

Complete the "Inventory of Philosophies of Education" in Chapter 6 (starting on page 170). Compare your five scores, then draft your philosophy statement!

In other education classes and as you pursue your teaching career you will continue to develop and discuss your teaching philosophy, so it will be good practice to begin to draft this now.

Use the green "Writing Your Philosophy Statement" box on the top of page 193 to help guide your writing. Be sure to make connections to the key concepts of this chapter, as well as your personal background/experiences/beliefs. You may also include outside resources, if you wish to do so.

Required: Include a reflection at the end of your statement, addressing the following:

- What new insights did you learn about yourself, teaching, or learning from drafting your philosophy statement?
- How do you see this philosophy affecting your practice as a teacher (or other profession if not pursuing teaching)?

There is no page minimum/limit, though you must respond completely and with depth of reflection and introspection to receive full credit. You are welcome to include images or other forms of media, if you wish.

As always, you will be evaluated on the below rubric.

Portfolio Rubric 2		
Criteria	Ratings	Pts
Completion The assignment is complete; items are answered/completed accurately, with supporting detail from the chapter and online lesson, and personal anecdotes.		15 pts
Reflection A complete, comprehensive reflection is included with direct connections to professional practice. Profound self-inquiry is present.		15 pts
Total Points: 30		

Inventory of Philosophies of Education

As you read through the following statements about schools and teaching, decide how strongly you agree or disagree. 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

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

- ⁴
_____ 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.
- ³
_____ 16. For the United States to be competitive economically in the world marketplace, schools must bolster their academic requirements to train more competent workers.
- ³
_____ 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.
- ⁵
_____ 18. Students learn effectively through social interaction, so schools should plan for substantial social interaction in their curricula.
- ³
_____ 19. Students should be taught how to be politically literate, and learn how to improve the quality of life for all people.
- ⁴
_____ 20. The central role of the school is to provide students with options and choices. The student must decide what and how to learn.
- ⁵
_____ 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.
- ⁴
_____ 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.
- ⁵
_____ 23. Students should be active participants in the learning process, involved in democratic class decision making and reflective thinking.
- ³
_____ 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.
- ²
_____ 25. Effective teachers help students to discover and develop their personal values, even when those values conflict with traditional ones.
- ⁴
_____ 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.
- ²
_____ 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.
- ¹
_____ 28. Education should be a responsibility of the family and the 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 provided on p. 172; then 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.

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 Ghosh’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.

A	B	C	D	E
Essentialism (Ghosh)	Perennialism (Sarah)	Progressivism (Marcus)	Social Reconstructionism (Ted)	Existentialism (Eloisa)
1. <u> 4 </u>	2. <u> 4 </u>	3. <u> 5 </u>	4. <u> 5 </u>	5. <u> 3 </u>
6. <u> 4 </u>	7. <u> 3 </u>	8. <u> 5 </u>	9. <u> 3 </u>	10. <u> 2 </u>
11. <u> 4 </u>	12. <u> 4 </u>	13. <u> 5 </u>	14. <u> 5 </u>	15. <u> 4 </u>
16. <u> 3 </u>	17. <u> 3 </u>	18. <u> 5 </u>	19. <u> 3 </u>	20. <u> 4 </u>
21. <u> 5 </u>	22. <u> 4 </u>	23. <u> 5 </u>	24. <u> 3 </u>	25. <u> 2 </u>
Scores <u> 20 </u>	<u> 18 </u>	<u> 25 </u>	<u> 19 </u>	<u> 15 </u>

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? As you look at the statements that you least support, what do those 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? This may be the beginning of a lifelong process for you. But it is a conscious and thoughtful way of positioning yourself, of determining your beliefs and approaches as an educator. This process will bring to the surface your answer to the question, what do I believe in? What kind of teacher do I want to be? What will I expect from my students? What do I expect from myself?

Be patient and thoughtful in answering these questions. It is likely that it will take a while for you to sort all this out. It is worth the time and the effort. It is believed that Socrates once said the unexamined life is not worth living. Perhaps the same can be said about teaching.

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”).

Let’s begin our discussion with the teacher-centered philosophies.

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. (In Chapter 9, we will revisit these teacher-centered philosophies and explore how they view the primary purpose of schools as “passing the cultural baton.”) The major teacher-centered philosophies of education are essentialism and perennialism.

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 meaningful 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 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 one another for material goods, and we are distracted by hundreds of cable channels, iPads, smartphones, 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 and self-directed and includes a great deal of individual contact with the teacher. Honest interpersonal relationships are emphasized; roles and “official” status are 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.⁹

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 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 ten-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 discernible 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 go 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 thirty schools follow the Sudbury model, including schools in the United States, Canada, Europe, Israel, and Japan.¹⁰

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.

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Social challenges and problems provide a natural (and moral) direction for curricular and instructional activities. Racism, sexism, climate change and environmental pollution, homelessness, poverty, substance abuse, homophobia, 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 alternative perspectives, and facilitate student analysis of these problems. Although 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.

PROFILE IN EDUCATION

Jane Roland Martin



Jane Roland Martin advocates the development of “schoolhomes” that support what she calls the three Cs—caring, concern, and connection. Her social reconstructionist vision focuses on fostering students’ individual emotional and cognitive needs. Read a full profile of Jane Roland Martin on Connect.

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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, the 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 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. 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 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. (See Contemporary Issues: A View from the Field: Greening Schools to learn how an entire school and an individual teacher follow the social reconstructionist philosophy to improve the environment.)



A View from the Field: Greening Schools

Sidwell Friends Middle School in Washington, D.C., is one of a growing number of green schools. Guided by its Quaker values, Sidwell Friends is committed to practicing responsible environmental stewardship. The building itself has achieved a LEED Platinum green certification, the highest level awarded.

Every aspect of the building has been constructed or remodeled with an eye toward conservation and sustainability. Photovoltaic panels on the roof provide 5 percent of the school's energy, which helps power the computer lab. On the rooftop garden, students grow herbs and vegetables for their school lunches. A constructed wetland in front of the school looks like an attractive, sloping landscape with a variety of plants, but it is much more. The school's wastewater flows below, filtered and cleaned by the plants and microorganisms, and then is recycled and used in the school's toilets. Skylights and reflective panels maximize the natural light in classrooms, a renovation that has been shown to improve academic performance. The windows, with their light-filtering shades, are the single most energy-efficient step employed in the building: Sidwell uses 10 to 15 percent of the energy of a comparable building to light the school. Even the siding on the building is green; the wood cladding is made from reclaimed cedar wine casks. Sidwell Friends represents an amazing institutional commitment to environmental sustainability. Educators use these building innovations as teaching tools, to help students understand the importance of protecting our planet. More and more, teachers across the nation are also promoting green living. Take, for example, Andy Stephens.

Andy Stephens is a science teacher at CALS Early College High School in Los Angeles. Andy's school is not a certified green school but he incorporates environmental education into his curriculum.

We focus on the impacts we have at our school in terms of energy usage, transportation, waste, recycling, and indoor air quality. In a culminating project, I work with a team of teachers to create an interdisciplinary (math, science, history, English) action project that includes a research paper, civic action, presentation, and reflection. Students look at the science behind an issue, mathematically analyze data, write about the history of the issue, and take action.

Andy also leads the school's environmental club, the Mean Green Team. The club's many activities include beach cleanups and peer education.

Andy was actively interested in the environment before becoming a teacher. He was an avid hiker, hunter, and fisherman growing up in Washington. "I was galvanized towards action at a young age thanks to many outdoor experiences and my connection to the land."

Courtesy of Andy Stephens.

More information about Sidwell Friends School and its green building can be found at www.sidwell.edu.

Andy Stephens has a BA in economics from Occidental College and completed his master's in science education at California State University, Northridge in 2008.



In social reconstructionism, students not only learn by doing, they learn to make the world a better, more just place to live.

JGI/Jamie Grill/Blend Images LLC

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."⁸ 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 such as 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 farmworkers 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 5.)

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*, standardized testing mandated by *No Child Left Behind*, 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.

Not all essentialists are the same. Author Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, contends that immigration and multiculturalism threaten the traditional “American” identity. He advocates for a time-honored, Anglo-Saxon curriculum reflecting European traditions. On the other hand, **E. D. Hirsch Jr.** advocates for a more inclusive curriculum that offers all students a shared knowledge, a common curriculum (not unlike Horace Mann’s idea of a common school). Hirsch wrote *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* and *The Knowledge Deficit*, and he suggests facts and ideas that might be included in his curriculum. Although people refer to his work by the popular title of his book, cultural literacy, he prefers to call it “core knowledge,” a knowledge that would be shared by all Americans.²



The current emphasis on pen-and-paper testing is an example of essentialism in action.

Tom Grill/Corbis/Getty Images

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. 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.

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Essentialists maintain that classrooms should be oriented toward 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.

RAP 3.3

What You See and What You Get

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 two hundred 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 they incorporate components of perennialism, which brings us to the other teacher-centered philosophy.

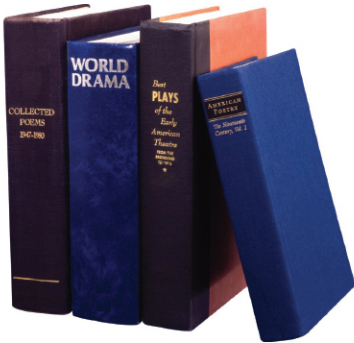
Perennialism

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*, the *Talmud*, or the *Quran*), discerning moral truths, and honoring those moral values. In the classroom description that follows, we will concentrate on secular perennialism as formulated in the twentieth-century United States by such individuals as Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler.



In a perennialist classroom, primary sources rather than textbooks are the center of learning.

Burke/Triolo/Brand X Pictures/Jupiterimages

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. 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, **Mortimer Adler** proposed in his *Paideia Proposal* (1982) 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. Critics chastise perennialists for the lack of women, people of color, and non-Western ideas in the Great Books they teach, but 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

You also 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.”⁴ Because perennialist teachers see themselves as discussion seminar leaders and facilitators, lectures are rare.

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 uses the Great Books as a core curriculum 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 at the end of their senior year and write a final essay that must be approved before they are allowed to graduate.

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, (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, visit Connect.)

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.⁵

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.⁶

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 such as Monopoly might be used to illustrate the principles of capitalism versus socialism. Computer simulations, field trips, and interactive Web sites on the Internet offer realistic learning challenges for students and build on students' multiple intelligences.



Learning by doing is a touchstone of progressivism.

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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. Because 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.

Constructivism

Constructivism, like progressivism, social reconstructionism, and 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 of and bring order to the world.

Built on the work of Swiss and Russian psychologists, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, constructivism reflects cognitive psychologists' view that the essence of learning is the constant effort to assimilate new information. 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 connecting the role of religion in political movements. 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.)

Although 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 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 text.

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, visit [Connect](#).) 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?)