

TEACHING THEORY

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>Social Reconstruction</i>	2
<i>Existentialism</i>	3
<i>Perennialism</i>	4
<i>Essentialism</i>	5
<i>Progressivism</i>	6
<i>Behaviorism</i>	7

CHARTING COURSE

The orator Daniel Webster was participating in a Senate debate concerning public lands. During the debate, the opposing sides were drifting far from the topic's original course. In the following opening paragraph Webster's reply brought the debate back to its beginning course:

"Mr. President: When the mariner has been tossed for many days in thick weather, and on an unknown sea, he naturally avails himself of the first pause in the storm, the earliest glance of the sun, to take his latitude, and ascertain how far the elements have driven him from his true course. Let us imitate this prudence, and, before we float farther on the waves of this debate, refer to the point from which we departed, that we may at least be able to conjecture where we now are."

As faculty, especially faculty, in the College of Language and Letters, we also need to ascertain where we are by examining from where we've



departed and charting to where we plan to travel.

As a faculty, we should individually examine our own philosophies of teaching—what principles define our views about learning, learners, scholarship, teaching, and teachers.

To aid in our self-reflection, the following pages describe

general educational philosophies that may give us a sense of the underlying beliefs that govern what we do and why we do what we do. (The material comes directly from Dean L. Webb's *Foundations of American Education*, 3/e, 2000.)

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

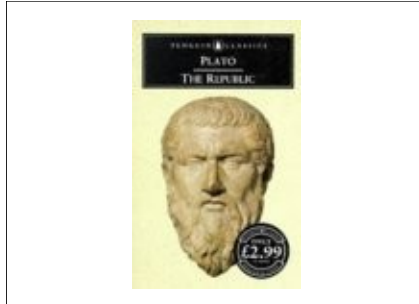
Educational philosophies are outgrowths of intellectual and philosophical movements. For example each of the following six educational philosophies attribute their basic tenets to the following individuals and movements:

1. **Social Reconstructionism**—Plato and Idealism.
2. **Existentialism**—Kierkegaard and Existentialism.
3. **Perennialism**—Aquinas and Catholicism (Neo-Thomism)
4. **Essentialism**—Luther and Protestant Sectarianism (Neo-Thomism).
5. **Progressivism**—Dewey and Pragmatism.
6. **Behaviorism**—Aristotle and Realism.

SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTIONISM

The metaphors “shaper of a new society,” “change agent” aptly describe the social reconstructionist teacher.

Social reconstructionist teachers must also be willing to engage in ongoing renewal of



Plato and Idealism

their personal and professional lives. They must be willing to critique and evaluate the conditions under which they work, and extend their educative role outside the domains of the classroom and school.

They must have a high tolerance for ambiguity, be comfortable with constant change, and be willing to think about their own thinking and the cultural and psychosocial forces that have shaped it. Such a teacher must be willing to engage in, and form, alliances with community groups, neighborhood organizations, and so-

cial movements to critique and question the practice of social democracy and university policy.

The social reconstructionist teacher must be open to diversity and view education from a global perspective. He or she must be widely read and be able to make available alternative materials and literature that reflect the amassed cultural experiences of marginal groups.

The social reconstructionist teacher should have excellent interpersonal communication skills.

“The Social Reconstructionist teacher is a shaper of a new society”

TEACHING METHODS

Teaching methods associated with social reconstructionism would encourage students to become involved in the social problems that confront the community and society. Rather than merely reading and studying about the problems of the poor or the disenfranchised, the students would spend time in the community

becoming acquainted with and immersed in their problems and their possible solutions.

Students would take some action or responsibility in planning for change.

The teaching strategies of computer simulation, role-playing, cooperative learning, internships, and work-study

experiences would be compatible with social reconstruction.

Students would work closely with older peers and adults on various aspects of problem detection and problem solving to enlarge their range of experience.

EVALUATION

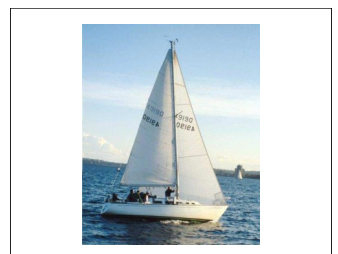
Social reconstructionists oppose standardized testing. The foundation for evaluation would evolve around the ability to think in critical terms and to expose underlying assumptions and practices. The type of evaluation that would be appropriate would be *authentic assessment* including formative evaluation, which would entail a cooperative effort between student and teacher, student

and student, and community and teacher.

Information would be shared regularly during periodic formal and informal conferences, and the student would be an active participant in the process.

Although the social reconstructionist educator would consider the needs of the individual as well as the need of the organization, conflict

would not be viewed as failure, nor would the lack of consensus be considered problematic.



EXISTENTIALISM

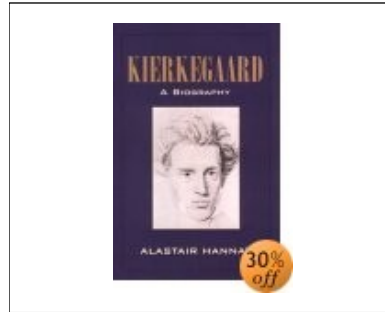
With the overriding concern for the individual as the ultimate chooser, the existentialist teacher would model valuing, decision making, and choosing. Such a teacher would pose moral and ethical, as well as intellectual, questions to his or her students. The teacher's job would be to awaken students to the ultimate responsibility they must bear for the decisions that they make. The teacher who would be most comfortable with the tenets of existentialism is typically one who is flexible, nondirective, and impervious to the disorder that often accompanies an

informal, open class atmosphere. The teacher's role is to help the individual achieve his or her potential and to strive for self-actualization.

The existentialist teacher attempts to become an excellent example of authenticity for students.

The teacher would be an individual who is comfortable with being introspective and reflective. Imagination and insight are important criteria for the existentialist teacher.

The existentialist teacher is an advocate for self-education and academic free-



Kierkegaard and Existentialism

dom. The teacher should encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning and education. Teaching, says the existentialist, is neither a science nor technology, but an art.

TEACHING METHODS

Since existentialists view the greatest obstacles to authenticity to be fear and conformity, the teaching methods they would use would not reinforce fear or conformity, but would value "existential anxiety," which is the anxiety associated with the freedom to choose.

The so-called "affective" ap-

proaches to values education, which engage students in cognitive discussions along with affective experiences, would be a favored teaching method.

In addition, the Socratic method, which includes asking questions, refining answers, and asking further questions until a conclusion is reached,

would be another important instructional strategy because it produces self-knowledge.

Furthermore, the existentialist teacher would provide time for self-reflection and privacy because the questions of human existence are best addressed in the quietude of private space.

"The Existentialist teacher is a mediator and reflective artist."

EVALUATION

The existential teacher spurns the use of standardized tests, rejects the notion of accountability, and stresses a more subjective form of appraisal or evaluation. The university is viewed as a place for experiencing life and making meaning out of nonmeaning, a place where students come to grips with their own values. The source of those values is inconsequential. What matters most is that there is a

personal endorsement for valuing and choosing. Within this paradigm of choice, the teacher is not viewed as an evaluator, monitor, or critic, but rather as a subjective or reflective artist who is committed to helping students fulfill their



personal goals. Types of evaluations would be self-assessments, journals, subjective appraisals, and presentations of students' choice.

PERENNIALISM

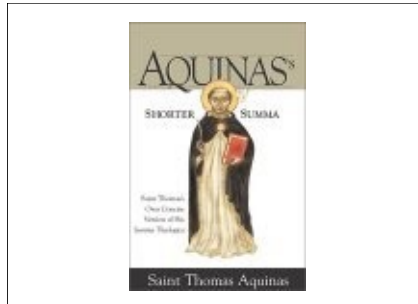
Perennialists view the teacher who is well educated in the liberal arts as the authority figure, the instrument that provides for the dissemination of truth. And if the teacher is the disseminator, then

the student is the receptacle for learning. The metaphor “director of mental calisthenics” has been used to describe the perennialist teacher.

Another metaphor that describes the perennialist teacher is “intellectual coach” who can engage students in the Socratic dialogue. The perennialist teacher must be a model of intellectual and rational powers. He or she must be capable of logical analysis, comfortable with the scientific method, well versed in the classics, have a good

memory, and be capable of the highest forms of mental reasoning. The major qualifications of the perennialist teacher include, stability, that one may never deviate from the truth; clarity, that one may not teach with obscurity; and utility, that one may see God’s honor and glory and not his own.

The educational focus of perennialism is on the need to return to the past, namely to universal truths and such absolutes as reason and faith. One would envision the purpose of schooling to be to cultivate the rational intellect and to search for the truth.



Aquinas and Neo-Thomism

“The Perennialist teacher is a disseminator of truth and intellectual coach.”

TEACHING METHODS

Perennialists maintain that education involves confronting the problems and questions that have challenged people over the centuries. Three specific methods of instruction for the perennialist include:

1. Didactic teaching by lectures or through textbook assignments.

2. Coaching that forms the habits through which all skills are possessed.
3. Socratic teaching by questioning and by conducting discussions of the answers elicited.

Prior to studying the great works of literature, philosophy, history, and science, students would be taught

methods of critical thinking and questioning strategies to prepare them to engage in “dialogue” with the classical writers.

For the ecclesiastical perennialists the highest goal of education is union with God. Any type of teaching that brings the learner closer with God would be encouraged.

EVALUATION

In addition to training the intellect, perennialists believe that the teacher has the obligation to discipline the student to train the will. Perennialists also believe it’s education’s task to impart knowledge of eternal truth. Education is not an imitation of life, but a preparation for it. They would consider the most appropriate classroom environment for training the will to be one that reinforces time on

task, precision, and order. In addition to orderliness and structure, for the ecclesiastical perennialists the learning environment would also reflect on appreciation for prayer and contemplation. The standardized, objective examina-

tion would be the favored evaluation tool of the perennialists.

Because the study of the classical tradition of the Great Books promotes an exchange of ideas and insights, the essay examination would also be utilized.



ESSENTIALISM

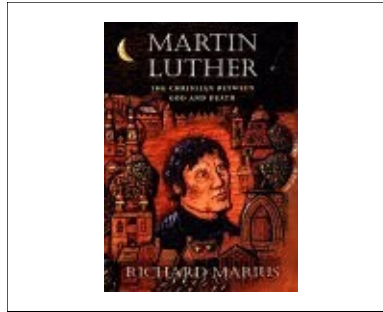
The essentialist teacher is an educator who has faith in the accumulated wisdom of the past. Rather than having majored in educational pedagogy, the essentialist teacher would have majored in a subject matter discipline, preferably in the liberal arts, sciences, or the humanities. The essentialist educator is viewed as either a link to the so-called “literary intellectual inheritance” (idealism), or a demonstrator of the world model (realism). To be an essentialist teacher is to be well versed in the liberal arts and sciences, to be a respected member of the intellectual community, to be technically

skilled in all forms of communication, and to be equipped with superior pedagogical skills to ensure competent instruction.

One of the most important roles of the teacher is to set the character of the environment in which learning takes places.

Contemporary essentialists have been critical of the preprofessional training of teachers, since they believe that their training falls short of what is demanded of teachers today.

Essentialists advocate intellectual discipline as well as



Martin Luther and Sectarianism

moral discipline and maintain that character training deserves an important place in school.

Essentialists maintain the education should not permit any “frivolous” subjects.

TEACHING METHODS

If the basic disciplines, or basic subjects, are at the heart of the school curriculum, then the methods of instruction that are to support such a curriculum include the more traditional instructional strategies such as lecture, recitation, discussion, and the Socratic dialogue. Written and oral communication occur

by a prominent place in the instructional milieu of the essentialist school. Essentialists view books as an appropriate medium for instruction. Generally, essentialist educators have found educational technology to be congruent with their educational theory. They prefer instructional materials that are paced and

sequenced in such a way that students know what they are expected to master. Detailed syllabi, lesson plans, learning by objectives, competency-based instruction, computer-assisted instruction are examples of teaching strategies that would be acceptable to the modern-day essentialist.

“The Essentialist teacher is trained in arts, sciences, or humanities, and is a skilled communicator.”

EVALUATION

Of all the theories, essentialism is perhaps most comfortable with testing. In fact, the entire essentialist curriculum reflects the influence of the testing movement. Extensive use of IQ tests, standardized achievement tests, diagnostic tests, and performance-based competency tests are examples of the widespread application of measurement techniques. Competency, accountability, mastery learning, and

performance-based instruction have gained increasing acceptance by many educators as a result of the essentialists’ influence on educational practice.

Essentialists believe Americans largely have lost sight of the true purpose of educa-

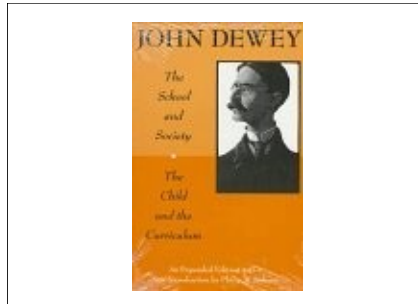


tion, which is intellectual training. They believe that the rigor of our educational programs and teaching methods have been declining steadily for several decades and that instruction has been pitched at the level of mediocrity.

PROGRESSIVISM

The metaphor of the “teacher as facilitator” or “director of learning” might best describe the progressivist teacher. Such a teacher is not considered to be the authority, or disseminator of knowledge or

truth, like the perennialist or essentialist teacher. Rather, he or she serves more as a guide or supervisor who facilitates learning by assisting the student to sample direct experience.



John Dewey and Pragmatism

The teacher’s role is to help his or her pupils to acquire the values of the democratic system. Although the teacher is always interested in the individual development of each student, the progressivist instructor would envision his or her role as focusing beyond the individual. Progressivism by its very nature is socially

oriented; thus the teacher would be a collaborative partner in making group decisions, keeping in mind their ultimate consequences for the students.

Progressivism embraces the notion that the student is an experiencing organism who is capable of “learning by doing.”

The progressivist teacher is grounded in the scientific method of inductive reasoning. As an educational theory, it encourages the learner to seek out those processes that work, and to do those things that best achieve desirable ends.

“The Progressivist teacher is a director of learning and collaborative partner.”

TEACHING METHODS

For the progressivist, since there is no rigid subject matter content and no absolute standard for what constitutes knowledge, the most appropriate teaching method is the project method.

The experience-centered, problem-solving curriculum lends itself to cooperative group activities whereby stu-

dents can learn to work together on units or projects that have relevance for their own lives.

The indispensable instructional strategy that would be used along with the project method is the scientific method. However, unlike the perennialist or essentialists who view the scientific method as a means

of verifying truth, the progressivist views scientific investigation as a means of verifying experience.

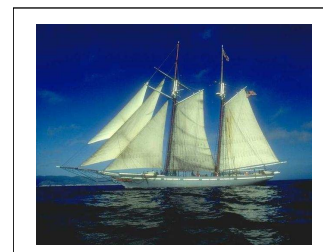
The atmosphere of the classroom would be active, experience directed, and self-directed.

EVALUATION

Because progressivism supports the group process, cooperative learning, and democratic participation, its approach to evaluation differs from the more traditional approaches.

For example, the progressivist would engage in *formative* evaluation, which is process oriented and concerned with ongoing feedback about the activity underway, rather than the measurement of out-

comes. Monitoring what the students are doing, appraising what skills they still need to develop, and resolving unexpected problems as they occur would be typical examples of the type of evaluation used by the progressivist.



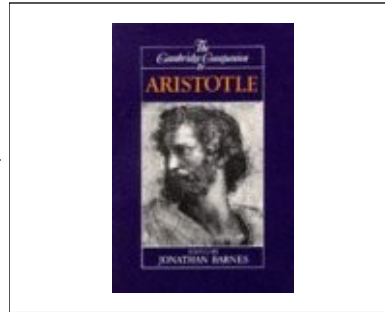
Progressivism believes learning through problem-solving should take precedence over the inculcating of subject matter, the teacher’s role is not to direct but to advise, and the school should encourage cooperation rather than competition.

BEHAVIORISM

Behaviorism, or behavioral engineering, is an educational theory that is predicated on the belief human behavior can be explained in terms of responses to external stimuli. The behaviorist teacher must be skilled in a variety of technical and observational skills. Moreover, since behavioral engineering depends on psychological principles, the teacher must be knowledgeable about psychology, in particular educational psychology that emphasizes learning. Also since behaviorism focuses on empirical verification, the teacher must be well versed in the scientific method.

The behaviorist teacher is very concerned about the consequences of classroom behavior. Therefore the teacher must be able to recognize which reinforcers are most appropriate as well as be skilled in using a variety of schedules of reinforcement that are effective and efficient in shaping and maintaining desired responses.

Behaviorist teachers are most concerned with the student achieving specific objectives or competencies. For this reason the teacher must be capable of planning and using behavioral objectives, designing and using pro-



Aristotle and Realism

grammed instruction, using computers, and utilizing performance contracting. Two metaphors for the behaviorist teacher are “the controller of behavior” and the “arranger of contingencies.”

TEACHING METHODS

Behaviorist theory is primarily concerned with the process of providing contingencies of reinforcement as the basis for any strategy or method. If there are appropriate opportunities for the learner to respond, and appropriate reinforcers that are readily available, learning will take place. They support the use of *pro-*

grammed instruction as an effective teaching method. Programmed instruction enables individual students to answer questions about a unit of study at their own rate, checking their own answers and advancing only after answering correctly.

A chief advantage of programmed instruction is the

immediate reinforcement that it provides.

Two general principles that guide the behaviorist teacher include:

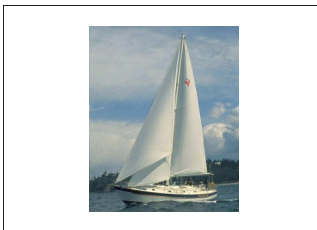
1. Identify expected student behavior.
2. Translate expectations into procedures and routines.

“The Behaviorist teacher is controller of behavior and arranger of contingencies.”

EVALUATION

Measurements and evaluation are central to the behaviorist. Specified behavioral objectives serve not only as guides to learning for the student, but as standards for evaluating the teaching-learning process. For the behaviorist, only those aspects of behavior that are observable, and preferably measurable, are of interest to the teacher. Advocates of behavioral objectives claim

that if teachers know exactly what they want students to learn and how they want them to learn, using behavioral objectives can be an efficient method for gauging how much learning has occurred. Measurement and evaluation



also provide a method for obtaining accountability from teachers since they are pivotal to the learning process. Two other types of evaluation used by the behaviorists are performance contracting and teaching students to record their progress.

Language &
Letters

*“In my mind, the overarching theme for all our scholarly work at Brigham Young University-Idaho should be **INSPIRED INQUIRY AND INNOVATION**. . . . We are not like other institutions of higher education; we have access to the gifts of the Spirit, which cannot be quantified nor counted. There are simply things we cannot adequately define and describe about the processes of learning and teaching with the Spirit. But, nonetheless, we should be excellent scholars; and our scholarship should be focused on the process of learning and teaching. . . . We will emphasize a wide range of scholarly endeavors and excel in and play a pioneering role in **understanding** learning and teaching processes.”*

—David A. Bednar

