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I believe that a teacher’s role is that of facilitator to her student’s learning and that her classroom should be a place that sparks the imagination, gets creative juices flowing and awakens her students’ desire and natural drive to learn. The teacher should strive to create a classroom which fosters her students’ growth and development. Some teachers emphasize to a greater extent the students’ sense of value and interest than other teachers do, and those teachers in the latter category depend less on the intrinsic desire to learn, relying more on external factors. Although external factors such as a child’s environment have great part to play, I believe that the child’s built-in desire to learn plays a key role in how that child learns. The teacher should therefore play on that innate drive to learn and not see herself in vacuum that is the main source of information.

There is much to be said for Maria Montessori’s philosophy of education. Maria Montessori was a doctor in Italy who was born in 1870 and died in 1952. Dr. Montessori held the view that human beings must touch and experience their world first-hand or true learning could not take place. She believed that as educators our role should be to awaken and encourage our students’ natural drive to learn, so that they would carry that love for learning throughout their lives.

I like the fact that children learn to help themselves as they move independently from activity to activity with the guidance of their teachers. This way, students learn about themselves and can learn more about the areas they are really interested in. I believe that a student will learn more when they are ready to learn about something and they get an opportunity to do just that when they are free to move about. If they learn things by their own curiosity and find things out on their own, not being forced to learn about a particular subject area, children during the crucial

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years of development acquire more of a life-long love of learning. Children learn about their world by way of field trips as every child should know about all the key places in their community. Peer learning is also an aspect of the Montessori experience that prepares children for life as it gives older children a greater responsibility and sense of purpose and it shows that we are all interdependent, as we can draw upon each other for assistance where necessary.

I do not believe that people are passive learners, but that all people learn better when they are actively involved. The teacher should therefore not merely deliver lecture-style lessons on the “chalkboard” but should play a support role, planning creative lessons in which students can really get involved in their learning. I don’t believe that we can have genuine knowledge without a clear understanding of the subject, not a rote memorization of what is presented to us.

I believe that learning is either by discovery or by discovery assisted by instruction, and that children cannot genuinely learn by instruction alone. Thinkers such as Socrates, who lived from 469 to 399 B.C., are considered to be Idealists. He believed that teaching was a cooperative art rather than a productive one. He believed that teachers should not view themselves as productive artists much in the way of a shoemaker or carpenter but rather as cooperating with the natural processes of the mind in the student’s process of learning. I would have to agree with Socrates when he said that teaching is a cooperative art. Learning can take place without the teacher, just by the mere processes of the mind, but a teacher aids the process in much the same way as a midwife cooperates with nature to facilitate the birth of a child. The child can be born without the presence of the midwife, but she helps the process along. For this reason, teachers who view

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themselves as indispensable and the sole reason that learning takes place are greatly mistaken. The process of teaching should involve much more than merely presenting facts for memorization. It should involve much questioning and discussion. As a teacher, I must work along with my students as they explore their environments and discover the world around them. We want to truly validate our students’ natural desire to learn by encouraging them to engage their intellects and learn. What our students learn by discovery becomes etched on their minds and is retained for the longer-term.

I also believe as the Realists do, in the concept of independence. That is that objects exist in the absence or presence of a human mind to see them. Realists such as Aristotle, who lived from 384 to 322 B.C., believed that humanity’s purpose is to use its ability to think. Aristotle, like Plato believed in thinking logically through a statement to determine its validity or reality. His method of logical thought was known as the syllogism. Aristotle did believe in the study of matter, as I do, in order to find out more. As a teacher I believe we should encourage our students to think logically through statements they are presented with in order to determine their truth and in the process discover facts about the world in which they live.

I disagree with the Idealists’ approach that ideas are the only truth in the world and the only source of true knowledge. Idealists believe that since matter is constantly changing it could not be trusted. I believe that there is truth to be found in investigating matter and in performing experiments to confirm reality. There is knowledge to be gained from the way things are even if

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they will change later on. I suppose that from thoughts and ideas there would arise the desire to prove hypotheses and from there a student can learn whether a hypothesis is true or not.

Realists believe that education and the method of education should be teacher-centred and highly organized, and I would have to disagree with this. I believe that whilst education should be organized, it should be based on the students’ interests. If a student is interested in something they are naturally more curious to learning about it and in so doing, is likely to retain more.

I believe in the Realists’ serious approach to education as we should take the matter of education as highly important and one which cannot be taken lightly. In educating our population we are weaving our social fabric.

I do believe that we should encourage our students to express themselves on paper in the way of poetry and composition and therefore do not agree with the Realists’ non-holistic approach to education.

I also believe that students should see the cause and effect of their actions and that they can affect their reality by the actions that they take. As such, my students would be given ample opportunity to perform experiments so that they can see effect. I would also like to reward positive behaviours in order that students can tend toward those actions that will increase their learning. This is in line with existential beliefs and behaviourism, as I do believe that learning changes behaviour.

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As Realists such as Thomas Aquinas believed, that the highest good comes through thinking, I, in much the same way, believe that there is much benefit to be derived from applying our minds and summoning our students to do likewise. Like Aquinas, I also believe that we are all God’s children and as such, our thoughts should be in line with Christian beliefs and His Word. This way we may understand ourselves better, as we strive to accomplish His purposes and in turn gain a better understanding of the world, making it a better place in which to live. Aquinas believed that a human teacher could only “point” the way to knowledge, but that God was the ultimate teacher, as only He could reach through to the very soul of a person.

I also agree with the Essentialists in that the acquisition of knowledge and skills is essential for life in today’s society.

I believe that individual ideas are formed by having experiences and as such my students should have ample opportunity to gain experience both in the classroom in hands-on activities, and outside the classroom, by way of field trips and physical activity.

Socrates once said, he neither Athenian or Greek, but a world citizen and this ties in with my philosophy of education in that we are all citizens of one world and we must strive to find out as much as we can about our world by way of investigation and that we should all strive to make the best contributions that we can with the knowledge that we acquire. I believe that each child should be taught that he or she is a very important part of the world with an equally important purpose. I will endeavour to show them such importance by way of highlighting each student’s strengths and keeping criticisms to a minimum. If I can help students to realize what their

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strengths are they will have a greater awareness of their purpose and of the knowledge they would like to acquire and would probably be more successful at this process.

I believe that it is wise to be a person of moral integrity, but that there are indeed immoral people in this world who have acquired quite a bit of knowledge. Part of a child’s education should be lesson in morality however, as this would make a better world in which to live for everyone.

Idealists such as René Descartes, who lived from 1596 to 1650, wanted knowledge that was true beyond the shadow of a doubt. In like fashion, I would like my students to endeavour to discover truths about their world such that when they find them they will be completely certain that it is factual. René Descartes is considered the father of modern philosophy and the founder of the rational method as applied to philosophical research. He has to his credit being the first philosopher to use the impressions which are in our minds and lay down the rules which logic must follow to come to a philosophical conclusion. Descartes broke with the traditional Scholastic-Aristotelian philosophy that were the norm developed the mechanistic sciences. He broke with Scholastic philosophy because Descartes thought that the Scholastics’ relied too heavily upon sensation as the source for knowledge. He still came to many of the same conclusions but he was more certain. He held that God was beyond the limits of our experience, maintained human liberty and Christian morality.

As a teacher I would strive to maintain our culture by teaching our children about our traditions such as music, dances, native dishes and cakes.

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Idealists believe that the role of the teacher in educating a person is a very important one and that the teacher can make a huge impact on the life of an individual. I agree with this belief and that the way in which I view my role as a teacher will have as much of an impact on my students’ lives. If I see my role as unimportant, my actions will speak likewise.

Reconstructionists’ such as Plato and Karl Marx believed that education should help rebuild social order. This is indeed a tall order in light of the myriad of social ills that we face. However, I do believe that if our children can be taught high moral standards at school the process can be aided a long way. I believe there are benefits to be derived from questioning our students about what they see as the purpose of their education as what our students believe is very important in gearing us toward what they want to learn. Reconstructionists are also multiculturalists and believe in world unity. Theodore Brameld (1904-1987) who is seen to have made the most significant contribution to this school of thought that people should overlook all bias and view the world as one community in which we all live. This is right in line with my view that each citizen of our world community has something to offer to the world and it should be our goal as teachers to help our students find that purpose. If students see themselves as citizens of the world they will see that their actions have a greater impact than if they believe that the scope of their responsibility is their individual geographical location. If our students can find their purpose we will have happier, more self-fulfilled people in our world and hopefully, we would enjoy a more harmonious peaceful world in which to live. Therefore, the teacher’s responsibility is great and her impact huge. Reconstructionists also believe in a global

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community in which all nationalities have a common purpose. My beliefs about heavy community involvement tie in with reconstructionists’ view that half of our students’ time should be spent in some community activity in which they can apply the things that they have learned. Whilst I do not believe that it will be feasible for students to spend as much as half of their time in community activities I believe that heavy community involvement helps to build character and responsibility /ownerships in the community. Furthermore, when children are being productive they also feel more sense of purpose and can often find out more about themselves and the professions they should take up in adulthood. Involvement in useful activities and accomplishing tasks helps to build self esteem as well.

I also believe as the Reconstructionists do that students should be involved in activities which will foster a greater awareness of future-related issues such as dwindling supply of fossil fuels, the shortage of water and the world population explosion, so that students can take greater ownership of these future issues and come up with viable solutions. Students should be encouraged to think green.

I should provide thought-provoking questions and discussion for my class, lessons that they will take with them into the future. My philosophy also overlaps with Reconstructionism in that the students should be involved in setting out the curriculum. This way they are participating in a democratic process and learning to exercise their “democratic right”. Then they will be in a position to make more responsible decisions about who they would choose to be the leaders of their nation.

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I believe that in learning a second language such as Spanish our students will be broadening their minds while expanding their understanding of those cultures and the global community. Spanish is the second most widely used language in the world and so our students’ global knowledge would be greatly increased. They would therefore be able to use their skills in many other countries of the world.

We should also explore global ills in our classrooms so that students have an awareness of the issues that we are faced with globally. We should also challenge them to think of viable solutions.

I would also want my students to be involved in critical thinking and analytical problem solving activities, both inside and outside of the classroom. This way they are better prepared with the different problems they will encounter during their careers.

I agree with the Pragmatists’ view that our students should have plenty of opportunity to experience new things, environments, smells, smells, textures and activities. I believe that the environment in which we place our students is of utmost importance, and as the Pragmatists do that their environment plays a key part in making a person who they will become.

The Pragmatists’ views overlap with Progressive views since one of the main contributors to Progressivism, John Dewey, also made huge contributions to the Pragmatist school of thought. Other noted Pragmatists included men such as Jean Jacques Rousseau, Charles Darwin and John Locke. Both Pragmatists and Progressivists take a cross-disciplinary approach to education and

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like to demonstrate as I do, that all subject areas can be seen in almost everything. I take the view that we should show our students that all disciplines are related and demonstrate that connection for them by way of group projects whereby we incorporate some of each subject area, to breakdown and solve a more complex thesis.

One of our focuses should be on achieving social reform but I disagree with reconstructionists like George Counts when he said that progressive education should be thrown out, as I believe that Progressivism has its’ place in education. Progressivism is an educational philosophy that is based on the precept that human beings are social animals who learn best in social situations with other people. According to Progressivists the learning situation should consist of realistic activities which simulate the real-world and in effect prepare the person to survive and excel in a competitive and modern society. Students should gain realistic, helpful knowledge and skills that they can apply in the real world.

One of the earliest and most famous practitioners of Progressive education was Francis W. Parker who believed that there was no use in having knowledge without understanding. Francis wanted schools to offer child-centered education that was based on real-life activities in order that children’s creativity could be encouraged and children would better be able to grasp the concepts.

In his Quincy, Massachusetts system he removed the traditional curriculum, replacing it with learning units that followed central themes and linked knowledge of different disciplines. He had gained two years experience in Germany, closely observing educational trends and was

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ready to apply the methods he had learned in his superintendent of schools position in Massachusetts.

His later work also served to train teachers in Progressive methods. Francis Parker’s 1894 “Talks on Pedagogics” became one of the first educational writings in America to earn world acclaim.

John Dewey (1859-1952) is remembered as the father of Progressive education and was the most noticed and probably the most effectual individual in Progressive education. A very talented philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer, Dewey was also the most famous spokesperson in Progressivism. Parker moved from practice to theory but Dewey started with hypotheses, devising methods and curricula to test them. Dewey had become dissatisfied with philosophy, stating that it was mere speculation and sought out ways to make it relevant to real issues. He rejected dichotomy in favour of a philosophy of experience in which everything in the world could be connected. Therefore in 1896 Dewey founded the Laboratory School to test his theories and discover how a school could become an interdependent community and develop individuals’ own capacities and satisfy individual needs. For Dewey these two goals were not mutually exclusive but were dependent on each other for success. This interdependence of purpose is the main thrust of Progressivism.

Dewey and other educators like Charles Eliot and Abraham Flexner worked to make the Progressivism philosophy into the main pedagogical belief in America and in 1917 began the Lincoln School of Teachers College which held the goal of formulating an elementary and

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secondary curriculum that would remove irrelevant material and strive to include material which was applicable to the needs of everyday life.

One of the most famous projects that arose from their work (a third grade project which followed the everyday life of the Hudson River) became an introduction to reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, history, science, literature and art. Each part of the project gave individual children the opportunity to focus on different aspects that they were interested in. Each part of the project also gave in depth coverage of some important part of modern society. The children also had to work cooperatively on the project in the various parts.

Alternative approaches which arose a few years later at the peak of the Cold War, competed with the Progressive approach but ironically included Dewey’s ideas of education based on real world experience and the student playing an active role in his learning. This led to a come-back for Progressivism and Parker’s and Dewey’s ideas in the second half of the 20th century.

The Open Classroom Movement led by Herb Kohl and George Dennison brought many of Parker’s child-centered ideas back into focus and in recent years Alfie Kohn has been an avid supporter of the Progressive movement, openly criticizing the No Child Left Behind Act.

Public Education in America experienced reduced funding in many states due to taxpayer revolts. This has led to the foundation of many independent schools, a large proportion of which follow the Progressive philosophy. Furthermore, the public has challenged the No Child Left

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Behind methods of teaching and testing, and this has led to an increase in the number of schools following the Progressive philosophy.

I agree with most of the Progressive views and although Progressive programs vary throughout America, most Progressive schools ascribe to the following principles:

* A flexible curriculum that is influenced by students’ interests
* Teachers act as facilitators of learning who guide students in using varied activities to learn
* Teachers use many different materials which give opportunity for individual and group work
* Teachers support learning by discovery
* Programs frequently use community resources and service-learning projects.

Most Progressive education programs accomplish the above goals through the following methods:

* Students learn by doing hands-on projects, in other words there is a focus on **experiential learning**.
* The curriculum is integrated and focuses on the themes to show how subjects are related.
* Problem solving and developing critical thinking skills is emphasized.
* There is also an emphasis on group work and developing social skills.

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* The goals of learning are real understanding and action or application instead of rote knowledge.
* Learning projects are collaborative and cooperative.
* Education aims at instilling social responsibility and teaching democracy.
* There is an orientation toward community service and service learning projects in the daily curriculum
* Subject content is chosen by thinking ahead to question what skills will be relevant in future society.
* Varied learning resources are employed instead of textbooks.
* There is a focus on promoting life-long learning and importance of social skills.
* A child’s performance is assessed by evaluating the child’s projects and productions.

I believe that Progressivists had a great contribution to make to education and agree with most of the above principles. However, I do not agree with the Progressivist’s contextual approach to learning everything and I believe that there are some subject areas in which we need to take a basic skills approach. For instance, in teaching reading and writing, we should not depart from some of the traditional teaching methods as the Realists would suggest, as they are more effectual. Some educators argue that Progressive education is available mainly to the upper middle class and actually puts minority students at a disadvantage.

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Despite these shortcomings, Progressivism has its many strengths, that have been mentioned above and offers a positive alternative to traditional methods of education and one that is useful in preparing students for their future lives in a harsh, competitive modern society.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, to which philosophy of education do I subscribe? Well, I’m all for whatever promotes active learning. I can take pieces from various philosophies of education that are relevant to my overall take on what a person’s education should be and it all comes back to that overriding theme. I believe a person’s educations should take the person’s interests into consideration but that that education at the end of the day should be a well rounded one, which involved the student in a wide cross-section of all areas. There should be no doubt in the person’s mind about what their earthly purpose is, who they are and the contribution they can make to our world-wide community. Our students should feel at the end of the day that each human being was created to work hard and should carry a core set of high moral standards and ethics throughout life.

The well-rounded individual should understand completely that we were all placed on earth for such a time as this and that undoubtedly we are citizens of one large global community, putting aside all differences. There are contributions that people of every diverse culture and nation have in common and although one global set of laws would be almost impossible in light of the varied beliefs and customs, there are a set of underlying principles that we each should take with us as we do our part to make the world a better place.

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