Personal Philosophy Paper

As a means of guiding the coherency of this paper, I will divide it by three parts. First, I will discuss my own personal worldview and philosophical concerns (metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology). Secondly, I will discuss the philosophical concerns in regards to the role of the teacher, the nature of the student, effective instructional strategies, and the scope and sequence of curriculum. Thirdly, I will conclude this paper by discussing the changes of perspective in the “Beginning Questions” from the beginning of the course to my current stance.

World View and Purpose for Education

How we will define worldview is the way in which a person views the world as it pertains to what really matters to him or her. Basically, a person’s worldview comprises all the presuppositions that are held about the world. My personal worldview first and foremost rests on the presupposition that God exists and holds all things in existence (Colossians 1:17); from this perspective, I would hold very closely theologically with the idealists because my worldview is based on a perfect ideal (God). My worldview may be considered dynamic and constantly changing as I experience more and God reveals more to me, which fits well with a pragmatic claim that as humans we are constantly rearranging what is true to us. However, my own worldview would not go so far as to say that truth (in a finite and objective sense) ever changes, but it is the perception from a finite human perspective that is undergoing constant change. The part of my worldview that speaks on how I interact with the world borrows from the Neo-
Scholastic claim that one should exercise his or her God-given ability to reason through situations, but in the realm beyond human understanding faith should be employed. It is essential to realize that faith is not whimsical but rational and reasonable. It is realizing the end of my perceptual abilities and being able to rest in One who can sustain me (Psalm 55:22).

**Areas of Philosophical Concern**

Metaphysics speaks to what is real or can be claimed to be real. My metaphysical claim is that what is real can be divided into the physical, emotional/mental, and spiritual. A person may encounter real experiences in any of these three categories. In Matthew 21:37, Jesus instructs that the greatest commandment was to love the Lord with all their hearts (lives), soul (spirit), and mind (intellect), showing us that there is so much more to a human’s existence than just the body and the physical. This, of course, is in direct opposition to the metaphysical claims of the pragmatists, which say that only what is physically perceived can be claimed as reality.

Epistemology offers to answer the question, “What is true?” Epistemologically, I believe that truth has two sources: special revelation (truth has been directly revealed by God in Scriptures or otherwise like through prayer) and general revelation (truth that is revealed by nature, through senses, and by one’s seeking and/or observation of the natural world). It should not be said that general revelation exists outside of God, for God was the one who created it and nature has His print on it. Paul says in his letter to the Romans that God’s invisible attributes can be clearly seen in what He has made (Romans 1:20).

Axiology seeks to know what is of value and is divided into ethics (morally valued) and aesthetics (that which is of beauty). Ethically, that which is moral falls under God’s law and those individuals are changed into new creations in God’s commands. Paul stresses in his letter to the Ephesians to put off their old, carnal, self and put on the new self, which is created in
God’s likeness both in righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24). I also believe that God has placed in each person’s heart His law, which guides people generally into what is right (Jeremiah 31:33). On the side of aesthetics, that which is beautiful is that which best reflects and emulates the characteristics of God. The psalmist proclaims that the reason he praises God is because He has fearfully and wonderfully (meticulously and beautifully) created him; as is such for each creation He has made (Psalm 139:14). For sake of coherence, when I make reference to axiology in the second portion of this paper, it will be in reference to ethics, rather than aesthetics.

**The Role of the Teacher**

The metaphysics of the teacher’s role in a classroom is, at the very core, two sided. Firstly, from a perennialist perspective, the teacher is an authority figure that knows what the student should learn (the set standards) and should exact discipline if the students are not contributing to a conducive learning environment. Secondly, from a more progressive stance, the teacher is also a fellow learner with the students, coming in to each day with the perspective that there is always something new to learn, even from the students. The teacher should foster an environment in a way that the learners may engage the subject matter (this is in stark comparison with the behaviorist and realist claims that students are passive learners waiting to be filled with information) and be free to ask questions. Additionally, the teacher should ultimately be subservient to God because the students are His beloved children, He ultimately knows what is best for them, and by listening to God, a teacher may understand better how to teach his or her students.

Epistemologically, the teacher is the main source of information for the students in the classroom. The teacher should decide what is true to teach (the standards given) and should allow for he facilitation of learning, a principle of existentialists (not merely spoon-feeding
students information, but challenging students to discover and think). From this perspective, the teacher allows students to critically engage with the subject matter in a way that will make the subject true and real. Pulling from an idealist concept, teachers should also craft an environment that allows students to safely readjust their positions on truth as they acquire more information.

By way of axiology, the teacher should set a good ethical example for students; a statement an idealist would agree with. Teachers should do so in both showing what is right and moral as well as displaying proper life decisions. The teacher, with greater experience, should be able to show students how to live a life that follows God’s laws. This notion that the locus of everything in the classroom is from the teacher, including the instilling of morals, comes from an essentialist’s perspective. As such, the teacher’s role is great and it is with much responsibility.

**The Nature of the Learner**

Metaphysically, I have detailed that the teacher is responsible for discipline and ensuring each student is complying within a safe learning environment. This stance stems from two philosophical foundations when seen from the student perspective. The first is a perennialist view that externally enforced discipline of the classroom helps students internalize the will power that later will be needed as they face difficult tasks when they have no enforcer. The second is a behaviorist and realist perspective that the nature of the learner responds to the stimuli given. While the teacher has a significant amount of power over the reality of the classroom, the student has the greatest amount of control over what he or she chooses as priority to learn. As such a pragmatic philosopher would say that each learner is dynamic in the way he or she interacts with the content, comes into the class with interests and passions, and should be directed in a way that will maximize learning with the student’s motivational force. Also at the core of the
metaphysics of the learner is that they are beloved children of God and should be encouraged the best for the student should always be strived for. From a progressivist perspective, students will learn as long as they are not frustrated and a humanist confirms this in saying that a student learns least when they are bored, threatened, humiliated, or frightened.

The nature of the learner in regards to truth is first dynamic (from a pragmatic perspective). The learner also has a natural desire to learn and discover things (progressivism). Knowing that the student is dynamic and has a natural desire to learn and discover sets an important foundation to know how they interact with the information, since they are interacting with it at all times (either negatively or positively). So, while the teacher certainly has significant authority over how the information is presented, the learner ultimately holds the power of choosing whether something is worthy of learning or not. Pragmatists would further assert that it is their experience and interaction with the information that will affect what the priority of importance the subject is to the learner.

Learners, with high school students in mind, are developing their axiological perspective of the world, and as such the learner should have as many opportunities to see good and moral behavior as possible in the classroom. This notion of giving learners experiences to shape their perspectives was exclaimed by pragmatists and an educational imperative. For, they proclaim, the only way to truly get any knowledge is for a student to use his or her experiences with reflective thinking. Of crucial importance to the learner’s developing morality is the teacher’s influence as the locus of that moral authority in the classroom.

**Effective Instructional Strategies**

Instructional strategies that are effective should first be rooted in the learner (an existentialist principle, that the individual is at the very center of the learning experience). All
the instructional strategies employed by a teacher should have all roots in the educational, social, emotional, and/or developmental needs of the learners in his or her classroom. This is in stark contrast with instructional activities and plans that are prescribed without the student in mind and may leave certain students “slipping through the cracks”.

The availability of the information should be made accessible to all learners, not just the smart students or the quicker ones. As such the nature of instructional planning should allow for all students access to the information and allow each student to interact with the content in some way. Perrenialists insisted that what differentiated humans from the animals was their ability to think and reason. Therefore, it is the great imperative of the classroom that the instructional strategies employed would help all students progress to the state in which they are able to think and reason.

Effective instructional strategies should also serve to benefit and affect values of the learner after he or she has left the classroom. This might include discipline, kindness, empathy, or critical thinking that among other worthy attributes. This idea stems from a progressive point of view that the school and the classroom is a microcosm of the larger society that not only prepares the student for the real world but also actively equips them at all points in their education. As such, the school and the classroom is not a distinct social setting but should be a part of how the student learns morals, values, and how to interact with others.

**Curriculum Scope and Sequence**

As all things need some form of objective to be based on, so the major bulk of the curriculum is based on the academic standards given by the state. As such, the teacher needs to decide which parts of those standards of higher priority, as it may not be feasible to cover every standard in the time given. This is mainly a perennialist idea in which the subject matter, or in
this case the standards, take a priority in curriculum as it provides a proper scope that all students need to be held accountable for. Though the curriculum itself is subject-centered, the way it applies to the students and the sequence in which it is taught is hugely student-centered, as was previously discussed in the instructional strategies to be an existentialist idea. Therefore, the scope of the curriculum should be comprehensive, should aim to be relatable to the types of learners, and should be tailored in delivery, speed, and sequence to the students in which the content is being taught. So, when we look at the sequence of curriculum specifically, it should be taught in a way that students are best able to understand it. Essentialists say that a logical and sequential order guides students through the content in a way that is natural to understand. An example if in Biology I would move from studying cells, genetics, ecology, and then to physiology, showing a logical sequence from simplest to more complex.

The standards, the information and truth of the subject, is non-negotiable no matter what kind of students a teacher may encounter, but the way that the information is taught and how truth claims are explained can and should vary depending on the kind of learners in a class. This perspective is another dicotomistic philosophy using perennialist and essentialist ideas. As a reminder, the facts and standards of the curriculum should be subject-based while the facilitation and application of the curriculum should be student-centered.

It should not be forgotten that teachers not only teach subject and information but instill values upon the student. The teacher’s mastery in the subject and their ability to logically organize the subject matter in a logical and sequential fashion should point to a logical order of the greater world and universe. But this organization should also allow students to value the subject matter itself; the logical sequence of the curriculum and the definitive goals (standards) should lead students into a great appreciation of the subject material.
Beginning Questions Evaluation

My change in thought was rather small between my initial answering of the questions and attempting to answer them now. However, this class has supplied me with different views on education and has given me words to flesh out my own beliefs and opinions. The following is a comparison between my initial answering and my current view.

What is the main purpose of education?

The big difference between my views then and now is that I realized a greater value in the content with the student’s learning experience. But for the most part my view of education is anchored in the student. The main purpose of education is to teach the student what they need to know about the content and to prepare the student each class time more and more for the happenings of the real world. Overall, the student should come out of the experience in some way greater than he or she was when she entered.

Who is responsible for a child’s education?

This area has not changed much at all, other than the fact that the student now has an even greater responsibility than before. In fact, if the student is not on board for learning, learning will not happen. My view of educational responsibility is three-fold: the teacher (instructional and supplying a safe environment to learn), the student (motivation and interests), and home life (from which the student will get support and influences outside of school).

What are the most significant human characteristics that teachers encounter in their students?

I had mentioned in the initial answering that discouragement was among the prominent human characteristics as I had seen in my student teaching experience. However, philosophically speaking, students are inherently curious and ready for discovery and students are also coming in with an expectation to either be bored to death or to be sparked with interest. As such, the other
human characteristic entails interest and discovery that is within each student awaiting to be awakened.

**How should significant adults be in the lives of children?**

Initially, I mentioned that adults should be authoritative and should command respect from students, but additionally I add that adults should also come off as warm, welcoming, and available for students. This fosters a respect but also a nurturing environment that is safe to make mistakes and be truthful.

**What should a teacher primarily seek to achieve?**

This stance has not changed much. I still firmly believe that the teacher should primarily seek success from the students and the way in which the teacher does so should be as diverse as the students in the class. The goals can be many and depend on the behavioral, developmental, social, or academic needs of the student.

**Who should be responsible to design/select curriculum?**

Initially, I had mentioned that the teacher should directly control the curriculum and allow for adjustments depending on the students. With more of a philosophical backing, I further proclaim that the teacher most certainly is responsible for the sequence and scope of the curriculum that was based off of the state standards. However, the needs of the students should always direct the application of the curriculum to the students.

**Which style of teaching is most effective?**

As mentioned before, effective teaching styles vary depending on the students and the type of teacher that is giving instruction. The teaching style should allow the teacher to be comfortable but should stem most directly from the types of students in the class. For instance, if the students
are in a basic biology class and have very little discipline in the classroom, it would be very much called for the teacher to be more authoritative with that class.

Should curriculum and instructional methods be content or student-centered?

Just as I mentioned initially, curriculum should definitely be both content and student-centered. Academically, we must ensure that students are learning the concepts and subject matters they need to be learning. But it is in the application and way of teaching that curriculum should be student-centered.

Conclusion