

Philosophy of Western Education

Philosophical Foundations of Curriculum

Chapter from *Curriculum Essentials: A Journey* by Linda J. Button

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Land Acknowledgment

We are gathered here today on the traditional and unceded territory of Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc within Secwepemcúl'ecw, the traditional and unceded territory of the Secwépemc. We are grateful to live, learn, and share on this land and are committed as future teachers to being active participants in the journey towards truth and reconciliation. We plan to do this by continuing our learning and sharing of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit, culture, history, and ways of knowing through Indigenizing our teaching practises.



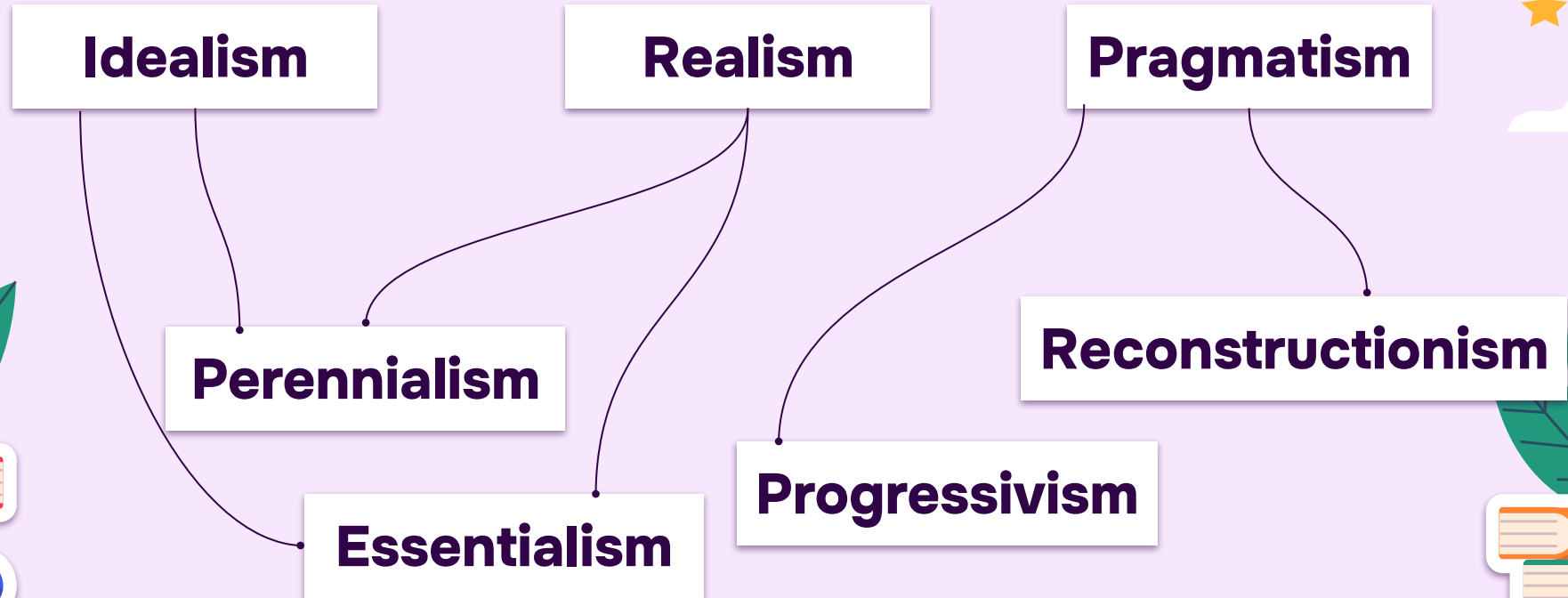


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Summary of Philosophical Foundations of Curriculum

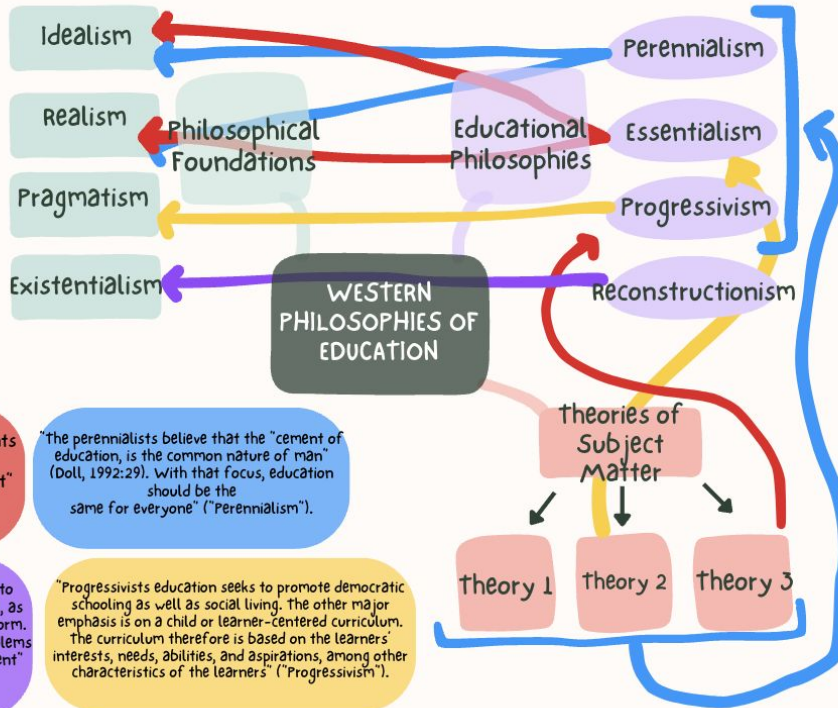


Visualize



Artist: Larissa
Beatty

Webbing Map



The three theories of Subject Matter are based on the Educational Philosophies of perennialism, essentialism, and progressivism ("Theories of Subject Matter").

"Subject matter should be taught for use." Supporters of this theory hold that the value of a subject depends upon the use that is made of it. This position derives from the philosophical belief that value is operational/instrumental" ("Theory 2").

Supporters of this theory believe that in this changing world of changing values, no subject matter is essential for its intrinsic value; and that it is very difficult to tell which subject matter is likely to be most functional" ("Theory 3").

"This philosophy aims to instill students with the "essentials" of academic knowledge and character development" ("Essentialism").

"The perennialists believe that the "cement of education, is the common nature of man" (Doll, 1992:29). With that focus, education should be the same for everyone" ("Perennialism").

"Reconstructionists' educational aims are to improve and reconstruct society as need be, as well as education for change and social reform. Thus, the study of contemporary social problems become the centerpiece of curriculum content" ("Reconstructionism").

"Progressivists education seeks to promote democratic schooling as well as social living. The other major emphasis is on a child or learner-centered curriculum. The curriculum therefore is based on the learners' interests, needs, abilities, and aspirations, among other characteristics of the learners" ("Progressivism").

Important Passages



Passage 1: “Since there is a strong political element involved in curriculum, it is important for us as educators to recognize what philosophy underlies the curriculum and to decide how curriculum in educating students who will become members and leaders in society.”

Passage 2: “... curriculum can be considered to be a reflection or a piece of the culture. These traditions include those in the wider society as well as traditions upheld in the school system.”



New Words

Word 1: **Advocate**.

Definition: To “defend or maintain a cause or proposal” (Merriam-Webster, 2024).

Why: Important to our teaching role; advocate for students; support the curriculum and also potentially to make change.

Example: “I advocate for climate protection.”

New Words



Word 2: Tradition.

Definition: “An inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior and cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs, and institutions”

(Merriam-Webster, 2024).

Why: social tradition is both passed down by and influenced through the curriculum.

Example: “The holiday tradition in my family has been maintained for many years.”



New Words



Word 3: Constructivism.

Definition: A philosophical theory that says learners construct knowledge rather than just passively take in information (University at Buffalo, n.d.).



Why: Connected to progressivism; students learn through experience; learning is inherently a social concept.

Example: “Constructivism may be seen in different teaching methods in the classroom.”







Our Unanswered Questions



1. How can these philosophies be applied to non-traditional or alternative learning environments?



2. Can we see these philosophies more in certain regions of Canada than others? (For example, in Quebec vs. in British Columbia)

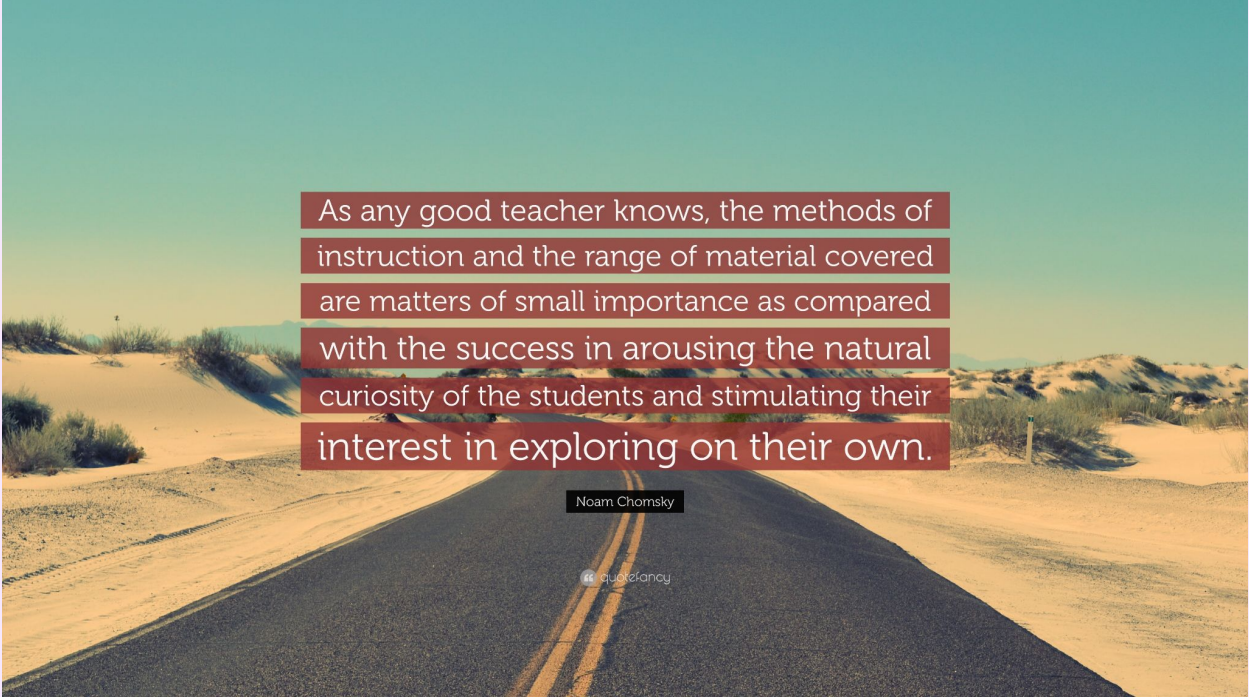
Activity Time!

In groups of 3 or 4, read the quotes and decide if it best represents the philosophy of Perennialism, Essentialism, Progressivism, or Reconstructionism then discuss the questions under the picture. A class discussion for each question will follow!

Remember you can refer to the hand out with key points on each philosophy!



Photo taken from
<https://images.app.goo.gl/MYLRWUDMvs2t4JvtV7>



As any good teacher knows, the methods of instruction and the range of material covered are matters of small importance as compared with the success in arousing the natural curiosity of the students and stimulating their interest in exploring on their own.

Noam Chomsky

cc quote fancy

1. Did you have the ability to explore your own interests in elementary/high school? How did that change your learning experience?
2. In what ways could you adapt your classroom environment to allow students optimal self direction?

“

Mastery is not a function
of genius or talent, it is a
function of time and
intense focus applied to a
particular field of
knowledge.

ROBERT GREENE

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★ Photo taken from
<https://cdn.graciousquotes.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Mastery-is-not-a-function-of-genius-or-talent-it-is-a-function-of-time-and-intense-focus-applied-to-a-particular-field-of-knowledge..jpg>

1. Should the goal of education be that students reach a level of mastery in English, science, and mathematics concepts? Why or why not?
2. To what degree do you think teachers should cater to the personal problems and social needs of students?

Photo taken from
<https://images.app.goo.gl/6zVkkcpPPxtgZFYu5>



The failure to read good books both enfeebles the vision and strengthens our most fatal tendency – the belief that the here and now is all there is.

Allan Bloom

quote fancy

1. What are the benefits and complications with expecting every student to study the same books?
2. Try to make an argument on why subject should be studied separately as opposed to combined (ex. History as history and geography as geography instead of social studies)



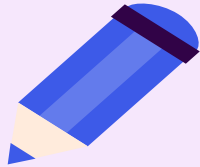
“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

– Nelson Mandela

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<https://images.app.goo.gl/KVSFuNZkzUzxrE6k6>

1. When you become a teacher, what are the national or global social problems you are inspired to address in your classroom the most and why?
2. Do you believe that learning about the problems humankind are facing in schools helps to solve them? Why or why not? (give examples)

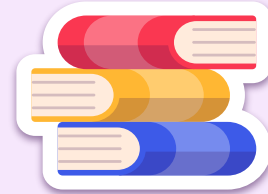
Three Main Takeaways!



Educational philosophies of perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, and reconstructionism stem from the base philosophies of idealism, realism, and pragmatism.



These philosophies differ on what subject matters and ways of teaching should be prioritized.



Philosophy directly shapes the development of the curriculum.

Resources

- Button, L. (2021). *Philosophical Foundations of Curriculum*. Curriculum Essentials A Journey.
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[https://www.buffalo.edu/catt/develop/theory/constructivism.html#:~:text=Constructivist%20Classroom%20Activities-.What%20is%20constructivism%3F.%2Dexisting%20knowledge%20\(schemas\).](https://www.buffalo.edu/catt/develop/theory/constructivism.html#:~:text=Constructivist%20Classroom%20Activities-.What%20is%20constructivism%3F.%2Dexisting%20knowledge%20(schemas).)
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Thank You for Listening and Participating!

Are there any questions?

