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## A Response to Professor Scheffler's Paper

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## A RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR SCHEFFLER'S PAPER by Reginald D. Archambault

Virtually all of my professional scholarly career has been spent in discussing relatively abstract questions of philosophy of education. Virtually all of the remainder of my academic career has been spent in dealing with problems of teacher education — its theory and its practice, its aims, manner, method and subject matter. Tonight I should like to approach the substance of Professor Scheffler's paper from the latter perspective. This is of course consonant with his call for a greater liaison between the two realms, and with his suggestion that investigations in philosophy of education might fruitfully develop from practical problematic contexts, and that findings thus derived might inform practice.

From this relatively practical perspective of the education of teachers and its concomitant concern with practical classroom considerations, I find much of value in Professor Scheffler's remarks. Although he deals primarily with the more narrow question of the investigation of *philosophies of disciplines* or forms of thought, he does set this problem in a broader context, and, by exemplification, deals with more basic questions regarding the role of philosophy in the education of teachers. Let us take a look, for a moment, at these more basic principles.

1. He sees the clarification of objectives as a key consideration in all teaching, a question that is particularly susceptible to philosophical analysis and subsequent processes of justifications.

2. He reiterates the principle of what Dewey called "the indissoluble relation between ends and means," by articulating it in his description of the way in which aims become manifest, not only in the selection of materials, but also in their categorization, and in the expectation of the perceptions, attitudes, and dispositions that might be derived from them through the live process of teaching.

3. He sees philosophy of education as supplying an approach to, and a method for, the analysis and synthesis of complex elements operating in a practical context, this in his discussion of the interpretation of particular exemplifications within a discipline in terms accessible to the novice.

4. He rightly claims that certain philosophical considerations, and particularly those concerning the selection of teaching aims, are logically prior to other educational considerations, that is, actual teaching strategies, and that decisions in that realm govern, at least in part, the nature and quality of the strategies that are chosen. This domain, the selection of teaching strategies, has traditionally been reserved to the psychologist.

5. A fifth point that Professor Scheffler makes is deserving of special emphasis, and that is the need, already noted in my introductory remarks, for greater communication and liaison between educational philosophy on the one hand, and teacher education in general, and classroom practice in particular, on the other. He suggests that educational practice might provide a genesis for philosophizing and a focus for prescriptive principles.

I will return to this point in a moment.

## A RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR SCHEFFLER'S PAPER

These points are, I believe, valid. They are important considerations with broad and significant implications for the role of philosophy in the education of teachers. In stating these principles in a relatively restricted context of *philosophies of forms* of thought he makes a very helpful contribution in that he exemplifies the principles clearly in a key facet of the complex teaching relation: the selection, treatment, and justification of the material of instruction in general, and the subject matter of a specific discipline in particular.

I have no quarrel with the selection of *philosophies of* as a central focus here. After all, the enormous majority of teachers in training, and practitioners in general, are expected to teach through the medium of established subject matter disciplines. And the selection of *philosophies of* is not intended to be exhaustive of the possibilities for valid investigation, as Professor Scheffler clearly points out at both the beginning and end of the paper.

My concern is not with the validity of the principles or the arguments in favor of investigation of the *philosophies of*, but rather with what I feel are logical and strategic considerations which might give priority to other foci for investigations in educational philosophy. This concern emerges, of course, from my perspective as an educator of teachers. And teacher education is in a state of crisis.

This crisis is the result of a wholesale lack of faith in the effectiveness of, and the conventional direction of, schooling. This disenchantment is felt most keenly by the finest students in teacher education programs of the highest quality. These students are in despair over the public school system. Many feel strongly that the system has failed to fulfill its promise, and they see a revolutionary change in the theory and process of schooling to be the only way in which that promise might be fulfilled. The corollaries of this view are a quest for relevancy, for immediacy, for direct access to pupil character and personality, and, concomitant with this, there is an utter distrust and often a rejection of conventional education and its emphases. The prime target is conventional education's aim of cognitive understanding of disciplined subject matter. The attack has been mounted by a critical mass of bright prospective teachers buttressed by a new educational literature, with a perspective that makes John Dewey appear to be only slightly to the left of Plato himself.

I would agree with Professor Scheffler that a real problem that faces teachers in training is to come to the kinds of understandings of their subjects and the relations of their subjects to their teaching practice which he so well describes.

However, the problem facing teacher education is more basic than that. It is: to compel the prospective teacher to consider the characterization and definition of, and the justification of, *any subject matter whatsoever*. Has teacher education come to this? The answer is yes.

The current literature of teacher education that captures the imagination of students is, in a very real sense, anti-theoretical. It is not theoretical literature, but polemic — a dialectical attack on conventional education that is exaggerated, overstated, and riddled with caricature and hyperbole — much of it deserved, incidentally. There is a severe confusion, however, between the validity of the sophisticated philosophical principles that underlie conventional approaches to education, and the failure to effectively and humanely put those principles into

## REGINALD D. ARCHAMBAULT

practice in a sustained way. The tendency, then, is to reject not only bad educational practice, but all the theoretical principles that underlie the model on which it operates. I am speaking of such basic contentions as:

- (1) Education is a purposive activity
- (2) Teaching is an end-directed activity
- (3) Education is a process by which a teacher changes behavior by getting the pupil to understand *something*
- (4) Cognitive understanding is often a prerequisite to moral development
- (5) And so on

Now, students of education are increasingly convinced of the validity of this new approach to education — existential, immediate, affective, direct. Subject matter, and all that it connotes, is seen as abstract, divisive, and hence as a deterrent to real learning and knowing.

This, then, presents a major problem for the philosopher of education. He must not only get his students to explore the philosophical tenets that underlie classic and conventional approaches to education. He must also get them to perceive the value of, and indeed the necessity for, such exploration. More specifically, he must get these students to consider the definition of and the justification of any subject matter, any mode of thought, at all. This is, of course, logically prior to a consideration of *philosophies of*.

The consideration of this problem — What, if anything is worth knowing?, opens the way to two other important priority questions in educational philosophy as it relates to practice.

1. The distinguishing of the elements in a dynamic teaching process, and the relations that exist between them. How are material, method, and aim to be distinguished in process and in the planning for that process? How do the objectives of instruction become manifest in process? These questions are complex. They have heretofore been relegated to the field of psychology. We are desperately in need of finding clear ways of talking about these elements and their relations so that we can distinguish them, analyze them, synthesize them and point out their implications for actual practice.

2. A second cluster of factors relate to questions of function, authority and responsibility in teaching. One of the greatest problems facing beginning teachers is the insecurity that stems from their failure to achieve a clear understanding of and commitment to a concept of their function and role and the limits of their responsibility and authority. Authoritarianism promotes guilt in the young teacher. Permissiveness promotes chaos. Directionless precludes evaluation. Child-centeredness precludes teacher responsibility. A philosophical investigation of these concepts as they related to teaching is sorely needed, and again transcends the less basic question of exploring alternative *philosophies of*.

Now, Professor Scheffler has suggested that great liaison between practitioners and philosophers is desirable, and that philosophical investigation might fruitfully stem from problems found in practical teaching contexts. The value he sees is in the enriching of the field of educational philosophy and the enhancement of its applicability. I heartily agree with the prescription, but I would see additional fruits to be derived.

## A RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR SCHEFFLER'S PAPER

Professor Scheffler notes the natural reluctance of philosophers to use real practical problems as a basis for investigation. This reluctance is as old as philosophy itself. To change this became Dewey's main preoccupation. Yet there is an equally strong reluctance on the part of many students in teacher education to face teaching problems directly and to come to philosophical, indeed moral decisions, regarding them.

For example, we are experiencing an interesting renaissance in the study of classic synthetic philosophies of education where ideological questions are viewed in a broad context of moral, cultural, political and social considerations. This is due in part to the influence of such people as Paul Goodman, and, more recently, Charles Reich, who concern themselves, and the young, with the deficiencies in the technocracy, the corporate state, the unjust society. Problems of education are viewed in a broader context of cultural corruption. This is in turn reiterated in educational tracts, such as Neill's *Summerhill*. I give two courses in philosophy of education, one synthetic, one an analysis of practical educational problems in school contexts. The first is now much more popular than the second.

What characterizes this trend is a tendency to disregard the problems that will actually face the practitioner, as student teacher or as professional. The difficulty that this causes for programs of teacher education and its students are enormous, and they are poignantly documented by Kevin Ryan, Director of MAT at the University of Chicago, in his book, *Don't Smile Until Christmas*. It is a collection of essays written by several of his students who experienced despair and failure in teaching, primarily because they are grossly unclear and insecure in their conception of their role as teachers, of their actual teaching goals, of the limits of their authority and responsibility, of the value of what is taught and expected to be known.

All of these are problems that are peculiarly susceptible to philosophical investigation.

Now, to turn briefly once again to the other cluster of problems, the distinguishing of the elements in the teaching process, and the relations among them. Professor Scheffler has said, in his paper, that teacher education programs have conventionally deemed it sufficient to offer (1) subject matter competence; (2) practice teaching, and (3) psychology and methodology. "No attention," he says, "is given to the need for a second-order, or philosophical perspective on the subject matter in question." It is equally true, and of perhaps more pressing importance, that no attention has been given to the need for a philosophical perspective on the relevant relations among those three (subject matter, practice teaching, and method). The teacher must merge them in practice. Yet he does not have the assistance of philosophy in understanding their relations. In a very real sense this violates Professor Scheffler's criterion of "reasonableness" in education which he proposes in his *Language of Education*. The prospective teacher emerges with no clear perspective on the teaching process — and his functions, purpose and responsibility in the classroom.

And it is ironical that at precisely the time that philosophical study of teaching is most needed there is such an inherent antagonism toward it among students, and so little recognition of its need among those who design programs of teacher education.

## REGINALD D. ARCHAMBAULT

### CONCLUSION

What I have tried to suggest, then, is that Professor Scheffler's approach is a valid and important one. His characterization of the role of philosophy, and its function in the education of teachers is sound. I have simply tried to point out areas of critical concern where these approaches are equally applicable and perhaps more sorely needed at this point, than in the investigation of given subject matters. Perhaps we could go to work on these as well.