Using 'Ordinary Language Analysis' for Teaching Philosophical Concepts in the Classroom

A major problem of teaching philosophy to children, in both the public and private sectors, is that the large proportion of children who could benefit by such instruction are never exposed to it. This is the result of many factors including teachers who are not prepared in philosophy, the resistance or inability of schools to offer such instruction, and the unwillingness of philosophers (both general and educational) to involve themselves in these kinds of enterprises. Many times the only exposure prospective teachers receive is an undergraduate course in the philosophy of education. And in many instances where even this course is not required, teachers are not introduced to philosophical thinking until they begin their graduate studies. Even here there is often only a one course requirement (if that), and, in any case, the applicability of philosophy to educational practice is often lost by this time.

Since prospective teachers will most likely only have experience in one philosophically oriented course, an important question is how to maximize this limited exposure so that they see the general relevance of philosophical thinking in their work and, one hopes, how some specific techniques may assist them in their teaching. Thus, I am arguing that teachers and how they perceive their own work, in terms of philosophical insights, must be prior to considerations of how they can use these insights in the classroom. In this vein, I would like to suggest some contemporary ways the philosophy of education can be taught to meet these goals.

In recent years there has been a rather dramatic shift in how undergraduate and graduate courses in the philosophy of education are being taught. Historically, these courses adopted a "systems" approach where the topics of idealism, realism, pragmatism and existentialism were examined as to their philosophical origins and their applicability to educational problems and issues. This approach often assumed (wrongly) at least two things: (1) that prospective and practicing teachers had training in philosophy, and (2) that meaningful parallels could be drawn between various philosophical "schools-of-thought" and actual day-to-day educational problems. Experience has suggested that on both accounts these assumptions, in particular the last one, have not been true.

More recent developments in the philosophy of education have taken as their starting point the analysis of concepts that are more central to the work teachers do. That is to say, instead of asking how a "realist", for instance, would view teaching, the question now asked is, "what does 'teaching' mean?" Or, even more specifically, "what do people called teachers do?" This shift in the direction of asking certain types of philosophical questions can be traced to the newer developments in philosophy that go by the various labels of "logical positivism", "analytic philosophy" and "ordinary language analysis." Although the complicated history of this development cannot be traced here (see Morton White, 1955), the impact of certain philosophers associated with this "movement", such as Russell, Wittgenstein, Ayer, Austin, Moore and Ryle, had had a lasting effect on how many philosophers of education now do their work. This influence can be seen in such writers as Hirst and Peters (1971), Green (1971), Peters (1967), Scheffler (1960), Soltis (1978) and Wilson (1963), to mention but a few.

In its most basic sense, analytic philosophy is concerned with language, meaning and the vertification of propositions. It views the central task of philosophy as one of analyzing the statements people use, whether these statements are made by other philosophers, scientists, teachers, salesmen, or anyone else for that matter. Language is seen as the principal tool that people use to intentionally or unintentionally describe their understanding of the world, of "reality". Language is in one sense, then, a mirror by which we come to understand the structure of the world. The earlier "logical positivists" attempted to understand this structure by creating formal "languages" whose propositions had to be strictly evaluated by logical tools. Statements whose meaning could not be verified in this way (by their logical structures) were labelled as meaningless. This, of course, included many so-called metaphysical statements.

The later developments in language analysis shifted from trying to construct a formal language to analyzing how everyday language is used. The emphasis was now on the analysis of concepts in terms of their use. Language was thought to be a highly complex activity that could only be understood fully when the concepts imbedded in statements were fully analyzed. The purpose of philosophy was seen to be the unravelling of linguistic puzzles rather than creating formal systems of thought. Philosophy, in other words, was to be a tool to clarify ambiguities in language, and in so doing show that many so-called philosophical "problems" are simply due to the misunderstandings of how language is used. For example, in a well known work entitled The Concept of Mind (1949), Gilbert Ryle tried to show that our use of the concept "knowing" has to be seen as having more than one aspect. The common understanding of the term usually associates knowing with "knowing that"; that is, knowledge consists of verbal or symbol utterances about a state-of-affairs. Ryle was able to show, however, that there are other types of "knowing" which are different from "knowing that", for instance, "knowing how" to do something constitutes a form of knowledge that cannot be reduced to the former.

Educational Applications

Ryle's work as an important landmark in shifting the direction of language analysis. In turn, many philosophers of education saw that the methods of ordinary language analysis could be useful in looking at central educational concepts. Such concepts as "teaching", "knowing", "learning", "discipline", and "competency" became the basis for systematic analysis. The use of these concepts was related to how they apply to teachers and students separately and in their interaction between teachers and

students. For example, one can examine the concepts of "teaching" related to teachers, "learning" related to students, and the relationship of the two in the context of the classroom situation.

Within this very brief overview, I would like to cite some instances where the insights of language analysis can be useful in teacher-student relationships. Again, my basic premise is that the appreciation of philosophical thinking by teachers, and its possible classroom application, often depends on a brief course exposure. If the information gained is to have any direct relevance to practice, at least two criteria should be met: (1) insights by teachers into the central concepts of their own work, and (2) the use of some techniques that may be helpful in showing students the value of philosophical thinking. On the first point, I have found that teachers need to clarify their thinking on the term "teaching". This may seem strange since this is what they are supposed to do, but nevertheless this is one concept that present-scontinual difficulties.

I have found Green's (1971:4) analysis of the teaching act to be a helpful tool in getting students to think about the concept from a language analysis point-of-view. Green constructs typologies of teaching "acts" which are listed below:

The logical acts	The strategic acts	The insitutional acts
1. Explaining	1. Motivating	1. Collecting money
2. Concluding	2. Counseling	2. Chaperoning
3. Inferring	3. Evaluating	3. Patrolling the hall
4. Giving reasons	4. Planning	4. Attending meetings
5. Amassing evidence	5. Encouraging	5. Taking attendance
6. Demonstrating	6. Disciplining	6. Consulting parents
7. Defining	7. Questioning	7. Keeping reports
8. Comparing		

Green's purpose is to demonstrate that a seemingly simple concept such as teaching is quite complex. It involves many "acts" that need to be seen separately and also in the way they overlap. I have found it useful to have students attempt to create their own lists first, and then compare them with Green's typologies. A second step, excluding the institutional acts, is to then begin a deeper analysis of some of the concepts and their relationships with others.

The analysis of these concepts can, of course, go in many directions. However, several approaches have become more-or-less generally accepted as standard ways to proceed. Green, for instance, speaks of developing model (or paradigm) cases, contrary cases, borderline cases and invented cases (pp. 207-213.) While Solitis (1978: 92-107) uses the terms generic-type, differentiation-type and conditions-type of analysis. These approaches constitute, in general fashion, the "techniques" of ordinary language analysis. It should be pointed out that these techniques are not necessarily mutually exclusive or exhaustive but rather constitute a beginning point for the student to get a better understanding of analysis.

We may briefly illustrate these approaches by referring to the concept of "explaining" which was the first one under Green's description of logical acts. We begin by asking the teacher what it means "to explain" something to a student. One might begin with trying to construct a model (or paradigm) case or a generic-type case — the two are closely related. Basically, in a model case one attempts to define a concept by citing clear and simple examples of it. Going back to the idea of "use" mentioned earlier, we want to know how "explaining" is ordinarily used by teachers.

In constructing the model case, one may concentrate on uses of the term itself or on examples of it. Thus, "to explain" something may be related to "giving reasons." These reasons, in turn, may be of a certain type, depending on the nature of the required explanation. That is, there may be reasons that are sequentially related, as in historical explanations, or "casual" explanations, as in science, or the reasons given for ethical positions, and so on. One of the purposes of the model case, then, is to discover the necessary condition(s) for a given concept. For "explaining", the ability to give reasons would seem to be a necessary condition. We may also use a more specific example to illustrate the point. What would be involved in explaining the concept of a traingle? How could this serve as a model case of "explaining?" The necessary conditions would, of course, be a plane figure with three sides and three angles. These properties would also constitute the sufficient condition for being a triangle, and would be the ones used in explaining the concept.

The purpose of a contrary case is to test (logically) the characteristics that went into making up the model case. If we could discover, for instance, an case where a person "explained" something but did not give reasons, then we would have a contrary case. In the previous example, the teacher could simply give the properties (definition) of a triangle without citing any "reasons". If this state-of-affairs is possible, then a contrary case has been found. This in turn forces us to look at the concept "explaining" in possibly other ways.

If a contrary case is found, this may lead to a differentiation-type analysis. The typologies created by Green on teaching would be an example of this strategy. In an analogous way, "explaining", from Green's initial differentiation, could be extended in different ways. Perhaps we could make a case that "explaining" in the giving-reasons sense applies to knowledge claims that have to do with "explaining-that", while "explaining" in a non-giving-reasons sense might apply to cases of "explaining-how" — how to use a ruler, execute a tennis swing, etc.

Borderline cases present another way of analyzing concepts. In a borderline case, we are not primarily interested in discovering necessary conditions, or contrary or differentiating cases, but rather with examples of the concept that are relevant but yet do not clearly fall into other ways of categorizing. For instance, a teacher asks a student to "explain" what causes plants to grow. The student points to the sun and says nothing more. While most teachers would not accept this "explanation", it might be classified as a borderline case since the sun is necessary for explaining plant life.

Another type of analysis is concerned with invented cases. The purpose of the invented case is to create an imaginary situtation which highlights new, and originally unforseen, possibilities for analysis. For the idea of "explaining, we could use the borderline case mentioned above but extend it by asking if "explaining" in some sense is possible if we limit ourselves only to ostensive (i.e. pointing to) definitions. In a border sense, we could also ask if it is possible to "teach" without "explaining?" Lastly, a contextual analysis strives to identify a necessary condition (as in a model and generic cases) for a given case, but then attempts to vary the

context of use from one situation to another to see if the necessary condition still holds. Thus, does giving reasons in both the "explaining that" and "explaining how" senses differ when the context shifts from teaching in a classroom setting to parental instruction in the home?

These approaches consitute, in a general way, some of the strategies that can be used in ordinary language analysis. As can be seen, they are not necessarily mutually exhaustive or exclusive; different problems may call for the using different strategies, or a given problem may call for the use of more than one kind of strategy. The value for the teacher is to be able to recognize and call upon these methods in the context of classroom instruction.

In my own experience with beginning teachers, the language analysis point-of-view has been well received. Teachers feel it is helpful in both clarifying the meaning(s) of their profession and in providing tools that can be used in daily instruction. On this last point, teachers find the necessary and sufficent distinction especially helpful. Besides clarifying the way analysis is done in terms of the approaches mentioned above, this distinction can be used with children at both primary and secondary levels and across many subject matter areas.

For teachers who have no prior training in philosophy, the concepts of necessary and sufficient conditions can be taught in a variety of ways. I have found it useful to use both a verbal and numerical approach. Following Hospers (1967:291-292), a schematic outline like the following can be utilized where "C" refers to "cause" and "E" refers to "effect". Thus, where "C" is a necessary condition for "E".

(1) If not C, then not E, or
(2) If E, then C.

A variety of concrete examples can then be supplied to demonstrate how the distinction can be used in examining a model case related to teaching as a profession or some specific instructional problem. We might ask, for instance, what constitutes the relationship between "teaching" and "learning". That is to say, is "teaching" a necessary condition for "learning?" Or we might want to demonstrate to students that oxygen is a necessary condition for life on this planet, or that having gasoline in the car tank is necessary for the car to operate, and so on.

Likewise for a sufficient condition to hold, then:

(1) If not E, then not C, or
(2) If C, then E.

Again, the idea here would be to have examples of a sufficient condition that pertains to the more general aspects of the teaching profession itself, as well as other examples where the distinction could be used in actual classroom practice. Thus, we could say that in his/her role of imparting information, the teacher must also believe that the information is correct. Or put differently, teaching that "Columbus discovered 'America' in 1492" is an example of "knowing that" something is the case. Saying that the teacher "knows" this fact implies that he/she also believes it. To say that she "knows" it but does not believe it would be contradictory. Thus, "knowing that" something is the case is sufficient for "believing" it to be so. Likewise, students can be taught the sufficient-condition distinction through various examples: the existence of life on this planet is sufficient for the presence of oxygen (Manicas and Kruger, 1976), Mike's being a dog is sufficient for his being an animal (Ennis, 1969), jumping off the Empire State building is sufficient for dying, and so on.

Teachers can also demonstrate other relationships involving these distinctions, and by so doing increase the range of philosophical ideas in the classroom setting. For example, teachers can show the relationship between the necessary and sufficient conditions within a given statement. Using the example from Ennis (1969:26) again, "If Mike is a dog, then Mike is an animal", one can show how, given two statements, if one is sufficient for the other, the other must be necessary. Depending on the level and willingness of the students, the teacher may build on the distinction by introducing the general idea of conditional statements, the concepts of "argument", "truth" and "validity" and, perhaps, some related ideas such as "biconditional", "converse", "contrapositive", and so on.

Summary

In this brief paper, I have attempted to show that in most school settings the value of philosophical thinking has to be transmitted, at best, in indirect ways. This is due to the amount of training present and prospective teachers receive in philsophical analysis. Usually, this consists of a one semester course which presupposes no prior work in philosophy. Given this limited exposure, the question of what is to be selected and how it is to be applied becomes crucial.

One approach, suggested here, is to introduce teachers into the purposes and techniques of "ordinary language analysis". While not denying the value of the more traditional approaches to the philosophy of education, my own experience has been that teachers are interested in those types of analyses which give them insights into their own professional problems while also serving as a vehicle for possible classroom application. Ordinary language analysis serves this dual purpose in that it permits teachers to analyze such crucial concepts as "profession", "teaching", "knowing" and "learning", and also gives them some logical tools that are useful in concept clarification in the classroom setting. Thus, while teaching philosophy in the schools is an admirable goal, the reality is severly limited by the training teachers presently receive and the cut-backs in funding now affecting most school districts. Thus, the limited exposure that most teachers received should be maximized, and it seems that ordinary language analysis is one means of accomplishing this goal.

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