

**A STUDY OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES****Dr. Meenakshi Lath***Associate Professor,**Bombay Teachers' Training College, Mumbai***Abstract**

*A level of mastery over foundational studies in philosophy have, in the past, been widely regarded as essential to the task of education of teachers. This paper throws a spotlight on the place of educational philosophy in teacher education and involves an investigation of pre-service teachers' educational philosophies. The educational philosophies questionnaire developed by LeoNora Cohen (1999) was administered to a group of 93 pre-service teachers who have never undertaken any course in educational philosophy.. The study revealed that the pre-service teachers associated most with the educational philosophies of essentialism and progressivism. Both these schools of thought share the attribute of awarding a central place to science and technology, embracing student-centred instruction with the teachers as guides, mentors and facilitators in the teaching-learning process. Progressivism centres the curriculum around the experiences, interests and abilities of students and the study of the natural and social sciences.*

**INTRODUCTION**

A level of mastery over foundational studies in philosophy, sociology and psychology have, in the past, been widely regarded as essential to the task of education of teachers. This paper throws a spotlight on one of those elements - the place of educational philosophy in the teacher education curriculum and involves an investigation of pre-service teachers' educational philosophies.

Philosophy is a 'love for wisdom', a pursuit of truth and search for the ultimate reality. The decline of philosophy of education has coincided with the increasing emphasis of practical skills like those related to the use of ICT in education. Teacher education programmes give less emphasis on the classic writings of the great educational thinkers, and more emphasis on field experiences, which is, at one level, justifiable.

The National Curriculum Framework of Teacher Education 2009 recommends the curricular areas of curriculum studies, pedagogic studies and assessment and evaluation studies for teacher education programmes. In line with the recommendations, several universities have done away with courses related to the philosophical foundations of education and instead introduced 'knowledge and curriculum' courses which introduce pre-service teachers to epistemological perspectives. However, epistemological beliefs are undeniably intertwined with philosophical beliefs and coloured by worldviews.

In the discourse on undergraduate teacher education in our country there are those who believe that with the absence of perspectives on educational philosophy in the teacher education curriculum. there is something missing. On the other hand, there are others who accept as true that the move of doing away with educational philosophy has actually been a progressive one, and has freed up the curriculum bandwidth to include several, more useful pragmatic elements.

This research paper, however, does not dwell on the polarity of these opposing points of view in this paper. Even without a grounding in educational philosophy, it is more than likely that pre-service teachers have a definitive worldview which influences their beliefs about education. Educational philosophy or beliefs refer to the nature of learning and beliefs about teaching and attempts to identify why, what and how one should teach. This is often influenced by our worldview - for example if someone has a naturalistic worldview as did Rousseau and to some

extent - Tagore, it is likely that this worldview will be reflected in their beliefs about education.

It has often been noticed, that at the end of the final semester of the teacher education programme, when the soon-to-graduate teachers were often required to write a statement of teaching philosophy and as part of their application. This trend that first started with ‘international schools’ has since caught on with other ‘progressive’ schools as well. Due to this reason, the researcher developed a curiosity to identify the predominant educational philosophies which prevailed among pre-service teachers.

This led the researcher to inquire into this with the following research questions in mind. What are the pre-service teachers’ educational beliefs? Which schools of thought do these beliefs most align with?

### **Decoding the philosophical jargon**

Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher who lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE observes that we must posit an equal and opposite reaction to every change because it maintains a certain level of equilibrium Barnes (1982). In philosophical circles it is often claimed in jest, that the first law of philosophy is: for every philosopher, there is an equal and opposite philosopher. The joke continues that the second law of philosophy is: both of them are wrong. Leaving the humour aside, it remains an established fact that in the world of philosophy, there exist a plethora of worldviews for a person to choose from. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to go into an in-depth exploration of the world philosophies, outlined very briefly below are a few of the schools of thought which are most popular in educational circles.

According to Cohen (1999) there are four world or general philosophies: idealism, realism, pragmatism and existentialism. These are also the philosophies which, in the past were included as part of the curriculum of most undergraduate education programmes.

Idealism is the philosophical school of thought which proposes that ideas are the only true reality. In other words, idealism believes in ‘mind over matter’. Plato was one of the foremost proponents of idealism. Plato’s student Aristotle, had an entirely different worldview. He believed in realism, a view which proposes a material view of reality, Ozmon (2012). In other words, reality is independent of the mind or ‘matter over mind’.

Pragmatists believe that reality is not something that is fixed and is constantly changing with the times. There are no absolute truths except those truths which work or enable you to solve problems. All educators are familiar with John Dewey, one of the pragmatist philosophers who emphasised the element of experience in education. Existential philosophy suggests that reality is subjective and the individual and human existence are paramount. Soren Kierkegaard is the foremost proponent of existentialism, Noddings (2015).

Related to one or more of the four world philosophies mentioned above are four educational philosophies widely used in classrooms all over the world: perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, and reconstructionism. Perennialism is an educational philosophy which suggests we need to teach the great ideas and everlasting truths, much in line with idealism. Essentialism, on the other hand, believes that we must teach the basics of information and skills needed for citizenship. Progressivism looks at education from the viewpoint of experimentation with experience being the whole essence of the educational initiative. Reconstructionism gives importance to social change and adopts a critical pedagogy aiming towards a better vision for the world Cohen (1999).

The related theories of learning align with the perspective of psychological orientations. The information processing model centres around a fixed body of knowledge and how the mind processes and stores information with the development of schemata. Behaviourism operates by attempting to shape desirable behaviour through reinforcement and believes in empirical reality. Constructivism is based on the construction of the knowledge in a unique manner by each learner, based on past experiences along with the scaffolding provided by the teacher.

Humanism gives importance to the cognitive and socio-emotional well-being of the child, in an atmosphere of freedom.

The above section briefly outlined the various schools of thought.

### The study

The inquiry adopted a descriptive survey approach. The participants in the study were a group of pre-service teachers who were undergoing an undergraduate programme in education and were training to be school-teachers. The tool used for the study was an ‘Educational Philosophies Self-Assessment Questionnaire’ which was developed by LeoNora Cohen (1999) for use as a part of a module on history and philosophy of education at Oregon State University. The questionnaire includes 40 items which cover the entire gamut of educational beliefs related to curriculum, teaching methodologies, assessments, role of the teachers and the place of the schools. The questions are framed in everyday language and use none of the jargon of philosophy. Hence it was deemed appropriate for the group which had never taken any philosophy course but had a fair understanding of knowledge, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. The scoring guide classified the responses according to educational philosophies of perennialism, essentialism, progressivism and reconstructionism - as well as the related theories of learning of information-processing, behaviourism, constructivism and humanism. These philosophies relate to the world philosophies of idealism, realism, pragmatism and existentialism.

The tool was administered to a group of 93 pre-service teachers who have never undertaken any course in educational philosophy. The descriptive data analysis was analysed based on the scoring guide and was done with the help of MS Excel. The questionnaire used was essentially a self-assessment and gave an opportunity to the learners to reflect on the various educational processes. Thus, an attempt was made by the researcher to weave this exercise into the tasks and assignments undertaken by the learners as part of their studies. As a mental exercise, after completing the questionnaire the pre-service teachers were asked to reflect on the questions and write up a teaching philosophy statement which summed up their most closely held beliefs about education. Reflective writing serves the purpose of giving voice to our innermost thoughts. While these teaching philosophy statements did not form a part of the analysis in the present research study, the statement was used by the pre-service teachers as introductory pages for the teaching portfolio maintained by them.

### Data Analysis:

The results of the descriptive analysis of the educational philosophies are presented in Table No. 1 below

**Table No. 1 Data Analysis of Educational Philosophies Questionnaire**

<b>Educational Theory of Learning</b>	<b>Philosophy/</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>of</b>	<b>Total</b>
			<b>of</b>		
			<b>Respondents</b>		
Perennialism		13.98			
Essentialism		18.28			
Progressivism		16.13			
Reconstructionism		12.9			
Information processing		5.37			
Behaviourism		15.05			
Constructivism		9.68			
Humanism		8.61			

From the table it may be seen that 18.28% of the pre-service teachers, the highest percentage aligned with the essentialism 6.13% teachers aligned with the progressivism, 15.05% aligned with behaviourist views, 13.98% of the sample aligned with perennialism and 12.9% of the pre-service teachers showed an inclination towards

reconstructionism. The lowest percentage of pre-service teachers - 5.37%, believed in the information processing theory of learning. 8.61% subscribed to humanism, 9.68% believed in constructivism.

The study revealed that the pre-service teachers associated most with essentialism and progressivism. Both these schools of thought share the attribute of awarding a central place to science and technology, embracing student-centred instruction with the teachers as guides, mentors and facilitators in the teaching-learning process. Progressivism centres the curriculum around the experiences, interests and abilities of students and the study of the natural and social sciences.

Insights gained through the process of the research study have led the researcher to reiterate that attention should be given to the philosophical bases of education while organizing any educational activity for pre-service teachers. It need not be in the form of a philosophical foundations course, but certainly, many activities can be conducted to encourage reflective and critical thinking during the teacher education process. Using an educational philosophy inventory is also a good way to enable pre-service teachers to consider their philosophical orientations. Reading and reflecting on the classic writings and extracts of the great thinkers who have contributed to education is another strategy that can be used. Book reviews are another way to get pre-service teachers thinking about educational practices. Infusing philosophical perspectives may be done through the 'knowledge and curriculum' courses as a precursor to teaching about epistemological perspectives.

It is said that philosophy is all about asking questions, attempting to answer these questions and questioning those answers. Whether for pre-service teachers or any human being, the purpose of philosophical inquiry is ultimately to clarify our own worldview which align our actions with our beliefs in the most authentic way possible. The present study was an opportunity for the pre-service teachers and the researcher to reflect on their practice as educators.

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