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Progressivism as a Curriculum Philosophy

The philosophy of Progressive education was popularized in the United States in the late 19th century by writings of foremost proponent John Dewey (Kelleher & Leonall, 2011). Following his "learning by doing" style and constructing lessons around student interests and the "social life of the community," Progressivists believe that education should focus on the whole child, rather than on the content or the teacher (Kelleher & Leonall, 2011, p. 284). This educational philosophy stresses that students, especially young children, should test ideas by active investigation and explore the subjects that are not only interesting but motivate the child to learn ("Progressive education" 2004).

In 1919, the gathering of educators in Washington, D.C. lead to the formation of the Progressive Education Association furthering its cause (Ideals of Progressive Education, 2001). Some of the founding principles of the group included: allowing students to develop naturally through opportunities for self-expression, learning through real world experiences, and seeing the students as problem solvers and thinkers who make meaning through their individual experience of their culture (Ideals of Progressive Education, 2001).

Beginning in the late 1950's and continuing throughout the second half of the 20th century, education began to move toward the more traditional methods of teaching which focused on direct and teacher-led instruction, with norm-based assessments (Little, 2013). "This trend continued into the modern era and was promulgated in American education through the passage of a federal school reform policy guided by conservatism—the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001 (ESEA), known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB)" (Little, 2013, p. 85).

With the failure of NCLB and the need to address how to propel American education forward to keep pace with the "prolific advances in technology and the globalization of our society," a new movement toward 21st Century Education is capturing education leaders throughout America (Little, 2013, p. 86).

> It means basing instruction on the needs, interests and developmental stage of the child; it means teaching students the skills they need in order to learn any subject, instead of focusing on transmitting a particular subject; it means promoting discovery and self-directed learning by the student through active engagement; it means having students work on projects that express student purposes and that integrate the disciplines around socially relevant themes; and it means promoting values of community, cooperation, tolerance, justice and democratic equality. (Labaree & Labaree, 2005, p. 277).

It is here that we see that the practices and principles of progressive education are closely aligned to the principles associated with 21st Century education.

One of the founding principles of progressive education is the student's freedom to develop naturally while engaged in activities that not only interest the student but motivate them to explore and learn. Game-based learning is not only motivating but a way for students to learn content, take risks and pique their interests in a non-threatening environment while keeping their attention. While games such as Angry Birds can be used to reinforce physics concepts, larger online gaming sites such as The World Peace Game (worldpeacegame.org) emerges the students in critical-thinking skills as well as immersing them into solving global problems. Research has shown that game-based learning requires student to become decision makers, strategic and analytical thinkers, problem solvers and have the ability to easily adapt to change. (Spires, 2015)

Another aspect of progressive education, cooperation between home and school, is also a common trend in 21st Century Education. Collaboration not only between students but also between home and school allows for learning that extends beyond the classroom. One example of this would be the use of Skype in the Classroom (education.skype.com). Allowing students to expand their horizons and collaborate on project through voice or video conferencing opens new opportunities to communicate for real-world purposes. PTChat (or Parent Teacher Chat) on twitter brings teachers and parents together in "real time" to connect in a weekly conversation (#ptchat). Applications such as Seesaw (web.seesaw.me) not only empowers students to take ownership of their own learning but enhances the classroom experience through documentation and collaboration with parents.

For progressive educators, education is viewed as an active process where creative self-learning and reconstruction of knowledge takes place (Ornstein, Pajak, & Ornstein, 2015). 21st Century educators strive to incorporate creativity and innovation into their daily routines. Project Based Learning and Digital storytelling allow students to go beyond writing an essay or answering a question by having students solve a problem and share a solution in the form of a digital story or interactive game. Students engage in communication skills that mirror their media rich world as well as encouraging them to create products that reflect their individuality and unique ideas. Wixie (wixie.com) is an online publishing and creativity tool that allows students to share what they know by using their own voice, art and writing. Applications such as SlideStory (slidestory.com) and Storybird (storybird.com) are also excellent resources for digital storytelling.

Although progressive educators tried to stray away from the 3R's of education to a more student centered approach, today's 21st Century education closely aligns with the progressive

philosophy by incorporating the 4 C's of education; creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration. Many of the aforementioned technologies are just small example of the vehicles that can be used to fully prepare students who "are able to think, solve problems and understand how to work collaboratively in such a rapidly changing and complex world" (Little, 2013, p. 94).

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