

## 4 Major Educational Philosophies

There are many different types of philosophies in education. Here we will focus only on the four main types of philosophies that may help you to form your teaching philosophy and write your teaching statement - Perennialism, Essentialism, Romanticism and Progressivism. A mix of more than two philosophies is called Eclecticism.

### Perennialism

Perennialism values knowledge that transcends time. This is a **subject-centered** philosophy. The goal of a perennialist educator is to teach students to think rationally and develop minds that can think critically. A perennialist classroom aims to be a closely organized and well-disciplined environment, which develops in students a lifelong quest for the truth. Perennialists believe that education should epitomize a prepared effort to make these ideas available to students and to guide their thought processes toward the understanding and appreciation of the great works; works of literature written by history's finest thinkers that transcend time and never become outdated. Perennialists are primarily concerned with the **importance of mastery of the content and development of reasoning skills**. The adage "the more things change, the more they stay the same" summarizes the perennialists' perspective on education. In this philosophy skills are developed in a sequential manner. Here, the teachers are the main actors on the stage.

### Essentialism

Essentialism is also a **subject-centered** philosophy. Essentialism is the educational philosophy of teaching basic skills. This philosophy advocates training the mind. Essentialist educators **focus on transmitting a series of progressively difficult topics and promotion of students to the next level**. Subjects are focused on the historical context of the material world and culture and move sequentially to give a solid understanding of the present day. Essentialism is a common model in U.S. public schools today. A typical day at an essentialist school might have seven periods, with students attending a different class each period. The teachers impart knowledge mainly through conducting lectures, during which students are expected to take notes. The students are provided with practice worksheets or hands-on projects, followed by an assessment of the learning material covered during this process. The students continue with the same daily schedule for a semester or a year. When their assessments show sufficient competence, they are promoted to the next level to learn the next level of more difficult material. William C. Bagley was one of the most influential advocates of essentialism.

### Romanticism

Romantics believed in the natural goodness of humans which is hindered by the urban life of civilization. Romanticism was a philosophical movement during the Age of Enlightenment (roughly 18<sup>th</sup> century) which emphasizes emotional self-awareness as a necessary pre-condition to improving society and bettering the human condition. Romantics believed that knowledge is gained through intuition rather than deduction. This is a **student-centered** philosophy that focuses on **differentiation - meeting the students learning readiness needs**. At a school founded on the philosophy of romanticism there is no set curricula, no formal classes and tests.

Students decide what they want to learn and, in some cases, the students are expected to take the full responsibility of their learning. Sometimes meetings are set-up with professionals of a field to give them insight to that topic. The five essential characteristics of romanticism are **imagination, intuition, individuality, idealism, and inspiration**. Some stalwarts of romanticism are Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Maria Montessori.

## **Progressivism**

Progressivists believe that **individuality, progress, and change are fundamental to one's education**. Believing that people learn best from what they consider most relevant to their lives, progressivists center their curricula on the needs, experiences, interests, and abilities of students. Progressivists like romantics, believe that education should focus on the whole student, rather than on the content or the teacher. They emphasize on group activity and group problem solving so that the students learn through **cooperative learning strategies**. It is anti-authoritarian, experimental and visionary and aims to develop problem- solving ability.

This educational philosophy stresses that students should test ideas by **active experimentation**. **Learning is rooted in the questions of learners that arise through experiencing the world**. Progressivism was developed by John Dewey's pedagogic theory, being based on Pragmatism. Experience represented the core concept of his philosophy. Some American schools also follow this philosophy.

## **Reference**

Schools of Educational Philosophy, Chapter 9: What are the philosophical foundations of American Education.