

# SORROW, CONSOLATION, AND PHILOSOPHY: WORDS ON PHILOSOPHY AND TEACHER EDUCATION

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It is in many ways paradoxical to speak of philosophy *and* education. First, one must overcome the jarring realization that the two are one and the same. What I mean is that philosophy entails education and that, conversely, education bereft of philosophy is bankrupt. Second, one must confront the roots of each term, which reveal a further confluence of meanings. The etymology of *philosophy* steers us towards the Greek pursuit and love of wisdom, whereas the roots of the latter term, *education*, are Latin, and lead us to an understanding of human development rooted in the drawing out of individuals' aptitudes and abilities. Each concentrates upon the very point of living.

Once, I encountered a teacher candidate who was in the midst of drafting a philosophy of education statement as a course assignment for a particular course. The student was leaning on a couch in a public space and ending a conversation on the telephone, which seemed particularly exasperating. I taught this teacher candidate in the previous term in a course that concentrated on the teaching of history in secondary schools. Noting her frustration, I greeted her and asked if she was well. She responded by telling me that she was irritated due to the fact that she was expected to have a philosophy of education before she actually began to teach.

I sought to console this student. I told her that her philosophy of education would always be a work in progress. I argued that this assignment would compel her to write out her thoughts as they stand now. I sought to persuade her that these thoughts would change over time. I described this statement that she would write as a rudder in a storm. When forced upon angry or turbulent waters, her philosophy would lead her out of the fray. I kept talking without interruption from this student, as she had ceased to speak.

Her face grew more solemn. Still, I spoke on, hoping to convince her that philosophy was something she had been doing all along without realizing it. She needed neither beard nor toga to be a philosopher. She needed not retreat to a mountain or to a cave, although these were options she might wish to entertain, to practice philosophy. She did not have to understand Kant to understand some points of philosophy.

Her eyes revealed the particular dewiness that precedes an explosion of tears. I was only beginning to run out of arguments when I moved to a new arsenal composed of questions and broad gesticulations. *Why ought we to be educated? How ought we to live? What ought we to do with the lives that we have?* These only hastened the pace of my talking and quickened my demise, which was imminent from the start.

*I am sure that you will feel differently about this statement of philosophy once it is completed,* I concluded, and hurried to the library where I found a quiet place to hide. I can only explain this student's sorrow by hypothesizing that she saw philosophy as something outside of, or beyond, the scope of education. Somewhere, somehow, the education program that she was pursuing forgot to mention that philosophy is not a statement. It is not a series of platitudes typed up in a neat Baskerville font and submitted to an instructor for a grade. It is only meant to provoke anxiety if you subscribe to a particular branch of existentialism.

At our worst, we, teacher educators, stammer on, convincing no one of anything good. Yet, at our best, we serve as exemplars of the philosophical life. We show our students what philosophy is by the manner with which we live our lives, by the ways we interact with each other and with ideas, and by the commitment we have to pursuing wonder, wherever it leads us.