

## **National Outlook: An Epistemological Approach to Educational Philosophy**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Since the beginning of public education educational practices have been vitally important. Leaders need to become aware of the necessity for the most effective possible educational system if they are to meet the demands of life in a highly precarious and rapidly changing world. According to Phenix (1986) humankind must see how important knowledge is in meeting these demands. Philosophers in education have enlightened the field with their expertise and knowledge in the area of their chosen discipline. Phenix(1986) states, that in the past decade educators have shown renewed appreciation for the place of the organized disciplines of knowledge in education. Philosophical reasoning in education is not new. Educational Philosophy is an ongoing and continuous process. Educators possess different philosophical views that cartels to their specific persona. Through pedagogical styles, each person is adaptive in how they learn, lead, guide, and empower relative to guiding and working with others.

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There are many educational philosophies that determine which teaching style, instruction, and school curriculum one will use. These include Idealism, Realism, Pragmatism, Existentialism, Progressivism, Analytic Philosophy, Reconstructionism, Social Reconstructionism, Scholasticism, Instrumentalism, Essentialism, Perennialism, Behaviorism, Constructivism, Communism, Chinese Thought, Middle Eastern Thought, Far Eastern Thought, Western Philosophy, Janism, and Confucianism. Effective teaching may be classified as transmission, apprenticeship, developmental, nurturing, and social reform (Pratt, & Collins, 2001).

The purpose of this essay is to briefly discuss how Idealism, Realism, Pragmatism, Existentialism, Progressivism, Analytic Philosophy, Reconstructionism, Social Reconstructionism, Scholasticism, Instrumentalism, Essentialism, Perennialism, Behaviorism, Constructivism, Communism, Chinese Thought, Middle Eastern Thought, Far Eastern Thought, Western Philosophy, Janism, Confucianism relate to education philosophically. A good education is vital to success in the twenty first century. Providing a quality education for today's youth is crucial. As educators we must assume the task of making sure that every child receives a good foundation. This means looking beyond perceived barriers of ethnicity, creed, color, and socio-economic status to guarantee that every person receives a quality education.

The components of metaphysics are derived from Aristotle. In education the reality of ontology is the study of existence. Theology often makes reference to the study of God. Universal science is the study of the first principles. When interfaced with the realm of education each part corresponds to the other. One needs the other in order to create a successful conducive environment. When one of the components of metaphysics coexists it creates a doorway to a realm of meaning that allows the other components to engage in the existence.

Epistemology deals with the nature, origin and scope of knowledge. Much of epistemology focuses on analyzing the nature and variety of knowledge and how it relates to similar notions such as truth and belief. Often times in education there are concerns for the justification of knowledge claims, that are the grounds on which one can claim to know a particular fact.

Axiology is the study of value or quality. In the realm of education, parents entrust students in the care of educators - to provide their children with a quality education that can be valued throughout their lifetime. Through education students can gain a sense of ethics and how to decipher through what is ethical and what is not.

We must ensure that every student achieves the goal of receiving a quality education. We must work to overlook negative stereotypes, handicaps and disabilities and set high standards and expectations for all children. To do so, it is important that we examine the school systems to make sure that students are learning in an inclusive environment. This means students at an early age, from all backgrounds should be exposed to modern technology, rigorous curriculum standards and highly trained educators that promote a student-centered approach to teaching.

We model what is morally and ethically good to personify moral conduct. Modeling the behavior we want students to assume is the most corrective form of being moral. According to Kritsonis (2002), ethical inquiries need to be examined to determine

the intention of education; principals should behave ethically toward teachers and students; teachers and students should behave ethically toward one another and to the principal; the educational environment should be designed ethically to promote morally good and right behaviors, and so forth.

Aesthetics in the realm of education deals with beauty. At times abstract thinking or non-conventional thinking is what it takes in order to be successful. Teachers instruct students to become independent thinkers and learners. Inferring information and making inferences is part of the wonderful world of aesthetics. The way a student interprets or comprehends a concept may be entirely different of what the teacher is trying to convey. We must provide a grounded foundation.

Teachers teach their students to be effective and logical thinkers. Effective thinkers create effective workers and effective workers create effective outcomes. Teachers teaching students effectively and efficiently will cause a domino affect of how those students effectively use their prior knowledge and new knowledge to achieve a positive outcome.

Epistemology concerns itself with what constitutes knowledge and how we arrive at it (Kritsonis, 2002). The focus of modern education on all educational levels and education for students with diverse abilities is increasingly dependent upon excellence and adequacy of knowledge. It is recognized that knowledge does not belong to one specialist, but through the agency of general education an understanding of higher order thinking can and should be attained by everyone (Phenix, 1986).

Realism is the question of existence. In realism what exists... in one person's sensory perception may not exist in another. What is real can be equated to what is valid. What is valid can be equated to what is reliable. In the era of education valid and reliable information are at forefront. Present-day realism is complex, highly refined position that is usually grounded in some theoretical description of a method of physical and natural sciences. Realists prefer to adhere closely to what might be called a hard-line stance with scientific theory (Kritsonis, 2002).

The educational philosophy of Idealism focuses on three concerns: (a) who should be responsible for education, (b) who should be taught, and (c) what should be the curriculum (Kritsonis, 2002). The aim of education to the idealist is to assist in the development of the mind and self of the pupil, and to assist in attaining the good life of the Spirit.

Pragmatism comes from the Greek word for action, also the root for the words practical and practice (Kritsonis, 2002). What is practical in education can in turn be put into practice, such as pedagogical techniques and styles.

Existentialism is largely a revolt against other traditional philosophies (Kritsonis, 2002). Where other philosophies attempt to grasp the ultimate nature of the world in abstract systems of thought, existentialists consider what it is like to be an individual human being living in the world (Kritsonis, 2002). Teachers can continuously strive to improve teaching performance and use assessment results not only to evaluate students, but also to find out whether teacher methods are working.

The aim of Progressivism was to educate the individual according to his or her personal interests or needs (Kritsonis, 2002). Progressivism emphasizes curriculum, activities and projects. The instruction features problem solving, group activities and

experiences as the progressive teacher acts as a facilitator of the learning process (Kritsonis, 2002).

For the most part, Analytic Philosophy seeks to clarify the languages, concepts, and methods we use in the more precise activities of life (Kritsonis, 2002). Teachers should be able to define the basic concepts of culture, subculture, society, socialization, acculturation, and enculturation and 1) explain how the family, the peer group, and the mass media socialize with children and youth; 2) describe the intellectual, economic, and social purposes of schooling; 3) compare the social selection and social mobility purposes of education; 4) identify the major issues related to the inequality in education 5) describe the social class system present; 6) compare the educational achievement and attainment of social class groups, ethnic and racial groups, males and females; and 7) evaluate the causes of differences in educational achievement and attainment among social class groups, ethnic and racial groups, and between males and females. In other words, we need to show how each of these aspects relate to educational philosophy.

Reconstructionism is a philosophy that advocates an attitude toward change and encourages individuals to try to make life better (Kritsonis, 2002). Reconstructionists see the primary struggle in society today between those who wish to preserve society as it is and those who believe that great changes are needed to make society more responsive to the needs of individuals (Kritsonis, 2002). In regarding education, Reconstructionists consider democratic control over the decisions that regulates human lives and a peaceful community as vital components to success (Kritsonis, 2002). Reconstructionists will inadvertently provide an optimum learning atmosphere with learning goals that are both challenging and attainable. They will help students gain readiness to learn, allow and encourage students to develop a sense of responsibility, self-reliance, and give them a variety of opportunities to complete guided and independent practice of new concepts.

Social Reconstructionism educators should pay attention to student interests, problems and accomplishment in social interaction both in and outside of the classroom. Communicating frequently with students, parents and or guardians about a student's academic and social progress in school will increase awareness. Social Reconstructions can develop skills for working with parents, making parents feel welcomed and invite them to become involve in their child's education along with establishing clear procedures for involvement and communicating these clearly to parents on a consistent basis.

Scholasticism may generally be characterized as a means for employing reason in the search for truth (Kritsonis, 2002). Teachers can expand expectations of students from non-English-speaking backgrounds and develop a commitment to provide effective instruction appropriate to the background of these students as early as possible in their school careers. Scholastic's will work to increase the participation of females and minorities in elementary and secondary curriculum and in courses related to occupations in which they are underrepresented (e.g., math, engineering, science), they will teach students about stereotypes and prejudice and how to recognize the bias that may exist in the materials they use in and outside of school.

Instrumentalist's position is that thoughts and actions are primary instruments used by human beings to solve practical problems (Kritsonis, 2002). Instrumentalists will compensate for or supplement biased materials in the classroom, serve on textbook adoption committees or find other ways to influence the selection on nonbiased

curriculum materials, make sure that all visuals in the classroom reflect human diversity, will not segregate students by sex at any time-lines, study groups, or activities. (It is assumed grouping by race is not allowed). Instrumentalists will use nonbiased language. They will attempt to use role models of both sexes and of different ethnicities when bringing resource people into the classroom and take advantage of opportunities to be trained in recognizing and dealing with biases.

Essentialists believed that in the pursuit of democracy, progressivism had permeated the school system, relegating the teacher to a position of minor importance thereby bringing about a decline in the quality of education (Kritsonis, 2002). As an educator it is important to, 1) provide a demographic overview of America's teaching force 2) evaluate ones motives for becoming a teacher, as well as those commonly cited by others 3) become familiar with teacher preparation programs 4) identify the most common strategies being used to recruit minorities into teaching. 5) discuss current issues related to teacher certification, including testing, alternative certification, emergency certification, recertification, and interstate certification 6) discuss the current status of the movement to institute national certification for teachers 7) compare projected data related to teacher supply with that's projected for demand, and explore the factors contributing to supply and demand 8) identify the major elements of teacher compensation, including incentive pay and supplemental pay and 9) discuss the public's views of the schools and student's ratings of teachers.

A perennialist believes that because mankind is uniquely endowed with rationale cognition, education must be aimed exclusively at the cultivation of intellectual virtues (Kritsonis, 2002). Perennialist will 1) evaluate the duties of elementary and secondary school teachers in terms of the recognized criteria for a profession, 2) identify the factors that should be considered when evaluating teachers 3) analyze the extent to which one feel competent on each of the principles relative to new teacher assessment 4) identify the programs and services provided by the major teaching organizations in ones state and local school districts and 5) describe the programs and services provided by the professional organization for ones teaching field.

Behaviorism is known through the works of B.F. Skinner. He was concerned with the outcome more so than the actual behavior. Constructivism is a present day philosophy, which is based on theory that states that children construct their own knowledge and values as a result of interactions with the physical and social world (Kritsonis, 2002). Constructivist will 1) define an educational theory and explain its relationship to philosophy as a discipline 2) express the difference between educational goals and instructional objectives 3) relate the ways in which district goals, objectives, and outcomes will affect how a teacher organizes instruction and works with students 4) discuss methods of organizing for instruction 5) differentiate between mastery learning and powerful learning 6) compare and contrast different teaching strategies 7) discuss the assumptions about student learning in the different models for school improvement 8) identify personal learning styles and 9) discuss the characteristics of effective schools.

Communism is not recognized as a contributing factor to western philosophic components. Communism was conceived from early philosophic elements and its presence has affected the extent of other philosophical movements. Chinese thought generally includes no God, no saviors with emphasis on dependence on oneself instead of outside sources for answers and wisdom (Kritsonis, 2002).

Middle Eastern Thought includes followers of Islam who believed in one God, Allah, with all earthy belongings going to Him. Islam maintains equality before God and a life hereafter. Followers also believed in limited polygamy (Kritsonis, 2002). Far Eastern Thought is noted for their stable traditions, they live in the same area for extended periods of time, they believe in a sense of duty, they believe in a rigid class structure, they have strong family ties, they have powerful ancestors worship, and they believe in punishment of the body (Kritsonis, 2002).

Western Philosophy is a line of related philosophical thinking, starting in Ancient Greece, and including the predominant philosophical thinking of Europe and its former colonies. Janism believers vowed not to injure any form of life (this included not stepping on anything or even scratching) (Kritsonis, 2002). Confucius believed that only after knowing the goal of perfection where one should dwell, one would have a definite purpose, which means only after having a definite purpose in life can one achieve calmness of mind, only after having achieved calmness of mind can one have peaceful repose, only after having peaceful repose can one begin to think, and only after one has learned to think can one achieve true knowledge (Kritsonis, 2002).

In conclusion, it is imperative that we as educators implement programs in order to reduce the drop out rates in our schools. We need to develop many extracurricular activities to get our young scholars more involved because the more the learner is involved with extracurricular activities in school, the better his performance will be academically. Many students are turn away from academics as a result of schools lacking extracurricular activities. By understanding our own educational philosophy and making it operational, we can reduce recidivism among our youth. There are many children being misled by factors that challenge us in our society. It is our duty as educators to step up and take control. Young people are our future. We need to educate, motivate, and lead them in the right direction. As educators, it is our moral and ethical responsibility to produce cultivated scholars.

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