

A Foundation for Reflection and Questioning: Philosophy Course Requirements in Teacher Education Programs at Selected Catholic Colleges and Universities

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Course work in philosophy is typically required as part of a core curriculum for pre-service teachers who enter undergraduate teacher education programs in Catholic colleges and universities. The purpose of this study was to explore requirements in philosophy in undergraduate teacher education programs at selected Catholic colleges and universities as identified by The Newman Guide to Choosing a Catholic College: What to Look for and Where to Find It (Esposito, 2007c). This is accomplished primarily through an examination and analysis of the philosophy requirements and course descriptions at these selected institutions. Specific content from the course descriptions examined is discussed in relation to teacher education with recommendations for practice at Catholic colleges and universities provided.

"I think; therefore I am" (Descartes, 1641/2003).

For many college graduates, Descartes' familiar words evoke memories of college days spent sitting in required philosophy courses pondering the relevance of what was being taught and how it could ever be applied outside of class. Breault (2005), now a well-known teacher educator, shares in an article that he questioned the relevance of the curriculum when he took an introductory philosophy class as a college freshman. Breault's experience, like that of many undergraduates, prompts the question, why do some universities require undergraduate students to take philosophy courses? In essence, what purpose do philosophy courses serve for the development of undergraduate students and for the purposes of this study, for those in teacher education programs? Also, in institutions where philosophy course work is required, what is the nature of the requirement and the content of the course work? Through the current study we sought to begin addressing these questions by exploring philosophy requirements in undergraduate teacher education programs at selected Catholic colleges and universities. In particular, this study sought to ascertain

the degree to which preservice teachers in undergraduate teacher education programs in these selected Catholic colleges and universities are required to take philosophy course work and to explore this content broadly through an examination of course descriptions.

This article begins with a discussion of philosophy course work at Catholic colleges and universities and its importance for preservice teachers. Second, the sample of Catholic colleges and universities as well as the data collection and analysis procedures used in this study are described. Third, results based on a content analysis of course descriptions from required philosophy courses are presented. A discussion of the findings with recommendations for practice for teacher educators within Catholic colleges and universities concludes the article.

Literature Review

At most Catholic colleges or universities, the core curriculum consists of course work in different disciplines, but almost always includes courses in philosophy (Esposito, 2007a; Trainor, 2006). Courses in philosophy are not just important at Catholic institutions (McCloskey, 2007), but these courses “point to the underlying theories and principles of every area of study” (Murphy, 2001, p. 18). For students who enter undergraduate teacher education programs (referred to in this article as preservice teachers) in Catholic colleges and universities, courses in philosophy are usually required as part of a liberal arts or core curriculum. While preservice teachers may take courses in philosophy as part of a liberal arts or core curriculum, the education literature emphasizes how preservice teachers in general often begin their teacher education course work with very limited understanding and appreciation of philosophy content (Gosselin, 2007; Weidler, 1998; Yost, Sentner, & Forlenza-Bailey, 2000). Bérci and Griffith (2005) state that “without the philosophical there is a gap in understanding what it is to know and how we come to know” (p. 407). Hence, it can be difficult for preservice teachers to understand the connection philosophy has to their practice as teachers (Gosselin, 2007).

Kreeft (2007) asserts that through the study of philosophy, students in Catholic colleges and universities are provided with the opportunity to explore who they are, why they exist, and the world around them. Nussbaum (1997) shares that a colleague of hers who teaches at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, sees the philosophy requirement as “a way of getting even the most passive students to think for themselves and to argue for their

beliefs” and that many students feel “the philosophy requirement has made them better Catholics by forcing them to defend their choices with arguments” (p. 16). In some cases, according to Nussbaum, students report that the philosophy course work leads them to question their Catholic faith. Lastly, Nussbaum states, “philosophy supplies something that formerly was lacking—an active control or grasp of questions, the ability to make distinctions, a style of interaction that does not rest on mere assertion and counter assertion” (p. 18).

As noted above, course work in philosophy leads to questioning, which Bérci and Griffith (2005) state “is at the heart of teaching and learning” (p. 406). Consequently, as students learn to question and refine their beliefs, the practice of reflecting on their actions begins to take shape, as illustrated in a study conducted by Pedro (2005). In this study, interviews along with reflection journals of five preservice teachers in a graduate teacher education program were collected to “discover how pre-service teachers understand and interpret reflective practice” (p. 50). Among the findings that emerged from this study, one finding in particular related to the role of questioning and problem-solving skills in the development of reflective teachers, and has direct implications for the present study. The preservice teachers interviewed indicated that questioning was used as a way for them to reflect on their practice. Specifically, the preservice teachers “asked themselves a range of questions as a means of learning what was expected of them within the classroom context” (p. 56) when working with students and examining their own actions.

Reflection is an encouraged practice and is often used extensively in teacher preparation (Calderhead, 1989) because it incites critical thinking (Pedro, 2005), instigates questioning (Bérci & Griffith, 2005), allows preservice teachers to problem solve (Spalding & Wilson, 2002), and helps preservice teachers learn from their experiences (Watson & Wilcox, 2000). When preservice teachers engage in reflection, they are using the self (Colman, 2008) as a means for obtaining an understanding and making meaning of experiences that occur within one’s environment (Larrivee, 2000; Loughran, 2002). Colman (2008) explains the self consists of “body and mind, perception and action” (p. 356). In order for preservice teachers to make sense of their experiences through the use of the self, it is important for them to engage in reflection and questioning where they begin to examine and understand themselves in terms of their core beliefs (i.e., ethics, life meanings, values; Larrivee, 2000).

Without engaging in this critical reflection of the self, Larrivee (2000) warns an individual could hold onto beliefs that have not been critically examined. This reflection and understanding of the self is especially relevant for pre-

service teachers who ultimately will be called upon to make critical judgments to test their beliefs. Examples of value-laden choices abound in the daily lives of teachers, ranging from seemingly mundane decisions regarding routine protocol and resource allocation to more complex issues like education of English language learners and students with disabilities. Further, as teachers, these individuals will undoubtedly transmit many of their values and beliefs to the children they teach. Hence, the importance of meaningful self-reflection for preservice teachers that provides that space for “deep examination of personal values and beliefs” (Larrivee, 2000, p. 294).

Despite the widespread use and benefits of engaging in reflection, preservice teachers often lack the foundation for developing skills in reflection and are not explicitly taught how to reflect (Russell, 2005). Therefore, discussions about the purpose of reflection, the importance of reflection in one’s practice as a teacher, and explicit demonstrations and modeling of how to engage in reflection about one’s own teaching are essential components needed in teacher education programs (Yost et al., 2000). In essence, “teacher educators must find ways to imbue preservice teachers with the intellectual and professional experiences necessary to enable them to reflect on critical levels” (p. 40). Some methods noted in the literature to help preservice teachers learn the skills to engage in reflection include the use of constructivist methods, dialogue, action research, and writing experiences (Yost et al., 2000); journal writing (Larrivee, 2000); as well as reading about experiences and practices used in one’s own teaching (Watson & Wilcox, 2000). In the study referenced above conducted by Pedro (2005), the preservice teachers expressed how courses and seminars at the university as well as mentors in their practicum experiences provided opportunities and helped them to engage in reflection on their practice. In addition, the preservice teachers cited engaging in self-reflection, verbal reflection with others, and written reflections in a journal as ways they engaged in reflection (Pedro, 2005).

Larrivee (2000) states that “reflective practitioners challenge assumptions and question existing practices, thereby continuously accessing new lenses to view their practice and alter their perspectives” (p. 296). It is precisely this experience with questioning and reflection that provides a critical foundation to the development of preservice teachers as they progress through their program and begin to examine the complexities of everyday life as a teacher. Gosselin (2007) notes that it is important for teachers to “study and approach their practice through philosophical inquiry” and stresses the importance of a background in philosophy on “the kinds of questions” (p. 43) teachers ask

as they reflect on their practice. Through the study of philosophy, preservice teachers are provided the opportunity to begin examining the self in terms of their own core beliefs as well as those beliefs that are unexamined by the individual. In essence, courses in philosophy have the potential of influencing preservice teachers' ways of thinking as well as acting with regard to reflecting on their practice.

Method

Sample

The sample of Catholic colleges and universities selected for this study were those identified in *The Newman Guide to Choosing a Catholic College: What to Look for and Where to Find It* (referred to in this article as the Newman guide; Esposito, 2007c). Since this study examined an area where no prior research exists, the Newman guide was used to identify a sample of Catholic colleges and universities. The universities identified in the Newman guide were selected by the Cardinal Newman Society based on data collected from questionnaires and interviews as well as a review of school websites and documents to identify those Catholic colleges and universities "where students can reasonably expect a faithful Catholic education and a campus culture that upholds the values taught in their homes and parishes" (Esposito, 2007b, p. 13). The authors do not intend for this sample to be representative of all Catholic colleges and universities, but rather a starting point for examining this area of study.

The initial sample consisted of all 21 colleges and universities identified in the Newman guide. However, an examination of the websites of these institutions indicated that only 10 of the original 21 had undergraduate teacher education programs. Therefore, only 10 of the Catholic colleges and universities from the Newman guide were selected for this study. A web search was conducted to collect information on the characteristics of each institution. In instances where this information was not available on the website, the registrar's office was contacted at the institution.

Demographic information on the Catholic colleges and universities selected for this study revealed that these institutions differed with regard to location, undergraduate enrollment, and religious order affiliation. With regard to the teacher education programs, half of the programs in the sample were accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE; $n = 5$) and all but one offered graduate programs ($n = 9$) as well as undergraduate programs ($n = 10$). A summary of institutional demographics

Table 1

Summary of Institutional Demographics and Teacher Education Program Information

Institutional Demographics	<i>n</i>
Location	
Midwest	2
Southwest	2
Southeast	3
Northeast	3
Religious Order Affiliation	
Benedictine	3
Dominican	1
Franciscan	1
Salesian	1
Not Specified	4
Undergraduate Enrollment	
500 - 1,500	4
1,501 - 2,500	5
2,501 - 3,500	1
Teacher Education Program Information	
NCATE Accredited	
Yes	5
No	5
Undergraduate Programs Offered	
Early Childhood/Elementary	10
Middle School	3
Secondary	8
Special Education	5
Graduate Programs Offered	
Post-Baccalaureate	3
Master's	6
Specialist	1
Doctorate	2

and teacher education program information is presented in Table 1.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were gathered from the identified institutions' websites. Specific information was collected regarding the required courses for undergraduate teacher education programs. In one instance it was unclear from the website what courses were required for the teacher education programs and an undergraduate course catalogue was requested from the institution. Required philosophy courses were identified based on the course prefix (i.e., phil, ph, phi) as well as the course title. A total of 26 required philosophy courses were identified from among the colleges and universities in the sample. However, a total of 68 philosophy courses were identified for purposes of analysis in this study because at some of the institutions students could choose from a list of philosophy courses to fulfill the requirement.

Once the required philosophy courses were identified, the course descriptions were obtained from the university website either directly from the philosophy departments' course descriptions or in an online version of the most recent undergraduate course catalogue. A content analysis was conducted to identify the major themes in the course descriptions. This analysis was guided by the overall purpose of the study, which was to ascertain the degree to which preservice teachers in undergraduate teacher education programs within Catholic colleges and universities are required to take courses in philosophy and to explore the content of philosophy course descriptions.

The content analysis was done on a total of 68 philosophy course descriptions with the course descriptions having an average of 52 words. When conducting the content analysis, ATLAS.ti, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program, was used in identifying the major themes in the philosophy course descriptions. Prior to coding these data in ATLAS.ti, preliminary themes were not developed. Rather, the themes identified emerged solely based on the information provided in the philosophy course descriptions.

Results

Course Requirements in Philosophy

Regarding the course requirements in philosophy, two findings were common and several findings varied among the Catholic colleges and universities stud-

ied. One common finding was that all 10 of the undergraduate teacher preparation programs required their preservice teachers to take courses in philosophy and all required that these courses be taken within the first 2 years (freshman and sophomore years). Consequently, at all 10 institutions preservice teachers took the philosophy courses prior to beginning their teacher education course work. However, in some cases, a philosophy of education course was taken later along with teacher education course work.

Among the findings that varied from one institution to another was the number of philosophy courses required, the choice students had in selecting courses, and the content of the courses. The required number of courses ranged from 1 to 4. At some of the colleges and universities, the preservice teachers were told which philosophy courses to take and at other colleges and universities the preservice teachers had a choice of courses. The majority of the universities ($n = 5$) stated the number of required philosophy courses and provided a list of specified courses that students were expected to take. In other cases, the colleges and universities ($n = 2$) stated the number of required philosophy courses, but the preservice teachers could choose from a list of philosophy courses that would fulfill the requirement. At the remaining institutions ($n = 3$) students were directed to take some specific courses, but were able to choose which other additional courses they wanted to take to fulfill the philosophy requirement.

Content of Philosophy Courses

Just as the number of required philosophy courses varied across colleges and universities, so did the content of the philosophy courses the preservice teachers were required to take as a part of their core curriculum requirements. Nine themes emerged from the content analysis of the philosophy course descriptions: aesthetics, ethics and morality, God and religion, law and politics, logic, metaphysical, nature, philosophy of education, and the self and essence of a human being. Also included in many of the course descriptions were the time periods that the course would focus on and the texts that would be used in the course. A summary of all the themes that emerged and examples of descriptors from philosophy course descriptions are presented in Table 2.

Among the themes that emerged, findings from this study reveal that the majority of the philosophy course descriptions pertained to the self and essence of a human being as well as ethics and morality. The themes self and essence of a human being and ethics and morality have significance to teacher

Table 2

Summary of Themes and Example Descriptors from Philosophy Course Descriptions

Themes	Example Descriptors
Aesthetics	Philosophical questions related to art (e.g., beauty, creation, expression, creativity, representation, ethics)
Ethics and Morality	The moral character of the human person (e.g., good and evil, virtue and vice, right and wrong, habits) The nature of human freedom and action (e.g., judgment, obligation, conscience, decisions, reasoning) Social ethics (e.g., freedom, authority, determinism, utilitarianism, justice, deontology, bioethics)
God and Religion	Existence of God (e.g., rational arguments for the existence of God, attributes and nature of God) Relationship between faith and reason (e.g., religion and morality, God and human freedom, natural theology)
Law and Politics	Political philosophy (e.g., ethics, political organizations, freedom, justice, authority) Nature of law (e.g., natural and positive law, constitutional law, law and morality)
Logic	Methods and theories (e.g., logical analysis, inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning, fallacies)
Metaphysical	Being (e.g., properties of being, analogy of being, existence, transcendental properties)
Nature	Philosophy of nature (e.g., matter, change, causes, substance, space, causality, nature of matter, the infinite, the good)
Philosophy of Education	Philosophical nature of teaching (e.g., students, curriculum, decision making, and knowledge) Historical and philosophical traditions in education, educational practice, and educational philosophies
Self and Essence of a Human Being	Capacities of a human person (e.g., being able to feel, love, understand, know) Different aspects and properties of a human person (e.g., intellect, having a soul, being able to reason, will, emotion, sensation, thought, affectivity)

education programs. Because the philosophy course descriptions emphasize the notion of self, these courses have the potential to assist preservice teachers in developing the skills needed to engage in reflection. The notion of reflection is not directly referenced in the course descriptions examined; however, a natural connection can be drawn between the study of self and the notion of reflection that involves the use of self (Colman, 2008) as a means for obtaining an understanding and making meaning of experiences that occur within one's environment (Larrivee, 2000; Loughran, 2002). This finding illustrates how courses in philosophy have the potential to influence preservice teachers' ways of thinking and acting with regard to reflecting on practice. Law and politics, logic, and philosophy of education are also significant to teacher education programs since background in the content reflected in these themes can potentially assist preservice teachers in their development.

The self and essence of a human being. The theme the self and essence of a human being was discussed extensively in the course descriptions referring to two main concepts: the capacities of a human person and the different aspects and properties of a human person. When these two concepts were discussed in the course descriptions, they addressed the nature of the human person. With regard to the capacities of a human person, concepts used in the course descriptions to address the nature of the human person included being able to feel, love, understand, and know, which is illustrated in the following course description:

[This course] studies what it is to say that human beings are persons and have freedom and subjectivity; the different powers of the human person, including the powers of understanding, willing, feeling, and loving; the difference between body and soul in human beings, and the unity of the two; and the question of the immortality of the soul.

A second course was described as including "an investigation of modern and contemporary responses to questions concerning the nature of the human reality, the nature and limits of human knowing, human freedom, human happiness and well-being, and the relation of the individual to society."

Regarding the different aspects and properties of a human person, some of the concepts noted included intellect, having a soul, being able to reason, the will, emotion, sensation, thought, and affectivity. These concepts can be seen in the following two course descriptions:

This course begins with the distinction of living things from non-living things, followed by the nature of the soul and its kinds. It then treats the relationship between soul and body, and examines sensation, reason and the emotions in depth.

The second half of the course addresses the properties of man from the Thomistic philosophical perspective: his vegetative, animative, and cognitive operations; the nature of the human soul; the unity of soul and body; the nature, act, and objects of the human intellect; the necessity and freedom of the human will; and the interaction of the intellect and will in the free human act.

Ethics and morality. When the theme ethics and morality was discussed in the course descriptions it referred to the moral character of the human person, the nature of human freedom and action, and social ethics. With regard to the moral character of the human person, concepts such as good and evil, virtue and vice, right and wrong, and habits were discussed. For instance, one of the course descriptions stated that the course “considers the ultimate end of man and the nature of human freedom, followed by the nature of habits, virtues and vices, and the necessity of virtues for a stable moral life.” In another course description, it is stated that inquiries would be made

into the significance of moral good and evil in the life of the human person; into moral virtue and vice (or moral character); into moral obligation; right and wrong actions; moral laws and the problem of exceptions; and the place of conscience in the moral life.

Discussions regarding concepts such as judgment, obligation, conscience, decisions, and reasoning were presented in the context of human freedom and action. In one philosophy course description, these concepts were presented such that as a result of the course “the student should come to understand the rational basis of moral doctrine, to appreciate its profound significance for the human person, and to develop a personal commitment to act always so as to promote his true good.” A second course description describes how students would explore “the nature of the moral good, the structures of moral agency and the proper criteria for making choices that bear on human beings and their well-being.” In yet a third course description, students would

study “the components of moral decisions and moral life: freedom, obligation, conscience, objective goods and values” and apply the “moral principles to particular circumstances.”

Finally, as related to social ethics, concepts discussed include freedom, authority, determinism, utilitarianism, justice, deontology, and bioethics. This is depicted in the following course description where “topics to be considered are the norms of morality and the general process of moral decision-making. Natural law, deontology and utilitarianism will be some of the moral theories included.” In other instances, specific topics related to social ethics were discussed, such as in the following course description:

On the level of the family, such problems as birth control, abortion, and divorce are addressed, while on the level of the wider society, such questions as problems within the corporate structure, and between the corporation and society, private property, the ethics of welfare, censorship, civil disobedience, punishment and respect for law are dealt with.

Law and politics. When the theme law and politics was portrayed in the course descriptions it was discussed in relation to concepts of political philosophy and the nature of law. Political philosophy was discussed in the course descriptions with reference to ethics, political organization, freedom, justice, and authority. This was evident in the following course description: “[This course includes] a philosophical examination of action and political life; work, labor, and technology; friendship; privacy and publicness; justice and other virtues; cities, states, and nations’ nature and convention; the moral and the legal.”

With regard to the nature of law, emphasis in the course descriptions was on natural and positive law, constitutional law, as well as law and morality. The following two course descriptions provide examples of how these concepts were addressed:

This course is concerned with the nature of law, including a comparison of descriptive and prescriptive law, an investigation of natural law both historically and systematically, and the relationship of natural law to human positive law, to constitutional law, to the law of nations and to custom.

[This course includes] a study of the relation between law and morality

and its consequences for the resolution of human conflict. Emphasis on the issues between natural law/right theory and its diverse critics. Topical problems deal with the legal enforcement of morals, punishment, discrimination.

Logic. When logic was discussed in the course descriptions concepts such as methods and theories used in logic emerged. In other instances, it was expressed in the course descriptions that students would learn about different types of inductive and deductive reasoning as well as fallacies. This was evident in the following two course descriptions:

This is an introductory consideration of logical theory: definitions, prepositions, and reasoning. Students are taught the methods used in logical analysis and the reasons behind them. The emphasis is upon dealing with arguments as they are expressed in everyday language.

Exploring valid and invalid patterns of deductive inference, with secondary consideration of inductive reasoning, this course examines the principles of Aristotelian material and formal logic, including signs and signification, abstraction and universals, prediction and judgments, and syllogistic reasoning. Informal fallacies are covered as well. The applicability of basic logic principles to both dialectical and rhetorical argumentation is treated in the latter half of the course.

Philosophy of education. Lastly, the theme philosophy of education strongly emerged in the analysis of course descriptions since several of the institutions studied required a specific course in philosophy of education. The course descriptions from the philosophy of education courses focused on the philosophical nature of teaching and educational thought. When the philosophical nature of teaching was addressed in the course descriptions, different aspects of teaching relating to students, curriculum, decision making, and knowledge acquisition were discussed. This was evident in the following course descriptions: “[This course includes] consideration of themes such as the nature of the student and of the teacher, goals of education, curriculum and methodology, the nature and division of knowledge, education and the common good.”

The course seeks to advance the students' understanding of the nature of education, particularly the notion that educators are builders of community, and to assist students in framing their beliefs about teaching and learning in PK-12 schools. The relevance of philosophy to teacher decision making will be made evident as students construct their own educational philosophy.

With regard to the philosophical nature of educational thought, emphasis was placed on philosophical traditions and times that shape educational thought. The following two course descriptions demonstrate the nature of these courses: "This intensive seminar will provide students an opportunity to gain an understanding of the historical and philosophical traditions that have shaped educational thought and practice in the United States."

This course investigates the philosophical basis of educational thought from classical to contemporary times. After establishing the nature of philosophy, the course examines the major philosophical systems and ideologies that have shaped educational theory.

Discussion

"Effective teaching is much more than a compilation of skills and strategies. It is a deliberate philosophical and ethical code of conduct" (Larrivee, 2000, p. 294). Thus, teachers need a foundation to reflect on their practice. For instance, Pedro (2005) found that preservice teachers' reflections were based not only on personal beliefs, but also educational theories. Philosophy course work in preservice teacher education programs at Catholic colleges and universities can provide a philosophical foundation from which preservice teachers are able to connect the knowledge learned in philosophy course work with the specific educational knowledge and skills they acquire in their teacher preparation course work. This intersect aids in closing the "gap in understanding what it is to know and how we come to know" that Bérci and Griffith (2005, p. 407) discuss occurs without the philosophical. Therefore, content from philosophy courses can allow preservice teachers to examine critically their practice in terms of the "moral and ethical implications and consequences" their actions can have on student learning (Larrivee, 2000, p. 294). This provides a space for critical reflection to occur, which allows for preservice teachers to examine "personal and professional belief systems as well as the deliber-

ate consideration of the ethical implications and impact of practices” (Larrivee, 2000, p. 294).

The results of this study clearly demonstrate that preservice teachers within the 10 Catholic colleges and universities studied are required to take philosophy courses with the number of required courses varying from 1 to 4. Also, some Catholic colleges and universities require preservice teachers to take specific courses while others allow students to choose from among a list of philosophy courses. Finally, at some of the Catholic colleges and universities, a philosophy of education course was required. When the philosophy of education course was a requirement, in many instances it was coded as a philosophy course. In one case the university allowed preservice teachers to take the philosophy of education course in place of a required philosophy course.

An examination of the required content in the philosophy course descriptions revealed that particular courses in philosophy can be significant to teacher education programs based on the following themes that emerged from the content analysis: self and essence of a human being, ethics and morality, law and politics, logic, and philosophy of education. With regard to the theme the self and essence of a human being, courses were described as providing opportunities for students to examine the capacities, aspects, and properties of a human person. Similarly, in the theme ethics and morality, an examination of course descriptions revealed that students reflected on the self by examining the moral character of the human person, the nature of human freedom and action, and social ethics. In both of these themes, direct reference was made to the human person or the self. Courses such as these where direct reference is made to the human person or the self are important to the development of preservice teachers because as preservice teachers learn about the self through philosophy courses, they can begin to examine and understand themselves (i.e., ethics, values), which can assist them in making sense of their experiences (Larrivee, 2000).

When the theme law and politics emerged in the course descriptions, concepts such as political philosophy and the nature of law were discussed. Philosophy courses pertaining to law and politics provide preservice teachers with a foundation for critically examining the law and understanding the role of morality when applied to law and politics. These areas apply significantly to the daily lives of teachers as they examine and reflect on their actions when implementing legal policies (i.e., Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) in their practice. Equally important, elements of law and morality studied in philosophy course work allow preservice teachers to examine the notions of justice

and discrimination with regard to the implementation of laws. For example, in many parts of the country large numbers of undocumented immigrant children attend school legally based on the mandate provided through the 1982 *Plyler v. Doe* case. However, much controversy and underlying discrimination is associated with the education of these students (Rabin, Combs, & González, 2008), as teachers are often placed in the role of protecting the rights of their students amidst political turmoil.

Methods and theories as well as inductive and deductive reasoning were discussed, indicating a theme of logic that emerged in the course descriptions. Philosophy courses that pertain to logic can assist preservice teachers in understanding and reflecting on different ways to teach lessons and present content to students beyond traditional direct instruction approaches. Experiences with inductive reasoning provide preservice teachers with a foundation for such methods as problem-based learning and case-based instruction.

Lastly, as noted previously, the theme philosophy of education was prominently seen since several institutions required a separate course solely focused on this topic. In these course descriptions the philosophical nature of teaching and educational thought was discussed. Obviously, this content significantly relates to teacher education programs. Philosophy courses pertaining to philosophy of education allow preservice teachers to begin to examine their own goals for teaching and how those goals will be accomplished through specific teaching methods. In addition, philosophy of education courses also assist future teachers in beginning to explain “why” they believe a particular way. This not only helps with decision making, but also being able to provide a rationale for their beliefs. Courses in philosophy of education are important in the development of the preservice teacher because “they typically do not understand how philosophy of education fits into the grand narrative of philosophy as a discipline” (Gosselin, 2007, p. 42).

Limitations

This exploratory study serves as an important first step in beginning to understand the degree to which preservice teachers in undergraduate teacher education programs within a selected group of Catholic colleges and universities are required to take courses in philosophy as part of their core curriculum and to examine the content of philosophy course descriptions. However, there are limitations regarding the study design, which have implications for how the results should be interpreted. The initial sample of 21 Catholic colleges and

universities was limited to those in the Newman guide. According to the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU, 2009), there are 244 Catholic colleges and universities nationwide. Thus, this purposeful sampling may not be representative of the total number of Catholic colleges and universities with teacher education programs. Similarly, since approximately 68% of Catholic colleges and universities identified by the ACCU have clearly identifiable teacher education programs, a second limitation is that the findings are not representative of all teacher education programs within Catholic colleges and universities. A final limitation is the sample only included Catholic colleges and universities with teacher education programs and not other faith-based colleges and universities with teacher education programs. Even though some other faith-based colleges and universities and even secular colleges and universities require philosophy courses to be taken by preservice teachers, the content and what is discussed in those philosophy courses may differ from those offered at Catholic colleges and universities.

This study is a first step in examining the impact of philosophy course work on preservice teacher development in Catholic colleges and universities. Future research should focus on a larger and more representative sample of teacher education programs at Catholic higher education institutions. Furthermore, in addition to course descriptions, philosophy course syllabi should be obtained to conduct more in-depth content analyses examining components such as course goals and objectives, required readings, assignments, and specific topics. It is important to examine the nature of philosophy courses in Catholic colleges and universities since philosophy courses are part of the core curriculum and can have the potential to assist preservice teachers in their development as educators.

Recommendations for Practice

Despite the mentioned limitations, findings from this study are useful to teacher educators at Catholic colleges and universities. The *Declaration on Christian Education* (Vatican Council II, 1965) emphasizes the importance of not only preparing students at Catholic colleges and universities who are “outstanding in their training, ready to undertake the weighty responsibilities in society” (n. 31), but for faculty at Catholic colleges and universities to “give abiding spiritual and intellectual assistance to the youth of the university” (n. 33). Therefore, it is important for professionals engaged in Catholic higher education, especially teacher educators, to examine the content and

extent of required undergraduate course work in philosophy since this course work should provide preservice teachers with the opportunity to gain a better understanding of who they are as human beings (Kreeft, 2007) and to examine their own core beliefs (Larrivee, 2000) in relation to the situations they encounter in their lives. In fact, one of the course descriptions examined in this study states that the course “introduces philosophy as an essential human activity” and that students have the opportunity to “not only experience major philosophers at work on important human issues, but also participate in this activity by developing their own skills for creative thinking, rational argument, and responsible judgment.”

Consequently, teacher educators can use the information presented in this study to reinforce the content of these courses in teacher education course work. As noted by Breault (2005) “teacher education programs bear some of the responsibility for the failure to take philosophy seriously in the preparation of future teachers” (p. 151). Teacher educators in Catholic colleges and universities should become familiar with the essence and purpose of philosophy courses at their colleges or universities in order to be able to link content from required philosophy courses with instruction of reflective practice taught in preservice teacher education programs. These connections can help students to understand the relationship between philosophy courses and the reflection process more broadly.

Conclusion

This article’s opening quote “I think; therefore, I am” was taken from one of Descartes’ writings titled *Meditations on the First Philosophy*. Similarly, in this writing, Descartes (1641/2003) also states, “But what then am I? A thinking being. What is a thinking being? It is a being which doubts, which understands, which conceives, which affirms, which denies, which wills, which rejects, which imagines also, and which perceives” (p. 411). Descartes’ words describe the nature of a human being as one who thinks. Philosophy courses at Catholic colleges and universities afford preservice teachers the opportunity to begin to know the self with regard to understanding their capacities and what makes them human beings as well as allowing them to be in touch with who they are in the world. Essentially, through required philosophy course work at Catholic colleges and universities preservice teachers learn to see themselves as thinking beings with a responsibility to question and reflect on their own values and beliefs as they make critical decisions affecting the lives of future

generations of children.

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