

Using a Philosophic Inventory

The following inventory is to help identify your educational philosophy. Respond to the statements on the scale from 5 “Strongly Agree” to 1 “Strongly Disagree” by circling the number that most closely fits your perspective.

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

5

4

3

2

1

1. The curriculum should emphasize essential knowledge, *not* students' personal interests.

5

4

3

2

1

2. All learning results from rewards controlled by the external environment.

5

4

3

2

1

3. Teachers should emphasize interdisciplinary subject matter that encourages project-oriented, democratic classrooms.

5

4

3

2

1

4. Education should emphasize the search for personal meaning, *not* a fixed body of knowledge.

5

4

3

2

1

5. The ultimate aim of education is constant, absolute, and universal: to develop the rational person and cultivate the intellect.

5

4

3

2

1

6. Schools should actively involve students in social change to reform society.

5

4

3

2

1

7. Schools should teach basic skills, *not* humanistic ideals.

5

4

3

2

1

8. Eventually, human behavior will be explained by scientific laws, proving there is no free will.

5

4

3

2

1

9. Teachers should be facilitators and resources who guide student inquiry, *not* managers of behavior.

Strongly agree		Strongly disagree			
5	4	3	2	1	
5	4	3	2	1	10. The best teachers encourage personal responses and develop self-awareness in their students.
5	4	3	2	1	11. The curriculum should be the same for everyone, the collective wisdom of Western culture delivered through lecture and discussion.
5	4	3	2	1	12. Schools should lead society toward radical social change, <i>not</i> transmit traditional values.
5	4	3	2	1	13. The purpose of schools is to ensure practical preparation for life and work, <i>not</i> to encourage personal development.
5	4	3	2	1	14. Good teaching establishes an environment to control student behavior and to measure learning of prescribed objectives.
5	4	3	2	1	15. Curriculum should emerge from students' needs and interests; therefore, it <i>should not</i> be prescribed in advance.
5	4	3	2	1	16. Helping students develop personal values is more important than transmitting traditional values.
5	4	3	2	1	17. The best education consists primarily of exposure to great works in the humanities.
5	4	3	2	1	18. It is more important for teachers to involve students in activities to criticize and transform society than to teach the Great Books.
5	4	3	2	1	19. Schools should emphasize discipline, hard work, and respect for authority, <i>not</i> encourage free choice.
5	4	3	2	1	20. Human learning can be controlled: Anyone can be taught to be a scientist or a thief; therefore, personal choice is a myth.
5	4	3	2	1	21. Education should enhance personal growth through problem solving in the present, <i>not</i> emphasize preparation for a distant future.
5	4	3	2	1	22. Because we are born with an unformed personality, personal growth should be the focus of education.
5	4	3	2	1	23. Human nature is constant—its most distinctive quality is the ability to reason; therefore, the intellect should be the focus of education.
5	4	3	2	1	24. Schools perpetuate racism and sexism camouflaged as traditional values.
5	4	3	2	1	25. Teachers should efficiently transmit a common core of knowledge, <i>not</i> experiment with curriculum.
5	4	3	2	1	26. Teaching is primarily management of student behavior to achieve the teacher's objectives.
5	4	3	2	1	27. Education should involve students in democratic activities and reflective thinking.
5	4	3	2	1	28. Students should have significant involvement in choosing what and how they learn.
5	4	3	2	1	29. Teachers should promote the permanency of the classics.
5	4	3	2	1	30. Learning should lead students to involvement in social reform.
5	4	3	2	1	31. On the whole, school should and must indoctrinate students with traditional values.
5	4	3	2	1	32. If ideas cannot be proved by science, they should be ignored as superstition and nonsense.
5	4	3	2	1	33. The major goal for teachers is to create an environment in which students can learn on their own by guided reflection on their experiences.
5	4	3	2	1	34. Teachers should create opportunities for students to make personal choices, <i>not</i> shape their behavior.
5	4	3	2	1	35. The aim of education should be the same in every age and society, <i>not</i> differ from teacher to teacher.
5	4	3	2	1	36. Education should lead society toward social betterment, <i>not</i> confine itself to essential skills.

Philosophic Inventory Score Sheet

In the space available, record the number you circled for each statement (1–36) from the inventory. Total the number horizontally and record it in the space on the far right of the score sheet. The highest total indicates your educational philosophy.

Essentialism

Essentialism was a response to progressivism and advocates a conservative philosophic perspective. The emphasis is on intellectual and moral standards that should be transmitted by the schools. The core of the curriculum should be essential knowledge and skills. Schooling should be practical and not influence social policy. It is a back-to-basics movement that emphasizes facts. Students should be taught discipline, hard work, and respect for authority. Influential essentialists include William C. Bagley, H. G. Rickover, Arthur Bestor, and William Bennett. E. D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy* could fit this category.

$$\frac{\quad}{1} + \frac{\quad}{7} + \frac{\quad}{13} + \frac{\quad}{19} + \frac{\quad}{25} + \frac{\quad}{31} = \frac{\quad}{\text{Total}}$$

Behaviorism

Behaviorism denies free will and maintains that behavior is the result of external forces that cause humans to behave in predictable ways. It is linked with empiricism, which stresses scientific experiment and observation; behaviorists are skeptical about metaphysical claims. Behaviorists look for laws governing human behavior the way natural scientists look for empirical laws governing natural events. The role of the teacher is to identify behavioral goals and establish reinforcers to achieve goals. Influential behaviorists include B. F. Skinner, Ivan Pavlov, J. B. Watson, and Benjamin Bloom.

$$\frac{\quad}{2} + \frac{\quad}{8} + \frac{\quad}{14} + \frac{\quad}{20} + \frac{\quad}{26} + \frac{\quad}{32} = \frac{\quad}{\text{Total}}$$

Progressivism

Progressivism focuses on the child rather than the subject matter. The students' interests are important; integrating thinking, feeling, and doing is important. Learners should be active and learn to solve problems by reflecting on their experience. The school should help students develop personal and social values. Because society is always changing, new ideas are important to make the future better than the past. Influential progressivists include John Dewey and Francis Parker.

$$\frac{\quad}{3} + \frac{\quad}{9} + \frac{\quad}{15} + \frac{\quad}{21} + \frac{\quad}{27} + \frac{\quad}{33} = \frac{\quad}{\text{Total}}$$

Existentialism

Existentialism is a highly subjective philosophy that stresses the importance of the individual and emotional commitment to living authentically. It emphasizes individual choice over the importance of rational theories. Jean Paul Sartre, the French philosopher, claimed that "existence precedes essence." People are born, and each person must define him- or herself through choices in life. Influential existentialists include Jean Paul Sartre, Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Gabriel Marcel, Albert Camus, Carl Rogers, A. S. Neill, and Maxine Greene.

$$\frac{\quad}{4} + \frac{\quad}{10} + \frac{\quad}{16} + \frac{\quad}{22} + \frac{\quad}{28} + \frac{\quad}{34} = \frac{\quad}{\text{Total}}$$

Perennialism

The aim of education is to ensure that students acquire knowledge about the great ideas of Western culture. Human beings are rational, and it is this capacity that needs to be developed. Cultivation of the intellect is the highest priority of an education worth having. The highest level of knowledge in each field should be the focus of curriculum. Influential perennialists include Robert Maynard Hutchins, Mortimer Adler, and Allan Bloom.

$$\frac{\quad}{5} + \frac{\quad}{11} + \frac{\quad}{17} + \frac{\quad}{23} + \frac{\quad}{29} + \frac{\quad}{35} = \frac{\quad}{\text{Total}}$$

Reconstructionism

Reconstructionists advocate that schools should take the lead to reconstruct society. Schools have more than a responsibility to transmit knowledge, they have the mission to transform society as well. Reconstructionists go beyond progressivists in advocating social activism. Influential reconstructionists include Theodore Brameld, Paulo Friere, and Henry Giroux.

$$\frac{\quad}{6} + \frac{\quad}{12} + \frac{\quad}{18} + \frac{\quad}{24} + \frac{\quad}{30} + \frac{\quad}{36} = \frac{\quad}{\text{Total}}$$

(Source: Prepared by Robert Leahy for *Becoming a Teacher: Accepting the Challenge of a Profession*, 3d ed., 1995. Used by permission of the author.)