

# ELPS 302 – Philosophy of Education

## Course Instructor

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## Introduction

Thomas Nagel, an American Philosopher active in the second half of the 20th century, explains philosophy in this way: "Philosophy, unlike most other subjects, does not try to extend our knowledge by discovering new information about the world. It tries to deepen our understanding by reflection on what is already closest to us -- the experiences, thoughts, concepts, and activities that make up our lives, and that ordinarily escape notice because they are so familiar. Philosophy begins by finding utterly mysterious things that pervade our everyday lives, such as language, perception, value and truth. For everyday purposes we don't have to know how these things are possible: we talk, we judge that this action is wrong or that assertion true. But it is possible, in the tradition deriving from Plato, to stop and think about what we are really doing, not for a practical purpose but just in order to understand what lies beneath the familiar surface of life." ("In the Stream of Consciousness," *The New York Review of Books*, April 11, 2002.)

This course is an opportunity to stop and think about what really happens in the familiar activities of teaching, learning, and schooling. That people learn, that individual persons appear to be different and react differently to schooling, that particular students profit more from schooling and because of schooling than others, that society expects certain outcomes from schooling, that individuals may have a vision for their own development that does not fit well with that proposed by others, all of this is familiar but, when you stop and think about it, also mysterious or at least intriguing. What really is going on in teaching, learning, and schooling? That is the question for this course. In fact, the course itself, as a locus for teaching and learning, for interest and boredom, for the pursuit of goals, for human development, is an event that begs for careful consideration of what is really happening, at this moment.

This examination of teaching, learning, and schooling seeks to develop in students an understanding of fundamental questions embedded in these activities and basic responses that have been developed to them in the tradition of philosophic thought: is it possible to attain knowledge; how can claims about human excellence be justified; how are the benefits of schooling justly distributed; on what basis can the distribution of social goods be justly correlated with the distribution of educational goods; how is the tension between individual freedom and the interests of society negotiated. The readings selected for the course introduce students to the Western philosophic tradition as the context and the instrument for discussing these questions. A central purpose of the course is to demonstrate that answers to these questions are necessarily implied whenever teaching, learning, or schooling occur and that it is worthwhile to make these answers and their justification explicit.

In addition, this course gives particular attention to three ethical issues: how is virtue acquired; what is human excellence; what is a just distribution of educational benefits. With regard to the first, students will understand the different approaches taken by Plato and Aristotle to the development of human virtue and the consequences of each approach for pedagogical practice. With regard to determinations of human excellence, students will understand the difference between intellectual and moral good and between objective and subjective accounts of good. With regard to the distribution of educational benefits the students will understand the act of

teaching and schooling as mechanisms for distributing educational goods to which social goods are attached and the ethical consequences of an achievement gap among identifiable groups. They will understand the nature of arguments for distributive justice as these can be applied to education and the ways in which the distribution of educational goods can be considered to be unjust. All of this, of course, relates directly to the conceptual framework of the School of Education which is summarized as "Professionalism in the Service of Social Justice."

Finally, the course gives explicit attention to how the provision and practices of schooling relate to human and group diversity and support or undermine the values associated with multiculturalism. This involves examining the justification for requesting special treatment in the schools on the basis of particular identities and testing these requests against other values in a democratic society such as equal treatment for all. It also involves examining the complexities of public identification of an individual person with an as a member of an identifiable group.

### **Course Objectives**

#### **Knowledge Area (Philosophical Knowledge):**

- a. The student will acquire an understanding of major philosophical questions that arise from the activities of teaching, learning, and schooling. The student will become familiar in a general way with the philosophic tradition in Western culture that explores the fundamental significance of teaching, learning, and schooling.
- b. The student will be able to articulate the significance of the following problems for education: the nature of human excellence; the freedom of the individual vs. the needs of society; the need for and justification of a principle of curriculum selection; teaching and schooling as instruments for the distribution of social goods; the basic assumptions implicit in pedagogical methods; the relationship between the acquisition of knowledge and personal identity.
- c. The student will understand the relevance of philosophical thinking to the activities of teaching, learning, and schooling, especially as this enlightens such questions as: does a teacher draw knowledge out of or put knowledge into a student; is there an objective account of human excellence; what rights do the public, the teacher, and the individual student have to determine the content of an educational program; how can one determine whether the distribution of schooling is just; what is the relationship between a curriculum of studies and the pursuit of truth; how does a teacher mediate between a student's personal interests and the extant culture, how do the politics of identity relate to the practices of schooling.
- d. In the examination of pedagogical practice and school policies, the student will demonstrate the ability to provide reasoned argument in support of his or her ideas, to assess judiciously the underlying assumptions of his or her positions, and to provide fair and reasonable evaluations of alternative positions.
- e. The student will understand the basis for claiming special treatment by individuals or groups in schooling.

#### **Skills (Communication Skills and Sensitivities-Written):**

- a. The student will write clearly and effectively. The student will analyze philosophic writings by composing reaction papers to the readings. Students will support their opinions about positions presented in the readings by developing valid supporting arguments.

#### **Skills (Communication Skills and Sensitivities-Oral):**

- a. The student will be able to clearly communicate an understanding of philosophical arguments related to educational practice. This will be done in class discussions during which the assigned readings are critically analyzed.

- b. The student will be able to provide valid arguments for positions espoused in class discussions.
- c. The student will be able to engage in critical, civil, and productive dialog with the teacher and other students in arguing for and against positions on philosophic questions fundamental to teaching, learning, and schooling. This will be done in class discussions.
- d. The student will test his or her ideas in class discussions on what should be done by teachers and schools and learn how to build a coherent analysis of educational theories and policies through discussion with others.
- e. The student will come to see the point of representing effectively his or her position on educational practice in shaping the contemporary practices of the schools. This will be done in class discussions.

**Skills (Critical Thinking Skills and Dispositions):**

- a. The student will be able to comprehend, explain, and summarize philosophic texts in the Western tradition that deal with issues fundamental to teaching, learning and schooling.
- b. The student will be able to analyze positions taken by philosophers on matters relevant to educational practice and to provide reasons for his or her agreement or disagreement with these positions.
- c. The student will be able to compare and contrast the thoughts of various philosophers on education.
- d. The student will be able to interpret his or her own experiences of teaching, learning, and schooling using the concepts and theories of the philosophers studied.
- e. The student will be able to construct arguments for either continuing or changing current educational practices.

**Skills (Ethical Awareness and Decision-Making Skills):**

- a. The student will recognize the need for making judgments about the treatment of students, the nature of the good life, and the just distribution of the benefits of schooling.
- b. The student will understand the different bases that various parties have for claiming a right to shape programs of education.
- c. The student will become perceptive of indicators of unjust distribution of educational benefits.
- d. The student will begin to understand the ways in which different kinds of goods are at stake in the mode and content of educational practices.
- e. The student will understand the ways in which issues of social justice appear in the activities of teaching and schooling.

**School of Education's Conceptual Framework**

The School of Education's Conceptual Framework includes the following standard (CF8): Candidates apply ethical principles in professional decision-making. The readings assigned in this course, especially as they are analyzed and discussed in class, directly address the knowledge and competencies embodied in this standard. The final examination in this course will assess the degree to which students have met this standard.

## **Instructional Methodology**

The basic instructional methodology of this course is discussion of readings from philosophers who have constructed arguments relating to the provision of education. The three activities involved in this course are: reading classic and contemporary writings in philosophy of education; discussing these readings in class; writing analytic reactions to these readings.

## **Required Texts**

Steven M. Cahn, *Classic and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Education*, McGraw-Hill, 1997.

*Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton University Press, 1994

## **Course Requirements**

The requirements for this course are:

1. Submit for each individual class's reading assignment a one-page reaction paper. These are to be critical commentaries on the reading assignments in which the student provides cogent arguments for the positions taken.
2. Participate in class discussions. Much of the work in this course is done during the review and discussion of the assigned readings. Each of us needs to be an actively engaged in analyzing the readings and applying the philosophical conclusions to contemporary educational issues and practices.
3. Participate in the two written examinations: mid-term and final. These will be open-book, essay examinations.

## **Evaluation**

Grades in this course will be assigned on the following basis:

Reaction papers-40%  
Class participation-10%  
Mid-term examination-20%  
Final examination-30%

Final numerical grades for the course are converted to letter grades as follows:

100-93 = A; 92-90 = A-; 89-87 = B+; 86-84 = B; 83-80 = B-; 79-77 = C+; 76-74 = C; 73-70 = C-; 69-65 = D+; 64-60 = D; below 60 = F.

## **Evaluative Criteria**

Reaction papers will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- Whether or not the paper expresses an opinion or critical judgment about something in the reading. A mere summary of the reading does not satisfy this criterion.
- Whether or not the paper supports the opinion or critical judgment with appropriate arguments. A mere expression of an opinion without supporting reasons does not satisfy this criterion.
- Whether or not the paper supports the opinion or critical judgment with valid arguments. Assumptions or unsupported empirical claims are not adequate support for a critical judgment.

Class participation will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- Presence in the class. A person who is not present the class obviously cannot participate in the class discussions.
- Demonstration of a familiarity with the assigned reading.
- Willingness to contribute to the discussion by offering opinions, answering questions addressed to the class or to oneself, providing follow-up comments to statements made by other students or the professor.
- Relevance and perceptiveness of the contributions offered.

Examinations will be judged on the following criteria:

- The answers address the point of the question.
- The answers cogently organize material from the assigned readings and class discussion in a way that is relevant to the question being asked.
- The answers efficiently address the question without providing extraneous material that is loosely connected to the point of the question.
- The answers are well expressed in unified, organized paragraphs that develop a line of thought.

### **Reaction Papers**

A reaction paper is required for each class in which readings are assigned. The reaction paper is an expression of an opinion about something in the reading, either the reading taken as a whole or a particular point or set of points made by the author. The reaction paper is not a summary of the reading, but an expression of agreement or disagreement with something to be found in the reading, an opinion which is then supported by reasons. The length of the reaction paper is about one page. In writing the reaction paper, no additional research or study is needed beyond concentrating on the assigned reading.

The reaction paper will be assigned a grade of 1, 2, or 3, with 3 being highest. Reaction papers submitted after the class in which it is due cannot receive a grade higher than 2.

### **Course Schedule**

January 31: Plato, *The Meno*. Cahn pp. 5-31.

February 7: Plato, *The Republic*, selections. Cahn pp. 39-90

February 14: Plato, *The Republic*, selections. Cahn pp. 90-109.

Aristotle, *Ethics*, selections. Cahn pp. 111-121.

February 21: Aristotle, *Ethics* and *Politics*, selections. Cahn pp. 124 (paragraph 6) -143.

February 28: No reading assignment - mid-term examination. The exam will be available February 25 by 4:00 PM and will be due back through "Assignments" on Blackboard by 9:00 AM on March 1.

March 14: Rousseau, *Emile*, selections. Cahn pp. 163-196.

March 21: Dewey, selections. Cahn pp. 276 - 288; 288-293; 309-317.

March 28: Freire and Whitehead, selections. Cahn pp. 262-273; 460-471; "Arizona: The Gift That Keeps On Giving" by Stanley Fish (found in Course Documents).

April 4: Gutmann and Neill, selections, Cahn pp.. 411-435; 368 - 376; "In Efforts to End Bullying, Some See Agenda" by Erik Eckholm; "Manhattan Free School" by Susan Dominus (found in "Documents" in Blackboard under Gutmann and Neill).

April 11: Rorty. "Hermeneutics, General Studies, and Teaching"; John R. Searle, "Traditionalists and Their Challengers," Cahn, pp. 522-36, 536- 546; William Deresiewicz, "The Disadvantages of an Elite Education," found in "Course Documents" under "Rorty".

April 17: Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," pp. 25-73; K. Anthony Appiah, "Identity, Authenticity, Survival," pp. 149-163; "Supporting Boys or Girls When the Line Isn't Clear" by Patricia Leigh Brown, and "Can a Boy Wear a Skirt To Class?" by Jan Hoffman, both found in "Course Documents" under Taylor.

April 24: No reading assignment. Class discussion will be on "High School Musical" and "High School Musical 2," parts of which will be shown in class.

May 2: The final examination will be distributed by 4:00 PM on April 29 and is due back through the Assignments section May 3 by 9:00 AM.

**The Final Examination and the School of Education’s Conceptual Framework**

The final examination will include two questions that relate to two standards within the School of Education’s conceptual framework, namely CF-3 which deals with understanding of distributive justice and CF-8 which deals with the ability to shape ethical arguments. Here are the rubrics that will be used in assessing students on these two standards:

**CF-3: Distributive Justice**

	<b>Target</b>	<b>Acceptable</b>	<b>Unacceptable</b>
<b>Distributive justice</b> IL-LUC-CF.3	Student precisely understands the ways in which questions of distributive justice enter into educational practices and policies. The student is able to elucidate the complexities of these issues using the writings of educational theorists. The student is able to construct a valid argument for an educational policy or practice that attempts to address these issues.	Student has a general understanding of the ways in which questions of distributive justice enter into educational practices and policies. The student is acquainted with some of the ways in which educational theorists have developed responses to these issues. The student is able to suggest reasons for an educational policy or practice that attempts to address these issues..	Student fails to identify the ways in which questions of distributive justice enter into educational practices and policies. Student fails to recognize the ways in which educational theories seek to address such issues. The student is unable to offer reasons to justify educational policies and practices that aim at resolving issues of distributive justice.

## CF-8: Ethical decision making

	Target	Acceptable	Unacceptable
<b>Ethical justification</b> IL-LUC-CF.8	Students precisely understands the ethical and moral dimensions of the question and can develop a valid argument for educational policies and practices that are morally justified.	Student has a general sense of the ethical and moral implications of the question and the student's statements about educational practices and policies, even though not fully justified, nonetheless point to the way in which an argument would need to be developed.	Student ignores or is mistaken about the ethical and moral implications of the question. ing of the educational theory in question. The student makes claims about educational policies and practices without a supporting argument.
<b>Educational theory</b> IL-LUC-CF.8	Student demonstrates an accurate understanding of the educational theory relevant to interpreting the question and can use that theory in developing a valid argument for educational policies and practices that are morally justified.	Student demonstrates general familiarity with the educational theory relevant to interpreting the question. The student's application of this theory in developing an argument for particular educational practices is reasonable even if not tightly organized.	The student fails to apply educational theory in interpreting the question or misunderstands how the educational theory is relevant.
<b>Overall</b> IL-LUC-CF.8	Student both understands the ethical and moral implications of issues raised in the question and demonstrates an accurate understanding of educational theory in developing an argument for ethically correct and morally good educational policies and practices.	Student understands, at least in part, the ethical and moral implications of issues raised in the question and understands the relevance of educational theory to developing an argument for ethically correct and morally good educational policies and practices, even if the student does not accurately use the theory or does not construct a valid argument.	Student does not recognize the ethical and moral implications of the question and fails to used educational theory in developing a recommendation for educational policies and practices that are ethically correct and morally good.

### Technology

Please note that all papers and examinations in this course will be managed electronically through Blackboard

### Diversity

As is readily evident from the above reading list, issues of diversity are embedded in various ways in the assigned readings and the class discussions. Among these are: the ethical justifications for multiculturalism; the implications of recognizing ascribed and achieved identities; the tension between personal freedom and identity assignment and recognition.

## **Course Policies**

### **Academic Honesty**

Academic honesty is an expression of interpersonal justice, responsibility and care, applicable to Loyola University faculty, students, and staff, which demands that the pursuit of knowledge in the university community be carried out with sincerity and integrity. The School of Education's Policy on Academic Integrity can be found at:

[http://www.luc.edu/education/academics\\_policies\\_integrity.shtml](http://www.luc.edu/education/academics_policies_integrity.shtml). For additional academic policies and procedures refer to: [http://www.luc.edu/education/academics\\_policies\\_main.shtml](http://www.luc.edu/education/academics_policies_main.shtml)

### **Accessibility**

Students who have disabilities which they believe entitle them to accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act should register with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSWD) office. To request accommodations, students must schedule an appointment with an SSWD coordinator. Students should contact SSWD at least four weeks before their first semester or term at Loyola. Returning students should schedule an appointment within the first two weeks of the semester or term. The University policy on accommodations and participation in courses is available at: <http://www.luc.edu/sswd/>

### **Harassment (Bias Reporting)**

It is unacceptable and a violation of university policy to harass, discriminate against or abuse any person because of his or her race, color, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, age or any other characteristic protected by applicable law. Such behavior threatens to destroy the environment of tolerance and mutual respect that must prevail for this university to fulfill its educational and health care mission. For this reason, every incident of harassment, discrimination or abuse undermines the aspirations and attacks the ideals of our community. The university qualifies these incidents as incidents of bias.

In order to uphold our mission of being Chicago's Jesuit Catholic University-- a diverse community seeking God in all things and working to expand knowledge in the service of humanity through learning, justice and faith, any incident(s) of bias must be reported and appropriately addressed. Therefore, the Bias Response (BR) Team was created to assist members of the Loyola University Chicago community in bringing incidents of bias to the attention of the university. If you believe you are subject to such bias, you should notify the Bias Response Team at this link: <http://webapps.luc.edu/biasreporting/>