

# The “Discussion - Case Study Approach” In Introduction To Philosophy Of Education Courses

John P. Portelli  
Mount Saint Vincent University

- \* *My mind felt knotted, paralysed, intimidated by the word philosophy. I had taken a course in Rhetoric in 1987 and was thoroughly intimidated by my professor to the point that I suffered from severe anxiety. Many fellow students experienced this tension and that particular professor was feared. I carried my fears into class that first day of philosophy of education. How would I survive? Why was I here?*
- \* *I came into class in September feeling unsure because of my lack of background in philosophy.*
- \* *When I first came to class I had an image of what this class might be like because I had heard other people talk about philosophy courses and how boring they are.*
- \* *When I came to philosophy class at the beginning of the term I was scared because I had never taken a philosophy course before. I didn't know what to expect. I also came in with what I would call a narrow view of what education is all about. I admit I had an “executive view” and I was traditionally minded.*
- \* *I must admit that my first week in this course was just horrible ... What made it even worse was that I didn't even want to be in this philosophy course because I couldn't see this course would help me as a future elementary teacher.*
- \* *At the beginning I found it difficult to read an article with no solution. Coming from a science background where a solution was necessary, I was not encouraged to think critically.*
- \* *I have gone through school being reinforced for the correct answer and punished for the wrong one. My teachers never thought about asking why we thought our answers were correct. We were never asked to back them up. Nor were we ever asked to critically examine issues and discuss our views on them. Issues were something where the teacher would tell you what point of view you should take so you could “speak intelligently about the subject!” We definitely went through the education system at a time when Raggedy Ann and Andy were very popular! Sit quietly and answer when you are asked a question and everything will be fine.*

These selections, taken from B. Ed. students' reflective commentary at the end of a 10 week introductory course in philosophy of education, capture the popular expectations, stereotyped impressions or feelings that pre-service education students normally hold about foundations courses especially philosophy of education: scepticism, intimidation, boredom, uselessness, fear and practical irrelevance. A grim though very real picture! The delicate task of teaching introductory foundations courses becomes more difficult and also tragic when one

learns, as stated in a couple of the above selections, that most students come with a strong and long background of “traditional teaching” in which complacency, uncriticalness, and the urge to acquire the right answer, which the teacher possesses, to get the highest grade, are implanted explicitly via the formal curriculum or implicitly via teaching styles. These qualities are essentially incompatible with a foundations perspective, and, some believe, even with the very notion of education. These expectations, impressions, feelings and qualities almost compel those who

teach in teacher education programmes to reduce the foundations requirements and give in to the “esteemed model of the teacher ... [ ] ... technologist, technician or applied scientist” (Giroux and McLaren, 1987, p.269). And, hence, to strengthen the commonly expected aim of teacher education institutions: “to provide students with the requisite technical expertise to carry out whatever pedagogical functions are deemed necessary by the various school communities in which students undertake their practicum experience” (Giroux and McLaren, 1987, p. 269). It, therefore, becomes crucial, from a foundational perspective, that our teaching does not contradict the very aim of our discipline.

With such considerations in mind, during the last three academic years, I have adopted a “discussion- case-study approach” in the required introduction to philosophy of education course at the pre-service level. This paper argues for this approach by offering a rationale for its use and by identifying and briefly criticizing some of the popular but negative views about the nature and role of philosophy of education in teacher education. The second part will briefly describe the approach, comment on the students’ reaction to it, and make some suggestions.

## PART I

Why are foundations courses, including philosophy of education, viewed as being incompatible with other pre-service courses and not helpful to education students? The popular perception is that philosophical questions and concerns are trivial and irrelevant because they are too theoretical and, therefore, can be safely ignored by the practitioner. Some argue that, since philosophers have offered different and opposing views, teachers do not have anything to gain from philosophy of education. Similar views are also held with regard to theory and research in general. As Carr and Kemmis (1986) put it, “teachers regard research as an esoteric activity having little to do with their everyday practical concerns” (p. 8). This is not surprising if one holds that teacher education programmes are highly dominated by “technicism” which is characterized by a “how to” or “quick-fix approach”, as well as elements of anti-intellectualism, extreme pragmatism and vocationalism (Apple and Tietlebaum, 1985; Adler and Goodman, 1986; Beyer, 1986; Popkewitz, 1987; Beyer, 1988a; Beyer 1988b; Giroux and McLaren, 1988; Beyer, 1989). This perspective is also reflected in the work and attitude of teachers who, as Ohanian (1988) maintains, “demand ...

carry-out formulae, materials with the immediate application of scratch-and-sniff stickers... as though each of us were heading to operate a fast-food franchise” (p. 56). Ohanian believes that such a perspective arises from (i) a mistaken belief that there are “instant, stir-and-serve recipes for running a classroom” (p. 56) and (ii) a over-emphasis of administration on test scores. This technicism, according to Giroux and McLaren (1988), is based on “the logic of instructional technology and mandated by the state to provide requisite technical and managerial expertise” (p. 161). And this perspective has led to the deskilling and disempowering of teachers, discouragement of a critical view of schooling and an acceptance and reproduction of current practice (Apple and Weis, 1983; Giroux and McLaren, 1988; Beyer, 1988a).

Given such attitudes, it is not surprising that “the dominant approach to the preparation of teachers emphasizes a combination of courses in educational psychology and in the methodology of the various content areas” (Beyer, 1989, p. 22). The influence of technicism and the popularity of extreme pragmatism and vocationalism in teacher education lead almost naturally “to an isolation of the educational encounter so that the sort of educational issues that are crucial in the foundations of education tend to be regarded as irrelevant or even counterproductive” (Beyer, 1989, p. 22). Not only are these educational issues disregarded, but through the use of the dominant technicist approach, students learn that “being a teacher ... means identifying knowledge that is certain, breaking it into manageable bits, and transmitting it to students in an efficient fashion. Being a student means acquiring this knowledge and learning how to use it in a context which does not include criticism and has little patience with analysis” (Beyer and Zeichner, 1982, p. 20). Within this approach, anything that deviates from the above norm is deemed useless and unimportant. But the foundations, if done well, of their very nature ought to challenge this approach as well as the practices that go with it. This dichotomy or conflict between the foundations perspective and technicist practices is also recognized by some teachers.<sup>1</sup>

The separation between foundations and other courses arises both because of the dominant practices found in teacher education described above, and the widespread attitude towards the foundations and research held by teachers. But I also believe that “foundations instructors must bear some of the responsibility for the distance which exists between these areas and the discontent

which results” (Beyer and Zeichner, 1982, p. 23). This latter point leads to issues concerning the nature and role of philosophy of education, the relationship between theory and practice, and the way philosophy of education courses are conducted.

One can identify at least two approaches adopted in the teaching of philosophy of education. The first deals with the traditional “isms” in philosophical discourse – such as realism, idealism and progressivism – and then attempts to identify what educational prescriptions follow from these “philosophies”. Within this approach, which is usually associated with traditional or pre-analytic philosophy of education, some argue that philosophy of education and educational theory become almost identical. The second approach, which arose as a reaction to the first, is associated with analytic philosophy of education. This approach to philosophy of education deals with the analysis of central educational concepts. Philosophy is viewed as “concerned with questions about the analysis of concepts and with questions about the grounds of knowledge, belief, actions, and activities” (Hirst and Peters, 1970, p. 3).

Which ever approach one adopts, one still needs to address the question of what teaching method is to be used in philosophy of education classes. In a recent article which comments on the methods of teaching philosophy of education, Johnston and Applefield (1988) write:

*The approach typically used to teach educational philosophy is based upon utilization of philosophical concepts and principles to allow students to engage in a process of analysis of historical and contemporary educational practices. Classroom activity is typically characterized by students reading assigned material and attending lectures which describe identified philosophical positions. They then discuss this material and finally analyze the philosophic underpinnings of a text, policy, or personal belief. At a more existential level, this approach may be described as one in which faculty lecture to students and grumble among themselves about lack of student engagement with questions. Students commonly memorize material for an objective exam and, in a final flourish to attain relevance, generate a written statement of their philosophy of education to undermine the teaching practices they would adopt (pp. 34 and 36).*

Given the concern that philosophy of education courses do not relate to other courses in education, do not illuminate practice, do not resolve anything, are not helpful for the students’ chosen profession and that students do not have enough experience or practice to make sense of them, I have attempted to use and evaluate the “discussion - case-study approach” with six groups of B. Ed. students over a period of three years (1988-89, 1989-90, 1990-91) totalling 153 students.

The rationale for using this approach rests on at least three points:

(1) My view about the nature and role of philosophy of education.

Philosophy of education is viewed as the critical inquiry of educational concepts, values, and practices. Philosophy is seen as “an activity; it is something you do rather than a body of subject matter you study” (Barrow, 1981, p. 14). And, therefore, as Gramsci concludes, “philosophy is not ... the intrusion into everyday life of an alien esoteric otiose knowledge but an essential dimension of essential human experience ... it is the criticism and superarching of common sense” (Quoted by Carr, 1986, p. 1).

(2) The importance of doing philosophy if one values a critical-reflective-inquiring approach to teaching.

Several complaints have been raised about the “traditional pedagogical practices of preservice education” – practices followed by professors who at the same time preach the value of inquiry instruction. Unfortunately, as Ross and Hannay (1986) note: “Students often encounter the reflective inquiry model as content to be memorized for an upcoming examination rather than as a process used to solve real problems” (p. 11).

(3) My belief that philosophy of education has something to offer to the resolution of practical, educational issues.

## **PART II**

The approach adopted is heavily based on a combination of large-group and small-group discussions of case studies as well as readings related to issues raised in them. Lectures, which were kept to a minimum, were given when either the students asked for further clarification or when

I felt some background to the issue(s) at hand would be helpful. The students were assigned at least one case study for each class, which they were encouraged to read and think about prior to class, as well as related readings<sup>2</sup>. The students were also assigned, on a weekly basis, to submit a question or questions or a short reaction to the readings. While these questions could form part of the agenda in their small-group discussions, they gave me an idea of the kind of issues that I needed to address either individually or in class.

While the use of case studies has been adopted in several disciplines, such as medicine, law, clinical psychology and business administration – in the first two instances the use of cases goes as far as a hundred years ago – the meaning of case studies and the purpose of employing them varies (Harrington, 1990-1991; Merseeth, 1991; Boehrer and Linsky, 1990). In my context, a case study was taken to consist of “an account of an event or events in the life of teachers and schools (Perry and Perry, 1969,p.1). It is a story or narrative of an incident or series of incidents in a teaching context that raises problems of, for example, a pedagogical or ethical or political nature, or a combination of all. In our context, contrary to some other ones, a case study is not meant as an example to support or explain a point or “a morality tale or fable”<sup>3</sup>. The reasons for using case studies include: (i) to provide students with a context which raises a controversial issue or issues; (ii) to give students the opportunity to explore the different aspects of the issue or issues by analyzing, discussing, and providing arguments for a position they might hold in resolving the issue; (iii) to help students relate the readings to practical concerns and develop practical judgements; and (iv) to help students clarify their own views and reasons for them. This perspective of the use of case studies is different, for example, from the one proposed by Harry S. Broudy. He insists that the use of case studies ought to enable educators to develop “a set of problems that can legitimately claim to be so general and important that all who are qualified to teach and to teach teachers should be familiar with them and their *standard interpretations and solutions*” (Broudy, 1990, p. 452, emphasis added). While one cannot deny that there are some issues or problems that may arise in different teaching contexts and being aware of such issues would be worthwhile, the generalizability and standardization proposed by Broudy can easily lead us to the vision of professionalism associated with technicism. Moreover, this perspective, unfortunately, may also diminish the importance of taking the specific context into account. And,

hence, Broudy himself is perplexed: “why is it so difficult to infer from what is going on in one third grade what one will find in another third grade five miles away?” (1990, p. 452). From my perspective, cases are neither meant to be prescriptive (in the sense of showing prospective teachers the only way to proceed) nor fully generalizable. As Harrington concludes, “cases provide students of teaching with opportunities to begin to see the context specificity of the teaching and learning process and to understand that it is impossible to know anything in general about teaching (declarative or procedural knowledge) without knowing something in particular (conditional/contextual knowledge). Cases thereby reveal the inherent complexity of the teaching and learning process” (1990-1991, p. 3). In essence, discussion of cases can demonstrate the inevitability of “the contingency of teaching” (Van Manen, 1990).

How did the students react to this approach? To answer this question adequately, I analyzed the students’ course evaluation carried out by the university, as well as their responses to a survey I conducted at the end of the course. For details of these evaluations see appendix A. The students’ course evaluation ratings and written comments with regard to (a) their improvement of their ability to think critically, (b) the value of the philosophical readings, (c) the value of philosophy of education in relation to their professional goals, (d) the value of philosophy of education in clarifying and resolving practical educational issues, and (e) the value of philosophical discussions, show that the use of the “discussion - case-study approach”, while being faithful to the nature of philosophical inquiry, has helped in correcting some of the popular misgivings about philosophy of education. For example, an analysis of the university administered evaluations indicates that in all areas evaluated (including increased ability to think critically, the value of readings, and fulfilling personal goals of a university career), the scores for this course are either on a par with or above the average of scores obtained by other pre-service education courses. The students’ evaluations and comments in general discredit the popular, but negative, views about the foundations<sup>4</sup>. Notwithstanding the students’ initial expectations and impressions, by the end of the term 89% of them identify the discussions as being the most helpful activity in the course, 90% of them found the case studies to be either extremely helpful or very helpful, 69% of them stated that the issues raised through the case-studies related to issues dealt with in other courses, and 87% of them

found the discussion of the issues and case studies either extremely helpful or very helpful in resolving some of the practical issues. The following

students' comments ought to give a good impression of why they found the discussions and case-studies beneficial:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <i>They encourage you to think past the issue on the surface and you benefit from listening to others' opinions.</i></li> <li>* <i>They enable us to "do" philosophy.</i></li> <li>* <i>They give the opportunity to voice concerns and opinions and hear those of others.</i></li> <li>* <i>They help one see something that perhaps one did not consider before.</i></li> <li>* <i>They give one the opportunity to share ideas, criticize and relate readings with real life experience.</i></li> <li>* <i>They prompt critical and reflective thinking.</i></li> <li>* <i>Case studies provide insight into areas that one had not yet experienced or might not have thought would occur in the classroom.</i></li> <li>* <i>I feel that I have learned to think more critically, with more patience. I think that I have learned to discuss an issue better than before, at least with some objectivity. I also look at children differently.</i></li> <li>* <i>Being introduced to new ways on how to handle different situations, I realized how closed minded I had been.</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <i>After participating in the discussions I found that I was better able to deal with situations faced in some of the practical educational issues. I could see many sides and try to deal with the issues.</i></li> <li>* <i>We discussed issues from all sides and became more accepting of other's opinions.</i></li> <li>* <i>The discussions of case studies allowed us to see extreme cases, as well as everyday incidents we can expect to encounter as teachers.</i></li> <li>* <i>You could feel the reaction of others and that you were not alone thinking in a certain way, or that others were as confused as you, or that you had an opinion on a certain topic and you knew where you were standing on the issue.</i></li> <li>* <i>They made me hear the views of others and relate them to my own. Some views were very different from my own and some of them I may not have thought of without the open discussions.</i></li> <li>* <i>It is one thing to make a statement about how things ought to be, but entirely different when it comes to putting things into practice. The issues/case studies revealed many problems one could encounter.</i></li> </ul> |
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The approach defended in this paper assumes a certain nature and role of philosophy of education, as well as a certain perspective to the theory/practice relationship. Both of these assumptions contrast with the "technicism" prevalent in teacher education programmes. As I said earlier, this dominant view aims for a one-to-one correspondence between theory and practice. Theoreticians, who do the thinking, are expected to offer prescriptions that work; teachers, who follow the directions, as practitioners, are expected to implement these prescriptions. Within this perspective, theory is meant to offer quick solutions that apply to all cases or contexts, and the simpler, more concrete or direct the suggestions the better, because teachers will carry them out more efficiently. As Pinar and Grumet observe, theory "has become a mere appendage ... judged

and justified solely according to its ability to predict and control those [human] affairs (1988, p. 96). Such an atmosphere erases "the boundary between the actual and the possible by acknowledging the possible only in its existing and predictable manifestations in the practical world" (Pinar and Grumet, 1988, p. 96).

From the critical-foundational perspective, the "technicist" understanding of the role of theory is deemed to be too reductionist and problematic. As Entwistle argues, there can never be a one-to-one correspondence between theory and practice, that is, one that "predicts accurately every contingency in a practical situation" (Entwistle, 1988, p. 26). The role of theory is "to evoke judgement rather than rote obedience," to bring "critical intelligence to bear on practical tasks rather

than merely implementing good advice" (Entwistle, 1988, p. 27). Or, as Pinar and Grumet put it, the role of theory is "to consciously question [the practical], interrupting the predictable with analyses that point to other possibilities" and "to restore the contemplative moment in which we interrupt our taken-for-granted understandings ... and ask again the basic questions practical activity silences" (1988, pp. 98 and 99). The students' comments with regard to the use of case studies and discussions and the way the issues dealt with in this course relate to other courses<sup>5</sup>, indicate that the students were becoming aware of the role of

theory defended in this paper and throughout the course. I am not claiming that this is *simply* the result of this course. Nor am I claiming that in order to bring about some concrete change in teaching all is needed is an awareness of this kind. However, the majority of the students' comments show that the issues dealt with in the course as well as the approach adopted have helped them to become aware of the need to consider these issues within their teaching, to realize the importance of thinking for themselves, to appreciate criticism, and value "patience with analysis". Let me offer some of the students' own voices in support of this:

- \* *The discussion of the issues and case studies caused me to be more critical about how to teach and many considerations about teaching, students and the classroom that I wouldn't have considered to be very important before this course.*
- \* *I would go to the discussions with my opinions, however, others often raised questions and issues that I failed to think about which sometimes changed or jodified my prior opinions. Isn't this open-mindedness?*
- \* *Different views were expressed, and some were modified as a result of looking at and considering possible arguments for and against these views. Discussions encouraged critical thinking.*
- \* *I have discovered that I will have to use a lot of my own judgement when I'm out there in the real world teaching.*
- \* *While I may have had vague notions of what a teacher should or should not be before, this class has forced me to explore those hazy notions and deal with hard questions. I may not have found all the answers, but I have learned to inquire, to reflect and to discuss these serious educational issues.*
- \* *The contradictions in our education system and society have become even more apparent to me than they were as a parent. I take some comfort in the statement that only by uncovering these contradictions is it possible to find some hope for change.*
- \* *During the first class we were asked to identify an issue that troubled us. I wrote*

*"mainstreaming". I wanted to know how to handle kids of varying ability in a whole class situation. I didn't want to think about it, I wanted practical hints on how to deal with it in specific examples.*

- \* *"That's OK in theory, but in practice it works like this ..." made me nervous. There were uncomfortable silences when it was brought up, and it was brought up often enough for me to get the message that there was something wrong with it. I agreed that there was something unsettling about this statement, because everyone else was worried about it too.*
- \* *Now I know what made me edgy. The big "BUT" right there in the middle is a tough stopper. Any person making this statement wants thought to end with the end of the statement. They want to package a problem and forget about it.*
- \* *I was hoping for these kind of skills when I arrived here in September last year. It feels like a decade ago!*
- \* *The most important thing I have learned is that there is no dichotomy between theory and practice; what you practice in the classroom is your theory — THERE IS NO TIME TO TRANSLATE IN SCHOOL SITUATIONS. This may seem like theory through default, but it is not.*
- \* *Somewhere in the readings this year, this idea was expressed much better. But until I knew it on my own terms, it was useless to me. When I was taught, it didn't stick. When I learned, I mean really understood, it became part of me.*

- \* *So, where I saw my initial issue as "mainstreaming", I now understand that issue in terms of equality, democracy and human rights.*
- \* *I had no answers to teaching problems before, and I certainly have no answers now, but there is a difference. I have a sense of the depth of the issues, and I find them all dependent on each other. The discussions*

*seemed circular before in an unproductive way; now the circular discussions seem productive in that they bring out all the aspects of a problem for consideration. This complexity may make it impossible to find a perfect solution, but it makes for a more reasonable, thoughtful solution.*

- \* *I still don't "know" anything, but I'm aware of a lot more!*

The presentation, analysis and defence of the "discussion - case study" approach has not been provided as a panacea to all the problems that we encounter in teacher education programmes. It has been presented as an example of a possibility available to us – a possibility that has brought about some positive changes. As a result of the use and reflection of this approach, I propose two suggestions. First, that while we should continue to improve the teaching of philosophy of education courses, we also need to combat and eliminate "technicism" in teacher education. If the latter fails, then philosophy of education courses are doomed to be seen as being incompatible with the other courses offered in teacher education. The philosophical perspective will remain perhaps the necessary or required perspective but the odd and disliked one.

My second suggestion, which is not unrelated to the first, is to introduce the philosophical perspective, even if partially, in other courses offered in teacher education programmes. This, of course, implies at least in some instances (I imagine in most instances), that philosophers of education have to take curriculum matters more seriously and even be willing to co-teach some of the other courses. This suggestion also implies that those who teach the so-called "curriculum and instruction" courses have to learn to be more patient and open to the foundational perspective<sup>6</sup>

## Notes

1. Consider, for example, the following journal entry by a graduate student and an elementary school teacher with fifteen years of teaching experience: "In the public schools that I have been in, teachers who criticize or try to change the system — those who don't believe in what they are told to teach or do — are not valued. They are disciplined by principals and administrative personnel. School board officials value those teachers who act only as technicians, who believe in the status quo, and who do not question even their own beliefs. Teachers are made to believe that their own feelings, beliefs, and ideas are not as important as the "material" that is there for one to teach. The job description is not to take a stand on what should be taught, but to teach what is already there. Those teachers

"technicians" are rewarded by becoming administrative personnel, who then make decisions regarding curricula. A lot of teachers who don't want to be relegated to the role of practitioner (not thinkers) leave the profession. If this control of knowledge is so predominant at this level, how can there be any substantial advances in changing the focus of how knowledge is organized in the classroom?"

2. The readings included selections from the writings of John Dewey, Jane R. Martin, Maxine Greene, Harold Entwistle, William Hare, Mary Warnock, P.H. Hirst, R.S. Peters, R.F. Dearden, P.S. Wilson, John Holt, Ann Margaret Sharp and Paulo Freire. Several of the case studies used are available in Fenstermacher and Soltis (1986). Other case studies, based on my own teaching and my work with teachers, were also discussed. During the third year of adopting this approach, half of the students taking the course, were spending a day and half per week in schools. By the middle of the term, several of these students presented cases of their own based on their school experience.

3. The following is an example of a case study I used. I developed this case which is based on a real incident I encountered a couple of years ago.

Rebecca had been an elementary school teacher for 12 years. For the last 3 years she has taught at the Grade 6 level. As part of the Language Arts class Rebecca has introduced a weekly activity on local news. The activity involves students selecting a newspaper article, presenting it to the class and then, if there is enough interest, discuss any issue or issues raised in the article. In the past these discussions have gone well. Moreover, although several controversial issues had been discussed the children seemed to handle differing views quite tolerantly. And, to Rebecca's relief, no parents had complained about this activity.

Unfortunately this year Rebecca was faced with some delicate situations and hard decisions to make. Some parents had complained that it was not part of the school mandate to discuss issues related to religion and moral values. A parent accused her of promoting permissiveness. With the principal's support, Rebecca had organized a session for parents to explain the intent of the activity and that this was consistent with some of the goals of public education publicized by the school board: to develop the disposition of critical thinking and to foster an awareness and understanding of distinctive human values. Although the majority of the parents agreed, some still complained forcefully and walked out of the meeting. Rebecca decided to pursue the activity. After all, most of the children seemed to benefit from the discussions.

The following month one of the students brought an article entitled "Abortion Bill to Be Introduced: More Abortions Performed at Clinic". On that day there wasn't enough time to fully investigate this article.

That evening Rebecca struggled with several questions. She knew that abortion was a very hotly debated issue in her community. Supporters of both sides of the issue had

demonstrated recently. The children she taught must surely be aware of the issue. But she wondered whether or not she should pursue the topic given the reaction this might instigate from some of the parents. Moreover, the curriculum guide for health very clearly indicated that the topic of abortion should not be dealt with in class prior to Grade 7. Rebecca thought that if she were to restrict this discussion the students may feel she is contradicting herself. On the other hand, should she risk creating more protests from parents to the extent that she would not be able to continue having any discussions?

4. The following examples of students' comments support the point made here:

- \* *This course is very useful because it addresses the context in which the other courses will take place and inspires one to think about personal teaching goals and styles.*
- \* *This course opened up a whole realm of teaching issues which are most important but yet are unaddressed in the methods courses.*
- \* *The issues we discussed could be related to life in general, problems that could arise in anyone's daily life.*
- \* *I found this course to be a compliment to the methods courses, this one helped me to formulate some basic ideas of the whole educational process and to put things into perspective or to question things.*
- \* *I found myself questioning a lot of other areas such as professors' teaching methods, their views on teaching practice etc. This course helped me to think about all areas.*

\* *Other courses I have deal very little with issues/topics dealt with in this course. This course was much more relevant.*

5. The observation that the issues discussed "helped one think about all areas" is made by several students. As a student put it, "Philosophy of education is evidently not limited to the philosophy of education class but permeates not only the other courses, but every course I could relate an issue or idea that was dealt with in this course. I gained more from this course than from any of the others."

6. A shorter and earlier version of this paper was published in *Paideusis*.

## Appendix A

At the end of each course, the University conducts course evaluations. The evaluations consist of two questionnaires. The first, "Teaching Evaluation Questionnaire" consists of 27 questions, each question having 5 possible replies from which students have to select one. The second, "Student Evaluation of Teaching", consists of 2 questions. The purpose of the second one is to give the students the opportunity to write their anecdotal comments on the course and the professor's teaching.

**TABLE 1**  
**Results of questions 11, 12 and 19**

	N	Question 11			Question 12			Question 19		
		Avg	Un%	Ed%	Avg	Un%	Ed%	Avg	Un%	Ed%
S86	9	1.33	90+	90+	1.67	85	67	1.75	70	50
F86	56	1.64	90+	75	1.91	70	50	1.73	70	50
F87	52	1.42	90+	90+	1.73	80	62	1.75	70	50
S88*	17	1.71	90+	70	1.53	90+	77	1.47	86	65
F88*	52	1.50	90+	86	1.89	70	50	1.46	86	65
F89*	49	1.34	90+	90+	1.64	85	70	1.48	86	65
F90*	53	1.28	90+	90+	1.67	85	67	1.34	90+	70
Grand avg		1.45	90+	90	1.72	80	62	1.56	80	60

S = Summer

F = Fall

\* = "Discussion - Case-study Approach" used

Question 11: My powers to think, criticize, and/or create have been improved as a result of this course: (a) strongly agree, (b) agree, (c) undecided, (d) disagree, (e) strongly disagree.

Question 12: The texts and other readings assigned for this course were: (a) very poor, (b) poor, (c) fair, (d) good, (e) excellent.

Question 19: This course has been successful in promoting the personal goals of my university career (that is, in helping me get what I want out of university): (a) very successful, (b) somewhat successful, (c) undecided, (d) somewhat unsuccessful (e) very unsuccessful.



Table 1 presents the results with regard to the 3 questions from the "Teaching Evaluation Questionnaire" that focus on the nature of the course rather than on the professor's teaching for the Introduction to Philosophy of Education course I have taught at Mount Saint Vincent University since the summer of 1986. The table provides the average ratings for each of these questions from my course, the percentile on the university scale (based on the evaluation ratings of 594 classes)

and the percentile on the Department of Education scale (based on the evaluation ratings of 50 classes). Table 2 presents the ratings for each response category for Questions 11, 12 and 19.

Tables 3 - 8 present the quantitative results of the survey I conducted on the last day of the course (1988, 1989 and 1990). The survey consisted of 5 questions. In each question the students were invited to comment on their reply if they wished.

**TABLE 2**

N = 288

**Question 11 (Critical Thinking)**

	F90	F89	F88	S88	F87	F86	S86	total	%
strongly agree	37	38	29	8	32	27	6	177	61.45
agree	14	9	20	7	18	22	3	93	32.29
undecided	-	-	2	1	1	6	-	10	3.4
disagree	-	1	-	1	1	1	-	4	1.38
strongly disagree	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	2	.69
no reply	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	.69

**Question 12 (Readings)**

	F90	F89	F88	S88	F87	F86	S86	total	%
very poor	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	2	.69
poor	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
fair	1	4	4	-	4	9	-	22	7.6
good	27	23	35	9	31	34	6	165	57.29
excellent	23	12	12	8	17	13	3	98	34.02
no reply	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	.34

**Question 19 (Promoting Personal Goals)**

	F90	F89	F88	S88	F87	F86	S86	total	%
very successful	36	29	26	12	22	25	3	153	53.12
somewhat successful	16	17	22	4	21	22	4	106	36.80
undecided	1	3	4	-	8	7	1	24	8.33
somewhat unsuccessful	-	-	-	-	1	2	-	3	1.04
very unsuccessful	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	.34
no reply	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	.34

**TABLE 3**

Question 1: Which of the course activities have you found helpful  
N = 153

	No. of replies	%
DISCUSSIONS	136	89
NO MENTION		
OF DISCUSSIONS	14	9
NO REPLY	3	2
LARGE-GROUP		
DISCUSSIONS	14	10
SMALL & LARGE-GROUP		
DISCUSSIONS	38	28
SMALL-GROUP		
DISCUSSIONS	44	32
DID NOT SPECIFY KIND		
OF DISCUSSION	40	30

In addition to discussions, 32 students mentioned readings, 34 mentioned the case studies, 27 mentioned the lectures, 17 mentioned the papers and 9 mentioned the video.

**TABLE 4**

Question 2: Did you find the case studies helpful?  
N = 153

	No. of replies	%
extremely helpful	68	44
very helpful	70	46
average	13	9
somewhat helpful	2	1
not at all	-	-

**TABLE 5**

Question 3A: Did you find the readings helpful in clarifying and discussing some of the practical educational issues?

N = 153

	No. of replies	%
extremely helpful	42	27.5
very helpful	76	50.0
average	28	18.5
somewhat helpful	5	3.0
not at all	2	1.0

**TABLE 6**

Question 3B: Identify three of the most helpful readings  
N = 153

Reading	No. of choices
John Dewey, <i>Experience and Education</i>	48
Maxine, Greene, "Teacher as Stranger"	44
J.F. Soltis and G.D. Fenstermacher, <i>Approaches to Teaching</i>	41
William Hare, "Open-Mindedness in the Education of Young Children"	33
Jand R. Martin, "The Ideal of the Educated Person" or "Education: A Journey of Alienation or Integration?"	31
Harold Entwistle, "The Relationship between Educational Theory and Practice: A New Look"	24
Mary Warnock, "The Neutral Teacher"	20
R.F. Dearden, "Controversial Issues and the Curriculum"	18
Charles Clark and P.S. Wilson, "How to Base the Curriculum on Children's Interests"	18
P.H. Hirst and R.S. Peters, selection from <i>The Logic of Education</i>	14
Ann Margaret Sharp, "Philosophical Teaching as Moral Education" or "What is a Community of Inquiry?"	11
D. Berliner, "The Executive Functions of Teaching"	9
John Holt, selections from <i>How Children Fail</i>	9
Susan Ohanian, "On Stir and Serve Recipes" (used in 1989 and 1990)	18
Ira Shor, "Interview with Ira Shor" (used in 1990)	16
Paulo Freire, "A Letter to North American Teachers" (used in 1989 and 1990)	14
Ron Reed, "Philosophy for Children: Aims and Methods" (used in 1990)	8

**TABLE 7**

Question 4: Did the issues and case studies relate to issues/topics dealt with in other courses? Why?

N = 153

	No. of replies	%
extremely well	32	21.0
very well	4	48.0
average	25	16.5
somewhat	19	12.5
not at all	2	1.5
no reply	1	0.5

**TABLE 8**

Question 5: Did the discussions (small-group and large-group) of the issues and case studies help you to resolve some of the practical issues? why?

N = 153

	No. of replies	%
extremely helpful	50	33
very helpful	83	54
average	11	7
somewhat	9	6
not at all	-	-

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