

Philosophical Foundations and Curriculum

Philosophy is an exploration for the wisdom of life, an attempt to understand the firmament as a whole, an examination of our moral responsibility and our social duty, an attempt to understand the spiritual inventions and our place with reference to them, the way we perceive the world around us and how we define what's important to us. It's a reflective or contemplative pursuit. It has no explicitly designated subject matter of its own but it's a system or type of cognitive operation that can take any area as its object.

Almost all people acquire a philosophy of life as it were by " osmosis" from family, academy, peer groups, church, tabernacle, synagogue and other factors of the culture. Constantly, this philosophy of life is unexamined and operates at an unconscious position. As a result, it's frequently set up to contain illogical rudiments, deficient ideas, and inconsistent beliefs. Our philosophy represents a deeply felt commitment and is an important determinant in the decision- making process of every existent as well as of the society as a whole.

Educational Philosophy is the ideas, opinions, and beliefs about epistemology (nature of knowledge), society/ culture, the discrete human being, and literacy. These foundational components control the content and association of the class. Our views toward these factors make up our philosophy of education. According to John Goodlad (1984), "Philosophy is the starting point in curriculum decision making and is the basis for all subsequent decisions regarding curriculum." It helps curriculum devisers to answer questions similar as to What subjects are of value? How scholars learn? What styles and data to use? It also provides them with a base for dealing with precise tasks and for making similar opinions as what workbooks, handbooks, or other cognitive and non-cognitive tasks to use and how to use them, what schoolwork to assign and how often it could be given, how to test scholars and how to use the test results, and what courses and subject matter to emphasize.

Philosophy is a general theory of education (John Dewey, 1910). Philosophical assumptions about the nature of the good life play a significant role in determining how we live and how and what we teach. It is a "Screen for selecting educational objectives." (Ralph Tyler, 1949). By means of curriculum, desired behavioural changes are sought to be achieved to attain the goals of life determined by a particular philosophy. Thus, philosophy determines the aim of education, so also it determines the curriculum. In other words, the philosophy of a country at a particular time determines the curriculum in which subjects, activities and experiences are included which are supported to meet the emerging demands of the society at that time.

Philosophy gives meaning to the decisions and actions of curriculum workers. The philosophy of the curriculum workers is reflected in their work. Their life experiences, common sense, social and economic background, education, and general beliefs about people are brought into and reflected through their work.

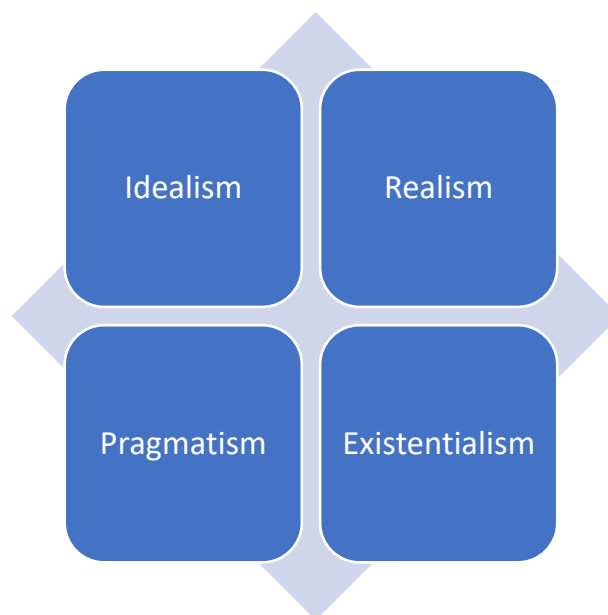
Four philosophical viewpoints that have influenced curriculum making. They are Idealism, Realism and Pragmatism and Existentialism.

Idealism

Idealism is a philosophical approach that has as its central tenet that ideas are the only true reality, the only thing worth knowing. In a hunt for genuineness, beauty, and justice that's enduring and everlasting, the focus is on conscious rationale in the mind. Plato, father of Idealism, espoused this view about 400 times BC, in his well-known book, *The Republic*. Plato believed that there are two worlds. The first is the spiritual or cognitive world, which is eternal, endless, orderly, regular, and universal. There's also the world of appearance, the world endured through sight, touch, smell, taste, and sound that's changing impaired, and disorganized. This division is frequently mentioned to as the duality of mind and body. To understand authenticity, one must pursue knowledge and identify with the Absolute Mind.

Plato also believed that the soul is completely formed previous to birth and is perfect and at one with the Universal Being. The birth process checks this perfection, so education requires bringing dormant ideas (completely formed notion) to knowledge.

In idealism, the point of education is to discover and develop each person's capacities and full moral excellence in order to better serve society. The curricular emphasis is subject matter of mind: literature, history, philosophy, and religion. Teaching techniques concentrate on handling ideas through lecture, discussion, and Socratic dialogue (a system of tutoring that uses questioning to help scholars discover and clarify knowledge). Contemplation, instinct, and whole- part sense are used to bring to knowledge the forms or generalities which are dormant



Four Major Philosophies

in the mind. Character is developed through imitating examples and heroes.

Realism

Realists believe that reality exists independent of an individual's mind. The ultimate reality is the world of physical objects. The focus is on the body/ objects. Truth is an objective which can be observed. Aristotle, a pupil of Plato who broke with his tutor's utopian gospel, is called the father of both Realism and the scientific system. In this metaphysical view, the notion is to understand the objective reality through " the assiduous and relentless scrutiny of all observable data." Aristotle believed that to understand an object, its ultimate form had to be understood, which doesn't change. For example, a rose exists whether or not a person is conscious about it. A rose can survive in the mind without being physically present, but eventually, the rose shares features with all other roses and flowers (its form), although one rose may be red and another peach coloured. Aristotle also was the first to educate sense as a formal discipline in order to be suitable to reason about physical events and aspects. The exercise of rational study is viewed as the ultimate purpose for humankind.

The Realist content emphasizes the subject matter of the physical world, particularly science and mathematics. The tutor organizes and presents a curriculum within a discipline, demonstrating use of criteria in making opinions. The teaching methodology concentrates on the mastery of data and foundational skills through demonstration and enumeration. Students must also demonstrate the capability to have critical and analytical reasoning using observation and trial. The content should be scientifically approached, formalized, and distinctly disciplined. Character is developed through training in the rules of conduct.

Pragmatism

For pragmatists, only those objects that are scientifically proven or observed are real. In the late 19th century American philosophy, the focus is on the reality of experience. Unlike the Realists and Rationalists, Pragmatists believe that reality is constantly changing and that we learn the finest through applying our situations and thoughts to problems, as they arise. The

world is dynamic and evolving, a “becoming” view of the universe. There's no absolute and unchanging candour, but rather, it is what works. Pragmatism is deducted from the teachings of Charles Sanders Peirce, who believed that thinking must produce action, rather than loiter in the mind and lead to indecisiveness.

The Pragmatist Philosophy was applied by John Dewey in his progressive approaches. He believed that students must accommodate to each other and to their environments. The schools should emphasize the subject matter of social experience. Education is dependent on the environment, time, and circumstance. Different artistic and ethical groups learn to work cooperatively and contribute to a popular society. The ultimate purpose is the creation of a new social order. Character development is grounded on making group opinions in the light of consequences.

For Pragmatists, teaching styles concentrate on hands- on problem solving, experimenting, and design, frequently having learners work in groups. The syllabus should bring the disciplines together to concentrate on working problems in an interdisciplinary way. Rather than passing down organized bodies of knowledge to new learners, Pragmatists believe that learners should apply their knowledge to real situations through experimental inquiry. This prepares the learners for citizenship, day-to-day living, and upcoming careers.

Existentialism

As a term, it's obtained from the word actuality, inferring that humans have presence-in- the- world. Existentialism emphasizes individualism and one's own self - fulfilment. A person creates his/ her own description and in so doing makes his/ her own meaning of life. Existentialism believes in the distinct interpretation of the world. It lays emphasis on Freedom and Individual Responsibility. It's grounded on the view that a person defines reality, verity and virtuousness. As a result, schools support children in knowing themselves and their place

in society. Students learn what they want and debate subjects freely. Numerous critics feel that this philosophy has limited approaches to school level.

Since the existentialists believe in one's own freedom, they do not endorse any rigid syllabus. They honour the 'individual differences' and wish to have different syllabus suiting the requirements, capacities and aptitudes of the individual. Syllabus, they say shouldn't primarily satisfy the immediate requirements but also ultimate necessities. The central place is given to 'humanities', poetry, drama, music, art, novels etc. as they bring into play the mortal impact in revealing man's essential guilt, sin, suffering, tragedy, death, hate and love. Humanities have spiritual power. Art and Literature should be grounded, as they represent a priori (beget effect) power of mortal nature. Second place is given to social sciences as they lead the man to feel that he's nothing further than an object. They still, wish to educate social sciences for inculcating moral obligation and for knowing the relationship of the individual to a group. History should be taught in order to help the scholars to change the course of history and to mould future. The study of the world's religion should be taught so as to develop religious perspectives freely among the students. Self-examination and social obedience is the first assignment. The child must be saved from his own unexamined self and from those who intrude with the free exercise of his moral decision. Scientific subjects and mathematics should be included in the syllabus but they shouldn't be given further stress, as they deal with objective knowledge. 'Self-knowledge precedes universal knowledge.' In short, they do not believe in formal syllabus comprising of a set of body of studies to be pursued but a syllabus, which features the resounding effect upon heart, and mind of passionate good reading and then particular contact. The syllabus should be chosen, sorted out and retained by the students.

Eclectic Approach

No school follows any one of these educational doctrines rigorously. Actually, schools tend to draw eclectically (taking the good of every doctrine) upon further than one doctrine to produce the kind of their parents, director and teaching would desire. Still, it's wanted for a curriculum designer to know the common available educational doctrines to give the finest of the education.

Translated Educational Philosophies

The above philosophies have been translated into the following educational philosophies which are rooted in any one of the major philosophies and closely related with teaching and learning process.

Perennialism: Perennialism is embedded in literalism. The syllabus of perennialism includes 3Rs, moral and religious training; Greek, Latin, Grammar, logic and geometry; the liberal arts. It expounds the history and teaches widely agreed upon knowledge and cherished values of society. Its attention is on teaching the three R's by group studies, training, written composition, computation and spelling.

The teacher interprets the information and the students are yielding beneficiaries. The teacher is a master of subjects and guides discussion. Common syllabus for all learners; learner interests are peripheral. The idea behind this syllabus was to give a thorough saturation in the foremost thinking of the foremost minds. In this manner, the learner would be trained. Perennialism generally do not use demonstrations and they tend to think that the pupil design system is a complete waste of time. As far as teaching materials are concerned, perennialism, like the essentialism, use books a great deal. The only teaching material they use is the

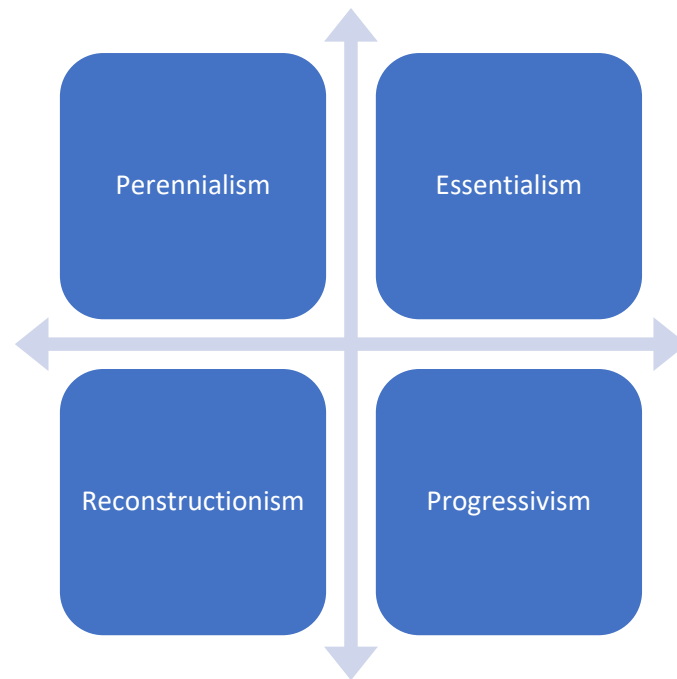
chalkboard. The view on discipline is same for Perennialism and Essentialism. They both seek to inculcate a system of control on the pupil and back it up with a variety of retributions. They say that they must do this in order to ease learning.

Essentialism: Essentialism is rooted in idealism and realism. The curriculum of essentialists includes 3Rs at elementary level; 5 core subjects at high school. It is not rooted in the past; concerned with contemporary scene. It parallels today's secondary schools with academics and cognitive skills along with computers.

Essentialism tries to instil all students with the most essential or basic academic knowledge and skills and character development.

Essentialists believe that teachers should try to embed traditional moral values and virtues such as respect for authority, perseverance, fidelity to duty, consideration for others, and practicality and intellectual knowledge that students need to become model citizens. The foundation of essentialists' curriculum is based on traditional disciplines such as maths, natural science, history, foreign language, and literature. Essentialists frown upon vocational courses. In the essentialist system, students are required to master a set body of information and basic techniques for their grade level before they are promoted to the next higher grade. The content gradually moves towards more complex skills and detailed knowledge. Essentialists argue that classrooms should be teacher-oriented. The teacher should serve as an intellectual and moral role model for the students. The teachers or administrators decide what is most important for the students to learn with little regard to the student interests. The teachers also focus on achievement test scores as a means of evaluating progress. The essentialist classroom is centred on students being taught about the people, events, ideas, and institutions. Essentialists hope that when students leave school, they will not only possess basic knowledge and skills, but they

will also have disciplined, practical minds, capable of applying lessons learned in school in the real world. Essentialism is different from what Dewey would like to see in the schools. Students



Translated Educational Philosophies

in this system would sit in rows and be taught in masses. The students would learn passively by sitting in their desks and listening to the teacher. An example of essentialism would be lecture based classes at universities. Students sit and take notes in a classroom which holds over one hundred students.

Progressivism: Progressivism is rooted in pragmatism. It reformed social and political order in society in the early 20th century. It teaches how to think; not what to think. The teacher teaches problem solving, inquiry, cooperation and self-discipline. He teaches through activities, experiments, problem solving, projects and thematic approaches.

Progressivism is focused on providing students with the skills and knowledge necessary not only to survive but also to succeed in a contemporary and competitive society.

Progressivism curriculum that promotes education aimed at helping students to develop the kind of problem-solving skills that will enable them to function successfully in a competitive society. The role of the teacher is to facilitate learning by posing questions for students that exercise their minds in a practical manner. The questions they pose for their students are often open-ended questions that may or may not have prescribed answers. Together with the teacher and classmates, students are given the opportunity to speculate and question the world around them and the world awaiting them. Teachers encourage creative thinking as well as analytic thinking. They act as liaisons between the shelter of childhood and the harshness of the real world, and it is their responsibility to introduce the reality of being a productive member of society to their students and the expectations as well as obstacles that lay before them on their path to success in the real world. Within small peer groups, for instance, students are encouraged to discuss, share and compromise. The teacher is there to encourage this process, rather than to provide prescribed solutions. Similarly, the learning environment is collaborative and democratic, giving opportunity for all to speak their minds and receive feedback from peers as well as the teacher. This continuous loop of feedback, potentially positive or negative, serves as the means of assessment for problem-solving based instruction.

Reconstructionism: Reconstructionism is rooted in existentialism. It emphasizes society-centred education; appropriate for a society in crisis. The curriculum of Reconstructionists emphasizes cultural pluralism, equality, and futurism. It looks at global issues and the larger social order. Its concentration is on studying empirical analysis and scientific approaches plus social, political and economic ideology.

The philosophy of Reconstructionism contains two major premises: 1) Society is in need of constant reconstruction or change, and 2) such social change involves a reconstruction of education and the use of education in reconstructing society. Reconstructionists believe that education should be a method of changing the world. Reconstructionism emphasizes the need

for change. Reconstructionism is more concerned with the broad social and cultural fabric in which humans exist. The school should be a place where reform takes place. They believe that education in schools must be directed toward humane goals that result in better social consequences for all.

Reconstructionists believe that the teacher should be an educational activist. S/he should be a person who is aware of what is going on in society and has an opinion and is able to discuss this with the students s/he teaches. Teachers need to be freed from passivity and fear of working for change. They need to focus on critical issues not generally found in textbooks or made a part of the school curriculum. They also need to make students more critical about the knowledge they receive.

Philosophy gives meaning to our decisions and actions. We should recognize the pervasiveness of philosophy in determining our views of reality, what values and knowledge are worthwhile, and decisions in education in general and curriculum development in particular. No single philosophy, old or new, should serve as the exclusive guide for making decisions about education or the curriculum. What we need is a prudent education philosophy; one that is politically and economically feasible and serves the needs of the students, and society. The kind of society into which we evolve is in part reflected in our educational/ training systems which are influenced by the philosophies adhered to by their leaders. Leaders need to scrutinize their curriculum in regard to their mission and philosophy.

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