Chapter 11: Educational Theory in American Schools: Philosophy in Action

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Philosophy Provides the Foundation for Educational Theories

Philosophy -- Theory

- Educational theory is the application of philosophy to the classroom.
- Organization of Curriculum
- Manner of Instruction
- Character of school environment
- Grading and testing (assessment)
- Varies from school to school and state to state

Educational Theories

- Essentialism & Perennialism: Eternal truths permeate all things, great ideas unfold but remain constant
- Behaviorism: Behavior defines the person, education is the process that teaches control of behavior
- Progressivism: Stresses child-centered problems, education is the process of finding and solving problems
- Reconstructionism: Stresses building a new social order, aims to change society
- Humanism: Stresses the innate goodness of the child, education is the development of individuals

Authoritarian / Nonauthoritarian

- Idealism / Realism
- Pragmatism / Existentialism

Convergent / Divergent Thinking

- One Possible Answer
- Possibility of Many Answers
**Authoritarian**
- Purpose of education is to train pupil’s minds so they can deal with intellectual concepts of life.
- Mastery of facts and information
- Any child can learn any subject at any level if the subject matter is properly presented
- “Mastery Teaching”

**Authoritarian**
- Attention to test scores
- Grade level achievement
- P.A.S.S
- Accountability
- More traditional teaching strategies
- Convergent Thinking—One answer to question, and the teacher has it!

**Authoritarian—Idealism**
- Learning Focus: subject matter of the mind: literature, history, philosophy, religion
- Curriculum goal: same education for all
- Teaching method: lecture, discussion
- Character development: imitation
- Aesthetic development: study of masterworks, values of past heritage

**Authoritarian—Realism**
- Learning Focus: subject matter of physical world: math, science
- Curriculum goal: Mastery of laws of the universe
- Teaching method: mastery of information and skills: lecture, recitation, demonstration
- Character development: rules of conduct
- Aesthetic development: study of design in nature

**Nonauthoritarian**
- Mind is not just a muscle to be developed (John Dewey)
- Human beings are problem solvers who profit from experience
- Importance of the individual and personal awareness
- Interest aroused through student inquiry
- Divergent thinking—possibility of multiple answers to question

**Nonauthoritarian—Pragmatism**
- Learning Focus: social experience
- Curriculum goal: creation of new social order
- Teaching method: problem solving, project method and development
- Character development: group decision making in light of consequences
- Aesthetic development: participation in art project based on cross-cultural and universal values
Nonauthoritarian—Existentialism

- **Learning Focus**—subject matter of personal choice
- **Curriculum goal**—personal freedom and development
- **Teaching method**—Individual exploration: discovery method
- **Character development**—development of individual responsibility
- **Aesthetic development**—personal view of the world, self-initiated activities

Eight Educational Theories

- Perennialism
- Essentialism
- Behaviorism
- Positivism
- Progressivism
- Reconstructionism
- Humanism
- Constructivism

Relationship of Philosophies to Educational Theories

- **Idealism**—Perennialism & Essentialism
- **Realism**—Behaviorism & Positivism
- **Pragmatism**—Progressivism & Reconstructionism
- **Existentialism**—Humanism & Constructivism

Perennialism—Focus of Learning

- Discipline the mind
- Learner assumed to be rational and spiritual person
- Reading, Writing, Recitation, Computation are considered important
- Stress “Higher-Order Thinking Skills”

Perennialism—Curriculum

- Early schooling best directed toward preparing children for maturity—3Rs
- Secondary school level directed more toward “intellectually elite”
- Vocational training for less gifted
- Strong use of Great Books Program
  - Hutchins and Adler
  - Studying the works of the leading scholars of history is the best way to a general education
Essentialism--(Idealism)--Basic View

- Formulated by William C. Bagley--1938
- Common Core of information and skills needed
- Three basic principles of Essentialism
  - Core of information
  - Hard work
  - Teacher-centered instruction

Essentialism--Basic View

- “Back to the Basics”
- Not so intent on transmitting underlying basic truths
- Advocate teaching that will help a person live a productive life today
- Therefore this “core” of information can and will change

Essentialism--Focus of Learning

- Transmit cultural heritage
- Develop good citizens
- How?--
  - emphasize core of fundamental knowledge and skills
  - develop sound habits of mental discipline
  - demand respect for authority in a structured learning situation

Essentialism--Focus of Learning

- School is a place where children come to learn what they need to know, and the teacher is the person who can best instruct students in essential matters
- Role of teacher is “imparter of knowledge”
- Role of student is “learner”

Essentialism--Curriculum

- Subject matter of symbol and content (Idealism)—laws of nature and universal truths of the physical world
- Literature, history, foreign language, religion
- Lecture, required reading, memorization, recitation, examinations

Essentialism--Curriculum

- Truth is defined as observable fact, therefore field trips, laboratories, A/V materials and nature studies
- Subject matter is the core of education
- School is the curator of knowledge
**Essential Schools Movement**
- Theodore Sizer
- Strip away the nonessentials
- Focus on students “using their minds well”
- Does not specify what specific content is essential
- Essential schools required to analyze what curriculum should be and change the curriculum to emphasize this core.

**Behaviorism—(Realism)—Basic View**
- “Control the environment and you will control the individual’s behavior”
- B.F. Skinner (1904-1990)
- Followed Pavlov
- Suggested that human behavior also could be explained as responses to external stimuli

**Behaviorism—Basic View**
- Share common belief that a student’s misbehavior can be changed and reshaped in a socially acceptable manner by directly changing the student’s environment.
- All people will attempt to avoid experiences and stimuli that are not pleasing and will seek experiences that are pleasing and rewarding.

**Behaviorism—Focus of Learning**
- Behavior is determined by environment, not heredity
- School environment highly structured
- Curriculum based on behavioral objectives
- Knowledge is best described as behaviors that are observable

**Behaviorism—Curriculum**
- Mastery of Facts
- Empirical evidence is essential—Scientific methodology
- Develop learning environments that lead to desired behaviors in students for which they are rewarded and will be motivated to continue

**Behaviorism—Reinforcement**
- Positive reinforcement
- Negative reinforcement
- Some believe negative reinforcement is ineffective
- Punishment
- “Extinguished”
Behaviorism—Reinforcement
- Not concerned about the cause of student’s problems
- Discover what is happening in the classroom environment and change it to allow student’s behavior to change

Positivism (Realism)
- Auguste Comte (1798-1857)
- Divided thinking of humankind into three historical periods—each characterized by distinct way of thinking
  - Theological era—people explained things by reference to spirits and gods
  - Metaphysical era—explained by causes, essences, and inner principles
- Positive period—do not attempt to go beyond observable, measurable facts

Positivism—Focus of Learning
- Acquisition of facts based on empirical observation
- Schools must develop content standards that represent understandings of experts
- Students are encouraged to master these understandings and to develop their own skills of observation, classification, and logical analysis
- Objective testing—all tested with same objective set of criteria

Progressivism—(Pragmatism)—Basic Views
- Pierce (1839-1914) founded Pragmatism—1800s
- Need for people to be able to adjust to change
- Alvin Toffler—"Future Shock"
  - First wave—agriculture
  - Second wave—industry
  - Third wave—information

Progressivism—Basic Views
- William James (1842-1914)—Pragmatism—theory of truth
  - Meaning and value of ideas only found in practical results
  - Satisfactory working of an idea constitutes its whole truth
- John Dewey (1859-1952)—founder of Progressivism
  - Ideas must always be tested by experiment

Progressivism—Focus of Learning
- Educational theory that emphasizes that ideas should be tested by experimentation
- Learning is rooted in questions developed by the learners
- Progressivists favor human experience as basis for knowledge
Progressivism--Focus of Learning

- Emphasize learning how to think rather than what to think
- Should actively prepare students for change
- Flexibility is important in curriculum design
- Life experience determines content

Progressivism--Curriculum

- Encourages divergent thinking
- Experience-centered curricula stresses process of learning rather than the results
- Interest in an intellectual activity will generate the practice needed for learning.

Progressivism

- Sees the learner as an experiencing, thinking, exploring individual
- Goal is to expose the learner to the subject matter of:
  - social experiences,
  - social studies,
  - projects,
  - problems, and
  - experiments that.....

Reconstructionism--(Pragmatism & Existentialism)--Basic Views

- Founded by Counts, Rugg, and Brameld
- Recognized that Progressivism had made advances beyond Essentialism in the area of teacher-pupil relations and teaching methodology
- However--Progressivism fixated too heavily on needs of the child and failed to develop long-range goals for society

Reconstructionism--Basic Views

- Calls for new social order that will fulfill basic democratic ideals
- People should control institutions and resources
- This can happen if international democracy of world government
Reconstructivism--Focus of Learning
- Critically analyze world events
- Explore controversial issues
- Develop vision for new and better world
- Promote programs of cultural renewal

Reconstructivism--Curriculum
- Critical Pedagogy
  - Unites theory and practice
  - Provides students with critical thinking tools
- Public Education should be the direct instrument of world reformation
- Use moral dilemmas to direct attention toward social and world reform

Humanism--(Existentialism)--Basic Views
- Based on the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)
- In “Émile,” Rousseau states “God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil.”
- Humans are born free and “good” at birth
- Become enslaved by institutions

Humanism--Basic Views
- Concerned with enhancing the innate goodness of the individual
- Rejects group-oriented educational system
- Believe that most schools de-emphasize the individual and the relationship between the teacher and the student.

Humanism--Focus of Learning
- Education should be a process of developing a free, self-actualizing person, centered on the feelings of the student.
- Education does not start with great ideas, the world, or humankind, but with the individual self.

Humanism--Curriculum
- Goal--complete autonomous person
- Education should be without coercion or prescription
- Students should be active and encouraged to make their own choices
Humanism - Curriculum
- Instruction based on student interest, abilities, and needs
- Students determine rules, books, and exercises
- Divergent thinking is completely honored

Humanism School Environments
- “We are people, not numbers!”
- Nel Noddings—“an environment of caring”
- A.S. Neil—Summerhill
- Block Scheduling
- Open classrooms
- Area Vocational Centers

Constructivism (Existentialism)
- Hands-on, activity-based teaching & learning
- Considers students as “active” learners who should be given opportunities to construct their own frames of thought.
- “True” learning is the active framing of personal meaning rather than the framing of someone else’s meaning.

Constructivism (Existentialism)
- Encourage development of critical thinking
- Understanding of big ideas rather than mastery of factual information
- Teach “how to learn” rather than facts
- Students learn by shaping their own understandings about their world
- This does not “fit” with current school structure.

Five Philosophical Orientations to Teaching

Overview of Educational Thought

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