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THE FAILURE OF PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION AND THE RETURN TO  
CLASSICAL MODELS

“My advice to all parents  
is...anything Wm. Heard Kilpatrick  
and John Dewey say do, don’t do.”  
Flannery O’Connor<sup>1</sup>

This paper consists of three parts: I first comment on each of nineteen characteristics of so-called “progressive education,” sometimes briefly, sometimes at greater length, and I conclude that progressive education is a seriously flawed philosophy of education. (The Appendix contains a list of these characteristics. Readers may wish to peruse them before proceeding.) In the second part I argue that we should return to the very type of education the progressives rejected early in the twentieth century, namely “traditional and classical education.” Finally I argue that globalization is a blessing and a boon for education. *Inter alia* it has made comparisons of student achievement from all parts of the world easier, and it will eventually provide the data to demonstrate which type of education, progressive or classical, is superior for both individuals and societies.

In *The Promise and Failure of Progressive Education*, Norman Norris, who identifies himself as a progressive, gives the first seven characteristics of progressive education.<sup>ii</sup> I shall now comment on these one by one.

1. Progressive education, also called “romantic modernism” by some, is the dominant philosophy of the educational establishment (schools of education, state departments of education, administrators and many teachers) that has controlled U.S. public schools for approximately sixty years. Progressive education was part of a larger cultural movement that began *ca.* 1900 and placed “its hopes for the future of humanity

in the free and untrammelled development of the natural and social sciences...it looked forward to the eventual triumph of science over religion: Science was to replace religion as the basis of public life and culture.”<sup>iii</sup> In the early 1900s during this Progressive movement, many were optimistic that sociology would solve the problems of society, and psychology and psychiatry would solve the problems of individuals. Needless to say, this didn’t happen.

Progressive education is associated with John Dewey (1859-1952) and to a lesser extent William H. Kilpatrick (1871-1965), but research has shown that many of their ideas came from Herbert Spencer (1820-1903).<sup>iv</sup> In Europe progressive education was developed and promoted by Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827), Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), the inventor of Kindergarten and Johann Herbart (1776-1841). Later in England progressive education was inspired by *Summerhill* (1960) written by the British schoolmaster A.S. Neil,<sup>v</sup> but it was brought to an abrupt halt in 1987 when an act of Parliament created a national curriculum stressing subject matter and traditional teaching methods.

2. Progressive education rejects the subject matter, methods and purposes of “traditional or classical education.” The fundamental purpose of “traditional or classical education” was to transmit the culture to the younger generation. Interestingly enough, the Greek word *paideia* captures both meanings, education and culture, thus showing the intimate relationship between them. Transmitting the culture to the young is of the utmost importance for two obvious reasons: the culture will die out if it is not handed down, and secondly, since humans do not survive by instinct, they must acquire a culture

to survive. Transmission of culture is the purpose of education in all known societies in the world and in the history of the world, with the possible exception of those societies where progressive education flourishes. Dewey saw transmission of culture as an important goal of education, but he was on the losing side of this controversy.<sup>vi</sup>

Where enculturation is a goal of education, there will be a body of knowledge to be handed down and mastered by students. Deny transmission of culture, and there will be no such “body of common content” to constitute the curriculum. As a result there will be little for schools to do other than address the emotional needs of students and assist them in developing skills, a subject I will take up shortly in connection with point #4.

3. Progressive education is “child-centered.” As just stated, all humans need enculturation if they are to live a life worthy of a human being. By rejecting this as a goal of education, progressives are ignoring a fundamental need of children, thus making a mockery of their claim to focus on the needs of the student.

4. Progressive education focuses on “the development of generic problem-solving ‘life-skills,’ presumably in opposition to education that is focused on a body of common content.” Part of the rationale for focusing on the development of skills at the expense of mastery of subject matter is the claim that knowledge is changing and expanding so rapidly that it is impossible to know what one will need to know even in the near future. Rather than learning facts which may soon be obsolete, one should hone one’s critical thinking and problem-solving skills and other abstract strategies. Another reason is that in multicultural societies, educators cannot agree on what the content should be. E. D. Hirsch, educational reformer extraordinaire and author of seminal works

on reforming education, calls focusing on skills “educational formalism” and considers it one of progressive education’s two biggest mistakes.<sup>vii</sup>

It would, of course, be wonderful if educational formalism worked. One could take courses in “How to Think Like a Scientist” and then be considered a scientist without having to study chemistry or biology or physics. Or one could become an expert in problem solving and offer to help the public with their legal problems without having studied law. The fact is that knowledge is needed even to understand the problems themselves, whatever the field. Moreover there is now a consensus among cognitive psychologists, who have studied how experts solve problems, that “the almost universal feature of reliable higher-order thinking about any subject or problem is the possession of a broad, well integrated base of background knowledge relevant to the subject.”<sup>viii</sup> Once again research has confirmed what common sense told us all along.

5. Progressive education is opposed to the “theoretical and the academic.” Subject areas are integrated and “taught through natural life situations.” Hirsch calls this “naturalism” and considers it progressive education’s second big mistake.<sup>ix</sup> Hence history and civics are not taught separately but are combined into “social studies,” and “integrated math” combines arithmetic, algebra and geometry.

It is obvious that children learn an enormous amount from the moment of birth until they go to school at age five or six, including the structure and a large vocabulary of their native language. This is done effortlessly and naturally without drill, structured practice or forced memorization. Progressives want this type of learning to continue into

the early grades. Requiring young students to memorize letters and sounds, facts, poems and such things as the multiplication tables is thought to be psychologically damaging. Oddly enough, progressives realize that regular practice and repetition are necessary in areas such as music, dance and gymnastics, but reject them in math, reading and writing. Another fact overlooked here is that there seems to be an instinct to learn the first language, but there is no such instinct to read or do math.<sup>x</sup> Hirsch traces “naturalism” to romanticism, about which I shall say more later.

6. The school is essentially a mechanism for social change. With this we can agree, but with one important addition, namely those who set out to change the culture should have an intimate knowledge of it and its history. In the West, at least since the time of Socrates, transforming culture has been an integral part of the tradition. One might say that the unexamined culture is not worth transmitting. All aspects of one’s culture should be scrutinized rationally, and those practices deemed worthy should be transmitted and those deemed unworthy should be transformed. Using education to ameliorate society is not, then, a new idea, but reforming it without knowing its origin and history thoroughly is.

7. Education should be “democratic.” Whatever this means, young students certainly should not vote on what is to be learned, how it should be taught, who should teach it or how the school should be administered. There is no reason why older students shouldn’t have an elected student council, class officers, etc. to give them a voice in nonacademic matters. Educators other than progressive educators do not think students have the experience or knowledge to make decisions on substantive issues in schools.

To these characteristics of progressive education Hirsch adds:

1. Progressive education is based on a “tool” metaphor; skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, analysis and synthesis are seen as tools, and getting an education is adding tools to one’s toolbox. The claim is that these skills are “all-purpose intellectual competencies”<sup>xi</sup> that can be mastered and applied to any subject matter. In other words, once one has acquired these tools, facts can be obtained from the internet and other sources and these techniques applied to them. Unfortunately studies of the way “novices and experts” solve problems reveal the shortcomings of the tool metaphor. As already mentioned, expert problem solvers and critical thinkers always have a deep knowledge of the relevant facts. Hirsch proposes a new metaphor, namely “intellectual capital,” which consists of both skills and knowledge. Just as a person with lots of money finds it easier to make more, so too students with “intellectual capital” find it easier to learn more than those without it. Intellectual capital is the key to becoming a “life-long learner.”

2. Progressive educationists oppose drilling, memorizing and hard work. According to progressives, “learning should be holistic and natural, presented in projects, not fragmented into isolated academic subjects.”<sup>xii</sup> Drill and practice are thought to bore students and destroy their interest and curiosity. “Drill and kill” is the progressive mantra.

Actually many things such as the facts of grammar, the multiplication tables, phonics and the spelling of words should be practiced and memorized. Adults who were

required to learn these “by heart” are usually grateful, having found mastery of these useful throughout life. In addition, experience tells us that children enjoy repetition and have an almost instinctive ability to master elementary facts.

3. Among progressives the emphasis is on “process,” and there is disparagement of “mere facts.” Suffice it to say that Hirsch has shown with devastating clarity that reading, which could be called the most basic “skill,” cannot be done with understanding unless the reader has the background knowledge expected by writers.<sup>xiii</sup> Assuming that high school graduates should be able to read newspapers, magazines and books addressed to the general public, Hirsch and his associates discovered empirically “what every American needs to know.” This is the body of knowledge which the public schools should teach. Progressive educationists, however, disparage “mere facts,” thinking children will be bored by them. They propose to teach instead abstract techniques, strategies and skills, which is what is meant by “process.” Again the consensus in cognitive science and mainstream psychology is that these techniques, strategies and skills are content-bound and should be acquired as by-products of the study of significant and interesting texts.

While no one would deny that knowledge is expanding rapidly, especially in the “hard” sciences, there is still in each society a core body of facts that all individuals should know if they are to be literate and able to communicate with their compatriots.

4. Progressives oppose the study of grammar.<sup>xiv</sup> How has opposition to the study of grammar, the “first liberal art,” come about? In 1952 a book entitled *The Structure of English* by Charles Fries of the University of Michigan was published, and on the first

page, “Fries compares the new scientific attitude toward language to Harvey’s work on the circulation of blood and traditional grammar to the practice of bleeding.”<sup>xv</sup> Educators concluded from this that the study of traditional grammar should be discouraged or better yet discontinued. Subsequently the National Council of Teachers of English issued three reports (1963, 1985 and 1991) all asserting that the teaching of grammar is not only a waste of time but can have harmful effects on students’ ability to speak and write. Progressive educators, always opposed to what involved drill and memorization, e.g. of the parts of speech, and always eager for the latest “scientific finding,” seized upon the anti-grammar movement among teachers of English and made it a staple of their ideology.

It is especially ironic that, while stressing the development of all-purpose formal skills such as analysis, synthesis and even metacognitive strategies, progressives should consider the analysis of sentences unimportant. How could anyone who cannot analyze sentences be expected to analyze arguments and/or essays and editorials?

5. There is an antipathy to testing, ranking and competition among progressives. Five criticisms of standardized tests are commonly alleged by progressives: 1) They belong to a “factory model” of education. 2) They introduce competition where there should be cooperation. 3) They ignore “the individuality of students’ talents and interests.” 4) They send “the wrong message about what is valuable in education and life.” 5) They are culturally biased and therefore unfair to members of some minority groups.<sup>xvi</sup>

While time does not permit us to respond to these one by one, suffice it to say that there are powerful arguments against each criticism. In general it can be said that objective tests provide incentives for both students and teachers, that tests provide ways to “monitor progress” and “remedy deficiencies,”<sup>xvii</sup> and ways to evaluate students, teachers and schools. It is also the case that grading non-standardized tests tends to be subjective and therefore unfair. Abolishing tests and grades completely would be unfair to those who work harder and/or are more intelligent.

Opposition to ranking students stems from romantic egalitarianism and from false concerns regarding students’ self-esteem. The fact is that discovering one’s strong points and weaknesses and how one stacks up against others is a valuable part of growing up for everyone. For those who subscribe to an Augustinian view of human nature rather than a romantic one, testing, ranking and competition are unavoidable aspects of education and life. They can be channeled to useful purposes in spite of disadvantages that may result from abuse or ignorance.<sup>xviii</sup> Finally, as Hirsch says, “one can understand that progressives would want to bash tests when their methods consistently fail to improve test scores.”<sup>xix</sup>

6. Progressives read each other’s books and articles but ignore what is going on in mainstream psychology, cognitive science, etc.<sup>xx</sup> What has been said above regarding “educational formalism” is a perfect example of this.

7. In schools of education there is an orthodoxy, and only those who are “educationally correct” are hired to teach.<sup>xxi</sup> Students of pedagogy are not, therefore, exposed to alternative views, and different schools of thought do not exist in education as

they do in other fields. Hirsch has charged that faculty with joint appointments are rarely found in schools of education.<sup>xxii</sup> In other ways too, schools of education tend to be isolated; they are “a thing apart.” Teaching in them is less prestigious than in other schools. Another critic claims that professors of education do not “commonly have students read original works (to see if in fact Piaget said what is claimed for him)...” Students “must rely on what their professors tell them to believe.”<sup>xxiii</sup>

8. Progressives have romantic notions about human nature and children. These enable them to fancy themselves as champions of children’s rights and depict others as cruel and insensitive. Martin Kozloff sums up the essence of “Romantic modernism” with the following five propositions:

1. The individual is naturally good.
2. The individual is naturally a moral being who will choose the right.
3. The individual is naturally able to construct knowledge---create concepts, propositions, moral principles and other generalizations.
4. The individual is naturally spontaneous and creative; health depends on unstifled spontaneity.
5. Society is hierarchical, routinized, regimented. Its knowledge systems contain pre-formed concepts, propositions, values and other generalizations. Its systems of roles, statuses, norms and obligations...constitute pre-formed identities, moral codes, and life courses. In summary, society is naturally repressive...It is crippling. It is the source of misery and of the perversion of natural goodness.<sup>xxiv</sup>

To these characteristics of progressive education, I add:

1. Progressive education rejected the transmission of culture as *the* or even *a* goal of education. I have discussed this earlier.

2. Since nothing ever works,<sup>xxv</sup> we see fad after fad, and alleged panacea after alleged panacea, e.g. project learning, discovery learning, cooperative learning, multiple intelligences, learning styles, the self-esteem movement, brain periodization, whole language, new math, integrated math, constructivist math, developmentally appropriate practices, etc. Some of these fads are short-lived; others, as Kozloff observes, “exist for decades under the same name (whole language) and when finally mauled by sufficient data and popular magazine articles revealing their damaging effects, merely change their name (to “balanced literacy”) and keep working at the same old stand.”<sup>xxvi</sup>

3. Because of constant experimentation children are used as guinea pigs and lab rats, an ethically questionable practice.

4. Many of the “latest innovations” are recycled “old innovations” such as “project learning,” which was promoted by William Kilpatrick in the early 1900s and “learning styles,” known fifty years ago as “individual differences.”

Many may rightly wonder why such an inadequate philosophy has endured for decades and continues to flourish in most schools of education and most public schools. As usual Hirsch has an excellent answer: progressivism derives from romanticism and romanticism is more of a religion than a philosophy. It is, in fact, a secular religion with its own creed, sacred scripture, heroes and saints, rites and rituals. Romantics transferred God or what is divine from the transcendent realm into nature. Hence what is natural is good and what is artificial is bad. Education is seen as “natural growth.”<sup>xxvii</sup> Children are

to be allowed to grow and develop naturally following their own instincts, impulses, interests and time schedules. This is the idea behind the word Kindergarten. Progressive education is a secular religion deriving from romanticism, and as a form of religion it cannot be refuted with empirical data nor disproved with rational arguments. Let us consider briefly the romantic origins of progressive education.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) actually had three different philosophies of education.<sup>xxviii</sup> Our concern is with the most influential one which is set forth in his novel *Emile*. The basic principle that underlies this philosophy of education is that humans are “naturally good and that it is by their institutions alone that they become wicked.”<sup>xxix</sup> In other words *la bonté naturelle* of human nature is corrupted by society. Rousseau says that he came to this remarkable thesis as a result of a “semi-mystical” experience he had while sitting under a tree during a journey in 1749 at the age of thirty-seven.<sup>xxx</sup> Thus this is not a principle he arrived at rationally nor as the result of experience. Rousseau in fact had no experience with children and no teaching experience except for some music lessons he gave early in his life. He fathered five children with his mistress Thérèse Levasseur, all of whom he handed over to a Foundlings Hospital to be reared.<sup>xxxi</sup> In *Emile* Rousseau sets out to show how a proper education “can, to a large extent, preserve intact the pristine goodness, innocence and happiness of the individual...”<sup>xxxii</sup> Emile, the boy Rousseau educates, is without a mother, and his father is not involved in his education. Emile and his tutor live an isolated life in a controlled environment away from the corrupting influence of society and are engaged in a scientific experiment.

Rousseau's advice regarding child-rearing and education is: "Do exactly the opposite of what is usually done, and you will have hit on the right plan."<sup>xxxiii</sup>

A second principle could be "Whatever is natural is good; whatever is artificial is bad." The child must be encouraged to follow his own impulses and instincts. He is never to be ordered to do anything, nor is he taught manners or morals until he reaches puberty.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Learning to read is postponed until age twelve and then the boy is allowed to read only one book, *Robinson Crusoe*, from which he learns what we would call "survival skills." From birth until age twelve the child's only book is the "Book of Nature."

Since in this paper I am concerned with progressive education and the education of young children, I will not discuss the education of Emile once he reaches his teen years when Rousseau does introduce history, religion and ethics. Suffice it to say here that the idea of educating a child in isolation to prevent his natural goodness and innocence from being corrupted by society is inhuman, impracticable and cruel. Nothing could be more unnatural or artificial. It seems unlikely that anything useful could be derived from such a preposterous thought experiment. Yet the progressive educationists found in it their romantic notions regarding human nature, their anti-social bias, their naturalism, their developmentalism and their anti-intellectualism.

Rousseau's ideas on education were ridiculed by his contemporaries, the *philosophes*,<sup>xxxv</sup> and his theory had virtually no effect on education in France in the

eighteenth century or even to the present day. It was outside France, by such figures as Pestalozzi, Froebel, Herbart and Dewey, that Rousseau's ideas were adopted and put to use resulting in revolutionary changes in educational practices. The evidence showing that Dewey was "profoundly influenced" by Rousseau is presented by Henry Edmondson in his book *John Dewey and the Decline of American Education*.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

As far as Rousseau's claim that humans are naturally good and that "it is by their institutions alone that they become wicked," since he offers neither evidence nor argumentation to support it, I apply the logical principle *Quod gratis asseritur gratis negatur* (What is gratuitously asserted can be gratuitously denied. More freely "What is asserted with no proof requires no refutation.") I simply deny it.

Thus far I have attempted to show that progressive education is a philosophy of education with very serious shortcomings that is, in fact, wrong on every important point. My claim is that reform of the public schools will be impossible unless progressive education is exposed, rejected and replaced with a more realistic philosophy. If that were to occur, what should replace it? At the outset of this paper I quoted Norman Norris, who said that progressives rejected "the subject matter, methods and purposes of traditional or classical education." It is precisely that "traditional or classical education" that should replace progressive education.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Someone may ask, "Can it be that after 2500 years of experience and after the rise of science, the social sciences and the emergence of education as an academic specialty that has produced tens of thousands of allegedly empirical studies that there is nothing better than ancient Greek ideas about educating the

young? Can it be that Plato and Aristotle are more reliable guides in this field than Pestalozzi and John Dewey?” The answer, in my opinion, must be in the affirmative; future generations will look back with astonishment that so many followed such a naïve and impractical philosophy for so long.

Regarding the subject matter, methods and purposes of traditional or classical education, for Americans the subject matter was identified by E.D. Hirsch in his 1987 book *Cultural Literacy*, cited above, the subtitle of which was “What Every American Needs to Know.” The same approach could be used in other societies. The teaching methods should be in almost every case the exact opposite of those recommended by progressives. For example there should be drilling and memorizing, always, of course, keeping in mind ancient Greek admonitions regarding “moderation in all things” and “nothing to excess.” The same applies to work; students should be expected to work reasonably hard. Skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, analysis and synthesis should be acquired as students study significant subject matter. In other words, “educational formalism” must be laid to rest and along with it the “tool metaphor.” Grammar must be reinstated as the “first liberal art” on which logic and rhetoric, the other two members of the trivium, are based. History and civics should be separated and taught as the important subjects they are. Initiation into a cultural tradition or cultural traditions should be recognized once again as the purpose of education. Finally, romantic notions regarding human nature and children must be replaced by more realistic ones such as those derived from Plato, Aristotle and the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Professor Tom Robinson in his magisterial book *Plato's Psychology* has shown how Plato progressed from a notion of conflict between body and soul in the *Phaedo* to conflict within the bipartite soul of the early *Republic* to conflict within the tripartite soul that is introduced in *Republic*, Book IV.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Plato's view of the soul is vividly illustrated with two unforgettable images. The first from *Republic* IX 588 ff. is of a "composite beast" that resembles a human but has within it a man, a lion and largest of all a many-headed beast representing respectively reason, the spirited element and the appetites. In the just soul the man enlists the lion to help control and tame the many-headed beast. The same psychic structure is presented in the *Phaedrus* with the image of a winged charioteer attempting to control a pair of horses, one of which is noble and of good stock, the other just the opposite, making the charioteer's task "difficult and troublesome."<sup>xxxix</sup> The important point is that Plato is keenly aware of inner conflict and of the need for a proper education to gain and maintain harmony and balance.

From the Judeo-Christian tradition we have inherited the story of Adam and Eve. This story can be seen as an etiological myth that explains the origin of evil. In spite of the fact that it is a myth, it contains a profound truth, namely that human nature is somehow disordered, that it is wounded and weakened and prone to selfishness, violence and a host of other vices. Hence it is in need of the external, fostering, formative assistance that education and society can provide.

How then can we be sure that rejecting progressive education and replacing it with traditional and classical notions regarding education will result in enhanced student

achievement, higher literacy rates and, one hopes, more intelligent participation in democratic processes? Data are already available that show that students in non-progressive schools achieve at higher rates than those in progressive schools and that students from deprived backgrounds do better in non-progressive schools.<sup>x1</sup>

Here is where globalization enters the picture.

While critics of globalization worry about the spread of capitalism and “capitalistic greed,” about imperialism, the homogenization of cultures and ecological destruction, and much more, as far as globalization and education are concerned research has uncovered no prophets of doom. Globalization seems to be a blessing and a boon for education, and a good education seems to be the best fortification against possible negative affects of globalization such as disorientation and loss of identity.

Globalization, which, of course, has been going on for a long time and is inexorable and unstoppable, has already made one important contribution to education: It has made international comparisons of student achievement easier. Comparative studies of student achievement have consistently shown that students from the U.S. do poorly, especially in science and mathematics, when compared with students from other industrialized nations.<sup>xli</sup> It is, to be sure, not surprising if students from schools which stress hard work, practice, memorization and mastery of content do better on standardized tests. Data from comparative studies have already provided ammunition for those who consider progressive education a seriously flawed philosophy of education that should be exposed and rejected.

Globalization also facilitates the comparison of teaching methods and has already led to the adoption by Western nations of methods developed in Japan and Singapore for teaching mathematics. Globalization makes travel and “study abroad” easier. Learning a foreign language, living with and interacting with people from other cultures is a uniquely broadening and enriching experience. One hopes in addition that it will lead to better understanding among peoples. Although I said above that progressive education as a secular religion seems impervious to refutation, my hope is that globalization will bring massive data regarding student achievement and greater public awareness of pedagogies and philosophies used successfully in other countries and that this will bring about a much-needed paradigm shift in American public education.

As humankind moves toward a global culture, it will be incumbent upon educators to initiate the young into that world culture, for instance by teaching the 1948 United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A world culture, however, need not be seen as a threat. I know of no reason why individuals as well as societies cannot be multicultural. Is there, for instance, any reason why one cannot be a citizen of Kolonaki, of Athens, of Attica, of Greece, of Europe, of the West and of the world? Each culture or micro-culture will have its traditions, rites, rituals and dialect which individuals can participate in and contribute to without losing their identity or becoming schizophrenic. Public schools, however, should teach the national culture and the world culture.

At *Republic* 376e Socrates asks, “What is this education to be, then? Perhaps it will be difficult to devise a system better than the one which centuries of experience have worked out with its two branches [music in the broad sense and gymnastics] for the cultivation of the mind and of the body.”<sup>xlii</sup> Progressives tried to find something better than “traditional and classical” education, but they have failed. The wise course would be to return to what worked for over two millennia and continues to work today in societies that never adopted progressivism.

## APPENDIX

### **Nineteen Characteristics of “Progressive Education”**

*The Promise and Failure of Progressive Education* by Norman Norris (2004)

1. Progressive education (hereafter P.E.) is associated with the work of John Dewey.
2. It rejects the subject matter, methods and purposes of “traditional or classical education.”
3. It is “child-centered.”
4. It focuses on “the development of generic problem-solving ‘life-skills,’ presumably in to opposition to education that is focused on a body of common content.”
5. It is opposed to the “theoretical and the academic.” Subject areas are integrated and “taught through natural life situations.”
6. The school is essentially a mechanism for social change.
7. Education should be “democratic.”

*The Schools We Need and Why We Don’t Have Them* by E.D. Hirsch (1996)

1. P.E. is based on a “tool” metaphor, and getting an education is analogous to getting more tools for your toolbox.
2. Progressives oppose drilling, memorizing and hard work.
3. The emphasis is on “process” and there is disparagement of “mere facts.”
4. They oppose the study of grammar.
5. There is an antipathy to testing, ranking and competition.
6. Progressives read each other’s books and articles but ignore what is going on in mainstream psychology, cognitive science, etc.
7. In schools of education there is an orthodoxy, and only those who are “educationally correct” are hired to teach.
8. Progressives have romantic notions about human nature and children.

To these I add:

1. P.E. rejects the transmission of culture as *the* or even *a* goal of education.
2. Since nothing ever works, in public schools we see fad after fad, e.g. project learning, discovery learning, cooperative learning, multiple intelligences, the self-esteem movement, brain periodization, new math, whole language, “constructing” meaning, etc.
3. Because of #2 above, children end up being used as guinea pigs and lab rats.
4. Many of the “latest innovations” are actually “old innovations” which have been recycled and given new names.

## NOTES

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<sup>i</sup> Quoted by Henry T Edmondson, *John Dewey and the Decline of American Education* (Wilmington: ISI, 2006), p. 1.

<sup>ii</sup> (Toronto: Scarecrow Education, 2004), pp. 13-14.

<sup>iii</sup> Lee Hardy, *First Things*, May, 2006, p. 64. On Dewey’s scientism and his unrelenting hostility to creeds of all kinds but especially religious ones, see Edmondson, pp. 28 ff.

<sup>iv</sup> See Kieran Egan, *Getting it Wrong from the Beginning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

<sup>v</sup> E. D. Hirsch, *The Schools We Need and Why We Don’t Have Them* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), p. 96. See also Edmondson, pp. 89-90.

<sup>vi</sup> In *Democracy and Education* Dewey wrote: “Education in its broadest sense is the means of this social continuity of life. . . Beings who are born not only unaware of but quite indifferent to the aims and habits of the group have to be rendered cognizant of them and actively interested. Education and education alone spans the gap. . . Unless pains are taken to see that genuine and thorough transmission takes place, the most civilized group will relapse into barbarism and then into savagery.” Quoted in Hirsch, p. 121.

<sup>vii</sup> Hirsch, p. 218.

<sup>viii</sup> *Ibid.* p. 152.

<sup>ix</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 218 ff.

<sup>x</sup> Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct* (New York: W. O. Morrow, 1994).

<sup>xi</sup> Hirsch, p. 21.

<sup>xii</sup> *Ibid.* p. 50.

<sup>xiii</sup> E. D. Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), *passim*.

<sup>xiv</sup> See David Mulroy, *The War Against Grammar* (Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 2003).

<sup>xv</sup> Mulroy, p. 5.

<sup>xvi</sup> Hirsch, *The Schools We Need*, p. 177.

<sup>xvii</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17.

<sup>xviii</sup> *Ibid.* p. 245.

<sup>xix</sup> E. D. Hirsch, “The Roots of the Education Wars,” p. 2.

[www.catholiceducation.org/articles/education/ed0174.html](http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/education/ed0174.html)

<sup>xx</sup> Hirsch, *The Schools We Need*, pp. 230-231.

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- <sup>xxi</sup> Martin A. Kozloff, "Fad, Fraud and Folly in Education," [people.uncw.edu/kozloffm](http://people.uncw.edu/kozloffm), p. 17. See also Hirsch, "An Intellectual Monopoly," *The Schools We Need*, pp. 63 ff.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Hirsch, *The Schools We Need*, pp. 123-124.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Kozloff, pp. 16-17.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Kozloff, pp. 4-5.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Edmondson, p. 31. See also Evan Keliher, "Forget the Fads --- The Old Way Works Best," *Newsweek*, September 30, 2002, p. 18.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Kozloff, p. 2.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Hirsch, *The Schools We Need*, p. 5.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Kingsley Price, "Philosophy of Education, History of," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), Vol. VI, p. 234.
- <sup>xxix</sup> F. C. Green, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 97.)
- <sup>xxx</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>xxxi</sup> This institution had a code system which would enable parents who later changed their mind to identify and retrieve their children. Rousseau declined to participate except in the case of his first born. See Green, pp. 87-94.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Green, p. 228.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Green, p. 230.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Green, pp. 230-233.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Green, p. 263.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Edmondson, pp. 8-9.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Edmondson describes traditional education as coming "from ancient Greece through the Judeo-Christian tradition and the best of Enlightenment thought especially the ideas of the nation's founders." Edmondson, p. 17.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), p. 43.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> 246a.
- <sup>xl</sup> Bonnie Grossen, "The Story Behind Project Follow Through," *Effective School Practices*, Vol 15 (1), Winter, 1995-6. See also Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy*, pp. 113-114.
- <sup>xli</sup> Edmondson, p. 115.
- <sup>xlii</sup> Author's translation.

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