

Defining Your Educational Philosophy

Andrew P. Johnson, Ph.D.

YOUR EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

This chapter will examine philosophies of education. At the end of this chapter you will be asked to describe your own educational philosophy.

Your Philosophy

A *philosophy* is a set of principles based on one's values and beliefs that are used to guide one's behavior. Even though your educational philosophy may not be clearly defined, it is the basis for everything you do as a teacher (DeCarvalho, 1991). It guides your decision making, influences how you perceive and understand new information, and determines your goals and beliefs (Gutek, 2004). An educational philosophy outlines what you believe to be the purpose of education, the role of the student in education, and the role of the teacher.

Educational philosophies address the following kinds of questions: Why do we educate people? How should we educate people? How does education affect society? How does education affect humanity? Who benefits from a particular type of education? What ethical guidelines should be used? What traits should be valued? Why type of thinking is of worth? How should we come to know the world and make decisions? What is the educational ideal? What is the nature of reality? What do we believe to be true in regards to knowledge and truth? How do we come to know? What do you believe to be true in regards to humans and human learning?

Elements of an Educational Philosophy

If you do an Internet search using the terms, '*educational-philosophy*' or '*teaching philosophy*' you will see that they come in a variety of forms. There are common but not universal elements included in an educational or teaching philosophy. For this chapter, we will focus on the four elements below. However, to be of use your educational philosophy will need to be designed so that you can use it to guide and direct your thinking and teaching practice. Therefore, I recommend that you add additional elements or adopt the ones below to suit your purpose.

- **The purpose of education.** Why do schools exist in our society? What purpose do these serve? Why do our societies invest so much time and resources on educating developing humans? To what end? How does this benefit the society or group?
- **Goals.** Based on your defined purpose, what are some short or long term goals?
- **Principles.** Based on your values, what are some guiding principles or things you believe to be true in regards to education, teaching, or learning? Here you should prepare a set of propositions that will serve as a foundation for your beliefs or actions.
- **Action statements.** Based on your philosophy, goals, beliefs, and values, what are some action statements? What will you do or strive to do in your classroom? What might we see if we come into your classroom? What do you aspire to do or accomplish? What are some processes and practices you will adopt?

Example of an Educational Philosophy

Below are the elements that I would include in my educational philosophy for my role as a professor working with pre-service and practicing teachers. Keep in mind that this philosophy is right for me and my teaching situation. You will need to develop your own.

Purpose. When functioning at its highest, it is my belief that education should help to help each person reach his or her full potential. I believe that a school's fundamental purpose is the development of better human beings, which occurs through self-actualization and self-transcendence.

Goals. A short term educational goal is to bring people, societies, and the global community to a higher place. A higher place defined here as a state where individuals have the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary for them to nurture themselves, others, and the environment and an inclination for them to act upon their worlds in productive yet responsible ways. A long term goal is the continued evolution of human consciousness and the global society.

Principles. I believe the following:

- We are preparing human beings who will be teachers.
- Teaching is an art, a science, and a craft learned over time with continued professional development and reflection.
- Preservice and practicing teachers need to discover who they are as teachers and people in order to teach at their highest
- Teachers need to identify and develop the teaching skills that work best for them.
- Learning to teach is not a standardized process.
- Students at any level are not standardized products.
- It is necessary to have a coherent body of knowledge related to teaching, learning, pedagogical, and content areas in order to teach effectively.
- Teachers should be empowered to make the choices that are best for their students and that are aligned with their teaching values.

Action Statements based on my philosophy. Based on the above, I will strive to do the following:

- present the knowledge and skills necessary for professional and personal growth.
- help students discover and develop their passions and special talents.
- inspire and motivate students to learn vs. control and manipulate.
- model the dispositions I believe to be of value: hard work, planning, creativity, honesty, integrity, and compassion.
- recognize and address the human element whenever possible.
- use course content and elevate students on personal and professional levels.
- be reflective practitioner.
- honor my students as learners and humans.
- provide students the knowledge and skills they will need to be successful teachers and humans.
- provide the lessons students need to move them forward.

THE NATURE OF EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES

Defining and elucidating your educational philosophy will enhance your ability to align it with your teaching practice. But before we go further, there are three things to note about educational philosophies:

1. They evolve. Educational philosophies evolve and change over time as a result of experience, interaction with others, reflection, and new knowledge and experiences. This is good. If you believe the same things in the same sorts of ways that you did five or ten years ago,

you have not grown. Even with the most strongly held beliefs, you may still believe them, but you believe more about them, you believe them at different levels, or you believe them in different ways if you are continuing to grow. If you are learning and evolving, your educational philosophy will continue to grow and evolve throughout your career.

2. You must develop your own. To be of any use, your philosophy must be aligned with your values and beliefs. (This is why it is important to identify what you value and believe.) There is no such thing as the “correct” philosophy. Effective teachers and people of good character often have differing educational philosophies. This also is a good thing as it leads to continued reflection, dialogue, and refinement. And whether it be a political philosophy, religious philosophy, or educational philosophy; forcing one’s philosophy on another is the ultimate form of domination and control. These are not traits to which we aspire in a democratic society.

3. Philosophies differences can strengthen a school. Differing educational philosophies within an educational setting is not a sign of dysfunction. Philosophical differences can strengthen a school. As long as colleagues listen and respect philosophical differences, differences can provide a variety of perspectives on curriculum, school issues, and other learning experiences.

4. Educational philosophies should be like a lesson plan objective. Everything that follows an objective should be to support or reach that objective. In the same way, everything that follows your educational philosophy should support or be in alignment with your philosophy. To the greatest extent possible, your teaching practices should align with your philosophy. This enables you to teach from your authentic self. When teaching from here, teaching seems effortless and is always effective.

INTEGRATION

To teach from your philosophy is to teach with integrity. There is an integration of your personal core values and beliefs with your professional thoughts and actions. If you teach from your philosophy you will never be wrong. At this point, you should be ready to begin to define and describe your educational philosophy. Remember, a philosophy is a guiding set of principles based on your values and beliefs.

MINI-LECTURES RELATED TO EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES

Your Educational Philosophy

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sN_EymDEGT8

Reflective Teaching

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofGaDa3o6qQ>

Developing your Teaching Mission or Purpose Statement

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arpo6jHXwDc>

Reflective Teachers and Your Educational Philosophy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8oH4xTTxfE>

Teacher Professional Development for Teachers: Journey and Growth

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqQJBz3aXj0>

Educational Psychology and Philosophy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmF7Nh4l5wE>

On Being Teacher - 1

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nseBXqtFo7U>

On Being Teacher – 2

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWJT4n7lG5k>

REFERENCES

DeCarvalho, R.J.(1991). The humanistic paradigm in education. *The Humanistic Psychologist* (19), 88-104.

Guttek, G. (2004). *Philosophical and ideological voices in education*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.