

Chapter 8

Finding Your Philosophy of Education

**Your philosophy should begin to answer: What is the purpose of education? What content and skills should schools teach? How should schools teach this content? What are the proper roles for teachers and students? Will I enjoy being a teacher

***Inventory of Philosophies of Education – Please complete (pp. 317-8)

***You will determine your preferences for Essentialism, Perennialism, Social Reconstructionism, or Existentialism.

Five Philosophies of Education

*** Essentialism, Perennialism, Social Reconstructionism, Existentialism – we can place these five philosophies on a continuum from Teacher Centered (authoritarian) to Student Centered (permissive).

Teacher-Centered Philosophies

***Teacher-centered philosophies emphasize the importance of transferring knowledge, information, and skills from the older generation to the younger one.

**The role of the teacher is to instill respect for authority, perseverance, duty, consideration, and practicality.

***The teacher is successful when students demonstrate through tests and writings that they are competent in academic subjects and traditional skills...

Essentialism

**Strives to teach students the accumulated knowledge of our civilization with the “essentials” of academic knowledge, patriotism, and character development.

**At one time this was known as the ‘back to basics’ movement.

**William Bagley probably first popularized the term.

***The launching of Sputnik in 1957 and the report *Nation at Risk* in 1983 have brought essentialism to center stage.

**Most of us have been educated in essentialist classrooms.

**The major component is a “core curriculum” with very few electives.

*Only by mastering the required material are students promoted to the next higher level.

**Essentialists expect that students will leave school with basic skills and an extensive body of knowledge, but also disciplined, practical minds.

Perennialism

**Like essentialism, perennialism also is teacher centered and there is little flexibility in curriculum.

*Both aim to sharpen students’ intellectual powers and enhance their moral qualities.

- ***Perennialists organize their schools around books, ideas, and concepts and criticize essentialists for the vast amount of factual information.
- **They require students to push toward “cultural literacy.”
- ***Perennialists recommend that students learn directly from the “Great Books” – works by history’s finest thinkers and writers – books as meaningful today as when they were first written.
- **Perennialists believe that the goal of education should be to develop rational thought and to discipline minds to think rigorously. They also see the process as one of sorting students from the ‘gifted’ to those not so ‘gifted’.
- **Many parochial schools reflect this model.
- ***Perennialists emphasize the 3 ‘r’s, however, reading is most emphasized.
- **Special attention is given to teaching values and character training.
- **Electives are commonly not present nor are textbooks.
- ***Teachers see themselves as discussion seminar leaders and facilitators – therefore, lectures are rare.
- **Multiculturalism, gender stereotypes, and other concerns are rare in perennial curricula.

Student-Centered Philosophies

- ***Are less authoritarian, less concerned with the past, and training the mind – more focused on individual needs, contemporary relevance, and preparing students for a changing future.

Progressivism

- ***Organizes school around concerns, curiosity, and real-world experience and students.
- ***Progressivism is the real world application of a philosophy called pragmatism.
- **To determine if an idea or concept has merit, test it in the real world.
- ***John Dewey was a reformer with a background in both philosophy and psychology who taught that students learn best through social interaction in the real world.
- **Education is an opportunity to learn how to apply previous experiences in new ways.
- **Social Constructivism is a form of progressivism.
- *Teachers are more facilitators and do not like to “teach to the test.”
- **Students usually work in small groups moving about and talking freely.
- **Interest centers are usually located throughout the room (books materials, software, projects).
- **Progressivists build the curriculum around the interests, experiences, and abilities of students.
- **There is no desire to ‘teach to the test’ nor follow an explicit curriculum.
- ***Computer simulations, field trips, and interactive web sites are popular strategies.

Social Reconstructionism

- ***Encourages schools, teachers, and students to focus their studies and energies on alleviating pervasive social inequities, and as the name implies, reconstruct society into a new and more just social order.

**The movement split from progressivism in the 1920s because of an impatience in the pace of change in the public schools.

**George Counts was a student of Dewey and authored the book, *Dare to Build the Schools a New Social Order?*

***Social Challenges and problems provide a natural (and moral) direction for curricular and instructional activities. Ex – racism, sexism, environmental issues, homelessness, poverty, substance abuse, homophobia, AIDS, and violence.

**The teacher's role is to explore social problems and suggest alternate perspectives, and facilitate student analysis of these problems.

**The social reconstructionist teacher creates lessons that both intellectually inform and emotionally stir students.

**Teacher is facilitator helping students to focus on questions with a genuine emphasis on improving society.

Existentialism

***Places the highest priority on students directing their own learning. Asserts that the purpose of education is to help children find the meaning and direction of their lives, and it rejects the notion that adults should or could direct meaningful learning for children.

***Does not believe that truth is objective and applicable to all.

**Most learning where students learn what adults believe they should learn is not sufficient nor effective and is soon forgotten.

***This could very well be the most challenging of all the philosophies.

***Thinking about why we are here and finding the purpose of life is the purpose of existentialism education.

**The teacher's role is to help students understand and appreciate themselves as unique individuals.

***Teachers help students define their own essence by exposing them to various paths they may take in life and by creating an environment in which they can freely choose their way.

*Students have a great latitude in choosing subject matter and activities.

**The Humanities may be emphasized as a means of providing vicarious experiences that will unleash creativity.

**Math and science are less emphasized because they may not as readily provide for self-awareness.

***Existentialism is self-paced, self-directed, and a lot of conversation between student and teacher is expected.

**This philosophy is not widely accepted in public schools.