Philosophy of Education
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ITL600
Becoming a Teacher
2 February 2018
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Abstract

This paper will discuss the two different philosophies that coincided with my personal educational beliefs according to the survey taken for ITL600. These philosophies are essentialism and progressivism. Sam Roberson and Cynthia Woody’s article, Declaring Civil War on Essentialist Teaching explain the fundamentals of essentialism but, also, criticize the practice while advocating for a different approach. Robert Tremmel’s article, On the Horns of a Dilemma explain the fundamentals of Deweyan progressivism and the problems it faces in the 21st century.
Introduction

Essentialism and progressivism are two different teaching philosophies that advocate for different methods of instruction. Essentialism is more focused around the teacher’s instruction while progressivism focuses on a student-centered classroom. Although these two educational philosophies are located on far ends of the learning spectrum, they both speak to my current educational beliefs based on my background and current ideas in regards to the classroom.

Article I – Declaring War on Essentialist Teaching

Roberson and Woody’s article begins by describing a story about a middle school student and her troubles with understanding her history class material. The student describes her failure to understand the fundamentals of the Civil War by stating that the majority of her classroom work is based on copying notes and listening to lectures. After learning about the Civil War from her family members, she stated that she now understood the historical event. The article’s authors describe essentialism as teachers who are “focal point[s] of the class…and masters of a particular subject or discipline.” (Roberson and Woody, 2012). Essentialism is teacher oriented while the students come secondary. The goal of essentialism suggests that teachers attempt to make students honest members of their community by instilling the concepts of respect and hard work. In regards to grading the students on performance, students “are graded on their ability to remember and replicate the teacher’s presentations as the class progresses along a predetermined schedule.” (Roberson and Woody, 2012). Although the authors give a thorough explanation of the essential teaching philosophy, they do not agree with it. Although they claim that this method of teaching benefits state standardized testing, they ultimately describe it as “low-level learning.” (Roberson and Woody, 2012). The authors advocate for progressivism, a more
student-centered classroom where teachers mainly guide classroom instruction rather than dominate it.

**Article II – On the Horns of a Dilemma**

Tremmel’s article explains the controversy that the progressive teaching philosophy poses in the 21st century. Although he says that progressivism has dominated the classrooms over the past fifty years, he shows that there is an argument between conservative traditional teaching and liberal teaching philosophies. The author shifts to explaining the fundamentals of “Deweyan Progressivism.” He says that John Dewey’s pedagogical movement in the early 20th century advocated for student-centered learning and hands-on education. The author shows that Dewey believed that it was time to “replace the old education” with a new one “based on the larger whole of social life.” (Tremmel, 2010). Progressivism is based on creating an environment for students to actively participate in lessons while questioning traditional philosophies and concepts. Students are then displaying their knowledge in the classroom without simply absorbing material and emitting it back to a teacher. The author does state that the traditional philosophy of essentialism and perennialism delivers better results for standardized tests. The controversy presented in this article asks what is more beneficial for student learning. Should students be at the center of instruction and have total freedom toward the structure of their curriculum or should the teacher? Tremmel pivots and reflects on Dewey’s ideas of student freedom in the classroom. He states the mentality of progressivists by saying that student observation and judgement gives them a sense of freedom in the classroom and “guidance given by the teacher to the exercise of the pupil’s intelligence is an aid to freedom, not a restriction upon it.” (Tremmel, 2010). Although this is a positive, there remains a negative to this way of thinking. The author states that when students are left alone with the materials needed to learn
curriculum, “the teacher being loath to suggest even what might be done with the materials lest freedom be infringed upon.” (Tremmel, 2010).

**Conclusion**

After learning about the two educational philosophies that aligned with my beliefs, I realized that they were both at the far ends of the learning spectrum. Although these different learning philosophies are at odds with each other, they both can be beneficial in a classroom. My background of being in the military aligns perfectly with essentialism and principles one and two in the educator’s code of ethics. I do believe that students should master the basic subjects such as social studies, language arts, math and science while learning positive civic virtues such as respect for authority and how to be a model citizen. In today’s society, it appears that these characteristics are lacking due to social media and low parental guidance. I also believe it is vital for students to learn by memorization and taking notes. This will help students better prepare for college courses since essentialism is key at universities along with remembering personal dates and information that may be important to an individual. Although I feel that an essentialist approach is beneficial, I realize that all students learn differently. This is where progressivism comes in. I do believe that a classroom should be student-centered in some aspects of the curriculum and students should test their knowledge with experimentation, collaboration, and participation. I believe this teaching philosophy will alleviate classroom boredom while creating a thirst for knowledge from our youth.
Resources
