

168

Dr. Albert Nissman  
Rider College  
Trenton, New Jersey 08602

About 2100 words  
(exclusive of tables)

ED 072026

PRAGMATISM PROFESSED; REALISM REJECTED : A RESEARCH STUDY OF PHILOSOPHICAL

BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

by

Dr. Albert Nissman

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,  
EDUCATION & WELFARE  
OFFICE OF EDUCATION  
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRO-  
DUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM  
THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIG-  
INATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPIN-  
IONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY  
REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDU-  
CATION POSITION OR POLICY

Need and Purposes for the Study

Too often, too many teachers, principals, yea, even professors of education and their deans have minimized the need and the importance of the Educational Foundations courses in general, and Philosophy of Education in particular. However, this researcher, a professor of Educational Foundations and Research, deems it vital for all educational practitioners to have a philosophical framework upon which to base their practices. There must be a rationale, a gestalt, a carefully thought-out and thought-through sense of purpose in professional practices. Otherwise, the practices degenerate into a shooting from the hip in all directions with dum-dum bullets, as it were. That is to say, the practices though deep are directionless and scattered.

Thus the purposes of this study can be summarized in these terms:

- 1) To investigate the intellectual and subjective subscription of Philosophy of Education Students to four philosophies of education.
- 2) To investigate whether the strength of subscription to these various philosophies change, as the result of exposure to an appropriate level course in which

SP 106 113

these philosophies and their roles in the current educational scene are examined and discussed.

### Statement of the Problem

Since 1968, this researcher has taught a graduate course in Philosophy of Education (Ed. 503), and since 1970 an undergraduate course in Development of Educational Thought (Ed.445). It was never his intention to proselytize his students, to convert them to his way of thinking. Rather, much to the contrary, he has felt that for the courses to have any efficacy, they must involve a scraping of the innards. He was not seeking disciples. He was seeking a way to expose the students to the differences in the variegated views of philosophies as applied to the educational enterprise. For years, the students had answered the questions. Now it was time for them to question the answers. Thus it was that although the writer is an eclectic (who really isn't?) with a heavy pragmatic strain, he sought to operate each course with a discussion of The Six Philosophical Questions, The Four Crucial Questions, and The Four Premises.

### The Six Philosophical Questions

What is man's origin?

What is man's nature?

What is man's destiny?

What is good?

What is true (real)?

What is beautiful?

Who can deny that the scraping of our innards by these fundamental questions must lead to an educational position, a human view, a re-evaluation of what it is that we fundamentally believe as educational practitioners?

#### The Four Crucial Questions

Who are my students?

What shall they be taught? How? Why?

For what purpose?

And by whom?

It is this researcher's view that much of the problem in education stems from the obvious fact that teachers do not typically view the natures, the abilities, and the capacities of their students first. They think in terms of subject matter first, and then it is without thinking of organically related methodology. Further, what is the justification? What is the purpose of teaching/learning a particular discipline and what kind of teacher is needed? These questions are crucial, indeed :

#### The Four Premises

Each course, too, was based on The Four Premises:

- 1) That there is no perfectly developed or absolutely closed , static philosophy of education.
- 2) That philosophy is more important, more practical than the so-called practical.

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 072 026

SP 006 113

AUTHOR Nissman, Albert  
TITLE Pragmatism Professed; Realism Rejected: A Research  
Study of Philosophical Beliefs and Practices.  
PUB DATE [72]  
NOTE 14p.  
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.65 HC-\$3.29  
DESCRIPTORS \*Educational Philosophy; \*Educational Research;  
Educational Theories; \*Graduate Study; \*Student  
Attitudes; \*Undergraduate Study

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the intellectual and subjective subscription of philosophy of education students to four philosophies of education and whether the strength of subscription changes as a result of exposure to an appropriate level course in which these philosophies are discussed. Sixty-three graduate and 63 undergraduate students were pre- and posttested using the "What Is Your Philosophy of Education" test. Validity and reliability for this instrument have not been established. Data was gathered and responses were noted for each of the four philosophical views: idealist, realist, pragmatist, and Aristotelian. For the total statistical analysis, the number of students subscribing to each philosophy was artificially obtained. Results indicated that Pragmatism exerts the major philosophical influence on students of education on the graduate and undergraduate levels. Further findings, recommendations, and implications are suggested. A four item bibliography is included.  
(MJM)

for

As a summary of findings, it may be stated the total student sample -- graduate and undergraduate - that

- 1) 55% of the students subscribed to the Pragmatic philosophy.
- 2) 22% of the students subscribed to the Idealistic philosophy.
- 3) 17% of the students subscribed to the Aristotelian philosophy.
- 4) Only 6% of the students subscribed to the Realistic philosophy.
- 5) Thus more than half of the students subscribed to Pragmatism, and less than half subscribed to Idealism, Aristotelianism, and Realism combined.

### Conclusions

- 1) Hypothesis # 1 -- a heavy preponderance of student responses are and will continue to be pragmatic -- was supported.
- 2) Hypothesis #2 --there is no significant difference between student responses on the pre- and post-test -- was supported.
- 3) Hypothesis #3 -- there is no significant difference between the graduate responses and the undergraduate responses --was supported.
- 4) Hypothesis #4 --there is no change in the proportion of students subscribing to a particular educational philosophy -- was supported.

Therefore, it was concluded that Pragmatism exerts the major philosophical influence on students of education -- graduate and undergraduates.

Recommendations and Implications

- 1) Whether the results of this study are because of (or in spite of) the professor, the text(s), discussions, etc. will never be known for certainty.
- 2) Ed. 445 and Ed. 503 (with one exception) both begin with discussions of Pragmatism.
- 3) Two texts begin with readings in Pragmatism and related philosophies, and the third text was used, beginning with Pragmatism. The fourth text discussed Pragmatism fourth.
- 4) More class time in both courses, graduate and undergraduate, was spent on Pragmatism.
- 5) The preponderance of pragmatists is consonant with the actual case in America. Our schools, especially the public schools, are largely under the influence of Pragmatism.
- 6). It is obvious, too, that although 1574/2940 responses were pragmatic, other schools were also represented. That is to say, that no one person subscribes to any one philosophy in its entirety to the exclusion of all other philosophical concepts. (There was one exception: a student who was completely pragmatic pre and post.)
- 7). The least subscribed to philosophy seems to be realism because of its implications of objective data, <sup>being</sup> transmitted to computer-like students.
- 8) However, there seems to be a dichotomy between "lip service" given to Pragmatism and the very actual practice of realism in the typical classroom of America.

Apparently, students enter college for pre-service and/or in-service teacher-education with relatively fixed ideas about what education ought to be. And these ideas are not too amenable to change according to the present data. But this does not in any way diminish the efficacy of the courses in Philosophy of Education if one views these courses as viable vehicles of intellectual challenge and philosophical exposure instead of a means for philosophical conversion.

But there is an element of disturbance. The findings may be indicative of the fact that in our diversely pluralistic culture we have difficulty in finding a consensus of purpose and method within the bounds of formal education.

It seems a paradox that in a world which has seen a man put on the moon, which has seen the heart transplanted, that we have not yet had the courage and the foresight to separate the nonsense from the wisdom in our educational process. 2.

### Bibliography

Butler, J. Donald. Four Philosophies: And Their Practice in Education and Religion. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968.

lon.

### Bibliography (continued)

1

Morris, Van Cleve. Modern Movements in Educational Philosophy. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969

Dr. Albert Nissman is Associate Professor of Education in the Graduate Division of Rider College, Trenton, New Jersey. He served as the professor for all classes represented in this study.

---

2. John Mathias, Graduate Student, Rider College, Summer 1972.