Herner Saeverot's *Indirect Education: Exploring Indirectness in Teaching and Research* (published open access by Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, in 2022) is a carefully crafted book examining both direct and indirect approaches to education. Saeverot argues that, appropriately understood and implemented, each of these pedagogical tactics can be useful in current educational practices. He argues, “Education needs both directness and indirectness” (2022, p. 1). Although he believes that both the direct and indirect educational methods are important for educators, in this book he focuses primarily on the use and purpose of indirect pedagogy.

According to Saeverot, education has two main purposes: (1) what is good for the individual, and (2) what is good for humankind. Consequently, education has both an
individual and a social perspective. He states that education “is about living well in a world worth living in” (2022, p. 1). In his view teachers need to help their students not only to grow as individuals, but to provoke or assist the students to act in a way that is best for society.

Much of what Saeverot has to say about indirect pedagogy can be traced back to the writings of Danish writer Søren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard did not speak specifically about direct or indirect education, but he did speak about direct and indirect communication, and educators use communication in teaching. Therefore, Saeverot draws on communication theory to help inform his understanding of direct and indirect education. He defines direct communication as “a straightforward approach or a straight line” and indirect communication “as a crooked road” (2022, p. 2). He uses the example of the student who “chooses to take a detour to school, using side streets and back roads” (2022, pp. 2-3). There are times when the straight path or road will not get you to school in the fastest and safest way possible. For example, if there is an accident or some sort of problem blocking the usual straight forward way one goes to school (the straight path), then another way must be found. In such cases the most resourceful and effectual way to school may well be taking the back road with its curves and turns.

The direct form of education often seems like the better path, and in fact at times it may well be, if the information communicated is desired and anticipated. However, when there are obstacles to overcome (Kierkegaard calls these “illusions” or even “self-illusions”) in being ready or able to receive a message (learn), or when a student is predisposed to not want to listen to the message, an educator may need to use an indirect approach. For Saeverot “education is indirect by nature” (2022, p. 7), and in the first chapter, Saeverot attempts a justification and clarification of indirect education.

There are many different forms of indirect communication that can be used by educators. Saeverot, however, is especially interested in helping educators understand how and when to use indirect communication (symbols, words, expressions, phrases, and stories) in the service of a student. Understood in this way, indirect pedagogy has some similarities with Paulo Freire’s (2000) understanding of the process of education as a practice of perception, analysis, and discovery. For Freire, and for the indirect pedagogical model, students should learn to think through and analyze problems on their own (see for example, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*). Furthermore, Saeverot not only explains when or under what conditions one should use a direct or indirect educational approach, but also “when to combine the two forms [direct and indirect] in relation to teaching and education research” (Saeverot, 2022, p. 2).

This concise book is divided up into seven chapters, each with its own theme. As stated earlier, the first chapter is concerned with justifying the use of the indirect approach in teaching. Saeverot’s argument is that those working in the area of education have become too one-sidedly direct, and that a deliberate intent to integrate

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1 Many of Kierkegaard’s writings comment on indirect communication, but perhaps it might be best described in *Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers*, especially in Vol. 1, pp. 252–319.
indirect elements into their teaching is needed (2022, p. 7). Furthermore, education is much more indirect than most of us realize. Teachers should use the best approach for the situation. Therefore, teachers and those involved in education often “attempt to shorten the distance between the students and society and real life as much as possible” (Saeverot, 2022, p. 7). This more often than not, is a direct approach. For example, one could take a trip to the botanical garden to smell the flowers rather than just reading about how the flowers smell. In deciding which approach to use Saeverot has two concerns: (1) to assess the quality of indirect approaches in education as to whether they are educative or detrimental, and (2) “to know when and in what situations one should use either direct or indirect approaches or both at the same time” (Saeverot, 2022, pp. 7–8).

Saeverot is especially interested in educators becoming aware of “intermediaries” that may be engaged in teaching. For Saeverot an intermediary “operates between teacher and student and prevents a direct or straightforward route” (Saeverot, 2022, p. 4). For example, a textbook, photograph, or a film can often serve as a strong intermediary between the teacher and the student. Saeverot further elaborates that awareness of these intermediaries may be recognized “through communication theory” (Saeverot, 2022, p. 8). He acknowledges that educators use many different forms (intermediators) of indirect communication when interacting with students, and that it is impossible to control them all. In this section he selects from one of several different theoretical models of communication theory, and he could have more clearly indicated that he is drawing from an older (or what he calls “classic”) theory of communication.2 Nevertheless, he rightly identifies the communication challenge facing teachers who are communicating with their students.

In attempting to control the intermediaries in an educational setting, the pedagogical strategy can be “perceived in two ways.” First, one might employ the traditional sense of minimizing and controlling the intermediaries and communication noise so that information can be presented clearly to the student. Second, the teacher can consciously make use of various intermediaries which leaves the student (or receiver) to interpret and respond. What is clear is that when a teacher is using the indirect approach the action usually remains invisible to the student so that they can decide for themselves. This means that the student can choose not to act on the material that the teacher is presenting. There is no certainty that the student will respond in the desired

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2 Communication, yet alone a communication theory, has proved difficult to define. This is due in part to three conceptual differentiations: (1) the differing level of observation, (2) intentionality (sometimes communication is intentional and at other times there are unintentional consequences), and (3) some definitions include normative judgment such as statements of success, effectiveness, or accuracy, etc. This leads many communication theorists to conclude that there is not just one definition of communication but different definitions and a range of theories depending on the purpose of the theory and the questions being addressed. For further reading on this topic see Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss, Theories of Human Communication, 10th ed., Waveland Press, Inc. Long Grove, IL., 2011.
way. However, the strength of the decision when a student makes up his or her own mind is arguably much stronger. It allows the “student to become more attentive ... more aware of the goings-on in the world and in their own lives” (Saeverot, 2022, p. 12).

In the second chapter, Saeverot draws upon original research from classroom observation and teacher interviews to discuss and demonstrate various direct and indirect educational strategies intended to remove or unlearn prejudicial attitudes and beliefs. In so doing he develops three theoretical models for direct and indirect pedagogy: (1) Direct Instructions (DI), (2) Indirect Summoning which is specified (ISS), and (3) Indirect Summoning which is unspecified (ISU). Furthermore, Saeverot provides an outline for a fourth model of teaching: Direct-indirect teaching (which is an interactive combination of DI and ISU). In the remainder of the chapter, he illustrates and discusses these teaching methods, and points out when and how to use them.

Communication is the topic of the third chapter. This chapter is primarily a discussion on the use of the indirect communication strategies of irony, deceit, and visual communication in pedagogy. In this chapter Saeverot takes on the important but challenging task of using a pedagogy that many consider detrimental to the student. However, he argues that the indirect use of irony, deceit and various uses of visual communication are sometimes necessary in order to help students come to understand and act in a socially responsible manner. He uses the metaphor of a Janus-faced form of indirect communication, by which he means that these forms of communication may be detrimental on one hand, but in certain circumstances they may be useful. Therefore, he argues for the cautious use of these communication strategies in education.

The strategies of irony or judicious deception are not intended to be used for the personal gain of the teacher, rather they are a means of helping students become aware and choose how to act. These strategies are not meant to be manipulative, nor do they in any way take power away from the students. Instead, they are meant to help students choose and live by the choices they make. There is no intent to force students into a pre-established truth, but these various strategies allow the students or invite students to think clearly and decide for themselves. Of course, any attempt to help the student freely and willingly take on the responsibility for his or her own choices comes with risks. Saeverot counsels that this approach needs to be used with caution, in that irony and deception are sometimes detrimental and may lead to distrust. At times, teachers may need to hold back words and actions in order to let the student discover what is right for them. For example, Saeverot references a case when a teacher may use “irony’s self-deprecating manner as an indirect way of giving the student ownership over their ideas, notions and thoughts” (Saeverot, 2022, p. 39).

I find Saeverot’s approach compelling yet challenging. There are times when these communication strategies are necessary for empowering a student to become aware and live by the new knowledge he or she inhabits. Saeverot can be easily misunderstood on this issue or ignored in favor of repeating the tired straightforward forms of communication. However, if one is interested in helping a student engage in life and live
in a self-aware manner, then irony and deception may well be the means to empower the student to live out the choices they have made. Of particular interest is Saeverot’s discussion of the challenge educators have when bringing students into existence. He states, “Whenever existence is brought into education, teachers stand before a particular challenge because they are in no position to tell students how to live their lives” (Saeverot, 2022, p. 45). For Saeverot, existence is a subjective and not an objective concern with predetermined guidelines and outcomes. Therefore, each student must take responsibility for their own subjective existence. It is not enough to just be knowledgeable. Saeverot argues that education is not just gaining information, but the student must convert the knowledge into action. Here Saeverot argues for an existential education. It is possible to exist without really engaging in life, and the educational task may well be to provide the opportunity for the student to take a stand concerning his or her own life in relationship to the world. Or, what Kierkegaard would describe as to come into existence.

Eventually indirect education will lead to some critical issues with regard to establishing the boundaries between the ethical and unethical use of irony, deception, seduction, and other forms of indirect education, and this is the topic of chapter 4. As Saeverot states, “Undoubtedly, certain indirect forms of communication and education can be unethical if they are used without caution.” Both this chapter on ethics and chapter 5, which is on the issue of time, are based on case studies that lend an authenticity to the discussion of the topics.

In chapter 5, Saeverot explains that there are many distinct types or forms of time. He, however, seems most interested in the concept of time as a lived experience. What Saeverot is trying to do is to help teachers plan to teach in a way that allows for unforeseen events to be incorporated into the educational experience. He argues that teaching should appropriate “indirect approaches in which ‘genuine time’ can become an integral element of the students’ being” (2022, p. 88). In short, “a lesson must not necessarily be governed by the clock” (Saeverot, 2022, p. 88), but by the educational efficacy of the activity.

The last two chapters are concerned with direct and indirect research approaches to education. Chapter 6, “Education research: The direct and indirect paths of education research”, focuses on research itself. This chapter attempts to determine when direct research is most appropriate for educational research and, alternatively, when indirect research is most appropriate. The chapter is carefully written and helpful for anyone desiring to conduct educational research.

Chapter 7 explores how research contributes to practice, which Saeverot argues is not automatic with evidence-based research. He understands evidence-based research to be “a positivist approach to research, whereby the researcher believes that reality can be grasped and understood at face value by way of using objective and value-neutral observations” (p. 106). It is questionable if anyone can be a totally objective and value-neutral observer, therefore Saeverot argues for an alternative approach to study education “through ironic indirection, which is intended not to replace but to
support and supplement the fundamental criterion of taking a doubting and critical approach to research.” This, he argues can be done through connecting irony to the research process. In so doing the researcher becomes “less results-oriented and more process-oriented” (Saeverot, 2022, p. 107).

This informative book is a must read for those interested in indirect education and is filled with challenging new ways to understand education, as well as how to teach and conduct research. It breaks new ground with its emphasis on direct and indirect approaches to education. Saeverot’s book not only contributes to the field of education, but to philosophy, communication, and psychology. This book will serve educators well, but not if one is looking for an easy read and quick solutions to the current challenges in education. The issues addressed in this study are considerable. Indirect communication is not an easy or quick solution to our current challenges in education. However, if one is serious about education and our student’s success, then this work is a valuable resource.

REFERENCES