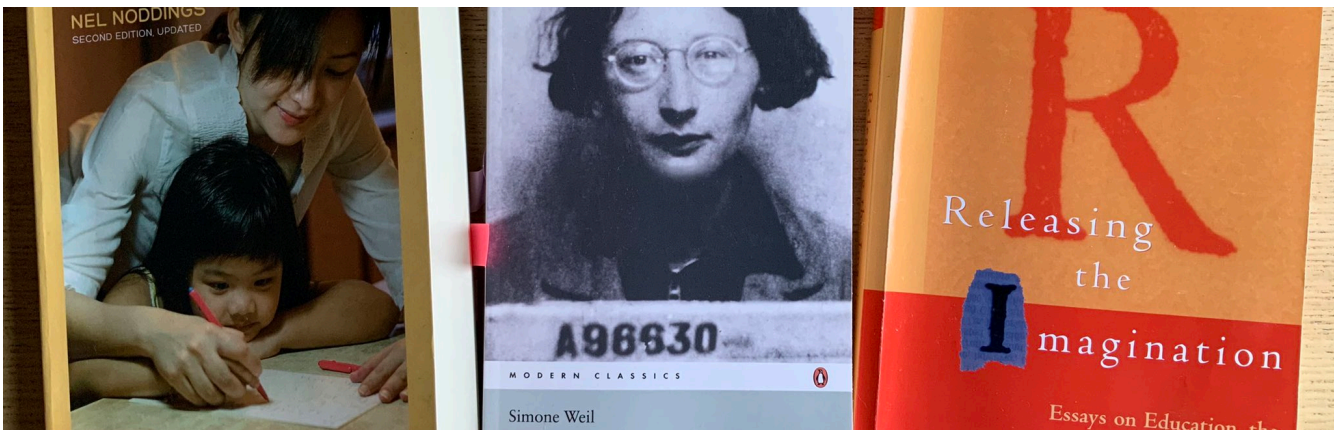


PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION READING NETWORK



“What are you reading”

In July 2020 Elizabeth O'Brien and Victoria Jamieson, PhD students at University College Dublin and Edge Hill University respectively, cofounded the Philosophy of Education Reading Network. Here they write about their experience so far, the significance the Network has come to hold, and their vision for the future.

E: A simple question sparked a rich and interesting conversation between Vicky and I last summer. It transpired that the work of certain philosophers central to my research were of peripheral interest to her, and vice versa. I shared my struggle of trying to read Iris Murdoch's *The Sovereignty of Good* by myself, of wishing I had someone who knew more to discuss it with.

V: As PhD students, we missed the special interactions that come from encounters with others along the research journey, so we were keen to find ways to connect with others and share our reading interests more widely, as well as creating a sense of accountability which would encourage us to read during periods of isolation and uncertainty.

E: It has been an extraordinary time, in its intensity if nothing else. Our homes were now also schools and universities. In this educational pressure-cooker the push to innovate, quickly, had kept us busy in our bubbles and pods. The incessant busyness made it difficult, in a number of ways, to carve out time for ourselves which was not directed towards a specific purpose, like finishing a chapter or a conference presentation. And yet, this was the scholarship we loved and valued. We wondered could we find a way to go about reading together, apart, and whether anyone else might be interested too.

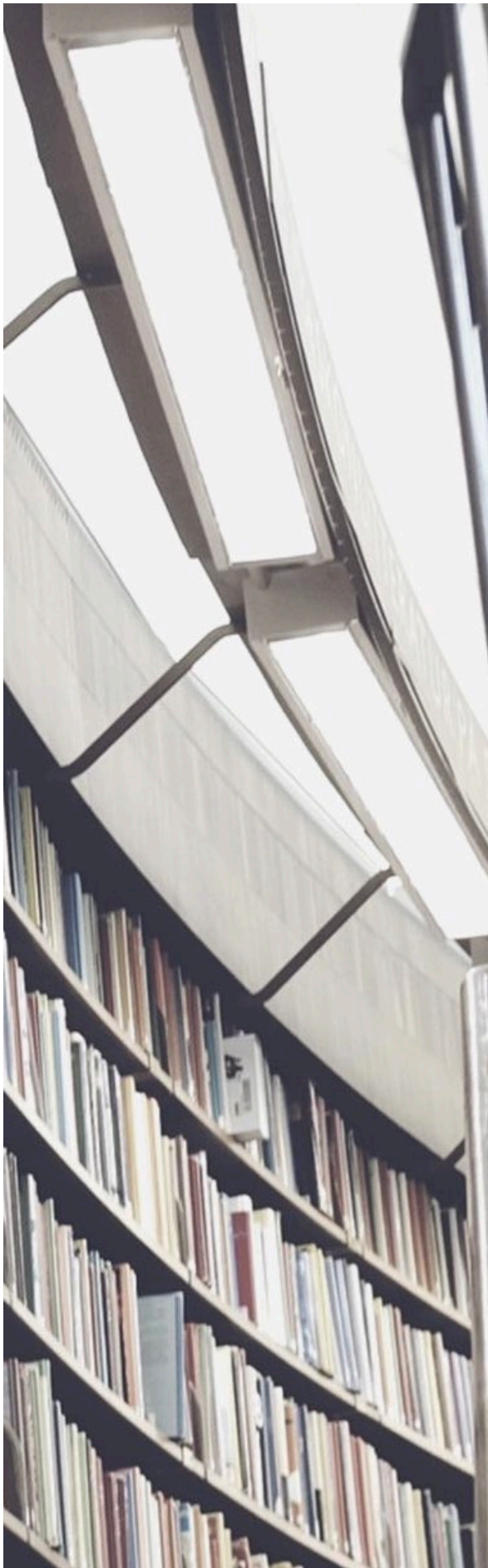
V: It is strange to think that Elizabeth and I have never actually met in person, though it is likely that we would have met at The PESGB Annual Conference, had it gone ahead. It was this current crisis that brought us together and gave us some impetus to create The Philosophy of Education Reading Network, which has brought individuals together across the globe: the online presence certainly has its advantages.

E: Initially we started a Twitter account, sent out an invitation to anyone interested in reading *The Sovereignty of Good* and coming together to discuss it, via Zoom. Twenty one people attended that first meeting last August! Many expressed the same idea – as we are now settling in to the long haul of engaging online and researching alone it was time to find new ways to be together. We had figured out the routines and the necessary shifts and pivots to keep on keeping on, and had come to a point where we realised what we missed. Conversation, company, new ideas and fresh perspectives.

V: When the pandemic forced many of us into isolation, we had no idea how long we would find ourselves adapting to the 'new normal' for, or what the months ahead looked like. We now find ourselves some 10 months into the pandemic, having experienced some tough restrictions, particularly socially. For many, reading is an escape and keeps the mind active, yet during the pandemic the most severe Covid-19 restrictions saw the closure of independent book shops, classifying them as 'non-essential'. Perhaps many of us would feel that books have been essential during this time. We now find ourselves fortunate enough to have just shared our sixth text as a group (Hannah Arendt's *Between Past and Future*). Each month we ask the Reading Network's community to make suggestions for texts we should cover, as we are keen to explore the wide range of interests which the group has to offer. We meet via Zoom on the third Tuesday of the month and we invite someone who is familiar with the text to open the session, giving a brief overview and then posing some questions and provocations for the group to discuss.

E: Looking to the future, the community aspect, the Network part of Reading Network, is something we are keen to preserve and to build on. We believe in the integrity of an open space, inviting in and drawing out the contributions of the learned and the novice. From the outset we asked that the session be opened by posing questions, and recently we have ended on a question too. The meetings are also a space to come and be a part of something without the pressure of taking part actively. The experience, we hope, is one which is both enjoyable and scholarly. It is lovely to see people appreciate each other, to see ideas bring out smiles!

V&E: We are grateful to everyone who has joined us, made suggestions of texts, posed questions, engaged in discussions on Twitter, and generally helped make the group what it has become. The Philosophy of Education Reading Network has certainly kept our philosophy of education spirits alive and our brains active, while allowing us to make friends along the way. While what we have built is by no means representative of all the wonderful things that go on in the various philosophy of education networks, the reading group has created an opportunity to connect people from across the globe to share their philosophy of education reading interests as part of a community. We are keen to build upon the rich diversity of the network, and welcome any new members to join us.



Details on how to join in, books we have read previously and the questions which have been raised during their discussion, as well as the books which have been suggested for future reading are available at philofed.com. There is a community blog which we hope to build into another forum to share the books we read and the experience of the Reading Network. We also keep in touch and continue discussions via **Twitter @philofed.**