

The Status of Philosophy of Education in the Curricula of Preservice Teacher Education Programs in Canada

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Philosophy of education is alive and well in Canada today. Data derived from teacher education institutions in the spring of 1977 indicated that as a component in the curricula of preservice teacher education programs it is (a) organized and approached from three perspectives: historical, analytic, and normative; (b) compulsory as a separate subject in 18 institutions, a constituent of a general foundations course in 9, a foundational option in 15, a free elective in 2; (c) required in initial programs because of its potential to clarify educational concepts and/or give perspective and direction to the entire program; not required either because of inadequate preparation on the part of the candidates or because of a belief in the mechanical nature of teaching; (d) allotted from one to five semesters; (e) perceived by instructors as extremely important, by students as irrelevant. Experimental programs are being designed to bridge the apparent gap between the theoretical and practical aspects of the curriculum.

La philosophie de l'éducation est aujourd'hui vivante et bien robuste au Canada. Les éléments d'information extraits des institutions d'enseignement adressés aux professeurs, au printemps de 1977, indiquaient comme partie constituante des programmes préliminaires pédagogiques les points suivants de la philosophie éducationnelle, qui est (a) organisée et approchée sous trois perspectives différentes: historique, analytique, et normative; (b) obligatoire comme sujet séparé dans 18 institutions, un élément constitutif des cours de base générale dans 9 autres, une option fondamentale dans 15, et finalement un choix libre dans 2; (c) requise dans les programmes initiaux à cause de son potentiel — de clarifier les concepts éducationnels et/ou de donner la perspective et la direction du programme tout entier; pas exigée soit à cause d'une préparation inadéquate de la part des candidats ou à cause de la croyance dans la nature mécanique de l'enseignement; (d) répartie sur une période de un à cinq semestres; (e) perçue par les instructeurs comme étant extrêmement importante, par les étudiants comme non pertinente. Les programmes expérimentaux sont destinés à combler les lacunes apparentes existant entre les aspects théoriques et les aspects pratiques du programme d'étude.

"Foundations of Education" has long been a staple theoretical component in preservice teacher preparation programs in Canada (Phillips, 1957; Smitheram, 1971). Although few major attempts have been made by Canadian educators to clarify precisely what is meant by the so-called foundations component or to present a rationale for its inclusion in the curricula of teacher education programs, it was only recently that this component has been seriously challenged (Barrow, 1979). When, however, drastic cutbacks were made a few years ago in teacher preparation programs in the United States, educational foundations courses were first

to come under attack (Lucas, 1971; Nash, Shiman, & Conrad, 1977). Warnings were sounded to the effect that a similar fate would befall foundation studies in Canada if their value were not articulated and justified (Gillett & Laska, 1973). This study was undertaken for the purpose of making some contribution to that end.

Educational foundation studies, as understood by the Canadian Association of Foundations of Education, embrace a range of disciplines including philosophy, history, sociology, anthropology, and comparative education. The present study was confined to philosophy of education — an area which until recently had been neglected in Canada. It concentrated primarily on the present status of philosophy of education in the curricula of initial teacher preparation programs in Canada.

A preliminary review of the Canadian literature on the topics of philosophy of education and teacher education over the past decade revealed that sporadic attempts had been made by philosophers of education in Canadian institutions to define the meaning of philosophy of education and/or its role in the preparation of prospective teachers. Noteworthy are the works of Anderson, Lawson, Schnell, and Swift (1968), Burke and Howard (1969), Harrison (1970), Bhattacharya (1971), Crittenden (1972), Hare (1973), Smitheram and Hillis (1974), Jackson (1974), and Akinpelu (1975). Despite the accomplishments of philosophers of education and the efforts of the Canadian Philosophy of Education Society to promote and advance scholarship in this area, there is very little agreement regarding the role of philosophy of education in the preparation of teachers for the elementary and secondary schools of the nation. A beginning has been made, but much remains to be done.

The present study was designed specifically to provide some background knowledge concerning what presently passes for philosophy of education in Canadian teacher education institutions and the extent to which it is perceived by teacher educators as necessary for the initial preparation of classroom teachers. It entailed an exploration of the following topics:

1. The meaning of philosophy of education and its relationship to educational theory;
2. The extent to which philosophy of education is required in initial teacher preparation programs as a separate discipline, and/or as part of a more general course in educational theory;
3. The rationale for including/excluding philosophy of education as a required component in initial teacher preparation programs;
4. The time allotted to philosophy of education in total initial teacher preparation programs;
5. The extent to which philosophy of education is seen as relevant to the

other components of professional programs, particularly other foundation studies, courses in curriculum and instruction, and field experience.

Information relating to these topics was gathered from teacher education institutions in Canada, departments/ministries of education in Canada, and university and college calendars. It was felt that the outcome of such an investigation would furnish important background information for more sophisticated studies directed to the basic issues of the goals of teacher education and the role of philosophy in achieving these goals.

DISCIPLINE OR ACTIVITY?

What passes for philosophy of education in the curricula of programs designed for the preparation of teacher candidates in Canada?

A perusal of calendars published by the teacher education institutions included in the survey provided ample evidence that there is no simple answer to this question. That the concept is a multifaceted one is borne out by the great variety of labels used to designate it as a subject of study in the curricula of preservice programs. On the basis of course titles and descriptions, the courses listed under the caption of "Philosophy of Education" were interpreted to fall roughly into three broad categories: historical, normative, and analytic. The number of courses at the pre-service level with a speculative orientation was negligible.

Those courses which seemed to emphasize the evolution of educational thought and/or theory, whether they were labelled "Philosophy of Education" (Brandon), "History of Educational Thought" (Alberta), or "History of Educational Ideas" (Mount Allison), were identified for purposes of this study as historico-philosophical. They required a disciplined grasp of the thought of the major educational theorists in the western world and the implications of their theories for educational practice. Using this criterion, only about 12% of the total course offerings were classified as "historical."

Slightly less than 20% of the courses listed in the calendars were analytical in nature. High priority was given in these courses to analytic technique since the purpose was to initiate students into the activity of philosophizing about education. Course descriptions referred to an analysis of the meaning of concepts used in educational discourse such as "education," "teaching," "authority," and "freedom," and the logic of justification offered in arguments about education. Students were often required or counselled to have prerequisites such as a course in logic, or permission of the instructor, before enrolling in analytic courses on the grounds that these courses were somewhat technical in nature and required a patient, rigorous, and often demanding type of thinking. Typical course titles were "Philosophical Analysis of Educational Concepts" (Regina), "Analytical Philosophy of Education" (Dalhousie), and "The Aims of Education: A Philosophical Study" (Alberta).

The majority of the course offerings, roughly 70%, were interpreted to be normative in nature. These embraced a study of the philosophical bases of education, often by means of a study of contemporary theories of education and their applications to educational settings. Here philosophy of education was seen as an educational discipline, prescriptive in nature, which provided a set of principles which would serve as guides in coping with the ever-present immediate practical problems in the educational society whether they were at the level of the classroom, the school, the system, the province, the nation, or the world. Courses embracing this dual aspect were located in the calendars of most of the teacher education institutions studied. Typical of such courses were the following:

Philosophie de l'éducation (Ottawa) :

Introduction à l'étude des principes philosophiques sur lesquels se fonde l'éducation moderne. Cette étude doit encourager l'étudiant-maître à examiner attentivement les théories contemporaines en éducation et l'amener à développer des vues personnelles dans ce domaine.

Philosophy of Education (University of Prince Edward Island) :

Following an introduction to the nature, purposes and structures of a philosophy of education, students will formulate a tentative philosophy of their own which will be refined throughout the course by means of a critical comparative study of a few distinctive normative theories and their application to actual educational settings.

In addition to its recognition as a separate branch of study, philosophy of education was also seen as an ingredient — usually an essential one — in a general course in educational foundations. In this context claims were made at times for its analytic role; more frequently for its prescriptive role.

COMPULSORY OR OPTIONAL?

What is the place of philosophy of education in teacher education institutions in Canada? Is it a constituent of programs designed for the preparation and/or initial certification of teachers? If so, what is its status within the programs? Is it compulsory as a separate subject of study? Is it one option in a compulsory educational foundations course? Is it a free elective? How much time is allotted to it in preservice programs?

In an attempt to find answers to these queries, questionnaires were mailed in the spring of 1977 to the 12 departments/ministries of education in Canada and to the 48 teacher education institutions involved in preservice teacher education in Canada. Departments were asked whether or not a course in philosophy of education was required as a condition for initial certification in their respective territories; universities and colleges of education were asked whether or not philosophy of education was included in the preservice programs for elementary and secondary teachers and, if so, to indicate the amount of time allotted to it and

whether it was a compulsory course, a foundational option or an elective. Replies were received from 9 departments of education and from 44 teacher education institutions.

In Canada the final authority in determining teacher education programs rests with the provincial departments of education. In most provinces, however, these programs are conceived on an individual basis by the institutions concerned within the framework of broad guidelines provided by the respective departments/ministries of education for certification purposes. What, then, is the policy of departments of education in Canada regarding philosophy of education for purposes of initial certification?

Responses received from nine of the provincial departments in Canada indicated that, generally speaking, a balance of the three traditional components — foundations of education, curriculum and instruction, practice teaching — is expected in the mandatory year of professional preparation at the preservice level. In five of the provincial departments heard from, the policy was to require one course in educational foundations. While the other four departments had no stated policy on the matter, foundation courses were usually included and recognized for initial certification purposes. No special preference, however, was accorded to philosophy of education over other foundational courses such as history and sociology of education. Eight of the nine respondents were positive concerning the future of foundations courses for initial certification and philosophy of education was seen as a recognized option within that component. One respondent made a personal comment to the effect that it would be better to introduce studies in educational foundations after initial certification. All respondents indicated that there was a close and co-operative working relationship between the teacher education institutions and the central authority in the provinces.

All 44 teacher education institutions reported that studies in educational foundations were available in all preservice programs for the preparation of elementary and secondary school teachers. Of the 44 programs, 42 stated that a foundations of education component was compulsory. The two institutions which did not specify a compulsory educational foundations component noted that studies in the foundational areas were offered on an optional or elective basis — in one instance, high priority was given to student choice of courses; in the other, students were counselled to take philosophy of education and sociology of education as electives.

Within the "Educational Foundations" component, the philosophy of education was included as a separate course in 40 of the institutions surveyed. It was a compulsory subject in the initial programs of 18 institutions, one of the options in a compulsory foundations course in 15 institutions, a constituent of a general foundations course requirement in the 9 remaining institutions. In two of the nine programs the foundations

course was taught in a multidisciplinary manner and philosophy of education was singled out and accorded its own time; in the remaining seven programs the course was taught in an interdisciplinary manner and focused on educational themes or issues. Examples of interdisciplinary courses were "Issues in Canadian Education" (Victoria) and "Communication and the Education Process" (York). It was also noted that electives in philosophy of education were available at 25 institutions. In a number of cases these were offered by philosophy departments.

In fine, the overall results of the survey of university departments of education and colleges of education seemed to indicate that philosophy of education tended to be a required constituent of initial programs in the Atlantic provinces, one of the options in a compulsory educational foundations course in the western provinces. In Quebec, philosophy of education was usually one ingredient within a compulsory foundations course. In Ontario, roughly half the institutions required philosophy of education as a separate subject; the other half offered it as one option in an educational foundations requirement.

Another aspect of the question related to the time allotment. Responses to the question regarding the minimum and maximum number of hours required or permitted in the programs indicated that when a full year is equated with six full courses, the time allotted to foundations courses was usually a minimum of one-half unit of credit (one semester) and the maximum was two and one-half units (five semesters). The time assigned for philosophy of education fell within the same parameters. Within the general foundations course, philosophy either permeated the entire course or was allotted one-third of the time assigned for the course.

Since the questionnaire did not make a distinction between four-year and one-year programs, it was difficult to know whether these responses reflected accurately both programs. One thing was clear: More opportunities for educational electives and free electives were available in the undergraduate four-year programs. Interested students who availed themselves of the courses offered in philosophy departments within the universities could amass a larger number of credits than the maximum mentioned. At the University of Lethbridge, for example, there was strong support in the Faculty of Education for the inclusion of philosophy and logic courses in the bachelor of education programs. Besides, students in certain major fields — mathematics, English, and social studies — were recommended to include philosophy courses. Those majoring in social studies, for instance, were recommended to take courses in ethics and social and political philosophy.

In summary, although the central educational authorities in Canada do not specify philosophy of education as a required subject in the professional year leading to initial certification, they do recognize it and, in some instances, strongly recommend that it be included. All teacher education institutions offer it in their preservice programs in one form or

another. Whether its status is compulsory, optional, or elective within these programs, the minimum of time allotted to it on the average ranges from one-third of a course to a full course. What, then, is the rationale for its present status in initial programs?

PRO OR CON

Teacher educators in Canadian institutions were requested to give reasons for including/excluding philosophy of education as a separate study in their respective teacher education programs. Although only 18 of the institutions polled made philosophy of education compulsory as a separate subject in their initial programs for the preparation of elementary and secondary teachers, an additional 24 institutions included it either as an essential component of a compulsory general basic course in educational foundations or as one of the options in a compulsory educational foundations course. Since the reasons given for its inclusion in the 42 programs transcended its compulsory/optional status as well as the manner in which it was approached, the following summation of the pro position embraces all responses.

By and large, there was a sense that the importance of philosophy of education was proportional to the desire to have educated people function as teachers, as opposed to merely trained people. Thus, philosophy of education was defended in the curricula of teacher preparation programs because of what it can do for the prospective teacher as a person and as a professional. More specifically, the teacher educators supported philosophy of education in one form or another in their preservice programs for the following reasons:

1. Its concern with crucial topics for education such as aims, knowledge, and values:

If one is to plan learning for others in terms of immediate goals and objectives, one must be able to rationalize them in terms of the ultimate aims of education and, therefore, to think clearly in making decisions about such aims. (St. Francis Xavier)

No other discipline approaches the ethical and epistemological questions underlying the practice of education in quite the same way. (Memorial)

2. Its concern with conceptual and logical analysis of educational claims and theories:

Philosophy of education develops a sensitivity to the language of teaching and the nature of argumentation and justification regarding certain educational aims. . . . (Calgary)

3. Its potential to provide a frame of reference which will not only give background, meaning, and perspective to the beginning teacher, but enable him to evaluate trends, fads, and issues which are current in education today:

La Faculté conçoit le cours comme une période de réflexion et d'évaluation plutôt que d'acquisition de connaissances factuelles sur les philosophes et les philosophies de l'éducation. Le cours se donne présentement en année terminale du 1er cycle, une situation qui permet d'en faire un moment de synthèse où l'étudiant confronte ses acquis scientifiques et techniques aux positions plus fondamentales dont s'inspire effectivement son agir (qu'il veuille l'admettre ou non . . .). (Sherbrooke)

Clearly to enter an education program at such a time is not to enter a form of learning in which one can expect ready answers to such issues and problems. . . . It is vital that the student challenge ideas which he/she will encounter, and think out his or her own position on the issues. This is no more than to point out what is true of educational processes at all levels, that they are concerned to develop understanding. Involvement cannot be summarized in terms of "listening and learning" but extends to reading, thinking, contributing, rejecting, debating, experimenting, and so on. . . . (Dalhousie)

Despite the strong reasons advanced for making philosophy of education compulsory, a number of respondents indicated that faculty in their institutions are less certain at this time that any part of the program can be said to be essential, and wish to provide also for an element of student selection according to interest or preference. Students, they say, should not be required to take philosophy. They should be permitted to choose one or more courses in foundations from a list including history, philosophy, sociology, and perhaps anthropology and comparative education.

Many of the reasons advanced for not requiring philosophy of education as a separate subject in preservice programs were very positive in their orientation. Philosophy of education was not excluded from these programs. It was included in one of three forms, each of which had its own justification.

In cases where philosophy of education was one of the options in a compulsory course in educational foundations, many of the respondents defended that stance on the grounds that students should have the utmost freedom of choice with respect to foundations classes. One respondent felt strongly that "freedom of choice is basic to doing philosophy and there is something incongruous about requiring people to philosophize." The following rationale given for the option stance reflects the position of a number of respondents:

As a historical happenstance, disciplines of history, philosophy, sociology, comparative education were put together in one department. We view ourselves as dealing essentially with value issues that concern schooling in general (i.e., value issues not tied to specific curricula). We believe that all students should take a course dealing with such value issues but that it need not be a philosophy course. (Toronto)

In cases where philosophy of education was included as one of the components of a general course in educational foundations the reasons given focused on time constraints, especially in the one-year programs.

Courses in the areas of history, sociology, and philosophy of education were perceived as valuable for prospective teachers and efforts were made to provide for an introduction to all three subjects in a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary context. In each case philosophy was assigned an integrative and/or directive role. The following excerpts illustrate the positions of those who offer general foundations courses:

The problem with philosophy of education is that it has rarely been made relevant to the practical aspects of the program. It can be made relevant but when this is done sociological and historical aspects of education become as critical as philosophical components. Hence, I prefer to teach "integrated" foundations courses as an introduction. Philosophy of Education can be pursued at upper levels and by experienced teachers in a more effective manner (at least in my view).

La philosophie n'est plus aujourd'hui au savoir absolu. Elle peut revendiquer pourtant au statut de "plaque tournante" dans le curriculum général de la formation. Elle peut être le lieu où se répercutent les questions "d'orientation profonde" qui caractérisent chacun des aspects de la formation.

A number of institutions indicated in their responses that they were in the process of developing an "integrated foundations course" which would include the so-called founding disciplines and which all the students would be required to take.

Finally, in cases where philosophy of education was offered on an elective basis, respondents were very supportive of it:

Every student is faced with a Faculty which regards issues in the Philosophy of Education, and the careful consideration of them, as well as the development of physical skills, as most important.

Educational philosophy remains as a full course on an optional basis and is chosen only by a handful of people passing through the program.

A number of philosophy departments within the universities co-operate with faculties of education in providing pertinent courses in or related to philosophy of education for students who elect them for one reason or another.

A few respondents felt that despite the value and importance which they as teacher educators assigned to philosophy of education it should not be offered at the preservice level. Examples of such responses are:

Many of our students believe that Philosophy of Education is either a very difficult subject or, at least, a difficult course to pass. Many think of it as being perhaps too "academic."

I don't think students at the preservice level appreciate a course in the Philosophy of Education as much as they would after having some teaching experience. They tend to be more concerned with "survival in the classroom" — with techniques on "how to do it" at the preservice level. I find that teachers place a higher value on the philosophy of education course after having been teaching for several years than they do immediately after taking the course.

Philosophy of education was excluded from the preservice program requirements in a few instances because "it is not required for certification." Only 2 of the 44 responses, however, could be categorized as a con position. In one instance, philosophy of education was excluded because of a "belief in the mechanical nature of teaching"; in the other, because "there is no evidence of its contribution to teaching effectiveness."

In fine, the arguments advanced for and against philosophy of education as a compulsory ingredient of preservice teacher preparation programs reflected in a general way the respondents' perceptions of the meaning of philosophy of education and their understanding of its intrinsic and/or instrumental value for prospective classroom teachers. Compulsory status as a separate discipline and/or as part of a general foundations course was preferred by those who held firmly to the ideal of a curriculum which would prepare teachers who were educated persons, not merely trained instructors; an optional status was supported by those whose proposed curriculum was designed to train teachers who would be immediately effective classroom performers.

RELEVANT OR IRRELEVANT?

The final question addressed to teacher educators across Canada read as follows: "To what extent, in your opinion, is philosophy of education relevant to the other components of a teacher preparation program (i.e., methods' courses, practice teaching, other professional courses)?"

The majority of responses to this question were one-phrase/one-sentence answers and represented two extreme positions: "absolutely essential" or "unsure of relevance." A large number of these responses gave a global, often glowing, endorsement of philosophy of education as being absolutely essential to the professional year of preparation. These tended to reflect the viewpoint of faculty members. Responses at the other extreme were fewer in number and seemed to reflect faculty's perception of the student point of view and/or position.

More significant, however, for this study were the many responses which addressed the specific aspects of the question posed. From a theoretical perspective, many teacher educators felt that there was a considerable scope in philosophy of education for treating matters that were central to other areas of the curriculum designed for the professional year of teacher preparation. For example:

One of the main purposes of the foundations part of the program is to develop the knowledge and understanding necessary to evaluate the effectiveness and consequences of using particular strategies and approaches with children and adolescents of differing ages. The theoretical and practical work complement each other because the effective use of teaching methods and materials depends upon the perceptions, attitudes, values, and beliefs of the teacher and student teachers who use them.

Very few courses in curriculum or student teaching do not make mention of the importance of aims and objectives.

Students are expected to have some mastery of at least one discipline at the undergraduate level — often a major in the subject and a minor in another. To teach these subjects and to appreciate their interrelation in general education, an understanding of epistemology is required.

Others felt that philosophy of education not only should be relevant to other aspects of the program but could be made relevant in practice. For example:

An experimental foundations program that embraces the three foundations courses and a methods course in an integrated studies approach is in progress.

In accordance with its philosophical premise, wherever possible, the introduction of a theoretical concept of learning must be followed immediately with a “practicing session” in a real classroom.

I have been attempting to link teaching methods more closely with theoretical analysis. One of the more specific ways of doing this is to work with teachers and student teachers in the development and analysis of methods of moral education; we are operating several “alternative” teacher education programs. In these the foundations person works on a team with people from social studies, art, etc. I’ve found this combination excellent — it gives philosophers far more chance for impact on students *and* colleagues.

Generally speaking, the responses showed that there was no doubt in the minds of the respondents about the relevancy of philosophy of education for the preparation of classroom teachers both in its analytic and prescriptive roles. There was considerable difference of opinion, however, as to how it could be made relevant to the theoretical and practical components of the preservice teacher education programs. Experiments were under way in several teacher education institutions in Canada to determine the extent to which it could be related effectively to the various facets of their preservice programs.

CONCLUSION

Although many aspects of the issue have not been explored in this particular study, the following generalizations would seem to be warranted on the basis of the information gathered.

Firstly, philosophy of education, as a component in the curricula of preservice teacher education programs, is alive and well in Canada today. Unlike their American counterparts (Nash et al., 1977) philosophers of education in Canada are not grappling with the death wish. Not only have Canadian faculties of education not dispensed with course offerings in this foundations area but, in many instances, they have also collaborated with philosophy departments for the purpose of supplementing their offerings. Furthermore, the range of opinions which emerged on the

various questions posed highlighted the finding that relevance, not survival, is the issue at stake. The responses indicated that philosophers of education in Canada are seriously searching for the aspect of philosophy of education which should be taught at the level of the initial preparation of teacher candidates, how it can be most effectively approached and the amount of time which should be allotted to it.

Secondly, teacher educators in Canada are convinced of the value of philosophy of education for the personal and professional preparation of teachers and are committed to its inclusion in preservice programs. This was underscored by the support given to philosophy of education in one form or another — historical, analytic, prescriptive — as a subject of the curriculum in preservice programs. Its place was justified on the grounds of its own intrinsic worth as a subject of study as well as its relevance to all other components of the program.

Thirdly, philosophers of education in education faculties recognize the need for collaboration among members of their own departments for the purpose of assisting student-teachers to bridge the gap between the theoretical and practical aspects of the program. Attempts were being made in a number of institutions to relate philosophy more immediately to practical classroom problems.

Finally, a comment made by one of the respondents regarding the extent to which philosophy of education was perceived to be relevant to other components of the program brings the study full circle. "The question is not," the respondent said, "whether philosophy is relevant to other components but whether the other components are relevant without philosophy."

According to Barrow (1979, p. 100), the question which teacher educators in Canada should be asking themselves in regard to preservice teacher preparation programs is whether what is done makes sense and whether it is the most rational kind of program that could be adopted. Hopefully, philosophers of education in Canadian faculties of education will accept the challenge.

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