

Chapter 21

Educational Democracy: Calling for a New Phase in Progressive Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will review the productive phases of the progressive education movement. It will detail several practices for educational democracy rooted from adult continuing education theory and practice. Educational historians know that education was broader than only education for children in formal public schools. In the past, many progressive educators have discounted adult continuing education, but in this new phase and age, the education and environment for children and adults are one-and-the-same. Some educators and historians may view the progressive movement as dead or out-of-date, but they miscalculate its continuing broader connection to society for addressing cultural, political, civic, academic, and economic matters. This new phase and age of progressivism makes it reasonable to bring the progressive education movement back-to-life and keep it in-style. The need for a new progressive movement to address current concerns about threats to democracy is paramount.

INTRODUCTION

Since the time of educator and philosopher John Dewey, there has been a progressive education movement. From Dewey's seminal book, *Democracy and Education* (1916), numerous radical-to-moderate educational views have emerged for reforming schools and/or changing society. Dewey is applauded for stimulating a range of progressive, educational, and democratic ideals, yet Dewey was not the first to connect education to democracy in America. Booker T. Washington (1896) spoke years before Dewey's work in a speech in New York actually entitled, "Education and Democracy," where Washington gives his

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views on race, democracy, and education in the United States (BlackPast, 2010). As Washington explains: “The time may not be far off when...we shall have to decide the course of our democratic institutions...”

Washington points out the inequality and disparity of money spent for education between the races: “And yet,” Washington exclaims, “each citizen of this country is expected to share the burdens and privileges of our democratic form of government...intelligently and conscientiously.”

Washington further makes the connections between American education, democracy, and citizenship. As Washington states,

When a great national calamity stares us in the face, we are, I fear, too much given to depending on a short campaign of education to do on the hustings what should have been accomplished in the school-room...let us examine with more care the work to be done...before all classes will be fit for the highest duties of citizenship.

Thus, Washington concludes,

Education, whether [for a] black man or white man, that gives one physical courage to stand in front of the cannon and fails to give him moral courage to stand up in defense of right and justice is a failure (BlackPast, 2010).

Both Washington and Dewey, at this time in America, knew that the union or duality of education and democracy had not been realized. Unfortunately, over a century later, democracy and education still have not been fully implemented, nor reimaged for a new period in America.

Metaphorically, while democracy seems to have grown up and matured a bit (i.e., politically, socially, and economically), education, on the other hand, has seemed to remain in its infancy—stunted in growth (i.e., philosophically, intelligently, and morally). For Dewey (1916) explains philosophy as “the general theory of education” (p. 328); where education “is the laboratory in which philosophic distinctions become concrete and are tested” (p. 329). For Washington (1896) education should give its citizens both ‘physical’ and ‘moral courage.’ Both educational thinkers envision an inextricable role of education to complement democracy. Without coming together, democracy is bankrupt of philosophy, intelligence, and courage. Likewise, education is void of political, social, and economic value.

However, the history of the dis-union between education and democracy would have been told for centuries; and we would have continued to accept this un-equal relationship until the end of time. This analogy where democracy has reached some level of maturity, while education inchoate still supports Dewey’s intentional message of democracy and education being inextricably tied together, as to what Adler (1982) calls “revolutionary.” Adler (1988) further explains in another work, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, that the education, which still exists in the United States, has been “thoroughly antidemocratic” (p. xxv).

Then something happened: The pandemic came; the world changed, and our existing American democratic system had severely shifted-and-split into extremes. Now, in this new time and century, the once grown-up democracy is in distress: in real trouble of ending altogether. Meanwhile, education is still there, under-developed and under-utilized, yet able to contribute to democracy whereby their union can address the political, social, and economic problems of today, or what Washington describes as the “great national calamity” [that] stares us in the face.

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