**Teaching the Whole Child**

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**ED800**

Educational philosophies regarding the nature of the child and how children become successful learners have been argued and debated throughout the history of schooling. Just as each child is unique, every foundational idea is considered by the practicing educator to be valid and correct. These discrepancies stem from personal opinions of the individuals, society and the schools in which they teach. Personal belief systems in education can be dated back to the beginnings of the American school system; where religion and public education were taught together in the classroom (History of Schooling, Danns). Today, with the separation of church and state, it is inconceivable for teachers to envision freely discussing religion and applying Biblical tenants in a public school setting. Although we may find fault in past educational practices, we must consider the role of the teacher and school in society. Should we only accept our personal educational philosophies as valid? If so, how do we overcome this as educators to better teach to our students’ individual academic and personal needs?

It is critical that educational philosophy develops and changes according to the social and academic needs of students. When the philosopher John Dewey began to get involved in reforming education, the Industrial Revolution was well under way and the mass production mindset was leaking into America’s classrooms. After visiting Jane Addams’ school, Hull House, Dewey began to see the need for developing schools similar to Addams. Progressive schools were taught by teachers who believed the whole child, not the lesson, should be the center of their educational experience. Progressive educators cultivates the child’s natural learning process by encouraging students to find one’s own way to solve problems, construct knowledge and learn from the outside world (My Pedagogic Creed, Dewey). Many educators still follow the progressive philosophy, though they must often be modified in order to meet the rigorous testing demands of today’s school. One very successful educator following the progressive model is Deborah Meier, a principal of a small school in New York City, where the key academic purpose in education is to encourage students to exhibit serious, thoughtful habits of mind when exploring, connecting and questioning the world around them. Her staff engages kids in productive conversations act as role models and build school communities where thoughts, information and ideas are shared (Podcast Interview). This is not the case in most school systems today where the whole child is not considered in the learning process.

A conflicting approach to the progressive model is the more classical approach presented by E.D. Hirsch. Hirsch contends that progressive education is not effective in closing the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students (Romancing the Child, Hirsch). He states that effective schools have explicit academic goals and obtain a better balance between disciplined learning and natural engagement. Classic schools get positive test results, though the children are not as free to question and personally develop. Many parents demand test driven schools, because accountability for the students and teacher is produced on paper. Conservative education is what many parents relate to, because it how they were schooled. The nature of the child is to learn naturally, but most school systems today want to see the bottom line through test scores. It is hard to find balance between the nature of children and the current learning goals in education. The conflict in educational theories will continue and today’s educators must meet the demands set forth to us by society. Unfortunately, it is often at the expense of the students and the style of learning taking place in our classrooms.