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## PHILOSOPHY A FRILL?

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Because philosophy of education courses are viewed by many as being impractical, an academic frill, they are vulnerable to elimination from teacher preparation programs as faculties of education struggle with current fiscal pressures.

Philosophy of education courses, as I conceive them, deal with the question of overriding aims, and consequent key features, of education. Such courses are indeed impractical along many dimensions. However, the sense in which they are practical is of such overwhelming import to the welfare of the school system as to reduce to triviality the senses in which they are not.

Intelligent student teachers insist on questioning the aims and key features of education. They should not be denied courses which not only provide a forum for such questioning, but which actively inform and challenge the questioner. A teacher's attitude to life, to school, to children, is a reflection of the philosophy (pattern of values with attendant assumptions) acquired through childhood and adolescence. Rather than being the object of consciousness, this pattern structures consciousness, and thus attitude. To engage in philosophical activity is to bring values, and attendant assumptions, into clear view for scrutiny; it is to be discomfited as much as it is to be liberated as all is subjected to challenge. Such engagement is a maturing, humbling process.

Teacher attitude pervades every class; the medium of a classroom teaches more, and deeper, than the message. Our children deserve the intelligent and wise teacher, rather than the glib and merely competent. The dismissal of philosophy of education courses as a frill is a modern day philistinism of the worst possible sort.

Given the current fiscal squeeze on faculties of education, programs are being reassessed and all courses are being scrutinized. Which courses can be eliminated without detracting seriously from the quality of teacher preparation programs?

Philosophy of education courses are increasingly being viewed as impractical, an academic frill one can excise with scant loss to teacher preparation programs, (though, it may be conceded, such courses might well be useful at the graduate level). I wish to take this view seriously. Trying to capture the essence of the charge, I restate the view as follows:

'Philosophy is an ivory tower pursuit, which is to say that philosophers read, think and talk rather than conduct field research. Thus philosophy is removed from the fray. Teaching is fray. Therefore philosophy is impractical and of little or no utility in a teacher preparation program.'

The phrase 'philosophy of education' is open to various interpretations which, in the end, reflect differing views regarding the function of philosophy with teacher education. One's stand is, in the final analysis, a value judgement, a statement of what philosophy of education courses ought, in the main, to be aiming at. This statement will, however, like all ought statements, be constrained by the historical meaning load carried by words, that is, 'philosophy' cannot mean anything at all I please, and neither can 'education'. I wish to make a clear statement regarding what, in my view, philosophy of education courses should, in the main, be aiming at, and then to defend such courses against the charges of impracticality and non-utility.

Philosophy has always been concerned with questions of value, with the good (and with the true and the beautiful to the extent to which these can be classified as value questions), and in wrestling with such questions, philosophers invariably have found themselves driven to notions of the nature of man. To eliminate such questions from philosophy is to eliminate the soul of traditional philosophy. To those who regard such surgery as a step forward, I have to say that value questions are clearly primary since the style of individual lives, and of societies, is at stake. Moreover, I believe one can make significant headway with value issues if one is willing to take seriously the notion 'the nature of man,' its vagueness notwithstanding.

I here accept 'wrestling with value questions' as a major concern of philosophy, and here assert that wrestling with the problem of ultimate aims, and consequent key features, of education should be the major concern of philosophy of education.<sup>1</sup> Put simply, my

view is that philosophy of education courses should force student teachers to consider what schooling should be after, what it should add up to in the lives of students, and hence what key features should characterize schooling. Thus all lesson notes, all curricula decisions, could be finally justified, shaped and made sense of, by overriding aims and features, which in turn would be grounded in a thoughtful view of the nature of man. Are such courses ivory tower, impractical, and of little or no utility in a teacher preparation program?

Philosophy, in my view, is indeed ivory tower: philosophers read, think and talk rather than engage in field research. To this extent it is out of the fray. Philosophy is indeed impractical in that it does not issue in precise instructions on how to conduct the Monday 9.00 a.m. mathematics grade eight fray; philosophy operates not at the nitty gritty level of day to day specific problems, but at a higher value/principle level.

Moreover, in my view, philosophy does not issue in demonstrably final answers to the questions of value it does tackle, rather it gives clarity and some precision to difficult choices, to dilemmas and to limits of knowing. Furthermore, I maintain that one can teach school maths, typing, chemistry and such very well without having engaged in formal philosophy. Philosophy is also impractical inasmuch as aims and key features of schooling are laid down by government departments of education so the questions have already been answered, pro tem, by qualified others. Moreover, to the extent that teachers are bound by government and school policies, the individual teacher cannot implement his/her own answers anyway. Philosophy is also impractical in that it hardly constitutes a qualification destined to assure success and advancement within the school system; questioning ultimate aims and key features tends to upset rather than impress those in authority.

Given all the above, the charges of impracticality and non-utility should not be dismissed lightly. I wish to insist, however, that such impracticalities notwithstanding, philosophy of education courses are essential within teacher preparation programs, that the senses in which they are practical is of such import to the welfare of the school system as to reduce to triviality the senses in which they are not.

To be a child is to be taught to play a cultural game (I do not use

the word 'game' pejoratively). The rules and point of the game become clearly known: what counts as a win, as a loss, as fair, as foul, as laudable, who qualifies as referee, who blows the whistle, etc. The school inevitably reflects and supports, to high degree, the current cultural game. The child becomes embroiled in the game and plays it to the best of his ability. Socialization is ubiquitous and inevitable.

Philosophy is ivory tower, out-of-the-social fray, reflecting. But this ivory tower is of a particular sort. It is best thought of as a spotter's box high above the football stadium. The spotter is undoubtedly out of the fray, but his vantage point gives him a perspective on the game that the players could not possibly achieve. He will be able to see, and judge, patterns of play that those caught up in the heat of the game cannot see. Pushing the analogy to its limits, reflecting on the nature of the game, and of its players, the spotter could conceivably conclude that the game was not worth playing, that life should have higher purpose than chasing a ball and seeking to outplay others. This new found view, born of the distance his tower afforded him, will affect how he conducts himself 'back' in the world.

Philosophy is the call, indeed the demand, to reflect on life and the social game one was inducted into, to gain distance on it. Is it really worth playing? Could it be played differently, better? The pursuit of truth, beauty, goodness inevitably puts a cultural game into question, just as it puts a personal life style into question. Philosophy is not concerned with success within the current game. Philosophy of education is concerned with whether or not, or to what degree, we ought to play the current schooling game; whether or not the current aims and chief features of schooling are right and good (and, possibly, true and beautiful).

So whilst philosophy is out of the fray, to baldly term it impractical seems particularly stupid. The man in the spotter's box is not escaping life; he is not contemplating his navel nor is he hypnotized by swirling clouds. He is in the serious business of getting a clear view of the game, in reflecting on that game, and at stake are people's life styles; he is in the serious business of reflecting on the school game, of judging its overall aims and effects and its pervading key features, and at stake is how we influence the young generation, what sort of game we embroil them in. He will 'take back' with him his new found view.

So the question is whether or not student teachers should be able to, or have to, reflect on the nature of the schooling game, and its participants, before being caught up in the game such that their perspective is unavoidably squeezed.

A large number of student teachers see no virtue in entering the school system unquestioning of its aims and key features. It is a stubborn fact that intelligent people do question, insist on questioning. To deny these people the opportunity for such reflection is surely inexcusable, certainly within a university, and doubly so within a democracy. And those students who see no virtue in considering ultimate aims and main features of schooling should surely be made to ponder. Do we really wish to have our children taught by provincial-minded teachers? Should the unexamined life be model for our children? Should student teachers not be made aware that they are embarking upon a moral enterprise, with all the difficulties and dilemmas that poses?

The practical import of engaging in serious philosophical reflection lies in the effect it has on attitude. To hold to certain values, whether or not one has reflected on them, and whether or not one can articulate them, is to have a philosophy. One's attitude to the world and people is the concrete reflection of one's values and hence of one's philosophy. A teacher's attitude to life, to school, to people, will pervade the classroom and children will bear the brunt of it for good or ill. By raising the question of values, along with the assumptions, hidden or otherwise, that are involved, philosophy of education bears on deep-seated attitudes. By bringing into focus and scrutinizing different views of the nature of man, with attendant value patterns and hence aims and key features of education, students' views are challenged and attitudes invariably softened. More so, I think, than any other discipline, philosophy tends to humbling, tends to wisdom. The commitment that ensues is sincere and informed rather than fanatical. Since a teacher's attitude colors all his/her dealings with children, and since attitude escapes legislative policies (when the classroom door is shut I am very much king), it is surely better that our children be taught by the wise rather than by the narrow, by the thoughtful rather than by the shrill. Expertise in teaching a subject is not enough; the medium of a teacher's classroom teaches more, and deeper, than the message. Consider, for example, the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>2</sup> The cultural game Nietzsche found himself embroiled in was calling for

certain plays: Christian love-thy-neighbor plays, democratic anti-elitist respect-everyone plays, and statism be-a-good (obedient) - citizen plays. From the vantage point of his psychic spotter's box, Nietzsche reflected upon the game he and others were being pressured to play and judged it foolheaded. Everywhere he looked in nature he saw the struggle for power-vitality. Some trees made the light and flourished, others were crowded out and shrivelled; some people are strong-creative, others are weak-conforming. There is health and there is sickness. Being convinced that man was part of nature, that life was the will to power and that God was dead, Nietzsche concluded that elitism was not merely inevitable, it was good; the nature of man was to be caught up in the struggle for power-vitality and the point of life was 'overcoming', was power-creativity. To hold down the strong-creative would be to institute social decay.

Refraining mutually from injury, violence and exploitation and placing one's will on a par with that of someone else — this may become, in a certain rough sense, good manners among individuals if the appropriate conditions are present (namely, if these men are actually similar in strength and value standards and belong together in one body). But as soon as this principle is extended, and possibly even accepted as the fundamental principle of society, it immediately proves to be what it really is — a will to the denial of life, a principle of disintegration and decay.  
(Nietzsche, 1966, p.203).

Thus anti-elitist, respect-everyone, love-everyone plays were anti-life, were attempts to level, to share power rather than concentrate it in the hands of the strong-creative, to condemn the struggle for power.<sup>3</sup> The strong-creative have no motive for being sadistic, and graciousness is the mark of one who has "attained his height and rules" (Nietzsche, 1966, p.222) but nevertheless, societies exist for the strong, not for the weak. To live is to exploit. To use the weak is inevitable and right. For the strong to love the weak as a matter of policy would be insane. For the strong to respect the weak would make no sense.

The essential characteristic of a good and healthy aristocracy, however, is that it experiences itself not as a function (whether of the monarchy or the commonwealth) but as their meaning and highest justification — that it therefore accepts

with a good conscience the sacrifice of untold human beings who, for its sake, must be reduced and lowered to incomplete human beings, to slaves, to instruments. Their fundamental faith simply has to be that society must not exist for society's sake but only as the foundation and scaffolding on which a choice type of being is able to raise itself to its higher task...  
(Nietzsche, 1966, p.202)

Even the body within which individuals treat each other as equals, as suggested before — and this happens in every healthy aristocracy — if it is a living and not a dying body, has to do to other bodies what the individuals within it refrain from doing to each other: it will strive to grow, spread, seize, become predominant — not from any morality or immorality but because it is living and because life simply is will to power. But there is no point on which the ordinary consciousness of Europeans resists instruction as on this: everywhere people are now raving, even under scientific disguises, about coming conditions of society in which "the exploitative aspects" will be removed — which sounds to me as if they promised to invent a way of life that would dispense with all organic functions. "Exploitation" does not belong to a corrupt or imperfect and primitive society; it belongs to the essence of what lives, as a basic organic function; it is a consequence of the will to power, which is after all the will of life.

If this should be an innovation as a theory — as a reality it is the primordial fact of all history: people ought to be honest...

(Nietzsche, 1966, p.203)

The consequences of such a philosophy upon one's conception of education and schooling are indeed dramatic. The ultimate aim of life will prescribe the ultimate aim of education, namely, that the strong-creative rise to the top within the school and within the society. The main feature of any classroom will reflect the ultimate aim of education, and in the case of this particular philosophy, the main feature of life, namely, struggle.

The teacher of this persuasion teaches to the bright students, driving them relentlessly to the far reaches of their abilities. To teach is to constantly challenge, to learn is to constantly strive. The teacher

will be totally uncompromising with regard to standards. To sell short the bright student is to be anti-life. Some students will get hurt along the way being unable to keep up, but this teacher will not relent, neither will he be upset. The weak will always get hurt. Teach them enough so that later on they will be of some use to the strong-creative, but understand that they are of no moment. The aim of teaching is clear: that the strong-creative flourish; the function of the school system is clear: to separate out the strong from the weak. To teach to the average student, to let standards drift downward so that none need fail, is to institute social decay.

The teacher of this persuasion understands the necessity to be in command. If the teacher does not take power in the classroom, someone else will — not because that someone is moral or immoral, but because (s)he is alive, because life is the will to power, and because (s)he is evidently stronger, more dynamic, than the teacher is. The teacher does not respect all his students, only the strong-creative, but he demands respect from all. He does not love all his students — he loves whom he finds he loves — and does not seek love. His task is to drive the capable to be ever more proficient, the creative to be ever more creative. The stakes are high. The school is no place for sentimentality.

The elitist attitude of such a teacher will pervade every class, and students will bear the brunt of it. Attitude is all bound up with one's conceptions of ultimate aims and consequent values, which in turn flow from, or assume, a conception of the nature of man. Thus philosophy structures attitude.

Philosophy of education courses bring such philosophies into the light of day and argue the validity of them. There are no privileged positions in philosophy, neither are there forbidden positions. The quest for truth is without fear or favor. Pat answers are shown to be so. Such courses are a constant and vivid reminder to the students teacher that teaching is a moral, not merely technical, enterprise. The process of weighing positions is a maturing process, as liberating as it is discomfiting; to engage in philosophy is to be battered as much as it is to be enlightened. Philosophy is scornful only of mindlessness, of uncritical acceptance.

Whether we like it or not, philosophy is the heart and soul of human activity, and at stake is the actual course of human lives, and therefore the quality of human interactions; philosophy of education

is the heart and soul of school activity, and at stake is the actual course of children's lives and the quality of classroom interactions. To regard reflection upon philosophies as a useless frill is surely a philistinism of the worst possible kind.

I conclude that since intelligent people insist on questioning, and since we wish teachers to be intelligent people, and since teacher attitude is of paramount practical import and is determined by that teacher's philosophy, philosophy of education courses as here conceived are essential within any teacher preparation program. It is the virtue of philosophy of education, not its crime, that it is ivory tower, out of the fray, for by reason of the 'distance' it affords, it gives perspective on aims and values in education which in turn issues in attitude, in a way of treating students and the world, in a sense of informed personal purpose. Only if we wish to attract the unreflective to the teaching profession, and only if we wish teacher attitudes to be determined by chance upbringing or government decree, could we seriously contemplate eliminating courses in philosophy of education.

#### Notes

1. In making value questions primary, I am not attempting to demean epistemology (e.g. in curricula theory), aesthetics, or conceptual analysis. For starters, I don't see how one can seriously tackle value questions without pushing into epistemology, aesthetics and conceptual clarity. But I am saying that in teaching training, under fiscal fire, the consideration of value questions must be considered essential, that which, when all else has yielded to pressure, must never be yielded.
2. A thumbnail sketch of Nietzsche's philosophy is bound to fail, such is the fecundity, and epigrammatic style, of his writings. My use of the couplet 'power-creativity' (and 'power-vitality') is my attempt to be concise without incurring severe distortion. Stressing one side of the couplet at the expense of the other will distort Nietzsche's position: stress power and Nietzsche quickly becomes a Darwinian monster and suitable support for Hitler; stress creativity and Nietzsche comes out as unrealistic about the realities of power and social pressures. Nietzsche was neither. The decisive thrust of Nietzsche is the creation of values: "But at some future

time, a time stronger than our effete, self-doubting present, the true Redeemer will come, whose surging creativity will not let him rest..."

(Nietzsche, 1956, p.229) ...the ripest fruit of that tree to be the sovereign individual, equal only to himself, all moral custom left far behind. This autonomous, more than moral individual (the terms 'autonomous' and 'moral' are mutually exclusive) has developed his own, independent, long-range will..." (Nietzsche, 1956, p.191); "Industry, modesty, benevolence, temperance are just so many hindrances to a sovereign disposition, great inventiveness, heroic purposiveness, noble being-for-oneself." (Nietzsche, 1967, p.196). My sketch leans a little to the power side and to that extent fails. However, my purpose is not to give a scholarly and complete exegesis of Nietzschean philosophy, rather it is to show how philosophies such as these bear on education.

3. "The task of those who are for practical purposes rulers, leaders, employers, squires, and guides of the people, should be to take good care where they are going and whither they are leading. But in fact, the words "ruler" and "leader" are not applied to them; they are denied this style and title. The false dogma of equality, so flattering to the weak, results in practice in a chartered libertinism for the strong. At no time in history has social elevation carried with it fewer obligations, or actual inequality proved more oppressive, than since the incorporation in positive law of an equality in principle bringing in its train the negation of all the duties that belong to station."

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## THE FIRST YEAR OF TEACHING: A GROUNDED THEORY — PART 1

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### Overview

This is the first of two papers detailing the findings from a recent New Zealand study of the socialisation and induction of primary school teachers during their first year of teaching. Background information about this study and the methodology used, as well as a discussion of four of the seven major categories of data to emerge from the study, will constitute the basis of the present article. In the second paper, the final three categories of data will be discussed, along with the practical application the findings have for a wide range of personnel connected with the training and professional development of beginning teachers in Australasia.

### Introduction

Over the past decade, much has been said and written about teacher induction and the first year of teaching. In Britain for instance, the probationary year has been the focus for a number of investigations, while in Australia and New Zealand different types of teacher education Review Committees have been popular and their reports provide a plethora of findings and recommendations relating to the professional development of beginning teachers.

To date, the impact of this decade of inquiry seems to have had little effect on the education, induction and on-the-job training of beginning teachers. In New Zealand for instance, each of these three phases is still undertaken on a haphazard and piecemeal basis; the high drop-out rate of young, beginning teachers from the profession does not seem to have changed substantially; and, educational policy relating to first year teachers also appears to have been largely unchanged and unchallenged. Indeed, the emphasis on the problems of beginning teachers in the New Zealand media (e.g. Waikato Times, 1979), in empirical research and in the popular, novel-like works of Ryan (1970, 1980) and Hannam *et al* (1976) has tended to cast a stereotyped image of the novice teacher as a person who is often ill-equipped to teach and struggles to survive in fitting in to the