

Book Review



The SAGE Handbook of Philosophy of Education

edited by Richard Bailey, Robin Barrow, David Carr, and Christine McCarthy
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The SAGE Handbook of the Philosophy of Education offers an introduction to philosophical inquiry for those practising or studying education, in a rather innovative fashion. The readers are introduced to the definition of philosophy of education in the early chapters of the book: 'philosophy of education is a field where philosophical inquiry is pursued that focuses upon issues arising within the domain of education' (p.18). These issues include the complexity of the domain of philosophy of education where a vast number of educational activities and concerns may be directed towards philosophical thought, e.g. meta-concerns, normative works, epistemological and axiological issues. In addition to a comprehensive delineation of the field of philosophy of education, the prestigious writers of this SAGE Handbook attempt to include a wide range of contemporary and traditional philosophical reflections on education while not confining themselves within the usual classifications of the different schools of thought. That is, instead of explaining schools of thought such as: idealism, realism, pragmatism, existentialism etc., and the philosophers and scholars affiliated with each school, the book focuses on either an individual or a cluster of individuals who can be identified with a certain school of thought. Hence the design of the book proves to be reader-friendly, particularly since the primary target groups of this book are students or practitioners wishing to gain easy access to philosophical thinking on educational concerns.

The book is divided into three sections that aim to reflect on educational issues that may be of interest to its non-philosophical readers. In the first section, the writers set forth a number of different ways of approaching the philosophy of education. In the second, the main focus is on classical and contemporary educational philosophers. In the third and final section certain concerns in contemporary education are treated philosophically. Throughout these three sections, the writers pay attention to topics that are perhaps not of primary - or for that matter exclusively - philosophical nature but to those topics eventually raising philosophical concerns. This can explain why the book includes chapters on both educational theorists and philosophers who have contributed to the domain of philosophy of education. As the authors state: 'Indeed, it is difficult to imagine any educational issue that is not related to assumptions about knowledge or values, or which would not benefit from critical consideration of key concepts.' (p.xix). Faithful to their intentions, the authors cover a broad range of topics that emphasize the interwoven nature of education and philosophical inquiry.

The first section (Educational Philosophy and Theory) comprises four articles providing an overview of the closely interwoven philosophical theories and educational practice. Despite the significance of philosophical thinking in educational practice, the book encourages critical thinking and emphasizes that restraining one's approach to 'an educational problem through the prism of an "ism" is to severely limit your options' (p.34). The section also covers contemporary concerns and aims in education. The current issues in education are referred

to, in quite a brief fashion, but in the subsequent chapters some of the most significant issues in today's educational systems are delineated in more detail.

The second section (Some Key Historical Figures in the Philosophy of Education) introduces past individual thinkers in philosophy, e.g., Plato and educationalists such as: Dewey, Rousseau and T.S. Eliot and present clusters of individuals influential in philosophical thought, e.g. feminism. This section of the book is where the authors, cautiously, structure their writing so as to meet the needs of their non-philosophical readers in an innovative and welcoming way. That is, instead of rigidly explaining philosophical schools of thought, the articles in this section take a different approach. The articles explain the thoughts and concepts raised by individuals with most impact on philosophy and education and then reflect on the school of thought they promoted. For example, in chapter 6 (Rousseau's Emile and educational legacy), the authors review Rousseau's thoughts by going through his "Emile" and then explain how ideas of child-centred education/critical theory have emerged based on Rousseau's educational concerns. Chapters 10, 11, and 12 take an opposite approach by initially reflecting on the current philosophical thought informing educational issues and then pointing out the figures contributing to a specific school. For instance, in chapter 10 (Post-structuralism, postmodernism and education), Smith explains some characteristics of modernity and how it had given way to ideas of postmodernism and continues by referring to two key writers on the topic: Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jacques Derrida. Chapter 13 is a very useful glossary of the most prominent figures in both traditional and contemporary philosophical and educational fields. This chapter can prove beneficial to a large number of readers who can easily build up a general overview of the most significant figures in education and philosophy.

In the third section (Philosophy of Education and Educational Practice) philosophical reasoning is applied to current educational concepts. For the ease of the reader, the section is divided content-wise into four sub-sections covering: teaching and general education; knowledge, learning and curriculum; social principles in education; and aspects of education. For instance, in the first sub-section some much-debated current topics are covered such as teacher professionalism (chapter 14), surviving pedagogical misconceptions (chapter 15) and ethical issues (chapter 16). Concerns in education such as moral citizenship (chapter 17), problems and criteria of indoctrination (chapter 18) are also reviewed. The overall aim of the section is to relate philosophical inquiry to current educational practice and to highlight its significance in treating today's educational issues, e.g. learning technologies, environment, equality and justice, inclusion and diversity etc. To this end, the book successfully includes enough topics from traditional and contemporary thoughts on the nature of educational issues raised today. It maintains a balanced review on the ideas of both philosophers and educationalist to achieve its goal.

In brief, this SAGE Handbook is an interesting and informative book on philosophy of education. It can be "handy" to a wide range of interested readers, e.g. students of different educational disciplines new to the area of philosophy; teachers, with no familiarity with philosophy who are keen to gain a basic knowledge of educational philosophy; and those with a desire to apply philosophy to educational practice. The book oscillates between classical and contemporary philosophical thought which provides a helpful perspective for the reader. It reflects on philosophical thoughts in an unambiguous, simplified, and attractive manner as well as supporting the significant relationship between educational practice and philosophical enquiry of the contemporary world.