

# Chapter 5

## Teaching Philosophies of Career and Technical Education

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### ABSTRACT

*Teaching philosophies as applied to career and technical education are more complex than teaching philosophies studied for a liberal arts teacher. Adult learners present challenges not often encountered by elementary or secondary teachers. Contact with the world of work presents teachers with the paradox of preparing young people directly for work but maintaining a nurturing classroom environment. This challenge often requires unique and innovative solutions to the educational problem presented by adult learners. This chapter presents philosophical approaches the career and technical education teacher can use in the classroom or laboratory.*

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

To understand teaching philosophies one should begin with the Greek *philosophos*, “lover of wisdom”. In the intellectual traditions of ancient Greece, philosophy has related meanings such as: the study of the truths or principles underlying all knowledge, being, and reality; a particular system of philosophical doctrine; the critical evaluation of fundamental doctrines; the study of the principles of a particular branch of knowledge; a system of principles for guidance in practical affairs; and a

philosophical spirit or attitude (Brewer, Campbell, & Petty, 2000; Kneller, 1971).

Philosophers of education maintain that the task of the philosophy of education is solely to try to study and explain approaches to education and educational issues. Educational philosophy does, however, include broader areas of study such as historical writings on education by important philosophers. The philosophy of education and the history of education cannot be clearly separated (Thompson, 1973).

The improvement of educational decisions, policies, values, and methods must be an objective of educational philosophy if it is not to be merely

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an intellectual exercise. The relationship between educational theory and practice—how theory is applied and tested in practice and how practice improves theory should be a focus of educational philosophy (Kneller, 1971).

From its most basic beginnings with the pre-Socratics, the study of philosophy sought to find fundamental, natural principles that could explain what individuals know and experience about the world around them with a comprehensive set of principles that would account for their knowledge of both the natural and the human world (Hyslop-Margison, 2002).

Philosophers believe that asking questions and not providing answers sharpens our inquiring mind. We are, by nature, inquisitive beings. Philosophers have questioned the ways people lived and sought the most acceptable conclusion. Ancient philosophers, beginning with Socrates (469-399 B.C), studied the “good life” and realized their thinking could be a mechanism for criticizing or refuting common myths or thoughts of their predecessors. It was with this beginning that Socrates became the first genius of philosophy (Taylor, Hare, & Barnes, 1998).

This chapter will begin with a review of perspectives of philosophy: Speculative; Prescriptive; and Analytic. This is followed by a brief discussion of systemic and holistic perspectives and a detailed examination of four basic systemic philosophies: idealism; realism; pragmatism; and existentialism.

It is important that philosophy be studied with values and ethics, therefore a short presentation of these components is presented along with logic and philosophy. The chapter then moves to common educational philosophies: perennialism; progressivism; conventionalism; and reconstructionism.

The last section of this chapter is an examination of the philosophers themselves and their influence on philosophical methods, the branches of philosophy, and the philosophy of education. The meaning of philosophy is presented along with discussions of the philosophies of ideal-

ism, realism, pragmatism, progressivism and existentialism.

## **5.2 BACKGROUND**

From the earliest of times humans have sought to find fundamental, natural principles that explain what they know and experienced in the world around them. We as a people are constantly striving to find the scope of the universe or we try to conceptualize the world and our place in it. In short—to see how the world looks and how we fit (Brewer, Campbell, & Petty, 2000; Kneller, 1971).

Philosophy is a product of the human mind, such as a theory in geometry. What the human mind produces depends on its general competence, the information and other raw material with which it works, and the general setting in which it works. Philosophy is found in its consideration in the nature of humans, our world, our values and the good life (self actualizations). What do we live for? What is the purpose of life? What sort of life should it be (Brewer, Campbell, & Petty, 2000; Kneller, 1971)?

As educators we must try to comprehend philosophy in its entirety. Our task is to interpret these finding which affect education. There are three modes or styles of philosophy:

- Speculative.
- Prescriptive.
- Analytic.

**Speculative Philosophy.** Speculative philosophy is the oldest mode of philosophy. This philosophical mode is the study of what should be. Applying this mode helps us to build a systematic way to think about the universe in general and the humans in it. It is the attempt to think in the most general and systematic way about everything in the universe—about the whole of reality, because the human mind wishes to conceptualize all things. We seek a pattern to help us conceive all things.

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