

Education, ethics and experience: essays in honour of Richard Pring, edited by Michael Hand and Richard Davies, London, Routledge, 2016, 168 pp., £95 (hardback), ISBN 9781138860414

Book review by Tristram Hooley

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This book is a festschrift published in honour of Richard Pring. Pring is a leading figure in the philosophy of education who has written widely on a wide range of education topics including educational research (Pring, 2015), educational philosophy (Pring, 2004) and the role of knowledge in education (Pring, 1976).

For those working in the field of career guidance, Pring is perhaps best known for his attempt to fuse vocational and academic education into a 'liberal vocationalism' which recognises the value in both (see Pring, 1995; Pring et al., 2009). In this concept Pring draws together the high ideals of liberal education whilst also recognising that education has a vital role in preparing young people for life (Pring, 1993). Unlike some other writers, Pring is not squeamish about the idea that education needs to prepare people to contribute economically through work. In fact, he celebrates the value of craft and of a job well done and argues that this is an appropriate, if not sufficient, outcome for education. His argument is that true vocational learning is not simply a utilitarian version of liberal education, but rather an alternative passage into the kind of knowledge and expanded imagination that liberal education seeks to foster.

I think that the concept of liberal vocationalism is useful for career guidance which has always sought to build bridges between education and work and to focus on what educational and vocational options are right for individuals. If this focus on the sanctity of individual talent and aptitude is to be socially equitable there is a need to dissolve the social hierarchies and prejudices that are associated with academic versus vocational options and to achieve the much heralded vision of 'parity of esteem'. Pring provides some philosophical underpinning to this ideological position and I think that those working in career guidance would benefit from engaging with his work.

This book explores a wide range of the themes on which Pring has focused, albeit at times from idiosyncratic directions. For example, Pring's discussion of liberal vocationalism is addressed primarily through Judith Suissa's chapter which compares Pring's perspectives with anarchist thinking about education. This is an interesting and informative chapter but neither provides a summary of Pring's thinking nor engages with some of its main critiques.

Of course a festschrift is not necessarily intended to provide an overview of the thinking of the individual that it honours. Rather it is to take up the issues which lie at the centre of Pring's thought and to use them as a jumping-off point for new and critical discussions. This book does that well and also serves to reopen some old arguments, for example, in Michael Young's chapter which revisits a debate that he and Pring began in the 1970s when Young published *Knowledge and Control* (Young, 1971) and Pring (1972) answered with 'Knowledge out of control'. The balance in the volume between revisiting these old favourites

and moving Pring's thinking into new areas seems appropriate and makes for lively and educative reading.

Some of the chapters in the book seek to claim Pring for one philosophical tradition or another. For example, David Carr contends that despite Pring's own oft-stated fondness for Dewey (clearly set out in Pring, 2014) he is actually on the side of those who oppose Dewey. Others illustrate his engagement with concepts such as moral seriousness (Hand), privatisation (Tooley), common schooling (Barrow), the craft of teaching (Davies), educational research (Oancea), religious schooling (Panjwani), the role of policy borrowing and lending in education (Han) and education and freedom (Sockett). All of the chapters offer valuable food for thought for those working in education, but the book's wide-ranging nature means that there are likely to be some areas that interest some readers more than others.

Of most interest to those involved in career guidance is Christopher Winch's chapter on 'why careers education is part of education'. Winch highlights Pring's interest in career education and guidance and asserts that it is essential to schooling.

The important point is that academic preparation, and even the opportunity to enjoy non-academic practical subjects that may be relevant to a future career, are not enough in themselves to enable young people to make informed choices about their futures. If this is right, then careers education and advice is not an optional extra ('nice, but not necessary'), but an essential feature of an education worthy of the name. (Winch, p. 38)

Winch's endorsement of the value of career guidance is welcome. However, he concludes that in Britain at the moment it remains as a 'marginal' activity which is poorly funded and inadequately embedded in schools. He argues that this needs to be addressed and sets out a three-point plan for this. Firstly, through the creation of a cadre of specialist career education teachers. Secondly through tasking the Local Enterprise Partnerships with responsibility for the gathering and provision of local labour market information. And finally through the establishment of a national body which would be capable of building up high quality national labour market information.

There are details of Winch's solution that I might disagree with. For example, his focus on Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) trained teachers rather than the alternative professional infrastructure offered by careers professionals is one area where Winch might benefit from further engagement with the career guidance field. However, Winch's chapter makes an important contribution to the debate, not least because it comes at these issues from a different perspective. Career guidance, Winch insists, is not just valuable in its own right it is also an essential component of a functioning education system. Without career guidance Pring's vision of liberal vocationalism will be hard to realise.

This book is a valuable addition to the debates that Pring has been contributing to for 40 years. For those of us working within career guidance it has particular value as it reminds us of the value of philosophical discussion about the nature and purpose of education and because it situates career guidance at the heart of this discussion.

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