



PHILIPPINE NORMAL UNIVERSITY

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**COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND
TEACHER EDUCATION RESEARCH**

Critical Analysis on
ED501 – Philosophy of Education

ESSENTIALISM:
*As a Philosophy and as a Philosophy of
Education*

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PART I - INFORMATION

Essentialism as a Philosophy

Essentialism as a Philosophy values the “essence” of each object. Essence can be defined as the attribute, or set of attributes that make an object what it fundamentally is, and must have. This essence describes a permanent, unalterable and eternal object. Without its essence, an object loses its identity.

Essentialism from the Different Points of View

- For the idealists, the abstract property of the object is its essence.
- For the realists, the essence of the object is the object per se. This essence categorized these objects.
- For the existentialists, the essence of the human nature is eternal, and unchangeable.

Essentialism as a Philosophy of Education

It is backed by the belief that there are certain basic skills, arts and science that are essential. These set skills and knowledge are essential in the PAST and are likely essential as well in the FUTURE.

History of Essentialism in Education

The main proponent of essentialism was William Bagley, a professor of education at Columbia University's Teachers College. This idea of Bagley, emerged during the 30's, as the state of American education is deteriorating, as compared to other countries (Guttek, 1990). Moreover, Bagley identified the cause of this problem was the emergence of progressivism, which he described as “essentially enfeebling”. Likewise, this idea again resurfaced during 1950's such as Bestor to criticize a new educational theory called “life adjustment” which focuses on personal and social skills over academic skills.

What do we teach in Essentialism?

- For Elementary – the 3R's (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic)
- For High School – History, Mathematics, Science, Language and Literature
- For College – Liberal Arts and Sciences
- Stresses Discipline, Respect for Authority and Nationalism

How do we teach in Essentialism?

- Essentialist views as teachers as models of discipline, socially-aware and masters of both content and culture.
- Teaching must take place in a well-organized and disciplined environment.
- Mastery of the subjects requires diligence and effort in the part of the learner.
- Curriculum must be carefully structured

Why do we teach in Essentialism?

- SOCIETAL – The goal of the education is to produce students that can be responsible enough to participate effectively in the society. For the essentialist, it agrees that the school is an essential social institution BUT, it does not agree that societal changes should be initiated by the school. However, the school should prepare the students to solve the societal problems by providing literacy and skills from a “socially aware” teacher.
- LIFE-LONG, GENERATIVE LEARNING - Students can be prepared to learn higher, more complex subjects. The essentialists focus on basic subjects which start from the basic, increasing its complexity.
- CULTURAL – To preserve and transmit the essentials of the common culture, and develop Patrimony.

PART II - ANALYSIS

I. Essentialism against Other Educational Philosophies

Essentialism and Perennialism

Perennialism and Essentialism are much more interrelated to each other, since it both agrees that schools should develop the students' rational and moral powers (Salandanan, 2012). They mutually believe that strategies should be teacher-centered, and does not allow students' interest to dictate teaching. With this, we can conclude that both of them are traditional, both in the What and Why's of teaching. The only difference, is that Perennialist focuses more on teaching the "Classics" and more philosophical in nature, as compared to the Essentialist who gives stress on basic skills and knowledge. Moreover, perennialist stresses on personal development first, as matched to the Existentialist, which focus on the development of essential skills of the learner.

Essentialism and Progressivism

Existentialism and Progresivism is far more different to each other. For progressivist, teachers should not focus on teaching universal truths or a particular body of knowledge but must educate the learners based on their interest (Salandanan, 2012). Thus, we can conclude that, on a progressivist point of view, it is the learner who determines his/her own pace of learning, and is the focus of the curriculum, while essentialism centers on the mastery of skills, regardless of the interest of the learners. Teachers were viewed by the progressivist as facilitators of learning, and the information should come from an actual experimentation (learning by doing). This contradicts the idea of the essentialist which views the teacher as an expert of his/her field, who is the source of knowledge by the students. Nonetheless, both philosophies accentuates that the goal of the education is to produce citizens that can responsibly, and actively participate in the society, which is, for the progressivist, is a democratic one, and for the essentialist, a disciplined one.

II. Criticisms on Essentialism

From its definition and terms, essentialism is indeed a very teacher-centered one. It stresses that teachers should be the source of knowledge and that students are just passive receivers of information (Ondego, _____). Students are forced to learn a body of knowledge and are expected to meet up with the standards set by the teacher. Furthermore, essentialism gives importance on traditional basic subjects, minimizing contemporary and creative subjects. This poses a threat that students trained under an essentialist point of view will lack creativity, since the learners were never given a chance to express themselves. Learners, also tend to lack adaptability in a fast changing world since they were taught traditional basic knowledge.

On the positive side, essentialism brings stability in education (Ondego, _____), since it focuses on a conservative and consistent subject areas which are already stable. Moreover, since essentialism focus on basic instruction, it gives the learner a stable and strong foundations of knowledge needed in a more complex subject. This idea helped the curriculum developers to structure the subject matter in a generative manner, starting from the basic education during the primary years, it gradually improved to complex subject. Furthermore, essentialism does not stressed only in basic skills and knowledge, but most importantly, Character, Discipline and Nationalism. Education under the essentialist point-of-view would yield into disciplined and responsible individuals who upholds the rule of law, and has a deep sense of nationalism in their mind, heart and in action.

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