

Philosophical Questions about Teaching Philosophy: What's at Stake in High School Philosophy Education?

Trevor Norris

Volume 23, numéro 1, 2015

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1070366ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1070366ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Philosophy of Education Society

ISSN

2369-8659 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Norris, T. (2015). Philosophical Questions about Teaching Philosophy: What's at Stake in High School Philosophy Education? *Philosophical Inquiry in Education*, 23(1), 62–72. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1070366ar>

Résumé de l'article

What is at stake in high school philosophy education, and why? Why is it a good idea to teach philosophy at this level? This essay seeks to address some issues that arose in revising the Ontario grade 12 philosophy curriculum documents, significant insights from philosophy teacher education, and some early results of recent research funded by the federal Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) in Canada. These three topics include curricular disputes, stories of transformation from philosophy student to philosophy teacher, and preliminary research findings. All underscore the importance and complexity of philosophy education, as well as its challenges and benefits, including the cross-curricular benefits philosophy education imparts to the study of other subject areas. Collectively, these serve as a springboard for asking some larger and broader philosophical questions about the teaching and learning of philosophy, and they demonstrate that this is a promising new area of study and of teaching for philosophers of education. I will raise some questions about philosophy that will help frame the next stage in the SSHRC research into the teaching and learning of philosophy in Ontario, and which I contend are new and fundamental questions to ask about philosophy itself.

*Philosophical Questions About Teaching Philosophy: What's at Stake in High School Philosophy Education?*¹

TREVOR NORRIS

Brock University

Abstract: What is at stake in high school philosophy education, and why? Why is it a good idea to teach philosophy at this level? This essay seeks to address some issues that arose in revising the Ontario grade 12 philosophy curriculum documents, significant insights from philosophy teacher education, and some early results of recent research funded by the federal Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) in Canada. These three topics include curricular disputes, stories of transformation from philosophy student to philosophy teacher, and preliminary research findings. All underscore the importance and complexity of philosophy education, as well as its challenges and benefits, including the cross-curricular benefits philosophy education imparts to the study of other subject areas. Collectively, these serve as a springboard for asking some larger and broader philosophical questions about the teaching and learning of philosophy, and they demonstrate that this is a promising new area of study and of teaching for philosophers of education. I will raise some questions about philosophy that will help frame the next stage in the SSHRC research into the teaching and learning of philosophy in Ontario, and which I contend are new and fundamental questions to ask about philosophy itself.

What's at Stake in High School Philosophy Education?

Philosophers are, like, trying to, like... they're the people that are willing to, like, find out information for, like, everybody. Like, they're the one out of a million that will, like, go the extra mile to let everybody know the truth of what's going on. They want to make people see what's actually happening because other people are scared; they don't want to make the effort. (Student 1, grade 12 philosophy student, focus group, fall 2013)

Now that I've learned all this stuff about human natures and the views of, uh, different philosophers, I feel, like, I have... it might of [sic] opened, like, some part in my mind that thinks about stuff like this more often. (Student 2)

It makes my brain hurt.... Philosophy should come with a bottle of Advil. (Student 3)

The above statements say much about the experience of high school students studying philosophy: that they struggle with philosophy, respect philosophy, think about philosophy, and struggle with finding the right words to talk about philosophy.

¹ Thanks to Sarah Cashmore, Julia Lowe, Dr. Laura Pinto, and Dr. Jeff Stickney. A version of this paper was presented at the Canadian Philosophy of Education Society conference in 2014 as the Early Career Invited Lecture. Thanks also to Claudia Ruitenberg for her response to this paper at that conference.

My research team and I are undertaking pioneering research on the teaching of philosophy at the secondary school level. Ontario is a leading jurisdiction in high school philosophy education. This makes it an opportune environment to ask a number of philosophical questions about the teaching of philosophy, and to make recommendations at the policy and teacher education levels.

This essay will address some issues that arose in revising the Ontario grade 12 philosophy curriculum documents, significant insights from philosophy teacher education, and some early results of research funded by the federal Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), all of which will be used as a springboard to raise some larger and broader philosophical questions about the teaching and learning of philosophy. In order to give a broader sense of what's been going on in Ontario, rather than focus on one particular component, my aim is to provide an overview of three areas: curriculum, philosophy teacher education, and early results from the SSHRC research conducted from 2012 to 2014. I will raise some questions about philosophy that will help frame the next stage in the SSHRC research into the teaching and learning of philosophy in Ontario, and which I believe are new and fundamental questions to ask about philosophy itself. What is at stake in high school philosophy education, and why? Why is it a good idea to teach philosophy at this level? While the subject of philosophy itself will likely never be as widely taught in secondary schools as subjects like math, history or English, it has one unique advantage: it is the “queen of the sciences,” unifying all forms of knowledge and running through all subjects and disciplines. Philosophy can help overcome disciplinary isolation by providing some intellectual cohesion between areas of human study. Furthermore, it aligns with many of the broadest educational goals, such as encouraging inquiry, analyzing, reasoning, intellectual autonomy, open mindedness, curiosity, and thought itself. One might even say that good philosophy is educational, and good education is philosophical.

Relevance to Canadian Philosophers of Education

I raise this topic as a promising new area of study and teaching for philosophers of education. Who better to study the teaching and learning of philosophy than philosophers of education? But I also propose this as a new area of teaching. If we are looking for links to teacher education, and if we find that philosophy of education courses at the undergraduate level are less prevalent than they used to be, then courses aiming to infuse philosophy in schools may be something new we can teach. Many of the overarching aims of education, as frequently outlined in curricular documents and other policies, are in fact the aims of philosophy broadly conceived: critical thinking, abstract reasoning skills, clear communication, engaged inquiry, and so on. This makes it even more evident that we can have something meaningful to contribute through the promotion of philosophical thought across the curriculum. While it's unusual that an opportunity would exist to prepare teacher candidates to teach philosophy courses in the school system, philosophical thinking can be infused into teacher education by connecting philosophy with mainstream subjects or “teachables” like geography, history, English, math and science to at least introduce students to philosophical concepts and methods of inquiry: for example, exploring foundational aspects of any given discipline (e.g., in math, what is a number?) and exploring links and parallels between subjects (where is the line between math and physics?). This can still have the effect of not only promoting philosophy among teacher candidates, but also encouraging and equipping them to promote philosophy directly in their own curricular areas when they are teaching in schools.

While philosophers of education often note—and rightly lament—that philosophers throughout history have rarely written extensively about education, philosophers have even less frequently written about what it is that they do with most of their time: they teach philosophy. This contrasts with the ancient context

of the early formation of philosophy in which we see that philosophy was invariably associated with specific schools, and philosophers themselves not only taught philosophy but also founded schools in which to teach philosophy. Schools were places in which philosophy could dwell and be practiced and developed. The fact that few philosophers have written about education in philosophy is in part something we hope to address in our empirical study of the teaching and learning of philosophy in Ontario schools.

In doing so, we can also examine comparisons with lively debates going on in other subject areas. For example, there have been significant disputes with respect to history education in Canada in recent years, sometimes called the “History Wars.” In Canada under Prime Minister Stephen Harper, this has taken the shape of an attempt to emphasize national political histories and institutions like the monarchy and military, rather than the local, social, and marginalized. In math education, an ongoing debate concerns whether math is something that is fixed and unchanging or a dynamic field undergoing continual revision, and the extent to which social and cultural values are evident in the use to which math is to be put: social justice or national economic competitiveness. This debate is evident in fields like critical mathematics pedagogy and ethnomathematics. What would an equivalent be in philosophy education? Where are comparable lines of dispute and disagreement? I will consider some of these when I discuss disputes in the curriculum revision process, but before doing that I’ll provide some background context to the philosophy courses.

The Political, Pedagogical and Personal Aims of Philosophy

One noteworthy pattern emerging in the SSHRC research is that few philosophy teachers or students emphasize the larger political impact or significance of studying philosophy. Philosophy teachers and students are far more likely to emphasize the personal and pedagogical benefits or impact of philosophy rather than the political. In contrast, political concerns are sometimes held up by such groups as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), many national governments, and many philosophers as a reason to promote philosophy education. For example, students talk about how their personal values and beliefs have been transformed, and how their ability to think critically and clearly has improved and helped them in their academic success. Few students comment on the importance of philosophy in the creation of an informed and thoughtful citizenry or on its role in a healthy democracy. In this sense, philosophy may parallel civic education—except instead of learning about structures of government and institutional processes students learn intellectual skills and communicative competencies upon which democracy depends.

In contrast, the promotion of political aims like peace, democracy, tolerance, freedom, and cross-cultural dialogue and understanding is the explicit aim behind UNESCO’s promotion of philosophy in its study, “Philosophy: A School of Freedom” (2007). Closer to home, the emergence of philosophy education in the province of Quebec demonstrates its association with major political and economic changes. Beginning in 1967, Quebec’s three philosophy courses were offered in CEGEPs and were considered key features of a strategic dismantling of an intensely repressive Catholic Church and a conservative and authoritarian government, which had left Quebec underdeveloped compared to the rest of North America or any country in Europe. As a part of the “Quiet Revolution,” philosophy courses were tasked with promoting Enlightenment ideas of secular humanism, pluralistic democracy, and even civilizational progress. CEGEP instructor de Mestral (2009) describes these changes: “Quebec went very quickly from being a society where all aspects of life were dominated by religious institutions to one where institutions and ideas were clearly secular” (p. 4).

This Quebec movement took some of its inspiration from two high school philosophy initiatives in France, one country where there is in fact a long tradition of high school philosophy education. Emmanuel Levinas who is well known as a philosopher today began his career as director of the École Normale Israélite Orientale, a private Jewish high school in Paris which focused on teacher education in philosophy. Ann Chinnery (2010) notes that this pedagogical dimension of Levinas's work and life is too often overlooked by Levinas scholars:

[E]ven those of us who work in Faculties of Education have done little with the fact that for over 30 years Levinas served as director of the Ecole Normale Isrealite Orientale (ENIO), a Jewish teacher training school in Paris, and that he was a teacher of philosophy and Talmudic classes there for more than 40 years. (p. 1)

A more well-known case of advocacy for high school philosophy was the Groupe de Recherches sur l'Enseignement Philosophique (Research Group for the Teaching of Philosophy, known as GREPH) formed in Paris by Jacques Derrida. This group was devoted to protecting the discipline of philosophy against the educational reform mandates of a French state threatening its eradication. The original purpose of the GREPH had been to examine the ways in which philosophy was taught in the French secondary school and university system. In 1975, the proposal of the Haby Reform aimed to relegate undemocratically the teaching of philosophy to a marginalized position in the French secondary school and university curricula. This specific act of intervention on the part of the state prompted the GREPH to become actively involved in the political debate on democratic educational reform.

Neither the Quebec nor French experience was particularly influential on the movement to develop high school philosophy in Ontario. That grew instead out of a Toronto-based group of professors and teachers who for over twenty years advocated on behalf of philosophy.

The Facts: The State of Philosophy in Ontario Schools

Ontario is one of the only jurisdictions in the English-speaking world to offer philosophy courses in a publicly-funded school system. Its chronology indicates a steady growth in popularity. Philosophy was first established in schools some twenty years ago when grade 13 philosophy was introduced. When grade 13 was phased out entirely in 2001-2002, philosophy was offered at the grade 11 and 12 levels. The grade 12 philosophy course is listed as "U" for university bound, and does not require completion of the grade 11 course, which is listed as "O" (for "Open"), meaning anyone can take it. In 1999, the Ontario Philosophy Teachers' Association (OPTA) was founded to serve and represent philosophy teachers and continues to hold a well-attended annual conference. Several textbooks exist to support the courses they teach, including one released by publishers McGraw-Hill in 2011 (Stickney et al.). Enrollment in both courses remains strong: there were 4,250 students in 236 grade 11 philosophy classes and 21,000 students in 1012 grade 12 classes, taught by 583 full-time equivalent philosophy teachers. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010-11)

Curriculum Disputes

In 2009, the Ontario Ministry of Education revised the Humanities and Social Sciences curriculum into which its philosophy courses are incorporated, the first time the philosophy curriculum has been revised since its

introduction in the late 1990s.² Curriculum revision is a highly contentious process, just as controversial in philosophy as in any other subject area. There were primarily three areas of dispute.

The first concerns the place of non-Western or non-traditional figures and concepts. This raises questions about inclusion and exclusion, Western and non-Western traditions—a debate going on in academia for several decades and known as the canon wars or culture wars. For example, the potential inclusion of Buddhism raised questions about philosophical inquiry and cultural practices, the tension between faith and reason, some arguing that Buddhism is hostile towards the emphasis on debate, inquiry, and concepts that characterize philosophy. Regarding the issue of feminism and the presence of women in the philosophy curriculum: What is the most effective way to address both the misrepresentation of women by philosophers and their frequent lack of representation in traditional constructions of the philosophy canon? Regarding the issue of inclusion of famous contemporary political actors such as Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, Jr., some argue that although both have written about politics, justice, *etcetera*, they have been more significant and influential as political actors than philosophical thinkers. Debates about the inclusion of various figures take place in the context of limited time and space in the curriculum. In a perfect world, it would be possible to include all of these thinkers, but in practice the inclusion of one thinker or topic often necessitates the exclusion of another.

A second key area of dispute was whether informal logic and argumentation theory should be included, and if so, whether as an elective or a mandatory stand-alone component at the beginning of the course. Arguments in favor of a mandatory stand-alone component emphasize that there is a particularly unique philosophical skill or set of skills that a student must become familiar with before engaging in actual philosophical thought, analysis or debate. Furthermore, this position argues that such a philosophical skill or method can be separated from the content of philosophy itself. Opponents of the inclusion of logic argue that philosophical skills will be best developed at the same time as students are “doing” philosophy, that philosophy is studied best when its “method” is infused with its content. In other words, students can learn fundamental features of argumentation and reasoning at the same time as they study metaphysics, epistemology, *etcetera*. To some extent, this debate parallels approaches to English education where one side argues that grammar, syntax and the fundamentals of composition should be studied separately from literature in order to give students the skills and abilities necessary to read and write well, while others argue that such skills and abilities can be learned at the same time as literature is studied. However, there are problematic epistemological assumptions behind attempting to extract a meta-level of meaning out of a course and considering it as a stand-alone content area. On a practical or strategic level, opponents are concerned that the inclusion of mandatory logic at the start of the course will dampen enthusiasm and scare off students at the very beginning of the course, resulting in lower enrollment and potential course cancellation. Rather than starting with the development of philosophical skills, students would be best motivated by beginning with basic philosophical questions that might provoke interest, such as “What is the meaning of life?” and “Are there things we can never know?” This is based on the idea that philosophy can only come alive when taught in conjunction with the engagement of substantive philosophical issues, and will be better retained by students that way. Furthermore, few philosophy teachers have adequate background in logic to teach it well, and it cannot be covered well in a short period of time.

A third contention that arose during the revision of the philosophy curriculum is the tension between a historical and a skills-based approach. The former emphasizes familiarity with the history of philosophy by considering the chronology of thinkers and ideas and examines how philosophers influenced and responded to one another; in other words, philosophy construed as the history of philosophy, or philosophy as the

² Curriculum available at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/ssstudies1112curr.pdf>

“history of who said what.” Ideally, because the “doing of philosophy” means thinking, thinking should happen when students are studying the history of philosophy. However, it’s possible to study the history of philosophy without being particularly philosophical, for example, by emphasizing memorization, dull and lifeless deference and dogmatic literalism. This approach can be productive to some extent if students are given the opportunity to construct potential responses that one philosopher might have given to another. On the one hand, part of the popularity of this approach is that it is more readily standardized, measurable and predictable. It can reduce variability between teachers and students and ensure that every classroom is the same. On the other hand, the history of philosophy can be construed as a dynamic and lively dialogue between thinkers that is not yet finished. Moving even further away from the history of philosophy, is it possible to be philosophical without drawing from the history of what philosophers have said? Kant (1992) emphasized a difference: “Not to learn philosophy—but rather to learn to philosophize, otherwise it remains only imitation—but to attain it oneself through exercise of the understanding, that is what matters” (p. 436). Claudia Ruitenberg (2014) points out that the “doing of philosophy” may be clarified with reference to Heidegger’s account of thinking because Heidegger (1954/1976) claimed that studying the history of philosophy may not necessarily be a sufficient condition for philosophy:

[E]ven if we have devoted many years to the intensive study of the treatises and writings of the great thinkers, that fact is still no guarantee that we ourselves are thinking, or even are ready to learn thinking. On the contrary—preoccupation with philosophy more than anything else may give us the stubborn illusion that we are thinking just because we are incessantly “philosophizing.”

This is consistent with Heidegger’s radical project of overcoming the history of philosophy and turning thought in a new direction.

In this approach, students drive the discussion and raise their own questions without regard for a conceptual framework arising from the history of philosophy. One advantage of such an approach is that it may encourage more open-ended questioning and thought. It may also bypass any conflict about what should or shouldn’t be included in the history of philosophy, a peaceful diversion from the canon wars. One problem with this approach is that students may develop considerable skill at asking open-ended and thoughtful questions yet have no idea what other philosophers have said, or have such a muddled view of philosophy that they are unable to conceive of how philosophy has changed throughout history. Ruitenberg (2014) rightly notes that learning the history of philosophy can help promote humility: The benefit of “combining learning to think with what others have thought is that it fosters the intellectual virtue of humility and an understanding that thinking has a tradition.” Furthermore, students may have little opportunity to read the actual writings of philosophers. For this reason it is often professors of philosophy in universities who most strongly oppose this approach as it creates precocious students who believe their own thoughts are of as great or greater value than those who spent their lives thinking and writing. Yet it remains attractive to those teachers who have little formal background in philosophy, which is something teacher education in philosophy should aim to address. A middle ground may offer a more appropriate approach where the history of philosophy still manages to keep open inquiry alive in the classroom. But the question is how best to convey this middle ground in course expectations and teacher prompts.

These curricular disputes reveal central questions that get to the heart of what philosophy is and isn’t, revealing that not only does philosophy provoke debate but that philosophy itself is the site of considerable dissensus and discord, that debates about what philosophy is are far from over. The curriculum review process casts new light on a timeless philosophical question: What is the aim of philosophy education? And a modern one: What can philosophy of education contribute to philosophy education?

Teacher Education: Transforming Philosophy

Until recently, Ontario offered no preparation for teachers tasked with teaching philosophy. Several years ago, the Ontario College of Teachers changed its mandate and permitted faculties of education to offer teacher education in philosophy. In 2011, I taught the first teacher education or “teachable” course in philosophy, following the precursor Additional Qualifications (AQ) course taught by Dr. Jeff Stickney in 2009 and 2010. This “teachable” required a background in philosophy (until this point, those with an undergraduate degree in philosophy were prohibited from entry into teacher education programs unless they had enough other courses to constitute a teachable). It also provided practicum placements and led towards certification as a philosophy teacher. This unique and unprecedented course did not focus on teaching the content of philosophy or attempt to shore up any limitations in students’ background. Rather, it emphasized how to translate philosophical content knowledge into classroom activities, lesson and unit plans, and strategies for assessment; although, if we take Rancière’s teaching in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991) to heart, perhaps a background in philosophy or teacher education in philosophy may not be necessary to teach philosophy.

An activity that began and ended the course I taught in 2011 demonstrates how teacher candidates’ conception of philosophy changed as a result of learning how to teach philosophy. In the first class, these post-graduate students were presented with a dozen visual images intended to demonstrate a range of ways of representing philosophy. The images included a library, a puzzle, an Escher drawing, a Swiss Army knife, a butterfly emerging from a cocoon, a group of people talking, a cave, someone staring out the window, *etcetera*. Students showed a fairly evenly distributed preference for these images in the first class. However, after some eight months of learning how to translate their background philosophical content knowledge into something that could be taught, and as they shifted their own identities from philosophy students to philosophy teachers, something significant became apparent when they did this activity in the last class: students were far less inclined to select images that showed philosophy to be a solitary undertaking that was concerned with static or unchanging knowledge, and more likely to prefer images that instead showed philosophy as something that was collaborative and dynamic. In other words, it’s possible that the experience of teaching philosophy will impact how one conceives of what philosophy is. This can perhaps be generalized to say that the experience of teaching a particular subject area will impact how one conceives of that subject.

This raises an interesting question about the relationship between philosophy and education, or rather, philosophy education. Is the teaching of philosophy simply the transmission of predetermined philosophical ideas, which philosophers determine in isolation from teaching, or is philosophy itself changed by its teaching? This makes the question of why philosophers have so rarely written about philosophy education even more puzzling.

Researching Philosophy

Turning finally from curriculum and teacher education to what is currently going on in philosophy classrooms in Ontario, I will present some preliminary data from our SSHRC-funded research project investigating how philosophy is conceived, practiced and experienced by those involved in its teaching and learning. For this project, we interviewed philosophy teachers regarding such things as their academic background, how they conceive of philosophy, how they deal with controversial issues, their aims in teaching philosophy, and some questions about how they go about teaching philosophy, such as the use of texts and primary documents. In focus groups with students, we asked why they wanted to take the course, what helps them learn philosophy,

and what impact philosophy has had on their values and worldview. Third and last, classroom observations focus on how class time is actually used, what kinds of interactions happen, and to what extent what actually happens in classrooms is consistent with teacher and student self-reporting.

We only finished collecting the data in early spring 2014 and are currently transcribing results, and preparing to initiate a more systematic analysis. But our preliminary findings indicate that:

- 1) Students are very *enthusiastic*: “It’s a beautiful course.”
- 2) Students find that it’s a real *struggle*: “It makes my brain hurt.... Philosophy should come with a bottle of Advil.”
- 3) There are a wide *variety* of ways in which philosophy is taught.
- 4) Students are ambiguous about *logic*: “You can’t question it, but it’s helpful.”
- 5) *Challenges* include positivism and relativism among students; a fear of theory and abstractions; weak reading abilities; and teachers’ lack of adequate preparation.
- 6) There is an overreliance on *textbooks* by teachers with little background in philosophy.
- 7) Philosophy courses *motivate* students in their *other classes*, and they often prefer it to their other classes:
 - a) “It’s probably going to be the only time I enjoy thinking in class.”
 - b) “Philosophy’s kind of a break from other courses. It’s also a, since philosophy, like the way philosophy is taught is so radically different and the way of thinking is so radically different, it just helps you with your personal development and it’s just... it just opens up a totally new way of thinking.... It really just opens you up to thinking about things in different ways. And it’s just different from how all the other courses are taught.”
 - c) “See, I, in contrast to what [classmate] said, I actually feel like philosophy’s not a break but it’s actually the only time you actually turn on in school. Um, it’s... at least for me. Coz, like, you look at math, math is just monotonous application of formulas. French, French we don’t really do much. To be honest, we’re sitting there, listening to our teacher read a book right now. And then, history, history does engage you, like, a lot better than those other two courses but I find that philosophy is the only real time when it’s, like, you have to be fully engaged or you just kinda... it’ll just pass you by. And you won’t get anything. It’ll be one or the other unless you actually turn yourself on.”
- 8) Students think about it often *outside of school*:

Question: “Are there any ways in which you’ve been impacted or influenced by philosophy?”

Student 1: “My sister gets annoyed when I argue with her now.”

Student 2: “I no longer have anything to talk about.”
- 9) Philosophy courses have led some to question their beliefs or the nature of *faith*: “I felt like I thought I had a better understanding whereas the people who just said they believed in Him because they did, they just couldn’t back it up, you know what I mean?”

- 10) Students have considerable *respect for philosophers*:
 “I think philosophy is the ideas and actions of many put into words, and then discussed and argued throughout history, even past their deaths, so their essence is still alive, and people are constantly trying to either enforce it or destroy it, and I think it really brings people together on an intellectual level, which is one of the most important things anyone can do.”
- 11) Philosophy courses have a significant *impact on personal values* and beliefs, even helping with personal existential crises (e.g., meaning of life, relationship issues, tendency towards cynicism, etc.):
 “Uh, it's changed my perspective on the world, uh. I used to kind of think the world was just, like, an evil place with some good people, and I realized that's a very negative view. And then I started studying, um, Hobbes... but then while for my ISU while, uh, studying him again, I realized that he was just a person who didn't really like anything, and I realized while looking at the world as a whole that it's not a dark place, it's a good place with bad people, but people try their best to be good, whether there is a God or there isn't, and it helped me see that, and... however the world is, like, I always have the two perspectives to go by, so philosophy helped me do that, so... there are a lot of good people; there are bad people, too, but Hobbes was wrong in some sense, and it kind of helped me build my moral code a bit more, just to realize that, and to accept it and move on.”

If we think of the ancient schools of philosophy founded in the classical context, we see that their aims were not strictly cognitive or an attempt to promote a mental gymnastic, but rather that philosophy education was oriented towards the transformation and healing of the whole person. Philosopher Pierre Hadot (1995) speaks of this in his book *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. He describes philosophy as a set of spiritual practices developed by the ancient schools which aimed to align the conflicting parts of the human psyche by creating a harmonious orientation towards the trials of life and the problematic features of the world and others. If Hobbes today can help address moral and existential issues which adolescents often struggle with quite intensely, then we see that the contributions of high school philosophy are more than academic.

Conclusions: Worthwhile Pain

Philosophers and philosophers of education are continually challenged to find grounds upon which to defend what it is that we do and what makes it worthwhile. Perhaps this is a rightful and necessary task, preventing inertia and keeping philosophy alive and vital. But on what grounds are we able to muster a defense of philosophy or philosophical education today? The Socratic promise of self-knowledge through the pursuit of wisdom and overcoming of opinion? The Enlightenment promise of liberation from immaturity and the public use of reason? Or a postmodern perspective that philosophy is just another form of discipline, reinforced by an incredulity towards metanarratives—perhaps even incredulity towards philosophy itself? In an age so dominated by consumerism and relativism and instrumental approaches to education, it is often hard to find grounds upon which to defend anything as worthwhile. Yet the enthusiasm of philosophy

students is evidence that somewhere something good is happening. There is no greater pleasure than to see the young fired up about ideas. As one student put it: “This is the only course I actually kind of pay attention in right now... it's the only thing I enjoy, so, it's actually the highlight of my day.” Philosophy may cause pain, as one student noted, but at least it is worthwhile pain.

In sum, these curricular disputes, these stories of transformation from philosophy student to philosophy teacher, and these preliminary findings all point towards both the importance and complexity of philosophy education, its benefits and challenges, and its cross-curricular connections. And they demonstrate that this is a promising new area of study and of teaching for philosophers of education. Where should we go from here? There are many promising areas of future research: exploring how philosophy relates to the promotion of citizenship engagement, whole-person development, other subjects taught in school, the development of moral reasoning skills, academic success, promoting social justice, comparisons with other jurisdictions around the world. Philosophers of education should promote philosophy in these courses and across the curriculum, continue to protect philosophy education from anti-philosophical pedagogy and curriculum reforms, and continue to consider it a worthwhile area of study.

References

- Chinnery, A. (2010). Encountering the philosopher as teacher: The pedagogical postures of Emmanuel Levinas. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(8), 1704-1709.
- de Mestral, C. (2009, November). *The Parent Report and the teaching of philosophy in Quebec's CEGEPS*. Paper presented at Kwansei Gakuin University, Hyogo, Japan. Retrieved from <http://unesco.chairephilu.uqam.ca/?the-parent-report-and-the-teaching>
- Hadot, P. (1995). *Philosophy as a way of life*. (M. Chase, Trans.). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Heidegger, M. (1976). *What is called thinking?* (J. G. Gray, Trans.). New York, NY: HarperPerennial. (Original work published 1954)
- Kant, I. (1992). *Lectures on logic*. (J. M. Young, Trans.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Rancière, J. (1991). *The ignorant schoolmaster: Five lessons in intellectual emancipation*. San Francisco, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2010-11). *Report on Enrolment Records in Philosophy Courses HZB3O & HZT4U*.
- Ontario Philosophy Teachers' Association. About Us. <http://ontariophilosophy.ca/about-us/>
- Ruitenbergh, C. (2014, June). *Demanding thinking, demanding philosophy: Response to Trevor Norris's CPES Early Career Invited Lecture*. Paper presented at the Canadian Philosophy of Education Society conference, Brock University.
- Stickney, J., Anderson, S., Jopling, D., Martyr-Andre, J., Oja, L., Quejada, E., & Wilson, A. (2011). *Philosophy: Thinkers, theories and questions*. Toronto, ON: McGraw Hill Publishers.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2007). *Philosophy: A school of freedom*. Paris, FR: M. Goucha (Ed.).

About the Author

Trevor Norris is Associate Professor in the Department of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies in Education at Brock University, St. Catharines. This research was supported in part by grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and Brock University. Correspondence concerning this

article should be addressed to Trevor Norris, Department of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies, Brock University, St. Catharines, ON. Email: tnorris@brocku.ca