



## Five Philosophies of Education

Essentialism, perennialism, progressivism, social reconstructionism, and existentialism. Taken together, these five schools of thought do not exhaust the list of possible educational philosophies you may consider, but they present strong frameworks for you to refine your own educational philosophy. We can place these five philosophies on a continuum, from teacher-centered (some would say “authoritarian”), to student-centered (some would characterize as “permissive”).

Are you politically conservative or liberal? (Great, now we are bringing politics into this discussion.) Actually, your political stance is one predictor of your

### IN THE NEWS

#### Reflection

After a hectic school year, Kentucky High school graduate Juan C. avoided the beach graduation celebration and chose instead to spend the week in reflection at a Trappist monastery. The student explained: We spend a lot of time nourishing our bodies, but we spend little time nourishing our souls.

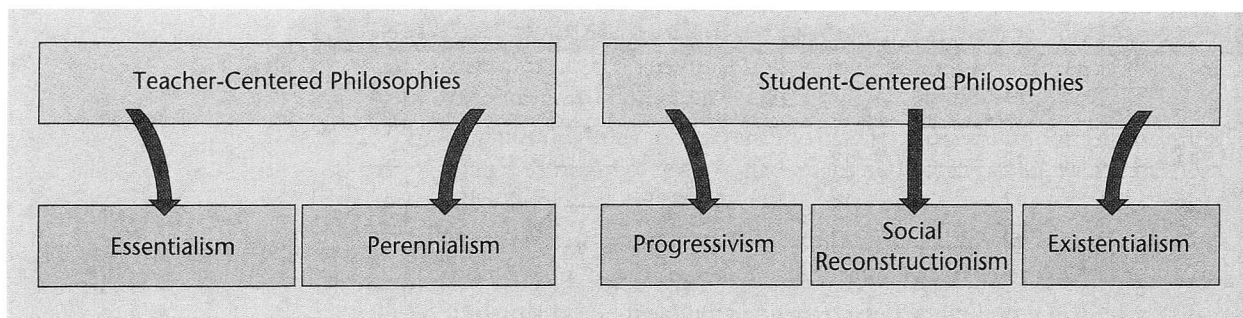
SOURCE: *American School Board Journal*, 1998.



What's new in education? Click on *News Feeds*.

FIGURE 9.1

Teacher- and student-centered philosophies of education.



**REFLECTION:** Check back with your scores on the Inventory of Philosophies in Education (p. 329). Now consider your scores in terms of teacher- or student-centered philosophies. What does this tell you about your own educational priorities?

educational philosophy. Conservatives often champion teacher-centered philosophies and practices that emphasize the values and knowledge that have survived through time, while liberals find student-centered approaches more to their liking. (See Figure 9.1).

Let's begin our discussion with the teacher-centered philosophies, for they have exerted significant influence on American education during the past two decades.



## Teacher-Centered Philosophies

Traditionally, **teacher-centered philosophies** emphasize the importance of transferring knowledge, information, and skills from the older (presumably wiser) generation to the younger one. The teacher's role is to instill respect for authority, perseverance, duty, consideration, and practicality. When students demonstrate through tests and writings that they are competent in academic subjects and traditional skills, and through their actions that they have disciplined minds and adhere to traditional morals and behavior, then both the school and the teacher have been successful. (If you recall from Chapter 4, "Schools: Choices and Challenges," these philosophies view the primary purpose of schools as "passing the cultural baton.") The major teacher-centered philosophies of education are essentialism and perennialism.

### Essentialism

**Essentialism** strives to teach students the accumulated knowledge of our civilization through core courses in the traditional academic disciplines. Essentialists aim to instill students with the "essentials" of academic knowledge, patriotism, and character development. This traditional or **back-to-basics** approach is meant to train the mind, promote reasoning, and ensure a common culture among all Americans.

American educator **William Bagley** popularized the term *essentialism* in the 1930s,<sup>1</sup> and essentialism has been a dominant influence in American education since World War II. Factors such as the launching of *Sputnik* in 1957, the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*, intense global economic competition and increased immigration into the United States have all kept essentialism at center stage. Some educators refer to the

present period as **neoessentialism** because of the increased core graduation requirements, stronger standards and more testing of both students and teachers.

Whether they call themselves essentialists or neoessentialists, educators in this camp are concerned that the influx of immigrants threatens American culture. In response, they call for rigorous schools teaching a single, unifying body of knowledge for all Americans. One of the leading essentialists, **E. D. Hirsch, Jr.**, authored *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs To Know*, and *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them*. Hirsch provides lists of people, events, literature, historical facts, scientific breakthroughs and the like, lists that specify what students at every grade level should know to be “culturally literate.”

Most of you reading this chapter have been educated in essentialist schools. You were probably required to take many courses in English, history, math, and science, but were able to enroll in only a few electives. Such a program would be typical in an essentialist school.

**The Essentialist Classroom** Essentialists urge that traditional disciplines such as math, science, history, foreign language, and literature form the foundation of the curriculum, which is referred to as the **core curriculum**. Essentialists frown upon electives that “water-down” academic content. Elementary students receive instruction in skills such as writing, reading, measuring, and computing. Even when studying art and music, subjects most often associated with the development of creativity, students master a body of information and basic techniques, gradually moving to more complex skills and detailed knowledge. Only by mastering the required material are students promoted to the next higher level.

Essentialists maintain that classrooms should be oriented around the teacher, who should serve as an intellectual and moral role model for the students. The teachers or administrators decide what is most important for the students to learn and place little emphasis on student interests, particularly when such interests divert time and attention from the academic curriculum. Essentialist teachers rely on achievement test scores to evaluate progress. Essentialists expect that students will leave school possessing not only basic skills and an extensive body of knowledge, but also disciplined, practical minds, capable of applying schoolhouse lessons in the real world.

**Essentialism in Action: The Coalition of Essential Schools** The **Coalition of Essential Schools**, headed by Theodore Sizer, offers several tangible examples of essentialism in action. The 200 coalition schools pledge to promote intellectual rigor, test students for mastery of information and skills, have teachers and students work closely together, and develop strong thinking skills across subjects. But is the Coalition of Essential Schools purely essentialist? Not entirely. Coalition schools recognize and promote individual student differences, a clear departure from a strict essentialist interpretation. In fact, schools in the coalition do not share a fixed core curriculum, but each school continually analyzes and can alter core contents. The coalition also stresses “less is more,” since Sizer believes that teachers and students should focus on fewer topics, but go into them more deeply. In fact, these essential schools also incorporate components of perennialism, which happens to be the next teacher-centered philosophy that we will discuss.

## Perennialism

Perennialism is a cousin to essentialism. Both advocate teacher-centered classrooms. Both tolerate little flexibility in the curriculum. Both implement rigorous standards.

Both aim to sharpen students' intellectual powers and enhance their moral qualities. So what are the differences?

**Perennialists** organize their schools around books, ideas and concepts, and criticize essentialists for the vast amount of factual information they require students to absorb in their push for "cultural literacy." Perennial means "everlasting"—a perennialist education focuses on enduring themes and questions that span the ages. Perennialists recommend that students learn directly from the **Great Books**—works by history's finest thinkers and writers, books as meaningful today as when they were first written.

Perennialists believe that the goal of education should be to develop rational thought and to discipline minds to think rigorously. Perennialists see education as a sorting mechanism, a way to identify and prepare the intellectually gifted for leadership, while providing vocational training for the rest of society. They lament the change in universities over the centuries, from institutions where a few gifted students (and teachers) rigorously pursued truth for its own sake, to a glorified training ground for future careers.

Those of you who received a religious education might recognize the perennialist philosophy. Many parochial schools reflect the perennialist tradition with a curriculum that focuses on analyzing great religious books (such as the *Bible*, *Talmud*, or *Koran*), discerning moral truths, and honoring these moral values. In the classroom description that follows, we will concentrate on secular perennialism as formulated in the twentieth-century United States by such individuals as Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler.

**The Perennialist Classroom** As in an essentialist classroom, students in a perennialist classroom spend considerable time and energy mastering the three "Rs," reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic. Greatest importance is placed on reading, the key to unlocking the enduring ideas found in the Great Books. Special attention is given to teaching values and character training, often through discussion about the underlying values and moral principles in a story. (Former Secretary of Education Bill Bennett wrote a collection of such stories in 1993, entitled *Book of Virtues*.) High school marks an increase in academic rigor as more challenging books are explored, including works of Darwin, Homer, and Shakespeare. Few elective choices are allowed. In an extreme example, in his *Paideia Proposal*, published in 1982, **Mortimer Adler** proposed a single elementary and secondary curriculum for all students, with no curricular electives except in the choice of a second language.

Electives are not the only things perennialists go without. You find few if any textbooks in a perennialist class. **Robert Hutchins**, who as president of the University of Chicago introduced the Great Books program, once opined that textbooks "have probably done as much to degrade the American intelligence as any single force."<sup>2</sup> Because perennialist teachers see themselves as discussion seminar leaders and facilitators, lectures are rare. Current concerns like multiculturalism, gender stereotypes, or computer technology would find no place in a perennialist curriculum.

While critics chastise perennialists for the lack of women, people of color, and non-Western ideas in the Great Books they teach, perennialists are unmoved by such criticism. To them, "training the mind" is ageless, beyond demographic concerns and transient trends. As Mortimer Adler wrote,

The Great Books of ancient and medieval as well as modern times are a repository of knowledge and wisdom, a tradition of culture which must initiate each generation.<sup>3</sup>

**Perennialism in Action: St. John's College** The best-known example of perennialist education today takes place at a private institution unaffiliated with any religion: St. John's College, founded in 1784 in Annapolis, Maryland ([www.sjcsf.edu](http://www.sjcsf.edu)). St. John's College adopted the Great Books as a core curriculum in 1937 and assigns readings in the fields of literature, philosophy and theology, history and the social sciences, mathematics and natural science, and music. Students write extensively and attend seminars twice weekly to discuss assigned readings. They also complete a number of laboratory experiences and tutorials in language, mathematics, and music, guided by the faculty, who are called *tutors*. Seniors take oral examinations at the beginning and end of their senior year and write a final essay that must be approved before they are allowed to graduate.

Although grades are given in order to facilitate admission to graduate programs, students receive their grades only upon request and are expected to learn only for learning's sake. Since the St. John's experience thrives best in a small-group atmosphere, the college established a second campus in 1964 in Santa Fe, New Mexico to handle additional enrollment.



## Student-Centered Philosophies

**Student-centered philosophies** are less authoritarian, less concerned with the past and “training the mind,” and more focused on individual needs, contemporary relevance, and preparing students for a changing future. Progressivism, social reconstructionism, and existentialism place the learner at the center of the educational process: Students and teachers work together on determining what should be learned and how best to learn it. School is not seen as an institution that controls and directs

youth, or works to preserve and transmit the core culture, but as an institution that works with youth to improve society or help students realize their individuality.

## Progressivism

**Progressivism** organizes schools around the concerns, curiosity, and real-world experiences of students. The progressive teacher facilitates learning by helping students formulate meaningful questions and devise strategies to answer those questions. Answers are not drawn from lists or even Great Books; they are discovered through real world experience. Progressivism is the educational application of a philosophy called pragmatism. According to **pragmatism**, the way to determine if an idea has merit is simple: test it. If the idea works in the real world, then it has merit. Both pragmatism and progressivism originated in America, the home of a very practical and pragmatic people. John Dewey refined and applied pragmatism to education, establishing what became known as progressivism.

**John Dewey** was a reformer with a background in philosophy and psychology who taught that people learn best through social interaction in the real world. Dewey believed that because social learning had meaning, it endured. Book learning, on the other hand, was no substitute for actually doing things. Progressivists do not believe that the mind can be disciplined through reading Great Books, rather that the mind should be trained to analyze experience thoughtfully and draw conclusions objectively.

Dewey saw education as an opportunity to learn how to apply previous experiences in new ways. Dewey believed that students, facing an ever-changing world, should master the scientific method: (1) Become aware of a problem; (2) define it; (3) propose various hypotheses to solve it; (4) examine the consequences of each hypothesis in the light of previous experience; and (5) test the most likely solution. (For a biography of John Dewey, see the Hall of Fame: Profiles in Education in Chapter 8.)

Dewey regarded democracy and freedom as far superior to the political ideas of earlier times. Dewey saw traditional, autocratic, teacher-centered schools as the

antithesis of democratic ideals. He viewed progressive schools as a working model of democracy. Dewey wrote:

To imposition from above is opposed expression and cultivation of individuality; to external discipline is opposed free activity; to learning from texts and teachers, learning through experience; to acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill is opposed acquisition of them as means of attaining ends which make direct vital appeal; to preparation for a more or less remote future is opposed making the most of the opportunities of present life; to statistics and materials is opposed acquaintance with a changing world.<sup>4</sup>

**The Progressive Classroom** Walk into a progressivist classroom, and you will not find a teacher standing at the front of the room talking to rows of seated students. Rather, you will likely see children working in small groups, moving about and talking freely. Some children might be discussing a science experiment, while another group works on a model volcano, and a third prepares for a presentation. Interest centers would be located throughout the room, filled with books, materials, software, and projects designed to attract student interest on a wide array of topics. Finally you notice the teacher, walking around the room, bending over to talk with individual students and small groups, asking questions and making suggestions. You sense that the last thing on her mind is the standardized state test scheduled for next week.<sup>5</sup>

Progressivists build the curriculum around the experiences, interests, and abilities of students, and encourage students to work together cooperatively. Teachers feel no compulsion to focus their students' attention on one discrete discipline at a time, and students integrate several subjects in their studies. Thought-provoking activities augment reading, and a game like Monopoly might be used to illustrate the principles of capitalism versus socialism. Computer simulations, field trips, and interactive websites on the Internet offer realistic learning challenges for students, and build on students' multiple intelligences.

**Progressivism in Action: The Laboratory School** In 1896, while a professor at the University of Chicago, Dewey founded the Laboratory School as a testing ground for his educational ideas. Dewey's writings and his work with the **Laboratory School** set the stage for the progressive education movement. Based on the view that educators, like scientists, need a place to test their ideas, Dewey's Laboratory School eventually became the most famous experimental school in the history of U.S. education, a place where thousands observed Dewey's innovations in school design, methods, and curriculum. Although the school remained under Dewey's control for only eight years and never enrolled more than 140 students (ages 3 to 13) in a single year, its influence was enormous.

Dewey designed the Lab School with only one classroom but with several facilities for experiential learning: a science laboratory, an art room, a woodworking shop, and a kitchen. Children were likely to make their own weights and measures in the laboratory, illustrate their own stories in the art room, build a boat in the shop, and learn chemistry in the kitchen. They were unlikely to learn through isolated exercises or drills, which, according to Dewey, students consider irrelevant. Since Dewey believed that students learn from social interaction, the school used many group methods such as cooperative model-making, field trips, role playing, and dramatizations. Dewey maintained that group techniques make the students better citizens, developing, for example, their willingness to share responsibilities.

Children in the Laboratory School were not promoted from one grade to another after mastering certain material. Rather, they were grouped according to their individual interests and abilities. For all its child-centered orientation, however, the Laboratory School remained hierarchical in the sense that the students were never given a role comparable to that of the staff in determining the school's educational practices.

## Social Reconstructionism

**Social reconstructionism** encourages schools, teachers, and students to focus their studies and energies on alleviating pervasive social inequities, and as the name implies, reconstruct society into a new and more just social order. Although social reconstructionists agree with progressivists that schools should concentrate on the needs of students, they split from progressivism in the 1920s after growing impatient with the slow pace of change in schools and in society. **George Counts**, a student of Dewey, published his classic book, *Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order?*, in which he outlined a more ambitious, and clearly more radical, approach to education. Counts's book, written in 1932, was no doubt influenced by the human cost of the Great Depression. He proposed that schools focus on reforming society, an idea that caught the imagination and sparked the ideals of educators both in this country and abroad.

Social challenges and problems provide a natural (and moral) direction for curricular and instructional activities. Racism, sexism, environmental pollution, homelessness, poverty, substance abuse, homophobia, AIDS and violence are rooted in misinformation and thrive in ignorance. Therefore, social reconstructionists believe that school is the ideal place to begin ameliorating social problems. The teacher's role is to explore social problems, suggest alternate perspectives, and facilitate student analysis of these problems. While convincing, cajoling, or moralizing about the importance of addressing human tragedy would be a natural teacher response, such adult-led decision-making flies in the face of reconstructionist philosophy. A social reconstructionist teacher must model democratic principles. Students and teachers are expected to live and learn in a democratic culture; the students themselves must select educational objectives and social priorities.

**The Social Reconstructionist Classroom** A social reconstructionist teacher creates lessons that both intellectually inform and emotionally stir students about the inequities that surround them. A class might read a book and visit a photojournalist's exhibit portraying violent acts of racism. If the book, exhibit and the class discussion that follows move the students, the class might choose to pursue a long-term project to investigate the problem. One group of students might analyze news coverage of racial and ethnic groups in the community. Another student group might conduct a survey analyzing community perceptions of racial groups and race relations. Students might visit city hall and examine arrest and trial records in order to determine the role race plays in differential application of the law. Students might examine government records for information about housing patterns, income levels, graduation rates and other relevant statistics. The teacher's role would be as facilitator: assisting students in focusing their questions, developing a strategy, helping to organize visits, and ensuring that the data collected and analyzed meet standards of objectivity. Throughout, the teacher would be instructing students on research techniques, statistical evaluation, writing skills, and public communications.



In a social reconstructionist class, a research project is more than an academic exercise; the class is engaged in a genuine effort to improve society. In this case, the class might arrange to meet with political leaders, encouraging them to create programs or legislation to respond to issues the students uncovered. The students might seek a *pro bono* attorney to initiate legal action to remedy a social injustice they unmasked. Or perhaps the students might take their findings directly to the media by holding a press conference. They might also create a Web page to share their findings and research methods with students in other parts of the country, or other parts of the world. How would the teacher decide if the students have met the educational goals? In this example, an objective, well-prepared report would be one criterion, and reducing or eliminating a racist community practice would be a second measure of success.

**Social Reconstructionism in Action: Paulo Freire** Paulo Freire believed that schools were just another institution perpetuating social inequities while serving the interests of the dominant group. Like social reconstructionism itself, Freire's beliefs grew during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when he experienced hunger and poverty firsthand. Influenced by Marxist and neo-Marxist ideas, Freire accused schools of perpetuating the status quo views of the rich and powerful "for the purpose of keeping the masses submerged and content in a culture of silence."<sup>6</sup> Schools were endorsing **social Darwinism**, the idea that society is an ingenious "sorting" system, one in which the more talented rise to the top, while those less deserving find themselves at the bottom of the social and economic pecking order. The conclusion: Those with money deserve it, those without money deserve their lot in life, and poverty is a normal, preordained part of reality.

Freire rejected this conclusion. He did not believe that schools should be viewed as "banks," where the privileged deposit ideas like social Darwinism to be spoon fed into the limited minds of the dispossessed. He envisioned schools as a place where the poor can acquire the skills to regain control of their lives and influence the social and economic forces that locked them in poverty in the first place. Freire engaged the poor as equal partners in dialogues that explored their economic and social problems and possible solutions. Freire believed in **praxis**, the doctrine that when actions are based on sound theory and values, they can make a real difference in the world. (It is no accident that the term praxis is also the name given to the teacher competency tests required by many states.) Freire's ideas took hold not only in his native Brazil, but in poor areas around the globe. As poor farm workers became literate and aware, they organized for their self-improvement, and began to work for change. It is not surprising that the autocratic leaders of his country eventually forced him into exile, for he had turned schooling into a liberating force. (For a biography of Paulo Freire, see the Hall of Fame: Profiles in Education in Chapter 8.)

## Existentialism

Existentialism, the final student-centered philosophy we will discuss, places the highest degree of importance on student perceptions, decisions, and actions. **Existentialism** rejects the existence of any source of objective, authoritative truth other than the individual. Individuals are responsible for determining for themselves what is true or false, right or wrong, beautiful or ugly. In short, it is up to the student to make all relevant educational decisions, and to evaluate those decisions.

Noted philosopher **Jean-Paul Sartre's** (1905–1980) classic formulation of existentialism is "existence precedes essence." What does this mean? One interpretation

TABLE 9.1

Five philosophies of education.

	Underlying Basis: Metaphysics	Underlying Basis: Epistemology	Focus of Curriculum	Sample Classroom Activity	Role of Teacher	Goals for Students	Educational Leaders
<b>Student-Centered Philosophies</b>							
Progressivism	The physical world is the basis of reality; the world inevitably progresses over time	We learn best from meaningful life experiences, social interaction, and scientific experimentation	Flexible; integrated study of academic subjects around the needs, and experiences of students	Learning by doing—for example, students plan a field trip to learn about history, geography, and natural science	Guide and integrate learning activities so that students can find meaning	To become intelligent problem solvers, socially aware citizens who are prepared to live comfortably in the world	John Dewey, Nel Noddings
Social Reconstructionism	The physical world is the basis of reality; world progresses, but slowly	We learn best from meaningful social experiences that improve society	Focus on social, political, and economic needs; integrated study of academic subjects around socially meaningful actions	Learning by reconstructing society—for example, students work to remove health hazards in a building housing the poor	Provide authentic learning activities that both instruct students and improve society	To become intelligent problem solvers, to enjoy learning, to live comfortably in the world while also helping reshape it	George S. Counts, John Brameld, Jane Roland Martin
Existentialism	Reality is individually determined; people shape their innermost nature in accordance with their free will	Each individual determines learning strategies; learning engages emotional as well as intellectual faculties	Each student determines the pace and direction of his or her own learning	Students choose their preferred medium—such as poetry, prose, or painting—and evaluate their own performance	One who seeks to relate to each student honestly; skilled at creating a free, open, and stimulating environment	To accept personal responsibility; to understand deeply and be at peace with one's own unique individuality	A. S. Neill, Maxine Greene

goes as follows: We did not ask to be born into this world; so we “exist” before we are anything. We also are powerless at the other end of the life cycle, when we die. In between those two uncontrollable events, we shape our essence.

Existentialists believe that each person needs to define life's meaning. To become an authentic individual, one who values and practices free choice, we must struggle free of the influences of our parents, teachers, schools, religion, and culture. Existentialists

**TABLE 9.1**  
(concluded)

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<b>Teacher-Centered Philosophies</b>							
Essentialism	The physical world is the basis of reality	We learn through reasoning, primarily empirical reasoning	Core curriculum of traditional academic topics and traditional American virtues	Teacher focuses on “essential” information or the development of particular skills	Model of academic and moral virtue; center of classroom	To become culturally literate individuals, model citizens educated to compete in the world	William Bagley, E. D. Hirsch, Jr., William Bennett
Perennialism	The realm of thought and spirit rooted in the physical world; all human beings are by nature rational animals	We learn through reasoning—particularly through creative, deep, and logical analysis	Core curriculum analyzing enduring ideas found in Great Books	Socratic dialogue analyzing a philosophical issue or the meaning of a great work of literature	Scholarly role model; philosophically oriented, helps students seek the truth for themselves	To increase their intellectual powers and to appreciate learning for its own sake	Robert Hutchins, Mortimer Adler

**REFLECTION:** How many of these philosophies have you experienced in your own education? Describe the circumstances. Would you like to encounter others as a student? a teacher? Explain.

believe education should be about helping each of us answer the fundamental questions: Why am I here? What is my purpose?

**The Existentialist Classroom** Existentialism in the classroom is a powerful rejection of traditional, and particularly essentialist thinking. In the existentialist classroom, subject matter takes second place to helping the students understand and appreciate themselves as unique individuals. The teacher’s role is to help students define their own essence by exposing them to various paths they may take in life and by creating an environment in which they can freely choose their way. Existentialism, more than other educational philosophies, affords students great latitude in their choice of subject matter and activity.

The existentialist curriculum often emphasizes the humanities as a means of providing students with vicarious experiences that will help unleash their creativity and self-expression. For example, existentialists focus on the actions of historical individuals, each of whom provides a model for the students to explore. Math and the

natural sciences may be de-emphasized because their subject matter is less fruitful for promoting self-awareness. Career education is regarded more as a means of teaching students about their potential than of teaching a livelihood. In art, existentialism encourages individual creativity and imagination more than it does the imitation of established models.

Existentialist learning is self-paced, self-directed, and includes a great deal of individual contact with the teacher. Honest interpersonal relationships are emphasized; roles and “official” status de-emphasized. According to philosopher Maxine Greene, teachers themselves must be deeply involved in their own learning and questioning: “Only a teacher in search of his freedom can inspire a student to search for his own.” Greene asserts that education should move teachers and students to “wide awake-ness,” the ability to discover their own truths.<sup>7</sup>

Although elements of existentialism occasionally appear in public schools, this philosophy has not been widely disseminated. In an age of high-stakes tests and standards, only a few schools, mostly private, implement existentialist ideas. Even Summerhill, the well-known existentialist school founded in England by **A. S. Neill** in 1921, struggles to persevere with its unusual educational approach.

**Existentialism in Action: The Sudbury Valley School** Visit Sudbury Valley School just outside of Boston, Massachusetts, look around, look closely, and you still may not see the school. The large building nestled next to a fishing pond on a ten-acre campus looks more like a mansion than a school. Walk inside, and you will find students and adults doing pretty much as they please. Not a “class” in sight. Some people are talking, some playing, some reading. A group is building a bookcase over there, a student is working on the computer in the corner, another is taking a nap on a chair. All ages mix freely, with no discernable grade level for any activity. In fact, it is even difficult to locate the teachers. If there is a curriculum, it is difficult to detect. Instead, the school offers a wide variety of educational options, including field trips to Boston, New York, and the nearby mountains and seacoast, and the use of facilities that include a laboratory, a woodworking shop, a computer room, a kitchen, a darkroom, an art room, and several music rooms.

Sudbury Valley provides a setting, an opportunity, but each student must decide what to do with that opportunity. Students are trusted to make their own decisions about learning. The school’s purpose is to build on the students’ natural curiosity, based on the belief that authentic learning takes place only when students initiate it. The school operates on the premise that all its students are creative, and each should be helped to discover and nurture his or her individual talents.

Sudbury Valley is fully accredited, and the majority of Sudbury Valley’s graduates have continued on to college. The school accepts anyone from 4-year-olds to adults and charges low tuition, so as not to exclude anyone. Evaluations or grades are given only on request. A high school diploma is awarded to those who complete relevant requirements, which mainly focus on the ability to be a responsible member of the community at large.



## Psychological Influences on Education

While essentialism, perennialism, progressivism, social reconstructionism, and existentialism are influential philosophies of education, they are far from the only forces shaping today’s schools. Teachers who take their profession seriously pay attention to work in other fields, such as psychology, and may modify their teaching based on