Existentialism And Its Educational Implications

Introduction

Since his creation man is trying to quench his thirst for knowledge and unconsciously he is expecting knowledge as a source of peace , power and unity. This urge led man to formulate different philosophies for getting educated . Some major philosophies of education are these

1. Idealism
2. Realism
3. Pragmatism
4. Reconstructivism
5. Essentialism
6. Behaviorism
7. Existentialism

All these philosophies has played a vital role for creating this world , we are living in. Each has got its own beneficial and disastrous effects , anyhow our main concern during this whole discussion will be about Existentialism and its Educational implication.

A brief history: Proponents and developers of existentialism

After 19th century when man has invented a lot of machines and has got many sources to travel and conquest this globe , a number of philosophies were developed for connecting and gaining as much advantage as possible from each other , as a result of this World war 1 and 2 broke out taking lives of millions of people , and it was felt that during the course of these two wars man has been converted in an object being used for super powers and dictators and is losing his own individual identity thus in opposition of this Existentialism was proposed.

Its also mentioned in journal of thought by Robert W. Boos , that existentailism was a reaction of pragmatic society which used man as a slave.

Existentialism is not produced by a single philosopher instead it’s the collective work of different men who wrote against the belief that man is an object to be used for his society. Main proponents of existentialism are

- Soren Kierkegaard
- Karl jasper
- Gabriel Marcel
- Martin Heidegger
- Jean Paul Sartre
- Albert Camus
- Van Cleve Morris

Formation of word “Existentialism” :

The word existentialism is formed through two French words “Ex” and “sistent” it means “ which stands out” , it is believed that Krierkigaard first listened to this word from a Danish philosopher F.C Sibbern in 1841.

Works on existentialism :

- Jean Paul Sartre ‘s nausea ,the wall road to freedom triology and being and nothingness are his famous work regarding existentialism
- “being and time”by Heidegger
- Camus’wrote a novel “plauge” he was also a journal writer in France , and after world war two he started to write immensely with full devotion. He also wrote the Rebel , The Stranger and The myth of sisyphus.
- Simon De beauvoire was a friend of Sartre ,she wrote about feminisim and existentialism in her book “ethics of ambiguity ”
- Kierkegaard wrote about Christianity and existentialism in his book “the courage to Be “ in which he emphasized that common man must attain self hood through God and must abandon the absurdity of life.
- Colin Wilson wrote “ the Outsider” and claimed existentialism as an optimistic approch .

Main ideas and gist of existentialism:

- Existentialism is not a system, it’s a philosophy which emerges from problems of life, while life is a mystery.
- Subjectivity is the only truth and reality , what a man experices and feels is real.
- Because I exist I think,and because a person thinks he has got a right to think what he has to do or should do .
- Existence precedes essence . Philosophers focuses on the conditions (life) and the concrete existence rather than the essence which is a by product .
- Man creates his own nature through his own choices
- No concrete values , man will not have any set of rules to follow instead he in himself has got that power that ill make him realize what he should do, he just have to nurture that power t o such an extent that someday he will be able to make the best choices possible .
- Life is learning , existentialist takes life as a set of challenges coming our way in order to make us realize what we are , man exists in such a way that he can not avoid actions , he is here to do something and that doing makes life .
- God is dead
- Man will follow in religion what he will think is worthy to follow, for an existentialist his free will and free thinking will tell him what is right or wrong what he has to follow , there will be no burden over him ,his experiences will lead him to a conclusion about the commands in his religion.
- Kierkegaard explained it by giving an example of teacher and student, he said “what do you think , who is working an earnest job? A teacher who teaches how to do hard things or a student who has to put these teachings in use?”
- Man is not bound to a group pf people, thus he will not be compelled to follow rules of nation and society , he must develop himself as he think suitable for him.
- Contingency in life is a reality , our lives are according to the happenings and situations we face

Educational implications and factors

Existentialism itself is not a system and not a lot of research has been done regarding its educational implication. After late 20th century and in the start if 21st philosophers and educationist tried to derived some educational objectives and rules with respect to this new self centered philosophy. Ruksana Akhterr in his book “Existentialism and its contemporary relevance to different education systems” explains that a lot of philosopher and educators has talked and discussed about Existentialism but still they have not focused over its educational implications so far .

Existentialist education for Sartre is Man (existing) act of free self creation Essence

Sartre explained this process in four steps.

1. Man exists
2. Encounters himself
3. Surges up (by his own decisions)
4. Defines himself

Aims and objectives:

- Education of a whole person not just his brain, heart and emotions are also focused.

It means that an existentialist system will focus on the mental, emotional , logical and physical growth of a learner, it will develop such a human being who will have accurate knowledge of what he must do in which situation . Harper said that an existentialist wants to educate the whole child not just one side.

- Unfolding of an individual, through different situations.

This explains the contingency of life, our lives are not what we want it to be it is what it is, and what it is or what we are , depends upon the choices we make . Idealists believed that this world is a cave full of ignorance and God is the light, Wisdom for man, but for Kierkegaard world is not a cave of ignorance it’s the reality we are living and it will help us learn , it is wisdom for us. The ups and downs and every day tasks are helping us learn .

- Making such students who will be eligible of making choices for themselves.

As choice making is the ultimate task in our lives , thus an existentialist will try his best to inculcate decision making abilities while staying committed to his decisions or choices , in this regard , Dr. V.K Maheshwari said that education must teach us how to make the best possible choices , and doing so wee must keep in mind that our choices will never be perfect so there is a chance of imperfection , consequently results will be unpredictable then.

- Development of a completely unique personality

As every human being is going through a different set of situation and if for say some pf them are having a same set , but they might be having a different sequence then, thus it indicates

that every human being will be different from others , we can not have a same product through a wholly different process , it’s a reality for an existentialist and he exaggerates it, provoking a sense of uniqueness and authenticity.

- Making child courageous, rational and strong , he must be able to face life with all its taste and colors.

· We all hear that life is not a bed of roses , this is an existential proverb , an existentialist believes this world to be a laboratory , a training club thus everything happening here good or bad must be faced and lived for getting an upgradation , seetharamu calimed that education must make such an individual who will accept ,death ,anguish , fear and anxiety courageously , as for him all of these are the facts of life .

- Man must know what is he and how much power does he have not physical but mental.
- Emphasizing freedom, freedom of thought specially .
- Sense of responsibility must be produced , enhanced and acknowledged
- Making of a socially strong and adjustable individual, who is able to understand freedom and differences among different human beings .Aminuddin Hassan (2009)pointed out that existentailism can help people avoid vices such as violence , eloping ,drug addiction as others .when a person will realize his importance and potential he will never take any such steps that can destroy the most important resource (self)

Curriculum :

A curriculum of every school depends upon the philosophy which drives the objectives of that school. An Existentialist school focusses on subjective teachings and tries to teach students life , using real life problems as a source to teach them.

- Subjects which can teach social aspects are thought to be more effective , such as in history students will focus on historic personalities , in order to learn how they tackled their problems and how students are going to coup with hardships and challenges in their lives. This will help students in self realization as they will decide and chose what is wrong and right for them whether they should do something or not . For existentialist humanities posses super effecting spiritual powers (Taneja 2005 :p214)
- The way of expression in an existentialist school will be through art mostly.
- Courses will be designed in such a way , that the student will be able to develop his own values and self. Focusing on Liberal learning

Liberal learning , leads to human freedom

“power 1982”

- Both natural and social sciences are being taught in an existentialist school, bit the stark difference is in these schools , students do not learn for the subject’s sake, but for his own practice, of how he will manage his own life.
- “ the subjects of the existentialist curriculum are unspecified , although any subject can be at the right moment , be the tool or vehicle to engage the student in his/her striving to become”

“scotter 1985”

- It will not be a structured or fixed kind of curriculum student will chose whatever he would like to from a wide range of subjects being offered at the schools.
- Natural sciences are not considered important , ass its in a realist school. Because natural sciences lack that power that can introduce a man to himself , it creates a breach within man and his self .
- No didactic type of learning is allowed in such schools. Instead as Heidegger said that the teacher will let his students do and learn simultaneously eventually they will learn the right thing to do .
- Curriculum must include everything which can happen in a man’s life at any stage , so as to produce a s strong , confident and courageous personality.
- Vocational training is thought to be useful at the last stage and is strongly opposed in early stages , as it deteriorates the Inner passion of a being which urges him to be himself instead it compels him to be a special kind of person , a fixed not free person, who has to be what he is instructed to be .

Teaching Method :

- Socratic method of teaching is usually considered more effective, as it includes three stages

1. Questioning
2. Refining answers
3. More questioning
4. Conclusion (accepted by consensus)

This kind of method enhances and promotes self confidence and students are free to think , and choose what they wish to , thus producing a situation where one can learn about himself and his eligibility of making choices will ne polished. Socratic method also helps the student in exploring his own self as Kierkegaard explained it as stethoscope for checking out inner self and life .

- Mass education and group discussions are thought to be less effective as they can be a shadow over individual power and choices .
- Students are encouraged to engage in different projects on their own , and of their own choice , such process and projects will boost up the instinctive and reflective thoughts in human mind.
- Like the curriculum teaching method will be according to the student , how he likes to study but the institute and the educator will give him only those choices which will help him in achieving aims of an existentialist .
- Teachers will ask the students to do something different , teachers will encourage differences among students and thus allowing them to think out of the box .
- The class rooms will be full of instruments such as binoculars, telescope , paint brushes , canvass , encyclopedias etc.
- There will be no emphasis on time table , students can stay at schools as long as they want to do research on their favorite projects . The only thing that is important is the contact between teacher, experiences and students.

Teacher’ Role:

Role of teacher for educating individuals is the most critical one as it serves as the pillow for the whole school system.

- A teacher in an existentialist school works as a guide , in providing and suggesting his students the right path to follow in order to explore their own self .
- He will create such situations in which he and the learner will have a free conversation and dialogues about the on going project. Jasper explains this as the best virtue of an existentialist educator as he explains life through conversations and communication instead of lectures as lectures can not help them to inculcate the spirit of freedom to think and create.
- He must be a calm observer and listener , so that he can exactly tell his students what kind of attitudes may help him in his quest .
- A teacher himself is a learner in an existentialist set up , he himself is learning new things from his students. Theodore Brameld stated that a teacher can never have enough experience , and without experience he can not develop a theory , thus he is a learner as well trying to develop a consistent theory.
- The teacher must encourage his student to take life as it is while making the best out of it , he must make them realize through his own actions that death is an unavoidable and inevitable thing, and despairs and hardships are part of real life .
- He will not try to impose his idea over the pupils, instead he will accept and acknowledge students innovations and creativity .
- Teacher will try to create some unique individuals , who will stand apart from others , because of their authenticity and freedom, the teacher will ne the supporting system for his students .

Students and student-teacher relationship in an existentialist school:

Students and their attitudes will reflect the ideas and philosophies working behind the system as they are the ultimate product that system is going to give the society.

- They will be free human beings, loving what they do.
- As they themselves will be living in freedom, thus they will also accept others uniqueness and freedom, acceptance and tolerance will be there main qualities.
- As far as student teacher relationship is concerned , they will have a friendly relation and an open one, students can have a dialogue with his teacher about any topic without any fear of being scolded or of discouragement . I and you relationship is considered more effective according To Buber and is also mentioned in Friedman as it results in trust among the educators and the student. Buber’s Address in education strongly condemns the teacher centered method as it destroys the I and thou relation and teacher is trapped in a net of information , thus subjectivity is lost when he has to provide everything himself and student has to learn what he is being taught, students activities and interest fades away and students ends up as a rebel then ,
- The student and teachers will work together for a common aim they will decide a path or paths and then will decide which path is the best possible , and then it will be up to the student to select it or not teacher will not force him. In Baker (1963) it was claimed that education is a communion between the authority and the learner , as it creates zero

chances of influence of one personality over others decisions, thus empowering students.

School :

An existentialist school is built while keeping in view all the objectives and aims of this philosophy .

- It must be a place for student democracy, where every individual can have his own way and can ask for anything, but for this teachers have to tell in detail or through a minor experience that what is wrong to right.
- It should be an institute where pupils can have a free dialogues and discussion . In Butler (1968)it is stated that schools are the palaces for socializing where people come and interact for various reason, while learning from each other Experiences.
- Schools must provide circumstances and situations for developing students awareness about different aspect of life, thus students will be able to choose in future from the possible opportunities.

An American educationist and a teacher, Van Cleve Morris , explains this awaerness process in three steps

1. Choosing an agent who will have to make choice in a specific circumstance .
2. Then that choosing agent ,psychologically becomes the free agent, who will have to choose freely who is only accountable to himself .
3. Finally , he will become the responsible agent , who is the sole responsible for his choice.

- Home also serves as a school, because there are certain experiences that an individual experience S at home as well , where he develops himself emotionally and mentally with his family because all of them more or less are going to experience and live the same phases to gather .in this regard Jasper claims home to be a “necessary historical Environment”.

Evaluation:

After researching and studying this much about Existentialism, we have concluded that to a certain extent this theory is far more significant than many others , because man has got an in borne sense of realizing importance of a thing or phenomenon, and its that importance which leads him to doing something. We all know that man will not do anything which he considers unimportant , useless and insignificant, thus if we assume this to be true , then it seems very important for man to realize his own importance , potentialities and significance for himself and for the whole society in a nutshell, this sense of importance will drive him throughout his life and he will ne able to use himself as much as he will be able to , secondly this sense of importance leading to self realization will help create a sense of responsibility and freedom , and free will is a natural thing which can not be suppressed God has given us freedom to choose and existentialist nurtures and promotes this reality , nevertheless eventually such a person having both these senses will be more accepting , more tolerant and courageous in choosing and rationalizing things.

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