

CHAPTER TWELVE

Philosophical Roots of Education

Teachers face the important everyday challenges of preparing lessons, assessing student performance, and creating and maintaining a fair and equitable classroom learning environment.¹ How well you succeed in meeting these challenges determines the degree of success you will have as a teacher. From informal conversations in the teachers' lounge to professional workshops and institutes, many opinions are offered on how to meet these challenges. Often because of the urgent problems teachers face each day, these opinions, lying at the surface of education, are not examined and reflected upon. But upon reflection, the seemingly everyday issues take on a deeper and more philosophical dimension. This chapter examines educational philosophy's role in helping teachers move from unexamined opinions to such philosophical questions as the following:

- What is truth, and how do we know and teach it?
- What is right and wrong, and how can we teach ethical moral values?
- How can schools and their curriculum exemplify what is true and valuable?
- How do teaching and learning reflect one's beliefs about truth and value?

¹Useful books on the philosophy of education are Robert D. Heslep, *Philosophical Thinking in Educational Practice* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 1997); and Nel Noddings, *Philosophy of Education* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995).

Throughout the chapter, we shall refer to these as “the basic questions.” As a future teacher, you will be asked to answer them, not in so many words perhaps, but through all of your daily actions. The policies and procedures of the school in which you teach will then reflect an underlying philosophy.²

These are not easy questions to answer. They cannot be answered in true-false, multiple-choice format. Most likely, your answers to these questions will change over time, become more complex, and upon reflection result in the creation of your own philosophy of education. In today’s educational practice, portfolios are used for ongoing student assessment. Teachers also keep journals with daily entries about classroom events, successes, and problems. Both portfolios and journals provide a personal framework of educational events upon which you can reflect. In much the same way, you can build a personal philosophy of education. It will not be easy or quick, but it will be rewarding both personally and professionally. It will help move your professional development from opinion to more reflective beliefs.

Although philosophical issues can be found throughout this book, they are especially relevant to Chapter 13 on the goals of education and to Chapter 14 on curriculum. This chapter will provide you with a philosophical and theoretical map, a kind of grid, upon which you can examine your opinions about education and transform them into your own philosophy of education. The following questions can guide you in reading the chapter and also serve to aid you on the journey to building your own philosophy of education:

1. What are the areas of philosophy, how are they defined, and what are my beliefs about them?
2. What philosophies of education are found in human culture? Do I find certain philosophies in my educational experiences? Do I find these philosophies useful in examining and explaining beliefs about education?
3. What theories guide educational practice — curriculum, teaching, and learning? Do I find these theories present in my educational experiences? Are these theories useful in examining and explaining my beliefs about education?
4. How do philosophies and theories of education influence teaching and learning in the classroom? For example, how does a teacher’s educational relationship to students reflect his or her ethics and values?
5. How does a teacher’s method of instruction reflect a particular theory of knowledge and human understanding? How does a teacher’s attitude to cultural diversity reflect his or her conception of a just society?

This chapter examines four educational philosophies and five educational theories. Systematic **philosophies**, such as idealism and realism, refer to complete bodies of thought that present a worldview of which education is a part. In contrast, educational **theories** focus on education itself and on schools. (See Figure 12.1.) There are close links between the general philosophies examined in this chapter and the more specific theories of education. The theories are the school-based components of the philosophical approaches. For example, the theory of essentialism is closely related to the philosophy of realism. Similarly, the theories of progressivism and reconstructionism both derive from the general philosophy of pragmatism.

²For the relevance of educational philosophy to classroom practices, see Tony W. Johnson, *Discipleship or Pilgrimage? The Study of Educational Philosophy* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1995).

FIGURE 12.1 Differences Between “Philosophies” and “Theories” of Education

GENERAL	SPECIFIC
←	→
Philosophies	Theories
Wide-ranging, systematic, complete, global	Focused on education; no complete philosophical system offered
Components related to metaphysics, epistemology, axiology, and logic	Components related to specifics of education, such as curriculum, teaching, and learning
Insights derived from the general system	Insights derived from more general philosophies or from school contexts

To understand current disputes about educational goals and curricula, we need to explore these often conflicting philosophical roots. Before doing so, we must define certain terms and areas of philosophy.

Special Terminology

Reality and existence

Every field of inquiry has a special terminology. Philosophy of education uses the basic terms *metaphysics*, *epistemology*, *axiology*, and *logic*.

Metaphysics examines the nature of ultimate reality. What is real and what is not real? Is there a spiritual realm of existence separate from the material world? Idealists, for example, see reality primarily in nonmaterial, abstract, or spiritual terms. Realists see it as an objective order that exists independently of humankind. Much instruction in schools represents the efforts of curriculum makers, teachers, and textbook writers to describe “reality” to students. As a teacher you will find that different textbooks have competing interpretations of reality, or at least different emphases.

Knowledge and knowing

Epistemology, which deals with knowledge and knowing, influences methods of teaching and learning. It raises such questions as: On what do we base our knowledge of the world and our understanding of truth? Does our knowledge derive from divine revelation, from ideas latent in our own minds, from empirical evidence, or from something else? Again, different philosophies hold different epistemological conceptions.

Teachers who believe that human ideas should conform to the ordered structure of reality will stress orderly and sequential teaching of subjects. In contrast, teachers who believe that the process (*how* we know) is more important than the content (*what* we know) will stress inquiry or problem solving.

What is of value?

Axiology, which prescribes values, is divided into *ethics* and *aesthetics*. *Ethics* examines moral values and the rules of right conduct; *aesthetics* addresses values in beauty and art. Whether a school explicitly teaches such values or not, teachers — like parents and society in general — convey values implicitly by re-

PROFESSIONAL PLANNING

for your first year

How Can You
Implement Your
Personal
Philosophy
of Education?

The Situation

Throughout a teacher's professional career, decisions need to be made regarding curriculum and instruction. These decisions reflect a personal philosophy of education. Consider, for example, Amanda Scott, a seventh-grade English and social studies teacher in her first year of teaching. The building principal has appointed Amanda to a three-person committee to review and make recommendations for revising the literature course. Amanda brings with her many progressive and critical theory ideas from her teacher-education program. For example, she believes that her own study of literature in middle and secondary school overemphasized historical rather than contemporary books and that too many selections were written by white Euro-American males. Inclined to a progressive philosophy and some critical theory ideas, she would like to revise the course to include more selections from contemporary Asian and African American writers, especially women.

At the committee's first meeting, the three members — Clara Emerson, a teacher with fifteen years of service in the school, David Senko, a teacher in his fifth year of teaching and committee chairperson, and Amanda — share their opinions. Mrs. Emerson says that the present literature curriculum represents selections from the finest writers in the American past — James Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Louisa May Alcott, and Henry David Thoreau. Speaking as an experienced teacher, she says that these important works carry with them enduring perennial themes that should be the core of any literature program. Amanda then gives her opinion but is somewhat overwhelmed by Mrs. Emerson, who speaks with a sense of authority. Mr. Senko, who spends much of his time on administrative responsibilities, takes a neutral position and concludes the first meeting by saying, "Both points of view are interesting and useful. The committee will meet next week to draft the general principles that will guide our work. Before our next meeting, it would be a good idea for Mrs. Emerson and Ms. Scott to meet informally over coffee to discuss their apparently opposing viewpoints."

Thought Questions

1. In what philosophies or theories of education is each divergent view located? For example, is Mrs. Emerson speaking as a perennialist? What philosophy or theory is represented by Amanda's point of view?
2. Do you believe that Amanda, who is a first-year teacher, should continue to argue for curriculum change against Mrs. Emerson, an experienced teacher? If not, why not? If yes, how should she proceed?
3. Mr. Senko appears to be neutral. Is his kind of neutrality philosophically and professionally defensible, or should he take more of a stand?
4. Do you see any ways in which the committee can work out a philosophical compromise? What might be the effects of such a compromise on the students and teachers, especially Amanda and Mrs. Emerson?

warding or punishing behavior depending on whether it conforms to their conceptions of what is right, good, and beautiful. Moreover, the school climate as a whole represents the values of the educational community.

Deductive and inductive thinking

Logic, which is concerned with correct and valid thinking, examines the rules of inference that enable us to correctly frame our propositions and arguments. **Deductive logic** moves from general statements to particular instances and applications. **Inductive logic** moves from the particular instance to tentative generalizations subject to further verification. Curriculum and instruction are both based on conceptions of logic. Does something in the subject itself logically dictate how material should be organized and presented to students (the deductive approach)? Or should teachers take their cue from students' interest, readiness, and experience in deciding how to present instruction (an inductive approach)?

With this background in terminology, we can examine different philosophies and theories. After discussing the key concepts of each one, we will see how it answers the basic questions raised at the beginning of the chapter and helps a teacher create his or her own philosophy of education. (See Overview 12.1 for the philosophies discussed in this chapter.)

Idealism

Notable idealist thinkers

Idealism, one of the oldest of the traditional philosophies, goes back to Plato, who developed idealist principles in ancient Athens. In Germany, Georg W. F. Hegel created a comprehensive philosophical worldview based on idealism, and in the United States, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau developed a transcendentalist variety of idealism. Friedrich Froebel based his kindergarten theory on idealist metaphysics.³ Asian religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism also rest on the spiritual outlook associated with idealism.

Key Concepts

Universal, eternal truth

Metaphysics. Idealists, holding that only the mental or spiritual is ultimately real, see the universe as an expression of a highly generalized intelligence and will — a universal mind. The person's spiritual essence, or soul, is the permanent aspect of human nature that provides vitality and dynamism. This mental world of ideas is eternal, permanent, regular, and orderly. Truth and values are absolute and universal.

Macrocosm and microcosm

Idealists, such as the transcendentalists, have used the concepts of the macrocosm and the microcosm to explain their version of reality. **Macrocosm** refers to the universal mind, the first cause, creator, or God. Regardless of the particular name used, the macrocosmic mind is the whole of existence. It is the one, all-inclusive, and complete self of which all lesser selves are parts. The universal, macrocosmic mind is continually thinking and valuing. The **microcosm** is a limited part of the whole — an individual and lesser self. But the microcosm is of the same spiritual substance as the macrocosm.

Latent knowledge

Epistemology. Idealism emphasizes the recognition or reminiscence of ideas that are latent — already present but not evident — in the mind. Such ideas are *a priori*; that is, they concern knowledge that exists prior to and independent of human ex-

³For a discussion of the leading contributors to idealism, see Howard A. Ozman and Samuel M. Craver, *Philosophical Foundations of Education*, 5th ed. (Columbus, Ohio, and Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Merrill/Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 1–15.

OVERVIEW 12.1

Philosophies of Education

Philosophy	Metaphysics	Epistemology	Axiology	Educational Implications	Proponents
Idealism	Reality is spiritual or mental and unchanging	Knowing is the rethinking of latent ideas	Values are absolute and eternal	A subject-matter curriculum emphasizing the great and enduring ideas of the culture	Butler Emerson Froebel Hegel Plato
Realism	Reality is objective and is composed of matter and form; it is fixed, based on natural law	Knowing consists of sensation and abstraction	Values are absolute and eternal, based on nature's laws	A subject-matter curriculum stressing humanistic and scientific disciplines	Aquinas Aristotle Broudy Martin Pestalozzi
Pragmatism (experimentalism)	Reality is the interaction of an individual with environment or experience; it is always changing	Knowing results from experiencing; use of scientific method	Values are situational or relative	Instruction organized around problem solving according to the scientific method	Childs Dewey James Peirce
Existentialism	Reality is subjective, with existence preceding essence	Knowing is to make personal choices	Values should be freely chosen	Classroom dialogues stimulate awareness that each person creates a self-concept through significant choices	Sartre Marcel Morris Soderquist

perience about them. Through introspection the individual examines his or her own mind and finds a copy of the macrocosmic mind. Since what is to be known is already present in the mind, the teacher's challenge is to bring this latent knowledge to consciousness. The goal of education is to help students arrive at a broad, general, and unifying perspective of the universe.⁴

Idealist teachers prefer a hierarchical curriculum based on traditional disciplines or subject matter. At the top of the hierarchy are the most general disciplines, philosophy and theology. These general and abstract subjects transcend the limitations of time, place, and circumstance, and they transfer to a wide range of situations. Mathematics is valuable, too, because it cultivates the power to deal with abstractions. History and literature also rank high as sources of moral and cultural

Hierarchy of subjects

⁴Gerald L. Gutek, *Philosophical and Ideological Perspectives on Education*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997), pp. 13-25.

models. Somewhat lower in the curriculum, the natural and physical sciences address particular cause-and-effect relationships. Language is important because it is an essential tool at all levels of learning. For the idealist, the highest level of knowledge recognizes the relationships among all these subject matters and integrates them.

Enduring values

Axiology. Because idealists see the universe in universal and eternal terms, they prescribe values that are unchanging and applicable to all people. Thus ethical behavior reflects the enduring knowledge and values of human culture. Philosophy, theology, history, literature, and art are rich sources for transmitting this heritage of values. This kind of education requires that students be exposed to worthy models, especially the classics — the great works that have endured over time.

The Basic Questions

Knowledge of universal ideas

If you were to ask an idealist teacher, “What is knowledge?” he or she would reply that knowledge concerns the spiritual principles that are the base of reality. This knowledge of reality takes the form of ideas. If knowledge is about universal ideas, then education is the intellectual process of bringing ideas to the learner’s consciousness.

Schooling: an intellectual pursuit of truth

In answering the question “What is schooling?” the idealist educator would say that the school is a social agency where students seek to discover and pursue truth. It is an intellectual institution where teachers and students explore the questions Socrates and Plato first asked: What is truth? What is beauty? What is the good life? These answers, although hidden, are present in our minds, and we need to reflect deeply to bring them to our consciousness. Nothing should be allowed to distract us from the intellectual pursuit of truth.

Who should attend school? The idealist would say everyone. Not all students have the same intellectual aptitude, but all need to cultivate their minds to the limits of their capacities. Gifted students need the greatest intellectual challenges that the teacher can provide.

Socratic method

How should teaching be carried on? The idealist would say that thinking and learning are names for the process of bringing ideas to consciousness. A very effective means of doing this is the **Socratic method**, a process by which the teacher stimulates the learner’s awareness of ideas by asking leading questions. Another important aspect of idealist methodology is modeling. Teachers should be models worthy of imitation by students; they should have wide knowledge of the cultural heritage and lead an exemplary life.

High standards

Idealists want to safeguard the quality of education by maintaining high intellectual standards and resisting any tendency toward mediocrity. In Plato’s *Republic*, for example, intellectual standards were so high that only a gifted minority entered the ruling elite of philosopher-kings. Today’s idealists would not go that far, but they define educational goals as the developing of intellectual capacity, and they generally accept the fact that not all students will go on to the highest stages of education.

Intellectual development, not vocational training

Implications for Today’s Classroom Teacher

Idealism offers significant possibilities for today’s classroom teacher. It seeks to create an intellectual environment for teaching and learning. It rejects the consumerism and vocationalism that often shape attitudes in contemporary society. It

sees teachers as vital agents in helping students realize their fullest potential, and it encourages teachers to acquaint themselves and their students with the finest elements of the cultural heritage. By immersing themselves in the great ideas of the heritage, learners prepare to contribute to the heritage in their own right.

Important subjects

Idealist teachers see certain subjects as especially powerful in stimulating thinking and developing identification with the cultural heritage. For example, they use mathematics to develop students' powers of abstraction. History is seen as the study of the contributions made by the great women and men of the past. Teachers expose students to the classics — great and enduring works of art, literature, and music — so that they can experience and share in the time-tested values conveyed by these cultural works.

An idealist lesson

How might a teacher use idealism in developing a lesson? For example, a fifth-grade teacher might illustrate the power of ideas and the higher ethical law by a unit on the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Students would study the biography of Dr. King and seek to discover the principles of nonviolence and justice that guided his actions during the civil rights movement. They would study and recite his "I have a dream" speech to discover the power of ideas in shaping behavior. Finally, Dr. King would serve as a model worthy of imitation.

Realism

A real world of objects

Realism, which stresses objective knowledge and values, was developed by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle. In the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas articulated a variety of religious realism, known as Thomism, which was a synthesis of Aristotelianism and Christian doctrine. Thomism emphasizes a dualistic conception of reality with a lower material and a higher spiritual dimension. Thomism became the philosophical basis for Roman Catholic education. Alfred North Whitehead continued the realist tradition. Realism holds that (1) there is a world of real existence that human beings have not made; (2) the human mind can know about the real world; and (3) such knowledge is the most reliable guide to individual and social behavior. These doctrines provide a starting point for considering realism's educational implications.

Key Concepts

Metaphysics and Epistemology. For the realist, a material world exists that is independent of and external to the mind of the knower.⁵ All objects are composed of matter. Matter, in turn, must assume the structure of particular objects.

Knowing: sensation, then abstraction

Human beings can know these objects through their senses and their reason. Knowing is a process that involves two stages: sensation and abstraction. First, the knower perceives an object and records sensory data about it, such as color, size, weight, smell, or sound. The mind sorts these data into those qualities that are always present in the object and those that are sometimes present. By abstracting out the necessary qualities (those that are always present), the learner forms a concept

⁵For an analysis of realism, see two books by Roy Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (London: Verso, 1986), and *Reclaiming Reality: A Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1989). Bhaskar's conception of realism is analyzed in David Corson, "Education Research and Bhaskar's Conception of Discovery," *Educational Theory* (Spring 1991), pp. 189–198.

Curriculum of organized subjects

of the object and recognizes it as belonging to a certain class. With this classification of the object, the learner understands that it shares certain qualities with other members of the same class but not with objects of a different class.

Like idealists, realists believe that following a curriculum of organized, separate subjects is the most effective way of learning about reality. Organizing subject matter, as scientists and scholars do, is a sophisticated method of classifying objects. For example, the past experiences of humankind can be organized into history. Plants can be studied systematically according to their classifications in botany. Units of political organization such as nations, governments, legislatures, and judicial systems can be grouped into political science. For the realist, the way to acquire knowledge about reality is through systematic inquiry into these subjects.

Rational behavior, based on reality

Axiology. In the realist's conception of knowledge, certain rules govern intelligent behavior. For example, human beings ought to behave in a rational way, and behavior is rational when it conforms to the way in which objects behave in reality. From their study of reality, people can develop theories based on natural, physical, and social laws. Since natural laws are universal and eternal, so are the values based on them.

The Basic Questions

Knowledge concerns objects

To begin our philosophical cross-examination, we again ask, What is knowledge? Realists would reply that knowledge concerns the physical world in which we live. When we know something, our knowledge is always about an object. Our concepts are valid when they correspond to those objects as they really exist in the world.⁶

Education via subject-matter disciplines

Formal education, the realists would say, is the study of the subject-matter disciplines into which knowledge has been organized and classified. History, languages, science, and mathematics are organized bodies of knowledge. If we know them, we will know something about the world in which we live. This knowledge is our best guide in conducting our daily affairs.

For realists, societies have established schools, as primarily academic institutions, to provide students with knowledge about the objective world. Since all persons have a rational potentiality, schooling should be available to all, with students pursuing the same academic curriculum that will prepare them to make rational decisions. Realist teachers should be subject-matter experts who combine their disciplinary expertise with effective teaching methods.⁷

Implications for Today's Classroom Teacher

Classrooms for learning, not therapy

In realist classrooms, the teacher's primary responsibility is to teach some skill, such as reading, writing, or computation, or some body of disciplined knowledge, such as history, mathematics, or science. Although they appreciate that their students are emotional as well as rational persons, realist teachers do not turn classrooms into therapeutic centers for emotional or behavioral adjustment. Realist teachers would oppose those nonacademic activities that interfere with the school's primary purpose as a center of academic learning.

Teachers as subject-matter experts

In order to perform their primary educational responsibility, realist teachers need to be knowledgeable in the content of their subject. For example, the teacher

⁶David Kelley, *The Evidence of the Senses: A Realist Theory of Perception* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986).

⁷William O. Martin, *Realism in Education* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

of history should be a historian who possesses a thorough background in that discipline. In addition, the realist teacher should have a general education in the liberal arts and sciences — a background that will enable the teacher to demonstrate relationships between her or his area of expertise and other subject-matter areas. Realist teachers may employ a wide repertoire of methods, such as the lecture, discussion, demonstration, or experiment. Mastery of content is most important, and methodology is a necessary but subordinate means to reach that goal.

Example of a realist approach

How might a high-school physics teacher with a realist philosophical orientation plan a unit on Isaac Newton's laws of motion? First, the teacher would historically locate Newton and comment on his scientific contributions. Second, the teacher might illustrate the laws of motion in a laboratory demonstration. Third, the students might discuss the demonstration and frame the scientific generalization that it illustrated. Finally, students would take a test to demonstrate their understanding of Newton's laws of motion.⁸

Because of their stress on the teacher's expertise and the academic learning of students, realists tend to favor competency testing for both teachers and students. They also believe that administrators and school boards should maintain strong academic standards and encourage a high level of achievement.

Pragmatism

Founders of pragmatism

Pragmatism, a philosophy developed in the United States, emphasizes the need to test ideas by acting on them. Among its founders were Charles S. Peirce (1839–1914), William James (1842–1910), George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), and John Dewey (1859–1952). Peirce stressed using the scientific method to validate ideas, and James applied pragmatic interpretations to psychology, religion, and education. Mead emphasized the development of the child as a learning and experiencing human organism. Dewey, in particular, wrote extensively on education.⁹

Chapter 4 examined Dewey's work as an educational pioneer. Here we will focus on his pragmatic or experimentalist philosophy, which featured change, process, relativity, and the reconstruction of experience.

Organism and environment

Influenced by Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory, Dewey applied the terms *organism* and *environment* to education. Dewey saw human beings as biological and sociological organisms who possess drives or impulses that sustain life and promote growth and development. Every organism lives in a habitat or environment. Education, so conceived, was to promote optimum human growth.

Rejecting the a priori foundation of the older idealist and realist perspectives, Dewey's test of experience meant that human purposes and plans could be validated only by acting on and judging them by their consequences. The need to judge by consequences also applied to educational programs. Did a particular educational program, curricular design, or methodological strategy achieve its anticipated goals and objectives? For Dewey, the only valid test was to try out the proposal and judge the results.¹⁰

Problem solving

Whereas idealism and realism emphasized bodies of substantive knowledge or subject-matter disciplines, Dewey stressed the process of problem solving. For

⁸Philip H. Phenix, *Philosophies of Education* (New York: Wiley, 1961), pp. 22–24.

⁹John Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1902); John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1906); John Dewey, *The School and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1923); and John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1938).

¹⁰Stephen M. Fishman and Lucille McCarthy, *John Dewey and the Challenge of Classroom Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1998).

Dewey, learning occurs as the person engages in problem solving. In Dewey's experimental epistemology, the learner, as an individual or as a member of a group, uses the scientific method to solve both personal and social problems. For Dewey, the problem-solving method can be developed into a habit that is transferable to a wide variety of situations.¹¹

Key Concepts

Experience

Metaphysics and Epistemology. Whereas idealism and realism emphasize an unchanging reality, pragmatism or experimentalism sees epistemology as a process of examining a constantly changing universe. In Dewey's philosophy of experimentalism, the epistemological, or knowing, situation involves a person, or organism, and an environment. Experience, defined as the interaction of the person with the environment, is a key concept. The person interacts with the environment to live, grow, and develop. This interaction may alter or change both the person and the environment. Knowing is thus a *transaction*, a process, between the learner and the environment. Although each interaction has some generalizable aspects that carry over to the next problem, each episode will differ somewhat. Effective people, by using the scientific method, can solve problems and add the features of a particular problem-solving episode to their ongoing experiences.¹²

No permanent realities

If reality is continually changing, then a curriculum claiming to be based on permanent realities is foolish. Concepts of unchanging or universal truth become untenable. The only guides that human beings have in their interaction with the environment are tentative assertions that are subject to further research and verification. Therefore, according to pragmatists, what is needed is a method for dealing with change in an intelligent manner. The Deweyites stress problem solving as the most effective method for directing change toward desired outcomes. Even though reality involves constant transformation or *reconstruction* of both the person and the environment, humankind can benefit from the process. Each time a human experience is reconstructed to solve a problem, a new contribution is added to humanity's fund of experience.

"Reconstruction" of person and environment

Relativity of values

Axiology and Logic. Pragmatic axiology is highly situational. Since we inhabit a constantly changing universe, values, too, must change. Values are relative to time, place, and circumstance. What contributes to personal and social growth is valuable; what restricts or limits experience is unworthy. Further, we can clarify our values by testing and reconstructing them in the same way scientific claims are verified.¹³

Inductive logic

Following the scientific method, experimentalist logic is inductive. Tentative assertions are based on empirical experience and must be tested. Experimentalist logic is suspicious of a priori truths and deductions based on them.

¹¹Lawrence J. Dennis and George W. Stickel, "Mead and Dewey: Thematic Connections on Educational Topics," *Educational Theory* (Summer-Fall 1981), pp. 320-321.

¹²Tom Colwell, "The Ecological Perspective in John Dewey's Philosophy of Education," *Educational Theory* (Summer 1985), p. 257.

¹³William R. Caspary, "Judgements of Value in John Dewey's Theory of Ethics," *Educational Theory* (Spring 1990), pp. 155-169. See also Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 151-156.

The Basic Questions

Knowledge is tentative

The pragmatist's answers to questions about knowledge, education, schooling, and instruction are very different from those of more traditional philosophies. Since knowledge is tentative and subject to revision, pragmatists are more concerned with the process of using knowledge than with truth as a body of knowledge. In contrast, traditional philosophers emphasize truth as a permanent body of knowledge.

An experimental process

For the pragmatist, education is an experimental process — a method of dealing with problems that arise as people interact with their world. Dewey argued that human beings experience the greatest personal and social growth when they interact with the environment in an intelligent and reflective manner. The most intelligent way of solving problems is to use the scientific method.

Interdisciplinary approach

When you face a problem, the pragmatists say, the information needed to solve it usually comes from many sources, not from a single discipline or academic subject. For example, to define the problem of pollution of the physical environment and to suggest ways of solving it, we must consider sources that are historical, political, sociological, scientific, technological, and international. An educated person, in the pragmatic sense, knows how to use information from all these sources. Pragmatists therefore favor interdisciplinary education. Idealists and realists, in contrast, are suspicious of interdisciplinary education because they believe students must first study organized subjects.

School as microcosm of society

Pragmatists such as Dewey see the school as a miniature community, a microcosm of the larger society. For them, no true separation exists between school and society. The school exercises three major functions: to simplify, purify, and balance the cultural heritage. To simplify, the school selects elements of the heritage and reduces their complexity to units appropriate to learners' readiness and interest. To purify, it selects worthy cultural elements and eliminates those that limit human interaction and growth. To balance, the school integrates the selected and purified experiences into a harmony.

Transmitting cultural heritage

Since many diverse cultural groups participate in society, the pragmatic school helps children of one culture understand and appreciate members of other cultures. Although cultural diversity is regarded as enriching the entire society, pragmatists want all cultural groups to use the scientific method. They also see schools as building social consensus by stressing common processes of learning. As genuinely integrated and democratic learning communities, schools should be open to all.

Cultural diversity, but shared learning processes

As a proponent of an open and sharing society, Dewey did not regard quality and equity as mutually exclusive. To offer equal opportunity for all, schools would not need to compromise educational quality. In Dewey's view, a society and its schools reach their zenith when they provide for the widest possible sharing of resources among people of all cultures in the community. Sharing does not diminish quality but enriches it.

Combining quality and equity

Implications for Today's Classroom Teacher

Subject matter as instrumental

Unlike idealist and realist teachers, who see teaching subject matter as their primary responsibility, pragmatist teachers are more concerned with the process of solving problems intelligently. While not ignoring subject matter, they use it instrumentally in problem-solving activities. They do not dominate the classroom but guide learning as facilitators of the students' research and activities.

Applying the scientific method

For students in a pragmatist classroom, the main objective is to share the experience of applying the scientific method to a full range of personal, social, and

intellectual problems. By using the problem-solving method, it is expected that students will learn to apply the process to situations both in and out of school and thus to reduce the separation of the school from society.

Classroom as community

Pragmatist teachers work to transform classrooms into learning communities by encouraging students to share their interests and problems. Pragmatist educators also encourage both cultural diversity and commonalities. Although they recognize that each culture has something of value to share with other cultures, they stress shared communication between members of different cultures so that all students together can help create the larger democratic community of shared interests and values. Instead of simply preserving the status quo, pragmatist teachers need to take risks. They must see knowledge as indeterminate and open-ended, and their educational goals must constitute an ongoing inquiry that leads to action.

Teachers as risk takers

How might pragmatism be applied to classroom teaching? Although pragmatism is applicable to all levels of schooling, we can use the example of a college teacher-education class that defines the study of local school governance as its problem and project. The class does preliminary reading about school district organization and then attends a meeting of the board of education. After this experience, the class divides itself into research committees to investigate specific areas of local district governance, such as (1) the roles, functions, and responsibilities of the board of education, the central office, and the building principals; (2) the development and review of curriculum and instruction; (3) teacher staffing, in-service training, and organization; (4) the composition, organization, and academic assessment of students; and (5) the role of community organizations. After completing the necessary research, each committee shares its findings with the class. Then an editorial committee prepares a collaborative paper on school governance. This project, illustrative of the pragmatist approach, is especially useful to future teachers' professional development.

A pragmatist lesson

Existentialism

Personal reflection

The philosophy of existentialism, representing both a feeling of desperation and a spirit of hope, examines life in a very personal way. An existentialist education encourages deep personal reflection on one's identity, commitments, and choices.

Key Concepts

Creating one's essence through choices

The existentialist author Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) stated that “Existence precedes Essence.” This means that human beings are born and enter the world without being consulted. They simply are here in a world that they did not make or shape. However, they possess volition, or will, which gives them the freedom to make choices and to create their own purposes for existence. As people live, they are thrust into choice-making situations. Whereas some choices are trivial, those that deal with the purpose and meaning of life lead to personal self-definition. A person *creates* his or her own definition and makes his or her own essence. You are what you choose to be. Human freedom is total, say the existentialists, and one's responsibility for choice is also total.¹⁴

This conception of a human being as the creator of his or her own essence differs substantially from that of the idealists and realists, who see the person as a uni-

¹⁴Ozman and Craver, *Philosophical Foundations of Education*, pp. 243–253.

For existentialists, education should help students develop consciousness about the freedom to choose and allow them to experiment with artistic media to dramatize their feelings and insights. (© Winter/The Image Works)



Existential Angst

versal category. Moreover, whereas the idealist or realist sees the individual as an inhabitant of a meaningful and explainable world, the existentialist believes that the universe is indifferent to human wishes, desires, and plans. Existentialism focuses on the concept of *Angst*, or dread. Each person knows that his or her destiny is death and that his or her presence in the world is only temporary. It is with this sense of philosophical dread that each person must make choices about freedom and slavery, love and hate, peace and war. As one makes these choices, a question is always present: What difference does it make that I am here and that I have chosen to be what I am?

Choosing self-determination

According to the existentialists, we must also cope with the fact that others — persons, institutions, and agencies — are constantly threatening our choice-making freedom. But existentialism does see hope behind the desperation. Each person's response to life is based on an answer to the question, Do I choose to be a self-determined person or do I choose to be defined by others? Each person has the potential for loving, creating, and being. Each can choose to be an inner-directed, authentic person. An authentic person, free and aware of this freedom, knows that every choice is really an act of personal value creation.¹⁵

Creating personal values

Since existentialists have deliberately avoided systemization of their philosophy, it is difficult to categorize its metaphysical, epistemological, axiological, and logical positions. However, some comments on these areas can illustrate the existentialist point of view. As already stated, each person creates his or her own self-definition, or essence, by the personal choices he or she makes. Epistemologically, the individual chooses the knowledge that he or she wishes to possess. It is axiology that is most important for existentialists, because human beings create their own values through their choices.

¹⁵Maxine Greene, *Landscapes of Learning* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1978); and Van Cleve Morris, *Existentialism in Education* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

The Basic Questions

Awakening consciousness of the human condition

Existentialists realize that we live in a world of physical realities and that we have developed a useful and scientific knowledge about these realities. However, the most significant aspects of our lives are personal and nonscientific. Thus, to our questions about knowledge and education, existentialists would say that the most important kind of knowledge is about the human condition and the personal choices we make. Education's most significant goal is to awaken human consciousness to the freedom to choose. Education should create a sense of self-awareness and contribute to our authenticity.

Questioning and dialogue

An existentialist teacher would encourage students to philosophize, question, and participate in dialogues about the meaning of life, love, and death. The answers to these questions would be personal and subjective, not measurable by standardized tests. An existentialist curriculum would consist of whatever might lead to philosophical dialogue. Particularly valuable are those subjects that vividly portray individual men and women in the act of making choices, including subjects that are emotional, aesthetic, and poetic.¹⁶ Literature and biography are important for revealing choice-making conditions. Drama and films that vividly portray the human condition and human decision making ought to be seen and discussed by students. In addition to literary, dramatic, and biographical subjects, students need to create their own modes of self-expression.¹⁷ They should be free to experiment with artistic media and to dramatize their emotions, feelings, and insights.

An existential curriculum

Same opportunities for all

The school, for the existentialists, is where individuals meet to pursue discussion about their own lives and choices. Since every person is in the same predicament and has the same possibilities, every individual should have opportunities for schooling. In the school, both teachers and students should have the chance to ask questions, suggest answers, and engage in dialogue.

Implications for Today's Classroom Teacher

Teacher encourages awareness

Teaching from an existentialist perspective is not easy because teachers cannot specify goals and objectives in advance — these are determined by each student as an individual person. Rather than imposing goals on students, the existentialist teacher seeks to create an awareness in each student that she or he is ultimately responsible for her or his own education and self-definition. In creating this awareness, the teacher encourages students to examine the institutions, forces, and situations that limit freedom of choice. Further, existentialist teachers seek to create open classrooms to maximize freedom of choice. Within these open learning environments, instruction is self-directed.

An existentialist lesson

Literature, drama, and film are especially powerful in existentialist teaching. An example of existentialist teaching might be a senior high school history class that is studying the Holocaust, the genocide of six million Jews in Europe during World War II. The class views Steven Spielberg's movie, *Schindler's List*, in which an industrialist, Oscar Schindler, who initially profits from the forced labor of Jewish concentration camp inmates, makes a conscious decision to save his workers from

¹⁶Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988).

¹⁷For an approach that uses narrative and dialogue to examine philosophical issues in education, see Carol Witherell and Nel Noddings, eds., *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991).

OVERVIEW 12.2

Theories of Education

Theory	Aim	Curriculum	Educational Implications	Proponents
Progressivism (rooted in pragmatism)	To educate the individual according to his or her interests and needs	Activities and projects	Instruction that features problem solving and group activities; teacher acts as a facilitator	Dewey Kilpatrick Parker Washburne
Social reconstructionism (rooted in pragmatism)	To reconstruct society	Social sciences used as reconstructive tools	Instruction that focuses on significant socioeconomic problems	Brameld Counts Stanley
Perennialism (rooted in realism)	To educate the rational person	Subject matter that is hierarchically arranged to cultivate the intellect (great books, etc.)	Focus on enduring human concerns as revealed in great works of the Western cultural heritage	Adler Bloom Hutchins Maritain
Essentialism (rooted in idealism and realism)	To educate the useful and competent person	Basic education: reading, writing, arithmetic, history, English, science, foreign languages	Emphasis on skills and subjects that transmit the cultural heritage and contribute to socioeconomic efficiency	Bagley Bestor Conant Morrison
Critical Theory (rooted in neo-Marxism and postmodernism)	To raise consciousness about critical issues	Autobiographies about oppressed peoples	Focus on social conflicts	McLaren Giroux

death in the Nazi gas chambers. The class then probes the moral situation of one man, Schindler, and the choice that he made in a senseless and cruel world.

Educational Theories

In the following sections, we examine five educational theories: progressivism, perennialism, essentialism, social reconstructionism, and critical theory (see Overview 12.2). Rather than being comprehensive statements about metaphysics, epistemology, axiology, and logic, theories are ideas that are specific to particular institutions and processes. Educational theories are specific to schooling, curriculum, teaching, and learning. Sometimes theories are derived from philosophies. At other times, they arise from practice.

Progressivism

A widespread reform movement

Progressives in education

Progressive education was part of the general reform movement in American life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Political progressives such as Robert La Follette and Woodrow Wilson wanted to curb powerful financial and industrial trusts and monopolies to make the democratic political system truly operative. Meanwhile, social welfare progressives, such as Jane Addams in the settlement house movement, worked to improve living conditions in Chicago and other urban areas.

Although the educational theory of progressivism is often associated with John Dewey's experimentalism, the progressive education movement wove together a number of diverse strands. Whereas some progressives sought to change the curriculum and instruction in the interests of social reform, other progressives, especially administrators, concentrated on making schools more efficient and cost effective. Administrative progressives sought to build larger schools that could house more class sections and create more curricular diversity.¹⁸

Progressive education arose from a rebellion against traditional schooling. Educators such as G. Stanley Hall, Francis Parker, and William H. Kilpatrick argued against mindless routine, rote memorization, and authoritarian classroom management. Progressive teachers developed teaching styles and methods that emphasized students' own interests and needs. Their classrooms were flexible, permissive, and

Here, elementary pupils are engaged in hands-on process learning in a progressive science class. (© Bob Daemrick/Stock Boston)



¹⁸Arthur Zilversmit, *Changing Schools: Progressive Education Theory and Practice, 1930–1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

open-ended. Marietta Johnson, founder of the School of Organic Education, described progressive educational principles as follows:

Emphasis on child's needs

We believe the educational program should aim to meet the needs of the growing child. We believe that childhood is for itself and not a preparation for adult life. Therefore, the school program must answer the following questions: What does the child of any particular age need to minister to the health of his body, to preserve the integrity of the intellect, and to keep him sincere and unself-conscious of spirit?

The answers to these questions will constitute the curriculum of the school, and as we grow in understanding of the nature and needs of childhood, the curriculum will change.¹⁹

Key Concepts

Practices opposed by progressives

The Progressive Education Association, an organization that incorporated a number of varieties of progressivism, did not fashion a comprehensive educational philosophy because progressive educators often disagreed about both theory and practice. Nevertheless, they generally condemned the following traditional school practices: (1) authoritarian teachers, (2) book-based instruction, (3) passive memorization of factual information, (4) the isolation of schools from society, and (5) using physical or psychological coercion to manage classrooms. Although they had more difficulty in agreeing about what they favored, members of the Progressive Education Association generally believed that (1) the child should be free to develop naturally; (2) interest, stimulated by direct experience, is the best stimulus for learning; (3) the teacher should be a facilitator of learning; (4) there should be close cooperation between the school and the home; and (5) the progressive school should be a laboratory for pedagogical reform and experimentation.²⁰

Practices favored by progressives

Opposing the conventional subject-matter curriculum, progressives experimented with alternative curricula, using activities, experiences, problem solving, and projects. Child-centered progressive teachers also emphasized collaborative learning rather than competition. More socially oriented progressives sought to make schools centers of larger social reforms.²¹ Moreover, progressive schools, especially those that were private, often sought to free children from conventional restraints and repression. Critics saw these schools as eroding adult authority and undermining traditional values.

Progressive reforms in schools

The Basic Questions

Antitraditional

Eschewing dogma and often disagreeing among themselves, progressives would not have answered questions about knowledge, education, the school, teaching, and learning with a single voice. While united in opposition to traditionalism and authoritarianism, some emphasized children's freedom and others emphasized social

¹⁹Marietta Johnson, "The Educational Principles of the School of Organic Education, Fairhope, Alabama," in Harold Rugg, ed., *The Foundations and Technique for the Study of Education*, National Society for the Study of Education, Part I (Bloomington, Ind.: Public School Publishing, 1926), p. 349.

²⁰Stephen J. Brown and Mary E. Finn, eds., *Readings from Progressive Education: A Movement and Its Professional Journal* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1988).

²¹The definitive history of progressive education remains Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School* (New York: Random House, 1961).

Child-centered and social reformist

Readiness, interests, and needs

Constructing reality

Example of a progressive approach

reform. Progressives viewed knowledge as relative, arising from human experience, rather than in universal terms. Education was a means of liberating human creativity in its various cognitive and affective dimensions. Progressives believed that all children had the human right to attend schools. Child-centered progressives wanted schools in which children were free to experiment, play, and express themselves. Social reformist progressives wanted schools to be agencies of social reform. (A discussion of social reformist tendencies in social reconstructionism, which is derived from progressivism, follows later in the chapter.)

For progressives, children's readiness and interests, rather than predetermined subjects, shaped curriculum and instruction.²² Instructionally flexible, progressive teachers used a repertoire of learning activities such as problem solving, field trips, creative artistic expression, and projects. They saw teaching and learning as an active, exciting, and ever-changing process. As educational community builders, progressive teachers wanted students to work collaboratively on projects based on their shared experience.

Constructivism, a currently popular epistemology similar to progressivism and to John Dewey's pragmatism, rests on four major premises: (1) learners do not passively receive and store information in their minds but actively create meaning from their own construction of concepts about reality; (2) though knowledge is shaped by a person's prior experience, learners continually reconstruct their concepts; and (3) the construction of new knowledge — new concepts — is located in the social situations and interactions in which it is acquired.²³ Constructivism, like progressivism, emphasizes socially interactive and process-oriented "hands-on" learning in which students work collaboratively to expand and revise their knowledge base.²⁴

Implications for Today's Classroom Teacher

How does a progressively oriented approach work in today's schools?²⁵ As an example, a junior-high or middle-school social studies program might examine the African American contribution to American life. Students might be organized in research teams, with each team focusing on particular problems and contributing collaboratively to the total project. The team activities might include the following:

Group A would trace the origins of African Americans to Africa and the slave trade. Such an investigation would involve research and reading in geography, economics, anthropology, and history. Each student in *Group A* would investigate a particular phase of the problem, and the results would then be integrated into the whole project.

Group B might identify the leading African American contributors to U.S. culture and prepare biographical sketches for class presentations. The group could also arrange an exhibit including photographs and evidence of each leader's contribution.

²²For a Deweyan-progressive framework for assessing current educational reforms, see Richard A. Gibboney, *The Stone Trumpet: A Story of Practical School Reform, 1960–1990* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994).

²³Constructivism is treated in Catherine Twomey, *Constructivism: Theory, Perspectives, and Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996).

²⁴For a discussion of the challenges of translating constructivist epistemology into classroom practice, see Peter W. Airasian and Mary E. Walsh, "Constructivist Cautions," *Phi Delta Kappan* 78 (February 1997), pp. 444–449.

²⁵See Kathe Jeris and Carol Montag, eds., *Progressive Education for the 1990s: Transforming Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991).

Group C might research current issues facing African Americans. The students could consult current newspapers and magazines and prepare a scrapbook of clippings.

As the various groups worked on their projects, the teacher would serve as a resource facilitator. Working with each group individually, he or she would suggest sources and help students discover ways of pursuing the project and solving the problems it presented.

Social Reconstructionism

Cultural crisis

As mentioned earlier, some progressive educators emphasized children's freedom; others, however, wanted education and schools to be agencies for social reform aimed at creating a new society. This social reconstructionism soon developed into a separate educational theory.

Reconstructing society through education

Social reconstructionism argues that humankind has reached a serious cultural crisis of global dimensions. If schools continue to reflect traditional concepts and values, they will transmit the social ills — exploitation, war, violence — that are symptoms of our cultural crisis. Reconstructionists argue that education should reconstruct society by integrating new technological and scientific developments with those parts of the culture that remain viable. For them, education's overriding goal is to create a world order in which people control their own destiny by applying their practical intelligence. In an age of nuclear weaponry, ecological deterioration, and pandemic disease, reconstructionists see education as a means of preventing global catastrophe. They see an urgent need for society to reconstruct itself before it self-destructs.²⁶

Outdated values

According to the reconstructionists, human civilization made a great technological leap when it moved from an agricultural and rural to an urban and industrial society. However, preindustrial ideas and values have persisted into the modern era. Some of these values, such as individualism and competition, are ill suited to solve modern problems. In the reconstructionist view, schools must help reduce the cultural gap so that our values can catch up with our technology.

Reconstructionist Thinking

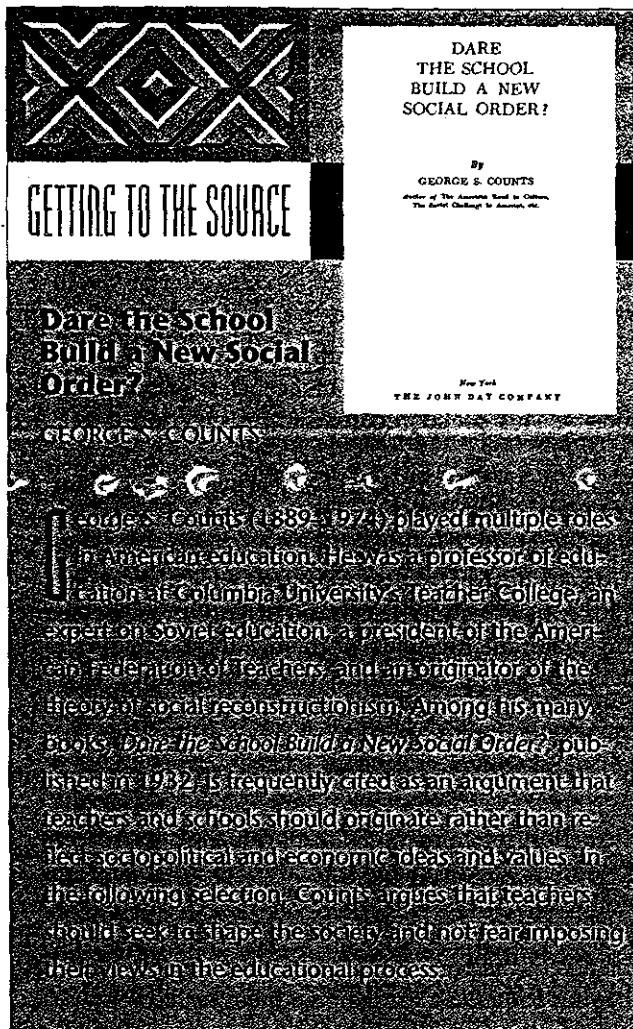
Identifying social problems

Reconstructionists urge teachers to lead their students on a searching examination of culture and society, both domestically and globally. As students identify and analyze major issues, they are locating social areas that need reconstruction. For example, certain nations enjoy plenty while others face the constant threat of starvation. A few people enjoy luxury, but many live with disease and poverty. Education should expose these socioeconomic inconsistencies and work to resolve them.

Need for a global curriculum

Reconstructionists see the technological era as one of tremendous interdependence. Events in one area of the globe will have an impact on other areas. The depletion of the ozone layer, for example, is not restricted to a single place but endangers the entire planet. With ever-increasing global interdependence, the inherited patterns of education that stress individualism, isolationism, or nationalism

²⁶For an analysis of reconstructionism in global perspective, see Carole Ann Ryan, "George S. Counts: Dare Educators Inspire World Vision?" in David B. Annis, ed., *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Midwest Philosophy of Education Society (1990-1991)*, Ames, Iowa: Midwest Philosophy of Education Society, 1991, pp. 11-17.



That the teachers should deliberately reach for power and then make the most of their conquest is my firm conviction. To the extent that they are permitted to fashion the curriculum and the procedures of the school they will definitely and positively influence the social attitudes, ideals, and behavior of the coming generation. In doing this they should resort to no subterfuge or false modesty. They should say neither that they are merely teaching the truth nor that they are unwilling to wield power in their own right. The first position is false and the second is a confession of incompetence. It is my observation that the men and women who have affected the course of human events are those who have not hesitated to use the power that has come to them. Representing as they do, not the interests of the moment or of any special class, but rather the common and abiding interests of the people, teachers are under heavy social obligation to protect and further those interests. In this they occupy a relatively unique position in society. Also since the profession should embrace scientists and scholars of the highest rank, as well as teachers working at all levels of the educational system, it has at its disposal, as no other group, the knowledge and wisdom of the ages. It is scarcely thinkable that these men and women would ever act

Survival depends on education

are dangerously obsolete. The reconstructionist would globalize the curriculum so that men and women will learn that they live in a global village.

For our own survival, the social reconstructionists believe, we must become social engineers, plotting our future and then using our scientific and technological expertise to reach the defined goal. In sum, a reconstructionist program of education will (1) critically examine the culture, even the most controversial issues; (2) cultivate a planning attitude; and (3) enlist students and teachers in social, educational, political, and economic change as a means of total cultural renewal.²⁷

²⁷ Among important sources of reconstructionist education are Theodore Brameld, *Toward a Reconstructed Philosophy of Education* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1956); George S. Counts, *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* (New York: John Day, 1932); and William O. Stanley, *Education and Social Integration* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1952).

as selfishly or bungle as badly as have the so-called "practical" men of our generation — the politicians, the financiers, the industrialists. If all of these facts are taken into account, instead of shunning power, the profession should rather seek power and then strive to use that power fully and wisely and in the interests of the great masses of the people.

The point should be emphasized that teachers possess no magic secret to power. While their work should give them a certain advantage, they must expect to encounter the usual obstacles blocking the road to leadership. They should not be deceived by the pious humbug with which public men commonly flatter the members of the profession. . . . Moreover, while organization is necessary, teachers should not think of their problem primarily in terms of organizing and presenting a united front to the world, the flesh, and the devil. In order to be effective they must throw off completely the slave psychology that has dominated the mind of the pedagogue more or less since the days of ancient Greece. They must be prepared to stand on their own feet and win for their ideas the support of the masses of the people. Education as a force for social regeneration must march hand in hand with the living and creative forces of the social order.

Questions

1. According to Counts, why should teachers reach for power?
2. How can education be a force for social reconstruction?
3. Is Counts's argument relevant to teachers' ongoing professional organization and development?
4. If you agree with Counts, how would you, as a beginning teacher, empower teachers?

Source: George S. Counts, *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), pp. 26–28. Reprinted by permission of Martha L. Counts. Cover from the 1932 edition, published by The John Day Company, New York.

The Basic Questions

Instrumental view of knowledge

Social reconstructionists are convinced that a new social order will be created only when educators challenge obsolete conceptions of knowledge, education, schooling, and instruction. Like the pragmatists and progressives, social reconstructionists see knowledge as an instrument to be used for a purpose. The knowledge areas that are particularly useful are the social sciences, including anthropology, economics, sociology, political science, and psychology. These disciplines provide insights and methods for planning social change.

Challenging the status quo

Education, for social reconstructionists, is to arouse students' social consciousness and to engage actively in solving social problems. Teachers encourage students to investigate controversial issues in economics, politics, society, and education in order to develop alternatives to the status quo. As a social agency open to all, the school is not only an academic institution but also a "think tank" in which students and teachers formulate hypotheses for social reform. Located on the cutting edge of change, reconstructionist schools will often be centers of controversy.

When this happens, conflict resolution should be carried out according to agreed-upon, democratic processes.

Implications for Today's Classroom Teacher

Role of the reconstructionist teacher

Since reconstructionist teachers see schools as agencies that will create a new social order, they do not define education in exclusively academic terms. Instead, reconstructionist teachers encourage students to diagnose the major problems confronting human beings on planet Earth: pollution of the environment, warfare, famine, terrorism and violence, and the spread of epidemic diseases such as AIDS. Limitations posed by socioeconomic class and discrimination by race or gender should be identified and examined so that we can begin eradicating them. Rather than be neutral observers of world problems, reconstructionists want to be committed to solving these problems for human betterment.

As another example, reconstructionist teachers might focus on the current debate between proponents of an American cultural core and advocates of cultural diversity.²⁸ Seeing this debate as a cultural war over national identity, they would lead students on a searching inquiry into such questions as: Who were Americans in the past? Who are Americans in the present? Who will we be in the future? To answer these questions, they would encourage students to analyze the claims of both camps. The goal would be to reconstruct inherited cultural beliefs and values to provide a larger sense of national identity and purpose. Teachers would encourage students to share their cultural heritages and to build a knowledge base incorporating the contributions of many diverse ethnic, racial, social, and language groups. Throughout this process, reconstructionist teachers would stress the use of democratic procedures.

Perennialism

Truth in the classics

Perennialism, a culturally conservative educational theory, centers on the authority of tradition and the classics. It believes that (1) truth is universal and does not depend on circumstances of place, time, or person; (2) a good education involves a search for and an understanding of the truth; (3) truth can be found in the great works of civilization; and (4) education is a liberal exercise that develops the intellect.

Perennialism draws heavily on realist principles. Since there are educational similarities between idealism and realism, some educational theorists also relate perennialism to idealism. However, leading perennialists such as Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler based their theory of education on Aristotle's realism.

Schools cultivate rationality

Agreeing with Aristotle that human beings are rational, perennialists see the school's primary role as the cultivation of rationality. Perennialists therefore oppose political, social, and economic theories that seek to use schools as multipurpose agencies. They do not want schools to stress students' emotional adjustment or to be vocational training centers for the marketplace. Although perennialists understand that emotional wellness and vocational competency are necessary for people to function in society, they believe that agencies other than schools should attend to these activities. To put extra nonacademic demands on teachers and schools takes away energy, time, and resources from the primary academic purpose.

²⁸For an analysis of this cultural conflict, see James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books/HarperCollins, 1991).

Perennial curriculum

For perennialists, the most important educational goals are searching for and disseminating truth. Since they believe that truth is universal and unchanging, a genuine education is also universal and constant. Thus the school's curriculum should consist of permanent, or perennial, studies that emphasize the recurrent themes of human life. It should contain cognitive subjects that cultivate rationality and the study of moral, aesthetic, and religious principles to cultivate ethical behavior. Like idealists and realists, perennialists prefer a subject-matter curriculum. This curriculum includes history, language, mathematics, logic, literature, the humanities, and science. The content of these subjects should come from the classical works of literature and art. Mastering these subjects is regarded as essential for training the intellect.

Hutchins: education develops the mind

Robert Hutchins, a president of the University of Chicago, was a highly articulate perennialist theorist. Hutchins described the ideal education as "one that develops intellectual power. . . . The ideal education is not an *ad hoc* education, not an education directed to immediate needs; it is not a specialized education, or a pre-professional education; it is not a utilitarian education. It is an education calculated to develop the mind."²⁹

Great books of Western civilization

Believing that the rationality of human nature is universal, Hutchins stressed education's universality. Since reason is our highest power, the cultivation of the intellect should be education's highest priority. Hutchins particularly recommended intensive study and discussion of the great books of Western civilization. The great books, he reasoned, place the members of each generation in dialogue with the great minds of the past. These classic works, containing persistent or perennial themes, help to make a person a genuine cultural participant. They cultivate the intellect and prepare students to think critically. In addition to the classics, he urged the study of grammar, rhetoric, logic, mathematics, and philosophy.

Critique of great books curriculum

Postmodernist critics argue that Hutchins's great books curriculum is really an attempt to give Western European culture predominance over other cultures, such as those of Asia and Africa. In this view, Hutchins's prized great books merely asserted dominant class interests at a given time in history. For example, critical theorists, as we will see later in the chapter, seek to deconstruct the texts of the great books to find their historically based meaning.

The Paideia Proposal

Paideia curriculum

Mortimer J. Adler's *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto* is a revival of perennialism.³⁰ *Paideia*, a Greek word, means the total educational formation of a person. Affirming the right of all people to a general education, Adler wants all students in America's democratic society to have the same high quality of schooling. The *Paideia* curriculum includes language, literature, fine arts, mathematics, natural sciences, history, geography, and social studies. These studies are a means to develop a repertoire of such intellectual skills as reading, writing, speaking, listening, calculating, observing, measuring, estimating, and problem solving, which lead to higher-order thinking and reflection.³¹

²⁹Robert M. Hutchins, *A Conversation on Education* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: The Fund for the Republic, 1963), p. 1. See also Robert M. Hutchins, *The Learning Society* (New York: Praeger, 1968); and Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1962).

³⁰Mortimer J. Adler, *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto* (New York: Macmillan, 1982); see also Mortimer J. Adler, *Paideia Problems and Possibilities* (New York: Macmillan, 1983).

³¹Adler, *Paideia Proposal*, pp. 22-23.

The Basic Questions

A general education

Progressives criticize perennialism for fostering educational elitism. Denying this allegation, perennialists defend their program as genuinely democratic, arguing that all persons have the right to the same high-quality education. Students, they contend, should not be grouped or streamed into “tracks” that prevent some from acquiring the general education to which they are entitled by their common humanity. To track some students into an academic curriculum and others into vocational curricula denies genuine equality of educational opportunity.

Against cultural relativism

Perennialists strongly oppose **cultural relativism**, which is associated with pragmatism, progressivism, social reconstructionism, and critical theory (some of which are examined later in this chapter). According to cultural relativism, our “truths” are temporary statements based on our coping with changing circumstances. Since environments change over time and differ from place to place, truth, rather than being permanently and universally valid, is temporarily and situationally valid. Perennialists, like Allan Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind*, condemn cultural relativism for weakening ethical character. They claim it denies universal standards by which some actions are consistently either morally right or wrong.³²

Implications for Today’s Classroom Teacher

Enduring human concerns

Perennialists, like idealists and realists, see the classroom as an environment for students’ intellectual growth. To stimulate students’ intellects, teachers must be liberally educated people who have a love of truth and a desire to lead a life based on it. Indeed, a liberal education is more important for perennialist teachers than courses in educational methods.

In primary grades, the perennialist teacher would emphasize learning fundamental skills, such as reading, writing, and computation, which contribute to a person’s literacy and readiness to begin the lifelong quest for truth. Perennialist secondary teachers would structure lessons around the enduring human concerns explored in the great works of history, literature, and philosophy. Like idealists, perennialists emphasize the classics that have engaged the interest of people across generations. In perennialist schools, administrators, teachers, and students maintain high standards for academic work.

A perennialist lesson

An illustration of the perennialist emphasis on recurring human concerns and values can be seen in a middle school literature class that is reading and discussing Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*. The students have discussed the main characters — Marmie, Jo, Beth, Meg, and Amy — and the issues the March family faced. The class discussion reveals that the sad times and the happy times experienced by the March family are found in family life today. Sometime later, when Alice, a student in the class, is asked at a family dinner, “What are you studying in school?” She replies, “We just finished reading *Little Women*.” Alice’s mother and grandmother both say that they, too, read and enjoyed the book when they were girls. A conversation then ensues in which Alice, her mother, and grandmother share their impressions of the book. In this way, perennial themes can become memories that transcend time and generations.

³²Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

QUESTION Should education be child-centered, focusing on children's interests and needs?

TAKING ISSUE

Education: Child-centered or Subject Matter?

A persistent issue in American education is whether the focus of curriculum and instruction should be on the child's interests and needs or on the transmission of the culture. Pragmatists and progressives contend that education should arise from children's interests. These interests, they say, will lead to projects that will bring children into contact with the larger world. Idealists, realists, perennialists, and essentialists disagree, arguing that schools should prescribe subjects that transmit the cultural heritage from adults to children, its immature members.

Arguments PRO

- 1 Experience in their immediate environment leads children to realize needs and interests in learning skills and knowledge. Children learn most effectively when guided by interests arising from their own direct experience.
- 2 Learning arising from interests is a process that engages children with their environment; projects are a hands-on, process way of learning by which children create their own concepts about reality.
- 3 As a result of following their interests, children will expand the effort that they need to solve problems and work on projects.
- 4 Child-oriented, process learning results in collaborative learning that brings about a genuine community of learners.

Arguments CON

- 1 Over time, civilized people have developed culture, often through trial and error. Thus, relying primarily on children's interests and needs to repeat this trial and error is a needlessly inefficient waste of time. It is crucial to transmit this cultural heritage from adults to children deliberately and efficiently.
- 2 Certain skills, especially literacy and numeracy, and certain subjects, such as mathematics, science, language, and history, have been developed by the culture's great thinkers. This organized knowledge needs to be taught deliberately and sequentially to children. Children should not be allowed to generate their own, possibly erroneous, ideas.
- 3 Even if children are not initially interested in learning the culture's skills and subjects, these need to be transmitted to them so they can participate in society.
- 4 To rely on children's interests as the foundation of the curriculum is to jeopardize the transmission of the culture from one generation to the next.

Essentialism

Essentialist goals

Rooted in both idealism and realism, **essentialism**, a conservative educational theory, emphasizes an academic subject-matter curriculum and encourages teachers to stress order, discipline, and effort. For essentialists, the important goals of education are (1) to transmit the basic skills and knowledge in the cultural heritage; (2) to emphasize skills and subjects that can lead learners to higher-order skills and knowledge; and (3) to use education as a civilizing agency that emphasizes continuity between the knowledge and values of the past and the requirements of the present.

Mastering basic skills and subjects

For essentialists, education involves learning the basic skills, arts, and sciences that sustain civilization.³³ Mastering these skills and subjects prepares students to function effectively as members of civilized society. Since learning the essential curriculum requires discipline and hard work, teachers should be skilled professionals both in subject matter and in teaching.

Core subjects

Arthur Bestor, an advocate of basic education in the 1950s, argued that the liberal arts and sciences, as intellectual disciplines, were the necessary core subjects of general education. Bestor and the Council on Basic Education contended that the lowering of academic standards places American education in jeopardy.³⁴ For them, the schools' essential responsibility is to introduce students to organized, coherent, and structured subjects. Bestor and other essentialists want elementary schools to teach the indispensable areas of reading, writing, computation, and research skills. In high school, science, mathematics, history, English, and foreign languages are the emphasized intellectual disciplines.

Basic Education

Critique of academic weakness

The "back-to-basics" movement derives from essentialist principles.³⁵ Back-to-basics proponents contend that social experimentation and untested innovations have lowered academic standards. They charge that many children in elementary schools have not mastered basic literary and computational skills and that academic weaknesses in high schools result from the absence of a prescribed curriculum. The back-to-basics position is that schools should concentrate on the essential skills and subjects that contribute to literacy and to social and intellectual efficiency.

Homework and testing

Back-to-basics proponents want teachers restored as educational authorities. Teachers must be well prepared and accountable for children's learning. Regular assignments, homework, recitations, and frequent testing and evaluation should be standard practices.

Neoessentialism

Revival of essentialism

In the 1980s and 1990s, a series of national reports on the condition of American education generated a period of neoessentialist educational reforms. The term *neoessentialist* indicates that this movement reiterated themes from earlier essentialists. These essentialist themes were prescribed as remedies for certain economic and social problems facing the United States, such as lowered productivity and increasing violence.

³³Gerald L. Gutek, *Basic Education: A Historical Perspective* (Bloomington, Ind.: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1981).

³⁴Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., *The Restoration of Learning* (New York: Knopf, 1955).

³⁵Ben Brodinsky, "Back to the Basics: The Movement and Its Meaning," *Phi Delta Kappan* (March 1977), pp. 523-527.

Here elementary pupils are working at a geography lesson on map skills illustrating emphasis on essential skills. (© Bob Daemrick/Stock Boston)



Neoesentialism was clearly evident in the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*, examined in Chapter 13, which recommended a high school curriculum of “five new basics”: English, mathematics, science, social studies, and computer science. Of these subjects, only computer science was really new; the others had all been emphasized by earlier essentialists.³⁶

E. D. Hirsch, who criticizes the decline of cultural literacy in the United States, also echoes neoesentialist themes. Hirsch argues that Americans need to possess a core of essential background knowledge. This core contributes to cultural literacy, which, in turn, is necessary for functional literacy and national discourse and communication. Without the transmission of such a cultural core by education, American society will become culturally fragmented.³⁷

Common themes run through the variations of essentialism: (1) the elementary school curriculum should cultivate basic skills that contribute to literacy and to mastery of arithmetical computation; (2) the secondary curriculum should cultivate knowledge of history, mathematics, science, English, and foreign languages; (3) schooling requires discipline and a respect for legitimate authority; and (4) learning requires hard work and disciplined attention.

The Basic Questions

Since the perennialists and essentialists share many ideas about knowledge, education, schooling, and instruction, their views can be examined as a shared educational defense of cultural conservatism. For them, knowledge lies in the cultural heritage, the tested wisdom of the human race accumulated over time. They differ,

³⁶National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), pp. 23-31.

³⁷E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

Essential knowledge

Common essentialist and perennialist themes

however, in that perennialists see wisdom originating with human rationality and essentialists see it coming from tested human experience. Both see the school as society's agency for transmitting the cultural heritage from adults to the young.

Perennialists and essentialists are suspicious of those who want to use schools as agencies of socialization or vocationalism. They are critical of those who promote multiculturalism without first establishing an integrating cultural core based on the Western and American heritage. For them, the school as a civilizing agency brings children and adolescents into contact with the fundamental processes of language and numeracy and with great works of art, music, and literature. Warning against the rising tide of violence in modern society, they urge schools to require behavior based on a civility that is rooted in Western culture.

Essentialists believe the curriculum should consist of basic skills, especially literacy and computation, and academic subjects such as the "five new basics" recommended in *A Nation at Risk*. Teaching and learning should focus on mastery of skills and subjects. Although all children and adolescents should attend school, they should meet rigorous academic standards. Promotion and graduations should require mastery of needed skills and subjects. Social promotion, based on age rather than academic achievement, should be ended since it places unprepared people in society and the workplace. The competency testing many states require for both students and teachers reflects contemporary essentialism.

Five new basics

Implications for Today's Classroom Teacher

Essentialist curriculum

Essentialist teachers, preferring a structured curriculum, seek to transmit the cultural heritage to students by means of carefully sequenced basic skills and subjects. The teacher is to be a specialist in subject-matter content and skilled in organizing it into instructional units. In the essentialist classroom, students devote their energy to learning academic skills and subjects rather than to currently popular fads. Reading, writing, and arithmetic and subject-matter disciplines such as English, foreign languages, mathematics, history, science, and geography are emphasized.

"Effective" schools and teachers

Much of the contemporary "effective schools" movement is based on the way essentialists define effectiveness. Schools are judged effective when principals and teachers hold high expectations of academic achievement and see the school's function as preparing students to be academically competent. Effective teachers know their subjects well, are committed to teaching them as academic disciplines, and succeed in having students do well on measures of academic achievement.

An essentialist lesson

The essentialist emphasis on first mastering facts and then basing generalizations on those facts can be illustrated in a high-school American history class that is studying the differences between the two African American leaders Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois. First, the teacher assigns reading on both men. Then he or she leads a discussion in which the students carefully identify Washington's and Du Bois's differences in background, education, and policy. After such teacher-led research, the students are to reach a judgment about why Washington and Du Bois acted as they did and to assess their influence in African American and United States history.

Critical Theory

Neo-Marxism

Critical theory, a highly influential contemporary educational theory, relates to Marxism, especially to current neo-Marxism. Karl Marx, an important nineteenth-century German philosopher, argued that all social institutions rested on an eco-

Conflict theory

conomic base and that human history was a struggle of socioeconomic classes for economic and social control. For example, Marx's concept of class struggle is important for **conflict theory**, a focusing theme in critical theory.³⁸ Using conflict theory, critical theorists believe that dominant social and economic classes use social institutions, such as schools, to maintain their control of society. Dominated classes, if conscious of their repressed condition, can change the conditions that exploit and disempower them.³⁹ Critical theorists see the school as a place where different groups are in conflict over control of curriculum and teaching.⁴⁰ For example, civil rights, environmentalist, feminist, counterculture, gay and lesbian, and antiwar groups are in conflict with neoconservatives, who emphasize fundamentalist religious values, nationalist patriotism, economic competition, and basic education. In the cultural conflict, critical theorists support disempowered groups such as the poor, minorities, and women by challenging the status quo that traditional schools reproduce.

Key Concepts*Who controls the schools?*

Critical theory involves both critique and reform. As critique, it examines the issue of control of educational institutions and agendas. Critical theorists ask the following crucial questions: Who controls the schools? Who makes policies that govern schools? Who determines the ethical, social, and economic goals of education? Who sets the curriculum? Once the question of control is answered, critical theorists turn to the motivations behind this control.⁴¹

Powerful groups dominate

Critical theorists contend that many structures in contemporary society, including educational institutions, are used by powerful groups to control those who lack power. The power holders seek to impose their knowledge, beliefs, and values on those who lack economic and political power. The power holders in the corporate capitalist sector dominate political processes and the media. In the United States, those who have power have traditionally been white males of European ancestry. The dispossessed have been women; unskilled and service workers; small farmers; and Asian, African, and Native Americans. Extending the critique globally, critical theorists divide nations into the powerful industrial ones and those, often in the southern hemisphere, that are less technologically developed. On the basis of their critique, critical theorists advocate a reform agenda to empower those who lack control over their own lives and destinies.

The Basic Questions*Postmodernism*

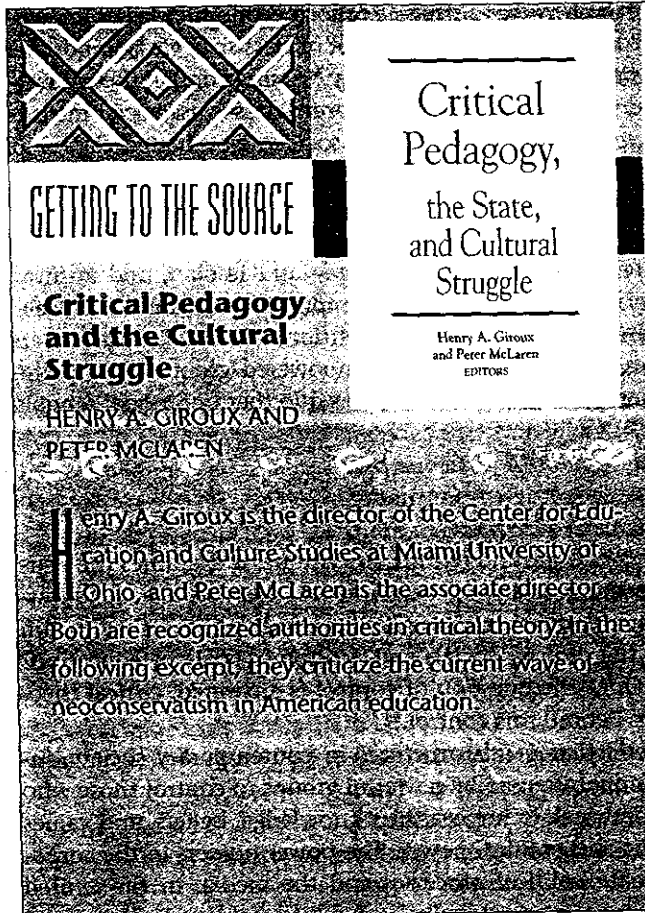
Seeking to create a "new public philosophy" for the "postmodern" twenty-first century, critical theorists challenge traditional beliefs about knowledge, especially the

³⁸For an assessment of Marxist educational theory, see Frank Margonis, "Marxism, Liberalism, and Educational Theory," *Educational Theory* (Fall 1993), pp. 449-465.

³⁹Martin Carnoy, "Education, State, and Culture in American Society," in Henry A. Giroux and Peter L. McLaren, eds., *Critical Pedagogy, the State, and Cultural Struggle* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 6-7.

⁴⁰James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books/HarperCollins, 1991), pp. 52-64. See also Valerie L. Scatamburlo, *Soldiers of Misfortune: The New Right's Culture War and the Politics of Political Correctness* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998).

⁴¹For an analysis of power relations, domination, and empowerment, see Seth Kreisberg, *Transforming Power: Domination, Empowerment, and Education* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).



[We] want to argue that the current debate about education represents more than a commentary on the state of public education in this country; it is fundamentally a debate about the relevance of democracy, social criticism, and the status of utopian thought in constructing both our dreams and the symbols and stories we devise in order to give meaning to our lives. The debate has taken a serious turn in the last decade. Under the guise of attempting to revitalize the language of conservative ethics, the [neoconservative] agenda has, in reality, launched a dangerous attack on some of the most fundamental aspects of democratic public life. What has been valorized in this language is not the issue of reclaiming public schools as agencies of social justice or critical democracy, but a view of schooling that disdains the democratic implications of pluralism, rejects a notion of learning which regards excellence and equity as mutually constitutive, and argues for a return to the old transmission model of learning.

It is worth noting that since the early 1980s the conservatives have dominated the debate over public education and have consistently put liberals and other groups of progressive stripe in the uncomfortable position of defending failed, abandoned, or unpopular policies and programs initiated in the 1960s, even

Deconstruction

major literary and philosophical texts of the old order. Rather than valuing these works as cultural classics, as do idealists, realists, essentialists, and perennialists, they see them as the constructions of dominant and often oppressive groups at a particular time in history.⁴² They argue that the conventional curriculum has been dominated by a Eurocentric, white male perspective that is contaminated by racism, sexism, and imperialism. Rejecting the perennialist argument that the curriculum must feature the classics of Western civilization, critical theorists see these classics as period pieces that legitimate the cultural dominance of one group over another. The curriculum needs to be deconstructed, or taken apart, and then reconceptualized to include different cultural experiences and perspectives, especially those neglected in the past by the dominant power structures.⁴³ Supportive of multicultural education, critical theorists emphasize learning rooted in the students' own autobiographies and family and community experiences.

⁴²Henry A. Giroux and Peter L. McLaren, "Schooling, Cultural Politics, and the Struggle for Democracy," in Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren, eds., *Critical Pedagogy, the State, and Cultural Struggle*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. xi-xii.

⁴³For reconceptualizing the curriculum, see Audrey Thompson and Andrew Gitlin, "Creating Spaces for Reconstructing Knowledge in Feminist Pedagogy," *Educational Theory* (Spring 1995), pp. 135-150.

though it is recognized that many of these programs and policies were either never properly implemented or were not given an adequate chance at achieving their expected results. The power of the conservative initiative resides, in part, in its ability to link schooling to the ideology of the marketplace and to successfully champion the so-called virtues of Western civilization. In addition, it has doggedly defended a programmatic policy of school reform based on jargon-filled and undifferentiated conceptions of authority, citizenship, and discipline. . . .

In our view, the debate over public education has been, predictably one-sided in that the conservatives have set the agenda for such a debate and initiated a plethora of policy studies designed to implement their own educational initiatives. The success of the conservative educational agenda also points to a fundamental failure among progressive and radical educators to generate a public discourse on schooling. This is not to suggest that there has been an absence of writing on educational issues among leftist critics. In fact, the body of literature that has emerged in the last decade is duly impressive. One major problem facing the recent outpouring of critical discourse on schooling is that over the years it has become largely academicized. It has lost sight of its fundamental

mission of mobilizing public sentiment toward a renewed vision of community; it has failed to recognize the general relevance of education as a public service and the importance of deliberately translating educational theory into a community-related discourse capable of reaching into and animating public culture and life. In effect, critical and radical writings on schooling have become ghettoized within the ivory tower, reflecting a failure to take seriously the fact that education as a terrain of struggle is central to the reconstruction of public life and, as such, must be understood in vernacular as well as scholarly terms.

Questions

1. How do Giroux and McLaren characterize the current debate over education?
2. What are the major elements in their critique of neoconservatism?
3. What emphases would critical theorists such as Giroux and McLaren recommend in a teacher's professional development?

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Public spheres

Critical theorists want all children and adolescents to attend school, but they also want schools to become liberating rather than indoctrinating agencies. They contend that schools have been and continue to be controlled by dominant groups that impose their version of knowledge as a means of social control. Children of subordinate groups, usually economically disadvantaged and politically weak, are indoctrinated to believe that they live in the best of all possible worlds. The approved textbooks and other educational materials confirm, or legitimate, this "sanitized" version of social reality. The "hidden curriculum" (see Chapter 9), with its emphasis on individual competition and private property, reinforces corporate values. Critical theorists want schools to be transformed into "democratic public spheres" where young people become conscious of the need to create a more equitable society for all people.⁴⁴

Teachers, like students, need to be empowered so that they can use methods that open students to social alternatives rather than mirroring the status quo. Critical theorists attack such mechanisms as standardized testing, teacher competency assessment, and top-down administrator-controlled schools as disempowering teachers.

⁴⁴Giroux and McLaren, p. xxi.

Implications for Today's Classroom Teacher

Agenda for teacher empowerment

Critical theorists want teachers to examine the ideologies that connect education to wider social and political issues. Their agenda for teacher empowerment includes (1) fighting for genuine school reform that will give teachers power over the conditions of teaching and learning; (2) engaging in collaborative research with other teachers to reconceptualize curriculum and instruction; (3) studying the culturally diverse people in the communities whose children the schools educate; (4) organizing community centers for collaborative action with community members; (5) engaging in critical dialogues with students about the realities of American politics, economics, and culture; (6) redistributing power in schools between teachers and administrators; and (7) involving schools in attempts to solve society's major problems, such as drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, illiteracy, malnutrition, and inadequate health care.⁴⁵

Emphasizing diversity

Emphasizing cultural diversity, the critical theorist would lead students on knowledge explorations that begin with their own unique multicultural experiences. The curriculum would stress study of the students' histories, languages, and cultures, as well as analysis of the persistent issues of American life, particularly those that empower some and disempower others.⁴⁶

Building Your Own Philosophy of Education

We now return to the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter and the realization that educational philosophers and theorists often provide conflicting answers. What is truth and how do we know and teach it? Do you believe that there are universal truths, as do idealists, realists, perennialists, and essentialists? Or do you think of truth as depending on changing circumstances, as do pragmatists and progressives? Your answers, reflecting your perception of reality, will influence your approach to teaching. They will also determine your view of equity and justice issues in schools and shape your attitudes about fairness and appropriate behavior in your own teaching and classroom. Your answers to these questions are part of your on-going quest to create your own philosophy of education.

Summing Up

1. To provide an orientation for developing your own philosophy of education, the text defined such terms as *metaphysics*, *epistemology*, *axiology* (*ethics* and *aesthetics*) and *logic*. It then related these terms to education, schooling, knowledge, and teaching and learning.
2. To provide a frame of reference for developing your own philosophy of education, we examined such philosophies of education as idealism, realism, pragmatism, and existentialism and educational theories such as perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, social reconstructionism, and critical theory.
3. By studying these philosophies and theories of education, you can work toward formulating your own philosophy of education and come to understand the underlying philosophical bases of curriculum and teaching and learning.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. xxiii.

⁴⁶Christine E. Sleeter and Peter L. McLaren, eds., *Multicultural Education, Critical Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

Key Terms

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| philosophies (389) | pragmatism (397) |
| theories (389) | experience (398) |
| metaphysics (390) | existentialism (400) |
| epistemology (390) | progressivism (404) |
| axiology (390) | constructivism (406) |
| ethics (390) | social reconstructionism (407) |
| aesthetics (390) | perennialism (410) |
| deductive logic (392) | The Paideia Proposal (411) |
| inductive logic (392) | cultural relativism (412) |
| idealism (392) | essentialism (414) |
| macrocosm (392) | "back-to-basics" movement (414) |
| microcosm (392) | cultural literacy (415) |
| a priori ideas (392) | critical theory (416) |
| Socratic method (394) | conflict theory (417) |
| realism (395) | |

Discussion Questions

1. Reflect on your own ideas about knowledge, education and schooling, and teaching and learning. What would you say is your philosophy of education? If you have the opportunity, share your thoughts with your classmates. Then listen to their philosophies and discuss the agreements and disagreements that emerge.
2. Reflect on how your philosophy of education has been influenced by significant teachers in your life or by books and motion pictures about teachers and teaching. Share and discuss such influences with your classmates.
3. Can you identify underlying philosophical orientations in the courses you are taking or in your teacher-education program as a whole? What are they?
4. Of the philosophies and theories examined in Chapter 12, which is most relevant and which is most irrelevant to contemporary American education? Why?

Suggested Projects for Professional Development

1. In your field-based or clinical experience, keep a journal that identifies the philosophy or theory underlying the school, curriculum, and teaching-learning methods you have observed. Share and reflect on these observations with the members of the class.
2. Create and maintain a clippings file of articles about education that appear in the popular press — newspapers and magazines — either critiquing schools or proposing educational reforms. Then analyze the philosophical and theoretical positions underlying these critiques and proposed reforms. Share and reflect on your observations with the members of the class.
3. Create and maintain a clippings file of articles about education that appear in local newspapers of the community in which the school where you are doing clinical experience, student teaching, or teaching is located. Then analyze the

- philosophical and theoretical positions underlying these articles. Share and reflect on your observations with the members of the class.
4. Research and prepare a statement on the philosophy of education approved by the board of education in the school district in which you are doing clinical experience, student teaching, or teaching. Compare and contrast the board's philosophy of education with the philosophies and theories discussed in this chapter. Share and reflect on your observations with the members of the class.
 5. Prepare a set of questions that can be used as a guide for interviewing key educators — deans, department chairs, professors — at your college or university about their educational philosophies. Share and reflect on your observations with the members of the class.
 6. Prepare a set of questions that can be used as a guide for interviewing administrators and teachers in the school district in which you are engaged in clinical experience, student teaching, or teaching. The questions should relate to their educational philosophies. Share and reflect on your observations with the members of the class.
 7. Prepare a set of questions that can be used as a guide for interviewing key community leaders — editors, politicians, media persons, officers of service organizations and unions — about their educational philosophies. Then assign members of the class to report the findings of their interviews.
 8. Prepare a set of questions that can be used as a guide for interviewing key campus leaders who represent a wide cultural diversity — officers of the African American, Hispanic, and Asian American organizations; gay or lesbian alliance; Young Republicans; Young Democrats; Socialist youth groups; leftist organizations; right-wing organizations; religious fundamentalists; Right to Life groups; Freedom of Choice groups — about their educational philosophies. Then assign members of the class to report the findings of their interviews.

Suggested Readings and Resources

Internet Resources

For information about neoprogressive and constructivist theories of education, consult the Association for Experiential Education at Princeton University: www.princeton.edu/rcurtis/aee.html.

For the Great Books approach associated with perennialism, consult Mercer University: htkkpk/roger.vet.uga.edu/%7Elnoles?grtbks.html.

For information on basic education related to essentialism and neoessentialism, consult the Council for Basic Education: www.c-b-e.org.

For information related to critical theory, consult the electronic journal *Postmodern Culture*: www.jefferson.village.edu/pmc.

For information on the discussion of philosophical topics, consult the University of Chicago Philosophy Project: csmaclab/www.uchicago.edu/philosophyProject/philos.html.

For teaching and learning related to critical thinking, consult the Critical Thinking Community: www.sonoma.edu/ctthink.

Links to resources on all aspects of philosophy can be found at: www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/Philosophy/VL.

Videos

- Transformation*. VHS, 25 minutes (1995). Insight Media, 2162 Broadway, P.O. Box 621, New York, NY 10024-0621. Phone: 212-721-6316. *Designed to assist teachers in developing a philosophy of education, the program examines key ideas and philosophers.*
- The Progressives*. VHS, 24 minutes (1988). Insight Media, 2162 Broadway, P.O. Box 621, New York, NY 10024-0621. Phone: 212-721-6316. *Explores the lives and philosophies of leading progressive educators.*
- Professional Ethics*. VHS, 22 minutes (1990). Insight Media, 2162 Broadway, P.O. Box 621, New York, NY 10024-0621. Phone: 212-721-6316. *Explores ethical situations and decisions in teaching.*

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- Johnson, Tony W. *Discipleship or Pilgrimage? The Study of Educational Philosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995. *In his critique of educational philosophy and the assumptions of educational philosophers, Johnson argues that it is necessary to rethink the field in terms of school practices.*
- Kanpol, Barry. *Critical Pedagogy: An Introduction*. Westport, Conn.: Bergin and Garvey, 1994. *Kanpol's book provides a useful and readable treatment of critical theory, a highly significant contemporary educational theory.*

Noddings, Nel. *Philosophy of Education*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995. *In her well-reviewed book, Noddings relates general issues in the philosophy of education to important questions of educational policy making and classroom practices.*

Ozmon, Howard A., and Samuel M. Craver. *Philosophical Foundations of Education*, 5th ed. Columbus, Ohio, and Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Merrill, an imprint of Prentice Hall, 1995. *In their widely used text, Ozmon and Craver present a first-rate analysis of the important educational philosophies.*