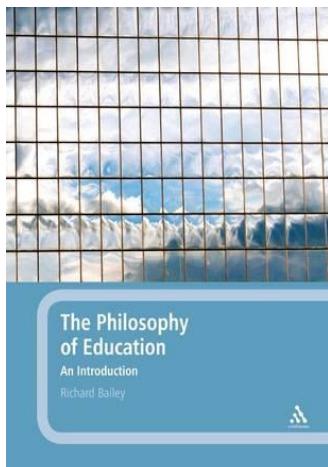


## Book Review



### **The Philosophy of Education: An Introduction**

Edited by Richard Bailey

London: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd. (2010).

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Review by **Sean Whittle**

This is an ambitious introduction to the philosophy of education in that it seeks to perform a number of demanding tasks. The first of these is to present an accessible, well written, and engaging guide for those coming to the discipline for the first time. The assumption is that many readers of this book will be classroom teachers who might encounter the philosophy of education as part of their Initial Teacher Training. Bailey's book would bring this kind of reader into contact with a range of major debates within contemporary education – from what should go on the curriculum to vexed issues of children's rights and educational opportunities. Philosophy of education is presented as a set of live debates that continue to be relevant to those involved at the 'chalk face' of education.

The second task that this book seeks to perform is to provide a relevant resource for graduate students who might need to quickly engage with the discipline as a part of a Master's course or within their doctoral studies. It also discharges this task in an exemplary manner. For these kinds of graduate students, with the majority no doubt working within the empirical or social science paradigm, there is a real need to be shown both the differences of and need for the theoretical perspectives that philosophy brings to educational research. The opening chapter discusses what the philosophy of education involves by drawing attention to debates concerning the definition of 'education' and 'philosophy'. However, alongside this there is a more practical treatment of the different types of philosophical thesis with some worked examples. This is all highly useful, particularly for the graduate student coming to the philosophy of education for the first time. In the second chapter the reader is drawn into the debate about whether education actually needs a philosophy. This chapter, written by Richard Pring, challenges the reader with the practical relevance of so much of educational philosophy. Given the way that philosophy education has withered away from so much of teacher training in the past thirty years these arguments have an almost counter intuitive aspect. The relevance and need for philosophy of education within educational research and discourse is carefully teased out through reference to major policy initiatives such as the *Nuffield Review*. For those new to what philosophy of education is, each chapter ends with a selection of further reading and useful websites to enable the reader to move beyond the introductory issues.

The third and perhaps most ambitious task that Bailey's book seeks to achieve is to produce some insight into how to conduct or 'do' philosophy of education. All the contributors to this introduction have attempted to show the reader how philosophers of education go about tackling or engaging with issues. Not only is each chapter peppered with question boxes and suggested activities to help one think through the issues, but there is also a sustained attempt to introduce the reader to a range of debates about major issues within the

philosophy of education. The reader is taken through a number of the central debates and so shown what concerns are central to a consideration of the philosophy of education. The debates include questions such as: *Can we teach ethics? Can schools make good citizens? Should the state control education? Should parents have a say in their children's schooling? What is wrong with indoctrination and brainwashing? What is education for?* The reader is not given the answers to these kinds of questions but rather is given the tools to take part in these ongoing debates. By the end of this book it should be obvious to the reader that the philosophy of education is a living discipline that is relevant to so much of the work and concerns of educators, teachers and researchers. In addition, Bailey and a number of other contributors have been effective at giving insight into the sense of the history or tradition within the discipline of the philosophy of education. There is a historical awareness that permeates much of the text. It is pleasing to note the recognition of the insights of R. S. Peters, and engagement with the arguments and opinions developed and defended by John White over his forty-year career as a philosopher of education.

It is worth noting that Bailey as the editor has gathered together many of the rising stars within the field of British philosophy of education. These newer voices have been juxtaposed with leading luminaries such as Standish, Smith and Pring. In this way the text serves also as a way of introducing the reader to many of the philosophers of education currently engaged in developing and defending the discipline. As a result it would be a mistake for the more experienced readers who are already familiar with the philosophy of education to simply dismiss this book as only for the beginner. In large part this is because the text as a whole provides an informed snapshot of the current state of philosophy of education. Bubbling beneath the surface of many of the chapters is the ongoing debate about what ought to be the role of philosophy and philosophers within education and educational settings. The emerging consensus is that the philosopher working within education is far more than the critical voice. Philosophy of education goes way beyond the clarification of concepts and seeks to inform and guide policy decisions and the practical day-to-day of education and schooling.

If there was an aspect of the text that could have been enhanced it would have been the missed opportunities to show some of the interrelationships between some of the topics covered within the various chapters. For example in the chapter on citizenship (*Can schools make good citizens?*) it would have helped the reader if there had been recognition of how these issues overlapped with the kind of points raised by Hand's discussion of the curriculum (*What should go on the curriculum?*).

Fundamentally, this book achieves what it set out to do – to present an introduction to the philosophy of education. In doing so it provides an exemplary model for how to conduct philosophy of education – and it does so in an accessible and relevant way.