

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ESSENTIALISM, PERENNIALISM, AND PROGRESSIVISM IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract: This paper examines three prominent philosophical streams in education—Essentialism, Perennialism, and Progressivism—and analyzes their implications for English Language Learning (ELL). Each philosophy offers a distinct perspective on curriculum design, pedagogy, and learning objectives. Essentialism emphasizes core knowledge and skills, Perennialism focuses on enduring ideas and great works, while Progressivism prioritizes student-centered learning and real-world application. This paper explores the key characteristics of each philosophy, provides real-world examples, and discusses their specific applications and implications within the context of ELL. By understanding these diverse perspectives, teachers can make informed decisions about instructional strategies and create more effective learning environments for English language learners.

Keywords: Essentialism, Perennialism, Progressivism, English Language Learning (ELL)

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy is essential in education for several key reasons, as it provides a foundational framework that influences teaching practices, curriculum development, and the overall educational experience. There are some main reasons of why philosophy is needed in education. First, philosophy clarifies the educational purpose. It means that by exploring questions about what education should achieve, teachers can establish clear goals and objectives. This clarity is crucial for guiding instructional strategies and ensuring that educational practices align with desired outcomes.

Next, philosophy guides curriculum development. This is so because different philosophical perspectives inform curriculum design. philosophy allows teachers to create curricula that reflect their educational values and meet the diverse needs of learners. In line with its influence in curriculum development, philosophy brings a strong impact on the teaching methods that teachers might apply in their daily practices. By grounding teaching methods in philosophical principles, teachers can adopt strategies that foster effective learning experiences.

Another thing to notice is that philosophy encourages critical thinking and reflection among teachers and students alike. Engaging with philosophical questions challenges individuals to analyze their beliefs, consider different perspectives, and evaluate the implications of their choices in educational contexts. This critical engagement is vital for developing informed and thoughtful learners.

Bigger than that, philosophy provides a framework for addressing ethical issues in education. Questions about equity, justice, and the role of education in society are deeply philosophical in nature. By grappling with these ethical

considerations, teachers can work towards creating inclusive and equitable learning environments that respect diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

Thus, a strong philosophical foundation will ultimately lead to improved educational outcomes. By integrating various philosophical perspectives—such as Essentialism for foundational skills, Perennialism for critical thinking, and Progressivism for real-world application—teachers can create a balanced approach that enhances student engagement and learning effectiveness.

Educational philosophy serves as a critical framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of education, encompassing its purpose, methodologies, and holistic goals. Within this broad spectrum, three prominent philosophical streams: Essentialism, Perennialism, and Progressivism, have deeply shaped educational practices and pedagogical approaches. Each of these philosophies offers unique insights and strategies that cater to different aspects of learning and teaching. Essentialism encourages a structured curriculum centered around essential knowledge and skills, emphasizing the importance of discipline and hard work in fostering academic achievement. On the contrary, Perennialism focuses on the exploration of enduring ideas and great works of literature, promoting critical thinking and moral reasoning through the study of classic texts. Progressivism, on the other hand, champions a learner-centered approach that prioritizes experiential learning and real-world applications, encouraging students to engage actively with their education. This paper delves into these three different philosophies, examining their core principles, and exploring their specific relevance to English Language Learning (ELL). In an increasingly globalized world where English proficiency is a crucial skill for personal and professional success, understanding the philosophical underpinnings of ELL becomes essential. By analyzing how each philosophy informs pedagogical approaches, teachers can enhance learning outcomes and create more effective instructional strategies that address the diverse needs of English language learners. This exploration not only highlights the of integrating these philosophical perspectives into teaching practices but also emphasizes the potential for a more holistic educational experience that prepares students for the complexities of modern communication in a global context.

DISCUSSION

A. Essentialism:

Essentialism promotes a fundamental curriculum comprising essential knowledge and abilities that all students must attain. It emphasizes discipline, hard work, and the transmission of traditional values and knowledge. Essentialism is rooted in the belief that universal knowledge and values should

be taught to students from an early age.

In the context of ELL, Essentialism translates to a strong focus on the fundamental building blocks of language:

1. **Grammar and Vocabulary:** Explicit instruction in grammar rules and vocabulary acquisition through drills, memorization, and structured exercises are central to this approach.
2. **Reading and Writing:** Emphasis is placed on developing strong reading comprehension skills and writing well-formed sentences and paragraphs, often through the analysis of classic texts and the practice of formal essay writing.
3. **Teacher-Centered Instruction:** The teacher plays a dominant role, delivering instruction, providing feedback, and assessing student progress through quizzes and tests.

Example:

A typical Essentialist ELL classroom might involve extensive grammar exercises, vocabulary lists with definitions and examples, and regular dictation or translation activities. For a detailed example: Learning grammar has a close relationship with discipline because the process of learning grammar requires consistency, rigor, and regular practice. The following is an explanation of the relationship between the two:

a. **Understanding Complex Structures:**

Grammar often involves complex and sometimes confusing rules. It takes discipline to learn, understand and remember these rules in order to apply them appropriately in communication.

b. **Practice Regularly:**

To master grammar, one needs to spend time regularly reading, writing and practicing the language. Without discipline in learning and practicing, progress in mastering grammar can be hindered.

c. **Perseverance in Correcting Mistakes:**

The process of learning grammar involves a lot of trial and error. Discipline helps one to stay focused on continuously correcting mistakes in speaking or writing, so that the grammar used becomes better.

Overall, these activities make students disciplined and discipline is an important foundation in the process of learning grammar. Without discipline, efforts to understand and apply grammar will be futile.

Implications:

Although Essentialism offers a robust framework for language structure, it may overlook communicative fluency and student involvement if not harmonized with alternative methodologies.

B. Perennialism:

Perennialism centers on the study of enduring ideas and great works of literature, philosophy, and art. It believes in the universality of human nature and the importance of developing rational thought and moral character. It equips students with knowledge that is relevant to everyday life and ready to face the challenges of the future. In the perennialist view, teachers have a central position as conveyors of knowledge, they are responsible for directing discussions and facilitating students' understanding of big ideas. Here students are considered as rational beings who have the potential to reach the truth through the guidance of the teacher.

The goal of Perennialism education is to encourage students to think critically and analytically through learning about the big ideas in history. Perennialism teaches students about eternal truths such as moral and ethical values. It equips students with knowledge that is relevant to everyday life and ready to face future challenges.

In ELL, this translates to:

1. **Classic Literature:** Reading and analyzing canonical works in English, such as Shakespeare, Milton, or Austen, are emphasized.
2. **Critical Thinking and Discussion:** Socratic discussions and debates are used to explore universal themes and ideas present in these texts.
3. **Development of Higher-Order Thinking Skills:** Students are encouraged to analyze complex language structures, interpret literary devices, and formulate well-reasoned arguments.

Example:

An ELL class using a perennialist approach might analyze Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, focusing on themes of revenge, morality, and human nature, while also examining the play's language and literary techniques.

Learning literature like *Shakespeare's Hamlet* has a close relationship with the development of critical thinking skills. *Shakespeare's Hamlet* involves the exploration of ideas, emotions, and values through text, thus encouraging its readers to analyze, interpret, and evaluate in depth. Here is the relationship between studying *Shakespeare's Hamlet* literature and critical thinking:

a. In-depth Analysis of Texts

Literature often has complex layers of meaning. Reading and studying literature encourages readers to analyze elements such as themes, symbols, characters, and conflicts. This process requires critical thinking skills to understand the relationships between these elements.

b. Practice Interpretation

In literature, there is no single answer to interpreting the meaning of a text. Readers need to use critical thinking to explore different points of view and arguments. This trains the ability to consider different contexts, backgrounds, and perspectives.

c. Improving Evaluation Skills

Studying literature involves evaluating the decisions made by characters or the values portrayed in the story. This helps readers develop the ability to judge actions, motivations, and consequences based on available evidence.

d. Improves Logic and Argumentation

When studying literature, readers are often asked to construct arguments about the meaning or value of a particular work. This requires the use of logic, analysis of evidence, and the ability to express opinions in a structured way.

Those processes build the ability to think logically, consider other points of view, and present arguments in a structured way.

Implications:

Perennialism can foster a deep appreciation for language and literature, but it may not adequately address the practical communicative needs of all learners.

C. Progressivism:

Progressivism emphasizes learning by doing, experiential learning, and student centered instruction. It believes that education should be relevant to students' lives and prepare them for active participation in a democratic society. In ELL, this translates to:

1. **Communicative Language Teaching:** The focus is on developing communicative competence through real-life interaction and authentic communication tasks.
2. **Project-Based Learning:** Students engage in projects that require them to use English in meaningful contexts, such as creating presentations, conducting interviews, or developing multimedia projects.
3. **Collaborative Learning:** Group work and peer interaction are encouraged to foster communication and collaborative problem-solving.

Example:

An ELL class following a Progressivist approach may undertake a project in which students investigate a local environmental concern, produce a public service announcement in English, and deliver their conclusions to the community. Students who are used to group work will be more adaptable in project teams at work. In group work, students learn how to cooperate with others, share ideas, and appreciate different points of view. These collaboration skills are very important in real life, both in the world of work and social relationships. Students who work in group learn to resolve conflicts in groups and will be better prepared to face challenges in work or the community. Group work involves discussion, presentation and sharing of information. It assists students in refining their oral and writing communication abilities, pertinent to both daily and professional contexts.

Implications:

Progressivism can enhance motivation and engagement by connecting learning to real-world contexts, but it may require careful planning and facilitation to ensure that all learners acquire the necessary language skills.

The understanding of the above educational philosophy streams can be briefly presented in the comparison and synthesis table below:

Comparison and Synthesis

Core knowledge (grammar, vocab)	Enduring ideas (classic literature)
Direct instruction, drills, memorization	Socratic discussion, textual analysis (real-world application)
Grammatical accuracy, basic fluency	Critical thinking, appreciation of literature

Feature Essentialism Perennialism Progressivism Focus Student experience
 Pedagogy Project-based learning, communicative tasks
 Learning Goal Communicative competence, fluency, real-world skills

In practice, all three concepts are frequently incorporated into an effective ELL curriculum. Explicit grammar instruction (Essentialism), literary text analysis to foster critical thinking (Perennialism), and project-based activities to foster communicative competence (Progressivism) could all be components of a well-rounded approach.

CONCLUSION

Essentialism, Perennialism, and Progressivism are three important educational philosophies that bring divergent, although complementary, insights and practices with deep implications for ELLs. Essentialism is a philosophical position predicated on a belief in a basic curriculum that holds fundamental knowledge and skills in reading, writing, and math as being absolutely indispensable for students if they are to grow into useful citizens. This philosophical theory advocates a structured teaching and learning environment in which the

teacher holds an authoritative role, imparting requisite knowledge through direct instruction but upholding the practice of mastering basics.

On the contrary, Perennialism seeks to develop in students critical thinking and a deepened appreciation for literature through the emphasis on permanent truth and universal knowledge. It calls for a curriculum rich in liberal arts, such as philosophy and natural sciences, advancing an inquiry-based pedagogical approach where students engage in discussions that sharpen their critical thinking. The approach sets the teacher in the role of a guardian of knowledge, guiding students through the discovery of eternal ideas that have shaped human thought.

Meanwhile, Progressivism emphasizes experiential learning in the development of communicative competence; that is to say, through group work and hands-on activities, students grapple with real-life problems in the learning process. In this student-centered approach, learners get to explore their own interests and become active participants in their learning process, which fosters a sense of control and meaning over their learning experiences.

By understanding these different learning philosophies—Essentialism's focus on basic skills, Perennialism's focus on critical thinking, and Progressivism's focus on experience-based learning—teachers can design more effective and engaging instructional approaches tailored to the diverse needs of ELL students. Future research should investigate hybrid methodologies that take elements from each of these three philosophies; this might help to provide a richer framework for both language acquisition and cultural integration, with a view to improving education outcomes in a variety of ELL settings.

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