

What Would Socrates Do? An Exploratory Study of Methods, Materials, and Pedagogies in High School Philosophy

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Abstract

For over half a century, North American philosophers and teachers have been interested in introducing philosophy courses at the high school level. In 1995, such a course was introduced into the curriculum for the Canadian province of Ontario, making it the first and only English-speaking jurisdiction in North America to have philosophy as part of its official curriculum, yet to date no investigation of how these courses are taught exists. Our research addresses this gap in the literature by describing the results of the exploratory stage of our empirical investigation into the practices of Ontario high school philosophy teachers. A survey reveals that they tend to rely heavily on textbooks and employ a wide range of pedagogies in their philosophy classes, favoring discussion and lecture, despite mixed perceptions about their effectiveness.

Background: Philosophy in North American K-12 Curriculum

Interest in philosophy courses at the high school level has been a topic of discussion for over half a century (see, e.g., Ayim, 1980; Jopling, 2000; Morgan & Perry, 1958-1959). This interest continues, as illustrated by the formation of the North American High School Philosophy Association (NAHSPA) at the 2004 American Philosophical Association (APA) Central Division Meeting. NAHSPA brings together an international group of teachers and academics to explore the possibilities of philosophy in high schools across North America.

Proponents of high school philosophy eloquently describe the many benefits that students can derive from the opportunity to engage in philosophical thought and discussion. Ayim (1980) reflects the perspectives that advocate for high school philosophy courses. As such, she envisions that a high school philosophy program is one that:

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might have the advantage of helping students to continue asking significant questions, keeping open the road to inquiry and to alternatives, investing less in infallible answers than in a rigorous method, and analyzing and evaluating their own decisions in a world that has never been in greater need of rethinking in such matters. (p. 21)

Ayim suggested, then, that the study of philosophy allows students to explore important questions and issues while building critical thinking skills and dispositions which serve them beyond narrow, instrumentalist educational aims (excessively career-focused, for example) and tend more towards liberal and democratic aims of education.

Despite keen interest and compelling reasons, high school philosophy has not been widespread in North America. Introducing children and adolescents to philosophical thought, however, has made great strides, largely through the work of Matthew Lipman and his colleagues. The publication of Lipman's philosophical novel for children, *Harry Stottlemeier's discovery* (1974), and its use in Montclair Public Schools in New Jersey led to the formation of the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) at Montclair State University (Pritchard, 2006). Widespread adoption of "Philosophy for Children" (P4C) has occurred internationally. Unlike a "stand alone" course, however, P4C entails the integration of philosophy in conventional subjects, largely at the elementary school level.

In spite of P4C's documented success, philosophy has been neither widely nor consistently adopted at the high school level, although some exceptions do exist in the United States. Moore (1967) locates scattered examples of high school philosophy courses in approximately two dozen US schools. References to courses offered by individual schools appear in the literature (see, e.g., Decyk, 1999; Dorbolo, 1997), although no state or district curricula contain philosophy courses. Rather, instances of such courses appear to be locally-developed, and anecdotal evidence (see Decyk, 1999) suggests that university faculty members have played an important role in establishing such courses in their own communities.

Context: Ontario's Centrally-Developed High School Philosophy Course

After significant lobbying effort on the part of a group supported by the Canadian Philosophical Association and by the chairs of all the Ontario philosophy departments, headed by Frank Cunningham, Ontario's Ministry of Education introduced a philosophy course into its secondary school system in 1995, making Ontario the first and only English-speaking jurisdiction in North America to have philosophy as part of its official secondary school curriculum although Quebec's CEGEP system has had a philosophy course available for a number of years (Jopling, 2000). The course was a non-compulsory Ontario Academic Course (OAC), offered to students in their fifth year of secondary school. In 1999, the Ontario Philosophy Teachers' Association (OPTA) was founded as an association for high school philosophy teachers, representing their interests locally and provincially and offering an annual conference.

A period of large-scale education reform began in 1998, including the gradual phasing out of OAC (thereby allowing students to graduate after four,

instead of five, years of high school) and the introduction of a new curriculum in Ontario. The number of high school courses offered in the province was reduced from approximately 1,400 to 200. Concurrently, two new non-compulsory philosophy courses were introduced to replace the former course. Given the overall reduction in choice of courses, philosophy fared extremely well. The new courses are: Philosophy: Questions and Theories (Grade 12), and Philosophy: The Big Questions (Grade 11). Because OAC was phased out, there was a period during which all three were offered.

While the introduction of the high school philosophy courses is notable, their existence would be meaningless without healthy enrolment. Ontario’s secondary school philosophy courses have been offered in approximately 300 Ontario schools between 1998 and 2005 with approximately 29,000 students presently enrolled. Ontario Ministry of Education data suggest that enrolment in high school philosophy courses has grown steadily since its introduction, with a slight decline in 2003-2004 academic year.

Figure 1 represents the percentage of all students enrolled in publicly funded Ontario Public and Catholic schools by grade who have taken a philosophy course based on data from the Ontario Ministry of Education. This set of data illustrates that enrolments within each grade cohort do appear to be increasing. We do not know, at this time, the reason for the lowered percentages in 2001-2002 and 2003-2004 academic years. As additional years of data become available, we will have a better sense of the overall trends. However, we see that in recent years, over 10% of all high school seniors have enrolled in the OAC or Grade 12 course in philosophy.

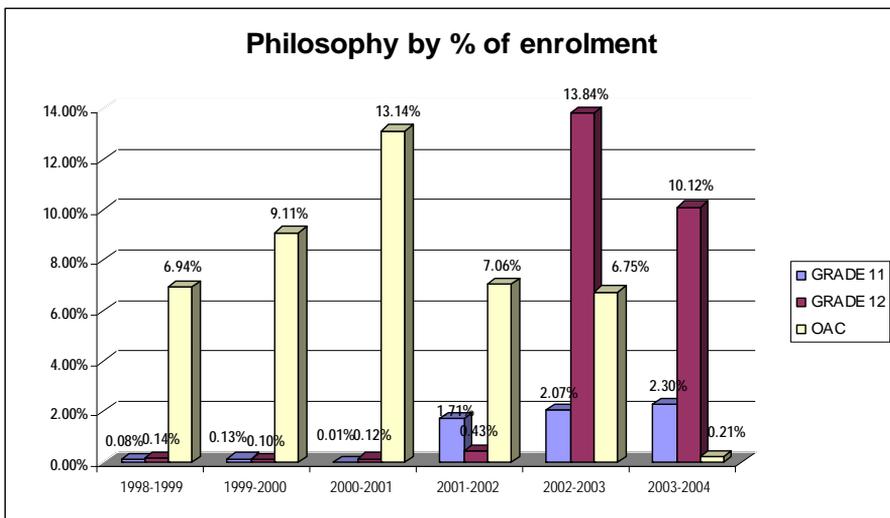


Figure 1. Philosophy by percentage of grade enrollment in Ontario.

Survey Design and Instrumentation

Since no empirical investigation of the content and structure of Ontario high school philosophy courses has been conducted to date, we sought to explore this issue through a survey administered to high school philosophy teachers, as well

as follow-up interviews in our second phase of research. This article presents the findings of our survey from the first phase of research.

The research, broadly speaking, addresses four objectives. Specifically, the first phase includes a survey that addresses the need to (1) determine how teachers conceptualize their ideal aims and pedagogies of teaching philosophy and (2) determine the differences in teaching methods between teachers with and without formal training in philosophy. Furthermore, data collected was used to facilitate the development of interview protocols for an interview study that addresses the need to (3) describe teachers' experiences of dealing with conflicts and controversies in their philosophy classes and (4) investigate whether religious education expectations come into conflict with philosophical rigor in Catholic schools. Thus, this survey sheds light on who is teaching Ontario high school philosophy, and how they are teaching it with respect to pedagogies and use of textbooks.

Members of the research team created a draft survey stemming from the research objectives and grounded in the academic literature. In particular, questions were designed to gather information about teachers' use of textbooks within the framework proposed by Apple and Christian-Smith (1991). The framework and questions are explained in subsequent sections of this paper. The team validated the survey through pilot exercises and revision. The final survey, which was administered online, had several discrete sections. The first section of the survey sought information about the respondents (i.e., gender, years having taught, subject certification, size and type of school, level of formal and information philosophy education, comfort level with teaching philosophy). The second section sought information about the materials used in class and how frequently they are used. The third section sought information about teachers' perceptions of textbooks and about how they use those textbooks. Finally, the last section asked teachers to report the frequency of pedagogical approaches used, and their perceived effectiveness in a philosophy setting.

Subjects and Methods

Potential respondents were contacted in several ways, as no comprehensive list or directory of high school philosophy teachers exists in the province. First, we invited previous research participants (from a 2005 OPTA survey) who had indicated interest in participating in future research by e-mail, and we encouraged them to forward the invitation to colleagues. Second, we sent invitations to participate directly to colleagues who teach philosophy in the high school system, again encouraging them to forward the invitation to colleagues. Third, Ontario school board curriculum coordinators were contacted directly, requesting that they pass along the invitation to any teachers within their school boards. Finally, an invitation to participate was made at the 2006 OPTA conference plenary session.

A total of 53 high school philosophy teachers responded. While the actual number of philosophy teachers in Ontario is unknown, it is offered in approximately 300 schools, suggesting a population of at least 300 or more teachers who may teach one or more section of philosophy per year. We can estimate that our respondents likely represent between 14% and 18% of the population. Approximately three-quarters of respondents are male and one-

quarter female. Just over half teach in a public secondary school, while the remainder teaches in separate Catholic and/or private schools.

The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS. First, frequencies were tabulated and cross-tabulations were conducted to determine the overall responses and to identify general differences among group responses. Chi-square tests and Kruskal-Wallis analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed to identify any differences across groups. Factor analysis was performed on the data to explore interrelationships among a set of variables through data reduction and interpretation.

Because the nature of this research was exploratory, several limitations are recognized. First, and foremost, since the precise population size and characteristics of high school philosophy teachers are unknown, we cannot with confidence generalize our findings to the population. Despite the fact that this phase of the research is merely exploratory and the characteristics of the sample cannot be projected with any confidence onto the population from which it is drawn, we feel the findings are nonetheless important and worthy of analysis as an initial contribution to the understanding of high school philosophy courses. Second, we cautiously note that some respondents may have attempted to appear educationally progressive or knowledgeable in the eyes of researchers by providing answers that do not reflect their actual views or practices.

Findings

Before we move to the findings relating to teachers' methods, materials and pedagogies, let us examine some general data collected about courses offered and teacher characteristics. This provides a general level of understanding about the school context, as well as teachers' educational backgrounds relating to philosophy.

While we had received official Ministry of Education data about enrolments (Figure 1), we investigated whether Ontario high school philosophy teachers perceived that enrolments were rising, declining, or remaining stable in their schools. Consistent with provincial trends reported in Figure 1, all suggested that philosophy enrolments are strong (56% reported that enrolments are "on the rise," while 42% reported they were "steady").

Next, we gathered data about which philosophy courses were offered at respondents' schools at the time of the survey. Most respondents (89%) teach in schools that offer philosophy in Grade 12, while only one-quarter offer philosophy in Grade 11.

We also investigated teachers' formal education levels (degrees, majors and their educational experiences in philosophy) as well subjects areas in which they are certified to teach. Thirty-two teachers report that they took one or more university courses in philosophy, though it was not their major. Ten participants report having majored in philosophy during their undergraduate education. At the time of the research, Ontario did not recognize philosophy as a "teachable subject" for certification. Amendments to Regulation 184/97 of the Ontario College of Teachers Act in 2007 led to the recognition of Philosophy as a Teachable Qualification in Ontario, effective in 2008. Thus, those who taught philosophy prior to 2008 are certified in other subject areas. Thirty-seven respondents report that they are certified to teach subjects in the humanities and

social sciences: the disciplinary category in which philosophy is situated in Ontario's curriculum policy documents. Specific teachable subjects in that area include history, geography, individual and society, and politics.

Homogeneity of Materials and Pedagogies Among Diverse Respondents

To address one of our research objectives, we examined the differences in teaching methods between teachers with and without formal training in philosophy. We also performed analyses based on other demographic data gathered to see if any significant difference existed that might shape the qualitative phase of our research. Statistical analysis of the data suggests that, regardless of age, gender, type of school and level of formalized philosophical education, respondents tend to have a homogeneous approach to use of materials as well as pedagogies in their high school philosophy classes.

Despite numerous rotations of the data through factor analysis, no factor loadings emerged to suggest that any variable groups hang together to describe approaches to teaching philosophy. However, two differences emerged across groups through significance testing. First, when asked, "How would you rate your knowledge of philosophy as it relates to your comfort level in teaching high school philosophy courses?", respondents with more formalized philosophy educations appear to have a higher level of comfort with the course ($F[5, 47]=7.56, p<0.001$) as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1
Comfort level cross-tabulated with philosophy background.

| How would you rate your knowledge of philosophy as it relates to your comfort level in teaching high school philosophy courses? | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| Which of the following best describes your highest level of formal education with respect to philosophy? | I consider myself an "expert" and my knowledge exceeds that necessary to teach this course | I am reasonably comfortable, and know enough to teach this course | I know enough to get by teaching this course |
| I am self-taught | 0 0.0% | 3 5.7% | 1 1.9% |
| I have taken professional development only | 0 0.0% | 0 0.0% | 1 1.9% |
| I have taken university courses, but it was not my major | 4 7.5% | 27 50.9% | 1 1.9% |
| I majored in philosophy in my undergraduate degree | 0 0.0% | 10 18.9% | 0 0.0% |
| I have a master's degree in philosophy | 4 7.5% | 1 1.9% | 0 0.0% |
| I have a doctoral degree in philosophy | 1 1.9% | 0 0.0% | 0 0.0% |
| Total | 9 17.0% | 41 77.4% | 3 5.7% |

The other statistically significant difference noted was that teachers in Southwestern Ontario and in the Greater Toronto Area tend to be more likely to view student skills as a challenge to their teaching ($F[4, 47]=6.41, p<0.001$). At this stage any possible unique geographical significance this finding might suggest—problematic as such an inference would be without a different set of data—is overshadowed by an apparent realization among teachers that they find themselves in a novel professional situation where pedagogical authority must be based upon something besides a mastery of subject matter: especially mastery of the kind that qualifies their administrative authority in the classroom simply by virtue of an intellectual superiority over students. Within these two regional cohorts, there is certainly the suggestion that philosophical subject matter and thinking presents a challenge to school structures that have traditionally relied on sharp intellectual and social distinctions between teachers and students for their everyday operations.

Taken as a whole, this statistical analysis suggests that regardless of age, gender, type of school and level of formalized philosophical education, respondents tend to have a homogeneous approach to use of materials as well as pedagogies in their high school philosophy classes. While the pedagogies and materials were homogenous, the statistically significant differences about perceived comfort level and perceptions about students provided us with potentially fruitful areas of investigation future research, and verification of the differences in comfort level which may bear on the findings that follow.

Textbooks and Their Use

Part of our research examined how Ontario high school philosophy teachers use textbooks and other classroom resources. The responses suggest that textbooks are widely used, which is not surprising since it is well-established in the educational literature that there is widespread use of textbooks in high school settings (see, e.g., Dove, 1998; Schug et al., 1997). As well, about two-thirds use textbooks weekly or more frequently. Six percent report that they follow the sequence of primary textbooks, while 77% report that they have their own sequence to the course, and select portions of the textbook to read. Thirty-nine percent report that they reviewed and selected the textbooks they use themselves, while 35% used what was already available in the department or school. Respondents report using teachers' guides relatively infrequently. Among teachers surveyed, 69% assign textbook readings weekly or more frequently (see Table 2).

As teachers of philosophy, one might expect to see an approach to textbook use that promotes critical thought and seeking out alternative perspectives. We analyze philosophy teachers' textbook use within the framework proposed by Apple and Christian-Smith (1991), who describe the nature of the interaction between the reader and the text. In a classroom context, both teachers and students are readers. More importantly, teachers play a role in guiding students' reading of texts. Teachers may provide guidelines for reading, questions for reflection, or guide discussion upon completion of reading. These are opportunities for teachers to encourage different approaches to student reading. They describe three ways to respond to, or interact with, texts: (1) dominated, (2) negotiated, and (3) oppositional (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991).

In the dominated approach, the reader accepts the message at face value. In a classroom context, this would involve positioning information in the text as “fact” and not seeking alternate perspectives nor questioning the content and its underlying assumptions. In the negotiated approach, the reader may dispute portions of the text, but tends to accept the overall interpretations presented. Finally, in the oppositional approach, the reader repositions herself in relation to the text, and takes on the position of the oppressed. In a classroom, this would involve questioning or encouraging students to question the overt and hidden messages in the text, and to seek out alternative conceptions and information (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991). Giroux (1983) would classify this as “counter-hegemonic classroom practice” (p. 60).

Table 2
Use of textbooks.

| How often do you... | Daily/ every class | | Almost every class | | Weekly (approx. every 5th class) | | Less than weekly (or less than approx. every 5th class) | | Never | |
|--|-----------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|---|-----|--|-----|-------|-----|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Assign readings from textbooks? | 3 | 6% | 14 | 26% | 17 | 37% | 8 | 15% | 4 | 8% |
| Assign questions or activities from a textbook teachers' guide? | 1 | 2% | 2 | 4% | 9 | 17% | 15 | 28% | 19 | 36% |
| Use lessons from a teachers' guide associated with a textbook as they appear in the teachers' guide? | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 7 | 13% | 15 | 28% | 24 | 45% |
| Adapt lessons from a teachers' guide associated with a textbook? | 0 | 0% | 3 | 6% | 8 | 15% | 13 | 25% | 22 | 42% |
| Consciously incorporate materials that conflict with contradict or present an alternative point-of-view from the text? | 3 | 6% | 9 | 17% | 13 | 25% | 14 | 26% | 6 | 11% |
| Ask students to look for “hidden” messages in an overall reading in a textbook? | 6 | 11% | 7 | 13% | 8 | 15% | 12 | 23% | 11 | 21% |
| Ask students to identify which/whose perspectives are represented or missing from readings in a text? | 6 | 11% | 9 | 17% | 10 | 19% | 10 | 19% | 10 | 19% |
| Discuss the inclusion/exclusion of diverse perspectives in textbook readings with students? | 4 | 8% | 10 | 19% | 14 | 26% | 10 | 19% | 8 | 15% |

The data we collected provides some insight into how teachers use textbooks within the Apple and Christian-Smith (1991) framework based on a number of questions (Tables 2 and 3). We asked teachers a number of specific questions about their textbook use so we could establish the degree to which their

pedagogy reflects dominant, negotiated or oppositional approaches. First, we inquired about how frequently they “consciously incorporate materials that conflict with, contradict, or present an alternative point-of-view to the text.” The more frequently conflicting or contradictory materials are provided, the more oppositional the approach can be inferred. Survey responses suggest that 23% of respondents provide such material daily or almost every class, suggesting a consistently oppositional approach in these cases. Half of respondents do this weekly or less frequently (suggesting more a negotiated approach), while eleven percent never engage in this practice (suggesting a dominant approach).

Table 3
Teachers’ perceptions of textbooks.

| | -2 | | -1 | | 0 | | 1 | | 2 | | |
|---|----|-----|----|-----|----|-----|----|-----|----|-----|---|
| Lack sufficient points-of-view | 3 | 7% | 2 | 5% | 6 | 14% | 13 | 30% | 19 | 44% | Have sufficient points-of-view |
| Too easy | 3 | 7% | 4 | 9% | 17 | 40% | 15 | 35% | 4 | 9% | Too hard |
| Superficial content | 2 | 5% | 4 | 9% | 14 | 33% | 13 | 30% | 10 | 23% | Deep or rich content |
| Hinder critical thinking | 1 | 2% | 4 | 9% | 7 | 16% | 16 | 37% | 15 | 35% | Foster critical thinking |
| Similar views | 4 | 9% | 10 | 23% | 23 | 53% | 4 | 9% | 2 | 5% | Dissimilar views |
| Necessary | 10 | 23% | 10 | 23% | 12 | 28% | 3 | 7% | 8 | 19% | Not necessary |
| Relevant | 23 | 55% | 8 | 19% | 6 | 14% | 4 | 10% | 1 | 2% | Not relevant |
| Do(es) not reflect the perspectives or positions I wish to convey | 1 | 2% | 2 | 5% | 15 | 35% | 15 | 35% | 10 | 23% | Do(es) reflect the perspectives or positions I wish to convey |
| Historical approach | 2 | 5% | 6 | 14% | 13 | 31% | 18 | 43% | 3 | 7% | Problem-based approach |

Next, we asked teachers how often they ask students to identify perspectives included and excluded from texts, and also how often they “discuss the inclusion or exclusion of diverse perspectives in textbook readings”. The more they ask students to identify included and excluded perspectives, and discuss issues around diverse perspectives, the more we infer an oppositional approach. Twenty-eight percent ask students to identify perspectives included and excluded from texts daily or every class, 38% do this weekly or less frequently, and 19% do not do this at all. Similarly, 27% report that they “discuss the inclusion or exclusion of diverse perspectives in textbook readings” daily or almost every class; 45% do this weekly or less frequently; and, 15% do not do this at all. Together, these data suggest that approximately one-quarter of teachers interact with the textbook in oppositional ways on a regular basis, while the remaining proportion tend to fall within a negotiated or dominant approach.

To investigate perceptions of textbooks, matched-pairs of phrases were used (see Table 3 for details). Respondents tended to perceive textbooks as having a

sufficient number of points of view, and are neither too easy nor too hard, neither too superficial nor too deep. Over 70% perceive that textbooks used foster critical thinking. Relatively few feel that textbooks do not reflect positions they wish to convey.

Taken as a whole, these responses indicate that respondents tend to have favourable views of the textbooks that they use, which may explain the finding that most use textbooks regularly. Consistent with favourable views on those books, one-quarter of those philosophy teachers surveyed engage in what might be an “oppositional” approach to textbook reading with students as described above, while the remaining 75% fall somewhere between negotiated and dominant.

Why do such a large proportion of philosophy teachers avoid engaging students in oppositional reading of textbooks? Teachers may not be in a position, for many reasons, to reflect upon, nor have students interact in a critical way, with textbooks in their entirety. There are several factors that might lead to the use of dominated and negotiated approaches. Teachers in Ontario are faced with two important resource constraints: limited time to address course content and limited funds available for classroom materials. Apple (2001) believes that the reason that conservative educational policies dominate is that teachers do not have realistic alternatives for use the classroom to share with students and guide lessons and planning. As a result, they turn to textbooks. Though other curriculum materials are available, teachers may not have time to locate them, nor funds to acquire them.

Also, teachers may not be aware of, nor trained to facilitate and encourage, critical inquiry among students. Data collected from the survey suggests that a relatively small proportion of high school philosophy teachers surveyed have formal training in philosophy. They may be uncomfortable taking a critical approach simply because they have not established sufficient subject-matter knowledge, and so rely heavily on the textbook’s format as a professional crutch, and its content as an intellectual recourse. Their public confidence in challenging what they themselves are only just learning could be mistaken for undermining their classroom authority. These teachers may be reduced to maintaining order as a survival mechanism: a finding which raises questions for further research.

Range and Perceptions of Pedagogies Employed

The use of multiple pedagogical approaches is encouraged in the North American teaching profession. Overall, the data suggest that a wide range of approaches to teaching and learning are utilized, though teachers tend to rely on lecture and discussion most heavily. By far, class discussion (used “almost every class” and “every class” by nearly three-quarters of respondents) and lecture (used “almost every class” and “every class” by 37% of respondents) are the most frequently utilized pedagogies, while role playing and guest speakers are the least frequently used. Cooperative learning strategies, independent work, and problem-based strategies are also relatively frequently used by respondents, in most cases on a weekly basis. A number of additional strategies are used “less than weekly.”

Guided class discussion is perceived as “very effective” by the largest proportion of respondents (87%), followed by problem-based applied philosophy (79%), media (videos and DVDs) (68%), and cooperative learning (66%). While

these are consistent with the most frequently-used strategies cited by respondents, lecture was among the most-used strategies, but considered by only 44% to be “very effective.” This finding may warrant further investigation since it appears counter-intuitive that an instructional strategy considered less effective would be widely utilized. Pedagogical approaches perceived as least effective by respondents are quizzes and knowledge-based tests. At this point, we might speculate that recourse to teacher-led instruction is a matter of practical expediency and pressure on their preparation time, especially if they are under-prepared to teach this subject. Also, some methods other than lecture may be misperceived as *more effective* because they are used less frequently and so maintain student attention only because of their novelty and not because of some intrinsic pedagogical superiority. Detailed responses about perceived effectiveness of various pedagogical approaches are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4
Teachers’ perceptions of pedagogical effectiveness.

| | Not effective | Somewhat effective | Very effective | Never used this | Response Total |
|--|---------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Independent reading and independent work | 4% (2) | 41% (19) | 54% (25) | 0% (0) | 46 |
| Cooperative learning strategies that are based on readings (e.g., jigsaw/expert group, think/pair/share, etc.) | 0% (0) | 26% (12) | 66% (31) | 9% (4) | 47 |
| Philosophers’ café | 6% (3) | 19% (9) | 45% (21) | 30% (14) | 47 |
| Guided class discussion | 0% (0) | 11% (5) | 87% (41) | 2% (1) | 47 |
| Formal class debate | 6% (3) | 38% (18) | 36% (17) | 19% (9) | 47 |
| Independent research on issues | 0% (0) | 49% (23) | 51% (24) | 0% (0) | 47 |
| Individual or group presentations or seminars on specific topics | 2% (1) | 32% (15) | 64% (30) | 2% (1) | 47 |
| Role-playing | 4% (2) | 23% (11) | 34% (16) | 38% (18) | 47 |
| Guest speakers | 2% (1) | 28% (13) | 26% (12) | 45% (21) | 47 |
| Lecture | 6% (3) | 43% (20) | 47% (22) | 4% (2) | 47 |
| Use of media (video, DVD) | 4% (2) | 21% (10) | 68% (32) | 6% (3) | 47 |
| Problem-based applied philosophy | 2% (1) | 17% (8) | 79% (37) | 2% (1) | 47 |
| Quizzes | 16% (7) | 53% (24) | 20% (9) | 11% (5) | 45 |
| Student essays | 2% (1) | 39% (18) | 59% (27) | 0% (0) | 46 |
| Unit tests that are primarily knowledge-based (e.g., multiple choice, short answer) | 15% (7) | 49% (23) | 28% (13) | 9% (4) | 47 |
| Unit tests that are primarily analytic (e.g., essay format) | 6% (3) | 36% (17) | 55% (26) | 2% (1) | 47 |

Some evidence supports teachers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of class discussions. Gallimore and Tharp (1992) posit that learning occurs best when three conditions are met. First, collaboration between students and teachers is accompanied by discussion. Second, instructional activities are meaningfully connected to students’ prior experience and knowledge. Third, instruction is

dialogic and occurs within the learner's zone of proximal development, defined by Vygotsky (Chaiklin, 2003; Gallimore & Tharp, 1992). Our data on perceptions of effectiveness suggest that class discussion may contribute to these three conditions and support Gallimore and Tharp's findings. Though without more qualitative data (forthcoming in our second phase of research), we cannot comment on the nature of class discussions, nor whether they meet the second and third conditions.

Beyond reporting descriptive data on the practices of high school philosophy teachers, it is difficult to draw any strong conclusions about the empirical effectiveness of these pedagogies on learning given the scope of our survey. The survey results, however, do raise some interesting questions. What is the nature of class discussion used? How do lecturing styles among respondents differ? Some evidence suggests that different approaches to lecturing can have different student responses in higher education settings, which may account for lecture use and for varied perceptions of effectiveness if what is true in higher education settings applies to adolescent students.¹ What sorts of cooperative learning strategies are teachers employing? What are the problems addressed in problem-based philosophy pedagogies?

Conclusion

Ontario has pioneered English-language philosophy courses available at the high school level, though to date little information exists about the nature of these courses and how they are taught. This exploratory study sheds light on who is teaching Ontario's high school philosophy courses, and how they approach the course with respect to materials and pedagogies. As a population that has not been studied previously, the findings of this research may provide useful information for other jurisdictions considering the introduction of high school philosophy courses, for publishers of pedagogical materials, for teacher educators preparing candidates to teach philosophy, and for philosophy teachers seeking general research-based perspectives on pedagogies and materials for their own courses. If the trajectory of enrolments in Ontario continues to increase as illustrated by the data presented in Figure 1, these findings will be useful as more teachers (who may or may not feel comfortable teaching philosophy) enter the field and seek information about resources and pedagogies employed by their colleagues. Second, these findings are important to teacher-educators as they establish curricula for new teachable qualification courses in philosophy, offered as of Fall 2008, as a point of comparison between the practices in the field and the discussions within pre-service teacher education courses.

Our data reveal some interesting characteristics about Ontario high school philosophy teachers—though we recognize their limited generalizability due to the methods used. Nearly three-quarters of our sample were male, and most only had limited formal education in philosophy. Not surprisingly, we found that those with less formal philosophical education reported less comfort level with teaching the course.

¹ See, for example, Saroyan & Snell (1997) who suggest that lectures fall into three categories: content-driven, context-driven, and pedagogy-driven. Their research suggests that the more pedagogically oriented the lecture, the higher it is rated as effective by students.

Overall, however, there appears to be homogeneity in our sample's instructional practices and perceptions of textbooks and pedagogies. As a group, they appear to rely fairly heavily on textbooks as a major resource for their courses, and tend to perceive them as relatively balanced and promoting critical thinking. However, when analyzed in light of Apple and Christian-Smith's (1991) framework, the responses suggest that there is room for a more "oppositional" approach to content in the classroom. A variety of individual and systemic factors may prevent teachers from the type of risk-taking necessary in a truly oppositional approach. These may include: fear of loss of their authority, perceived or real pressure from students, parents or colleagues to accept "official" knowledge in texts and avoid controversial perspectives, and pressure from administrators and others to adhere to provincial curriculum expectations (see, e.g., Brandes & Kelly, 2001; Evans, Avery, Pederson, 1999; Pinto & Portelli, 2008). Additional research in our second phase of data collection will shed light on these systemic factors.

Beyond the specific use of textbooks, we found that though the high school philosophy teachers surveyed employ a wide range of pedagogies, they tend to utilize class discussion and lecture most frequently. Those teachers surveyed perceived class discussion as effective, though they report using lecturing frequently despite their perception that it is not particularly effective. Our analysis raises a number of questions about the possible rationale for their pedagogical choices, and the apparent contradiction in choice versus perceived effectiveness.

In our second phase of research, we investigate more in-depth accounts of materials, methods and pedagogies through one-on-one interviews. This second phase builds upon various survey findings, including how teachers make pedagogical decisions and how they use pedagogies to deal with conflict as well as religious educational environments. It will address in greater depth some of the questions raised in our discussion.

As a relatively new area of investigation, our exploratory, empirical investigation also raises new questions about high school philosophy that warrant future investigation. Some areas recommended for future research include:

- Content analysis of frequently-used and approved philosophy textbooks, with an investigation into whether researchers' analyses correspond to teachers' perceptions of those textbooks. Since teachers surveyed reported that the current textbooks are relatively balanced and promote critical thinking, these features ought to be the foci of content analysis.
- Analysis of topics addressed in high school philosophy courses, with particular attention to diverse perspectives and strands of philosophy covered.
- How faculties of education prepare prospective philosophy teachers in both initial and continuing teacher education programs given the introduction of philosophy as a teachable qualification in 2008.

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