Australian Journal of Teacher Education

Volume 11 | Issue 1 Article 4

1986

Problems in Teaching Philosophy of Education

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Those of us who teach philosophy of education can hardly be happy with the present state of our subject. On many counts now the energetic optimism of a decade or two ago just seems misplaced. Of course there have been considerable achievements, but much is wrong and badly wrong. The abundance, diversity and quality of literature that marks a health discipline is not yet in evidence, educational leaders and top decision makers take little heed of philosophical counsel, eminent educational philosophers are questioning the place of theoretical disciplines in teacher education, declining membership of philosophy of education societies seem to reflect declining career prospects, and political developments in some countries are reflected in educational administrations that set little value on liberal studies, independent thought and philosophy.

What is to be done? Many things. One of these that is important is to improve our teaching of our subject. We know that many (certainly not all) working school teachers look back on the philosophical component of their initial education with no especial gratitude. This is bad principally because the whole point of a subject like educational philosophy depends on its 'going to work', which it is hardly likely to do if it is considered redundant by those who man and administer institutions of learning. It is also bad because it creates a climate of opinion where few will mourn the down-grading or abolitition of philosophy of education courses.

Good teaching is in many ways a very personal thing in that it is a matter of developing an individual style based on experience, flare, self-knowledge, insight and so on. But is is not just a personal matter and in teaching any subject it is valuable to be able to draw on a recorded body of experience, reflection and perhaps research. It is important to stress reflection, for working out how to teach is not just a matter of acquiring tips and techniques for more efficient practice. Questions of principle are always involved and the best books on teaching say history or science include explorations of such questions. A remarkable thing about philosophy of education is that during two decades of fairly lively growth of this discipline virtually nothing seems to have been written about how it should be taught. Certainly the topic is sometimes discussed at conferences and (interminably) at some staff meetings. A little has been written on the teaching of philosophy but as will be argued shortly, philosophy of education is a different case. The lacuna here is paradoxical if not actually damning. For education philosophers presume to a special

competency in reflecting on subjects and disciplines so as to illumine how best to teach them. Indeed we would claim to be particularly alert to the fact that views about how to teach a subject are underpinned by, and endorse, views about the nature of that subject. Moreover there is no reason to believe that philosophy teaching is innocent of the technical and psychological questions that are assumed to arise in the teaching of all other subject matters.

Philosophy of education then, presently suffers from the lack of a body of literature about teaching philosophy of education. Ideally such literature should be forthcoming from writers with something very positive to contribute, writers who can expound and defend interesting practical recommendations. Not belonging to this class I shall attempt something more modest. I shall attempt to set out some six main issues about philosophy of education teaching, doing this in the hope that my remarks will stimulate further contributions from others who work in the area.

(1) A central question asks precisely what is it that we seek to teach when we teach philosophy of education. Lecturers in this subject are often asked questions like 'which philosophy do you teach?' and we usually reply with a standard explanation along the lines that our concern is not to teach *a* philosophy of education but to help our students to acquire competence at philosophical thinking that will stand them in good stead when they encounter puzzling educational questions in the course of their teaching careers. When we say such things we are making an important point, inviting our questioners to think not in terms of *a* philosophy understood as a doctrine or point of view that one may embrace or reject, but to think in terms of doing philosophy understood as an activity of elaborating and scrutinizing arguments with special attention to meanings, presuppositions, grounds and implications.

To put the matter like this, however, is to suggest that learning philosophy is entirely a matter of acquiring knowledge-how rather than knowledge-that. Such a suggestion is badly misleading in several respects.

(a) Not only is it the case that philosophical schools are often divided by different views about how to do philosophy, but these different views in turn presuppose more-or-less explicit philosophical doctrines. Linguistic analysis or phenomenological investigation for example may be held to be proper ways to do philosophy;but such contentions will be sustained by reference to doctrines regarding, respectively, the fundamentality of language to thought and the possibility of presuppositionless attention. Accordingly (supposed) knowledge-how to do philosophy depends upon (supposed) knowledge-that in the form of philosophical doctrine.

(b) One could hardly learn a way to do philosophy in a philosophical vacuum. One needs to know what the issues are and what at least some philosophers have had to say about them. In other words, to enter philosophical discourse one needs to know quite a lot about what is already going on.

Many of us have, perhaps in response to student 'feed-back', attempted to give helpful introductory lectures on 'how to do philosophy'. The above two points help us to understand why these have been of no great value. A third point shows why an over-emphasis on philosophy as knowing-how can threaten something more pernicious than time-waste.

(c) There is no justification, either in principle or in history, for a view of philosophy as the activity of engaging in certain kinds of questioning, analysis and argument that is its own justification. Such engagement has worth in so far as it helps us achieve clarifications and answers about things that matter — about things that make a difference to how we understand the world and how we live in it. To teach philosophy of education as exclusively a matter of knowledge-how is to overlook the centrality of the business of answering educational questions and working out educational policies. Many teachers of philosophy (educational and otherwise) do make this mistake and even advocate the study of philosophy as a kind of mental exercise. Should we then wonder that our discipline comes to be despised as indulgent mental gymnastics or sophisticated one-upmanship when it ought to be seen as inseparable from the fundamental quest for meanings and values.

Yet notwithstanding these three points we are right to keep the central emphasis on teaching how to — or perhaps on teaching to . . .; for if our students do not go away from our courses more able and inclined to spot issues that they might otherwise have overlooked, and to think them through as they arise, then it is reasonable to say that whatever it is that they have learned from us, it is not philosophy. Moreover there is a practical point that to teach students a well worked out approach to today's educational issues may well be a matter of teaching something that will soon lose applicability. Think of some of the things we were discussing in 1970 . . . .

In teaching philosophy of education it seems, then, that our aim is to teach something of a mixed bag. We aim to teach knowledge of issues and of possible philosophical approaches to such issues, but we seek to do this in such a way that our students will embark on some philosophical thinking of their own, coming,however tentatively, to substantive conclusions that can inform their own teaching. But this bland summary conceals a host of further problems, some of which will be raised as separate points. Here I just mention one which in my own teaching I have found disquietingly intractable. It is the problem that many students do not move beyond acquiring a philosophical knowledge-that, acquiring a knowledge of what philosophers have identified as issues and what they have said about them. One can think of all sorts of possible reasons for this - dogmatic teaching, student indolence or inability, restrictive assessment systems (or at least student beliefs that assessment systems require them to restrict their thinking), shortness of courses, lack of thinking time (consequent, for example, on unitisation, continuous assessment and data-processing models of

teacher education). There can hardly be a serious philosophy of education teacher who is not personally worried by this problem. But, to return to my opening theme, it is both amazing and disquieting that as a professional group we seem to have given the matter next to no attention at all.

(2) A related problem is also to do with the fact that philosophy of education is normally and appropriately taught as part of some programmes of initial or continuing education of teachers — it is taught, that is to say, to people whose proper and primary concern is to know what they should do when they set about the business of teaching. But this seems to be in conflict with something which is surely of the essence of the philosophical enterprise — in conflict, that is, with its commitment to an indefinite open-ness of inquiry. Student teachers apprehensive about coping with difficult classes on their first teaching practice will anticipate something helpful from the scheduled philosophy lecture on 'Discipline and Punishment'. By the end of the lecture they will have learned that there is general agreement on what punishment is, that there are three main theories of punishment (though one of these may not really be a theory of punishment), that all have strong points and also serious, probably fatal shortcomings, that some philosophers have tried to combine the theories but without great success since they are really incompatible, that most of this theorising has been concerned with criminal adults rather than naughty children, and that much more work needs to be done towards the development of a satisfactory theory of punishment in education. An so our students file out to the tea-room wondering what all this tells them about what to do if children flick paper pellets during next week's poetry lesson.

Of course, philosophy has no monopoly on such open endedness. It is equally appropriate to all subjects from maths and science to history and literary criticism, even if, scandalously, some disciplines are not taught thus even at supposed universities. Moreover my imagined example is an exaggerated one. One doesn't necessarily teach theories of punishment a week before first teaching practice, and in any worthy teacher education course someone will have given practical advice on how to minimise and handle problems of classroom control. But this being so, our student teacher may well ask 'Why have we wasted time on these inconclusive theories — another hour of practical advice would have been an hour better spent?' Our answer, of course, is that when deciding whether and how to punish pupils it is morally important to have in mind the complex issues of principle and purpose that are involved — this being why we want our students not just to receive lectures on the topic but to discuss it formally and informally and to read and write about it. I can see no ground for doubting that we are right in this. Yet to say no more than this is to display insensitivity to how things can seem to the student. Those of us who earn a living teaching philosophy of education will almost certainly have come to do so because we find philosophical disputations worthwhile and interesting. Fortunately, however, not all people are the same

and we may forget that the enquiries which we find urgently exciting may not appear so to those whose predilictions fit them to make very different educational contributions.

There is another way in which the student teacher's perspective may differ from ours. When presenting views on punishment (or curriculum or accountability or whatever) we think that we show respect for learner and for subject matter when we draw attention to the inadequacies and inconclusiveness of presently available theories. But a different response will seem reasonable to many students. They will see the invitation to engage in philosophy as an invitation to engage in a futile activity where endless arguments ultimately resolve nothing. Accordingly they might then add, it seems to be just a matter of how you feel, so that all this reasoning is beside the point. In this way our intended display of intellectual virtues will have encouraged our students to embrace an irrationalist position which has no room for intellectual virtues.

Part of the answer here lies in the fact that philosophical inquiry is not as inconclusive as it can seem. It seems more inconclusive than it is because no one is likely to spend time debating what has been reasonably well established — philosophers attend to what is unsettled just as scientists investigate what is unknown. But what is appropriate when we engage in philosophical research may not be appropriate when we teach philosophy — here perhaps we need to spend time emphasising what *has* been established as well as introducing students to on-going investigation. But this is only part of the answer. The deeper roots of the problem may lie in an eccentricity of modern academic life. Through most of its history philosophy has been done by men who have also been engaged in other activities, both practical and scientific, often without clear cut divisions between these various activities. Other ages would not have had one person to give tips on classroom management and someone else to reflect on the underlying principles. Working in a system where the division is institutionalised it is surely incumbent on those of us who develop and teach the theory to give much more thought than we have done to how our labours and their products will appear to those whom we presume to help. It is often said, of course, that in their various ways the several 'foundation' disciplines can all throw light on actual problem and policy decisions, and that only the working teacher can fuse these together as is appropriate to deciding what to do in one particular teaching situation. But it surely verges on impertinence to require novice teachers to fuse together disciplinesthat, increasingly, are taught quite separately by specialists who often view one another's work with amazed incomprehension or bored disdain.

(3) There is, I believe, another respect in which teachers of educational philosophy need to make allowances for student perspectives — there is what can be called 'the problem of readiness'. Often in my own teaching I sense that I am teaching philosophy to students who are not yet ready for it. Their lack of readiness may consist either in their not having become alerted to the

sorts of puzzles that give philosophy its point — puzzles about how we should live and how we should understand the world. Or it may consist in their not having achieved sufficient capacity for ratiocination and abstract thinking. This assertion may seem to conflict with reports of successful philosophy teaching to school children and with the fact that quite young children often spontaneously raise and puzzle over philosophical questions. ('I wonder what colour green really is.' 'If God made the world who made God?' 'How do we know we're not dreaming all the time?') So when our student teachers find philosophy prohibitively alien to their familiar modes of thinking, then it is at least possible that a natural aptitude has been damaged by other aspects of their 'education' — perhaps by science teachers who distortingly represent their discipline as a matter of no more than observation and quantification, or by arts teachers who encourage emotive responses to the exclusion of reasoned reflection.

Notwithstanding such points some of the blame must be borne by the philosophy teacher. In all teaching there is the familiar problem of having to adjust one's exposition to the present level of a learner's understanding. It may be inherent in philosophy that we are more likely to go wrong here than in other disciplines. Progress in one's philosophical understanding often consists in coming to see or make conceptual distinctions of a kind that are never more than vaguely implicit in much other discourse. At first it is quite difficult to grasp such distinctions, but once they are grasped they become so integral and seemingly natural to our thinking that we forget how we once had to work for them. Doing this we overlook the need to give our students adequate time and help to cope with like difficulties. To them it is just not obvious that alternative definitions of indoctrination are not intended to be complimentary, nor that different theories of punishment are not descriptions of different kinds of punishment.

My talk here of 'readiness' is not intended to point to a view with which this notion is often associated in other areas of education. I do not endorse the view according to which in teaching all subjects to the young we should wait until they become inquisitive about them and then provide opportunities for them to conduct their own inquiries. Whatever its merits elsewhere this view is doubly untenable of philosophy. Firstly, notwithstanding what has been said about children spontaneously asking philosophical questions, the fact is that there are many philosophical questions that most of us would never ask if we were not introduced to them. Mostly philosophical questioning is generated within a philosophical tradition which is presumably why many otherwise rich cultures seem to have been largely devoid of critical philosoping. Secondly, even a genius is unlikely to make much progress in philosophy as a solo enterprise. It would be simple foolishness to ask our students to think hard about difficult questions without helping them to get help from the thinking that has already been done.

(4) Challenges as to whether philosophy is really very important often call forth the appropriate reply which points out that in fact philosophical assumptions are present, recondite and unexamined in much of our educational thought and practice — they permeate other foundation disciplines and they are present in how teachers understand and teach the subjects they teach. This raises the question of the relationship between teaching philosophy and teaching other disciplines. Not so long ago there were very good reasons for insisting on the autonomy of philosophy of education. But these reasons arose in a context that is now largely passed — a context where all sorts of things counted as philosophy of education and where anyone with any teaching experience seemed to be qualified to teach the subject. The present context seems to be one where we should reverse the emphasis. Philosophy of education has been established as a discipline in its own right but at the risk of being cut off from the rest of the educational enterprise. We now need to make links rather than to sever them. This is not just because, as already noted, work has to be done to help teachers fuse insights from various disciplines into integrated educational judgements. It is also because philosophy is not 'going to work' as it should in two areas where it has much to offer and where it ought to be seen to have much to offer by working teachers and other practitioners. One area concerns the elucidation of the nature and value of school curriculum subjects so as to inform questions about why and how they should be taught. The other concerns the elucidating of and drawing attention to issues embedded but overlooked in various programmes for the study and reform of education. Not so long ago much damage was done to the practice of education because insufficient attention was paid to the naivety of notions of knowledge, understanding and the human mind that are presupposed in the behavioural objectives movement. There are good reasons to have similar fears about the boom in 'educational administration'. Educational philosophers should, then, be contributing their voices both to curriculum courses and also to many courses in educational theory. This is not easy to do for serious misunderstandings and even antagonisms can arise. For example an educational philosopher may have a high regard for science and a keen interests in science education. These may be expressed in his reflections on the history and nature of scientific knowledge and in an awareness that an over-simple and over-confident view of scientific method is expounded in many science lessons and text books. He may be optimistic that in time due respect for science will be reflected in science teaching that does not hide the fact that there are puzzles about just how and why science works. But he may express all this by asking awkward questions about the nature of scientific evidence and about presuppositions implicit in research programmes. To the philosopher it may seem absurd that anyone should mistake his attempt to understand science for an attempt to denigrate it; and part of the fault surely does lie in the fact that much science and science education seems to be in a phase marked by a complacent and unscientific

lack of self-scrutiny. But philosophers too may be at fault, for we forget that the kinds of questions that we ask all the time will seem very odd and opaque to people who spend their days asking questions of a very different kind.

I have taken science as an example but the same applies to other fields. It is surely most urgent that educational philosophers establish teaching foodholds in both curriculum and foundation studies, but our urgency in the matter could generate resistances that will make success unlikely.

(5) Should we teach philosophy or philosophy of education? At first sight the answer seems obvious. Philosophy as a compulsory ingredient of courses of initial teacher education is surely only justified in so far as it is fairly directly and explicitly related to the business of becoming an educator. However there are those who do not accept this. They apparently deny that there is or could be such a thing as philosophy of education, and believe that what passes for such is inadequate intellectual fare for the beginning teacher. It is not easy to come to grips with this view since,to my knowledge, it has nowhere been fully argued and the occasional assertions leave it unclear precisely what is being asserted. If it is being denied that there is such a thing as philosophy of education standing all on its own and apart from philosophy in general, then it is a denial of something that no educational philosopher is likely to hold. For clearly educational philosophy is continuous with the rest of philosophy. What distinguishes it is its focus of attention and the fact that it has a few topics of its own such as 'curriculum' and 'indoctrination'. But clearly there could be no serious educational philosophising that was not inextricably tied up with other areas of philosophy such as ethics, epistemology and philosophy of mind. The same, of course is true of aesthetics, political philosophy or philosophy of law.

This being so there are clearly good grounds for saying that a good course in philosophy of education should not attend only to texts about education; nor should it eschew lengthy excursiouns into general questions in ethics, epistemology and so on. A course that did not include such links to the philosophical mainstream should be regarded as no more than a most elementary introduction — and of course on Dip. Ed years and some other programmes a very elementary introduction is all one has time for.

There is another reason why philosophy of education courses should not be confined to the study of educational texts. There are some *good* books in philosophy of education, but no *great* works unless, of course, one includes those philosophical classics which more or less incidentally all educational matters as do Plato's *Republic* and Schiller's *Aesthetic Education of Mankind*. But in any course of study we should, as soon as possible, introduce our students to the best. This is very important to bear in mind with regard to many B.Ed. courses, some of which, appropriately to their name, are composed almost entirely of educational studies of one kind or another. Accordingly the

recommended reading for many undergraduates will consist very largely of recent writings about education of one sort or another. Such writings are often notoriously bad and only rarely at all good. There is thus a fair chance that students will study for degrees without being given the opportunity to extend their own minds by engaging with the products of the very best minds.

These considerations amount to further good reasons for including some 'mainstream' philosophy in any philosophy of education course, but they are not I think grounds for teaching philosophy rather than philosophy of education to student teachers. Rather, I suggest, we ought to stick with what seems to be the commonest practice of starting with educational issues and then leading on, perhaps mainly in more advanced and/or elective courses, to general philosophy. We should surely start by focusing on philosophy of education partly for motivational reasons. One can give a reluctant student teacher persuasive practical reasons for studying Dearden or Illich — it is hard to see how one could do this regarding Hume or Quine. Moreover, any philosophy course that does not start, and remain in touch, with issues that can be expected to matter to the student is almost bound to become a course of mental gymnastics. Many undergraduate courses in mainstream philosophy seem to do just this, so helping to generate the hostile views of philosophy that were noted earlier.

Advocates of philosophy versus philosophy of education do often base their case on an argument for mental training. Let students learn to think philosophically by studying the philosophical classics and then, it is confided, they will be best equipped to recognise and think about philosophical issues as they arise in the course of their work as educators. I'm not sure how confident we should be of such transfers. Even some outstanding philosophers have not been too impressive when they have turned briefly to educational matters. In any case, given that there is now a growing body of philosphical writing about education it surely makes sense to use this to give educators their philosophical training. Here we are back to the knowledge-how and knowledge-that duality. Being able to think philosophically about educational matters is not just a matter of having philosphical skills — one needs to know what the issues are and what has been thought about them.

(6) The final problem to which I wish to attend is the problem of neutrality and bias. This problem arises in the teaching of any subject, though it will be most apparent and so perhaps more likely to be allowed for in obviously controversial subjects like philosophy than in say natural sciences where the bias may be hidden along with the controversiality. Nevertheless the problems here are formidable. A false solution urges philosophy teachers to be neutral or unbiased. This is a mistake and not only because it urges them to do the impossible but also because the attempt to achieve such impossibility is likely to kill the subject. What student will feel the urgency of philosophical questions and be stirred to reflect on them if teachers affect a thoroughly bland lack of

commitment. Serious teachers should evidence their seriousness by evidencing that their own thinking has got them somewhere. If they fail to do this then again philosophy will look inconsequential.

Of course good philosophy teachers should not make known their own views alone — alternatives must be seriously and sympathetically presented and students introduced to the appropriate literature. It is at this point, however, that issues become extremely difficult to a point where I know of and can suggest no really satisfactory solution. For while it is important to present to students a variety of viewpoints, this alone is clearly not adequate to the problem. For as has been noted, philosophical differences can be, inextricably, not just differences of substantive conclusions but also differences of how philosophy itself is conceived and how it is thought that philosophy ought to be done. Thus, for example, there presently exists a very fundamental division of thinking among Australian educational philosophers, with a powerful 'radical' group rejecting much or all of what they regard as 'analytic' or 'academic' philosophy of education. If I understand them alright this group are opposed to what they regard as an establishment view of educational philosophy which they believe sets about the philosophical enterprise in a way that is not only mistaken but is likely to yield conservative prescriptions and engender modes of thinking likely to help buttress educational injustices. So far this radical critique has yielded few educational prescriptions, though these will no doubt emerge. So clearly what is at stake is very much a difference of view as to the mode and perhaps the purpose of philosophical inquiry. Moreover it is a difference of view that involves some extremely difficult issues in metaphilosophy in discussing which the ideas of important and difficult theorists such as Quine and Althusser often feature. For philosophy of education to have thus generated its own meta-critique is surely an invaluable step towards maturity of a still far from mature discipline. But the issues at stake in such fundamental divisions do present problems for philosophy of education teaching. For here we confront not just two different philosophical views but what sometimes seem to amount to two kinds of philosophy. To present only one is therefore to evidence bias of a very fundamental and pervasive kind. But to try to present both without attenuation to the point of distortion is just altogether unrealistic given the limited time available for most courses.

To exacerbate the problem there are, of course, considerably more than the two kinds of philosophy of education noted in my illustration. We may see the problem as partly eased by the reflection that the point of studies in philosophy of education is that they 'go to work' in schools as when, for example, teachers make decisions on curriculum or school administration. Typically schools are staffed by teachers educated in a variety of institutions. So by a J.S. Mill kind of argument we may hope that the educational thinking of all will benefit when teachers with different philosophical backgrounds debate educational issues in common-rooms and staff meetings. Unfortunately there

is little reassurance here for those of us who teach in geographical regions where most teachers will come from just one or two institutions of initial training. The only real solution here would seem to be that introductory courses in philosophy of education really should be introductory and that teachers should come to see their working career as involving a continuous re-engagement with philosophical questions necessarily arising in that career, and with new philosophical perspectives on them. This of course would be more than the solution to a problem — it would be the ultimate mark of success. This returns me to my opening point. Teachers of educational philosophy ought to do much more reflecting and discussing about why we mostly fall a long way short of such success, and about how we might more nearly approach it.

Preservice Classroom Experiences : The Cooperating Teacher's Role

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There was a time when we used to have student teaching as the only classroom experience for an individual who wanted to be a teacher. Such experiences were generally arranged during the last quarter or semester of the person's college education In these situations, it was a matter of completing it whether one liked it or not. Following this pattern of teacher training we turned out many teachers for whom teaching may not have been a number one priority. Currently, practical school experiencea are provided starting in the freshman year. State of Ohio 1980 guidelines require that preservice teachers complete field-based experiences equivalent in time to one full quarter prior to student teaching. Similar guidelines are either in place or being implemented in other states.

Staggered field-based experiences provide for the gradual participation of preservice teachers in practical settings. Such experiences tie theory to practice and involve preservice teachers in their own learning as they have first-hand encounters with children's behaviour, the learning process, and classroom management techniques. However, it has presented a problem for cooperating teachers who were used to the model of one-time student teaching. Roles and responsibilities of student teachers and cooperating teachers are outlined here in order to help both parties cope with different stages of classroom field-based experiences.

The cooperating teaher's role is a crucial one in the preparation of quality teachers and this model of providing preservice classroom experiences in different phases has put new demands and responsibilities on cooperating teachers. They need to be more sensitive and knowledgeable about the nature and level of field-based experiences.

Initial Observations

Field experiences vary a great deal depending upon where they fall in the preservice teacher's program. In the typical freshman experience, the person is placed in an urban, suburban, or rural setting to make observations. Some programs suggest that the preservice teachers become involved in non-instructional activities such as distributing materials, taking attendance, or locating resources; however, many programs restrict them to an observer's role.