

2nd Discussion

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school planning, curriculum leaders must identify themes that seem true to them. Although this process may be time consuming, the investment is necessary. To be both decisive and effective in their roles, curriculum leaders must combat the urge to ignore the value implications of the job or to reduce all arguments to "thoughtful uncertainty."

DETERMINANTS OF AN EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

Major philosophies of life and education have traditionally been defined by criteria in the form of three questions: What is good? What is true? What is real? Individual perceptions of goodness, truth, and reality differ considerably, and an analysis of these questions reveals unique patterns of response. When such responses are categorized and labeled, they become formal philosophies.

In the language of philosophy, the study of goodness or values is referred to as *axiology*, knowledge or truth as *epistemology*, and reality as *ontology*. Axiological questions deal primarily with values; in a school context, philosophical arguments are concerned with the ultimate source of values to be taught. Questions of an epistemological nature in a school context are directed toward the media of learning or the best means of seeking truth. Ontological questions, in search of reality, are most often concerned with the substance of learning, or application of the content of study. Thus, the standard philosophical inquiries concerning goodness, truth, and reality are translated into questions concerning the source, medium, and substance of learning in a school environment.

These queries are not simple because there are many ways to select ideas, translate them into instructional patterns, and package them into curriculum programs. Those possibilities are constantly increasing as our knowledge of the world becomes more sophisticated and technology opens new options.

FIVE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES

There are many educational philosophies, but for the sake of simplicity, it is possible to extract five distinct ones: (1) perennialism, (2) idealism, (3) realism, (4) experimentalism, and (5) existentialism. Collectively, these philosophies represent a broad spectrum of thought about what schools should be and do. Educators holding these philosophies would create very different schools. In the following sections, each of these standard philosophies is discussed in terms of its posture on axiological, epistemological, and ontological questions. The five standard philosophies are compared in Table 2.1 in terms of attitudes on significant questions.

Perennialism

The most conservative, traditional, and structured of the five philosophies is *perennialism*, a philosophy drawing heavily from classical definitions of education. Perennialists believe that education, like human nature, is a constant. Because the distinguishing characteristic of humans is the ability to reason, education should focus on developing rationality. For the perennialist, education is a preparation for life, and students should be taught the world's permanencies through structured study.

For the perennialist, reality is a world of reason. Such truths are revealed through study and some through divine acts. Goodness is to be found in rationality

TABLE 2.1 Five Major Educational Philosophies

	Perennialism	Idealism	Realism	Experimentalism	Existentialism
Reality Ontology	A world of reason and God	A world of the mind	A world of things	A world of experience	A world of existing
Truth (Knowledge) Epistemology	Reason and revelation	Consistency of ideas	Correspondence and sensation (as we see it)	What works	Personal, subjective choice
Goodness Axiology	Rationality	Imitation of ideal self, person to be emulated	Laws of nature	What is	Freedom
Teaching Reality	Disciplinary subjects and doctrine	Subjects of the mind—literary, philosophical, religious	Subjects of physical world—math, science	The public test	Subject matter of choice—art, ethics, philosophy
Teaching Truth	Discipline of the mind via drill	Teaching ideas via lecture, discussion	Teaching for mastery of information—demonstrating, reciting	Subject matter of social experiences—social studies	Arousing personal responses—questioning
Teaching Goodness (Values)	Disciplining behavior (to reason)	Imitating heroes and other exemplars	Training in rules of conduct	Problem solving, project method	Awakening self to responsibility
Why Schools Exist	To reveal reason and God's will	To sharpen the mind and intellectual processes	To reveal the order of the world and the universe	Making group decisions in light of consequences	To aid children in knowing themselves and their place in society
What Should Be Taught	External truths	Wisdom of the ages	Laws of physical reality	To discover and expand the society we live in to share experiences	Unregimented topic areas
Role of the Teacher	Interprets, tells	Reports, is a person to be emulated	Displays, imparts knowledge	Group inquiry into social problems and social sciences, method and subject together	Questions, assists student in personal journey
Role of the Student	Passively receives	Receives, memorizes	Manipulates, passively participates	Aids, is a consultant	Determines own rules
School's Attitude Toward Change	Truth is eternal, no real change	Truth is to be preserved, antichange	Always moving toward perfection, orderly change	Actively participates, contributes	Change is necessary at all times

itself. Perennialists favor a curriculum of subjects and doctrine taught through highly disciplined drill and behaviorial control. Schools, for the perennialist, exist primarily to reveal reason by teaching eternal truths. The teacher interprets and tells. The student is a passive recipient. Because truth is eternal, all change in the immediate school environment is largely superficial. Perennialist thought is sometimes found in extreme forms in religious or highly politicized schools, which can be characterized by high degrees of inflexibility and certainty of purpose.

Idealism

Idealism is a philosophy that espouses the refined wisdom of men and women. Reality is seen as a world within a person's mind, and truth is to be found in the consistency of ideas. Goodness is an ideal state, something to strive to attain.

Idealists favor schools that teach subjects of the mind, such as are found in most public school classrooms. Teachers, for the idealist, would be exemplars—models of ideal behavior.

For idealists, the schools' function is to sharpen intellectual processes, to present the wisdom of the ages, and to present models of behavior that are desirable. Students in such schools would have a somewhat passive role, receiving and memorizing the reporting of the teacher. Change in the school program would generally be considered an intrusion on the orderly process of educating. Idealists are confident in their sources of learning.

Realism

For the *realist*, the world is as it is, and the job of schools is to teach students about that world. Goodness, for the realist, is found in the laws of nature and the order of the physical world. Truth is the simple correspondences of observation.

The realist favors a school dominated by subjects of the here-and-now world, such as disciplines of knowledge. Students would be taught factual information for mastery. The teacher would impart knowledge of this reality to students or display such reality for observation and study. Classrooms would be highly ordered and disciplined, like nature, and the students would be somewhat passive participants in the study of things. Changes in school would be perceived as a natural evolution toward a perfection of order. Although a teacher in a school dominated by realism would be open to discussion, the curriculum itself would be largely predetermined.

Experimentalism

For the *experimentalist*, the world is an ever-changing place. Reality is what is actually experienced. Truth is what presently functions. Goodness is what is accepted by public test. Unlike the perennialist, the idealist, and the realist, the experimentalist openly accepts change and continually seeks to discover new ways to expand and improve society.

The experimentalist favors a school with a heavy emphasis on social subjects and experiences. Learning would occur through a problem-solving or inquiry format. Teachers would aid learners or consult with learners, who would be actively involved in discovering and experiencing the world in which they live. Such an educational program, which focuses on value development, would factor in group consequences.

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Distinguishing experimentalism from the previous three philosophies is a belief that the student is the focus of the teaching-learning act. Experimentalism, sometimes called *progressivism*, arrived in the United States early in the 20th century and has been reinforced by human development studies.

Existentialism

The *existentialist*, a proponent of the newest philosophy, sees the world in terms of personal subjectivity. Goodness, truth, and reality are individually defined. Reality is a world of existing, truth is subjectively chosen, and goodness is a matter of freedom.

For existentialists, schools, if they exist at all, are places that assist students in knowing themselves and learning their place in society. If subject matter existed in a curriculum, it would be largely a matter of interpretation in subjects such as the arts, ethics, or philosophy. Teacher-student interaction would revolve around assisting students in their personal learning journeys. Change in school environments would be embraced as both a natural and necessary phenomenon. Nonschooling or homeschooling, and an individually determined curriculum, would be a possibility.

Because schools are complex places with many forces vying for prominence, few educators hold a pure version of any of these philosophies. These various schools of thought have evolved as distinctive forms of philosophy following the examination of beliefs on pertinent issues (e.g., grading, grouping, discipline, or the role of the Internet). When an educator chooses not to adopt a single philosophy, or blends several philosophies, or selectively applies educational philosophies in practice, he or she is said to hold an *eclectic* position. Most classrooms and public schools come closest to an eclectic stance, applying philosophical preferences as conditions demand.

PHILOSOPHIES AS FOUND IN SCHOOLS

During the 20th century, U.S. public schools evolved from highly standardized content-focused institutions (Idealism-Realism) to more flexible and diverse institutions (Realism-Experimentalism). Our understandings of human development and the learning process, and the pressures on our rapidly changing society, account for these alterations of philosophy and the form of schooling. In the early 21st century, under the implementation of the Common Core, schools are pursuing more of a structured approach (Perennialism-Idealism).

All formal schools are designed to promote an education, but the curriculum designs of school differ just as educational philosophies differ. Schools represent a kind of blueprint, or plan, to promote a type of learning; because the ends sought by planners differ, all schools are not alike. This section introduces the 15 dimensions of any school design—dimensions by which schools can be compared and contrasted. Each dimension has been prepared to illuminate the various philosophical ranges within schools. Although these continua do not match the five philosophies precisely, you can begin to see a rough parallel between these philosophies and the various observable dimensions of the school setting. Questions for curriculum planners are highlighted for your consideration.

The intentions of schooling might be thought of as a continuum of choices. On one end of such a continuum is the belief that education is the process of shaping raw