

CONTEMPORARY THEORIES OF EDUCATION AND ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to examine some of the contemporary theories of education and analytic philosophy of education in order to provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the evolutionary nature of education, disparities in philosophy of education, and how education is influenced by philosophical perspective. The article is a phenomenological one and as such presents the issues from the perspective of past literature.

According to Knight (2006), the progressive model of education puts the child at the focal point of school and seeks to develop a curriculum and teaching method that grow out of students' needs, interest, and initiatives. That is, "the process of education finds its genesis and purpose in the child". Therefore, on this premise, the high-points of progressivism highlights pupils as active rather than passive participants, teacher's role as an advisor, a guide, a fellow traveler, rather than an authoritarian and classroom director, and the school as a microcosm of the larger society. This suggests that learning should be integrated. In addition, progressivism purports that classroom activity should focus on solving problems, rather than on artificial methods of teaching subjects and the social atmosphere of the school must be cooperative and democratic.

The educational value of progressivism also holds that wherever possible, freedom of choice must be given to students. The teacher, instead of being an authoritative classroom director, is a

person seeking progress, committed to society and democratic ideals, and sensitive to the growth of students. Thus; the teacher is a fellow learner, traveler, and guide who facilitates the group learning process. For progressivism, students are thinking and are socially responsible individuals who are called to work democratically and cooperatively with others. Persons are viewed as organisms in connection with others and their social environment. Students are to be actively engaged in their own learning and that of others.

Knight (2006) suggested a democratic classroom, which is sensitive to and is a representative of the wider society as a preferred setting for progressivism. In a real sense, this setting is represented by the world, because the learning experience is a part of life, not a preparation for life.

Progressivism is compatible with a biblical philosophy of education in that it can be affirmed for its concern for persons, who are viewed as active participants in the learning process.

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In addition, this philosophy is compatible with a biblical philosophy of education in that it encourages sensitivity to student's experiences, needs, and interests, along with a concern for cooperative learning. Also, it deals with issues of everyday life and breaks the barriers between academic formality and daily experience.

On the other hand, progressivism has an optimistic perspective of persons, which does not recognize the effects of sin. This is contrary to a biblical philosophy of education because persons cannot solve their own problems without God. Progressivism also allows for relative truth and values, as opposed to God-ordained absolutes, and it locks faith in the supernatural dimensions of life.

For perennialism, the literature shows six basic principles that it has given to education as a basis on which it operates. Brennen (2002) states that in perennialism man is seen as a rational animal so as individuals develop their minds, they can use reason to control appetites, passions, and actions. Another principle is that knowledge is universally consistent, therefore there are certain basic subject matters that should be taught to all people. Also, the subject matter, not the child, should stand at the center of the educational endeavor and the great works of the past are a repository of knowledge and wisdom which have stood the test of time and are relevant in our day. Two other principles hold that human nature is consistent, so education should be the same for everyone and the educational experience is a preparation for life, rather than a real-life situation (Brennen, 2002).

Perennialism as a modern theory of education emphasizes the development of reasoning powers along with academic excellence. It affirms intellectual, spiritual, and ethical purposes in education in guiding the students to the truth. Goals include the teaching of a prescribed body of classical subject matter. The curriculum is subject centered, with stress on mental discipline

and literary analysis. Teachers are viewed as academic scholars; philosophers who have a grasp of vast areas of knowledge and wisdom. Corresponding to the teacher's role, students are viewed as rational beings who are to be guided by the first principles revealed in the classics and liberal arts.

In perennialism, the primary settings for learning include the classroom or lecture hall, the study, and the library where classical heritage can be shared. Perennialism can be affirmed for its sensitivity to the past, for its concern for rationality, and for its emphasis on excellence. This philosophy is compatible with the biblical philosophy of education for it maintains that absolute truth exists and that human nature is consistent. It also recognizes the intellectual, spiritual, and ethical purposes of education. Perennialism is also known for its preoccupation with the past and its tendency toward rationalism.

The essentialism theory purports that educators stress academic excellence, the development of the intellect, and the teaching of a certain body of subject matter. The content of essentialist education includes the fundamental academic subjects and the mastery of basic and advanced knowledge. Its curriculum stresses mental discipline. Unlike perennialism, essentialism considers modern scientific and experimental inquiry in addition to classical studies. Essentialism stresses a movement in education back to basics along with the mastery of those basics broadly defined.

For essentialism, the model teacher is the person of literature and sciences who is in touch with the modern world and has become an expert in his subject area. Students are viewed as rational beings who gain command of essential facts and skills that support their intellectual study and help them adjust to their physical and social environment. Like perennialism, essentialism centers upon the primary settings of the

classroom and library, but also emphasizes the research laboratory. Essentialism can be affirmed for its emphasis on the mastery of basic learning skills and its recognition of the need for hard work and discipline in learning. This philosophy also recognizes the intellectual, spiritual, and ethical purposes of education. But different from perennialism, it also emphasizes adjustment to the physical and social environment. Criticisms can be raised about essentialism's teacher-directness and its possible tendency toward rationalism. It can lead to problems if the needs of individual students are ignored.

In summary, essentialism has contributed three major principles to education. These include the fact that the school's task is to teach basic knowledge. Basic subject matters should be mastered at the elementary and secondary school levels to eliminate illiteracy at the college level. In addition, learning is hard work and requires discipline. Memorization, drill, and problem solving methods foster learning. Finally, the teacher is the focus of the classroom activity. She decides what students ought to learn and is responsible for presenting the subject matter in a logical sequence and has the right to discipline students to create a conducive learning environment.

According to Knight (2006), the high points of reconstructionism can be seen in its critical examination of current social, political, and economic orders and for its concern for social needs. Reconstruction seriously grapples with human responsibility in the world. In relation to this, Knight (2006) stated a principle of reconstructionism that "world society is in a crisis, and civilization as we know it will come to an end unless current practices are reversed". Also, reconstructionists recognize problems in current society and see possibilities for reform, and educators in this perspective are viewed as primary instruments for social change. Thus, Knight suggests with reference to principles of reconstructionism that the only effective solution

to world problems is the creation of a planetary social order, and formal education can become a major agent in the reconstruction of the social order.

Knight (2006) suggests that teaching methods must be based upon democratic principles that rely upon the native intelligence of the majority to recognize and act upon the most valid solution to the world's problems. A reconstructionist educational philosophy holds the goal of building an ideal and fair social order. Efforts are directed toward the establishment of a practical utopia where persons are liberated to be and become all they were intended to be. The content of reconstructionist education centers upon social problems and the development of corrective programs. Critical analysis is made of social flaws. Teachers are viewed as subversive educators, social critics, and community organizers who seek to raise the consciousness of others in the direction of needed change. Students are viewed as potential change agents committed to and involved in social renewal. The settings for teaching are varied and include the classroom, the small cell or group meeting, the community center, the streets, and the fields.

Reconstructionism is compatible with a biblical philosophy of education in that it recognizes social sins. However, it may ignore the realities of personal sin in the liberators and the oppressed, as well as in the oppressors. Its preoccupation with the social order may result in ignoring personal responsibilities, and their emphasis upon change may ignore the need for continuity in personal and corporate life.

In conclusion, the application of reconstructionism in education is twofold. Firstly, it identifies the major problem areas of controversy, conflict and inconsistency in subject areas such as economics, sociology, political science, psychology, and anthropology. Secondly, the use of methodologies, such as role plays, simulations and jurisprudential models to create

awareness of problems and openness to solutions are looked into.

According to Knight (2006), analytic philosophy is an umbrella term that encompasses a number of somewhat diverse viewpoints that are referred to under labels such as logical positivism, logical empiricism, linguistic analysis, logical atomism, and oxford analysis. In other words, analytic philosophy is characterized by an emphasis on clarity and argument. To Knight (2006), in its pure form, analytic philosophy might best be seen as a revolt against the traditional aims and methods of philosophy. Analytic philosophy is the more specific set of developments of early 20th-century philosophy that were the historical antecedents of the broader sense.

Knight (2006) pointed out the difference between philosophic analysis, traditional philosophies and modern philosophies. Unlike traditional and modern philosophies, philosophic analysis did not attempt to provide a systemic philosophy. Also, it was not interested in making metaphysical, epistemological, or axiological statements about ultimate reality, truth, and value but problems having to do with confusion of language and meaning (Knight, 2006).

Certainly, analytical philosophy has other ends. However, although Dewey did not have analytical philosophy in mind, when he said that education is the process of forming fundamental dispositions toward nature and our fellow human beings, philosophy may even be defined as the most general theory of education.

There is nevertheless a sense in which analytical philosophy can also be said to be the most general theory of education. Although it does not seek to tell us what dispositions we should form, it does analyze and criticize the concepts, arguments, and methods employed in any study of or reflection upon education. Also, it does not follow that this is all analytical philosophy is concerned with doing. Even if the other things it

does – for example, the philosophy of mind or of science – are useful to educators and normative theorists of education, as, it is hoped, is the case, they are not all developed with this use in mind.

It has long been established that education is basic to the existence of any community or society.

Thus; it is only natural that certain foundational principles of education are shared properties among diverse people groups over time. In John 13:34-35; Ephesians 4:14; 1 Timothy 1:10, and Titus 2:1 show the New Testament record that links the success of the church of Jesus Christ, as a worshipping community of "salt and light" reaching out to a dark world, to the teaching of sound doctrine. Education in the New Testament times would show that much of the New Testament understanding of education is simply assumed from the practice of the Old Testament and Judaism. For example, the family remains the primary context for education, with prominence also given to the church as the extended family or community of faith. Likewise, the goal of educating the whole person, mind and character, carries over from Hebrew practice in the Old Testament. Even the methodology of both instilling information and drawing out or developing the innate talents and abilities of the student finds its antecedent in the Old Testament.

The New Testament education focuses its attention on educating the whole person (intellect, emotions, and will), educating through personal relationship (i.e., the mentoring relationship of teacher and disciple), the process of both instilling knowledge and encouraging learning through discovery, and educating through experiential learning. Especially important theologically are the truths of educating the whole person. This can be seen in James 1:25; John 2:2-6 and John 16:5-15; 1 John 2:26-27, where intellectual knowledge is applied to personal behavior, and where the work of

God's Spirit is seen in illuminating the learner as he or she is instructed in the faith respectively.

According to the Gospel records (John 3:2), the teacher comes from God. This was seen as much of Jesus' public ministry was spent teaching his disciples, as well as the crowds. He (Jesus) was recognized and acknowledged as a teacher by his disciples, the general public, and contemporary Jewish religious leaders, including Nicodemus who identified Jesus as "a teacher who has come from God". Also, Mark 14:14 and John 13:13 tell us that Jesus referred to himself as a teacher on numerous occasions.

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