

### Conflicting Views: Traditional vs. Progressive Educational Ideas

The subject of American educational policy has been a significant topic of debate by scholars in our country throughout the 20th Century and continues today not only by scholars but also by legislative bodies and the public sector as well. Traditional and progressive educational ideas in regards to the nature of the child have long been debated in attempts to figure out what is really in the best interest of our children. In John Dewey's *The Child and The Curriculum* (p. 188) he describes catchwords associated with the traditional sect as "guidance and control." Traditional educational policy focuses on all students learning the liberal arts and sciences. This traditional approach aims for students to master core-knowledge through their teacher's lectures and teachings while using common texts to teach from. A leader in traditional education views is E.D. Hirsch Jr. who encourages readers in his article, "Traditional Education is Progressive" that knowledge-based learning (traditional forms) are successful in filling achievement gaps in under-achieving schools by focusing on the curriculum (p. 44.) Progressivists view the nature of the child in an opposing way, as they believe students should be the center of the educational process, not the curriculum. The progressive education movement was strongly supported in the early 1900s by John Dewey and his laboratory school in Chicago. Progressive schools like Dewey's are highly humanistic and the curriculum taught was of great interest to the child. Going back to Dewey's *The Child and the Curriculum* (p. 186,) Dewey refutes the traditional form of education as he explains that a child's differences and backgrounds are eliminated and covered up by teaching with facts and figures from a teacher's lessons. Progressivists emphasize the child's motivation to learn as they take into account each child's learning style, interests, and ability levels.

In order to be a successful learner, traditional educators believe in a "back to the basics" movement (as described by Diane Ravitch in her book, *Left Back: A Century of Battles Over School Reform*, p. 462.) Traditionalists concentrate student's attention on the curriculum and rely on teachers to focus all instruction on mandated truths, laws, and formulas. In the eyes of traditionalists, successful learners rely on teachers and texts to proceed through the educational process by following specific standards. On the other hand, progressive educationalists, such as Dewey, believe a successful learner is self-motivated and interested in his/her learning process because the subject matter is relatable and centered on their lived experiences. Scholar, Sir Ken Robinson's speech, "Schools Kill Creativity" explains that this progressive form of education is necessary because it focuses on educating the whole being, in order to face the future as a competent individual. The progressive educational movement also creates successful learners by building learning communities. In William Harms' first chapter of *Experiencing Education*, he describes Dewey's need for successful students to be learners who help one another and learn through experimenting together in small communities (p. 2.) These conflicting progressive and traditional ideas are abundant in schools across the nation today; there is no right answer when it comes to educating all children, more frequently, aspects of both sides are used.