(NOTE: this paper earned 24/24; it was exemplary in all components. The Beginning Questions reflection was particularly strong)
Philosophy of Education

Introduction

My philosophy of education was formed at a young age as a result of my experiences in school, and consequently is has been undoubtedly flawed. I was a dedicated, motivated, student, with little desire to question the nature of my education; I simply came to school, swallowed whole the instruction of the day, and devoted myself to performing well - whether that was in factoring polynomials or memorizing the genus and species of the common flowers of California. All of it seemed important (though little truly seemed interesting), and I did not understand those students who gave little effort or time to education. I entered the teaching profession five months ago with a similar view; my worldview has changed.

Education is important; it is important to expand knowledge, acquire capabilities, and assimilate facts, such as the reagents involved in beta-glucan synthesis, into the deep recesses of the brain (where they will most likely never be accessed again), but there are more factors at play than a student's ability to grasp an abstract concept or study effectively for a test. Motivation, interest, intrigue, practicality, connection, and personal value are the principal elements of education. The attainment of knowledge, sound logic, and the ability to reason, whether it is preferable to the educator or not, come second to a student's affective well-being. Though most educators enter the field because they love their subject, only those who understand, embrace, and satisfy the students' affective needs will be truly successful. Elements of idealism, essentialism, pragmatism, and perennialism have influenced my development of educational philosophy; aspects of each are found in my personal views.
World View and Purpose of Education

My worldview is plastic to some extent, but certain aspects are inflexible. For example, I believe in one God and His Son's sacrifice for mankind's sins. Therefore, each human has immense value, life has genuine purpose, and morality is not relative (it is definite). The malleable portions of my worldview include how my beliefs are expressed. The expression of my beliefs, though the core beliefs do not change, has changed through the years, and I anticipate it will continue to morph as new experiences, revelation, and information from experts offer perspective. For example, though morality is important, I have held that affirmation should be withheld until submission and repentance takes place, but I no longer regard that perspective valid. In an educational setting, this can be readily applied. Affirmation and encouragement must be offered regardless of a student's apparent effort or appropriate attitude - after all, it is His kindness that leads to repentance. I believe relationships in education should function similarly. In no way, however, should affirmation of students undermine expectations or standards.

The purpose of education is multifaceted. The procuration of knowledge in diverse disciplines per the California state standards is a given. This is the primary focus that the vast majority of parents, guardians, administrators, and teachers can agree upon. Analyzing the topic at a deeper degree though, one may come to the conclusion that the reason for this accumulation of knowledge is evidently to produce capable and successful contributing community members. Given this larger purpose of education, some leeway regarding the methods by which a student meets the state standards may be given. A teacher, for example, should have to liberty to select texts that relate and pertain to their specific demographic. Character education must be emphasized through these texts. It is the subconscious mantra of each teacher to kill two (or
three) birds with one stone whenever possible; time is of the essence, and character education is a fundamental portion of the purpose of education that must be integrated into the curriculum as each teacher sees fit - it is important for students to graduate with substantial knowledge, but also with a substantial moral compass.

**Metaphysics**

The metaphysics pertaining to my philosophical viewpoints are an amalgam of idealism, perennialism, and pragmatism. Like Plato, I strive to know and reflect ideals in my life. I believe a perfect or ideal state exists for each situation and person, and there is always a morally and upstanding position that can be taken. Morality is not relative; it is certain. Practical knowledge, like the perennialists may condone, can be derived from what is tried and true. Information and human reason that stands the test of time can be considered useful for instruction; the latest whim of the educational society is unreliable, and therefore must be tempered with caution. Outside of God's revelation, I adhere to pragmatic philosophy - what is real is what is practical, applicable, and useful (what can be discerned with objective observations).

**Epistemology**

My views of metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology are related - one affects the other. What is true is based upon what is real. My beliefs concerning what is real about Jesus dictate what is true. Since I believe He is God, I hold to His words as absolute truth. The interpretation of some of His words may differ from person to person, and also my understanding may alter through the years, but the source of truth remains the same. As a result, there does exist a standard by which to reason by - understanding and defining that standard is the difficult part.

Human reason, aside from the revelation of God, still has purpose and value, as long as it
does not contradict the truth expressed through Jesus. What has stood the test of time (perennialism) and what is practical (pragmatism) is also true, if it does not contradict expressed revelation. Our experiences shape our understanding of truth; some truth can only be completely comprehended through experience.

**Axiology**

Though the ideal human is beautiful, flawed humans (and there are plenty) are also beautiful because of the grace and forgiveness afforded to mankind through Jesus. If He found flawed humans beautiful, so should we. Value, then, is derived from the nature of humanity; value is inherent in each person. No single person is less valuable than another. Mankind is the most valuable being; nature does not hold a higher place, because this truth is originated from God. Any action, system, procedure, product, art, effort, or thought that affirms the value of humans as children of God is both beautiful and valuable. What negates the value of humans or of God is detestable and ugly.

**Role of the Teacher**

The role of the teacher is to equip students for success. This role is dual pronged; one focus is the content area, the other focus is character education.

Teachers in California must follow the California state standards. The majority has agreed upon these standards and that is what teachers are employed to do. At times the material may seem dull or disagreeable, but teachers are employees, not sovereign rulers of children. Teachers answer to the state, administration, and parents. The focus of all teaching should be to equip students to be successful, so applications to real life must be made consistently.

Character education always has the end goal of producing morally upright citizens, but one's epistemology may influence how character is taught. If it is believed that people are
inherently evil, the best character education can do is control students through reward and punishment. But, if people have equal potential for good, or even subconscious tendencies for good, character education will be approached differently. The latter is my opinion. Character education must be approached with the belief that people naturally want to make good choices - it is only ignorance or irrational fear or shame that hinders people. The goal of character education and part of the role of the teacher is to debunk fear that may hold a student back from expressing their inner desire to be altruistic, and also to provide logic for students that need to make clear connections about their decisions and the effects of those decisions.

**The Nature of the Learner**

All students want to learn and be successful, but unfortunately students enter a classroom with previous life experiences that have thwarted their growth. Students enter with predispositions and baggage that affects them. Each student is different, and each student carries different amounts of baggage in varying forms. A portion of the class may come ready to learn, relatively self-controlled, and open for instruction. The remainder of the students, however, have affective filters, counter-productive philosophies, or domestic unrest that act as obstacles to development. Negative past experiences with peers or teachers, such a cutting sarcasm, may produce affective filters. The filter must be removed for learning to take place. Sometimes this is an arduous task and it takes time for trust to be built. Some students enter with counter-productive philosophies, believing that the weight of responsibility lies solely on adults to produce learning in an individual. This is a belief in entitlement, and it is difficult to uproot. These students need to be in a position to make choices and see how those choices affect them. They cannot be coddled, especially at the high school level, and they must be shown how their logic is flawed and will result in an unsuccessful life. The students that have domestic unrest - a
verbally or physically abusive parent or sibling - are so emotionally scattered that they find it tough to focus on one thing for more than a few minutes without getting restless. These students must be given some leeway, some grace, be affirmed regularly, but also have high standards.

**Effective instructional Strategies**

When it comes to instruction I lean towards perennialism and essentialism; I believe that what has stood the test of time is valuable. Conversely, what has not stood the test of time should be modified. If the best instructional strategy consistently produces mediocre results, it is time to branch out and try new things. What has worked decently in the past is ok for a time, but the goal is to have 100% engagement, and if that goal is not being met, the teacher should experiment and modify old practices. Despite the need to modify instructional styles, tried and true methods have deep validity.

It is important for the students to be supplied with only what is essential to their success. Backward design must always be implemented. The teacher should always ask, "What do I want the students to get out of this?" Instructional strategies must be structured to accommodate the end goals. Formative assessment can play an important part in a child's learning process. The goal, after all, is to learn the material - not to get it right on a one-time summative test.

**Curriculum Scope and Sequence**

The scope of curriculum should cover the California state standards; the sequence is up to the teacher to decide. I believe it is important to start out a semester very slow, establishing routines and confidence in students so that heavier loads of information may be applied as the semester progresses. Although there is a lot of information to cover, the students must be a part of the 'discovery' process. Socratic questioning plays a big part of my class discussions, and students are included in choosing what they learn in this form to some degree, an element of
learning a pragmatist may endorse. Limited choice between equally beneficial and challenging topics upholds high standards, but also allows for freedom of expression. Concepts in interpreting literature, composition, and speech will build upon one another. Time focusing of one particular area will be extensive - I do not believe in a survey of any topic - in depth focus is the best way to truly learn something.

**Comparing Beginning Questions**

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<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Beginning Response</th>
<th>Current Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the main purpose of...</td>
<td>The purpose of education is to provide a structured format that presents students with opportunities to learn about fundamental concepts and develop fundamental skills. Education only provides the opportunity for learning, but it does not guarantee that learning will occur. Education simply provides an environment conducive to learning.</td>
<td>I now believe that education must include character education. The goal is to produce contributing citizens, so an emphasis on character must exist. This can be integrated into the curriculum, especially in English and literature classes.</td>
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<td>Who is responsible for a child's...</td>
<td>There are a variety of parties responsible for a child's education; they include: teachers, parents, administrators, and the children themselves. One cannot force a child to learn, so it is imperative that children take responsibility for their own education. However, it is important for the teacher as...</td>
<td>I have not changed my opinion on this topic. I still think the responsibility for a child's education is on many parties.</td>
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<td>Question</td>
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<td>What is the behavioral nature of students that teachers may encounter?</td>
<td>A variety of behavioral predispositions may be encountered in the classroom. Students come in many forms: unmotivated, intrinsically motivated, extrinsically motivated, disruptive, emotionally needy, special needs (ADD), etc. In short, the behavioral nature of students is sporadic, plastic, and diverse. Their behavioral nature is a result of their environment, predispositions, and past experiences. The teacher has influence only over the classroom environment, which means that many problems may arise that are rooted in realm of influence the teacher cannot access.</td>
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<td>Why?</td>
<td>I still agree with this. I would add that relationship is key. It is difficult to have relationship with an authoritarian style.</td>
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<td>The significant adults (parents, teachers) in the lives of children should be: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, democratic, or other? Why?</td>
<td>Significant adults should be authoritative. Control is an illusion that authoritarian teachers have bought in to. Perhaps the classroom of an authoritarian teacher is silent, but learning is not likely to be occurring at the level of an authoritative teacher's class. Permissive and democratic classrooms are chaotic because students do not know what is best for them yet; there must be rigid standards and expectations, supported by consequences for breaking negative behavior. I still agree with this. I would add that relationship is key. It is difficult to have relationship with an authoritarian style.</td>
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<td>What should a teacher</td>
<td>Learning is the ultimate goal in teaching.</td>
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<td><strong>primarily seek to achieve?</strong></td>
<td>The extent to which a student learns is evidenced by their ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the material. Although character education is an aspect of education, it is not what a grade is based upon.</td>
<td>on character education, but character education should be incorporated into the curriculum.</td>
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<td><strong>Which style of teaching is the most effective and why?</strong></td>
<td>An authoritative style of teaching with differentiated instruction and assessment is the most effective. The teacher must be able to relate to the students, but not in a democratic or authoritarian way. The teacher needs to walk a line of relationship between friendship and aloof dictatorship.</td>
<td>Strict consequences are tough to administer without be authoritarian, and even when it is done in an authoritative way, students may perceive it though an authoritarian filter. Trial and error, I suppose, is the only way to acquire this skill.</td>
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<td><strong>Who should be responsible to design/select curriculum?</strong></td>
<td>The administration, department chair, and the teacher should work together to select and design instruction. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the administration to present parents with well-equipped students that meet the state standards, so therefore they should have some say in the process. The chain of command then falls to the department chair, who directs and influences decisions for the department.</td>
<td>I would also add that if a parent does not wish their child to be taught a certain text, they must be given the right to select an equal, appropriate text to replace it. In this way, parents have some say over the curriculum.</td>
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The administration and department chair handle the "big ideas" of curriculum and the teachers figure out how to teach those ideas.

**Conclusion**

My goal as an English teacher is to produce effective communicators. Students will only buy in to this purpose if they first believe that people are important. If students feel valuable themselves, they will also see value in other people and see the importance of effective communication. An authoritative style that corrects inappropriate or sarcastic behavior is essential to create a positive and safe learning environment. Students must be safe and free, feel protected and valued. The environment is key to the acquisition of content information as well as character development. Without relationship, students will not connect with the material.