

## **Editorial for Progressive Education: Antecedents of Educating for Democracy**

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Progressive education is a pedagogical movement that emphasizes student-centered learning experiences and that incorporates aspects such as learning by doing, valuing diversity, integrated curriculum, problem solving, critical thinking, collaborative learning, social responsibility, democracy, and lifelong learning. An important feature is the situation of learning within social, community, or political contexts, which more broadly links progressive education with efforts today by some educators who actively promote critical pedagogy and democratic education. Recently, core progressive ideas appear in the social justice youth development model.

### **Roots of Progressive Education**

In the US, progressive education is often seen as beginning with the 1870s child-centered school reform of Francis Parker and reflected in the educational philosophy of John Dewey. Promoted by the Progressive Education Association from 1919 to 1955, the movement continues to influence some aspects of school reform and pedagogy today through efforts to foster project-based learning, whole language, hands-on learning in mathematics and science, and by organizations such as the Progressive Education Network (PEN). But as an approach to pedagogy, progressive education is in no way limited to the US or the early 20th century. The ideas grew out of work in other countries, and can be traced back to the earliest theories of teaching and learning.

Some other examples may be useful to consider: In France, the Ecole Moderne, developed from the work of Célestin Freinet, showed how to realize the social activism side of progressive education. In Italy, Loris Malaguzzi and the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education are another manifestation, demonstrating among other things the importance of art in learning. Paulo Freire's work in Brazil on critical literacy, later extended to many other countries, is another contemporary example, one that emphasizes the political as well as the pedagogical. Similarly, influenced by his experiences in South Africa, Mahatma Gandhi developed a conception of basic education that resonates with progressive education. It was concerned with learning generated within everyday life, relied on cooperation among individuals, and aimed at educating the whole person, including moral development.

It is worth noting that progressive education invariably seeks to go beyond the classroom walls. Thus, the work of Jane Addams and others at Hull House to work with new immigrants might be considered as progressive education, even if it is not situated within a traditional school (Addams, 1910; Cremin, 1988). Participants in Hull House learned from one another, drawing on their diverse backgrounds and experiences. They also connected their learning to the problems of the day, such as poor working conditions, substance abuse, and the spread of disease. Both the individuals and the organization as a whole were seen in terms of a growth model of learning.

Myles Horton and the Highlander Folk School focused on social activism with adults, but a case can be made for their work as exemplifying the progressive education ideals. Students there studied labor conditions and laws, voting rights, and peace, connecting understanding and action. Similarly, there is much work in museums, libraries, community and economic development, online collaboration, and other areas of informal education that may express progressive education more fully than what we see in schools today.

Historically, schools and colleges of education were places of ideas, research with

lab schools, and experiences in informal learning environments. Progressive educators have focused on educating students for full engagement with the problems of today as the future is unknown. Accordingly, students who have been encouraged to critically think about the present are best positioned to solve the unforeseen problems they are certain to encounter in the future.

### **Education for Democracy**

However, within the last few decades, a growing conservative viewpoint shaped by some business leaders and implemented by more stringent Federal education policies has shifted the conversation to focus on educating students for the production of future workers for corporate America (Boyles, 2004). The business model of schooling emphasizes accountability, which is often reduced to high-stakes testing of basic skills rather than creativity or complex problem solving. A corporate model of management has taken over schools by installing CEO-style leaders with little experience in education in top education positions. Where once a major movement within US public education aspired to developing a critical, socially engaged intelligence appropriate to democracy, most of today's schools appear to narrow education to skills preparation for global capitalism.

While Dewey valued individuality and personal freedom, he argued against the excessive individualism of modern capitalism due to the lack of social responsibility and lack of any collaborative aspect of democracy (Miller, 2007). According to Dewey, the purpose of education is progress and students should learn through democracy by engaging in learning that fosters the development of democratic citizens. For progressives, a democratic person is a social conception where democratic education provides opportunities for participation in democratic life (Biesta, 2007).

Many progressive schools of today, mostly private and some charter, involve students in the governance and decision making process. These schools practice democracy by giving voice to students through town hall meetings and having a student serve on all school committees and on advisory boards. To bring about change, students work through their student representatives, sign petitions and may even organize a protest. However, since these schools self-select like-minded members of the community with a common goal, an absence of diverse opinions can exist, providing a false reality of the democratic practice. Still, democracy requires teaching. Thus, democratic education deliberately engages students in experiencing democracy through intelligently participating in collaborative real-world problem solving. For society to be prepared for democracy, its children must be trusted with responsibilities in school. According to Miller (2007), democratic schools develop children that "are capable of remarkable intelligence, compassion, maturity, collaborative problem solving and social responsibility when given a chance" (p.5). Students do not need wise adults to govern and instruct them, they need wise adults to resourcefully guide their intelligence while taking an active role in self-governance.

### **This Issue**

In this first of a series of three special issues dedicated to exploring the legacy of progressive education, we include nine articles that draw on the past of progressive education as a way of looking at relevant present day educational issues. Dewey's views of the past were mediated by concerns of the present: "We naturally remember what interests us and because it interests us. The past is recalled not because of itself but because of what it adds to the present" (*Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 3). To learn about the history of progressive education, and in that context engage in critical dialogue about the aims of education and what educating students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should entail.

We first present three articles addressing the role of critical discourse in higher education. In "Anti-Progressivism in American Education," Wayne Urban presents three mid

20<sup>th</sup> century critiques of progressive education in teacher education faculties. He writes about the decline of academic standards in colleges of education and the need for a commitment by education faculties in making colleges of education intellectually places and academically rigorous. The next article is a case study of the Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education, “The Turning of One’s Soul”—Learning to Teach for Social Justice: The Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education (1950–1964).” Here Carol Rodgers explores that teacher education program’s experiment to help students understand and care deeply about issues of race and social justice, including issues of environmental sustainability. In “The Role of Moral Principles and Ethics in Fostering Democratic Ideals,” Gregg Jorgensen turns to John Dewey’s theories of ethics and moral education. He asks how personal and political beliefs become part of our national debate and how to foster democracy through education. Jorgensen highlights the possibilities of using widely available media and morally complex contemporary issues to stimulate critical thinking in the social studies classroom.

The next article looks at learning in informal settings. In “Can Museums Teach Art? Barnes, Dewey and The Art of The Steal,” Walter Feinberg helps us to understand the controversy over the move of Albert Barnes’s multi-billion dollar art collection to downtown Philadelphia, a controversy based in part on competing visions of what art is. Barnes thought that the purpose of art, and especially his own collection, was to educate. A viewer of an artwork needs to be aware of the problem that the artist was addressing and the tools afforded by the artist’s tradition. The article examines Barnes’s understanding of art, as inspired by and then further developed by Dewey, along with the interesting differences in their theories. These ideas have important implications for aesthetic education and the role that aesthetics plays in a democracy.

The following two articles provide some historical context for democratic education. Leonard Waks analyzes the roots of Progressive Education. His “Dewey and Progressive Education, 1900-2000” considers Dewey’s ideas underlying the experimental school Dewey founded. As 21<sup>st</sup> century progressive educators connect with the lineage of historical tenets, Waks analyzes specific aspects of Dewey’s work and raises key questions. Then, Tom Little’s “Progressive by Any Other Name: The Relationship Between 21st Century Education Principles and the Historical Tenets of the Progressive Education Movement,” begins with the first annual meeting of the Progressive Education Association (PEA) in 1919, and traces the changing nature of development of progressive education principles. Little shows the close proximity of progressive tenets to 21st Century educational attributes and goals. In so doing, Little showcases the relevance of progressive education in schools today.

We close the issue with three articles that present several examples of democratic education. In “Co-Creating a Progressive School: The Power of the Group,” Chris Collaros, Fred Burton, and Julie Eirich discuss how the Wickliffe Progressive Elementary School, which has a 40-year tradition of progressive influences, drew on the history of progressive education to develop its set of Ten Principles of Progressive Education. These principles, as illustrated with actual curriculum and experiences of school-age children and teachers, are important ideas to consider in creating and sustaining a progressive school. In “Where’s Wonder?” Fred Burton notes the lack of joy, passion, and imagination for today’s students. He reflects on ideas from some major progressive educators: David Hawkins, Eleanor Duckworth, and Ken and Yetta Goodman and connects those ideas to the current context of school reform. Fred reminds us that standards and high stakes tests are not all there is to education and that wonder has an important place. Finally, Liba H. Engel looks at the work of Janusz Korczak in “The Democratic School and The Pedagogy of Janusz Korczak: A Model of Early Twentieth Century Reform in Modern Israel.” She examines the way in which Korczak’s pedagogy, which was established in the first half of the twentieth century in Europe, is implemented in a contemporary Israeli school, called the Democratic School.

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