

PBH 602. Assignment #2: Philosophical Foundations of Health Education/Health Promotion

The experiences we have as children can shape the beliefs we have as adults. When we become adults, we start to see things differently based on new experiences and events that may have occurred in our lives. Our principles, values, and beliefs shape the decisions we make in life and how we choose to live it. As we experience new life events we normally change the way we make decisions. These events, change our attitude and make up our philosophy of life. Our philosophy on life tends to shape the way we choose to do our work. As a health education/promotion specialist, the way you see the world, and the things you believe shape every approach you take in your work and the strategies that you choose to use. Philosophy has been defined as, a statement that summarizes the attitudes, principles, beliefs, values, and concepts that are held by an individual or a group. Over the past 30 to 50 years, educators have found numerous philosophies and philosophical principles that are associated with someone establishing and maintaining good health. These philosophies are seen as a set of guiding principles that help build a framework to better understand the depth of health and all of its dimensions.

A health education/promotion specialist should keep their biases out of their work, even if it goes against their beliefs. Their main goal should be to help others improve their health. A specialist who motivates their students or clients towards a balanced (symmetric) lifestyle, while taking into consideration all of the compounds that are associated with health, is using the philosophy of symmetry as one of his/her methods. It is believed that if you are a specialist who seeks to enhance the health of others through education, you should be using this philosophy with your students or clients. A person who has a holistic philosophy believes that the human mind and body disappear and that the man or woman is a "unified integrated organism" or a whole being. It is believed that this holistic view of health produces more health specialists who are more passionate about creating a society in which the promotion of good health is seen as a positive goal. The philosophy of wellness also believes in "wholeness". A specialist who uses this philosophy integrates the spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional, environmental, and social dimensions of health to form a whole healthy person. These six dimensions of health are constantly being developed. Followers of this philosophy believe that everyone is capable of achieving some measure of wellness. They believe that you reach the top state of wellness when you have developed all six dimensions of health to the best of your ability. At that point, you have fulfilled true wellness and health.

The process of developing a philosophy usually involves several meetings with faculty, staff, students, and the community you are trying to serve. These meetings allow you to focus on your core beliefs and principles regarding health education/promotion. However, you can still develop a philosophy for your work without having a full meeting. If you construct a list of your thoughts using the following headings, you can start to get a basis for what your philosophy is. 1. Personal values and beliefs, 2. What health means to you, 3. Attributes of people you admire and trust, 4. Results of health studies and readings that you might find meaningful, and 5. Outcomes you would like to see from the process of health education/promotion. From this list, you will find common themes that will show up, and these themes can serve as a draft for your health education/promotion philosophy statement. Forming and creating a philosophy is something that will never stay the same. When changes happen in our lives, our views tend to be changed, as well as our beliefs. The principles that we started with will most likely change the longer we are in the field and experience more life events and new learnings.

Another approach that you can use for the creation of your philosophy, as well as with the tweaking of your philosophy, is a set of personal questions that allow you to think critically, as well as allow you to focus on your principles. Questions like, what does it mean to be healthy? What are your health-related responsibilities and obligations to yourself, your community, or society? What do you expect your community and society to do to keep you healthy? These personal questions can assist you in seeing what it is that you prioritize for yourself in life. Once you do that, you can then ask yourself questions relating to your field. Such as, what is health education/promotion, and what does it mean to be a professional in this field? What are your goals for yourself and your profession? What are your professional responsibilities to yourself, your community, and your profession? Asking yourself and answering both the personal and professional questions, can help you see the focus you pay on yourself, and then see the focus that you have for your students or clients. These questions allow you to see what your beliefs and views are as a human being, but also as a health education specialist. They require you to question yourself and dive deeper into yourself to discover what is important to you, where your moral standings are, and what beliefs you hold to be true. After answering these questions, not only should you be able to formulate your philosophy, but you should also be able to apply changes where necessary if you are not satisfied with what you discover about yourself.

Many different philosophies of health approaches exist today and they are each unique in the process that they entail. Depending on the health specialist they will use a philosophy that resonates with them the most. A specialist who uses behavior contracts, goal setting, and self-monitoring to try to promote a modification in an unhealthy habit or individual is focusing his or her approach on the behavior change philosophy. This approach allows for the creation of easily measurable objectives, which increases the ability to assess outcomes. A completely different approach is the cognitive-based philosophy, which focuses on the acquisition of content and factual material. The goal of this philosophical strategy is to increase the knowledge of individuals or groups so that they are better prepared to make decisions about their health. This is seen in a school setting when a health educator posts in the classroom statistics about teenagers being killed or injured in car accidents, because of underage drinking and failure to wear seat belts.

Rather than just providing students or clients with factual information. You can also provide students with simulated problems, case studies, or scenarios. Each situation you give them requires them to make a decision, looking for the best answer or approach. This approach is called the decision-making philosophy. It asks students or clients to think critically by creating and analyzing potential solutions. With this approach, they can develop the skills needed to address many health-related decisions they might face, for the entirety of their lives. However, It has been believed that some of these traditional approaches run the risk of blaming students or clients for taking part in health behaviors that are often either out of their control or not seen as in their best interest. Because of this belief, the freeing or functioning philosophy came about. A specialist who uses this philosophical approach has the ultimate goal of freeing people to help them make the best health decisions possible, based on their needs and interests, and not necessarily the interest of society and what society advertises that they need to live healthy lives. This approach has been classified by some specialists as a subset of the decision-making philosophy.

In an attempt to make society a better place for health education, a specialist will take an approach to help their students or clients that are a bit more indirect, yet still has a big impact in the field. The specialist will emphasize the goal of creating social, economic, and political

change, for things that will benefit the health of his or her students or clients. This approach is known as the social-change philosophy. A specialist who focuses on this philosophy is usually at the forefront of the adoption of policies or laws that will enhance the health of all humans. The approach that specialists can take that seems to be considered as being more progressive and open is the eclectic health education/promotion philosophy. A specialist who works under this philosophy changes the approach they use in each case depending on the setting (i.e., school community, worksite, or medical). Normally a specialist uses the philosophical approach that they favor most, but with this approach, specialists are adaptable and resourceful, and they will use any health education/promotion approach that seems appropriate to the situation. All of the philosophies stated above are different yet, most of them, if not all, can be used together. The approach that any given specialist decides to take is based on the outlook and philosophy that they have for their work and their goals. In the end, they all help assist the specialist in making the world healthier for an individual or communities.

The New York State Education Department (NYSED), "Navigate by the Stars", health education initiative focuses on health and education best practices by following ten navigational stars. One of the initiatives focuses on standards-based teaching, where the educator must follow the national and NYS health standards in their teachings. This type of teaching and learning allows students to be given the knowledge, skills, and ability, to maintain and enhance their personal health and fitness. As well as being able to create and maintain safe environments, and manage their personal and community resources. A skills-driven focus is key in the learning process. This initiative teaches students to develop the competence and confidence needed to effectively apply health skills to a variety of health-related situations they might encounter. Health educators must stay up-to-date with scientifically research-based trends, and integrate promising programs and strategies into their focus, this initiative allows for students to be enabled to reach the health standards we are striving for. While teaching, educators must also make sure to focus on student's strengths, not weaknesses. This strength-based approach helps the students build character and adopt healthy behaviors. Students must successfully practice strategies and approaches so that they are confident that they can attain certain behaviors. We must make sure that students are at the center of their learning, especially when they are practicing new behaviors. As educators, we can guide them through their learning journey. Our role can be to facilitate opportunities for them and engage them in challenging situations. Students should feel that their learning is authentic and of their discovery. This is done by providing real-life learning experiences, and skills in situations that they can relate to.

Lastly, the Star's initiative makes clear that our program needs to be one that is integrated into education, by incorporating sound educational theories, practices, strategies, and assessments. Our health programs need to be led by qualified and skilled teachers who are fully supported by the school and community they serve. This includes the coordinated school health framework where all adults in a school building are working together with the same goal of improving the health of the students and communities they serve. This includes counseling and guidance services, as well as physical education, family members, and the school food service agents all working as one big team. This can be thought of as a health education/promotion committee. The navigational stars aren't so different from the philosophical approaches mentioned earlier. They provide educators with research-based practices that allow them to come to their audience with different approaches. All of these stars in the initiative can be incorporated into a philosophy of your teaching, similar to the earlier philosophies. They can all be used interchangeably and on their own to help with your framework of teaching health education.

I am a big believer in mental health awareness. I believe in social-emotional learning, as well as self-talk and self-accountability. Being healthy to me means being aware of all of the dimensions of health, and actively working on improving or maintaining those dimensions. I enjoy seeing research being done on the teenage brain and all of the different things that play a factor in their sleep, moods, appetite, and mental, emotional, and social health. I also like reading research on different cultures the limitations and beliefs of those cultures, and how it can affect your health, especially your social-emotional, and mental health. My biggest belief is that all behavior is changeable and that each individual has a different individuated approach or method to help them see how they can make a change for the betterment of their health. With all of this said, my philosophy of health education/promotion is as follows; to be a leader in my school, and community by advocating health education through the wellness dimensions of health, using individual methods, and different approaches (i.e., eclectic philosophy) to promote positive, realistic attainable behavior change. My goal is to make my students or clients, informed consumers of all the different strategies we can take to help them reach their short-term goals, eventually leading to long-term goals. I want to educate and promote realistic healthy lifestyle choices.

I feel like my philosophy of health education/promotion resonates with the eclectic philosophy approach. I believe that all cases should be handled with different approaches. The individual, the situation, and the environment, including the socio-economic standing of the client or student. Should all be taken into consideration and adapted to help them with goals that seem doable for them. What influences my views on this philosophy is my own experiences with my personal life and with my work life. When I was a teenager I used to be heavy, I ate a lot of fast food and drank a lot of juice. I came from a low-income family and I was not surrounded by what can be considered healthy food options. I always wanted to go on a "diet" but I never knew how to do this. I thought that boiling and steaming everything that I ate meant eating healthy. I soon learned, through relationships I built, and through some schooling and personal research, that this was not what being healthy meant or looked like. I never took a look into my mental health (as a Hispanic male this was never a topic), emotional health, spiritual, and social health.

Now that I am older I do a lot of personal self-reflection and mental, emotional, spiritual, and social work for myself. I see the difference that it makes to my physical health and how they all go hand in hand to make me feel whole. I have changed my entire lifestyle and stopped treating my food choices like a diet, but more of a lifestyle. I have seen tremendous change in myself over the years, and I want to influence others around me. My work inspires my philosophy because as a high school physical education and health teacher I am seen as a role model and students come to me all the time to talk to me about their health. The question I hear all the time is, "What do I need to eat to lose weight? I've tried so many different diets", they don't like it when my first response back is, "How many hours a night do you sleep?" or "What's your stress been like lately?". This allows me to start a conversation with them about their overall health and wellness. I have seen that most of the time students did not need a new "diet" but more so a reconnection with their wellness dimensions.

My philosophy can be held accountable by numerous research-based best practices. The first of them being scientifically research-based. As a health educator, my role is to become familiar with all of the research-based studies out there, as well as strategies found to be successful. Keeping myself up to date with the research allows me to be able to be so adaptable and use the eclectic philosophy approach for my students. My philosophy is also responsible for allowing my students to be skills-driven, learner-centered, strength-based, and authentic. All

while using a standard-based teaching and learning approach. My philosophy is all about allowing my students to develop confidence in themselves so that they can see that they are competent enough to effectively apply the health skills given to them to any health-related situation. I am asking them to be at the center of their health journey as I facilitate the opportunities and experiences for them. I want them to be able to explore, discover, and question all of their decisions and their actions until they find what works for them best. This allows them to find their strength. They will be able to build their character while finding their identity as human beings. They will have taught themselves what it is that they need to do and they will know how to do it. My philosophy allows for the process they experience to be authentic because they are going through their own realistic learning experiences, and applying learned skills to make changes and improvements. The work will all be done by them. I just serve as the provider of information and sit back, observe, and enjoy their journey to the best versions of themselves that they can be. The health and wellness journey doesn't ever really stop and it is something, just like my philosophy, that is constantly growing and changing. It should never be given an ending point.

One could argue that my philosophy is not realistic and does not provide students with an ending which can cause students to feel like they are not making any improvements or growing in their health journey. To this, I say that students doing the work will see the improvement happening within themselves, and do not need to physically see an end date. My job as a facilitator of their process is to continue educating them on the next steps they can take in their journey. Students are constantly developing their confidence and practicing their skills, so they will learn that there is always some reflective work that can be done. We do not stop aging so why should the work for our health and wellness stop? As we grow, and experience new life events, our perspective changes and we will have to do more research on approaches, and strategies, and learn how to live with the changes we are seeing. Approaches, philosophies, age, the world, is constantly changing, some could say improving, so we should be doing the same with our mental health, health, and wellness.

One could also argue that mental health is not connected to health and wellness and that it does not play a part in a person's health. However, the definition of health states that health is the complete mental, physical, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. One could be free of diseases, but if they are just paying attention to their physical health and not their mental health, they cannot reach a complete state of health. Being in touch with your mental health plays a big part in your emotional health, which is one of the dimensions of wellness. A student could be feeling sad and having a rough time emotionally. If you have them do self-talk or self-reflection on what it is that could be making them feel those emotions. They can then start the work to start becoming in tune with their mental health and find the reason for why they are feeling sad. With that said, this approach will not work for every student, so being able to have an eclectic philosophy mindset approach will help me with my approaches when one fails.

Lastly, no one philosophy or approach is one that will ever stay the same. Neither will the approach be one that works for every individual. At the end of the day, this work asks for us to constantly keep growing as individuals. So that we can help the individuals or groups that we work with to keep growing themselves. We must stay bias-free, and use our life experiences, our beliefs, and life views, to help us with the process we want to take as educators. Being able to see the process we like to work with for ourselves, allows us to see that everyone has their own process. When working with them we must be able to help them find their process. We are facilitators of our health and we must serve as facilitators for others. This is the beauty of this

field. We get to use research-based work to assist us in our learning so that we can keep educating and promoting. The work we do and the approach we take is extremely personal. The behavior that we choose to carry ourselves with, is the behavior that our students or clients need us to help them find for themselves.