

Alison Eberts
March 4, 2017

Education is, one of the most widely debated institutions in the United States. There are many philosophies, approaches, and ideologies about this profession, and it seems that everyone has the “best method” for teaching and learning. These various ideologies often have conflicting viewpoints, and may seem at opposite ends of pedagogical spectrums. Case in point, traditional educational systems are vastly different from those of progressive educational systems. John Dewey (progressive) and E.D. Hirsch (traditional) have incredibly different stances on education, and seem to present little similarity. However, both these approaches to education keep one thing at the center of focus: the education of all students.

The end of the Civil War created egalitarian movements throughout the United States, and education was no exception. According to Danns and Span, schools were reformed “to become more accessible, centralized, uniformed, bureaucratic, and functional to the needs of society,” and that the function of schools was to create “pathways to greater social and economic mobility.” E.D. Hirsch advocates for the traditional system of schooling because it creates more chances for social mobility. Traditional systems of education focus on “recitation, memorization, recall, testing, grades, promotion, and failure” (Hirsch, p.43). This means that students are all receiving instruction in similar fashion, and are given information by the teacher to write down for review and practice. There is less one on one, individual instruction than other methods, and an emphasis on whole class instruction. Hirsch argues that this system provides greater equality among learners. When “knowledge is effectively given to the entire group simultaneously, more students are learning much more of the time.” Hirsch believes that while teachers may spend time working individually with one student, the rest of the class sits silently. While it may seem like such mass delivery ignores individual student needs, Hirsch claims that this delivery allows for more students to be on the same page at one time.

According to John Dewey, the progressive education system focuses on social construction as a vehicle for teaching students. Dewey argued that while values and norms are built in the home, the school must prepare students for act in the society at large. In chapter one of *Experiencing Education*, it is noted that Dewey challenged the conventional education system with the belief that schools should become cooperative communities. Originally a professor of Philosophy, Dewey focused on the role of an individual in the world, and how people find their place or niche. In an educational setting, this means that students are the central parts of their education, instead of sitting listeners, and teachers are guides along the process. In his pedagogical statement, Dewey demonstrates that the purpose of school is to function as a community where ideas are shared instead of given, and students take an active role in inquiry and discovery. Discovering one’s place in society and being prepared to function as a contributing member to a community, Dewey argues, is what will perpetuate social and economic mobility. Whereas Hirsch focuses on the teacher as the deliverer of the information, Dewey states, “The teacher is not in the school to impose certain ideas or form certain habits in a child, but is there as a

member of the community to select the influences which shall affect the child." That is, students are just as important to their learning as the teachers are, but with more responsibility to choose the ways in which they will be influenced or inspired. Additionally, student progress (instead of reciting facts from memory similar to the rest of the class) is, "not the succession of studies, but in the development of new attitudes, and new interests in, experience." Dewey believes that for students to succeed in school, they must learn the importance of working together in a community, which will allow them to choose their own path of social mobility outside of the school.

These ideologies seem vastly different when compared to each other. However, both Dewey and Hirsch agree that students' best needs and interests are the most important aspect of an education. Hirsch argues that traditional education is the vehicle for students of all abilities, races, and classes to "secure the knowledge and skills that will enable them to improve their condition," while Dewey believes that "formalism and routine [threatens education] with no greater evil than sentimentalism." Whether it's by becoming masters of their own learning, or learning to retain valuable information, both philosophies agree that all students deserve a quality education.