

Educational Philosophies

Robert Pazmino identifies 7 educational philosophies that can serve as foundations for religious education. Quotations below are from Pazmino's book *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, except where noted otherwise.

1. Perennialism “emphasizes the cultivation of rational powers along with academic excellence.” A goal is “guiding the individual to the eternal truths.” Content typically takes a “great books” approach, where great books lead the learner to the one and ultimate truth. Allan Bloom is well-known for supporting a perennialist approach to education. The Weston curriculum series takes a perennialist approach in part, by emphasizing the Bible as a path towards the only great spiritual truths.

2. Essentialism stresses “the transmission and assimilation of a prescribed body of subject matter,” along with the “discernment of truths... through the use of careful observation and reason.” Like perennialism, essentialism stresses a “back-to-basics” approach. Unlike perennialism, essentialism includes insights of the sciences in addition to classical studies. The *New Beacon Series* edited by Sophia Fahs can be seen as an essentialist curriculum, in part.

3. Behaviorism “incorporates a behavioral modification sequence for desired student responses and skills, and uses appropriate reinforcement.” Clear objectives are defined in advance. B. F. Skinner is the best-known proponent.

4. Progressivism emphasizes “social problem solving, democratic relationships, and growth.” Content includes “comprehensive, unified exposure to problem-focused studies.” Robert L'H Miller points out that progressivism emphasizes a curriculum content focused on experience, especially the direct experiences of the learners. John Dewey and the early Sophia Fahs are progressive educators.

5. Reconstructionism works towards “building an ideal and just social order.” Content focuses on “social problems and the development of corrective programs scientifically determined for collective action.” Paolo Friere is a reconstructionist.

6. Romantic naturalism “values individual freedom to develop one's potential with the goal of self-actualization.” Content grows out of “a person's felt and real needs which are identified with the help of others.” John Holt and Carl Rogers are well-known romantic naturalists. Parts of the movement to do away with Sunday school arise from this philosophy, and some Unitarian Universalist homeschoolers and “unschoolers” don't send their children to school out of a romantic naturalist philosophy.

7. Existentialism emphasizes “the inner search for meaning for one's own existence in the realization of authentic personhood.” Content focuses on “themes of the human condition with learning activities free of rational constraints.” Barbara and Hugo Holleroth were existentialist educators, and *The Haunting House* and *About Your Sexuality* were existentialist curricula. For the Holleroths, persons are constantly impacted by “powers”(e.g., authority, sexuality, social norms, etc.) to which persons must respond—and in responding, persons defined themselves.

Annotated Bibliography

Pazmino, Robert. *Foundational Issues in Christian Education: An Introduction in Evangelical Perspective*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1997.

Perennialism:

Allan Bloom. *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.

Behaviorism:

B. F. Skinner. *The Technology of Teaching*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968.

Progressivism:

Dewey, John. *Experience and Education*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1938/1997. —A brief but comprehensive overview of the progressivist philosophy.

Helen Firman Sweet and Sophia Fahs. *Exploring Religion with Eight Year Olds*. New York: Henry Holt, 1930. —A closely observed description of one Sunday school class taught under a primarily progressive educational philosophy.

Reconstructionism:

Paolo Friere. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1981. —The classic statement of reconstructionist educational philosophy.

bell hooks. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. London: Routledge, 1994. —A collection of essays. Chapter 4 is a concise introduction to Paolo Friere. Chapter 8 describes how hooks taught one class.

Romantic naturalism:

John Holt. *Instead of Education: Ways To Help People Do Things Better*. Sentient Publications: 1976/2004. —One of Holt's books on "unschooling."

Carl Rogers. "Student-Centered Teaching," chapter 9 in: *Client-centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications and Theory*. London: Constable, 1951/1995. —An enlightening description of a class run under a romantic naturalist educational philosophy.

Existentialism:

Barbara Holleroth. Introduction to *The Haunting House*. Boston: UUA, 1974. —A concise statement of an existentialist educational philosophy as applied to UU RE.

Maxine Greene. "Diversity and Inclusion: Toward a Curriculum for Human Beings" in: *Teachers College Record*, v. 95 no. 2 Winter 1998. —A brief overview of an existentialist approach to curriculum, one which is rooted in Dewey's progressive philosophy.
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