



CHAPTER

CHAPTER FOCUS
Philosophical questions have always influenced education. Since educators do not agree on the answers to these questions, different philosophies of education have emerged. This chapter introduces the foundations of educational philosophy and illustrates how each of five major philosophies appears in practice. Although there are similarities, there are also profound differences in the way leading educators define the purpose of education, the role of the teacher, the nature of curriculum and assessment, and the method of instruction. For a chapter outline, see the IM.

Philosophy of Education

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. What is a philosophy of education, and why should it be important to you?
2. How do teacher-centered philosophies of education differ from student-centered philosophies of education?
3. What are some major philosophies of education in the United States today?
4. How are these philosophies reflected in school practices?
5. What are some of the psychological and cultural factors influencing education?
6. What were the contributions of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle to Western philosophy, and how is their legacy reflected in education today?
7. How do metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, political philosophy, aesthetics, and logic factor into a philosophy of education?



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WHAT DO YOU THINK? What is your philosophy of education? Take an electronic version of the quiz on pages •••–•••. Then, submit your responses to see how they compare to those of your colleagues.

CHAPTER PREVIEW

The root for the word **philosophy** is made up of two Greek words: *philo*, meaning “love,” and *sophos*, meaning “wisdom.” For thousands of years, philosophers have been wrestling with fundamental questions: What is most real—the physical world or the realm of mind and spirit? What is the basis of human knowledge? What is the nature of the just society? Educators must take stances on such questions before they can determine what and how students should be taught.

Since educators do not always agree on the answers to these questions, different philosophies of education have emerged. Although there are some similarities, there are also profound differences in the way leading educators define the purpose of education, the role of the teacher, the nature of the curriculum and assessment, and the method of instruction.

This chapter is intended to start you on a path of thoughtfully considering your values and beliefs. Five influential philosophies will be described, and you will see how each can shape classroom life. We invite you to consider how psychological and cultural beliefs can also affect schools. We then revisit the roots of Western philosophy with three ancient Greeks as our guides: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Finally, we briefly examine the building blocks of philosophy, the divisions within philosophy that focus on questions pertinent to educators (what is of worth? how do we know what we know?). The ideas in this chapter will spark some very basic questions about your role in the classroom, and the school’s role in society. Your answers to these questions will help you frame your philosophy of education.



Finding Your Philosophy of Education

What is a philosophy of education? Do you have one? Do you think it matters? If you are like most people, you probably have not given much thought to philosophy, in education or elsewhere. Being a practical person, you may be more concerned with other questions: Will I enjoy teaching? Will I be good at it? How will I handle discipline problems? Believe it or not, underlying the answers to these practical questions *is* your philosophy of education.

At this point, your philosophy may still be taking shape (not a bad thing). Your beliefs may reflect an amalgam of different philosophies. Unfortunately, they may also be filled with inconsistencies. In order to help you shape a coherent and useful educational philosophy, you must consider some basic—and very important—questions, such as:

- 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?

Still not sure what a philosophy of education is all about, or how it shapes classroom and school life? Let’s listen to some teachers discussing the direction a new charter school should take. You’ll see that each teacher has very clear ideas about what schools are for, what students should learn, and how teachers should teach.

Hear that noise coming from the faculty room down the hall? Your potential colleagues sometimes get a bit loud as they debate the possible directions for the new charter school. As you listen in, try to sort out which of these educational directions appeals to you.

JACK POLLACK: I am so excited! This new charter school can be just what we need, a chance to reestablish a positive reputation for the quality of public education! Let’s face it, we are competing in a global economy, against nations whose students outscore ours on all the standardized tests that matter. It’s embarrassing. If we can create a rigorous school (I’d prefer to call it an “Academy”) with tough standards and a real commitment to learning, then look out! We’ll make those “preppie” kids from Country Day School sorry they ever opted out of the public school system. I’d love to see a school with a strict code of conduct and core courses, like literature, history, math, and science, without those silly electives like “mass media.” I would love to see our students wear uniforms and enroll in courses at the Advanced Placement level. What a great school not only for kids to learn, but for us to teach! It’s all about rigorous standards.

MYRA MILLER: Jack, you and I both would like to teach in a more rigorous school, one with a tougher curriculum. But I am getting tired of standards and testing. I’ll tell you a secret: I don’t much care whether South Korean kids score better than Americans on some silly short answer test. I’m interested in a school committed to learning, not testing or competing. The new school should replace these boring textbooks with Great Books, books that intrigue, entice, and teach. Kids thirst for meaningful ideas. The school I envision would focus on classic works of literature and art. We would teach through intellectual questioning, a

GRABBER:
A Change of Space
IM

FOCUS QUESTION 1
What is a philosophy of education, and why should it be important to you?

CLASS ACTIVITY:
Another Change of Space
IM, Activity 8.1



“Socratic dialogue.” What exciting discussions we could have about *The Old Man and the Sea*, Plato’s *Republic* and Homer’s *Iliad*. Maybe we can re-invent the all-but-extinct American student: One who knows not only how to read, but a student who actually *wants* to read, *enjoys* reading and best of all, knows how to *think*. Jackie, I like the name you came up with—“Academy”—but I want our new charter school to create great minds, not just great test scores.

MARK WASHINGTON: I agree with Myra that we need to move beyond today’s tyranny of testing, but Hemingway and Homer are not the answers. Problem is, we have more relevant issues and skills to deal with, issues never dreamed of in Plato’s or Shakespeare’s day. Our job as teachers is to make certain that our students can do well in the real world. We must be practical. Let me give you an example: When I was in eighth grade, my class took a three-week trip around the Midwestern states by train. Most of the semester was spent planning this trip. We worked together, researching different areas of the region and deciding where to go. We learned how to read train schedules and maps because we had to. We had to be organized and run meetings effectively. Math, history, geography, writing . . . talk about an integrated curriculum! We learned by doing. I still remember that trip and what went into it as a high point in my life. I want all students to have that kind of intense experience, to learn how to solve real world problems, not just answer test questions or discuss books.

TED GOODHEART: I want students to do more than simply fit into society; I want them to leave the world a better place than they found it. Behind our community’s pretty façade are people in pain. We need to educate kids to care more about these people than we did. One out of six children is born into poverty here. One out of six! I want to teach kids to make a difference, and not let books and homework insulate them from real world concerns. The new charter school must equip children to tackle issues like poverty, violence, pollution, bigotry, and injustice. We need to prepare students with both a social conscience and the political skills needed to improve our society. I want to teach students whose actions will make me, and all of us, proud. Teaching in a socially responsible charter school would be my dream.

CARA CAMUS: Everyone in this room has been trying to design a charter school backwards, thinking mostly about what we teachers think. Here’s a revolutionary idea: Let’s build an education around the students. Why not have the students decide what they will learn? Students must assume primary responsibility for their own learning. I would like our charter school staffed by teachers who are skilled in facilitating and counseling children to reach their personal goals. Believe it or not, I trust students, and I would give every child (even the youngest or least able) an equal voice in decision making. It’s not enough to slowly reform education; we need to rebuild it from the center, from where the students are.

CLASS ACTIVITY:
The Fishbowl
IM, Activity 8.2

As you might have suspected, these teachers are not only discussing different approaches to a proposed charter school, they are also shedding light on five major educational philosophies. Do any of these diverse views sound attractive to you? Do any sound particularly unappealing? If so, note which of these teachers you thought reflected your own beliefs, and which were really off the mark. If you found that you had strong opinions—pro or con—about one or more of these teachers’ positions, then you are beginning to get in touch with your educational



philosophy. Let's leave the faculty room conversation, and take a closer, more orderly look at your own philosophical leanings. The following inventory can help you sort out tenets of your educational philosophy.



Inventory of Philosophies of Education

As you read through each of the following statements about schools and teaching, decide how strongly you agree or disagree. In a bit, we will help you interpret your results. Write your response to the left of each statement, using the following scale:

- 5 Agree strongly
- 4 Agree
- 3 Neither agree nor disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 1 Disagree strongly

- 1. A school curriculum should include a common body of information that all students should know.
- 2. The school curriculum should focus on the great ideas that have survived through time.
- 3. The gap between the real world and schools should be bridged through field trips, internships, and adult mentors.
- 4. Schools should prepare students for analyzing and solving the social problems they will face beyond the classroom.
- 5. Each student should determine his or her individual curriculum, and teachers should guide and help them.
- 6. Students should not be promoted from one grade to the next until they have read and mastered certain key material.
- 7. Schools, above all, should develop students' abilities to think deeply, analytically, and creatively, rather than focus on transient concerns like social skills and current trends.
- 8. Whether inside or outside the classroom, teachers must stress the relevance of what students are learning to real and current events.
- 9. Education should enable students to recognize injustices in society, and schools should promote projects to redress social inequities.
- 10. Students who do not want to study much should not be required to do so.
- 11. Teachers and schools should emphasize academic rigor, discipline, hard work, and respect for authority.
- 12. Education is not primarily about workers and the world economic competition; learning should be appreciated for its own sake, and students should enjoy reading, learning, and discussing intriguing ideas.
- 13. The school curriculum should be designed by teachers to respond to the experiences and needs of the students.
- 14. Schools should promote positive group relationships by teaching about different ethnic and racial groups.



RAP 3.6
Putting Your Philosophy
into the Classroom, p. ●●●

15. The purpose of school is to help students understand themselves, appreciate their distinctive talents and insights, and find their own unique place in the world.
16. For the United States to be competitive economically in the world marketplace, schools must bolster their academic requirements in order to train more competent workers.
17. Teachers ought to teach from the classics, because important insights related to many of today's challenges and concerns are found in these Great Books.
18. Since students learn effectively through social interaction, schools should plan for substantial social interaction in their curricula.
19. Students should be taught how to be politically literate, and learn how to improve the quality of life for all people.
20. The central role of the school is to provide students with options and choices. The student must decide what and how to learn.
21. Schools must provide students with a firm grasp of basic facts regarding the books, people, and events that have shaped the nation's heritage.
22. The teacher's main goal is to help students unlock the insights learned over time, so they can gain wisdom from the great thinkers of the past.
23. Students should be active participants in the learning process, involved in democratic class decision making and reflective thinking.
24. Teaching should mean more than simply transmitting the Great Books, which are replete with biases and prejudices. Rather, schools need to identify a new list of Great Books more appropriate for today's world, and prepare students to create a better society than their ancestors did.
25. Effective teachers help students to discover and develop their personal values, even when those values conflict with traditional ones.
26. Teachers should help students constantly reexamine their beliefs. In history, for example, students should learn about those who have been historically omitted: the poor, the non-European, women, and people of color.
27. Frequent objective testing is the best way to determine what students know. Rewarding students when they learn, even when they learn small things, is the key to successful teaching.
28. Education should be a responsibility of the family and community, rather than delegated to formal and impersonal institutions, such as schools.

Interpreting Your Responses

Write your responses to statements 1 through 25 in the columns on the next page, tally up your score in each column. (We will return to items 26 to 28 in a bit.) Each column is labeled with a philosophy and the name of the teacher who represented that view in this chapter's opening scenario (the charter school discussion). The highest possible score in any one column is 25, and the lowest possible score is 5. Scores in the 20s indicate strong agreement, and scores below 10 indicate disagreement with the tenets of a particular philosophy.

A	B	C	D	E
Essentialism (Jack)	Perennialism (Myra)	Progressivism (Mark)	Social Reconstructionism (Ted)	Existentialism (Cara)
1. _____	2. _____	3. _____	4. _____	5. _____
6. _____	7. _____	8. _____	9. _____	10. _____
11. _____	12. _____	13. _____	14. _____	15. _____
16. _____	17. _____	18. _____	19. _____	20. _____
21. _____	22. _____	23. _____	24. _____	25. _____
Scores _____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Your scores in columns A through E, respectively, represent how much you agree or disagree with the beliefs of five major educational philosophies: essentialism, perennialism, progressivism, social reconstructionism, and existentialism. Check back to see if your scores reflect your initial reactions to these teachers’ points of view. For example, if you agreed with Jack’s proposal to create an “Academy,” then you probably agreed with a number of the statements associated with essentialist education, and your score in this column may be fairly high.

Compare your five scores. What is your highest? What is your lowest? Which three statements best reflect your views on education? Are they congruent and mutually supporting? Looking at the statements that you least support, what do these statements tell you about your values? You may notice that your philosophical leanings, as identified by your responses to statements in the inventory, reflect your general outlook on life. For example, your responses may indicate whether you generally trust people to do the right thing, or if you believe that individuals need supervision. How have your culture, religion, upbringing, and political beliefs shaped your responses to the items in this inventory? How have your own education and life experiences influenced your philosophical beliefs?

Now that you have begun to examine varying beliefs about education, you may even want to lay claim to a philosophical label. But what do these philosophical labels mean? In the following pages we will introduce you to all five of these educational philosophies, and look at their impact in the classroom.

Five Philosophies of Education

Essentialism, perennialism, progressivism, social reconstructionism, and existentialism. Taken together, these five schools of thought do not exhaust the list of possible educational philosophies you may consider, but they present strong frameworks for you to refine your own educational philosophy. We can place these five philosophies on a continuum, from teacher-centered (some would say “authoritarian”), to student-centered (some would characterize as “permissive”).

Are you politically conservative or liberal? (Great, now we are bringing politics into this discussion.) Actually, your political stance is one predictor of your

IMAGINE . . .

Reflection

After a hectic school year, Kentucky High school graduate Juan C. avoided the beach graduation celebration and chose instead to spend the week in reflection at a Trappist monastery. The student explained: We spend a lot of time nourishing our bodies, but we spend little time nourishing our souls.

SOURCE: *American School Board Journal*, 1998.

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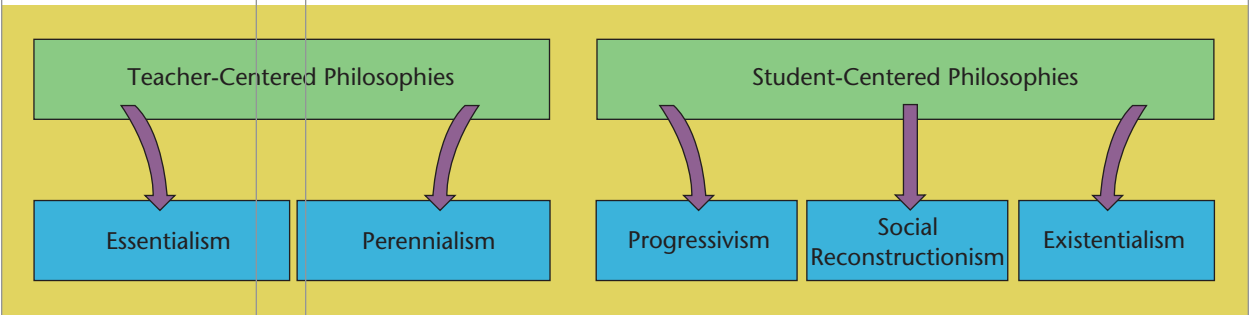
INTERACTIVE ACTIVITY

Where Do You Stand on the Philosophy Spectrum?

Note where you think your philosophy of education falls, and compare where you stand to where your colleagues do.



FIGURE 8.1
Teacher- and student-centered philosophies of education.



REFLECTION: Check back with your scores on the Inventory of Philosophies in Education (p. ●●●). Now consider your scores in terms of teacher- or student-centered philosophies. What does this tell you about your own educational priorities?

TEACHING TIP
The coverage of five educational philosophies will integrate three focus questions.

FOCUS QUESTION 2-4
How do teacher-centered philosophies of education differ from student-centered philosophies of education?
What are some major philosophies of education in the United States today?
How are these philosophies reflected in school practices?

POWER POINT 8.1
Essentialism

educational philosophy. Traditionalists often champion teacher-centered philosophies and practices that emphasize the values and knowledge that have survived through time, while those committed to change find student-centered approaches more to their liking. (See Figure 8.1).

Let's begin our discussion with the teacher-centered philosophies, for they have exerted significant influence on American education during the past two decades.



Teacher-Centered Philosophies

Traditionally, **teacher-centered philosophies** emphasize the importance of transferring knowledge, information, and skills from the older (presumably wiser) generation to the younger one. The teacher's role is to instill respect for authority, perseverance, duty, consideration, and practicality. When students demonstrate through tests and writings that they are competent in academic subjects and traditional skills, and through their actions that they have disciplined minds and adhere to traditional morals and behavior, then both the school and the teacher have been successful. (If you recall from Chapter 4, "Schools: Choices and Challenges," these philosophies view the primary purpose of schools as "passing the cultural baton.") The major teacher-centered philosophies of education are essentialism and perennialism.

Essentialism

Essentialism strives to teach students the accumulated knowledge of our civilization through core courses in the traditional academic disciplines. Essentialists aim to instill students with the "essentials" of academic knowledge, patriotism, and character development. This traditional or **back-to-basics** approach is meant to train the mind, promote reasoning, and ensure a common culture among all Americans.

American educator **William Bagley** popularized the term *essentialism* in the 1930s,¹ and essentialism has been a dominant influence in American education since World War II. Factors such as the launching of *Sputnik* in 1957, the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*, intense global economic competition and increased immigration into



the United States have all kept essentialism at center stage. Some educators refer to the present period as neoessentialism because of the increased core graduation requirements, stronger standards and more testing of both students and teachers.

Whether they call themselves essentialists or neoessentialists, educators in this camp are concerned that the influx of immigrants threatens American culture. In response, they call for rigorous schools teaching a single, unifying body of knowledge for all Americans. One of the leading essentialists, **E. D. Hirsch, Jr.**, authored *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs To Know*, and *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them*. Hirsch provides lists of people, events, literature, historical facts, scientific breakthroughs and the like, lists that specify what students at every grade level should know to be “culturally literate.”

Most of you reading this chapter have been educated in essentialist schools. You were probably required to take many courses in English, history, math, and science, but were able to enroll in only a few electives. Such a program would be typical in an essentialist school.

The Essentialist Classroom Essentialists urge that traditional disciplines such as math, science, history, foreign language, and literature form the foundation of the curriculum, which is referred to as the **core curriculum**. Essentialists frown upon electives that “water-down” academic content. Elementary students receive instruction in skills such as writing, reading, measuring, and computing. Even when studying art and music, subjects most often associated with the development of creativity, students master a body of information and basic techniques, gradually moving to more complex skills and detailed knowledge. Only by mastering the required material are students promoted to the next higher level.

Essentialists maintain that classrooms should be oriented around the teacher, who 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 and place little emphasis on student interests, particularly when such interests divert time and attention from the academic curriculum. Essentialist teachers rely on achievement test scores to evaluate progress. Essentialists expect that students will leave school possessing not only basic skills and an extensive body of knowledge, but also disciplined, practical minds, capable of applying schoolhouse lessons in the real world.

Essentialism in Action: Rancho Elementary School Rancho Elementary School in Marin County, California, proudly promotes its essentialist philosophy, and announces on its Web page that “students will participate in a highly enriched environment exposing them to rigorous academics, foreign language, citizenship/leadership opportunities and grade appropriate technology.” Its mission is the acquisition of basic skills through direct instruction in the core academic areas, including reading through phonics. As a testament to its success, the school boasts high test scores. Beyond academics, the school also emphasizes “firm, consistent discipline” and close parent-teacher relationships.

If you do not live in Marin County, you may not have heard of Rancho, but you may have heard of a school belonging to The Coalition of Essential Schools, as 200 schools nationwide are members. But don't be misled by the name. Although these schools promote intellectual rigor, test students for mastery of information, and emphasize strong thinking skills across subjects, they are not pure examples of essentialism. The schools do not share a fixed core curriculum, they emphasize the study of single topics or issues in depth, and incorporate components of perennialism, which brings us to the other teacher-centered philosophy.

RAP 3.5

What You See and
What You Get, p. ●●●

VIDEO SEGMENT 23

Essentialism in Action



POWER POINT 8.2
Perennialism

CLASS ACTIVITY:
Great Books in
Every Philosophy
IM, Activity 8.3

Perennialism

Perennialism is a cousin to essentialism. Both advocate teacher-centered classrooms. Both tolerate little flexibility in the curriculum. Both implement rigorous standards. Both aim to sharpen students’ intellectual powers and enhance their moral qualities. So what are the differences?

Perennialists organize their schools around books, ideas and concepts, and criticize essentialists for the vast amount of factual information they require students to absorb in their push for “cultural literacy.” Perennial means “everlasting”—a perennialist education focuses on enduring themes and questions that span the ages. 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. Perennialists see education as a sorting mechanism, a way to identify and prepare the intellectually gifted for leadership, while providing vocational training for the rest of society. They lament the change in universities over the centuries, from institutions where a few gifted students (and teachers) rigorously pursued truth for its own sake, to a glorified training ground for future careers.

Those of you who received a religious education might recognize the perennialist philosophy. Many parochial schools reflect the perennialist tradition with a curriculum that focuses on analyzing great religious books (such as the *Bible*, *Talmud*, or *Koran*), discerning moral truths, and honoring these moral values. In the classroom description that follows, we will concentrate on secular perennialism as formulated in the 20th-century United States by such individuals as Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler.

The Perennialist Classroom As in an essentialist classroom, students in a perennialist classroom spend considerable time and energy mastering the three “Rs,” reading, ’riting and ’rithmetic. Greatest importance is placed on reading, the key to unlocking the enduring ideas found in the Great Books. Special attention is given to teaching values and character training, often through discussion about the underlying values and moral principles in a story. (Former Secretary of Education Bill Bennett wrote a collection of such stories in 1993, entitled *Book of Virtues*.) High school marks an increase in academic rigor as more challenging books are explored, including works of Darwin, Homer, and Shakespeare. Few elective choices are allowed. In an extreme example, in his ***Paideia Proposal***, published in 1982, **Mortimer Adler** proposed a single elementary and secondary curriculum for all students, with no curricular electives except in the choice of a second language.

Electives are not the only things perennialists go without. You find few if any textbooks in a perennialist class. **Robert Hutchins**, who as president of the University of Chicago introduced the Great Books program, once opined that textbooks “have probably done as much to degrade the American intelligence as any single force.”² Because perennialist teachers see themselves as discussion seminar leaders and facilitators, lectures are rare. Current concerns like multiculturalism, gender stereotypes, or computer technology would find no place in a perennialist curriculum.



FRAME OF REFERENCE

Essentialists and Perennialists:
Different Core Curricula

While both essentialism and perennialism promote a conservative, status quo approach to education and schools, these teacher-centered philosophies draw their curricula from different sources. The first column includes excerpts from a typical essentialist list (we included a few of the words and phrases under the letter “c”); the second column provides selections from the perennialists’ *Great Books* curriculum. Remember, these are only a few suggestions from very long lists!

The List

centigrade	Calvary
center of gravity	cast pearls before swine
cerebellum	Cascade Mountains
carry coals to Newcastle	cadre
capital expenditure	catharsis
Cézanne	carbon dioxide
Canberra	carte blanche
Cain and Abel	Caruso, Enrico
Caesar Augustus	cathode ray tube
<i>Candide</i>	

Great Books

Aristotle, <i>Sense and Sensible</i>	Thomas Mann, <i>Death in Venice</i>
<i>The Bible</i>	Karl Marx, <i>Das Kapital</i>
Geoffrey Chaucer, <i>Canterbury Tales</i>	Herman Melville, <i>Moby Dick</i>
Charles Darwin, <i>On the Origin of Species</i>	George Orwell, <i>Animal Farm</i>
Charles Dickens, <i>Oliver Twist</i>	Thomas Paine, <i>Common Sense</i>
F. Scott Fitzgerald, <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	Plato, <i>Charmides</i>
Homer, <i>The Iliad</i>	Jonathan Swift, <i>Gulliver’s Travels</i>
Henry James, <i>In the Cage</i>	Virginia Woolf, <i>Night and Day</i>
James Joyce, <i>Ulysses</i>	Leo Tolstoy, <i>War and Peace</i>
<i>The Koran</i>	

REFLECTION: How many of these names and terms can you identify? Does this list make you feel culturally literate—or illiterate? Do you believe that lists like this one should be important? Why or why not?

While critics chastise perennialists for the lack of women, people of color, and non-Western ideas in the Great Books they teach, many perennialists are unmoved by such criticism. To them, “training the mind” is ageless, beyond demographic concerns and transient trends. As Mortimer Adler wrote,

The Great Books of ancient and medieval as well as modern times are a repository of knowledge and wisdom, a tradition of culture which must initiate each generation.³

Perennialism in Action: St. John’s College The best-known example of perennialist education today takes place at a private institution unaffiliated with any religion: St. John’s College, founded in 1784 in Annapolis, Maryland (www.sjcsf.edu). St. John’s College adopted the Great Books as a core curriculum in 1937 and assigns readings in the fields of literature, philosophy and theology, history and the social sciences, mathematics and natural science, and music. Students write extensively and attend seminars twice weekly to discuss assigned readings. They also complete a number of laboratory experiences and tutorials in language, mathematics, and music, guided by the faculty, who are called *tutors*. Seniors take oral examinations at the beginning and end of their senior year and write a final essay that must be approved before they are allowed to graduate.

Although grades are given in order to facilitate admission to graduate programs, students receive their grades only upon request and are expected to learn only for learning’s sake. Since the St. John’s experience thrives best in a small-group atmosphere, the college established a second campus in 1964 in Santa Fe, New Mexico to handle additional enrollment.



YOU BE THE JUDGE

TEACHER- VERSUS STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACHES TO EDUCATION

Teacher-Centered Approaches Are Best Because . . .

AFTER CENTURIES OF EXPERIENCE, WE KNOW WHAT TO TEACH

From Plato to Orwell, great writers and thinkers of the past light our way into the future. We must pass our cherished cultural legacy onto the next generation.

TEACHERS MUST SELECT WHAT IS WORTH KNOWING

The knowledge explosion showers us with mountains of new, complex information on a daily basis. Selecting what students should learn is a daunting challenge. Teachers, not students, are trained and best equipped to determine what is of value. To ask students to choose what they should learn would be the height of irresponsibility.

SCHOOLS MUST BE INSULATED FROM EXTERNAL DISTRACTIONS

Students can be easily distracted by the “excitement” of contemporary events. While academic and rigorous school-based learning may be less flashy and less appealing, in the long run, it is far more valuable. Once schoolwork has been mastered, students will be well prepared to leave the sanctuary of learning and confront the outside world.

WE ARE FALLING BEHIND OTHER NATIONS

U.S. student performance on international tests lags behind that of students from other nations. We have grown “educationally soft,” lacking the challenging teacher-centered curriculums that other nations use. Only by creating a tough and demanding curriculum can we hope to compete with other nations.

COMPETITION AND REWARDS ARE IMPORTANT FOR MOTIVATING LEARNERS

Most people want and need to be recognized for their effort. Students are motivated to earn good report card grades and academic honors, to “ace” the SATs and be admitted to a prestigious college. Competition to earn high grades is the engine that drives successful school performance. Competition and rewards also drive the nation’s productive workforce.

Student-Centered Approaches Are Best Because . . .

GENUINE LEARNING ORIGINATES WITH THE LEARNER

People learn best what they want to learn, what they feel they should or need to learn. Students find lessons imposed “from above” to be mostly irrelevant, and the lessons are quickly forgotten.

THEY BEST PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THE INFORMATION AGE

The knowledge explosion is actually a powerful argument for student-directed learning. Teachers can’t possibly teach everything. We must equip students with research skills, then fan the flames of curiosity so they will want to learn for themselves. Then students can navigate the information age, finding and evaluating new information.

EDUCATION IS A VITAL AND ORGANIC PART OF SOCIETY

The most important lessons of life are found not on the pages of books or behind the walls of a school, but in the real world. Students need to work and learn directly in the community, from cleaning up the environment to reducing violence. Social action projects and service learning can offer a beacon of hope for the community, while building compassionate values within our students.

MULTIPLE CHOICE TESTS ARE NOT AN OLYMPIC EVENT

Education is not a competition, and academic tests are not a new Olympic event where youngsters have to get the highest score to please the cheering crowd. National success will come from living up to our beliefs, not “beating” the children of some other nation on a multiple choice test.

MEANINGFUL REWARDS DO NOT COME FROM ACADEMIC COMPETITIONS

Grades, funny stickers, and social approval are poor sources of motivation. Authentic learning rests on a more solid foundation: intrinsic motivation. Real success comes from an inner drive, not from artificial rewards. Schools need to develop students’ inner motivation and stress student cooperation, not competition.

Teacher-Centered Approaches
Are Best Because . . .

DISCIPLINED MINDS, RESPECTFUL CITIZENS

Students who listen thoughtfully and participate respectfully in classroom discussions learn several important lessons. For one, they learn the worth and wisdom of Western culture. They also learn to appreciate and to honor those who brought them this heritage, the guardians of their freedom and culture: their teachers.

Student-Centered Approaches
Are Best Because . . .

HUMAN DIGNITY IS LEARNED IN DEMOCRATIC
CLASSROOMS

Democracy is learned through experience, not books. Students flourish when they are respected; they are stifled when they are told what and how to think. As students manage their own learning, they master the most important lesson any school can teach: the importance of the individual's ideas.

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 **YOU DECIDE . . .**

Do you find yourself influenced more by the arguments supporting teacher-centered approaches, or those advocating student-centered approaches? Are there elements of each that you find appealing? How will your classroom practices reflect your philosophy?



Student-Centered Philosophies

Student-centered philosophies are less authoritarian, less concerned with the past and “training the mind,” and more focused on individual needs, contemporary relevance, and preparing students for a changing future. Progressivism, social reconstructionism, and existentialism place the learner at the center of the educational process: Students and teachers work together on determining what should be learned and how best to learn it. School is not seen as an institution that controls and directs youth, or works to preserve and transmit the core culture, but as an institution that works with youth to improve society or help students realize their individuality.

Progressivism

Progressivism organizes schools around the concerns, curiosity, and real-world experiences of students. The progressive teacher facilitates learning by helping students formulate meaningful questions and devise strategies to answer those questions. Answers are not drawn from lists or even Great Books; they are discovered through real world experience. Progressivism is the educational application of a philosophy called pragmatism. According to **pragmatism**, the way to determine if an idea has merit is simple: test it. If the idea works in the real world, then it has merit. Both pragmatism and progressivism originated in America, the home of a very practical and pragmatic people. John Dewey refined and applied pragmatism to education, establishing what became known as progressivism.

John Dewey was a reformer with a background in philosophy and psychology who taught that people learn best through social interaction in the real world. Dewey believed that because social learning had meaning, it endured. Book learning, on the other hand, was no substitute for actually doing things. Progressivists do not believe that the mind can be disciplined through reading Great Books, rather that the mind should be trained to analyze experience thoughtfully and draw conclusions objectively.

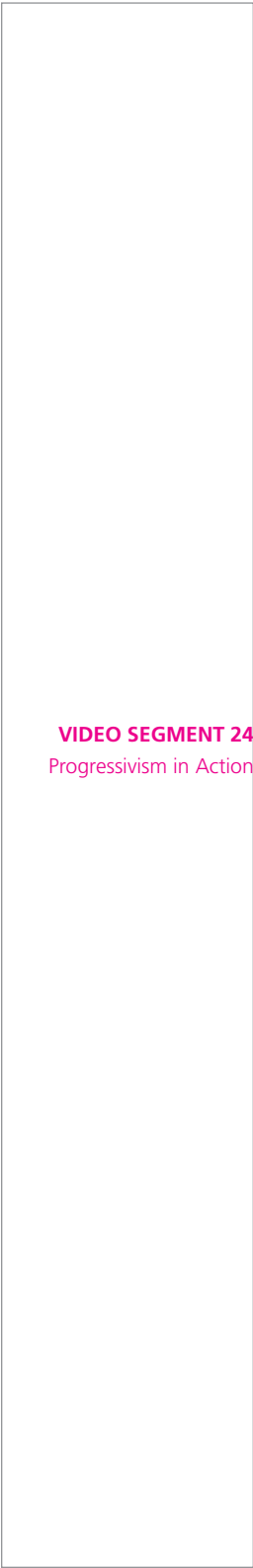
Dewey saw education as an opportunity to learn how to apply previous experiences in new ways. Dewey believed that students, facing an ever-changing world, should master the scientific method: (1) Become aware of a problem; (2) define it;

RELATED READING

The View from Saturday by
E. L. Konigsburg (1998).

POWER POINT 8.3

Progressivism



VIDEO SEGMENT 24
Progressivism in Action

(3) propose various hypotheses to solve it; (4) examine the consequences of each hypothesis in the light of previous experience; and (5) test the most likely solution. (For a biography of John Dewey, see the Hall of Fame: Profiles in Education in Chapter 7.)

Dewey regarded democracy and freedom as far superior to the political ideas of earlier times. Dewey saw traditional, autocratic, teacher-centered schools as the antithesis of democratic ideals. He viewed progressive schools as a working model of democracy. Dewey wrote:

To imposition from above is opposed expression and cultivation of individuality; to external discipline is opposed free activity; to learning from texts and teachers, learning through experience; to acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill is opposed acquisition of them as means of attaining ends which make direct vital appeal; to preparation for a more or less remote future is opposed making the most of the opportunities of present life; to statistics and materials is opposed acquaintance with a changing world.⁴

The Progressive Classroom Walk into a progressivist classroom, and you will not find a teacher standing at the front of the room talking to rows of seated students. Rather, you will likely see children working in small groups, moving about and talking freely. Some children might be discussing a science experiment, while another group works on a model volcano, and a third prepares for a presentation. Interest centers would be located throughout the room, filled with books, materials, software, and projects designed to attract student interest on a wide array of topics. Finally you notice the teacher, walking around the room, bending over to talk with individual students and small groups, asking questions and making suggestions. You sense that the last thing on her mind is the standardized state test scheduled for next week.⁵

Progressivists build the curriculum around the experiences, interests, and abilities of students, and encourage students to work together cooperatively. Teachers feel no compulsion to focus their students' attention on one discrete discipline at a time, and students integrate several subjects in their studies. Thought-provoking activities augment reading, and a game like Monopoly might be used to illustrate the principles of capitalism versus socialism. Computer simulations, field trips, and interactive websites on the Internet offer realistic learning challenges for students, and build on students' multiple intelligences.

Progressivism in Action: The Laboratory School In 1896, while a professor at the University of Chicago, Dewey founded the Laboratory School as a testing ground for his educational ideas. Dewey's writings and his work with the **Laboratory School** set the stage for the progressive education movement. Based on the view that educators, like scientists, need a place to test their ideas, Dewey's Laboratory School eventually became the most famous experimental school in the history of U.S. education, a place where thousands observed Dewey's innovations in school design, methods, and curriculum. Although the school remained under Dewey's control for only eight years and never enrolled more than 140 students (ages 3 to 13) in a single year, its influence was enormous.

Dewey designed the Lab School with only one classroom but with several facilities for experiential learning: a science laboratory, an art room, a woodworking shop, and a kitchen. Children were likely to make their own weights and measures in the laboratory, illustrate their own stories in the art room, build a boat in the shop, and learn chemistry in the kitchen. They were unlikely to learn through isolated exercises or drills, which, according to Dewey, students consider irrelevant.

Since Dewey believed that students learn from social interaction, the school used many group methods such as cooperative model-making, field trips, role playing, and dramatizations. Dewey maintained that group techniques make the students better citizens, developing, for example, their willingness to share responsibilities.

Children in the Laboratory School were not promoted from one grade to another after mastering certain material. Rather, they were grouped according to their individual interests and abilities. For all its child-centered orientation, however, the Laboratory School remained hierarchical in the sense that the students were never given a role comparable to that of the staff in determining the school's educational practices.

Social Reconstructionism

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. Although social reconstructionists agree with progressivists that schools should concentrate on the needs of students, they split from progressivism in the 1920s after growing impatient with the slow pace of change in schools and in society. **George Counts**, a student of Dewey, published his classic book, *Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order?*, in which he outlined a more ambitious, and clearly more radical, approach to education. Counts's book, written in 1932, was no doubt influenced by the human cost of the Great Depression. He proposed that schools focus on reforming society, an idea that caught the imagination and sparked the ideals of educators both in this country and abroad.

Social challenges and problems provide a natural (and moral) direction for curricular and instructional activities. Racism, sexism, environmental pollution, homelessness, poverty, substance abuse, homophobia, AIDS, and violence are rooted in misinformation and thrive in ignorance. Therefore, social reconstructionists believe that school is the ideal place to begin ameliorating social problems. The teacher's role is to explore social problems, suggest alternate perspectives, and facilitate student analysis of these problems. While convincing, cajoling, or moralizing about the importance of addressing human tragedy would be a natural teacher response, such adult-led decision-making flies in the face of reconstructionist philosophy. A social reconstructionist teacher must model democratic principles. Students and teachers are expected to live and learn in a democratic culture; the students themselves must select educational objectives and social priorities.

The Social Reconstructionist Classroom A social reconstructionist teacher creates lessons that both intellectually inform and emotionally stir students about the inequities that surround them. A class might read a book and visit a photojournalist's exhibit portraying violent acts of racism. If the book, exhibit and the class discussion that follows move the students, the class might choose to pursue a long-term project to investigate the problem. One group of students might analyze news coverage of racial and ethnic groups in the community. Another student group might conduct a survey analyzing community perceptions of racial groups and race relations. Students might visit city hall and examine arrest and trial records in order to determine the role race plays in differential application of the law. Students might examine government records for information about housing patterns, income levels, graduation rates and other relevant statistics. The teacher's role would be as facilitator: assisting students in focusing their questions, developing a strategy, helping to organize visits, and ensuring that the data collected and analyzed meet standards of objectivity.

POWER POINT 8.4
Social Reconstructionism

GLOBAL VIEW
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PROFILE IN EDUCATION

Jane Roland Martin



"Domephobia," the fear of things domestic, is Jane Roland Martin's word for gender bias in schools and in society. She coined the term when she compared the distinct educations Jean-Jacques Rousseau designed for his fictitious students Emile and Sophie. Martin was frustrated that while the boy, Emile, was said to revel in intellectual exploration, Sophie was to receive second-rate training—to be a wife and mother.

Martin deplores the disconnect between intellectual development and the development of abilities to love and care for a family. She recognizes that today's schools continue to craft different expectations for males and females. In fact, she knows this inequity firsthand. Teaching philosophy at the University of Massachusetts at Boston for over thirty years, Martin found herself fighting to have her intellectual voice heard in a traditional male discipline. Her experience of bias fueled her anger that equal opportunity education is still so far from reality.

Yet, Jane Roland Martin knows "women are barometers of change." Feminism today, like Sophie's education 300 years ago, gives men and women a special gift—a new perspective on gender roles. At the dawn of a new millennium, women's roles at work and in the family are indeed changing. Not only are women wives and mothers, they are corporate CEOs, medal-winning soccer players, and Supreme Court justices. Yet even as

society may champion the greater earning power and talents of women, we are seeing a backlash against the more liberated roles of women. The trouble? The changes have cast as fiction the rosy Norman Rockwell portrait of the American family: More than half of all mothers work outside the home and single-parent homes number 1 in 5. These numbers stir concern that day care is bad, working mothers are neglectful and the well-being of the nation's children is threatened.

What society may see as problematic, Jane Roland Martin envisions as opportunity. Historically the physical, emotional, and social needs of children have been met by family, primarily mothers. Today, women are drawn by economic need and personal desire to enter the workforce. Martin sees these changes as a defining moment for schools, a chance to recreate within schools the nurturing tasks traditionally performed at home.

Martin's critics say no, schools should focus only on intellectual development. Not Martin. A social reconstructionist, she challenges schools to open their doors to what she calls the 3Cs—caring, concern, and connection. As more children are cared for outside the home, she fears the 3C curriculum is in danger of being lost. And American society has paid a heavy price for ignoring such domestic needs. Social inequalities continue and children are often the victims. Martin has an antidote: transform schoolhouses into "schoolhomes."

The schoolhome is far different from traditional "factory-model schooling which views children as raw material, teachers as workers who process their students before sending them on to the next station on the assembly line, [and] curriculum as the machinery that forges America's young into marketable products."¹ Instead, Martin's schoolhome focuses on students' individual emotional and cognitive needs. It

embraces the experience of all learners and welcomes racial, cultural, and gender diversity. Martin's vision of schools reflects her vision of American society as everyone's home:

Instead of focusing our gaze on abstract norms, standardized tests, generalized rates of success and uniform outcomes, the ideas of the schoolhome direct action to actual educational practice. Of course a schoolhome will teach the 3Rs. But it will give equal emphasis to the 3Cs—not by designating formal courses in these but by being a domestic environment characterized by safety, security, nurturance and love. In the schoolhome, mind and body, thought and action, reason and emotion are all educated.²

The schoolhome will incorporate the 3Cs into our very definition of what it means for males and females to be educated. Creating such nurturing and equitable schools will require "acts of both great and small, strategic and utterly outrageous. The cause demands no less, not one whit less."³

¹Jane Roland Martin. *The Schoolhome: Rethinking Schools for Changing Families* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 41.

²Jane Roland Martin. "Women, School, and Cultural Wealth." In Connie Titone and Karen Maloney (eds.), *Thinking Through Our Mothers: Women's Philosophies of Education* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill, 1999), pp. 161–62.

³Jane Roland Martin. *Coming of Age in Academe: Rekindling Women's Hopes and Reforming the Academy* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 182.

REFLECTION: Do you agree with Jane Roland Martin that the 3Cs should be an integral part of the curriculum? Explain. Describe what a 3C curriculum might look like in schools today.

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To learn more about Jane Roland Martin, click on *Profiles in Education*.



Throughout, the teacher would be instructing students on research techniques, statistical evaluation, writing skills, and public communications.

In a social reconstructionist class, a research project is more than an academic exercise; the class is engaged in a genuine effort to improve society. In this case, the class might arrange to meet with political leaders, encouraging them to create programs or legislation to respond to issues the students uncovered. The students might seek a *pro bono* attorney to initiate legal action to remedy a social injustice they unmasked. Or perhaps the students might take their findings directly to the media by holding a press conference. They might also create a Web page to share their findings and research methods with students in other parts of the country, or other parts of the world. How would the teacher decide if the students have met the educational goals? In this example, an objective, well-prepared report would be one criterion, and reducing or eliminating a racist community practice would be a second measure of success.

Social Reconstructionism in Action: Paulo Freire Paulo Freire believed that schools were just another institution perpetuating social inequities while serving the interests of the dominant group. Like social reconstructionism itself, Freire's beliefs grew during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when he experienced hunger and poverty firsthand. Influenced by Marxist and neo-Marxist ideas, Freire accused schools of perpetuating the status quo views of the rich and powerful "for the purpose of keeping the masses submerged and content in a culture of silence."⁶ Schools were endorsing **social Darwinism**, the idea that society is an ingenious "sorting" system, one in which the more talented rise to the top, while those less deserving find themselves at the bottom of the social and economic pecking order. The conclusion: Those with money deserve it, those without money deserve their lot in life, and poverty is a normal, preordained part of reality.

Freire rejected this conclusion. He did not believe that schools should be viewed as "banks," where the privileged deposit ideas like social Darwinism to be spoon fed into the limited minds of the dispossessed. He envisioned schools as a place where the poor can acquire the skills to regain control of their lives and influence the social and economic forces that locked them in poverty in the first place. Freire engaged the poor as equal partners in dialogues that explored their economic and social problems and possible solutions. Freire believed in **praxis**, the doctrine that when actions are based on sound theory and values, they can make a real difference in the world. (It is no accident that the term praxis is also the name given to the teacher competency tests required by many states.) Freire's ideas took hold not only in his native Brazil, but in poor areas around the globe. As poor farm workers became literate and aware, they organized for their self-improvement, and began to work for change. It is not surprising that the autocratic leaders of his country eventually forced him into exile, for he had turned schooling into a liberating force. (For a biography of Paulo Freire, see the Hall of Fame: Profiles in Education in Chapter 4.)

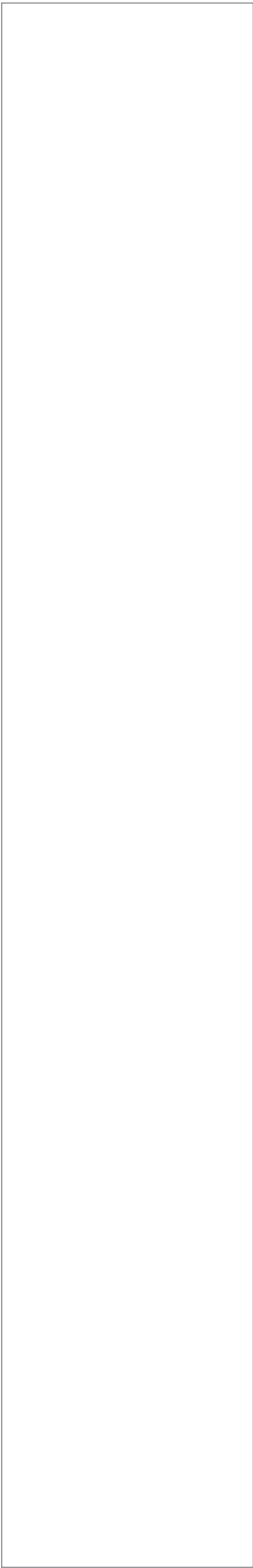
Existentialism

Existentialism, the final student-centered philosophy we shall discuss, places the highest priority on students directing their own learning. **Existentialism** asserts that the purpose of education is to help children find the meaning and direction in their lives, and it rejects the notion that adults should or could direct learning for children. Existentialists do not believe that "truth" is objective and applicable to all. Instead, each of us must look within ourselves to discover our own truth, our own purpose in life. Teaching students what adults believe they should learn is

VIDEO SEGMENT 25
Social Reconstructionism
in Action

POWER POINT 8.5
Existentialism

CLASS ACTIVITY:
Observation
IM, Activity 8.4



neither efficient nor effective; in fact, most of this “learning” will be forgotten. Instead, each student should decide what he or she needs to learn, and when to learn it. As the Buddhist proverb reminds us: When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.

There is little doubt that for many readers this is the most challenging of all the philosophies, and schools built on this premise will seem the most alien. We are a culture very connected to the outside world, and far less connected to our inner voice, or as an existentialist might say, our essence. We compete with each other for material goods, we are distracted by hundreds of cable channels and i-Pods and a constant array of external stimuli. Thinking about why we are here and finding our purpose in life is not what schools typically do, but existentialists believe it is precisely what they should do. Schools should help each of us answer the fundamental questions: Why am I here? What is my purpose?

The Existentialist Classroom Existentialism in the classroom is a powerful rejection of traditional, and particularly essentialist thinking. In the existentialist classroom, subject matter takes second place to helping the students understand and appreciate themselves as unique individuals. The teacher’s role is to 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. Existentialism, more than other educational philosophies, affords students great latitude in their choice of subject matter and activity.

The existentialist curriculum often emphasizes the humanities as a means of providing students with vicarious experiences that will help unleash their creativity and self-expression. For example, existentialists focus on the actions of historical individuals, each of whom provides a model for the students to explore. Math and the natural sciences may be de-emphasized because their subject matter is less fruitful for promoting self-awareness. Career education is regarded more as a means of teaching students about their potential than of teaching a livelihood. In art, existentialism encourages individual creativity and imagination more than it does the imitation of established models.

Existentialist learning is self-paced, self-directed, and includes a great deal of individual contact with the teacher. Honest interpersonal relationships are emphasized; roles and “official” status de-emphasized. According to philosopher Maxine Greene, teachers themselves must be deeply involved in their own learning and questioning: “Only a teacher in search of his freedom can inspire a student to search for his own.” Greene asserts that education should move teachers and students to “wide awakeness,” the ability to discover their own truths.⁷

Although elements of existentialism occasionally appear in public schools, this philosophy has not been widely disseminated. In an age of high-stakes tests and standards, only a few schools, mostly private, implement existentialist ideas. Even Summerhill, the well-known existentialist school founded in England by A. S. Neill in 1921, struggles to persevere with its unusual educational approach.

Existentialism in Action: The Sudbury Valley School Visit Sudbury Valley School just outside of Boston, Massachusetts, look around, look closely, and you still may not see the school. The large building nestled next to a fishing pond on a 10-acre campus looks more like a mansion than a school. Walk inside, and you will find students and adults doing pretty much as they please. Not a “class” in sight. Some people are talking, some playing, some reading. A group is building a bookcase over there, a student is working on the computer in the corner, another is taking a nap on a chair. All ages mix freely, with no discernable grade level for any activity. In fact, it is even difficult to locate the teachers. If there is a curriculum,



it is difficult to detect. Instead, the school offers a wide variety of educational options, including field trips to Boston, New York, and the nearby mountains and seacoast, and the use of facilities that include a laboratory, a woodworking shop, a computer room, a kitchen, a darkroom, an art room, and several music rooms.

Sudbury Valley provides a setting, an opportunity, but each student must decide what to do with that opportunity. Students are trusted to make their own decisions about learning. The school's purpose is to build on the students' natural curiosity, based on the belief that authentic learning takes place only when students initiate it. The school operates on the premise that all its students are creative, and each should be helped to discover and nurture his or her individual talents.

Sudbury Valley is fully accredited, and the majority of Sudbury Valley's graduates continue on to college. The school accepts anyone from 4-year-olds to adults and charges low tuition, so as not to exclude anyone. Evaluations or grades are given only on request. A high school diploma is awarded to those who complete relevant requirements, which mainly focus on the ability to be a responsible member of the community at large. More than 30 schools follow the Sudbury model, including schools in Canada, Europe, Israel and Japan.⁸

Can Teachers Blend These Five Philosophies?

Some of you might be drawn to (and let's face it, sometimes repelled by) one or more of these philosophies. A social reconstructionist idea like students learning as they work to improve the world sounds perfect to some of us, while a more traditional approach focused on reading and discussing great books (preferably on a tropical island) is a dream come true to others. But for many, elements of both of these approaches are appealing. So you might be wondering if this is an either/or proposition; must we be purists and choose one philosophy, or can we mix and match, blending two or more philosophies?

As you probably have guessed, people differ on the answer, which means you get to think it through and come to your own conclusion. Some schools blend several philosophies. For example, the YES College Preparatory School in Houston and Wakefield High School in Maryland mix several different philosophies in their programs. There is both traditional academic emphasis on content mastery, with many AP tests being offered, as well as a more progressive approach as students create independent senior projects. And the faculty and students seem to appreciate the blending. But others are not so sure this is a good idea.

Advocates of a purist model argue that while this sounds like a comfortable and reasonable compromise, much is lost in such a compromise. For example, if we want children to be independent problem solvers, then we must promote that approach. Blending independent problem solving with a traditional philosophy of teachers telling students what they are to learn does not work. Either students are taught how to think for themselves, or they are told what to think, and compromise is not an option. More traditional teachers have their reservations as well. They fear that much of progressive education, although replete with lofty goals, actually leads to little real learning. They claim that blending student centered philosophies with a demanding traditional curriculum actually dilutes learning.⁹ As you consider where you want to teach geographically, you might also want to consider where you want to teach philosophically. Are you comfortable with the school's educational philosophy? If you have some freedom in structuring your classroom, which philosophy or philosophies will you follow? Are you a purist, or will you be blending several philosophies? (See Table 8.1.)



TABLE 8.1
Five philosophies of education.

	Focus of Curriculum	Sample Classroom Activity	Role of Teacher	Goals for Students	Educational Leaders
Student-Centered Philosophies					
Progressivism	Flexible; integrated study of academic subjects around the needs, and experiences of students	Learning by doing—for example, students plan a field trip to learn about history, geography, and natural science	Guide and integrate learning activities so that students can find meaning	To become intelligent problem solvers, socially aware citizens who are prepared to live comfortably in the world	John Dewey, Nel Noddings
Social Reconstructionism	Focus on social, political, and economic needs; integrated study of academic subjects around socially meaningful actions	Learning by reconstructing society—for example, students work to remove health hazards in a building housing the poor	Provide authentic learning activities that both instruct students and improve society	To become intelligent problem solvers, to enjoy learning, to live comfortably in the world while also helping reshape it	George S. Counts, Jane Roland Martin, Paulo Frence, bell hooks
Existentialism	Each student determines the pace and direction of his or her own learning	Students choose their preferred medium—such as poetry, prose, or painting—and evaluate their own performance	One who seeks to relate to each student honestly; skilled at creating a free, open, and stimulating environment	To accept personal responsibility; to understand deeply and be at peace with one's own unique individuality	A. S. Neill, Maxine Greene
Teacher-Centered Philosophies					
Essentialism	Core curriculum of traditional academic topics and traditional American virtues	Teacher focuses on “essential” information or the development of particular skills	Model of academic and moral virtue; center of classroom	To become culturally literate individuals, model citizens educated to compete in the world	William Bagley, E. D. Hirsch, Jr., William Bennett
Perennialism	Core curriculum analyzing enduring ideas found in Great Books	Socratic dialogue analyzing a philosophical issue or the meaning of a great work of literature	Scholarly role model; philosophically oriented, helps students seek the truth for themselves	To increase their intellectual powers and to appreciate learning for its own sake	Robert Hutchins, Mortimer Adler
REFLECTION: How many of these philosophies have you experienced in your own education? Describe the circumstances. Would you like to encounter others as a student? a teacher? Explain.					

FRAME OF REFERENCE

Voices of the Five Philosophies

YESTERDAY’S VOICES



William Bagley (1874–1946) *Essentialism* Bagley believed that the major role of the school is to produce a literate, intelligent electorate; argued against electives while stressing thinking skills to help students apply their academic knowledge.



Robert M. Hutchins (1899–1979) *Perennialism* During the sixteen years he served as president of the University of Chicago, Hutchins abolished fraternities, football, and compulsory attendance, and introduced the Great Books program.



John Dewey (1859–1952) *Progressivism* A founder of progressivism, Dewey not only worked to democratize schools, he also fought for women’s suffrage and the right of teachers to form unions.



George S. Counts (1907–1974) *Social Reconstructionism* Counts viewed education as an important tool to counter social injustices, and, if educators questioned their own power to make critical decisions, Counts’s plea was to “Just do it!”



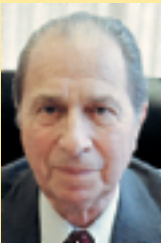
A. S. Neill (1883–1973) *Existentialism* Neill’s attitude toward education stemmed from his own problems as a student, problems which fueled his creation of Summerhill, a school that encouraged youngsters to make their own decisions about what and when to learn.

REFLECTION: The ideas of Dewey and Counts were particularly popular in the 1930s, 1960s, and 1970s, while the teacher-centered philosophies were popular in the other decades of the twentieth century. Existentialism drew a few influential supporters, but never many adherents. How did historical events during the twentieth century influence which of these voices were heard?

TODAY’S VOICES



E. D. Hirsch, Jr. (1928–) *Essentialism* He established the Core Knowledge Foundation to develop a prescribed curriculum in subject areas, including technology. Visit your local bookstore and browse through his books delineating what educated people should know.



Mortimer Adler (1902–2001) *Perennialism* He renewed interest in perennialism with the publication of *The Paideia Proposal* (1982). Adler advocated that all students be educated in the classics and that education be a lifelong venture.



Nel Noddings (1929–) *Progressivism* She believes that an ethic of care can best be cultivated when the curriculum is centered around the interests of students. Schools are challenged to nourish the physical, spiritual, occupational, and intellectual development of each child.



bell hooks (1952–) *Social Reconstructionism* Her theory of education, *engaged pedagogy*, helps students and teachers develop a critical consciousness of race, gender, and class biases. A prolific writer, her books include *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981) and *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994).



Maxine Greene (1917–) *Existentialism* She believes that it is crucial for students and teachers to create meaning in their lives. Greene sees the humanities and the arts as catalysts for moving people to critical awareness and conscious engagement with the world.

REFLECTION: How do these spokespersons reflect current political trends? Which voices are being heard in public policy circles today, and which are not? Why is this the case?

PHOTO-SYNTHESIS Philosophy Photos

Each of these photographs reflects a major tenet of the five educational philosophies described in this chapter. See if you can match the picture with the philosophy it best represents.



A



B



C



D



E

Answers: (A) Social reconstructionism; (B) Progressivism; (C) Existentialism; (D) Perennialism; (E) Essentialism



FOCUS QUESTION 5
What are some of the psychological and cultural factors influencing education?

POWER POINT 8.6
Constructivism



Psychological Influences on Education

While essentialism, perennialism, progressivism, social reconstructionism, and existentialism are influential philosophies of education, they are far from the only forces shaping today's schools. Teachers who take their profession seriously pay attention to work in other fields, such as psychology, and may modify their teaching based on models proposed there. The following descriptions offer a glimpse into some of these forces guiding current school practices.

Constructivism

Constructivism, like existentialism, puts the learner at the center of the educational stage. **Constructivism** asserts that knowledge cannot be handed from one person to another (from a teacher to a learner), but must be *constructed* by each learner through interpreting and reinterpreting a constant flow of information. Constructivists believe that people continually try to make sense and bring order to the world.

Built on the work of Swiss and Russian psychologists, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, constructivism reflects the cognitive psychologists' view that the essence of learning is the constant effort to assimilate new information. Let's take a brief spin in your car to see how this works. You are driving happily along the highway and don't you know it—you hear an odd noise. No, it's not your passenger, it is coming from the engine. Just before panic sets in, you remember that your friend Karen mentioned that the air pressure looked low in your left front tire. You suspect that is causing the noise. You are doing just what a constructivist would expect you to do: looking for a pattern, a meaning to explain the noise. You step out of the car, look at the tires, but they all seem just fine. Now you need to figure out another explanation for the noise, another meaning. You open the hood, look around the engine, and find the fan belt waving wildly, hitting everything in sight. You back off, relieved that you have "learned" what is making the noise. You have reconstructed your thoughts based on new information. Next time you hear that noise, you might look first for that pesky fan belt. If that is not the problem, you will start the process again, and build more knowledge about what could go wrong in your car.

In a constructivist classroom, the teacher builds knowledge in much the same way, gauging a student's prior knowledge and understanding, then carefully orchestrating cues, penetrating questions, and instructional activities that challenge and extend a student's insight. Teachers can use **scaffolding**, that is, questions, clues or suggestions that help a student link prior knowledge to the new information. The educational challenges facing students in a constructivist classroom could be creating a new way to handle a math problem, letting go of an unfounded bias about an ethnic group, or discovering why women's contributions seem all but absent in a history textbook. In a constructivist classroom, students and teachers constantly challenge their own assumptions. (If you check back to the philosophy inventory, see how you responded to item 26, which captured this aspect of constructivism.)

While constructivism runs counter to the current emphasis on uniform standards and testing, it is enjoying popularity, especially among school reformers. Perhaps part of the reason for its growing acceptance is that constructivism dovetails with authentic learning, critical thinking, individualized instruction, and project-based learning, ideas popular in reform circles.

Behaviorism

In stark contrast to both existentialism and constructivism, **behaviorism** is derived from the belief that free will is an illusion, and that human beings are shaped entirely by their environment. Alter a person’s environment, and you will alter his or her thoughts, feelings, and behavior. People act in response to physical stimuli. We learn, for instance, to avoid overexposure to heat through the impulses of pain our nerves send to our brain. More complex learning, such as understanding the material in this chapter, is also determined by stimuli, such as the educational support you have received from your professor or parents and the comfort of the chair in which you sit when reading this chapter.

Harvard professor **B. F. Skinner** became the leading advocate of behaviorism, and he did much to popularize the use of positive reinforcement to promote desired learning. (For a biography of B. F. Skinner, see the Hall of Fame: Profiles in Education in Chapter 7.) Behaviorists urge teachers to use a system of reinforcement to encourage desired behaviors, to connect learning with pleasure and reward (a smile, special privilege, or good grades). In a program termed **behavior modification**, extrinsic rewards are gradually lessened as the student acquires and masters the targeted behavior. By association, the desired behavior now produces its own reward (self-satisfaction). This process may take minutes, weeks, or years, depending on the complexity of the learning desired and on the past environment of the learner. The teacher’s goal is to move the learner from extrinsic to intrinsic rewards. (If you check the inventory at the chapter’s opening, behaviorism was represented by statement 27. How did you respond?)

Behavior modification is perhaps most commonly used to manage student behavior. One well-known program is **assertive discipline**, developed by Lee and Marlene Canter. “The key to assertive discipline is catching students being good, recognizing and supporting them when they behave appropriately, and letting them know you like it, day in and day out.”¹⁰

Critics of behaviorism decry behaviorists’ disbelief in the autonomy of the individual. They ask, Are people little more than selfish “reward machines”? Can clever forces manipulate populations through clever social engineering? Are educators qualified to exert such total control of students? Those who defend behaviorism point to its striking successes. Behaviorism’s influence is apparent in the joy on students’ faces as they receive visual and auditory rewards via their computer monitor, or in the classroom down the hall where special needs learners make significant progress in a behaviorist-designed curriculum.



Cultural Influences on Education

Most of the ideas and philosophies discussed in this chapter are drawn from Western culture. As a nation, we rarely identify or reflect on the ideas that derive from many parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. We are guilty of **ethnocentrism**, the tendency to view one’s own culture as superior to others, and (perhaps worse) a failure to consider other cultures at all. Let’s broaden our view, and examine education as practiced in other cultures.

In much of the West, society’s needs dictate educational practices, with statewide standards, national goals, and high-stakes testing. In the rest of the world, that is to say, in most of the world, the child’s education is primarily a concern of the family, not the society. A child’s vocational interests, for example, might mirror the

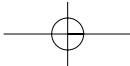
POWER POINT 8.7
Behaviorism


www.mhhe.com/
sadker8e

INTERACTIVE ACTIVITY
What Philosophy or Approach Is This?
Read scenarios and match the philosophy or approach being exhibited.

CLASS ACTIVITY:
Small Group Activity:
Designing a School
IM, Activity 8.5

GLOBAL VIEW
S. G. Summer introduced the concept of *ethnocentrism* early in the 1900s. Culture tends to encompass national character/basic personality, perception, time and space concepts, thinking, language and nonverbal communication, values, behavior (norms, rules, manners), social groupings and relationships.
www.ic.intermundo.net



<p>IMAGINE . . .</p> <p>Towards Enlightenment: Are Schools Feng Shui?</p> <p>Décor makes a difference, at least that's what some researchers say about the link between school architecture and student achievement. As classroom daylight increases, so does student performance in math and reading. In windowless classrooms (typical of the energy efficient 70s and security conscious 90s) students experience a kind of jet lag, which contributes to a lag in academic success.</p> <p>SOURCE: <i>The New York Times</i>, August 5, 2001.</p>	<p>occupation of a parent or be built around the unique interest or talent of the child, rather than respond to the broader employment market or societal priorities. Family and community are foremost; the nation is a weaker influence.</p> <p>In Western society, formal schools, formal certification and degrees are valued; in other societies, more credence is placed on actual knowledge and mastery rather than educational documentation. The notion of <i>teachers</i> and <i>nonteachers</i> is foreign in many cultures, since all adults and even older children participate in educating the young. Children learn adult roles through observation, conversation, assisting and imitating, all the while absorbing moral, intellectual, and vocational lessons. This shared educational responsibility is called informal education.¹¹ (What does calling this practice “informal education” reveal about Western values and assumptions? Would someone in a culture practicing this integrated education call it “informal education”?) In the process, adults also learn a great deal about the children in the community. Strong bonds are forged between the generations. (As you probably already concluded, item 28 on our opening inventory describes informal education. You might want to check your answer to that statement.)</p> <p>Oral traditions enjoy particular prominence in many parts of the world, even in literate societies where reading and writing are commonplace and valued. In the oral tradition, spoken language becomes a primary method for instruction: Word problems teach reasoning skills; proverbs instill wisdom; and stories, anecdotes, and rhymes teach lessons about nature, history, religion, and social customs. The oral tradition refines communication and analytical skills, and reinforces human connections and moral values. Not infrequently, religious and moral lessons were passed on initially through oral communication, only later to be written. In fact, the word Qur'an (Koran) is often translated as “the Recitation.”</p> <p>The practices and beliefs of peoples in other parts of the world offer useful insights for enhancing—or questioning—our own educational practices, but they are insights too rarely considered, much less implemented. Perhaps this will change in the years ahead as immigration continues to bring these ideas to our communities, while technological advances bring all world cultures closer together. For now, however, our education philosophies are rooted in the ideas and thoughts of Western thinkers. Let's visit some of these powerful thinkers and their influential, enduring contributions.</p> <div><p>The Three Legendary Figures of Classical Western Philosophy</p><p>To understand Western philosophy, we must look back to the birthplace of Western philosophy—ancient Greece. Specifically, we must begin with a trio of philosopher-teachers: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Together they laid the foundation for most of Western philosophy. It is likely that you are familiar with at least their names. Let's review their lasting contributions to the world of philosophy.</p></div>
<p>CRITICAL THINKING QUESTION</p> <p>Many of your students are between the roles of children or parents. Who are the significant <i>noneducators</i> providing an <i>informal education</i> in their current world?</p> <p>FOCUS QUESTION 6</p> <p>What were the contributions of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle to Western philosophy, and how is their legacy reflected in education today?</p>	

FRAME OF REFERENCE

An Example of the Socratic Method in Action

TEACHER: Today we will try to understand what we mean by the concepts of right and wrong. What are examples of conduct you consider wrong or immoral?

STUDENT: Lying is wrong.

TEACHER: But what if you were living in Germany around 1940 and you were harboring in your house a certain Jewish man named Nathan Cohen, who was wanted by the Nazis? If asked by a Nazi if you knew the whereabouts of that Mr. Cohen, wouldn't it be acceptable, even obligatory, to lie?

STUDENT: I suppose so.

TEACHER: So could you rephrase what you meant when you said that lying is wrong or immoral?

STUDENT: I think what I meant is that it is usually wrong to lie. But it is true that there are times when lying is acceptable, because the overall effects of the lie are good. Look at how much your Mr. Cohen was helped; the lie about where he was may have saved his life.

TEACHER: So you are saying that it is okay to lie, as long as the consequences of the lie are positive. But consider this hypothetical situation: I am a business tycoon who makes millions of dollars selling diamonds to investors. I sell only to very rich people who can afford to lose the money they invest in my diamonds. I tell my customers that my diamonds are worth \$10,000 each, but they really are fakes, worth only \$2,000 each. Rather than keeping the profits myself, I give all the money to the poor, helping them obtain the food and shelter they need to live. If you look at the obvious consequences of my business—the rich

get slightly poorer and the needy are helped out immensely—you may conclude that my business has a generally positive effect on society. And, yet, because the business is based on fraud, I find it immoral. Do you agree?

STUDENT: Yes, I find it immoral. I suppose I was wrong in saying that whenever a lie has generally good results it is morally acceptable. In your diamond example, unlike the Nazi example, the lie was directed at innocent people and the harm done to them was significant. I want to change my earlier statement that a lie is acceptable whenever it has generally good results. What I want to say now is that you should never lie to innocent people if that would cause them significant harm.

As is typical of Socrates' dialogue, this one could go on indefinitely, because there is no simple, "correct" solution to the issues being discussed—the meaning of right and wrong and, more specifically, the contours of when a lie is morally acceptable. By asking questions, the teacher is trying to get the student to clarify and rethink his or her own ideas, to come eventually to a deep and clear understanding of philosophical concepts, such as right and wrong.

REFLECTION: Have you ever experienced the Socratic Dialogue as a student? What were your reactions? Would you like to develop this teaching technique? Why or why not?

The name of **Socrates** is practically synonymous with wisdom and the philosophical life. Socrates (469–399 B.C.E.) was a teacher without a school. He walked about Athens, engaging people in provocative dialogues about questions of ultimate significance. Socrates is hailed as an exemplar of human virtue whose goal was to help others find the truths that lie within their own minds. In that regard, he described himself as a "midwife"; today we call his approach the **Socratic method**. By repeatedly questioning, disproving, and testing the thoughts of his pupils on such questions as the nature of "love" or "the good," he helped his students reach deeper, clearer ideas.

Socrates's method did not just promote intellectual insights in his students; it also challenged the conventional ideas and traditions of his time. Socrates offended many powerful people and was eventually charged with corrupting the youth of Athens. Even in this, Socrates provides a lesson for today's teachers: challenges to popular convention may lead to community opposition and sanctions. (Luckily, sanctions today are less severe than those meted out to Socrates, who was condemned to death for his "impiety.")

We know about Socrates and his teachings through the writings of his disciples, one of whom was **Plato** (427–347 B.C.E.). Plato's writing is renowned for its depth, beauty and clarity. His most famous works were dialogues, conversations

TEACHING TIP
Assist students to make learning connections to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. If the three were currently teaching *just down the hall*, what might be happening (both content and process) in their classrooms?

RAP 3.4
The Great Lecture Theory of Learning, p. ●●●



FRAME OF REFERENCE

Why We Remember Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle

- **Socrates.** His philosophical lifestyle; the Socratic method, in which students are provocatively questioned so that they can rethink what they believe; his noble death
- **Plato.** Discussions of philosophy through eloquent dialogues; the theory of “forms,” or “ideas,” that exist in an eternal, transcendent realm; a vision of utopia, where an elite group of philosopher-kings rules over other members of society
- **Aristotle.** The breadth of his knowledge; the synthesis of Plato’s belief in the eternal “forms” and a

scientist’s belief in the “real” world that we can see, touch, or smell; the theory of the Golden Mean (everything in moderation)

REFLECTION: How might your current classroom instruction change if your education professor was Dr. Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle? Detail aspects of a “typical” lesson.

between two or more people, that present and critique various philosophical viewpoints. Plato’s dialogues feature Socrates questioning and challenging others and presenting his own philosophy. After Socrates was put to death, Plato became disillusioned with Athenian democracy and left the city for many years. Later, he returned to Athens and founded **The Academy**, considered by some to be the world’s first university.

Plato held that a realm of eternally existing “ideas” or “forms” underlies the physical world. In Plato’s philosophy, the human soul has three parts: intellect, spirit, and appetite (basic animal desires). Plato believed that these faculties interact to determine human behavior. Plato urged that the intellect, the highest faculty, be trained to control the other two. For a look at Plato’s famous “Parable of the Cave,” from *The Republic*, setting out his political philosophy (he envisioned a class of philosopher-kings that would rule over the warriors and the common people) visit the Online Learning Center.

Just as Plato studied under Socrates, **Aristotle** (384–322 B.C.E.) studied under Plato. Aristotle entered Plato’s Academy at age 18 and stayed for 20 years. In 342 B.C.E., Aristotle went to northern Greece and, for several years, tutored a young boy named Alexander, later known as Alexander the Great. After educating Alexander, Aristotle returned to Athens to set up his own school, the **Lyceum**, adjacent to Plato’s Academy.

The depth and breadth of Aristotle’s ideas were unsurpassed in ancient Western civilization. In addition to tackling philosophical questions, Aristotle wrote influential works on biology, physics, astronomy, mathematics, psychology, and literary criticism. Aristotle placed more importance on the physical world than did Plato. Aristotle’s teachings can, in fact, be regarded as a synthesis of Plato’s belief in the universal, spiritual forms, and a scientist’s belief that each animal, vegetable, and mineral we observe is undeniably real.

Aristotle also won renown for his ethical and political theories. He wrote that the highest good for people is a virtuous life, fully governed by the faculty of reason, with which all other faculties are in harmony. Aristotle promoted the doctrine of the **Golden Mean**, or the notion that virtue lies in a middle ground between two extremes. Courage, for example, is bordered on the one side by cowardice and on the other side by foolhardiness.

Many of the ideas first formulated by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle have long been integrated into Western culture and education.



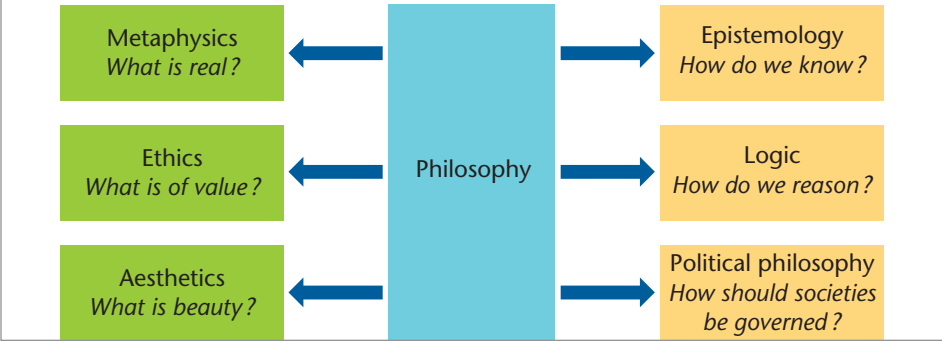
Basic Philosophical Issues and Concepts

Philosophy has many subdivisions that are of particular significance to educators: metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, political philosophy, aesthetics, and logic. (See Figure 8.2.) These fields are where key educational questions are raised, including: How do we know what we know? What is of value? What is education’s role in society? As you ponder these questions, you should find elements of your philosophy of education coming into sharper focus.

Metaphysics and Epistemology

Metaphysics deals with the origin and structure of reality. Metaphysicians ask: What really is the nature of the world in which we live? **Epistemology** examines the nature and origin of human knowledge. Epistemologists are interested in how we use our minds to distinguish valid from illusory paths to true knowledge. It may be easiest to remember the scope of these closely related disciplines by considering that epistemology and metaphysics address, respectively, *how* we know (epistemology) *what* we know (metaphysics) about reality.

Is Reality Composed Solely of Matter? One of the most basic metaphysical issues is whether anything exists other than the material realm that we experience with our senses. Many philosophers assert the existence only of the physical, affirming fundamentally the existence of matter, a philosophy called **materialism**. By emphasizing in their curriculum the study of nature through scientific observation, modern public schools clearly deem that the material world is real and important. Other philosophers contend that the physical realm is but an illusion. They point out that matter is known only through the mind. This philosophy is called spiritualism or **idealism**. The physical world exists to teach us higher principles and meaningful lessons, but life is far more than a drive to acquire physical things. Spiritual leaders like Jesus and Gandhi have taught these lessons. Educators focused on idealism might teach students the importance of finding their place and purpose in the world, the importance of helping one another, and the need to protect the environment rather than abuse it. A third group of philosophers asserts that reality is composed of both materialism and idealism, body and mind, a belief associated with French philosopher René Descartes and called **Cartesian dualism**.



FOCUS QUESTION 7

How do metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, political philosophy, aesthetics, and logic factor into a philosophy of education?

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTION

What is education’s role in society? This question has been introduced earlier in pragmatic and now in philosophical terms. In conversation with a partner, can students answer the question using the vocabulary and understanding from this chapter?

POWER POINT 8.8

Branches of Philosophy

FIGURE 8.2
Branches of philosophy.



MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCE CONNECTION
Have students create (alone or in small teams) a visual organizer that incorporates all these terms: metaphysics, epistemology, materialism, idealism, Cartesian dualism, empiricism, rationalism, ethics, political philosophy, aesthetics, deductive reasoning, and inductive reasoning. Compare and contrast their designs with classmates. Does comprehension grow as the drawings get clearer?

RELATED READING
Tuesdays with Morrie: An Old Man, a Young Man and The Five People You Meet in Heaven by Mitch Albom (2003).

RAP 3.3
Philosophy on The Big Screen, p. ●●

Is Reality Characterized by Change and Progress? Metaphysicians question whether nature is constantly improving through time. The belief that progress is inevitable is widely held in the United States. On the other hand, some philosophers hold that change is illusory and that a foundation of timeless, static content underlies all reality. Still others believe that change is cyclical, swinging widely from one side of center to the opposing side.

Teachers who believe in the inevitability of progress seek new approaches to teaching and new subjects to be taught, thereby “keeping up with the times.” Other teachers, less enamored with change, pay little heed to current trends and technologies. They may prefer to teach everlasting, timeless truths discovered by great thinkers, such as Plato and Aristotle. Finally, some teachers suggest that, with change such a constant, it is pointless to try to keep pace. They choose to ignore these cycles and to simply select the teaching methods they find most comfortable.

What Is the Basis of Our Knowledge? **Empiricism** holds that sensory experience (seeing, hearing, touching, and so on) is the source of knowledge. Empiricists assert that we experience the external world by sensory perception; then, through reflection, we conceptualize ideas that help us interpret that world. For example, because we have seen the sun rise every day, we can formulate the belief that it will rise again tomorrow. The empiricist doctrine that knowledge is gained most reliably through scientific experimentation may be the most widely held belief in Western culture. People want to hear the latest research or be shown documentation that something is true. Teachers expect students to present evidence before drawing conclusions. Even children demand of one another, “Prove it.”

Rationalism emphasizes the power of reason—in particular, logic—to derive true statements about the world, even when such realities are not detected by the senses. Rationalists point out that the field of mathematics has generated considerable knowledge that is not based on our senses. For example, we can reason that 7 cubed equals 343 without having to count 7 times 7 times 7 objects to verify our conclusion experientially. Whereas educational empiricists would support hands-on learning activities as the primary source for discovery and validation of information, rationalists would encourage schools to place a greater emphasis on teaching mathematics, as well as such nonempirical disciplines as philosophy and logic.

Ethics, Political Philosophy, and Aesthetics

Whereas metaphysics focuses on what “is,” ethics, political philosophy, and aesthetics are concerned with what “ought to be.” In these disciplines, philosophers grapple with the issue of what we should value. As you read on, consider the place of ethics, political philosophy, and aesthetics in the classroom.

Ethics is the study of what is “good” or “bad” in human behavior, thoughts, and feelings. It asks, What is the good life? and How should we treat each other? (What should schools teach children about what is “good” and what is “bad”?)

Political philosophy analyzes how past and present societies are arranged and governed and proposes ways to create better societies in the future. (How might schools engage in an objective evaluation of current governments, including our own?)

Aesthetics probes the nature of beauty. It asks, What is beauty? Is beauty solely in the eyes of the beholder? Or are some objects, people, and works (music, art, literature) objectively more beautiful than others? (How can teachers help students understand how their personal experiences, peer group values, and cultural and ethnic history shape their standards of what is beautiful?)

Logic

Logic is the branch of philosophy that deals with reasoning. Logic focuses on how to move from a set of assumptions to valid conclusions and examines the rules of inference that enable us to frame our propositions and arguments. While epistemology defines reasoning as one way to gain knowledge, logic defines the rules of reasoning.

Schools teach children to reason both deductively and inductively. When teaching **deductive reasoning**, teachers present their students with a general rule and then help them identify particular examples and applications of the rule. Inductive reasoning works in the opposite manner. When teaching **inductive reasoning**, teachers help their students draw tentative generalizations after having observed specific instances of a phenomenon.

A teacher who explains the commutative property of addition ($a + b = b + a$) and then has the student work out specific examples of this rule (such as $3 + 2 = 2 + 3$) is teaching deductive reasoning. Contrast this with a teacher who begins a lesson by stating a series of addition problems of the form $3 + 2 = 5$ and $2 + 3 = 5$, then asks, “What do you notice about these examples?” If students can draw a generalization about the commutative property of addition, they are reasoning inductively. While math is a natural field to isolate examples of deductive and inductive reasoning, logic equips students to think more precisely in virtually any field.



Your Turn

[I]n modern times there are opposing views about the practice of education. There is no general agreement about what the young should learn either in relation to virtue or in relation to the best life; nor is it clear whether their education ought to be directed more towards the intellect than towards the character of the soul. . . . [A]nd it is not certain whether training should be directed at things useful in life, or at those conducive to virtue, or at nonessentials. . . . And there is no agreement as to what in fact does tend towards virtue. Men [sic] do not all prize most highly the same virtue, so naturally they differ also about the proper training for it.¹²

Aristotle

More than 2,300 years later, we still find that reasonable people can come to entirely different points of view on all kinds of issues in education. (Remember the charter school discussion in the faculty room at the beginning of the chapter?) If everyone agreed on what should be taught, and how to teach it, there might be just one philosophy of education. But it is not so simple.

Rereading the inventory statements at the beginning of this chapter can help you determine if one of the five major philosophies speaks for you. You may be more eclectic in your outlook, picking and choosing elements from different philosophies. Your responsibility as an educator is to wrestle with tough questions, to bring your values to the surface and to forge a coherent philosophy of education.

You might say a clear philosophy of education is to a teacher what a blueprint is to a builder—a plan of action; reassurance that the parts will fit together in a constructive way. With a clear philosophy of education, you will not ricochet from one teaching method to another, and will not confuse students, parents and administrators with conflicting messages about the role of students and teacher in the classroom. If you have a well-honed philosophy of education, you will be better able to assess whether you will find a comfortable fit in a school and a community. Simply put, a philosophy brings purpose and coherence to your work in the classroom.

RELATED READING

The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life by Palmer Parker (1998).



SUMMARY

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CHAPTER REVIEW

Go to the Online Learning Center to take a quiz, practice with key terms, and review concepts from the chapter.

1. What is a philosophy of education, and why should it be important to you?
Behind every school and every teacher is a set of related beliefs—a philosophy of education—that influences what and how students are taught. A philosophy of education answers questions about the purpose of schooling, a teacher’s role, what should be taught and by what methods.
2. How do teacher-centered philosophies of education differ from student-centered philosophies of education?
Teacher-centered philosophies, like essentialism and perennialism, are more conservative, emphasizing the values and knowledge that have survived through time. Student-centered philosophies focus on individual needs, contemporary relevance, and a future orientation. Progressivism, social reconstructionism, and existentialism place the learner at the center of the educational process.
3. What are some major philosophies of education in the United States today?
Essentialists urge that schools return to the basics through a strong core curriculum and high academic standards. Perennialists value the Great Books and the philosophical concepts that underlie human knowledge. The curriculum of a progressivist school is built around the personal experiences, interests, and needs of the students. Social reconstructionists more directly confront societal ills. Existentialism is derived from a powerful belief in human free will, and the need for individuals to shape their own futures.
4. How are these philosophies reflected in school practices?
Essentialism and perennialism give teachers the power to choose the curriculum, organize the school day, and construct classroom activities. The curriculum reinforces a predominantly Western heritage. Progressivism, social reconstructionism, and existentialism focus on contemporary society, student interests and needs, while teachers serve as guides and facilitators.
5. What are some of the psychological and cultural factors influencing education?
Constructivist teachers gauge a student’s prior knowledge, then carefully orchestrate cues, classroom activities, and penetrating questions to push students to higher levels of understanding. According to Skinner, behavior can be modified through an extrinsic reward system that motivates students even if they do not fully understand the value of what they are learning. The practices and beliefs of peoples in other parts of the world, such as informal and oral education, offer useful insights for enhancing our own educational practices, but they are insights too rarely considered, much less implemented.
6. What were the contributions of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle to Western philosophy, and how are their legacies reflected in education today?
Socrates is hailed today as the personification of wisdom and the philosophical life. He used persistent questions to help students clarify their thoughts, a process now called the Socratic method. Plato, Socrates’ pupil, crafted eloquent dialogues that present different philosophical positions on a number of profound questions. Aristotle, Plato’s pupil, provided a synthesis of Plato’s belief in the universal, spiritual forms and a scientist’s belief in the physical world. He taught that the virtuous life consists of controlling desires by reason and by choosing the moderate path between extremes.

7. How do metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, political philosophy, aesthetics, and logic factor into a philosophy of education?

Metaphysics deals with the nature of reality, its origin and its structure, and poses curricular choices: Should we study the natural world, or focus on more meaningful lessons? Epistemology examines the nature and origin of human knowledge, and influences teaching methods. "How we know" is closely related to how we learn and therefore, how we should teach. Ethics is the study of what is "good" or "bad" in human behavior, thoughts, and feelings. Political philosophy proposes ways to create better societies in the future, and asks: How will a classroom be organized, and what will that say about who wields power? Aesthetics is concerned with the nature of beauty, and raises the issue: What works are deemed of value to be studied or emulated?

THE TEACHERS, SCHOOLS, AND SOCIETY READER WITH CLASSROOM OBSERVATION VIDEO CLIPS



Go to your *Teachers, Schools, and Society* Reader CD-ROM to:

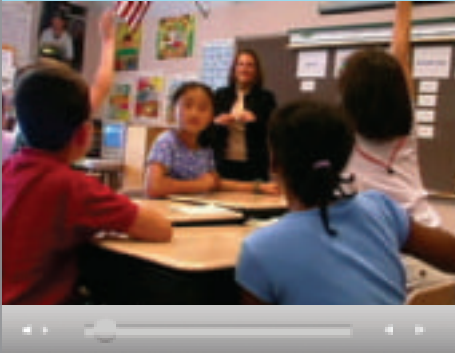
READ CURRENT AND HISTORICAL ARTICLES

- 8.1 Text excerpts from *Experience and Education*, John Dewey.
- 8.2 **Pathways to Reform: Start with Values**, David Ferrero, Jr., *Educational Leadership*, February 2005.
- 8.3 **Teaching Themes of Care**, Nel Noddings, *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76, no. 3 (1995).

ANALYZE CASE STUDIES

- 8.1 **Brenda Forester**: A preservice education student is concerned that one of her methods classes will not prepare her for teaching. Her philosophy of education is challenged when she observes a writing process classroom.
- 8.2 **Michael Watson**: A teacher finds that the assistant principal's evaluation of his class calls into question his teaching style as well as his philosophy of education. The evaluation suggests that his style and rapport with the students are getting in the way of his being more demanding.

OBSERVE TEACHERS, STUDENTS, AND CLASSROOMS IN ACTION



Classroom Observation: Essentialism in Action


It is hard to visualize how different philosophies might manifest themselves in the classroom. In this observation you will observe essentialism in action as an elementary teacher as she organizes an exciting class competition based on a television game. The involvement and excitement of the students is apparent.



KEY TERMS AND PEOPLE

KEY TERMS	informal education, •••	teacher-centered philosophies, •••
The Academy, •••	Laboratory School, •••	
aesthetics, •••	logic, •••	KEY PEOPLE
assertive discipline, •••	Lyceum, •••	Mortimer Adler, •••, •••
back-to-basics, •••	materialism, •••	Aristotle, •••
behavior modification, •••	metaphysics, •••	William Bagley, •••, •••
behaviorism, •••	oral tradition, •••	George Counts, •••, •••
Cartesian dualism, •••	<i>Paideia Proposal</i> , •••	John Dewey, •••, •••
constructivism, •••	perennialists, •••	Paulo Freire, •••
core curriculum, •••	philosophy, •••	Maxine Greene, •••
deductive reasoning, •••	political philosophy, •••	E. D. Hirsch, Jr., •••, •••
empiricism, •••	pragmatism, •••	bell hooks, •••
epistemology, •••	praxis, •••	Robert Hutchins, •••, •••
essentialism, •••	progressivism, •••	Jane Roland Martin, •••
ethics, •••	rationalism, •••	A. S. Neill, •••
ethnocentrism, •••	scaffolding, •••	Nel Noddings, •••
existentialism, •••	social Darwinism, •••	Plato, •••
Golden Mean, •••	social reconstructionism, •••	B. F. Skinner, •••
Great Books, •••	Socratic method, •••	Socrates, •••
idealism, •••	student-centered philosophies, •••	
inductive reasoning, •••		

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES



WEB-TIVITIES

Go to the Online Learning Center to do the following activities.

1. What Is Your Philosophy of Education?
2. Philosophies of Education
3. Progressivism and Dewey’s Laboratory School
4. Existentialism
5. Behaviorism

1. Suppose that you are a student who must choose one of five schools to attend. Each reflects one of the five major philosophies. Which would you choose and why? Which school would you choose to work in as a teacher? Why?
2. Interview a teacher who has been teaching for several years. Find out what that teacher’s philosophy was when he or she started teaching and what it is today. Is there a difference? If so, try to find out why.
3. Reread the five statements by the teachers in the faculty room at the beginning of the chapter. In what areas do you think these teachers could agree? In what areas are their philosophies distinct and different? What do you predict will be the result of their meeting? Which of the statements by the five teachers do you agree with most? Are there elements of each teacher’s philosophy that could combine to form your own philosophy of education?
4. How would you describe your own philosophy of education? Imagine you are a teacher. Create a 3-minute speech that you would give to parents on back-to-school night that outlines your philosophy of education and identifies how it would be evident in the classroom.
5. The key terms and people in this chapter could be dramatically expanded by including Far Eastern and Middle Eastern philosophy. Consider the following additions: Buddhism, Confucius, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Mohammed, Shinto, Taoism, Zen Buddhism. Research and briefly describe each of these. What has been (or might be) the impact of these religions, principles, and individuals on our present school philosophy?

REEL TO REAL TEACHING

QUIZ SHOW (1992)
Run Time: 130 minutes

Synopsis: By giving answers to the players they wanted to win, the producers of the popular 1950s game show *Twenty-One* had their trump card for capturing huge audience ratings. Charles Van Doren, college professor and scion of a great literary family, was the “perfect” game show contestant. The fact that the handsome and genteel Van Doren was prepared to participate in the cheating was an extra benefit. Based on a true story, the film probes the fault lines between knowledge, privilege, and scandal, and raises serious questions about what is most worth knowing.

Reflection:

1. What hooks you into a good game show or causes you to quickly flip channels? How is your educational philosophy reflected in your passion (or distaste) for game shows?
2. Which educational philosophy is best represented in *Quiz Show*? What elements of the classroom are seen on the game show stage?
3. How did factors such as race, religion, gender, and socioeconomic class determine who knew the answers on *Twenty-One*? Compare how these same factors shape how we define who is intelligent in schools.
4. After the scandal, Charles Van Doren noted that he believed the difference between good and evil was “not cut and dried.” How is this statement revealed in the motives of the *Twenty-One* producers? Contestant Herb Stempel? Charles Van Doren? What power did each have? What power did each believe he had? How is this “winning at all costs” attitude reflected in schools and the testing culture?
5. What accounts for the popularity of quiz shows in the 1950s? Today? Consider the events, people, and values of each time period. How do game shows reflect American society and the value it places on knowledge?

Follow-up Activity: It’s Game Night at your school. Choose a subject area and design your own “quiz show” based on one of the five philosophies discussed in the chapter. How will you define winning? How will the host, contestants, questions/answers, interactions, seating arrangements, and prizes reflect the key principles of the philosophy? Consider the many variables, such as the “facts”; the roles of gender, race, and class; and political motivations, among other things, that go into creating a “quiz show.”

How do you rate this film? Go to *Reel to Real Teaching* to review this film.

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FOR FURTHER READING

Approaches to Teaching, by Gary Fenstermacher and Jonas Soltis (3rd ed., 1998). Through an interactive, case studies approach, the authors explore the strengths and weaknesses of various philosophical perspectives. Readers are challenged to critically assess their own philosophical positions on education and to unpack the meaning of teaching.

Children as Philosophers, by Joanna Haynes and Tony Brown (2001). This book was written with the belief that philosophy can assist with children’s thinking, speaking, and listening skills as well as provide a stimulus and structure for moral inquiry.



Happiness and Education, by Nel Noddings (2005). When parents are asked what they want for their children, they usually answer that they want their children to be happy. Why, then, is happiness rarely mentioned as a goal of education? Criticizing the current cultural emphasis on economic well-being and pleasure, the author explores what we might teach if we were to take happiness seriously as an aim of education.

Schools with Spirit: Nurturing the Inner Lives of Children and Teachers, by Linda Lantieri (ed), (2001). Fourteen respected educators describe how schools can nurture the inner life of students without violating the beliefs of families or the separation of church and state. *Schools with Spirit* inspires educators to develop “spiritual intelligence” in themselves and their students, from the first tentative steps of fostering emotional growth to the bold movement of welcoming the spiritual dimension in our schools.

Zen and the Art of Public School Teaching, by John Perricone (2005). This book is based on the assumption that “we teach who we are,” and that our philosophy determines if we find joy and passion in teaching. With quick wit and poignant examples the author, invites readers to participate in an introspective journey designed to help them better know themselves and the professional path upon which they have embarked.