

Response to Frank Margonis? Review of Labor of Learning: Market and the Next Generation of Educational Reform

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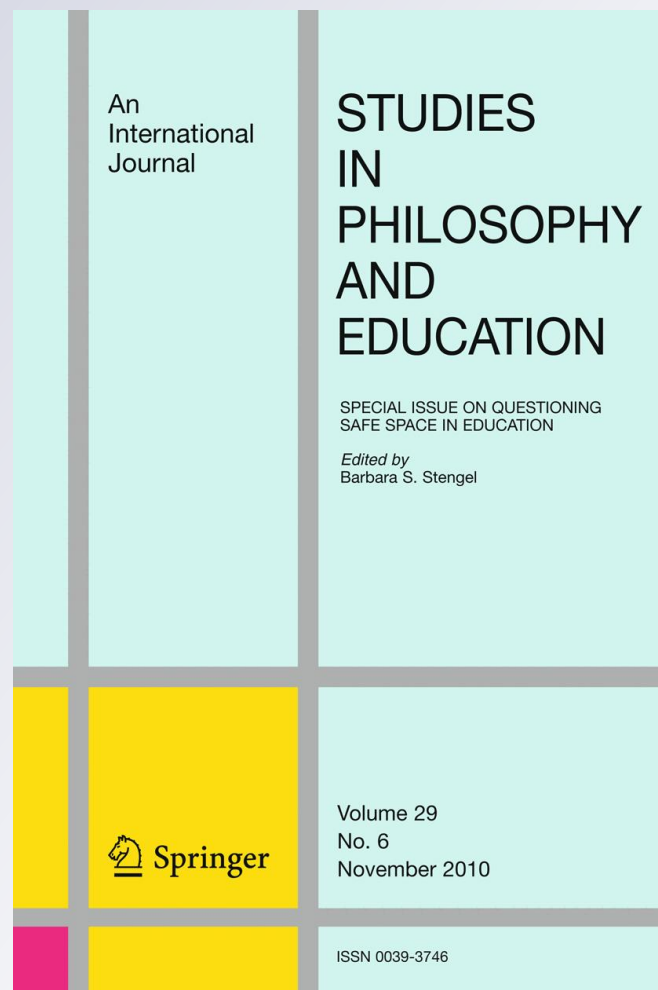
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Response to Frank Margonis' Review of *Labor of Learning: Market and the Next Generation of Educational Reform*

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Frank Margonis is an ideal book reviewer. His summary is incredibly accurate and illuminating; I just wish it were a foreword to the book. I am not about to disagree on all the compliments; the reviewer is absolutely right when he agrees with me. What makes the review even better is that in his critical remarks, Margonis is not going after numerous logical and factual errors that are undoubtedly easy to spot. He goes to the very core of my argument, and I will therefore repay him in kind.

His first point is that I moved away from ethical concerns of education and the language of ideals, which is concerned with the relationships in schools becoming more humane, and rich. Margonis charges me with abandoning the project and turning my attention to cold economical and hedonistic view of education and school as an institution. I don't think I abandoned my ethical ideals. The role of ideals is to lead but not mislead. Certain ideals can only be misleading, while others can lead somewhere; ideals are not born equal. For example, the hope to abandon private property of the means of production can only mislead. Requiring children to learn in schools is another such example. Because I pursue a more realistic approach to school reform does not make my stance less ethical. The end result is still the same; I want the world of education to be free of oppression and domination and rich with relationship and meaning to youth. And I believe paying students to learn and abandoning compulsory education will help to achieve it. What Margonis did not appreciate is that paying students to learn removes students from economically depressed inner cities, and their school, without actually moving children away from their communities.

The second point is that my radical solution naively implies sharing of educational and financial resources, which middle class Americans were unwilling to accept in the past. However, citizens of countries with more centralized taxation are not more generous to other people's children; they just have a better tax structure, and therefore more equal funding. Consider abolition of slavery in America. It did not necessarily solve the problem of economic equality; however, it made the gradual progress towards equality much more

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plausible. Without structural changes in schooling, more dialogical and more humane relationships will remain utopian, and no stronger ideal will change that. Schooling is a particular labor arrangement, and as such, it sets limits on how humane they can be.

It's not that I am less ethical now than I used to be, it's that I understand now more fully the limits of ethical thinking. Thinking ethically does not make one an ethical person, does it? I'd also like to point out that Margonis' two critiques are mutually exclusive: am I not sufficiently idealistic, or too utopian?