

Editorial Statement

What's Next?: The Future of Progressivism as an "Infinite Succession of Presents"

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Progressive education, though its meaning be contested, is the basic idea that schools should be agents of democracy. To reform society, we must reform the schools. The converse is also true: Change in schooling is realizable only to the extent that society progresses. Thus, progressive education entails not merely progressive methods for individual learners, but education for a progressive society.

Growing out of a period of rapid social, economic, demographic, and political change in the early 20th century—with an influx of millions of immigrants and a move toward a more urban, industrial economy—the United States version of progressive education arose as the belief that schooling needs to be solidly grounded in the idea of democracy as the idea of "associated living" or a "conjoint communicated experience" (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 93). This idea requires an appreciation for diversity as both a crucial element for democratic life and a resource for learning, as well as the goal of fostering a "critical, socially engaged intelligence" (Miller, 1997, para. 1). Similar ideas have developed in other regions and other times as the articles in this series of Special Issues demonstrate.

The future, if nothing else, is about hope—hope for individuals to thrive within the flourishing of global societies and the environment. Thus the articles in this "Future" issue have a strong forward-looking and hopeful aspect. Yet, this hope is grounded in concrete experiences set against the background of a world filled with injustice and contradictions; thus conceptualized, hope is a profound and rigorous endeavor, not just a fleeting wish. Accordingly, the articles describe some progressive projects already on the ground, but also build on historical and contemporary precedents, experiences, and theories. In this way, they present a portrait of realizable hope, another tenet of progressivism.

One major reason for this future emphasis is the importance of growth in progressive philosophy, whether that is for the individual, family, school, neighborhood, community, nation, or world. Growth, in the progressive sense, is also about a political movement to improve the social good. In today's educational parlance, growth might be seen as "measurable increases" on standardized tests in order to be "accountable" through "outcomes assessments." But that is not what progressive educators envisioned. For them, growth is not a means to an end, but a valuable process in and of itself. Growth begets more growth, and education leads to more education in a process of inquiry and problem solving that is dynamic, exciting, and creative. In contrast to those who simply wanted education to provide labor skills for a growing, diverse population, Dewey (1897), whose philosophy inspired many in the movement, saw education as "a process of living, and not a preparation

for a future of living.”

The words seem paradoxical: Rather than sacrificing the present for some hypothetical future, progressive educators seek to live fully in the present precisely so as to prepare for the future. Late in his life, having observed both the successes and the failures of progressive education, Dewey maintained this idea:

When preparation is made the controlling end, then the potentialities of the present are sacrifice to a suppositious future. When this happens, the actual preparation for the future is missed or distorted. The ideal of using the present simply to get ready for the future contradicts itself. It omits, and even shuts out, the very conditions by which a person can be prepared for his future. We always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future. This is the only preparation which in the long run amounts to anything. (Dewey, 1938, p. 51)

The "full meaning of each present experience" does not just happen. Dewey also emphasized the need for a carefully developed philosophy of experience. These experiences are purposeful, and should be rich and "educative" though they can come from any number of sources within the classroom and community, not just textbooks or traditional content areas. The important thing is that they help learners to work together, connect ideas, solve problems, and evolve both cognitively and socially. Furthermore, these experiences must be rich with a number of connected experiences in an "experiential continuum" (1938, Chapter 2, para 5) that provides continuity by connecting the learner with curriculum and community. For Dewey and other progressives, schools are not fortresses for knowledge transmission; they are open, welcoming social centers for knowledge generation.

Another way that "futureness," is inherent in the progressive movement is within its inquiry-based curricular realizations. Inquiry is always moving into the future, out into space, its trajectory unknown. This is also true for human existence itself. Like Heidegger's notion of *Dasein*, "being-in-the-world," our existence is dynamic in its presence and always embedded in the context of everydayness. We humans are not just dangling objects in space like marionettes, or "essences" locked into fixed subject positions. Rather, we exist in kind of forward-moving way, in a process of revealing or unfolding that projects openness, readiness, and involvement. What we do and how we move through the world (in sum, our experiences) matter because they have social meaning and historic possibility. Dewey wrote that, "Every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into" (1938, Ch 3, para. 12).

Thus, human existence is the projection of the future on the basis of the possibilities that constitute it. We are always being and becoming based on what we were and what is possible to be, and in consideration of the objects, problems and questions in front of us. This future-forward "being-in-the-world" comprises our entire sense of "being there," including our intellectual, moral, creative, emotional, physical and artistic aspects, or what has been coined in progressive school terms, "the whole child." But it involves more than what a child

alone is, can be, or desires. The child, or any learner, is always already a social being in a spatial and temporal matrix. Therefore, inquiry into projects and problems are, inescapably, socially and contextually embedded endeavors that move the inquirer into multiple possibilities and imminent "futureness." Outcomes cannot be easily predicted and the most significant may be developed in the process of learning, not specified as *a priori* goals. "Being-in-the-world" describes a way of framing existence itself, but it also captures nicely the mood of inquiry, and especially the ideas of human growth and social, open-ended activity that progressives wanted to put forth.

It is easy to be cynical about progressive education in this decade, and to see it as one of Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek's "lost causes" that needs to be resurrected and defended (2008). To be sure, progressivism never had foremost status in US schools, especially among more conservative educational administrators and standards-based reformers, although it has been favored philosophically by many education professors and teachers (Cremin, 1959; Labaree, 2005; Miller, 1997). And there have always been progressive schools and projects, as the other issues in this special series and other writing (e.g., Apple & Beane, 2007) have described.

Nonetheless, much of schooling tends to value uniformity, not diversity; complicity, not challenge. Instruction is typically teacher-centered, ruled by teacher-talk, textbooks, exams and classroom management schemes (Labaree, 2005, p. 278). Rather than being a progressive force, schooling is often a standards-driven testing factory to produce workers for a competitive marketplace, rather than a nurturing place for the development of engaged citizens. A healthy society needs people who can be both workers and citizens, but the dominant discourse in much of the world has been reduced to one of failure to produce a globally competitive workforce, by citing such problems as low standardized test scores, inept teachers, empty pipelines of scientific talent, sluggish innovation, and poor job growth.

That is precisely why we need to turn to progressivism for the future: to rebalance the purpose of schooling, but also to rebalance society itself, and to try to develop a shared purpose for forging ahead in a complex world of uncertainty, inequality and global economic crisis in a neoliberal era (Harvey, 2007) where the market relation has become "the model of social relations" (Hall, Massey, Rustin, 2013, p. 4). Perhaps, more than ever, we need a sense of global consciousness and global citizenship, what Kwame Appiah (2006) calls *cosmopolitanism* or "ethics in a world of strangers," which is a sense of responsibility for others. Drawing from classic Greek sources, Habermas, as well as the experiences of the Civil Rights movement in the US, Danielle Allen (2004) asks us to start the process by learning how to "talk to strangers."

Progressive education cannot alone create a unified system of global dialogue, consciousness, citizenship and ethics, nor is this kind of universal transcendence fully achievable or even wholly desirable, but it is integral to the enactment of a better world. Yet, today, being committed to progressive education is not easy. With the movement out of fashion in many quarters, dismissed as naïve, romantic, and more rhetoric than reality (Labaree, 2005), when conformity, standardization, obedience, competition, job preparedness

and corporate models have become *de rigueur*, progressive educators might not know where to focus their energies or how to keep hopeful. Concrete material changes in the schools and in communities toward more progressive practices, as described in these articles, are small but significant examples of hope for a "lost cause" that can and should still be defended, and provide inspiring possibilities for other educators.

As a closing thought, Howard Zinn's words, which could easily be pinned to progressive ideals, provide a meaningful framework for reading these contributions: "The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think humans should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory" (2004, para. 11). In their own way, and from far-flung diverse places such as Spain, Indonesia, China, the UK, and the US, each piece is simultaneously a story about the past, present and future. Each one is a link in this chain of "infinite successions." Each one is a victory.

Iván M. Jorrín Abellán, Sara L. Villagrà Sobrino and Sara García Sastre discuss the future of Information Computer Technology (ICT) in education in their "Escuela Nueva" in Spain: Implications in teachers professional development for the 21st Century." *Escuela Nueva* has been around for 136 years, inspiring many different progressive projects. In this paper, the authors trace the history of *Escuela Nueva*, and describe one of its recent physical offshoots, Ana de Austria, a rural public school that, paradoxically, is ahead of urban areas in its use of ICT, and thus provides a fascinating model of progressive education for Spain's future. Their three-year study at Ana de Austria highlights the importance of, and the possibilities for, teacher professional development that is "deeply grounded in reflective collaborative processes where practice, experience, inquiry and discussion are paramount."

Laura A. Edwards and Kyle A. Greenwalt consider another future-looking issue: global education. In "Mining the present: Reconstructing progressive education in an era of global change," the authors examine their charge to "globalize the teacher education program" at Michigan State University. To address this request, they developed an experimental preservice teacher education program called the Global Educators Cohort Program (GECP), and a course titled TE 352: Immigration, Language and Culture. Drawing on historical (especially Cold War) contexts and contemporary versions of "global education," and considering what that term might mean, they reconstruct it by creating their own unique vision of teacher education that deliberately includes John Dewey's progressive ideals. Theirs is an attempt to define a "location-specific, globally-minded, progressive education practice" for their pre-service candidates.

Steven Jay Gross and Joan Poliner Shapiro take a different global perspective in "The New DEEL (Democratic Ethical Educational Leadership) and the Work of Reclaiming a Progressive Alternative in Educational Leadership from PreK-20." The aim of DEEL is to create an action-oriented partnership around inquiry into the nature and practice of democratic, ethical educational leadership. Core ideas from progressive education such as open dialogue, right to voice, community inclusion, and responsible participation toward the common good are employed in this change effort. This paper is important because educational leadership is often the most conservative subfield of education, and may look

uncritically toward corporate-style reform and neoliberal arguments about competition for improving schools, rather than progressive reform. Gross and Shapiro show that through their nine years of work with DEEL, they have begun to “reclaim” progressive precepts in educational leadership both nationally and internationally.

Progressive education is a description of learning throughout life in any venue, not just formal learning settings. Sharon Irish and Penny Evans describe one such alternative to formal learning in “Structures of Participation in the University of Local Knowledge.” They discuss how the Knowle West Media Centre (KWMC), in south Bristol, UK, has provided methods for local people to share knowledge important to them, especially for those who find traditional university and continuing education financially and geographically out of reach. The University of Local Knowledge (ULK), a conceptual rather than physical space, is an ongoing framework at KWMC to collect video vignettes of local knowledge and share them in a web-based portal. This community-based knowledge network, grounded in progressive concepts, is becoming both a critique of established academic disciplines and a system for self-organized learning.

Jiacheng Li and Jing Chen consider another alternative model in their piece “Banzhuren and Classrooming: Democracy in the Chinese Classroom.” The authors point out that the classroom community is a laboratory for democracy in today’s China, and this is changing the understanding of schooling and education. An approach to democracy in the Chinese classroom for the future focuses on the *banzhuren* (home-classroom teacher), a deeply influential figure in Chinese children’s lives, who loops with the children for up to six years, providing continuity while giving —advice, courage and support. The *banzhuren* is responsible for “classrooming,” which is less about teaching subjects, and more about giving moral, social and emotional guidance. With huge class sizes compared to Western norms (sometimes 50-60 students), the Chinese classroom needs a person who attends to the “whole child” to help children develop relationships, community and self-awareness both inside the school and out. The *banzhuren* embodies many progressive ideals, but more resources are needed for *banzhuren* professional development, research and collaboration.

Sally Jean Warner Read explores the question, “What does it mean – or rather, what does it look like – to be a progressive educator in the 21st century?” Her narrative inquiry of three progressive educators, “The Educators and the Curriculum: Stories of Progressive Education in the 21st Century,” looks at how her participants draw on their “personal practical knowledge” in order to enact progressivism, not just profess its philosophy. The stories of these educators reveal a commitment to risk taking, to balancing individual student and social needs, and to finding meaning in their work.

In “Looking from Within: Progressive Education, its Prospects and Challenges,” Teuku Zulfikar examines progressive education in Indonesia. He notes that progressive activities such as critical thinking, critical dialogue, and student-centered learning are now being recognized as fostering effective learning by a growing number of Indonesian

educationalists. However, these ideas run counter to long-standing and deeply embedded cultural constraints, such as a tradition of rote learning and teacher-centered classrooms. Zulfikar ends with recommendations about how to better implement progressive ideals in the Indonesian school system.

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