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If It's the Institution That's Causing the Decline, Change the Institution: Comment on Colgan

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Andrew D. Colgan's (2018) insightful article in a previous issue of this journal makes a powerful case that the decline of philosophy of education in teacher education programs is best seen as the result of changes in teacher education institutions. His institutional analysis is compelling, and his proposed "de-institutionalizing solutions" (p. 66; pp. 82–83)—revive teacher culture and return teacher education preparation to teachers' colleges—seem promising, if the recommended changes can be made, although they are, as he says, "long-term."

Here is a third remedy, equally de-institutionalizing and equally long-term: *change the institution*. That is, cultivate fertile ground for philosophers of education to ply their trade, and for students to study the subject, someplace other than teacher education programs. Where? In philosophy departments, of course!

The history of the treatment of philosophy of education by mainstream philosophers (by "mainstream" I mean simply those whose institutional homes are in departments of philosophy rather than faculties of education) is checkered, and the vast majority of current philosophy faculty members know nothing about the field and so are poorly placed to advance it in their departments. It is also true that humanities departments generally, and philosophy departments in particular, face their own institutional pressures and threats. But there are notable exceptions and some promising signs—meager signs, I grant—that philosophy departments are slowly becoming at least a bit more hospitable to the field. This hospitality can be cultivated. It should be, because it provides a different institutional home for the field and its practitioners. And, as Colgan has amply demonstrated, such a home is badly needed if philosophy of education is to flourish.

This change would be radical, in that it would require philosophers of education to be trained in ways very different from the way the majority are trained now. But if that's what it takes to preserve the scholarly integrity of the field, or even its very existence, shouldn't we try? I don't offer this proposal as a rival to Colgan's proposed solutions, but rather as an additional avenue worth pursuing. Those of us who care about the survival of the field should do whatever we can to ensure its survival. Working to cultivate a home for philosophy of education in departments of philosophy—along with working to revive teacher culture and return teacher preparation to teachers' colleges—can't hurt, and might help.

References

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Harvey Siegel is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Miami. His main interests are in epistemology, philosophy of science, and philosophy of education.