

## Writing a Philosophy Statement

Writing a statement of your educational philosophy can be a meaningful experience for beginning teachers. The act of articulating one's beliefs and finding a way to express those beliefs to others can help provide clarity and direction as one continues to develop professionally. However, philosophy statements can also become mere repetitions of platitudes and slogans unless the writer explains the thought processes that were used to develop the statement. For example, saying "I believe all children can learn" can be a powerful statement of personal philosophy when paired with a discussion of what the writer means by learning and a description of how the writer arrived at the conclusion that all children can learn. Without the supporting explanation, the statement seems to be more slogan than substance.

Philosophies traditionally explore the sources and meaning of truth and knowledge. In writing an educational philosophy, then, we might consider how knowledge is created, transmitted, or shared in society. For example, do we believe that knowledge is "out there" somewhere, waiting for us to stumble upon it? Or, is knowledge inside us? Should teachers try to "fill students up to the brim" with facts or encourage students to come to their own conclusions? What other ways might we describe the processes of education?

For secondary teachers, a philosophy statement is often structured around specific issues within the subject matter. The statement might reflect how people learn English, for example, or the relative importance of dates & battles in the study of history. Methods courses within the major typically assist students develop understandings about the issues and dilemmas of the academic discipline.

Finally, the philosophy statement often reflects the major educational philosophies of perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, and social constructivism. Statements are probably most meaningful when they avoid "jargon," but refer as appropriate to the accepted vocabulary and concepts of education.

### Some statements reflecting major educational philosophies

The Perennialist might say: Schools should teach the classic subjects such as mathematics, literature, and the sciences. Time and history have shown us what is important. Recently, too much effort has been put into trying to solve social problems through the schools. We should re-focus our efforts on providing the opportunity for students to gain a strong classical education.

The Essentialist might say: Classical education is valuable, but we also need to include the basics for living as a productive citizen. Education should focus on developing a literate electorate. Some academic subjects do not directly relate to the "real world" but must be taught anyway. "Cultural literacy" is important. Social problems and issues may be important, but they should be handled outside of the school.

The Progressivist might say: The best education addresses the needs of the individual student. We need to educate the "whole" student: affective,

cognitive, and psycho-motor. Students learn best when they are challenged by work that relates to real-life problems. Some classical education is necessary, but the major goal of education is to help students work and live productively in an ever-changing society.

The Social Reconstructionist might say: The major goal of any education is to improve society. The school is the center of the community and as such, cannot separate itself from the social problems and issues in the community. Classical education is only valuable when it can help students learn how to make society a better place now and in the future.

One way to begin the process of writing your own philosophy statement would be to complete a series of sentences:

I believe that the goal of education is...  
I believe that the role of the teacher is...  
I believe that students should...  
I believe that parents and community members...  
I believe that knowledge is...

Once you have considered your beliefs about each of the above, try to write the "why" for each of them. For example, if I say "I believe the goal of education is to prepare people to become active and productive members of their community," I might list some reasons why I believe this: "a democratic society requires citizens to be active and involved, if people aren't prepared to work with their communities to make improvements, they might be stuck with bad situations or unresponsive governments, schools are important parts of communities and need to help students understand their own role as community members".

Now you have a list of reasons for your beliefs and you can begin to structure this into a narrative statement. Consider using an introductory paragraph that sets up the foundation for your statement and previews the information to follow. Then, you might group your ideas around the basic topics presented above (goals, roles, students, communities) or you might find that it makes more sense to group your ideas around common threads or themes from your list of reasons. Whichever approach you take, be sure to write in an active voice and use clear and logical ideas to support your statements.