Philosophical Foundations of Educational Theory, Policy and Practice

Prof Morwenna Griffiths

Credit Rating  20 credits, SCQF 11

Rationale

Philosophy of Education underwent a significant renaissance in the sixth and seventh decades of the last century, as Anglo-American philosophers sought to apply the techniques of logical and linguistic analysis to the clarification of issues and problems of professional educational concern. Under the influence of such key thinkers as Richard Peters and Israel Scheffler, modern educational philosophy became established as one of the foundational academic disciplines for the rigorous study of education. Since then, however, the concerns of educational philosophers have broadened to embrace philosophical approaches extending beyond the Anglo-American analytical tradition, such as phenomenology, existentialism, critical theory, poststructuralism and postmodernism. Although mainly inspired by the analytical approach, this course aims to identify and examine a range of conceptual and practical issues concerning the nature and purposes of schooling, the content of the curriculum and the role of the teacher from a wide variety of past and present intellectual perspectives. To this end, the course begins by exploring the significant extent to which contemporary educational issues and problems are shaped by the ideas of some major past philosophers - namely, Plato, Aristotle, Locke, Rousseau, Dewey and Arendt. In subsequent sessions the course will proceed to examine the significance and relevance of past and present philosophers and philosophers of education.

Teaching

10 x 2.5 hour seminars = 25 hours

Each session will involve some formal presentation of the issues in the form of lecture, guided reading or structured questions. This will be followed by seminar discussion. For the first seven weeks the course tutor will be responsible for the formal input, but in the last three sessions, course members will be expected to undertake presentations to facilitate the exploration of particular issues on the basis of prior recommended reading.

Assessment

One written essay of 4,000 words.

Content

The content of this course is by its nature relatively fluid, depending not just upon the topicality of the issues, but also upon the interests, previous academic experience and/or professional background of course members. The following brief descriptors, should therefore be taken as indicative and negotiable, rather than of course content to be covered.

Week 1  Introduction.

Explanation of and introduction to the pedagogical methods in the course. Course members to make a start on identifying educational issues of particular concern to them, individually and collectively. Workshop to discover issues of particular significance and relevance to course members. Expectations and experience of course members.

Weeks 2 and 3  The Greeks

Socrates, Plato and Aristotle: the lasting legacy of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle with regard to aspects of contemporary educational theory, policy and practice; some continuing questions arising from this legacy in the contemporary literature of educational philosophy and theory.
Week 4  Personal professional theories and public philosophy (1)

Week 4: Personal professional theories and public philosophy (1)

Workshop: course members to identify educational issues of particular concern to them, individually and collectively. A preliminary mapping of philosophical theories and writing about these educational issues. Choices about presentations in weeks 7, 8, and 9.

Weeks 5 and 6  Education for individuals and education for society

Weeks 5 and 6: Education for individuals and education for society

Rousseau, Locke, and Arendt: different analyses of human learning and the purposes of education, especially in relation to society. The ways that these ideas have been influential in educational theory and practice.

Week 7  Education, experiences and values

Week 7: Education, experiences and values

Dewey. Sources of critique and philosophy to be found in experience. Lyotard: Grand narratives and ‘little stories’

Weeks 8 and 9  Personal professional theories and public philosophy (2)

Weeks 8 and 9: Personal professional theories and public philosophy (2)

Presentations by students individually, in pairs or as groups. The purpose of the presentations is to facilitate discussion in the group as a whole, as well as to clarify students’ own positions.

Week 10  Conclusions and resolutions

Week 10: Conclusions and resolutions

Workshops: Reflections on what has been learnt individually and collectively, and Explorations of topics for the assignment.

Some Recommended Course Reading


Locke, J (1899) Some Thoughts Concerning Education Oxford: Clarendon

Locke, J (1892) Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Cambridge University Press

