



## MTL Dissertation

### Philosophical Inquiry in Education

One form which the MTL Dissertation can take – apart from qualitative and quantitative inquiry, extended literature review, and ‘project-based’ dissertation – is a **philosophical inquiry**. The word count of a philosophical dissertation is **25,000 words** excluding footnotes, appendices and list of references.

Philosophical approaches to education are concerned with the nature and aims of education and the philosophical problems arising from educational theory and practice.

A philosophical dissertation in education can take different forms. One may write a dissertation on a particular philosopher’s ideas on education, or on how a particular philosopher’s ideas can inform educational theory and practice. Alternatively, one may engage with a particular debate in the philosophy of education, drawing on the work of multiple philosophers and theorists. Furthermore, one may also start from a particular concern in educational practice and reflect upon it from a philosophical point of view.

A philosophical dissertation is not the same thing as an ‘extended literature review’. In a philosophical dissertation, one is expected to engage with a number of primary and secondary texts related to the philosopher/s being focused on. Throughout the dissertation, one would be expected to present a correct exposition of the philosophical ideas being discussed, as well as engage critically with the texts, while also eliciting the implications of these ideas on educational theory and/or practices. The multiple tools of philosophy – argumentation, deep engagement, exposition – would need to be drawn upon to construct a coherent structure in a philosophical dissertation.

Some prior knowledge and background in philosophy would be necessary if one wanted to opt for writing a philosophical inquiry as a dissertation in education. Students interested in utilising this approach in their dissertation are advised to contact one of the lecturers who specialise in philosophical inquiry for further advice and guidance.

Some criteria by which a dissertation using philosophical inquiry will be judged include:

- Clear presentation of research questions
- Clear identification of the philosophical issues and problems being engaged with
- Evidence of wide reading on the subjects/philosopher/s being discussed
- Engagement with primary sources of the philosopher/s engaged with
- Detailed and accurate exposition of the main ideas being discussed
- Critical engagement with the texts
- Nuanced use of concepts and ideas
- Logical flow between the different chapters and in the dissertation as a whole
- Clear and coherent writing, argumentation, and structuring of the dissertation
- Correct and consistent referencing

A short video by Paul Standish, Professor of Philosophy of Education, on the importance of philosophy and philosophical research to education:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9SufG1QDmlw>

Ample reading of books and journal articles can help to inspire interest in a particular topic that one can then go on to write a philosophical dissertation on. Here are some journal titles and books to explore further what is being written about education in the philosophical world.

Journals:

*Educational Philosophy and Theory*  
*Journal of Philosophy of Education*  
*Ethics and Education*  
*British Educational Research Journal*  
*Educational Theory*  
*Philosophical Inquiry in Education*  
*Studies in Philosophy & Education*  
*Journal of Philosophy in Schools*

Books (click on the hyperlinks to access):

*Philosophy of Education: The Key Concepts*  
*Philosophy of Education: An Introduction*  
*Philosophy of Education*  
*The Routledge Companion to Education*  
*The Sage Handbook of Philosophy of Education*  
*The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education*  
*A Companion to the Philosophy of Education*  
*Educational Research: An Unorthodox Introduction*  
*Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory*