning*, and *diacognition*. Rule's notion of *dialogic space* is informed by an "ontological understanding of dialogue as constitutive of human being and human learning" (xx). "It is a contextually specific zone of engagement that operates at a number of levels within a learning situation: between participants, within participants, between them and their subject matter, between them and the world." (xx). It is presumed to be open and supported by values of "trust, love, mutual respect and epistemological curiosity" (xx). This topic is discussed fully in Chapter 5 and elaborated in Chapters 6 and 7. The idea of *boundary learning* arises from Bakhtin's suggestive notion of the boundary that exists within an individual's words between those that are his own and those that are of others, and the tense dialogic struggle that takes place on these boundaries. Rule argues that learning boundaries exist both within and between participants in a dialogue space and that learning occurs as participants

traverse and redefine these boundaries. Such boundaries are not rigid demarcations but rather permeable and shifting thresholds of contact and communication (xx). Chapter 8 develops this notion in more depth. Rule's notion of diacognition concerns the relations among teaching, learning and knowing. Diacognition has three dimensions: dialogue, cognition and position. "It is based on the assumption, drawn from Paulo Freire, that teaching and learning are constitutively related: learning involves cognition of content by learners, and teaching involves a recursive re-cognition of that content by the teacher, taking into account the learners' cognition, as the teacher instigates the learners' learning" (xx-xxi). Chapter 10 develops and illustrates diacognition more fully.

The approach is both thematic and historical and the style of presentation is easy to follow. The topics of the first part were presented historically, providing the core or foundation for Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10. It is fascinating to read this book because it covers a wide range of philosophical positions and thinkers, allowing the reader to appreciate the diversity of cultures and ways of thinking that inform philosophies of education. The author also provided lists of tables, figures and comprehensive lists of references. The figures and tables are some of the good features of the book which make it easier to understand and appreciate the paradigms or frameworks. There are 3 tables and 19 figures presented by the author. They provide visual impact that effectively communicate processes, patterns, and trends relationships. Rule was able to use them to simplify complex ideas. Rule gives a comprehensive view on *dialogue and boundary learning* by explaining what for him is the *genealogy for education*. He reviews four traditions associated with dialogue that are pertinent to education. Rule chose four major philosophers to represent each of the tradition. Each chapter explores the biography and work of the central figure, with a particular focus on their ideas and practices regarding dialogue and its place in teaching and learning. He proceeds from *Socrates and Dialogue as Vocation*, to *Martin Buber and the Life of Dialogue*, to *Mikhail Bakhtin and Ideological Becoming*, then to *Paulo Freire and Emancipatory Education*. He used the word *traditions* because he wished to evoke the wider contexts and relations of their thinking and its reception. Rule's use of the term *genealogy* does not connote a strict *line of descent* from one tradition to the next. The traditions overlap in time as they developed in different socio-economic situations. Some were built on preceding traditions, while others have a more implicit association owing to some commonalities in ontological and axiological assumptions (1).

Chapter 1 (3-16) describes the Socratic tradition from the ancient Athens in the 5th and 4th centuries BCE. Plato's dialogues featuring Socrates are Rule's key sources for understanding the nature of Socratic dialogue and its relation to teaching and learning. While Socrates disliked the term *teacher*, the way that he instigates learning through question-answer method is suggestive for education as a shared responsibility in the public sphere. What then are the implications of the Socratic method for teaching? Even as Socrates denied that he was a teacher or that he had any special wisdom, he clearly led his interlocutors through a process of learning (11). The Socratic dialogues put forward Socrates as a kind of prototypical learner, at once unique and universal, who modelled a process of inquiry. He both takes responsibility for his own learning as a learner-teacher, puts responsibility for his own learning as a learner-teacher, and puts responsibility for learning on his interlocutor as a teacher-

learner. Socrates was a disruptive, ironic questioner who upset the systems and norms of his day (16). It is difficult to imagine a system of education based on the ideas of Socrates because he would no doubt continually question its very foundations. “But what is education?”, he would insist, and refuse to take any formulaic response for an answer (16).

Chapter 2 (17-27) is on the Jewish tradition associated with the Jewish philosopher and theologian, Martin Buber. His primary word *I-Thou* illuminates the encounter between persons and provides the basis for interpersonal dialogue. This dialogical relation is best embodied in what Buber calls *inclusive education*, which involves three elements: First, a relation between two persons, such as between a teacher and a learner; Second, an event experienced by them in common, such as a lesson, a seminar, a learning circle; and Third, the *living through the common event* by one of the participants (e.g. the teacher) from the standpoint of the other (e.g. the learner), without forfeiting his own reality. Buber calls this move *experiencing the other side* (25). Buber is a significant reference point in a global peace education. Dialogue is seen as a crucial not only before and after conflict, but also as conflict unfolds. It recognizes conflict and differences between protagonists, and the possibility of engagement on the basis of a common humanity and recognition of *the Other as a Thou*. Buber exemplifies a commitment to peace by striving for genuine peace between Jews and Arabs in his lifetime (27). His understanding of dialogue and inclusion were powerfully influential across a range of disciplines and contexts in his own lifetime (27).

Chapter 3 (29-41) is on the third tradition, that of *Russian dialogism*. It draws on the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin and his circle. Bakhtin’s ideas about dialogue from his study of the novel and his concepts, including authorship, internally persuasive discourse and ideological becoming, among others, have informed his thinking about *dialogic pedagogy*. Bakhtin did not generate educational theory and talks about *pedagogical dialogue* pejoratively. For him, pedagogical dialogue is a manifestation of idealism: someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error. He contrasts it with *genuine dialogue* (34). While Bakhtin’s notion of dialogue, that “Life by its very nature is dialogic,” powerfully informs his key ideas, Rule observes that his ideas often “seem to be more like sea vessels in movement than immovable terrestrial structures” (41). He adds that their variability and their constant becoming can be confusing. Still, he acknowledges that they seem to be well received in various educational areas, crossing disciplinary, ideological and discursive boundaries along the way.

Chapter 4 (43-54) discusses the fourth tradition, which is associated with the Brazilian adult educator and theorist Paulo Freire, working in Latin America in the 1960s until the 80s. Freire worked with many collaborators in developing and refining his ideas. His collaborators included Shor, Macedo, Faundez and Horton, with whom he wrote “talking books” in dialogue form. Freire’s ideas about *emancipatory dialogue* within the context of education for liberation have been especially influential in adult education (1). Freire’s approach to dialogue should be understood in the context of the massive inequality and oppression that shaped Brazil during the colonial and post-colonial eras that persisted during his lifetime. It was also understood in relation to

their struggle for political, cultural and psychological liberation (49). The link between knowing and doing is captured in the notion of *praxis* (50). Freire extends his dialectical way of thinking about the relation between theory and practice, action and reflection, to teaching and learning, the teacher and the learner. For Freire there is no teaching without learning and vice versa. Teaching has no meaning unless it instigates learning. Learning is the proper function of teaching. If the teacher teaches without the learners learning, he is not teaching. He is simply exercising control, asserting authority, monopolizing space and time with his voice and his presence. The teacher is to ignite learning by creating conditions that allow learners to be subjects of their own learning (51). Teaching and learning are thus dialectically related in the dialogue of knowing. Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist. Then emerges the *teacher-student* and *student-teachers*. The teacher no longer just teaches, but is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn teaches as they learn. They become jointly responsible for a process in which they all grow (52). Paulo Freire remains both an inspirational and a controversial figure. His ideas resonated with progressive educators in his own country and across the world (53).

The author looks at applications of dialogue ideas, teaching and learning in various contexts of education, in non-formal early childhood and adult education programmes and AIDS support groups, as well as in formal settings of schooling and tertiary education.

Chapter 5 (57-71) contains the result of his investigations in adult education projects as dialogic spaces. Rule draws on a historical case study of a South African non-formal adult education project, the Tuition Project. He examines the conditions that make dialogue possible in adult education and explores the broader application of *dialogic space* in the field (xxii). The notion of dialogic space in relation to adult education projects has an emancipatory agenda. The case study of the Tuition Project was a product of his hard work and research in the 1980s and 1990s. It was a formative experience for the author as educator and learner in understanding dialogue through education. It chronicles his effort as a student. “As a PhD student, writing about the Tuition Project some years later, I developed the notion of dialogic space as a way of understanding the learning encounters that I and others experienced within the project” (55).

Chapter 6 (73-90) features exploratory experiments on Mikhail Bakhtin’s ideas in academic development among certificate students. Rule experiments with Bakhtin’s ideas in relation to pedagogy in a different context of lifelong education: a certificate of education at a university. It thus shifts from a non-formal to a formal setting, and relates Bakhtin’s ideas of language, dialogue and speech to students’ academic development in tertiary education. In particular, it explores and applies his concepts of dialogue, language types and speech genres to the context of student development. It argues for a pedagogy that negotiates the boundary between formal and informal knowledge, considering both disciplinary foundations and students’ experiences (xxii). Of particular importance here is the dialogical relation between the students’ world and words, on the one hand, and the academic discourses of the institution and its disciplines, on the other. It argues that an effective negotiation of this boundary

between student and the academy can contribute to the student's *ideological becoming* (55).

Chapter 7 (91-103) focuses on early childhood education and *relational pedagogy*, particularly on community-based pedagogy for young children who do not have access to early education centers. It argues for a relational pedagogy to promote dialogic engagement among teachers, caregivers and children. The relations among teachers, children and caregivers provide a basis for a formative engagement between the home and school environments (xxii-xxiii). It explores relational pedagogy as a particular form of dialogue in education. Here the context is a rural community-based programme for children (55). The chapter argues that relationships of trust, care and support must characterize a pedagogy that attempts to help children and caregivers negotiate the boundary between home and school (56).

Chapter 8 (105-121) revisits the work of Freire and Bakhtin and brings them into dialogue regarding their notions of dialogue and dialectic. It then draws out some of the implications for education theory and practice in relation to two South African contexts of learning that facilitate the access to education of disadvantaged groups, one in higher education and the other in early childhood education. This chapter also develops and applies the notion of boundary learning in relation to these contexts (xxiii). Rule concludes that while Freire and Bakhtin's ideas have a lot in common concerning dialogue, they differ with respect to dialectic/s.

Chapter 9 (123-140) explores the possibilities of a dialogic education in the context of the HIV and AIDS pandemic in South Africa. The context of the research is Richmond, a rural village in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands region. Its focus is on community learning, particularly in HIV and AIDS support groups of persons living with HIV, and its potential contribution to school-based learning. In particular, it examines the *other* and *othering* in relation to the AIDS pandemic and advocates a dialogic pedagogy of trust and connectedness, which involves persons living with HIV and AIDS as resources for teaching and learning (56).

In his exploration, Rule develops and illustrates the notions of dialogic space and boundary learning in a range of contexts. This led to his articulation of the relations among teaching, learning, and knowing. His questions were: "What can dialogue contribute to these relations? What are the implications for teaching and learning within a dialogic approach?" (141).

Chapter 10 (143-166) is where he introduces the notion of *diacognition* as a conceptual framework for understanding teaching and learning as knowing. He proposes *diacognition* as a conceptual triad consisting of *dialogue*, *cognition* and *position*, for understanding teaching and learning as moments in a broader encompassing process of knowing (141). Diacognition entails coming-to-know through a situated process of positioning and repositioning in dialogical exchange with oneself and others. The process of knowing unfolds through the dialogical process of teaching and learning, which manifests in both interpersonal and intrapersonal dialogues (166). It takes the form not only of the learners' cognition of the content but also the teacher's recognition of content and learners as she teaches it to them (166). Accordingly, recognition can take the form of *decognition*, *intercognition* or *metacognition*. *Decognition* being "the realisation that you do not know what you

thought you knew.” *Intercognition* refers to “the changing commonality of knowing and understanding that develops as teacher and learners engage.” *Metacognition* refers to “the processes of reflection that can enhance teaching and learning.” (166) Rule proposes this framework to serve as a heuristic for understanding teaching and learning, being related moments of knowing and as a dialogical provocation for teaching and learning that is more cognitively, emotionally and socially conscious (166).

His discussion on diacognition is illustrated in figures: Figure 11 on Diacognition (144), Figure 12 on Learning as cognition (145), Figure 13 on Teaching as recognition (147), Figure 14 on Teaching and learning as intercognition (151), Figure 15 on Teaching and learning as boundary crossing (153), Figure 16 on Diacognition with Four levels of cognition (155), Figure 17 on Teaching and learning as dialogue (162), Figure 18 on The learning event as diacognition (163), and Figure 19 on The labourer’s cognition (164).

In recognition of Freire’s understanding of dialogue, Rule adapts Freire’s exemplar of learning and cognition in diacognition. His starting point regarding cognition is Paulo Freire’s insight that teaching and learning are moments in the larger process of knowing or cognizing. Cognition also applies to non-formal and adult contexts of teaching and learning, outside of the conventional school and higher education frameworks.

The book makes a persuasive case for a dialogical account of learning. Dialogue is the key to boundary learning. This is the laudable aspect of the book because it engages readers to a full intellectual engagement, allowing them to reflect on the academic life. Rule’s thoughts and insights about dialogic space, particularly diacognition and boundary learning, are welcome development in the academe for their practicality. Together, dialogue, cognition and position comprise the conceptual framework of diacognition that sees teaching and learning as moments of knowing. This knowing unfolds through the dialogical process of teaching and learning, manifesting simultaneously in interpersonal and intrapersonal dialogue.

Dialogue and Boundary Learning is an added treasure to the already developed yet still flourishing immense literature on Philosophy of Education. I highly recommend it to teachers and educators to use it as one of the primary references or readings in Education. Surely, the different philosophies of education of Socrates, Buber, Bakhtin and Freire are very relevant in contemporary education. Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 are excellent references in education research, especially in the field of philosophy and education. I consider Chapter 10 on diacognition as the main contribution of the author.

His style of presenting the book is worth emulating. It is a piece by piece putting together of ideas and experience, testing and writing about them as articles, and eventually putting them altogether into a book. Reading *Dialogue and Boundary Learning* could encourage those contemplating of writing a book. It is well organized, systematic, and logical in its presentation. In every chapter or part, Rule puts a summary to better appreciate the topic. He encourages documenting work and to write research in one’s discipline be it theology, philosophy, psychology, etc. Rule’s context is South Africa. It would be wise to do one’s own in one’s context and situation. Education is for all. The examples will be different, cases and exercises would be

unique, etc. with distinct challenges. This book is exhaustive but could still be expanded as it is still open as an ongoing activity. Diacognition could still be explored as the educational theory continues to evolve. But it is a good starting point, a good venue to appreciate more philosophies of education. The selected articles and philosophers are more than adequate to engage in reflective thinking.

I applaud Rule for producing this simple book which is certainly a significant addition to the advancement of philosophy of education in the world. His perspective is that of a South African growing up in the 1970s when the nation was actively struggling against its apartheid policies. It is a great help for students and professors alike who are looking for a reputable primer on different traditional philosophies of education, contextualized in contemporary situations. This book is a very helpful introduction to the main philosophies of education and as already mentioned, clearly written and comprehensive. Rule's indispensable articles and chapters featuring teaching and learning on AIDS, his classroom experiences and commentaries are excellent complement to textbooks on Education and Philosophy. This is an essential supplement for everyone who teaches or studies Philosophy of Education and Research to broaden one's perspectives. Rule respects other's views as he sets parameters in looking for other views. The book can serve as a guide in developing one's philosophy of education in the Philippine perspective.

Juan Rafael G. Macaranas
De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde
Manila