Philosophical Orientation in Pre-Service

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ABSTRACT: This investigation involved pre-service education students who were enrolled in a one-year full-time professional Bachelor of Education program in Ontario, Canada. Each of the students completed an educational philosophy survey to identify their current philosophical orientation. Overwhelmingly, most pre-service students selected and identified with the statements emanating from the progressivist school. The majority (+90%) of pre-service student teachers who completed the survey strongly agreed with the statements underpinning progressivism. A minority (3%) or 15 of the 520 surveyed indicated they were Social Reconstructionists (an outgrowth of progressivism) and only 1% or five participants indicated that they strongly identified with Existentialist statements.

RESUME: Cette enquête a mis en cause des étudiants en enseignement en pré service qui étaient inscrits pour une année à plein temps en licence professionnelle de programme d'enseignement en Ontario, au Canada. Chaque étudiant a réalisé une étude sur la philosophie pédagogique afin d'identifier son orientation philosophique actuelle. Avec une écrasante majorité, la plupart des étudiants a choisi et identifié utilisant des affirmations provenant de l'école progressiste. La majorité des étudiants enseignants en pré service (+ 90%) qui a fini l'étude, est tombée largement d'accord avec les affirmations sous-entendues par le progressisme. Une minorité (3%) ou 15 parmi les 520 mis en étude, a indiqué qu'ils étaient des reconstructeurs sociaux (une ramification du progressisme) et seulement 1% ou 5 participants ont indiqué qu'ils incarnaient réellement les affirmations existentialistes.

Introduction

This research effort was a means to unearth, describe, label, and cultivate pre-service teachers' educational philosophy. These actions, within a single time period, promoted awareness and served to inform and infuse pre-service teachers' theory and practice at a time when they were taking their first steps within a collaborative and reflective process.

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Indeed, "a pre-service program can either set this process in motion with the appropriate tools, attitudes, and expectations, or it can set the novice up for a dizzying fall from the heights of unchallenged naive idealism" (Russell & McPherson, 2001, p. 8). The need to consider self in relation to society is a developmental outcome within teacher training. In fact, meaning making in a pre-service program requires reflection upon self in relation to others as a means to self-monitor (Schoonmaker, 1998). This inward gaze creates personal knowledge and education professors have a responsibility to address this possibility while positioning philosophy within a teacher-training program as a centre point that can shore up a developmental approach within teacher training. Furthermore,

> Philosophy is not a theoretical key that unlocks practice. Theory must be fundamentally rooted in practical experience if it is to be of value. The common professorial disclaimer that we are "not equipped" to talk about practical matters appears humble but is in fact arrogant; and it betrays a lack of understanding of theory. *If we are not equipped to talk about practice, we are not equipped to talk about theory.* We must as far as possible address both theory and practice. (Beck, 1993, p. 2)

Students completing a pre-service educational program experience both practicum (student teaching) and theory classes that delve into teacher training requisites. The completion of either requisite does not suddenly cause someone to become another person, or even think differently; however, at the conclusion of an education program successful candidates do become qualified teachers with diploma and teaching certification. These documents permit a person to teach in an area that is limited to, and defined by, their certification. What they teach is often clearly prescribed by curricular documents and even the manner in which they teach is suggested in these same documents. However, what they believe and value in education is often unexamined yet surfaces recursively via behavior and reflective thoughts while teaching.

Teacher knowledge and the related behaviours required to teach are espoused by well meaning Faculty: however, "teacher knowledge begins with what teachers already know and enact in their practices rather than beginning with knowledge that needs to be given to teachers" (Clandinin, 2007, p. 15). There is a need to look at the elements of knowledge that student-teachers bring into the School of Education. After all, "teacher knowledge refers to teacher' narrative knowledge, their personal practical knowledge, composed and recomposed over time and in the contexts of personal and professional knowledge landscapes" (p. 15). The past experiences of student-teachers guide and inform their

actions, thoughts, and reflections, hence we have varied outcomes following teacher education classes and practicum.

Teachers may teach in a certain manner for many unexamined and inaccessible reasons, yet some have suggested, "the single most important factor in determining the learning environment is teacher behavior. Intentionally or unintentionally, teachers' verbal and nonverbal behaviors influence student behaviors" (Levin & Nolan, 2004, p. 1). Accepting this notion and working to utilize such an assertion can ensure certain outcomes – some expected, and some unexpected.

Arguably, all behavior is connected to a teacher's philosophy, beliefs, values, and motivations (knowledge) which become visible during teaching because teaching demands action, reflective thought, and revision as success is pursued and challenges surface. Students, in turn learn about the content of the curricula and its surrounding curriculum via the actions of teachers who are key facilitators. Talking to students about teachers, we often learn about a teacher's words, actions, and humility. Students describe teachers in colorful terms and note their actions and general disposition since it is the philosophical orientation of a teacher that may be of most interest to a student. Stories of teachers abound in our society and there have even been several popular movies released about teachers, such as *The Blackboard Jungle*, *To Sir with Love*, *Coach Carter*, *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, and *Mr. Holland's Opus*, to name but a few. In each movie it is clear that these teachers have a philosophy which informs and guides their teaching.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to uncover pre-service students' philosophical orientation. In doing so, we could label their beliefs in order to assign a theoretical identity that could be discussed, examined and reflected upon. Knowing what your philosophical identity is can facilitate growth and assist in the development of self-understanding. It was the pre-service students' professional perceptions of self and philosophy of education that was the foci of this study.

The following questions served as a guide in this research:

1. What is the philosophical orientation of a pre-service education student?
2. What are the theoretical preferences of pre-service students with regard to teaching and learning?
3. Will pre-service teachers' philosophical orientations be similar or dissimilar?

Theoretical Background

The word philosophy calls up images of concepts, hypotheses, and notions of impracticality. Perhaps it is this notion of impracticality that causes many pre-service student teachers to declare they have no philosophy of education or that their philosophy is undeveloped, illusive, or not available to them at the onset of a pre-service program. And yet, discussion of an educational issue such as tardiness or homework quickly produces debate, where lines are drawn, words surface, and positions are taken in the pre-service classroom.

The exchange of positions is the lifeblood of a Faculty of Education and the requirement to put on paper a teaching philosophy is critical to the development of teachers whether they are in teacher training programs, or well into their career (Witcher, Sewall, Arnold, & Travers, 2001). The development of a teaching philosophy is an indispensable task that *does* affect the teaching-learning process as it contextualizes, underpins, and connects educational theory to praxis (Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, James, & Minor, 2002). Moreover,

> The distinctions and conceptualizations we make in our thought are not just of theoretic interest; on the contrary, they have practical consequences, for our thought is inextricably related to our actions. If we misconceptualize a situation, or if we erect a false dichotomy, our practical efforts will bear the misshapen fruit. (Phillips, 1998, p. 410)

Each teacher's conception of philosophy is informed by beliefs about human existence, educational products, and processes. These beliefs nourish our positions as we may be called on to speak about the issues relating to the meaning of life, our universe, and the limits of knowledge, and truth while teaching, coaching, counseling, or guiding students. The need to respond to these issues requires self-knowledge, skills, and sensitivity. A teacher may need to address the validity of ideas, communications, ethics, and aesthetics as part of another area of study.

Philosophy infuses our "moral and social compass, behavioral, attitudinal, and value guide-posts, essential personal and professional prescriptions, and a consistent but alterable assessment means for professional evaluation" (Petress, 2003, p. 1). Indeed, an educator's philosophy impacts perceptions, beliefs, understanding, and values to the point where all decisions can be traced back to their educational philosophy. Naturally, as is the case in most education rudiments, educational philosophy is arranged into five branches of philosophy which can be viewed as approaches to teaching and education.

Orientations: Philosophy Within Education

The branches historically labeled *Essentialism, Perennialism, Progressivism, Existentialism,* and *Social Reconstructionism* are broad and wide reaching. In fact, to address each area as required exceeds the scope of this paper: hence a cursory view is presented. Admittedly, while each branch is well known to most educators, there is another branch known as *Behaviorism.* It was introduced in the 1920s with core reflexive responses to stimuli and the positive classroom environment characterizing this mode were emphasized to produce desired behaviors in a classroom. Conversely, Essentialism is often described as a focus on core subjects, rather than student behaviors, and centres on basics: the three Rs, of reading, writing, and arithmetic. It is a teacher-centred approach with detailed prescriptive structure, lecture, practice, and drill in a "practical" manner (Bagley, 1941). Perrenialism is closely aligned with Essentialism, yet Perrenialism emphasizes a liberal education to facilitate rationale thought, and European-American traditional values in a prescriptive curriculum (Hutchins, 1954). Progressivism involves the whole student, their interests and abilities, and endeavours to produce independent thinkers within a democratic society. Progressivism is activity based and inclusive as all students are prepared to live and contribute to a democratic society (Dewey, 1916). Social Reconstructionism, an outgrowth of progressivism, demanded reform to instill noble ideals and erase social injustices (prejudice, discrimination) via multicultural exposure and community service in the real world. Being politically active, working in society, and challenging the status quo was encouraged within this curriculum (Counts, 1934). Lastly, Existentialism, which is not a quest for truth, but rather a matter of choice as students choose what matters and construct there own curriculum via electives. Education is student-centred and teachers promote personal responsibility in a consequential environment (Neill, 1960). This study was limited to these branches or orientations and the goal was to uncover the strength of connection to a particular orientation in student-teachers.

Sample

The purposeful cross-sectional sample (N=520) was selected due to accessibility and convenience. All participants were students who attended university classes in classroom management that this author instructed. Participants were limited to pre-service students who were enrolled in the Bachelor of Education (BEd) program, a one-year full-time professional program that meets the requirements of the Ontario

College of Teachers for teacher certification (Certificate of Qualification). All participants had an approved undergraduate degree from an accredited university before enrollment. Participants were enrolled in one of two divisions in the BEd program. The sample included 320 pre-service teachers who were training to become J/I (Junior/Intermediate - Grades 4 to 10) teachers and 200 pre-service students in the I/S (Intermediate/Senior – Grades 7 to 12) levels.

Students completed courses in curriculum studies, curriculum methods, and foundations in education. In addition, there were three practice teaching sessions for a total of 13 weeks of placement in elementary and secondary schools throughout the province of Ontario, Canada. Age ranged from 23 to 56 and there were 349 females and 171 males, respectively.

Research Design

Since, the intent of this research was to facilitate the discovery, understanding, and identification of educational philosophy, a survey was constructed and piloted during the 2002-2003 academic year during the mid-point of the Faculty of Education year. During this time, each of the 48 survey items was edited to ensure comprehension, accessibility, and ethical soundness. Changes were made to several survey prompts to enhance face validity, and each item was reviewed by a team of professors within our Faculty of Education. Closed-ended statements were developed which required the respondent to indicate the extent of agreement on a scale that ranged from strongly agree (SA / 5), Agree (A / 4), Neutral (N / 3) to disagree (D / 2), strongly disagree (SD / 1). Each statement was linked to one of the six educational philosophies. Reaction to a statement could be added to a total with the higher score indicating more agreement with philosophy that represented that viewpoint. The highest possible score in any one area was 40, and the lowest possible score was eight. Scores in the mid to high 30s indicate strong agreement, and scores below 20 indicate disagreement with the tenets of a particular philosophy.

During the following year, 2003-2004, a refined survey tool allowed each participant to write the number of his or her response in a blank space (see below). Next, they were asked to add the numbers in each column to illuminate their stance concerning statements that were linked to identify educational philosophies as follows (see Table 1).

Scores, in columns A through F respectively, were then examined to determine the extent of agreement or disagreement with the beliefs of six major educational philosophies. Participants were asked to compare

each of the six scores and highlight the highest and lowest. Results were presented in each class and a philosophical label could be used to identify that person's educational philosophy. Discussions were held recursively in each class which addressed how an educational philosophy can influence teaching. This survey was completed during the mid-term after each student had experienced teaching practica and completed several educational theory classes.

Table 1. Educational Philosophy Tabulation Instrument

A Essen-tialism	B Perennial -ism	C Progress -ivism	D Existential -ism	E Social Reconstruc-tionism	F Behavior-ism
1. _____	2. _____	3. _____	4. _____	5. _____	6. _____
7. _____	8. _____	9. _____	10. _____	11. _____	12. _____
13. _____	14. _____	15. _____	16. _____	17. _____	18. _____
19. _____	20. _____	21. _____	22. _____	23. _____	24. _____
25. _____	26. _____	27. _____	28. _____	29. _____	30. _____
31. _____	32. _____	33. _____	34. _____	35. _____	36. _____
37. _____	38. _____	39. _____	40. _____	41. _____	42. _____
43. _____	44. _____	45. _____	46. _____	47. _____	48. _____

Results

Preliminary analysis of each completed survey was first undertaken as part of the University class this researcher instructed. Participants were instructed to complete the survey and calculate totals. Each student then posted these results on a whiteboard at the front of the class. Overwhelmingly, participants claimed to be a progressivist, (96%) or 499 out of 520 pre-service student teachers who completed the survey. In some cases, the scores were close to another category. 3% (15) indicated they were Social Reconstructionists (an outgrowth of progressivism) and only 1% (5) indicated that they strongly agreed with the Existentialist statements.

Discussion

Lacking philosophical identity in the classroom affects both teachers and students. Secondly, disregard for educational philosophy can only increase the probability of inappropriate practice and dysfunction. Teachers need to question themselves and ask, "Who am I as a professional, and where am I going in my journey with children? Your philosophy will lead you" (Crews & Glasscott, 1998, p. 234). Therefore, illuminating a student teachers' educational philosophy is imperative since it instigates behavior and is embedded in the beliefs, values, and reflections of educators.

Educational philosophy guides more than just actions; it motivates revisions and grounds teachers throughout their careers. The fact that so many participants strongly agree with the progressivist statements indicate that this model is just as strong and appealing as it once was in the 1920s and 1930s. It is not a point of concern; it is a point of interest, since we can now label and relate our observations in practicum or later in their teaching careers to a particular philosophy.

Specifically, respondents answered strongly agree (SA) with most, if not all of the following statements: 3, 9, 15, 21, 27, 33, 39, and 45. Participants strongly agreed that (3) students learn best by engaging in real-world activities rather than reading. This statement was drawn from the tenant of experiential learning which is an important mechanism of both democracy and the Progressive Education Association. Next, participants strongly agreed that (9) schools should prepare students for analyzing and solving the types of problems they will face outside the classroom. This aspect of the progressive curriculum seeks to instill in each student concern for, and a role in, society.

Participants also indicated that: (15) curriculum within a school should be built around personal experiences and the needs of the students, and (21) art classes should focus primarily on individual expression and creativity. Moreover, participants believe that (27) since students learn effectively through social interaction, schools should plan for extensive social interaction in their curricula. Our study found that pre-service educators believe that (33) schools must place more emphasis on teaching about the concerns of minorities and women and (39) students should be active participants in the learning process. Lastly, (45) teachers must stress for students the relevance of what they are learning to their lives outside, as well as inside, the classroom.

Implications

The emergent outcomes of this research led to several supplementary questions. Three of these are presented and discussed herein.

1. Why did these students so strongly believe and embrace the progressive orientation?
2. What are the implications for progressivism in our schools and our pre-service programs?
3. What are the next steps for these pre-service students in practice and for me as a researcher?

To answer the first question I reflected upon our pre-service educational Program and located within our own philosophical framework an expectation. The expectation put forward several beliefs that, within our program, "it is anticipated that the pre-service interaction of theory, practice, context, and self-knowledge will serve as entry points to the profession of teaching " (Nipissing University, 2006-2007, p. 2). Our framework included six interconnected portals:

1. An interdisciplinary program focused on the development of professional understandings;
2. The integration of professional understandings through performance;
3. An understanding of the diversity of our society and communities and the concomitant attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary to create effective learning environments;
4. An understanding of self as developing professional teacher;
5. The development of critical reflective practice through guided introspective analysis of emerging professional/practical attitudes, knowledge and skill, and
6. The development of technological knowledge, skills, and values to support effective practice. (pp. 2-3)

These conceptual rudiments were commonplaces for staff to observe and meet, and it seems the resultant Program, which could be labeled constructivist, was actually "grounded in the philosophy of Dewey and the theories of Piaget (1950) and Vygotsky (1978), [since] constructivisim is based on the premise that students learn best when they are able to construct their knowledge, often from hands-on interactions" Henniger, 2004, p. 258). In fact, my teaching activities complement these structures and as I further reflected upon my specific class discussions, lesson plans, assignments, activities, and notes developed during classes, I noted my progressive predisposition. I recalled student feedback related to our classroom activities which were very much concrete, hands-on activities in which pre-service students interact with one-

another and work together on meaningful tasks that were often authentic case studies drawn from the school in which they taught. Our classes were activity based and I assumed the position of facilitator in discussions and tasks.

From my vantage point our Faculty of Education program is very much the same as my classroom, with each staff member having the freedom to teach and interact with others as each member desires. We negotiate our teaching assignments, but we are granted the latitude to bring authentic material and experiences to life within these classes: this appears to result in a facilitative approach as we respond as guides who put forward problem-solving scenarios requiring small group and large group cooperation. It is this constructive-progressivist context that influences the pre-service students in our program, I believe. We are not dispensers of knowledge and we are not given scripts or packages of information to dispense in lessons and classes. The result is arguably a self-motivated staff that often works together on meaningful processes and products which in turn move us forward. I believe our students sense this and quite possibly are very much influenced by the program they move through.

> [Further, this] characterization of teaching speaks to the necessity to educate teachers for the 21st century in ways that do not prescribe fixed directions or firm positions, but instead provide openings to a variety of journeys. Central to the constructivist concept, is the notion that *there is no one way of being a teacher* and that the developing teacher will always remain an active learner, constructing knowledge, skills and values from the complex interaction of theory, practice, context and awareness of self. These are strong skills endorsed by the Ontario College of Teachers ... this conceptual framework acknowledges that teachers of today are more responsive, professional, lifelong learners. [italics added] (Nipissing University, 2006-2007, p. 2)

However, our surveyed pre-service teachers are choosing *one-way of being* (progressivist), hence this could be viewed as a point of tension as our program philosophy suggests *there is no one way of being a teacher* and herein lies the plausible next steps for this research. The survey needs to be continued longitudinally to see if there are changes in philosophical orientation within the teaching journey and each year I need to survey pre-service students to monitor the philosophical orientations in order to address the third emergent question above.

A second emergent supplementary question surfaced as a concern for the future of the Faculty of Education program and the programming in all schools that our pre-service students find employment within.

Specifically, what are the implications for progressivism in our schools and our pre-service programs?

Even though progressivism is in its infancy compared to other educational philosophies, it has been embraced by most of the pre-service students in this sample and is a reality for many Faculty of Education programs who seek to survive and thrive in the 21st century, I believe. Indeed, "progressivism views nature as being in flux, as ever changing and therefore, knowledge must continually be redefined and rediscovered to keep up with that change" (Ryan & Cooper, 2004, p. 281). The suggestion, for our schools and our pre-service programs, is to confront change and respond accordingly. "Spending year in and year out performing the same role is inherently deadening. Twenty years of experience doing the same thing is only one year of experience twenty times over" (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991, p. 11). Hence, there is a need to modify, transform, and amend current curricula and instruction to keep up with the demands of society.

Keeping up with society can mean, for instance, keeping up with the technological revolution and information highway which has caused our Faculty to become a lap-top program and where students are confronted with new and current issues such as cyber-bullying in schools. In response, we embrace the issues, discuss the possibilities in our Faculty classes and staff meetings, and it is this change that is necessary to meet the needs of pre-service students who are creating new lived experiences in classrooms.

> Progressive educators believe that the place to begin is with the student rather than the subject matter. The teacher identifies what the student's interests and concerns are and tries to shape problems around them. The student's motivation to solve the problem is the key and posing problems based on student interests helps heighten their motivation. (Ryan & Cooper, 2004, p. 281)

As an educator in charge of teaching "classroom management," I see and hear pre-service students dealing with traditional issues and new realities. For example, cell phones in classrooms, text messaging, email, video-streaming via cell phones, and cyber-bullying are just some of the new challenges that cannot be ignored in this digital age, therefore each Faculty of Education will have to confront these pressing issues and ironically build this content into the program to equip pre-service students with skills, understanding, and competence.

Overall, it was Dewey's concern for social functioning within a society that remains appealing today possibly due to the daily dysfunction that reaches us via the media coverage of education and schooling. Pre-service teachers often find fault within the educational

system they are plunged into each practicum, suggesting it is wanting and that they intend to make it better.

Conclusion

A teacher's educational philosophy "constitutes a moral and social compass, behavioral, attitudinal, and value guide-posts, essential personal and professional prescriptions, and a consistent but alterable assessment means for professional evaluation" (Petress, 2003, p. 1). As educators, we can anticipate questions from our students concerning our beliefs, as students ask us not only what we believe, but also where these beliefs come from, and what supports our beliefs. The writing and stance of Dewey appeals to participants in this research effort and informs both our theory and our praxes. After all, it was Dewey that suggested "meanings and purposes of education must be actively constructed by individual persons" (Dewey, 1916, p. 96). The option of being an active student while developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes is attractive to both the participant and the observer/teacher. Teaching in this manner instills a feeling of pride and ownership and a sense of commitment to our own philosophy that underpins and defines our understanding of good teaching.

This survey was part of an effort to facilitate discussion and encourage debate among Faculty of Education pre-service teachers because, as Webster (2004) points out,

> Research indicates ... that beliefs, and therefore purposes, held by pre-service teachers remain basically unchanged through education programs (Britzman, 1986; McDiarmid, 1990; Pajares, 1992;Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). In spite of this resilience to educative change, it is argued here that facilitating authentic development of teachers' purposes of education, by changing their holistic beliefs remains a worthwhile task. (p. 82)

In fact, it was this perspective that motivated this study in an effort to discover and identify pre-service teachers' educational philosophies. The developmental mode of teacher education is often a process of self-analysis and discovery. The requirement to clearly formulate and express one's educational philosophy seems understandable and necessary in order to construct sturdy internal and external connections that can withstand questioning from stakeholders. Knowing yourself better can improve self-analysis, and an educational philosophy grounds us, as we can stand tall in turbulent times amidst debate and criticism. In sum, knowing your educational philosophy reinforces and feeds professional well-being.

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