

How to teach so that the learners learn? “On one side we have children’s natural abilities and interest, on other side we have the teaching of the appreciation and use of the great heritage of ideas in the world” (Diane Ravitch, 2000). Students’ interests are enormously varied. “Every student will need much knowledge beyond the basic but what John needs may differ greatly from what Ann needs. Do we help John and Ann to acquire the knowledge and attitudes needed to achieve their goals or we go and teach them by pre-established curriculum?” (Nel Noddings, 2005) What is the best environment for kids to learn? Here we explore and compare two opposite educational methods, talk about the most famous educators and their contributions to American education.

Two educational methods are progressive education or child-centered and traditional education with pre-established curriculum or back-to-basics movement. One of the most famous educators was John Dewey. His progressive education challenged the way children in the USA were taught, moving the focus from memorization to practical skills and active community participation. “As a philosopher, he believed that learning was an intensely social process. Students learned best while engaged in activities that involved creative problem-solving and responsibilities to fellow students” (W. Harms and I. DePencier, 1996). John Dewey wanted to replace memorization, listening and recall with the active participation and teaching students analytical skills. Dewey felt that democracy was the ideal social structure, the one best suited to the needs and aims of all people. From his point of view the democracy in education was very important. If a democratic society wants to train its children the ways of democracy, schools would need to incorporate democratic methods into their system. Progressive education envisioned the teachers as facilitators who should encourage student participation and activity through discussions and group projects. The main focus of the teachers should be the child, not the subject, as each student has individual strengths which should be cultivated and grown. Students have a freedom to choose subjects of their interest, they are challenged to use their creativity, to experiment, and try different things until they get the individual solutions to the problems.

Not everyone was fond of John Dewey philosophy and democratic education. John Dewey critics accuse him of creating a form of educational anarchy, of leaving children’s education to themselves, of keeping the knowledge away from education. Two of the most prominent critics of the progressive education and supporters of the traditional education were E.D. Hirsch and Allan Bloom. They claim that there is a certain set of factual information that every American

needs to know. "Traditional knowledge based schooling is currently employed with great success in most other advanced nations" (Hirsch, 1997). There should be high standard and a common curriculum in major subjects for all children. Many teachers appreciate clear curriculum guidelines. It is impossible to teach 150 students in a high school without textbooks and be a facilitator of projects suited to the individual needs and interests of each student.

The crash of educational ideas and practice will continue as long as there is not a clear idea of what is fundamental, nature of the child or the curriculum.