Topic 3 Reconstructionism, Behaviorism and Existentialism in Education

By the end of this topic, you should be able to:
1. Describe the major world views of philosophies: reconstructionism, behaviorism, and existentialism; and
2. Identify the contributions of the major world views of philosophies (such as reconstructionism, behaviorism, and existentialism) to the field of education.

INTRODUCTION

When it comes to teaching our students, what aspects will you bring into the classroom? What are some of the qualities that will help shape the way you teach your students? As a teacher, it is beneficial for you to have a firm knowledge of philosophy in education. Your views on such a topic will greatly affect the way you teach your students.

This topic discusses different types of educational philosophies that can be used in the classroom, where they originated, how best to use them in your classroom, and which philosophies are best used in different types of learning scenarios. From each type of philosophy learned (reconstructionism, behaviorism, and existentialism), one can begin to organize his or her own personal educational philosophy. Educating yourself in the different types of educational philosophy is one step towards assuring that your teaching becomes more effective.

At some point, teachers, schools and administrators develop their own philosophies for education. Philosophy in the learning process gives learners and educators a basis on which to build knowledge. Which philosophy should your society adhere to? Explain and give examples.

8.1 RECONSTRUCTIONISM

Reconstructionism is a philosophical theory holding that societies should continually reform themselves in order to establish more perfect governments or social networks, thus social questions will emerge as there are quests to create a better society and worldwide democracy. Reconstructionism is an ideology that emphasizes the importance of changing for the better.
In other words, reconstructionism is a philosophy that centers on the idea of constant change. To a reconstructionist, the world is a ceaselessly evolving whole and its inhabitants need to ceaselessly evolve themselves in order to cope with the situations around them. Reconstructionism sharply contrasts with idealist theories, which reconstructionists regard as reflective theories that mirror inherited social patterns and values. Simply stated, the major premises of reconstructionism is:

• Society is in need of constant reconstruction or change; and
• Such social change involves a reconstruction of education and the use of education in reconstructing society.

Reconstructionists encourage others to make necessary changes that will be beneficial to their future. These are positive changes that will help make life better and solve social problems. These changes are completed through a systematic outlook called the reconstructionist philosophy. However, the reconstructionist philosophy is not a philosophy in the traditional sense of the word since it does not seek to make detailed epistemological or logical studies. Reconstructionism is more concerned with the broad social and cultural fabric in which humans exist. As a result, reconstructionist philosophy should be seen as a purely social philosophy. For example, reconstructionist educators focus on a curriculum that highlights social reform as the aim of education. Leading exponents of reconstructionism include George S. Counts and Theodore Brameld.

Reconstructionist ideas in one form or another have existed throughout history. In his book, The Republic, Plato forms a plan for a just state in which education is the building material for a new and better society. Equally, Augustine, a Christian philosopher, preached reconstructionist reforms to make possible an ideal Christian state. Robert Owen and Edward Bellamy were a part of the Industrial Revolution and appreciated the use of technology to improve humanity throughout the world other than as a means of producing wealth. Karl Marx received a doctorate in philosophy yet wrote extensively on economics and history. According to Marx, education has long been used to manipulate people into accepting the attitudes of the ruling class. However, the hidden curriculum in school life can be used to overthrow the interests of the ruling class. Hidden curriculum is defined as all activities that go on as students learn subject matter, and the lessons that those other activities convey about the value and the meaning of what the students are learning. John Dewey saw education as a tool for immediate and continuous change of individuals and societies. During the 1920s and 1930s, his philosophy became identified with radical social reform and directions.
8.1.1 Theodore Brameld

A philosopher and visionary educator who developed the reconstructionist philosophy of education, Theodore Brameld (1904 - 1987) spent a lifetime working for personal and cultural transformation through education (please refer to Figure 8.1). Much influenced by John Dewey’s educational philosophy, Brameld urged that schools become a powerful force for social and political change. He welcomed reasoned argument and debate both inside and outside the classroom when he was teaching at Long Island University, New York University, and Boston University in the United States of America. George S. Counts also influenced Brameld deeply. Writing in The Social Frontier, a journal of educational and political critique, Brameld argued for a radical philosophy that analyses weaknesses in the social, economic, and political structure. From this analysis came constructive blueprints for a new social order that challenged social inequities like prejudice, discrimination, and economic exploitation. These issues were addressed in Minority Problems in Public Schools, published in 1945. Placing abundant faith in the common person, Brameld considered democracy the core of his educational philosophy. In 1950, he asserted in Ends and Means in Education: A Mid-Century Appraisal that education needed a reconstructed perspective and suggested reconstructionism as an appropriate label to distinguish this philosophy. Many of Brameld’s ideas grew out of his experience in applying his philosophical beliefs to a school setting in Floodwood, Minnesota where he worked with students and teachers to develop democratic objectives. Brameld also insisted that controversial issues and problems ought to play a central role in education as he considered that no issue should be out of bounds for discussion and critical analysis.

Starting in 1950 with the publication of Patterns of Educational Philosophy: A Democratic Interpretation, Brameld developed his cultural interpretation of four philosophies of education: (1) essentialism, (2) perennialism, (3) progressivism, and (4) reconstructionism. He viewed essentialism as an educational philosophy concerned mainly with the conservation of culture; perennialism as centering on the classical thought of ancient Greece and medieval Europe; progressivism as the philosophy of liberal, experimental education; and reconstructionism as a radical philosophy of education responding to contemporary crisis. In his writings throughout the 1950s, Brameld maintained that reconstructionists - like progressivists - opposed any theory that viewed values as absolute or unchanging. Values must be tested by evidence and grounded in social consensus.
Brameld continued to refine his philosophy in his many publications. In 1965, a small but influential book, *Education as Power*, clearly and concisely outlines many of the major tenets of reconstructionism. Education has two major roles: (1) to transmit culture and (2) to modify culture. For instance, when American culture is in a state of crisis, the second of these roles - that of modifying and innovating - becomes more important. Reconstructionism, as Brameld affirmed, is a crisis philosophy; the reconstructionist is very clear as to which road mankind should take, but he or she is not at all clear as to which road it will take.

Above all, reconstructionism is a philosophy of values, ends, and purposes, with a democratically empowered world civilization as the central goal of education. Social self-realization (the realization of the capacity of the self to measure up to its fullest, most satisfying powers in cooperative relationship with other selves) is the capstone of reconstructionist theory and practice. Brameld also pays attention to politics, human relations, religion, and the arts in his philosophy. A commitment to existential humanism remains constant. Defensible partiality, a central concept in reconstructionism, suggests a search for answers to human problems by exploring alternative approaches and then defending the partialities that emerge from a dialectic of opposition.

Brameld's abiding interest in the concept of culture led him to write a scholarly volume, *Cultural Foundations of Education: An Interdisciplinary Exploration* (1957), that demonstrated his debt to influential anthropologists. One of Brameld's final books, *The Teacher as World Citizen: A Scenario of the 21st Century* (1976), provides a visionary outline and culmination of many of his lifelong hopes and beliefs. He wrote as if he was looking back from the eve of the year 2001, the teacher-narrator recalling global transformations of the preceding quarter century. Radical changes have occurred, especially the establishment of a World Community of Nations based on a global Declaration of Interdependence.

Brameld's conception of the utopian spirit as a realizable vision of what could and should be achieved was influenced greatly by many scholars. However, some critics found that Brameld's educational philosophy was too goal-centered and utopian while others were disturbed by his advocacy of teachers as social change activists. As others criticized his early interest in Marx, as well as his ongoing critique of the capitalist value system, Brameld's unpopular commitment in intercultural education and education for a world community in the 1950s was more widely embraced as multicultural and global education a half century later. (Text has been adapted from: http://education.stateuniversity.com)
8.1.2 George S. Counts

George Counts (1889-1974), another prominent thinker of the reconstructionist philosophy, recognized that education was the means of preparing people for creating this new social order (please refer to Figure 8.2). He is a leading spokesman for the social reconstructionist point of view in American education and also an authority on the Soviet Union educational system.

Apart from his concentration on Russian education, much of Counts' teaching and research was devoted to understanding the school as a social institution, its relations to other social institutions, and its potential for fostering social betterment. The Selective Character of American Secondary Education (1922) and The Social Composition of Boards of Education (1927) were two other significant books published by Counts during the 1920s. The former argued that schools were partly responsible for the continuance of social inequality, and the latter pointed to the influence on American education of the existing power structure in society. In these and other works completed during the 1920s, Counts introduced themes that foreshadowed the social reconstructionism with which he was identified in the 1930s.

In 1932, at the depths of the Great Depression, Counts combined three speeches into a slim volume called Dare the School Build a New Social Order? His speech titled Dare Progressive Education Be Progressive? articulated the anxieties and ambitions of professional educators during the Depression. He demanded that teachers should put their talents to work not only as educators but as economic reformers and political activists. He insisted that only education could advance the cause of social reform without revolution. Counts challenged educators to take an increased role in leadership and government and to impart to their students a sense of progressive politics. Moreover, Counts argued for the replacement of traditional capitalism with some form of democratic collectivism in order to avert social and economic chaos. He called for educators to shape the attitudes of children so that they would be receptive to the idea that collective control of the economy was necessary. Thus schools, according to Counts, could become the incubators of a great society dedicated to cooperation rather than to exploitation.

All of this enhanced Counts' stature among the reconstructionists or the frontier group, as they were alternatively labeled, but also made him a prime target for the criticism of conservatives who viewed him as
something of a communist sympathizer, bent on undermining the American way of life.

George S. Counts adhered to reconstructionism as a philosophy of education. He advocated the present and the future, not the classics of the past, in developing the curriculum. There are numerous serious problems in society presently which need identifying. Solutions need to be sought for these problematic situations. It is necessary to achieve these solutions quickly, since time can run out in solving the identified problems: unemployment, housing, food for needy people, racial discrimination, and educational opportunities for all. In addition, the school must reflect problems in society and take the lead in working towards solutions. Classroom teachers have the capacity and leadership to aid schools in taking the lead to improve society. The school curriculum must emphasize problem-solving involving problems inherent in society. Dividing the curriculum into traditional subject matter areas such as geography, history, reading, spelling, science, writing, geometry, algebra, and arithmetic (among others) is outdated. Life in society does not demand these divisions. Rather, subject matter is integrated and used to solve problems. George S. Counts opposed:

- Teachers solely selecting objectives, learning activities, and appraisal procedures for students.
- Teachers sequencing experiences and activities for students.
- The use of precise measurable ends in teaching-learning situations.
- A classical curriculum emphasizing great ideas of the past.
- A conservative course of study which stresses a stable and static curriculum.

(Text has been adapted from: http://www.encyclopedia.com)

Summarise the main ideas of the following reconstructionists:

- Theodore Brameld
- George S. Counts

What role does reconstructionism play in society and school? Identify and discuss with regards to your society and school setting.

8.2 BEHAVIOURISM

Behaviourism is not considered a philosophy in the same vein as idealism, realism, or pragmatism. It is most
often considered a psychological theory, a more specialized and less comprehensive theory than a systematic philosophy. Nevertheless, behaviourism has been given increasing attention and acceptance in the field of education, so much so that in many instances behaviourism has extended into areas ordinarily considered the domain of philosophy. These extensions include theoretical considerations dealing with the nature of the human being and society, values, the good life, and speculations or assumptions on the nature of reality.

Behaviourism asserts that the only reality is the physical world that we discern through careful and scientific observation. People and other animals are seen as complex combinations of matter that act only in response to internally or externally generated physical stimuli. We learn, for instance, to avoid overexposure to heat through the impulses of pain through our nerves that is sent to our brain. Human nature, according to behaviourism, is neither good nor bad, but merely the product of one’s environment. It is not human nature but defective environments that are responsible for harmful things that people do to themselves and others. To a behaviourist, there is no such thing as free will or the autonomously acting person; such ideas are only myths that may make us feel better but do not correspond to scientific observation.

Furthermore, behaviourist theorists believe that behaviour is shaped deliberately by forces in the environment and that the type of person and actions desired can be the product of design. In other words, behaviour is determined by others, rather than by the individual’s own free will. By carefully shaping desirable behaviour, morality and information is learned. Learners will acquire and remember responses that lead to satisfying after-effects. Repetition of a meaningful connection results in learning. If the student is ready for the connection, learning is enhanced; if not, learning is inhibited. Motivation to learn is the satisfying after-effect, or reinforcement.

Behaviourism is linked with empiricism, which stresses scientific information and observation, rather than subjective or metaphysical realities. Behaviourists search for laws that govern human behaviour, like scientists who look for patterns in empirical events. Change in behaviour must be observable; internal thought processes are not considered.

Behaviourism has its roots in the early 1900s in the work of the Russian experimental psychologist Ivan Pavlov (1848-1936) and the American psychologist John Watson (1878-1958).
By refining and expanding their studies, Harvard professor B. F. Skinner (1904-1989) has emerged as the driving force behind the spread of behaviourism within modern American culture. Skinner developed the now-famous Skinner box which he used to train small animals through behavioural techniques (please refer to Figure 8.3). (Text has been adapted from: http://www.slc.sevier.org and http://ksuweb.kennesaw.edu)

8.2.1 Ivan Pavlov

Ivan Petrovich Pavlov (1849 - 1936) is widely known for first describing the phenomenon of classical conditioning (please refer to Figure 8.4). Ivan Pavlov's research on using the reinforcement of a bell sound when food was presented to a dog, and finding that the sound alone would make a dog salivate after several presentations of the conditioned stimulus, was the beginning of behaviourist approaches.

Learning occurs as a result of responses to stimuli in the environment that are reinforced by adults and others, as well as from feedback from actions on objects. Using Pavlov's experiment, a teacher can help students learn by conditioning them through identifying the desired behaviours in measurable, observable terms, recording these behaviours and their frequencies, identifying appropriate reinforcers for each desired behaviour, and providing the reinforcer as soon as the student displays the behaviour. For example, if children are supposed to raise hands to get called on, we might reinforce a child who raises his hand by using praise, such as, Thank you for raising your hand.

As Pavlov's work became recognized in the West, particularly through the writings of John B. Watson, the idea of conditioning as an automatic form of learning became a key concept in the developing specialism of comparative psychology, and the general approach to psychology that underlie it, behaviourism. Bertrand Russell was an enthusiastic advocate of the importance of Pavlov's work for the philosophy of mind.
Pavlov's research on conditional reflexes greatly influenced not only science, but also popular culture. The phrase Pavlov's dog is often used to describe someone who merely reacts to a situation rather than use critical thinking. According to a pure behaviourist, human beings are shaped entirely by their external environment. By changing a person's environment, you will change his or her thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. Providing positive reinforcement whenever students perform a desired behaviour will help them learn to perform the behaviour on their own. (Text has been adapted from: http://www.slc.sevier.org)

8.2.2 John B. Watson

John Broadus Watson (1878 - 1958), an American psychologist, established the psychological school of behaviourism after doing research on animal behaviour (please refer to Figure 8.5). He also conducted the controversial Little Albert experiment. Watson grew up in Greenville, South Carolina and attended Furman University there. He entered the University of Chicago to study philosophy with John Dewey, but claimed that he did not understand what Dewey was talking about.

Then, Watson hunted for a different advisor and settled on functionalist psychologist, James Rowland Angell and a physiologist, Henry Donaldson. Watson had also worked on the physiology of the dog's brain with Jacques Loeb, one of the most famous biologists in the United States at that time and a major proponent of the view that life and the behaviour of living organisms could be explained entirely through chemistry and physics without recourse to a supposed vital force. For that reason, Loeb assumed that all behaviour was dictated by instinct and learned responses to stimuli.

Through the combined influence of Dewey, Angell, Donaldson and Loeb, Watson developed a highly descriptive, objective approach to the analysis of behaviour that he would later call behaviourism. In 1924, Watson defined behaviourism as:

"Behaviourism ... holds that the subject matter of human psychology is the behaviour of the human being. Behaviourism claims that consciousness is neither a definite nor a usable concept. The behaviourist ... holds, further, that belief in the existence of consciousness goes back to the ancient days of superstition and magic..."
The great mass of people even today has not yet progressed very far away from savagery - it wants to believe in magic....Almost every era has its new magic, black or white, and its new magician.” (Blumenfeld, 1984).

Before that, in 1913, Watson published an article called Psychology as the Behaviourist Views It (occasionally called The Behaviourist Manifesto) describing the major features of his new philosophy of psychology termed behaviourism. The first paragraph of the article concisely explains Watson’s behaviourist position:

“Psychology as the behaviourist views it is a purely objective experimental branch of natural science. Its theoretical goal is the prediction and control of behaviour. Introspection forms no essential part of its methods, nor is the scientific value of its data dependent upon the readiness with which they lend themselves to interpretation in terms of consciousness. The behaviourist, in his efforts to get a unitary scheme of animal response, recognizes no dividing line between man and brute. The behaviour of man, with all of its refinement and complexity, forms only a part of the behaviourist’s total scheme of investigation”

The article became well-known to psychologists generally after it started to be widely cited in introductory psychology textbooks in the 1950s. The article is also notable for its strong defense of the objective scientific status of applied psychology, which at the time was considered to be much inferior to the established structuralist experimental psychology.

With his behaviourism, Watson put the emphasis on external behaviour of people and their reactions on given situations, rather than the internal, mental state of those people. In his opinion, the analysis of behaviours and reactions was the only objective method to get insight about human actions. This point of view, combined with the complementary ideas of determinism, evolutionary continuism, and empiricism, has contributed to what is now called radical behaviourism.

Watson conducted the Little Albert experiment in 1920, reputed to be one of the most controversial experiments ever conducted in psychology (please refer to Figure 8.6). The goal of the experiment was to show how principles of, at the time recently discovered, classical conditioning could be applied to condition fear of a white rat into Little Albert, an 11-month-old boy. It is widely known that human beings are born with only two natural fears: fear of falling and the fear of loud noises. Albert was given a white rat and his
reaction was noted to be playful.

He had no fear of the white rat and was even comfortable picking the rat up while playing with it. The next time the rat was given to Albert, he did exactly the same thing. However, this time, a loud noise using a metal pipe and a hammer was made. The noise was so sudden and loud that it made little Albert cry. They did the same thing many times. Finally, when they gave Albert the rat without the noise, the child would cry at the mere sight of the animal. Next, they introduced a white rabbit and as soon as Albert saw the animal, he began to cry. They gave him a Santa Claus mask which also made him cry. Little Albert was conditioned to cry at the sight of the white rat, but in the process, he made the connection that anything white and furry would lead to a loud noise. This experiment gives us much insight into the parameters of the human mind.

The Little Albert experiment made Watson announce that as far as behaviourists are concerned, there was nothing within the organism to develop. If one started with a healthy body at birth, he continued, it would be possible through proper behavioural conditioning to make a person “a genius, a cultured gentleman, a rowdy, or a thug. This is encapsulated in Watson’s twelve infants quote:

*Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I’ll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief and, yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors. I am going beyond my facts and I admit it, but so have the advocates of the contrary and they have been doing it for many thousands of years.* (Behaviourism, 1930, p. 82)

Watson was even more materialistic than previous behaviourists. He thought that the major function of the nervous system is simply to coordinate senses with motor responses. Hence, the brain is only a part of the nervous system and not the seat of mind or consciousness or a self-active entity. He considered that the senses not only gain knowledge of the world but also are instruments in guiding activity. In denying mentalistic ideas of mind and consciousness, Watson also declined such concepts as purpose, feeling, satisfaction, and free will because they are not observable and as a result not capable of scientific treatment or measurement.
8.2.3 Behaviourism and Positivism

Watson’s desire for giving credibility only to direct observable things set a pattern for those who came after him in the field of behaviourism. E. L. Thorndike was inclined towards Watson’s viewpoint when Watson announced that anything that exists, exists in some quantity capable of being measured. Dazzlingly, this kind of thinking in psychology corresponds somewhat with philosophy, where positivism had given the same philosophical basis to Watson’s position. According to the positivism principle:

All knowledge comes from positive information of observable experience. Scientific methods are the best way of achieving this. All else is metaphysics.

Positivism originated out of the French Enlightenment. It was established by a French philosopher named Auguste Comte who sought to replace the brainpower approach of rationalism by leveraging the principles of the natural sciences such as physics, chemistry and biology. At the time of Comte, science was having a huge impact and was steadily replacing religion as the key authority for knowledge about what was true or false. Even today, when something is pronounced scientific, it is generally held to be irrefutable.

The roots of positivism lie particularly with empiricism, which works only with observable facts, seeing that beyond this is the realm of logic and mathematics. The basic principle of positivism is that all factual knowledge is based on the positive information gained from observable experience; therefore, any ideas beyond this realm of demonstrable fact are metaphysical. Only analytic statements are allowed to be known as true through reason alone. For example, roses are flowers is analytic, whilst roses are fragrant is unreal and requires evidence.

Comte and positivism had influenced thinkers to use science in devising social policy, and behaviourists followed this tradition. Contemporary behaviourists are heavily influenced by Watson’s belief that through the use of scientific conditioning, virtually any kind of person can be produced from a reasonably healthy child.

The school of thought named logical positivism emerged when modern positivism began to show more interest in the logic and language of scientific concepts. Logical positivism attempted to make philosophy more rigorous by creating criteria for evaluating the truth or falsity of certain philosophical statements. Its main criteria for any statement is verifiability, which comes from two different sources: (1) empirical statements, which come from
science, and (2) analytic truth, statements which are true or false by definition. Logical positivism heavily influenced the philosophy of science, logic, and the philosophy of language. Logical positivists include philosophers like Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead.

Ozmon and Craver (2008) assert that the connection of positivism and behaviourism is where the behaviourist seeks a language framework that more accurately reflects the facts of behaviour. Rather than using the concept of self to signify personal identity or the characteristics of an individual, behaviourists speak of the conditioned or reinforced behaviours. The behaviourist maintains that because so little is known about behaviour, people wrongly assign meaning to behaviour by reference to an inner being, a self, mind, consciousness, soul, or some such hidden entity that causes the behaviour.

Together with their concern for more linguistic accuracy, logical positivists have coined the principle of verification; that no statement should be taken as truthful unless it can be verified empirically or at least until it is capable of being verified. The behaviourist, mindful of careless linguistic and logical statements, also seeks to avoid such mistakes. Behaviourists maintain that observable, factual behaviour and environmental conditions do exist, and they must be explained in objective, logical, and accurate terms. (Text has been adapted from: http://changingminds.org)

8.2.4 B. F. Skinner

Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1904 - 1990) was an American psychologist and advocate for social reform (please refer to Figure 8.7). He was the Edgar Pierce Professor of Psychology at Harvard University from 1958 until his retirement in 1974. Skinner invented the operant conditioning chamber, innovated his own philosophy of science called radical behaviourism, and founded his own school of experimental research psychology - the experimental analysis of behaviour.

Radical behaviourism is a philosophy developed by Skinner that underlies the experimental analysis of behaviour approach to psychology. Radical behaviourism proposes that all organismic action is determined and not free.

Radical behaviourism inherits from behaviourism the position that the science of behaviour is natural science, a belief that animal behaviour can be studied profitably and
behaviour is natural science, a belief that animal behaviour can be studied profitably and compared with human behaviour, and a desire for operationalizing. Its principal differences are an emphasis on operant conditioning, use of idiosyncratic terminology or jargon, a tendency to apply notions of reinforcement to philosophy and daily life and, particularly, an emphasis on private experience.

Radical behaviourism embraces the genetic and biological endowment and ultimately evolved nature of the organism, while simply asserting that behaviour is a distinct field of study with its own value. From this two neglected points emerge radical behaviourism. Radical behaviourism does not involve the claim that organisms are tabula rasa without genetic or physiological endowment.

Skinner's psychological work focused on operant conditioning, with emphasis on the schedule of reinforcement as independent variable, and the rate of responding as dependent variable. Operant techniques have made extensive use of reinforcement. Roughly speaking, in operant conditioning, an operant is actively emitted and produces changes in the world, that is, produces consequences that alter the likelihood that the behaviour will occur again.

Operant conditioning has two basic purposes: (1) increasing or (2) decreasing the probability that a specific behaviour will occur in the future, which are accomplished by adding or removing one of two basic types of stimuli: (1) positive or pleasant or (2) negative or aversive:

- If the probability of a behaviour is increased as a consequence of the presentation of a stimulus, that stimulus is a positive reinforcer: \( R^+ \);
- If the probability of a behaviour is increased as a consequence of the withdrawal of a stimulus, that stimulus is a negative reinforcer: \( R^- \);
- If the probability of a behaviour is decreased as a consequence of the presentation of a stimulus, that stimulus is a positive punisher: \( P^+ \); and
- If the probability of a behaviour is decreased as a consequence of the withdrawal of a stimulus, that stimulus is a negative punisher or response cost punishment: \( P^- \).

Negative reinforcement and punishment are often confused. It is important to note that a reinforcer is anything that increases the likelihood that a behaviour will happen again. A punisher will always decrease
behaviour. Operant conditioning tells something about the future of the organism: that in the future, the reinforced behaviour will be likely to occur more often.

Skinner wrote Beyond Freedom and Dignity in 1971 that argued to facilitate entrenched belief in free will and the moral autonomy of the individual, which Skinner referred to as dignity, hinders the prospect of using scientific methods to modify behaviour for the purpose of building a happier and better organized society. Skinner attempted to promote his philosophy of science, the technology of human behaviour, his conception of determinism, and what he calls as cultural engineering. Skinner argues that a technology of behaviour is possible and that it can be used to help solve currently pressing human issues such as over-population and warfare:

Almost all major problems involve human behaviour, and they cannot be solved by physical and biological technology alone. What is needed is a technology of human behaviour.

Skinner also creates for a more precise definition of freedom, one that allows for his conception of determinism; action that is free from certain kinds of control, and speaks to the conventional notion of freedom by disputing against autonomous man. Skinner notes that the forces of freedom and dignity have led to many positive advances in the human condition, but may now be hindering the advance of a technology of human behaviour.

According to Skinner, dignity is the process by which people are given credit for their actions and note that credit is typically a function of the conspicuousness of control. We give less or no credit, or blame, to those who are overtly coached, compelled, prompted or otherwise not appearing to be producing actions spontaneously. Skinner saw punishment as the logical consequence of an unscientific analysis of behaviour as well as the tradition of freedom and dignity. Since individuals are seen to be making choices they are then able to be punished for those choices. Skinner speaks to feelings about what is right, as well as popular notions of good and suggests that cultural evolution is a way to describe the aggregate of behaviour as a culture is a collection of behaviour, or practices. As a society, we can control and design the culture in such a way that good gets rewarded and bad gets extinguished. In short, with the right behavioural technology, we can design culture. To Skinner people are bodies displaying repertoires or ranges of behaviour:

The picture which emerges from a scientific analysis is not of a body with a person inside, but of a body which is a person in the sense that it displays a complex repertoire of behaviour... What is being abolished is autonomous
man - the inner man, the homunculus: very small human being, the possessing demon, the man defended by the literatures of freedom and dignity. His abolition has long been overdue... Science does not dehumanize man, it de-homunculizes him.

Skinner asserted that positive reinforcement is more effective at changing and establishing behaviour than punishment, with obvious implications for the widespread practice of rote or repetition learning and punitive or corrective discipline in education. He also propose that the main thing people learn from being punished is how to avoid punishment. According to Skinner there are five main obstacles in learning: people have a fear of failure; the task is not broken down into small enough steps; there is a lack of directions; there is also a lack of clarity in the directions; and positive reinforcement is lacking. Using Skinnerian beliefs, a learner can be taught using five principles to deal with the learning problems, that are giving the learner immediate feedback; breaking down the task into small steps; repeat the directions as many times as possible; start working from the most simple to the most complex tasks; and finally giving positive reinforcement. (Text has been adapted from: http://en.wikipedia.org)

(a) What is behavior? How do behaviorists explain behavior?
(b) What is the difference between a reinforcer and a reward?
(c) Behaviorists use a lot of punishment. Do they actually do this? Explain.

In your opinion, is the Little Albert experiment ethical? Discuss.

8.3 EXISTENTIALISM

Although often treated like a philosophical school of thought, it would be more accurate to describe existentialism as a trend or tendency that can be found throughout the history of philosophy. Basically, existentialists focus primarily on matters such as choice, individuality, subjectivity, freedom, and the nature of existence itself. The nature of reality for existentialists is subjective, and lies within the individual. The physical world has no inherent meaning outside of human existence. Individual choice and individual standards rather than external standards are central. Existence comes before any definition of what we are. We define ourselves in relationship to that existence by the choices we make.

We should not accept anyone else's predetermined philosophical system; rather, we must take responsibility for
deciding who we are. The focus is on freedom, the development of authentic individuals, as we make meaning of our lives. In brief, existentialism is a twentieth century philosophy concerned with human existence, finding self, and the meaning of life through free will, choice, and personal responsibility. The belief that people are searching to find out who and what they are throughout life as they make choices based on their experiences, beliefs, and outlook without the help of laws, ethnic rules, or traditions.

Existentialism then stresses that a person’s judgment is the determining factor for what is to be believed rather than by religious or secular world values. Among the major philosophers identified as existentialists are Soren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre.

8.3.1 Soren Kierkegaard

Soren Kierkegaard (1813 - 1855) was from a wealthy and prominent merchant family in Copenhagen, Denmark (please refer to Figure 8.8). His father was a firmly committed to a strict approach to faith and life and sought to ensure that his family would grow up within a firmly Lutheran household. His father also appears to have been personally endowed with intelligence, imagination, spirituality, melancholy and a tendency towards feeling a strong sense of guilt; where Soren, at least, inherited all these traits.

However, Kierkegaard chose not to follow the path in life to which he had seemed be directed; he decided that he would not put himself forward for ordination as a Lutheran minister. In his journal wrote in 1935, he said that:

“the thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die”. Kierkegaard was primarily a philosopher who asked searching questions as to how best, that precious and rare thing, a human life, ought to be lived. He himself used the terms existential and existentialism in relation to his philosophisings, his heartfelt view was that life, existence, in all its aspects was subjective and ambiguous. Philosophy was seen as an expression of an intensely and courageously examined individual existence; an expression that was, hopefully, free from illusion. In his view individuals must be prepared to defy the accepted practices of society, if this was necessary to their leading, what seemed to that person, to be a personally valid and meaningful life.
In one of Kierkegaard's earliest work in 1843, titled Either/Or, suggested that people might effectively choose to live within either of two existence spheres, that he called the aesthetic and the ethical spheres. Aesthetical lives were lives lived in search of such things pleasure, novelty, and romantic individualism.

Nevertheless, Kierkegaard thought that such pleasure, novelty, and romantic individualism would eventually tend to decay or become meaningless and this would inevitably lead to much boredom and dire frustration. On the other hand, ethical lives mean as being lived very much in line with a sense of duty to observe societal and confessional obligations. Such a life would be easy, in some ways, to live, yet would also involve much compromise of several genuinely human faculties and potentials. Such compromise would inevitably mean that human integrity would tend to be eroded although lives seemed to be progressing in a bourgeois-satisfactory way. Thus, what sort of person a person tended to become was very dependent on the life choices they made and the sort of lives they subsequently led.

In his later works he suggested that there was a third, religious, sphere where people accepted that they could live in the truth that they were individual before the eternal to which they belonged. By living in this truth people could achieve a full unity of purpose with all other people who were also, individually, living in the same truth. This is the choice that he made for himself in his own efforts to live a life which he considered to be valid. Kierkegaard ideas became controversies with the Lutheran Church in Denmark where he had formed the view that the church was at that time open to being seen as worldly and corrupt and he had made some blatant public criticisms known to all. Through Kierkegaard efforts, the word existentialism gained familiarity with increasing number of people take sides of this thought. (Text has been adapted from: http://www.age-of-the-sage.org)

8.3.2 Jean-Paul Sartre

Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre (1905 - 1980), commonly known as Jean-Paul Sartre, was one of the leading figures in French philosophy and existentialism (please refer to Figure 8.9). He was educated in his native Paris and at German universities; Jean-Paul Sartre taught philosophy during the 1930s at La Havre and Paris. He was captured by the Nazis while serving as an Army meteorologist, Sartre was imprisoned for one year before returning to his teaching position, where he participated actively in the French resistance to German occupation until the liberation.
Recognizing a between the principles of existentialism and the more practical concerns of social and political struggle, Sartre wrote not only philosophical treatises but also novels, stories, plays, and political pamphlets. Sartre’s philosophical influences clearly include Descartes, Kant, Marx, Husserl, and Heidegger. Employing the methods of descriptive phenomenology to new effect, his Being and Nothingness in 1943 offers an account of existence in general, including both the being-in-itself of objects that simply are and the being-for-itself by which humans engage in independent action. Sartre devotes particular concern to emotion as a spontaneous activity of consciousness projected onto reality. Emphasizing the radical freedom of all human action, Sartre warns of the dangers of mauvaise foi (bad faith), acting on the self-deceptive motives by which people often try to elude responsibility for what they do.

In addition, in the lecture Existentialism is a Humanism of 1946, Sartre described the human condition in summary form: freedom entails total responsibility, in the face of which we experience anguish, forlornness - lonely and miserable, and despair; thus genuine human dignity can be achieved only in our active acceptance of these emotions. Sartre asked the question: Are all humanists also existentialists? which then he answered that it is not necessarily since there is a close affinity between existentialism and humanism, but they are not quite the same thing. The easiest way to explain is to quote Sartre himself mentioned:

“I have been reproached for suggesting that existentialism is a form of humanism: people have said to me, “But you have written in your Nausée that the humanists are wrong, you have even ridiculed a certain type of humanism, why do you now go back upon that?”

In reality, the word humanism has two very different meanings:

“One may understand by humanism a theory which upholds man as the end in itself and as the supreme value. Humanism in this sense appears, for instance, in Cocteau’s story Round the World in 80 Hours, in which one of the characters declares, because he is flying over mountains in an airplane, “Man is magnificent!” This signifies that although I, personally, have not built aeroplanes I have the benefit of those particular inventions and that I, personally, being a man, can consider myself responsible for, and honored by, achievements that are peculiar to some men. It is to assume that we can ascribe value to man according to the most distinguished deeds of certain men. That kind of humanism is absurd, for only the dog or the horse would be in a position to pronounce a general judgment upon man and declare that he is magnificent, which they have never been such fools as to do -
at least, not as far as I know. But neither is it admissible that a man should pronounce judgment upon Man. Existentialism dispenses with any judgment of this sort: an existentialist will never take man as the end, since man is still to be determined. And we have no right to believe that humanity is something to which we could set up a cult, after the manner of Auguste Comte. The cult of humanity ends in Comtian humanism, shut-in upon itself, and - this must be said - in Fascism. We do not want a humanism like that.”

Sartre added by revealing that:

“But there is another sense of the word, of which the fundamental meaning is this: Man is all the time outside of himself: it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that he makes man to exist; and, on the other band, it is by pursuing transcendent aims that he himself is able to exist. Since man is thus self-surpassing, and can grasp objects only in relation to his self surpassing, he is himself the heart and center of his transcendence.” Besides, he said that: “there is no other universe except the human universe, the universe of human subjectivity. This relation of transcendence as constitutive of man - not in the sense that God is transcendent, but in the sense of self surpassing, with subjectivity - in such a sense that man is not shut up in himself but forever present in a human universe - it is this that we call existential humanism. This is humanism, because we remind man that there is no legislator but himself; that he himself, thus abandoned, must decide for himself; also because we show that it is not by turning back upon himself, but always by seeking, beyond himself, an aim which is one of liberation or of some particular realisation, that man can realize himself as truly human.”

We find that Sartre rejects any connection between humanism and existentialism if humanism means putting humanity on a pedestal and declaring that, because of the achievement of a few individuals, all human beings are thereby exalted. This is not to deny those achievements or even to deny that any individuals could achieve similar things, on the contrary, this is merely the insistence that no one is made better by anything other than their own actions. Finally, the key for existentialists is the ability of people to make the proper choices in their lives. There is no single human nature which limits us in what we can do and according to Sartre, we are all radically free and capable of doing whatever they want. It is the affirmation of humanity's freedom which, for Sartre, is the only appropriate humanism existentialism should follow. (Text has been adapted from: http://atheism.about.com)

Summarise the main ideas of the following existentialists:
• Soren Kierkegaard
• Jean-Paul Sartre

(a) In your own words, define existentialism.
(b) Can we really live an authentic existential life? Analyse and explain.
(c) Jean-Paul Sartre said: Man is nothing else but what he makes for of himself. Discuss and elaborate on its meaning.

8.4 RECONSTRUCTIONISM, BEHAVIOURISM AND EXISTENTIALISM IN PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Finally, we will consider in this section how these various philosophies apply in the field of education. This section consists of:

• Reconstructionism in philosophy of education
• Behaviourism in philosophy of education
• Existentialism in philosophy of education

8.4.1 Reconstructionism in Philosophy of Education

Reconstructionism is the changing of society, education, and using educational methods to make a social change. Changes in society need to occur quite often to keep up with the demands of the world. People turn to education to assist them with making a change. Reconstructionists encourage others to make necessary changes that will be beneficial to their future. These are positive changes that will help make life better.

Table 8.1 explains the role of the reconstructionism philosophy with regards to education:

| Aims of Education | The idea of change for a better educational system. Goals are needed to achieve the desired change. These goals are flexible in that they can be modified to overcome road blocks and possible problems. The belief is that |
all plans should be thought out in its entirety before beginning the task. There is no conflict between knowing and doing in reconstructionism. Education should include individuals and the society. They should work together and use each other as a support system to achieve their goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods of Education</th>
<th>Children should be exposed to real life issues to make connection to textbook material. Textbooks should not be the only means of educating. The textbook should be a supplement to the real life lessons taught. The reconstructionist believes that the teacher is simply a puppet when teaching. They are given material and expected to teach directly from the text and not deviate. Teachers are required to teach the textbook, because it contains the proper material to prevent questionable issues. According to reconstructionists, the appropriate way to teach includes a combination of both the textbook and real-life experiences.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>The curriculum for the reconstructionism philosophy involves the students being active in the community. They benefit from interaction in society on specific matters. Learning should take place both in the classroom and out. Reconstructionists believe that the curriculum should emphasize truth, fellowship, and justice. They believe in incorporating world issues and stepping outside local community ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Teacher</td>
<td>The teacher should be aware of the world issues and be able to incorporate them into his/her teachings. The teacher needs to motivate the children to use their education to help solve the problems of society. The teacher is essential in informing the students of the problems, giving possible solutions, and assisting the students in trying to solve possible issues. It is important for a teacher to be actively involved as a social activist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique of Reconstructionism in Education</td>
<td>Although wishing to change that area of society is a reconstructionist attribute, this attribute is not mutually exclusive with their other philosophies as to how they wish to change society. This creates an ambiguous division between pure reconstructionist and applied reconstructionists, that is those who do want the system changed but adhere to another philosophy on how to change it which is often the case.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pure reconstructionism is impractical. If one looks at history, all reconstructionists who have made great impact in society had done so in just one area under another philosophy. What just makes them reconstructionist is the fact that they wanted to change the system. For example, the Christian reconstruction gave rise to the Presbyterian Church. Reconstructionism is a way of thought that is best used in conjunction with other ways of thought. One wishes to change something about the system with respect with one's beliefs and not just with the notion that change is needed.

Source: http://pangeatec.selu.edu/~swoodson/edf607/reconstructionism.pdf

8.4.2 Behaviourism in Philosophy of Education

Behaviourist theorists believe that behaviour is shaped deliberately by forces in the environment and that the type of person and actions desired can be the product of design. In other words, behaviour is determined by others, rather than by our own free will. By carefully shaping desirable behaviour, morality and information is learned. Learners will acquire and remember responses that lead to satisfying aftereffects. Repetition of a meaningful connection results in learning. If the student is ready for the connection, learning is enhanced; if not, learning is inhibited. Motivation to learn is the satisfying aftereffect, or reinforcement.

Table 8.2 give details on the role of the behaviourism philosophy with regards to education:

| Aims of Education | Through behaviourism the aims of education is to develop appropriate behaviours in the classroom setting that are conducive to learning, having these consistent reward systems are crucial to obtain and continue desired, positive behaviours. Behaviourism is described as a developmental theory that measures observable behaviours produced by a learner's response to stimuli. Responses to stimuli can be reinforced with |

Table 8.2: Behaviourism in Philosophy of Education
positive or negative feedback to condition desired behaviours. Punishment is sometimes used in eliminating or reducing incorrect actions, followed by clarifying desired actions.

### Methods of Education

Instruction should be designed to produce observable and measureable outcomes in students but do not believe that teaching should be directed toward strengthening the mind, but should be aimed at producing desirable outcomes in students key concepts as learning for its on sake, rational, intellectual, traditional knowledge. Educational effects of behaviourism are key in developing basic skills and foundations of understanding in all subject areas and in classroom management.

### Curriculum

The behaviourist’s curriculum is based on science; thus, it is structured, researched, and can be measured to produce such quantifiable actions. The curriculum for behaviourism is designed with learning objectives that are small and easily manageable, and clearly states what is expected of the learner. Small amounts of information should be presented by lessons, and students should be reinforced positively when success at learning is demonstrated. For example, students should receive simple forms of motivation such as verbal praise, smiles, a touch on the shoulder, and candy.

### Role of Teacher

The teacher has control and students are raw material to be shaped. Teachers arrange reinforcements so that students come to behave as teachers want them to. Since the rewards are important to the learner in some way, students are more apt to work towards a goal. Teaching is the systematic shaping of a student’s behaviour views since the teacher acts as a manager, controller, predictor and director of learning. The role of the teacher is to determine the desired behaviour and to arrange the external contingencies which will reinforce the desired behaviour.

### Critique of Reconstructionism in Education

Human rationality can only be accounted for in a universe in which immaterial abstract entities exist. Rationality presupposes abstract entities such as laws of thought, ideas, and mind. Skinner explicitly rejects the existence abstract entities because behaviourism is a materialist or physicalist view of the universe. Laws can only exist in a universe where non-material things can
exist. Certainly, in a materialist’s universe, these things are excluded in principle since they are not matter, for no materialist would argue that a law of logic is composed of material substance. Behaviourism, thus, cannot adequately account for such things as unchanging, abstract, immaterial things like laws of logic. In addition, behaviourism undermines human experience by insisting that freedom, responsibility and novelty are illusions. However, the human experience valued by poets, musicians and educators is based on just such a world of freedom. These things are the subject of novels, films, and poetry. Finally, behaviourism is self-defeating because it is logically bound to material determinism. Material determinism is a description of reality which if true would mean every effect is produced by a material cause which is linked together in an unbroken chain, endlessly. In a behaviouristic world a person’s behaviour as well as everything else is predetermined by this blind cause/effect series.


8.4.3 Existentialism in Philosophy of Education

Related to education, the subject matter of existentialist classrooms should be a matter of personal choice. Teachers view the individual as an entity within a social context in which the learner must confront others views to clarify his or her own. Character development emphasizes individual responsibility for decisions. Real answers come from within the individual, not from outside authority. Examining life through authentic thinking involves students in genuine learning experiences. Existentialists are opposed to thinking about students as objects to be measured, tracked, or standardized. Such educators want the educational experience to focus on creating opportunities for self direction and self actualization. They start with the student, rather than on curriculum content.

Table 8.3 give explanation on the role of the behaviourism philosophy with regards to education:

Table 8.3: Existentialism in Philosophy of Education
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims of Education</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education should develop the student as an individual; the individual should be encouraged and freed to make choices, since it is through creative choices that one manifests one's freedom. Existentialism as an educational philosophy that helps the individual self come into a full realization of the following prepositions: I am a choosing agent, unable to avoid choosing my way through life; I am a free agent, absolutely free to set the goals of my own life; and I am a responsible agent, personally accountable for my free choices as they are revealed in how I live my life.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods of Education</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students should be trained to become creative individuals. They should not be instructed about the right answer, but be encouraged to consider options so that they might construct in their personal answers.</td>
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</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students should be allowed to dictate curriculum, to a degree, although existentialists tend to hold that the basics that reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies should be presented in relation to the students' affective development. Although any subject that has meaning for the individual can be justified for the existentialists' curriculum, the humanities hold a special place since they assist students in addressing ideas which help them understand themselves.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The existentialist teacher is seen as a facilitator who assists students in understanding themselves and their places in the world.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critique of Reconstructionism in Education</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It diminishes function of school &amp; teacher due to the overly introspective and the non-existence of the transcendent God and His Word. Each one does what is right in his one's own eyes. Put God out of our lives thus faith is dampened, truths lose continuity, and the Church ministries are affected.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


How do the following philosophies apply in philosophy of education:
- Reconstructionism
- Behaviourism
- Existentialism
SUMMARY

- Reconstructionism is a philosophical theory holding that societies should continually reform themselves in order to establish more perfect governments or social networks, thus social questions will emerge as there are quests to create a better society and worldwide democracy.
- Brameld urged that schools become a powerful force for social and political change.
- George S. Counts recognized that education was the means of preparing people for creating this new social order.
- Behaviourism asserts that the only reality is the physical world that we discern through careful and scientific observation.
- To a behaviourist, there is no such thing as free will or the autonomously acting person; such ideas are only myths that may make us feel better but do not correspond to scientific observation.
- Pavlov is widely known for first describing the phenomenon of classical conditioning.
- According to Pavlov, learning occurs as a result of responses to stimuli in the environment that are reinforced by adults and others, as well as from feedback from actions on objects.
- Watson put the emphasis on external behaviour of people and their reactions on given situations, rather than the internal, mental state of those people. In his opinion, the analysis of behaviours and reactions was the only objective method to get insight in the human actions.
- Watson conducted the Little Albert experiment in 1920, communicated to be one of the most controversial concern in psychology. The goal of the experiment was to show how principles of, at the time recently discovered, classical conditioning could be applied to condition fear of a white rat into Little Albert, an 11-month-old boy.
- Behaviourists preserve that observable, factual behaviour and environmental conditions do exist, and they must be explained in objective, logical, and accurate terms.
- Skinner invented the operant conditioning chamber, innovated his own philosophy of science called radical behaviourism, and founded his own school of experimental research psychology - the experimental analysis of behaviour.
- Skinner asserted that positive reinforcement is more effective at changing and establishing behaviour than punishment, with obvious implications for the widespread practice of rote or repetition learning and punitive or corrective discipline in education.
- Existentialists focus primarily on matters such as choice, individuality, subjectivity, freedom, and the nature of
existence itself. The nature of reality for existentialists is subjective, and lies within the individual. The physical world has no inherent meaning outside of human existence. Individual choice and individual standards rather than external standards are central. Existence comes before any definition of what we are. We define ourselves in relationship to that existence by the choices we make.

- Kierkegaard was primarily a philosopher who asked searching questions as to how best, that precious and rare thing, a human life, ought to be lived.
- Sartre devotes particular concern to emotion as a spontaneous activity of consciousness projected onto reality.
- According to Sartre, we are all radically free and capable of doing whatever they want.
- People turn to education to assist them with making a change. Reconstructionists encourage others to make necessary changes that will be beneficial to their future.
- Behaviourist theorists believe that behaviour is shaped deliberately by forces in the environment and that the type of person and actions desired can be the product of design. Learners will acquire and remember responses that lead to satisfying aftereffects. Repetition of a meaningful connection results in learning. If the student is ready for the connection, learning is enhanced.
- Related to education, the subject matter of existentialist classrooms should be a matter of personal choice. Teachers view the individual as an entity within a social context in which the learner must confront others' views to clarify his or her own.

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