4. Why is it important for Angelica’s students to understand how various people throughout history have suffered oppression?
   a. They need to see that they are not alone.
   b. They will be encouraged to see how people have overcome difficulties.
   c. They need to understand it so they won’t perpetuate it.
   d. It is vital to understand that history repeats itself.

5. In the lesson you observed, what purpose does the candy serve?
   a. The candy randomly given and taken shows students that they actually have very little control over their lives.
   b. They are learning to cleverly hoard candy and keep it from being taken away, much as they will need to do in a capitalistic country.
   c. The candy is an incentive to participate fully in the rock-paper-scissors activity.
   d. The candy is randomly given and taken away, showing that in governments without freedom there is little control over one’s destiny.

Application Exercise 7.5: Developing Professional Competence

Flash Cards 7.1

Shared Writing 7.1: Importance of History

Chapter 8
Philosophical Foundations of Education in the United States

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will have knowledge and skills to:

8.1 Articulate why a philosophy of education is important.
8.2 Explain how two prominent teacher-centered philosophies of education affect teaching and learning.
8.3 Compare and contrast how three prominent student-centered philosophies of education affect teaching and learning.
8.4 Develop your own personal philosophy of education.

Dear Reader

When it comes to a philosophy of education, there’s no avoiding it. Every decision, action, and every interaction come from a philosophy, whether we’ve thought about it, written it, or never even considered it. One thing’s for sure—we live it. The Greek word philosoph means “love,” and Sophia means “wisdom.” Philosophy, then, means “love of wisdom.” Philosophy is a means of answering fundamental questions. It’s not a boring, stuffy subject, but rather a vibrant way of discovering and expressing ways of being and behaving. A teacher’s philosophy of education is the teacher’s “love of wisdom” regarding teaching that expresses itself every day in the classroom.

This chapter provides only a very brief overview of some of the components of philosophy that apply to teaching and learning. Don’t be put off by the terminology. Think about the meanings and implications of the words that label the areas of philosophy we discuss: essentialism, pluralism, pragmatism, social reconstructionism, and existentialism. Consider the concepts seriously and internalize them. Each area has a down-to-earth definition and is illustrated with words that are familiar. Take it personally and pay attention to how each philosophy affects teaching and learning. You’ll learn a lot about yourself. This won’t happen with a quick read-through and a glance at the figures. The chapter is relatively brief, allowing time to read it twice or even three times, purposefully reflecting on the content to make it personally meaningful.

If you’ve ever considered questions such as “Who am I?” or “What’s my purpose in life?” you have engaged in philosophical thought. Every attitude and action is determined by some deeper basic beliefs, conscious or unconscious. To bring a philosophy to the surface of your consciousness requires consideration of your values and views about life. It necessitates reflection on circumstances, reactions, assumptions, intentions, and so on.
Few teachers have a defined philosophy of education. If asked, most may shrug and say, "I've never thought about it," or "I don't have time for that kind of stuff." But if you study a teacher's attitudes and actions over even a relatively brief period of time, you can probably make some accurate statements about the philosophy that impacts what you observe.

8.1 Why Is a Philosophy of Education Important?

8.1.1 Articulate why a philosophy of education is important.

A philosophy of education is a living, dynamic part of who we are in the classroom. Allan C. Ornstein (2003) expresses the far-reaching impact of a philosophy of education when he writes,

"Philosophy enters into every important decision about curriculum, teaching, instruction, and testing... The methods and materials a teacher chooses to use in a classroom reflect a professional judgment, which reflects philosophy... In short, choices reflect philosophy—and whether we recognize our own philosophy in education, it is out there and it influences our behavior and attitudes in classrooms and schools."

(p. 17)

Because teacher preparation puts you in a position to think about decisions relative to teaching, prospective teachers are usually asked to write a philosophy of education. This means you will look closely at established philosophical viewpoints, you will analyze what these viewpoints mean to teachers and their work, and then you will either state with which philosophy you agree or with which combination you most closely align. The philosophy of education you write before entering the classroom as a teacher will be based on limited experience and will be a work in progress. But it's a start, and it's an important one. It's healthy and productive for teachers to teach according to combinations of philosophies. This creates balance and produces commonsense, responsive decisions in the classroom. Read new teacher Craig Cleveland's reasons for developing a philosophy of education then watch his interview as he expresses his personal philosophy.

People change and grow, often in response to personal experiences. Your philosophy will change and grow. In Figure 8.1, read about Karen Heath's experience of writing an initial philosophy of education as a college assignment and her subsequent experiences leading her to revisit her philosophy.

Teaching in Focus

Craig Cleveland, history teacher, Roosevelt High School, California. In his own words...

"Much of what you need to know about effective teaching and learning is found within yourself already. The environment and circumstances in which you learned positive and life-changing lessons may have been in school or elsewhere in life. The relevant and meaningful lessons your students learn will need to be both inside and outside the school. If education is going to have the power to transform them into thoughtful mature people, essential to creating a learning environment in the classroom is a researched and clearly articulated philosophy about how learning happens. When such a philosophy is in place, teachers are able to make sound and reliable instructional decisions and refinements."

Continuing my education in a graduate program, reading professional literature, regularly reflecting on my teaching with an eye toward improvement, and having ongoing conversations with friends and colleagues help me to make more concrete my beliefs about how learning happens. A ninth-grade student of mine made the insightful statement, "Learning Is Natural." I believe learning is natural when the learner has interest and a voice as a participant in the learning environment of school.

Philosophy Trees

Our discussion of each philosophy is accompanied by a diagram of a tree. The analogy of a philosophy of education to a tree is appropriate in many ways. The tree trunk represents teaching. The root system is a particular philosophy of education, or a combination of philosophies, providing the strength and foundation of the tree. The philosophy literally grows the tree. The branches of the tree represent the work of teachers. Each trunk-attached branch supports smaller branches with plentiful leaves that represent teaching and learning.

Figure 8.1 Karen Heath, 2005 Vermont Teacher of the Year

One of the ubiquitous rites of passage for prospective teachers in the completion of a philosophy of education. When I was a senior in college 22 years ago, having just completed my student teaching, one of the final requirements before being certified was to complete such a document. I was still a student, and much of what I thought about and wrote was largely theoretical. I wrote about the need for children's differences to be recognized, the importance of process in education, and freedom within a structured environment. "A Personal Philosophy of Education," as it was titled, went subsequently into a box in an attic while I ventured across the country and, a few years later, settled into a house in Vermont where the box was moved to a new attic, gathering dust with other college relics.

Last year when I was nominated to be Teacher of the Year, I was called upon once again to produce a philosophy of education. I sat down one weekend and wrote about what I believe to be the most important aspect of education—the heart. Years of experience have taught me that in order to be an effective teacher, my heart must be in it fully, from devotion to subject matter, to striving to keep up with best practices, and, most importantly, to having a heart connection to the children, as that is the only sure avenue to effective student learning.

It took a bit of digging, but I found the old college box, and at the very bottom of it lay my original philosophy of education. I took it like a treasure into the afternoon sun in our yard and carefully read not just a philosophy, but also the mind-set of an idealistic 23-year-old. Surprisingly, I still agreed with everything I had written, but there was a distinct lack of mention of anything having to do with relationships. I guess that is the aspect of teaching that I have truly learned over time.

Though my first written document sat unmoored for 23 years and my newest one was just composed, I have always carried with me a philosophy of education. It brings stability to my work as initiatives and programs come and go. From a fairly benign population of children in a wealthy college town to an inner-city Boston high school, my philosophy is the backbone of what I do as a teacher. It directs what and how I teach and, most importantly, how I interact with my students. It is the core of who I am as a teacher.
Many aspects of a tree’s growth are directly analogous to teaching and learning. Do you recall seeing a cross section of a tree trunk? Elementary students learn that you can count the rings to determine the age of a tree because each year of growth not only takes a tree skyward but also wraps another layer of life around it. So it is with teaching experience. Each year, previous experiences aren’t shed but rather are wrapped in new experiences.

Trees have two kinds of roots: anchor roots, which grow deeper with time and hold the tree upright against most winds, and feeder roots, which shoot out in all directions and draw in nourishment. Have you ever noticed a makeshift fence or stakes with colored tape around the base of a tree when construction was nearby? The purpose of this barrier is to let workers know that digging closer would likely damage the tree. Although a tree can survive the loss of some feeder roots, the diameter of the feeder and anchor root system is generally the same as the diameter of the canopy of the tree’s branches and leaves. Cutting away feeder roots will diminish the canopy in like proportion. The size and stability of the philosophical root system determine the effectiveness of the teaching and learning canopy. Your anchor matters; your philosophy of education affects all aspects of your success as a teacher.

Teacher-Centered and Student-Centered Philosophies

When we refer to an aspect of education as teacher centered, the teacher is prominent in the classroom, determining, and being the center of curriculum and instructional strategies. When the curriculum and instructional strategies are student centered, the students have choices concerning what to learn and the instructional strategies actively involve students in their own learning. The five philosophies discussed here fall neatly into these two categories. Essentialism and perennialism are teacher-centered approaches, whereas progressivism, social reconstructionism, and existentialism are more student centered, as illustrated in Figure 8.2. Keep this in mind as you read about the five philosophies. Also think about early childhood, elementary, middle, and high school classrooms as you consider each philosophy of education.

---

8.2 How Do Two Prominent Teacher-Centered Philosophies of Education Affect Teaching and Learning?

8.2 Explain how two prominent teacher-centered philosophies of education affect teaching and learning.

**Essentialism**

Essentialism is a philosophy of education based on the belief that a core curriculum exists that everyone in the United States should learn. This core can shift in response to societal changes but should always be basic, organized, and rigorous. When you hear some praise the concept of “back to basics,” chances are that person is an essentialist.

Essentialism is an ancient philosophy, but it grew in popularity in the 20th century in the United States as a backlash to progressivism, the educational philosophy begun by John Dewey. Whereas progressivism puts student interests at the center of curriculum and instruction, essentialism puts little stock in what students want in terms of what and how they learn. Essentialism gained impetus from the launching of Sputnik by the Soviet Union in 1957 and again from the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983—two events we discussed in Chapter 7. Supporters of the essentialist philosophy are vocal about their view that schools have dumbed down the curriculum with nonessential courses, resulting in lower test scores (Ravitch, 2000). Essentialists favor high expectations for students, along with testing to measure mastery of standards.

An essentialist philosophy of education puts the teacher front and center as an intellectual and moral role model. Direct instruction is encouraged, but other instructional methods are used if they have proven effective. Students are expected to listen and learn as they follow the rules of the classroom.

One prominent proponent of essentialism is E. D. Hirsch, author of *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1987). Hirsch lists events, people, facts, discoveries, inventions, art, literature, and more that he believes all Americans should know about to be culturally literate. Another proponent of essentialism is Theodore Sizer (1932–2009), founder of the Coalition of Essential Schools, a group of about 200 schools that pledge to promote the essentialist goals of a rigorous curriculum based on standards. Sizer (1985) insists that Coalition of Essential Schools students clearly exhibit mastery of content as well as evidence of developing thinking skills.

Take a few minutes to study the essentialism tree in Figure 8.3. Visualizing how teachers might translate the elements of essentialism into their classrooms will help you understand this philosophy of education.

**Perennialism**

Perennialism is a philosophy of education based on a core curriculum, and in that regard it is similar to essentialism. The difference lies in what constitutes the core. The word perennial means “everlasting” and is often used when talking about plants.
A perennial flower blooms in season, is dormant for a time, and then blooms again, year after year. A flower that is not a perennial is an annual that must be replanted each year. Perennialism, as a philosophy of education, says there is a curriculum with themes and questions that endure and are everlasting. In contrast, the curriculum of essentialism is considered basic and core, but its components may change as society changes and, as such, the essentialist curriculum is more comparable to an annual.

Perennialists believe that even as life changes and times change, the real substance and truths of life remain the same. The wisdom students need may be obtained through the study of Great Books, the writings of those considered to be the great thinkers through the history of Western civilization, such as Homer, Shakespeare, Melville, Einstein, and many others. Perennialists do not endorse choices in the curriculum or elective courses, and they ascribe to a rigid curriculum for elementary, middle, and high schools.

Teachers who practice perennialism as a philosophy of education want to be in control of the classroom. They dispense knowledge and lead discussions of classics that require rigorous, logical thought by students. Differences in students are rarely considered, as all are expected to learn from the classics (Webb, Metha, and Jordan, 2017).

Mortimer Adler (1902–2001), author of the *Paideia Proposal* (1982), is perhaps the best known recent proponent of perennialism as a philosophy of education. The word *paideia* refers to a state of human excellence. Adler said that schools should use intense study of the classics to strive for excellence in students (Pulliam and Van Patten, 2013). Adler founded the Great Books of the Western World program at the University of Chicago in 1930.

Take a few minutes to study the perennialism tree in Figure 8.4. Visualizing how teachers might translate the elements of perennialism into their classrooms will help you understand this philosophy of education.
Examining the progressivism tree reveals that the progressivist teacher often facilitates student discovery and critical thinking rather than serving as a dispenser of knowledge. In Video Example 8.1, we observe a fourth-grade teacher working with a small group of students as they grapple with the differences between a food web and a food chain. Watch and listen as the teacher skillfully, and in a non-intimidating way, helps the students think about what they know and draw their own conclusions.

**Figure 8.5 Progressivism tree**

Although public education is traditionally slow to adopt new technology, the use of tablets in the classroom is proving to be the exception. Some estimates put tablet sales to schools as doubling each year for several years. However, integrating them into the curriculum is still in the infancy stage. Teachers using tablets see them as valuable tools for teaching and learning, with potential to have greater impact with time.

Tablets make sense in every kind of school, but particularly in rural areas, providing virtual field trips, conversations with experts from around the world, advanced placement courses, and more. In some areas there aren’t enough towers to make Internet access possible in homes. Even without Internet, programs can be loaded on tablets to give access to students in rural areas.

Let’s look at some benefits of tablet use for teaching and learning:

1. Students are comfortable with the technology. Teachers may have difficulty adjusting to tablets, but students don’t. Tablets are portable, colorful, connected, and interactive.
2. Tablets are now readily available, made by a number of companies, each with strong and weak points. Apple’s iPad, Amazon’s Kindle Fire, Barnes & Noble’s Nook, Google’s Nexus 7, and other Android tablets are among the most popular. The Microsoft Surface has some advantages because of its detachable keyboard, solving the typing issue of other touch-only tablets. Increased competition will likely drive prices lower.
3. Innovative software is continually being developed specifically for tablets. There are applications for tablets in all subject areas. For example, in science there are apps that allow students to explore and label the stars and constellations. Images from digital microscopes may be shared on tablets. Also, tablets can bring history to life through interactive ebooks and videos, with primary sources accessible. Students can keep up with happenings around the world on tablets. For students with special needs, curriculum may be tailored through specific apps that help them learn in ways that suit their strengths.
4. Cameras on tablets allow individual exploration, creativity, and the capacity for more engaging presentations.
5. Because of access to the Internet, information on tablets does not go out of date as it does in a textbook.
6. Tablets can store thousands of books, allowing students virtually limitless data storage capacity.
7. Tablets provide class interactivity. Students can communicate with teachers and other students, share ideas, and work on projects.
There are drawbacks to using tablets in the classroom that will undoubtedly be remedied with innovation and time. Here are some of the challenges of classroom tablet use:

1. The initial cost of tablets for a whole school is expensive. When questioned, cost is a factor for most individuals in positions to make the tablet-or-no-tablet decision. However, a New York City Council member has suggested replacing textbooks with tablets for 1,700 schools. She contends that this does happen when New York City stops purchasing textbooks.

2. So far, most tablets do not have built-in keyboards. The touch screen is not considered efficient for lengthy writing. It is still more difficult for students to respond to data on a tablet than on desktop or laptop computers.

3. Monitoring student activity on tablets is a dilemma for many teachers that may be solvable using a tablet that is loaded with only what teachers want on them. The Kuro educational tablet allows content to be stored locally on the device. If a school doesn't want Internet access on the tablets, but only curriculum for the various subject areas, programs such as the CurriculumLoft, a web-based storage system for digital curriculum, will make this possible.


5. Perhaps the biggest challenge from a teacher's standpoint is finding ways to make tablets, or any technology for that matter, part of daily instruction, not just a motivating add-on. The possibilities are many.

Chances are you will enter the teaching profession with classroom tablets both commonplace and productive.

Social Reconstructionism

More than any other philosophy of education, social reconstructionism looks to education to change society, rather than just teach about it. Social reconstructionism as a philosophy of education calls on schools to educate students in ways that will help society move beyond all forms of discrimination to the benefit of everyone worldwide. This philosophy addresses such topics as racial equality, women's rights, sexism, environmental pollution, poverty, substance abuse, homophobia, and AIDS.

Proponents of other educational philosophies often avoid such topics, thus relegating the topics to the null curriculum, discussed in Chapter 4.

Arts, Theodore Brameld (1904–1987) founded the philosophy of social reconstructionism following World War II. Brameld (1956) based the philosophy on two premises: (1) people now have the capacity to destroy civilization and (2) people have the potential to create a civilization marked by health and humanity. The basic tenets of social reconstructionism, however, go back to the early Greeks and, more recently, to Karl Marx, who called for a social revolution that would bring about equity among all people (Jacobson, 2003).

Teachers who subscribe to social reconstructionism promote active student involvement in societal problems. They plan experiences for students to explore and possible solutions, but avoid moralizing. They promote democracy and the freedom to make choices while helping students discover the consequences of particular lines of reasoning and action. All of this occurs within an educational context that focuses on reading comprehension, research techniques, analysis and evaluation skills, and writing as a form of persuasive communication.

Major proponents of social reconstructionism as a philosophy of education include George Counts (1907–1974), Paolo Freire (1922–1987), and Ivan Illich (1925–2002). In his book, Dare the School Build a New Social Order? (1932), Counts wrote about his view that schools should equip students to deal with world problems. Freire wrote in Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) about his personal experiences in working with poor, illiterate peasants that led him to the philosophy that education is the key to empowering the poor to control and improve their lives. In his book Deschooling Society (1971), Illich promoted a radical view. He wrote that schools as we know them should be eliminated because they do nothing to decrease poverty. He contended that schools actually prevent what he saw as real education, a process he viewed as happening in more informal ways. Although "deschooling" American society is not likely to happen, the social reconstructionism views of Illich have prompted important questions about the role of public education (Chartock, 2004).

Figure 8.6 Social reconstructionism tree

Take a few minutes to study the social reconstructionism tree in Figure 8.6. Visualizing how teachers might translate the elements of social reconstructionism into their classrooms will help you understand this philosophy of education.

Brenda Beyer, a fifth-grade teacher at Rees Elementary, considers her philosophy a healthy mix of progressivism and social reconstructionism, as you can read in Teaching in Focus and see in her interview.

Teaching in Focus

Brenda Beyer's passionate approach to teaching is evident in every aspect of her work—curriculum choices, teaching methods, relationships with students, interactions with colleagues, and the learning environment she has created in her classroom.

In her interview, Brenda tells us she considers her choice to teach a "calling." She had planned to be an engineer until she took a course that addressed the needs of children with disabilities. That's when she knew teaching would be her life's work. She has taught for over 20 years, most of them spent in a multilevel classroom at Rees Elementary, south of Salt Lake City, Utah.

Brenda's classroom is very student friendly, with tables and a couch rather than desks in rows; a large classroom library with books for all reading levels on a wide range of topics; multiple cabinets of art supplies; display boards of student work; and an area filled with Native American art, posters, and artifacts that have personal meaning to Brenda because of her Native American heritage.

Brenda was one of the originators of the multilevel concept at Rees Elementary. She wanted to have longer-term relationships with individual students. She saw the benefits of children at different stages of maturation being together for several years. Brenda also liked the idea of collaborating with other teachers in creative ways. With colleagues Chris and Tim, Brenda maintains an arts-infused curriculum by teaching at three classes of multiage students an art form. Her specialty is visual arts, evident by the amount of artwork in her classroom.

Each day is filled with opportunities, according to Brenda, who finds purpose and beauty all around her as she fulfills her calling. Watch Brenda's interview to learn more about her and her classroom.
Existentialism

The primary emphasis of existentialism is on the individual. As a philosophy of education, existentialism contends that teachers teach the whole person, not just math, reading, science, or any other particular subject. Each student searches for personal meaning and personal understanding. If learning about a subject increases a student's sense of self, then it's worthwhile. Practices such as standardization, tracking, and testing do not fit into an existentialist viewpoint. Because meaning is personal, each student has the freedom and the subsequent responsibility to make his or her own choices. Existentialism rejects traditional education. Few schools practice existentialism as an educational philosophy, and most that do are private. However, there are teachers in both public and private classrooms who practice some elements of existentialism.

The existentialist teacher honors individual students by arranging for learning experiences from which each student may choose. The classroom atmosphere is supposed to be stimulating and full of choices. The student's job is to make choices and then take responsibility for those choices. Teachers and students have a great deal of individual contact, participating in learning that is self-paced and self-directed (Greene, 1978). A teacher who follows existentialism as a philosophy of education teaches best by being a role model, and demonstrates the importance of a discipline by pursuing academic goals related to the subject area.

A. S. Neill (1883–1973) was one of the most influential proponents of existentialism. He founded the Summerhill School in England following World War I. Learning by discovery was the primary feature of Summerhill. The student as an individual was emphasized and exploration for the sake of learning had few restrictions (Neill, 1960).

Maxine Greene (1917–2014) was the most well-known proponent of existentialism. She referred to a heightened level of personal awareness as "wide-awareness." Greene refuted critics of existentialism who said that the philosophy in practice allows children to run free and out of control. She maintained that freedom has rules that allow others to be free as well (Greene, 1995).

Take a few minutes to study the existentialism tree in Figure 8.7. Visualizing how teachers might translate the elements of existentialism into their classrooms will help you understand this philosophy of education. Then read what Chris Roberts, one of our focus teachers at Rees Elementary School, says that reflects his philosophy of education.

Teaching in Focus

Chris Roberts, Grades 3-5 Multiage Classroom, Rees Elementary School, Utah. In his own words . . .
I heard or read somewhere that "you teach who you are." I know, after teaching 23 years, that there is a lot of truth in those five words. I've had students return to visit me years after they've been in my class and I get invited to many of their weddings. As we catch up on the years that have passed, none of them talk about their reading or math; they tell me about me. Their memories don't focus on the great unit I taught on Native Americans, but rather on the time I told them about a trip I want on or a belief I have about life. I don't think you can be an excellent teacher if your own life is boring or "unexamined," as Henry David Thoreau would caution. Children will naturally be less interested in learning from someone they find uninteresting. Don't let the classroom, and pressures you will surely face, rule your life. Live a full life. Share with your students what you learn and experience on your amazing path.

Application Exercise 8.3: Contrasting philosophies of progressivism and perennialism

Point of Reflection 8.2
Do you identify most with the elements of progressivism, social reconstructionism, or existentialism? Explain your reasoning.

Check Your Understanding 8.3
8.4 How Do I Begin to Develop My Own Personal Philosophy of Education?

8.4 Develop your own personal philosophy of education.

When it comes to developing a philosophy of education, balance is important. If you found yourself aligning with parts of one and parts of another as you read about the prominent philosophies of education, and thinking, “How will I weigh all this and decide?” you are certainly not alone. Very few educators can place themselves squarely in one camp or another. Picking and choosing from among the components of several philosophies is referred to as taking an eclectic approach. This entails balance. It’s natural for teachers to lean toward one philosophy or approach more than another, but subscribing to only one philosophy will not serve the needs of all children.

Other Philosophies

Before considering the development of a personal philosophy of education, let’s look briefly at some other “isms” that may impact educational philosophy.

Realism is a philosophy based on the belief that ideas are the only reliable form of reality. Idealism believes that because the physical world changes continually, ideas are what should be taught. Taking the opposite stance, realism is based on the belief that some facts are absolutely recognized by all or not. Realists contend that the only way to know these absolutes is to study the material world.

Romanticism, or naturalism, contends as a philosophy of education that the needs of the individual are more important than the needs of society. Many early childhood and elementary educators incorporate into their classrooms the tenets of romanticism that state that young children are born good, pure, and full of curiosity, and that their individual interests should be validated with opportunities to explore and manipulate elements of their environment.

Postmodernism grew out of a sense that those in power control those who don’t have power. Postmodernists believe this control is manifest through major institutions such as schools. The decades of the 1960s and 1970s were times of unprecedented outrages for justice and equality through the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, and a renewed concern for the poor. Postmodernism philosophy grows as a response to these cultural stirrings. The postmodern curriculum includes perspectives on history and literature by a variety of authors representing different lifestyles. Proponents of postmodernism contend they are attempting to strike a balance of power among all people and that intellectual growth from multiple perspectives is one avenue for doing so. Critics of postmodernism contend that the philosophy seeks to promote political purposes rather than intellectual purposes (Ozmun and Caward, 2008). You will likely encounter other philosophies as you participate in future teacher preparation courses. The ones you have read about so far provide many choices for you to consider as you begin the process of forming your own philosophy of education. This chapter’s “The Opinion Page” feature expresses a philosophy of education. The writer has definite opinions about a particular aspect of education that should be included in the opportunities afforded students.

Your Turn

Now it’s your turn to grow a philosophy tree. The root system will consist of an anchor philosophy—that is, the philosophy with which you most closely align. There’s no need to ascribe to every tenet of this anchor philosophy, but it should express most of your current beliefs about teaching and learning. Other philosophies may be part of the feeder root system. The branches and leaves of the tree’s canopy will be a mix of what you believe about the roles of the teacher, students, the learning environment, the curriculum, and instruction. Keep in mind that the deeper and wider the philosophical root system, the stronger and more stable the trunk will grow and the richer and more extensive the canopy will be.
One approach to help begin examining your own philosophy is to study the content of Table 8.1 carefully. Considering the responses to the important and broad questions in the table is a way to explore your own philosophical views. There are many questions that may be asked, with each philosophy of education contributing unique responses.

Table 8.1 Questions and philosophical responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Essentialism</th>
<th>Perennialism</th>
<th>Progressivism</th>
<th>Recontructionism</th>
<th>Existentialism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is real?</td>
<td>Elements of core curriculum; may change</td>
<td>Elements of core curriculum; unchanging</td>
<td>What can be verified through the senses</td>
<td>What can be verified through research and analysis</td>
<td>Reason primarily on the individual’s perspective and experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do we acquire knowledge?</td>
<td>From a combination of the classics and science</td>
<td>From the never-changing classics</td>
<td>From individual experiences and discovery</td>
<td>From individual and group searches for meaning and justice</td>
<td>Through individual gestures; making choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is valuable?</td>
<td>Core of knowledge that responds to some societal needs</td>
<td>Changeless core of knowledge</td>
<td>Determined by individual interacting with own culture</td>
<td>Whatever makes society more just and equitable</td>
<td>Whatever leads to greater self-knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What makes sense?</td>
<td>Classics provide generalizations; specifics are deduced; observation and analysis may lead to generalization</td>
<td>Deductive reasoning from truths of classics</td>
<td>Discovered through problem solving</td>
<td>Weighed against potential benefit or harm to society</td>
<td>Whatever enhances individual freedom and increases personal responsibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Application Exercise 8.4: Table 8.1: Questions and philosophical responses**

Another approach to growing your philosophy tree is to spend some time thinking about your favorite teachers in early childhood, elementary, middle, and high school. Why did you admire them? What made them special? Your answers need to go beyond “She was so nice” or “He just stands out in my mind.” To help you think through the reasons particular teachers had positive effects on you, use the chart in Table 8.2. Think about how this person appeared to view his or her role as a teacher, including relationships with students, the creation of the learning environment, and approaches to curriculum and instruction. Table 8.2 will help organize your recollections.

A sincere, honest start to the development of a philosophy of education will help you grow into the teaching profession. Having opportunities to talk about your philosophy and listen to your classmates, your instructor, and teachers in the field will make you more comfortable articulating your stance. The more you think, talk, and listen, the more confident you will become that you are grounded in your reasons for how you approach your role, your students, the learning environment, curriculum, and instruction.

Figure 8.8 is a tree waiting for you to make it your own. Your philosophy tree can be a valuable component of the teaching portfolio you will no doubt develop as part of your teacher preparation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher’s Name</th>
<th>Teacher’s Role</th>
<th>Interactions with Students</th>
<th>Learning Environment</th>
<th>Curriculum</th>
<th>Instruction</th>
<th>Aligned with Which Philosophy?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Concluding Thoughts**

Chances are that a philosophy of education is not something you’ve ever seriously considered. Now you have some background about major philosophies of education. You have been prompted to think about, and tentatively declare, which philosophy represents your primary beliefs about teaching and learning. You also know that an eclectic approach is not only natural but will actually benefit the diverse groups of students you will encounter.

Thoughtful teachers are not necessarily swayed by gimmicks and fads. They have basic beliefs about teaching and learning that guide their practice, and they can articulate the bases for their decisions. These are teachers who will positively affect student learning throughout their careers. This applies equally to early childhood, elementary, middle, and high school teachers. A carefully considered philosophy of education provides a solid foundation for professionals in the classroom.

After reading the Chapter in Review, read more about Brenda and respond to items in this chapter’s Developing Professional Competence.

**Chapter in Review**

Why is a philosophy of education important?

- We all have philosophies that guide our decisions, attitudes, and actions.
- A teacher’s philosophy of education affects every decision about teaching.
How do two prominent teacher-centered philosophies of education affect teaching and learning?

- Essentialism is a philosophy of education based on the belief that there is a core curriculum that is responsive to the times and that every American should know.
- Perennialism is a philosophy of education based on the belief that there is a changeless core curriculum that every American should know.

How do three prominent student-centered philosophies of education affect teaching and learning?

- Progressivism is a philosophy of education that focuses on a curriculum of interest to students and experiential learning.
- Social reconstructionism is a philosophy of education that endorses a curriculum that benefits society by promoting equity.
- Existentialism is a philosophy of education that focuses on the individual’s search for meaning.

How do I begin to develop my personal philosophy of education?

- Incorporating components of more than one philosophy of education into your personal philosophy is an eclectic approach.
- Growing an effective philosophy tree requires a strong root system with philosophical grounding to enhance both teaching and learning.

Developing Professional Competence

Thoughtfully reading this scenario and responding to the items that follow will help you prepare for licensure exams.

Brenda Beyer ascribes to a very student-centered philosophy of education, as we have seen in her interview and what we have read in Teaching in Focus. She knows the content she teaches and works very hard to be the best teacher she can be. The one thing that continually bothers Brenda is the fact that we are in an era of standards, where curriculum is prescribed and teaching is on a fast-paced schedule. Add to this the week of standardized tests she must monitor every spring, and we find Brenda seeking balance for her students and innovative ways to accomplish what is expected of her while paying attention to individual student needs.

One of Brenda’s favorite authors is Vito Perrone (1991). Here is an excerpt that is particularly poignant for her:

To engage students constructively, the school day needs more continuities, not more fragmentation. Work that can truly be valued takes time, sometimes hours and days. It is hardly reasonable to expect a child to complete a fine piece of artwork in ten- or twenty-minute intervals, twice a week, or produce a well-organized, thoughtful description, a poetic or narrative story within ten minutes. Teachers know this but claim that in this current basic skills, testing, “academic” environment, they don’t have the time any more for work of that quality. (p. 33)

Now it’s time for you to respond to two short essay items. In your responses, be sure to address all the dilemmas and questions posed in each item. These items are followed by two multiple-choice questions.

1. Perrone writes about “continuities.” What kinds of activities do you think Brenda would put in this category? Explain two continuities you would expect to see in her classroom.

2. How might Brenda incorporate balance into the day as she teaches the standards while valuing quality and creativity?

Application Exercise 8.5: Developing Professional Competence

3. What do you think Brenda may consider sources of fragmentation of her teaching day?
   a. District administrative guidelines that outline the time to be spent each day on language arts, reading, math, science, and social studies.
   b. Her students go to dance/movement class with Chris Roberts in the morning and to music/theater class with Tim Mendenhall in the afternoon.
   c. She has an early lunch time with her class.
   d. Rees incorporates two recess times a day.

4. Brenda attributes her agreement with Perrone’s point about what is valuable in schoolwork to her Native American heritage. What might be the best of these four options for Brenda to let students know about her opinion?
   a. She could teach the students some of the soothing chants and tunes Native American mothers sing to their children.
   b. She could share artifacts and talk with students about how they are preserved.
   c. She could tell them stories about patience and perseverance from Native American folklore.
   d. She could explain to students the meaningfulness of the sundial and how Native Americans have historically honored the sun.

Application Exercise 8.6: Developing Professional Competence

Flash Cards 8.1

Shared Writing 8.1: Basic Philosophical Questions