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PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION: A DEFINITION

When John Dewey died in 1952, *The New York Times* announced the death of the "Father of Progressive Education." For sixty years, Dewey had called for a radical transformation in schooling. He had inspired a movement to establish new schools that would be democratic rather than authoritarian, that would make learning meaningful and pleasurable by focussing on the needs and interests of children. Dewey advocated a radical change in school methods, shifting from memorization and recitations to learning activities based on experience.[1]

Dewey had begun his long career as a school reformer in the 1890s, one of those periods when school reform was prominent on the national agenda. At that time, a number of educators and community leaders were working to change schools. Some of them shared Dewey's views: they too wanted schools that would reject rote learning and authoritarian discipline and would, instead, use the interests of children to promote learning in a democratic setting. These progressive educators wanted to make schools into humane institutions that respected childhood, and they hoped that the children who were educated in these schools would, as adults, create a better society.

Although progressive education aroused widespread interest and sometimes passionate debate, it is a difficult movement to define. Indeed, Lawrence Cremin, its leading historian, saw progressive education as so diverse that his important study of educational reform, *The Transformation of the School*, avoided a definition.[2] Yet, despite the fact that the movement was complex, I believe it can be defined. Clearly, in the 1920s and 1930s, when progressive education had reached a high point in its influence, there was general

agreement on what differentiated a progressive school from others. Despite diversity, progressive education was based on a clearly identifiable cluster of ideas.[3]

In arriving at a definition, it is important to recognize that progressive education was only one of several contemporary educational reform movements. Each was an effort to adapt education to a nation that was being transformed by industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. As Americans faced these major challenges, many hoped schools could play a role in helping the nation cope with rapid change.

Educational reformers believed new forms of schooling could help meet new pressures and new demands. But while they agreed that schools needed to change, these reformers differed widely in their prescriptions. Some wanted schools to devote more attention to developing skilled workers to meet the needs of a society that was growing more and more dependent on highly evolved technologies. They called for a vocational component in the curriculum to prepare young people to enter modern industrial occupations. Others reformers were concerned with the problem of absorbing new immigrants from eastern and southern Europe; they wanted the schools to be a major force in unifying the nation and producing loyal citizens. Both groups saw education as a form of social control. In the face of rapid changes that were eroding traditional social institutions such as the family and the church, they hoped schooling could become a new stabilizing force.

A third group of reformers (whose goals overlapped with the other two groups) was primarily concerned with applying principles of efficiency, centralization, and bureaucratic decision making, based on the example of modern business, to the schools.[4] They deplored the conventional curriculum as inefficient. They called for testing and standardization. At the same time, they wanted to rescue urban schools from hopelessly inefficient and corrupt ward politics.

Each of these educational reform groups wanted to change schools and adapt them to modern society. Moreover, each of them was part of the progressive movement prominent in American politics and social reform in the years before World War I. The focus of these reformers was on social rather than individual needs.

While the movement to establish progressive schools, which developed at the same time, was also was concerned with social goals, its focus was on meeting the needs of individual children. Dewey and his followers also wanted to accomplish social reform through schooling, but theirs was a distinct movement with its own agenda. Their first priority was to create schools in which children would find a nurturing environment that would allow them to develop their individual capacities.

Progressive educators shared a common core of beliefs, but it was not, of course, a monolithic movement. Its leaders emphasized different aspects of their aims and, over time, the movement stressed different aspects of its agenda. Yet there is a central core of ideas and practices that were widely recognized in the 1920s and 1930s as part of a movement that stemmed from the educational and philosophical writings of John Dewey. These formed the essential core of progressive education.

John Dewey grew up in rural Vermont and attended the tiny University of Vermont. After graduation, he taught high school briefly and then went back to school and earned his Ph.D. at the nation's first professional graduate school, The Johns Hopkins University. From there he embarked on an academic career in philosophy and psychology at the University of Michigan and then, in 1894, he accepted a position at the new University of Chicago, where he added the department of pedagogy to his professional concerns.

Even before he came to Chicago, Dewey was dissatisfied with a philosophy that treated ideas as abstractions, unrelated to daily living. He had been concerned with finding ways in which academic philosophy and psychology could play a larger role in dealing with broad social questions. He had begun to expand philosophical discussions by bringing social issues, such as the ethics of participating in a strike, into his classrooms.[5] He argued that it is only "[w]hen philosophic ideas are . . . used as tools to point out the meaning of phases of social life" that "they begin to have some life and value."[6] Dewey's philosophy supported a new approach to the discipline, providing a link between the world of ideas and the social world. By the time he got to Chicago, Dewey had rejected philosophical idealism and developed a philosophical position that denied the separation between the spiritual world of thought and ideals and the natural world of human action.[7]

Crucial to Dewey's new position was his reading of the larger meaning of Darwin's revolution in biology. For Dewey, *The Origin of Species* "introduced a mode of thinking that in the end was bound to transform the logic of knowledge, and hence the treatment of morals, politics, and religion."[8] Darwin had shown that all living forms, including humans, are constantly undergoing change and, most important, that these changes tended in no particular direc-

tion, with no discernible purpose except the continuation of life itself. Therefore, Dewey argued, Darwin's discoveries meant that ultimate truths could not be found outside the flux and change of this world. It was this ever-changing world itself that provided the only source of meaning. In keeping with his rejection of any transcendental source of values, Dewey believed that philosophy should reject "inquiry after absolute origins and absolute finalities in order to explore specific values and the specific conditions that generate them."[9] And, by turning away from questions about a hypothetical transcendental reality, philosophy could turn to the concrete ways by which we could "improve our education, . . . ameliorate our manners . . . [and] advance our politics."[10] Philosophy would come down to earth and be available to those who sought to improve the human condition.

Chicago in the middle of the last decade of the nineteenth century was an ideal place for a young philosopher to integrate academic talents and social concerns. The city itself exemplified the new social forces changing the face of the nation. The new industrialism and the growth of the new cities could be seen here firsthand. Furthermore, William Rainey Harper was assembling an innovative faculty at the new University of Chicago; many of the people he brought there were interested in social reform and they, too, were finding fresh ways of looking at their disciplines. At the same time, Jane Addams, at Hull House, was pursuing innovative methods of examining and alleviating the problems of industrial, urban America.

Addams played an important role in shaping Dewey's ideas. When she decided to live among the poor at Hull House, it was not in order to serve as merely another source of charity. She recognized that "the dependence of classes on each other is reciprocal" and that the members of the middle classes had much to learn from the poor; that a life cut off from contact with the poor was devitalizing.[11] Education was to be a central theme at Hull House, but it was to be a process in which teacher and student frequently exchanged roles. The middle class residents had much to learn from the people of the neighborhood. Thus Hull House was to be "the living embodiment of an alternative view of education," a view that stressed how education could serve the needs of people of many different backgrounds and, at the same time, could foster a new sense of community.[12]

Dewey was deeply involved with Hull House from its beginning. He was a member of its first board of directors. (Addams once said that the "philosopher" was included "to keep us from

becoming either hard-boiled or sentimental in this new undertaking.")[13] It was in the context of the University of Chicago and Hull House that Dewey developed the principles of his philosophy of education.[14]

Education played a central role in Dewey's philosophy. Because humans are part of nature, they must strive to adapt; adaptation is the price of survival. Learning is an essential part of the adaptation process. The individual encounters new situations and copes with them by learning new behaviors. Dewey saw learning as a process of problem solving. For genuine learning to take place, it must be real to the student, the process must actively engage the learner. The fault with the traditional school is the passivity of the learner, who is expected to absorb, without question, the prescribed curriculum through drill and rote exercises.

Shortly after his arrival in Chicago, Dewey, in collaboration with his wife Alice, established an experimental elementary school. Here he believed he could follow a scientific approach to test and refine his ideas about human nature and individual psychology and education. At the University of Chicago's laboratory school he could experiment and develop sound principles of pedagogy.[15]

In 1899 Dewey issued his first comprehensive statement of his educational philosophy—the basis of progressive education—in a series of lectures to the parents of the children enrolled in his school. These lectures (published as *The School and Society*) enunciated the main principles of the new education.[16]

First, from his vantage point as a Darwinian, Dewey posited the goals of education in purely naturalist terms as continuing individual growth, physical as well as mental. The child should be viewed as a complex organism, not as just a mind, and schools should recognize that "the care and growth of the body are just as important as the development of the mind."[17] Respect for the growth of the individual also meant a recognition by the school that not all children learn at the same rate and in the same way. The goal of individual growth called for a respect for childhood and a recognition that the activities of children could be valuable in themselves, for their own sake, without reference to later adult life. "[I]f we identify ourselves with the real instincts and needs of childhood," Dewey said, "and ask only after its fullest assertion and growth, the discipline and information and culture of adult life shall all come in their due season."[18]

Second, Dewey regarded the school child not only as a distinct individual but also as one who came to school with a number of important assets: an "interest in . . . communication; . . . in finding

out things; in making things, . . . and in artistic expression." These he called "the natural resources . . . upon the exercise of which depends the active growth of the child."[19] While a child does not have "much instinct for abstract inquiry," the child does have a "constructive impulse" and an "art instinct."[20] The school should use these resources; education should be regarded as an active pursuit that makes use of the child's native curiosity. The experiences that a child brings to the classroom could be used by the school but, instead, Dewey argued, the child "has to leave his mind behind, because there is no way to use it in school. If he had a purely abstract mind, he could bring it to school with him, but his is a concrete mind, interested in concrete things."[21] In the progressive school, therefore, learning would come as the result of activities that involved the child's natural interests.

It is important to note, however, that for Dewey this did not mean that the teacher simply stood back and let nature take its course. According to Dewey, the teacher had a crucial role, for the child's interest had to be directed: "Through direction," the child's interests "tend towards valuable results, instead of scattering or being left to merely impulsive expression."[22]

Dewey tied the "new education" to broader patterns of social change—the emergence of an industrial society. He introduced the idea of school as the "legatee" institution, one that had to take on socialization functions that had previously been the responsibility of institutions that were disintegrating under the pressures of industrialism. Dewey argued that under the old "household and neighborhood system" (that was disappearing) "[t]he entire industrial process stood revealed." Now the learning that took place and the character traits that were developed by observing and participating in the productive process had to be found somewhere else. In the face of the radical changes wrought by industrialism "only an equally radical change in education suffices." The school would have to assume new functions; its curriculum would have to encompass much more than the "three R's."[23]

Finally, although Dewey believed that the goal for the individual was growth, this was not the ultimate purpose of the new school. Individual growth was important not only for the sake of each child but even more important for the good of the larger community. The ideal of community permeated Dewey's educational thought. He repeatedly referred to the new school as "an embryonic community" and in his well-known formulation maintained: "When the school introduces and trains each child into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit

of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guaranty of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious."[24] For Dewey the school was to become the key to reforming society.

Dewey's educational philosophy is often described as child-centered, as opposed to subject-centered. In some ways, this is true. For Dewey, education had to begin with the interests and capacities of the child, not with the formal curriculum. But Dewey did not throw out the curriculum. He recognized the importance of "the traditional or three R's curriculum" and conceded that it represented "the keys which will unlock to the child the wealth of social capital which lies beyond the possible range of his limited individual experience."[25] But Dewey believed the essential skills and knowledge that children needed could be taught by enlisting their active cooperation. The teacher, therefore, needed to have a carefully developed curriculum, but this course of study had to remain flexible so that the teacher could use the activities that engaged the natural curiosity of the child to promote the necessary learning. Second, with maturity, Dewey believed, a child developed an increasing capacity to see long-term goals. Therefore, as the child advanced in school, the curriculum could be more and more formal; it did not have to appeal to the immediate experience and interests of the student. In short, schooling could become more subject-centered in the later grades without doing violence to the principle that the schooling process should be based on using the interests and experiences of individuals.[26]

Dewey's philosophy of education must be seen as part of a larger philosophical outlook. Two major threads that permeated his thought were a devotion to scientific methods and to the idea of a democratic community. As a Darwinian, Dewey saw humans as part of nature. Therefore, the proper approach to understanding human behavior was similar to the methods that had been so successful in the study of other parts of the natural world. But for Dewey science was more than chemistry and biology; science was a method, a broad approach to solving human problems. It meant first ascertaining as objectively as possible what the facts were, then developing hypotheses and projecting these into the future to see the possible results of following one or another hypothesis and, finally, choosing one hypothesis and testing it in action or in the imagination. As Richard Bernstein has pointed out, Dewey believed that "scientific knowledge of man gained through the social sciences . . . [could] play an enormous role in intelligently determining our decisions, choices and actions."[27]

But for Dewey, science was directly related to questions of value. In education, for example, science could be the basis for the testing and measurement helpful to traditional schools "in which marks, grading, classes and promotions are important" and where the "aim is to establish a norm." On the other hand, in a progressive school, science could be the basis for "a study of the conditions favorable to learning." Here a pedagogy based on science could find the conditions that would permit learning to take place "naturally and necessarily," conditions that would "call out self-educative activity, or learning." In this setting, the scientific method could discover ways to cooperate "with the activities of the pupils so that they have learning as their consequence."[28] For Dewey, science could not define the problem, nor by itself, offer solutions—its power lay in its ability to clarify options and allow intelligent choices.

Dewey clearly linked his scientific approach to human affairs with his ideal of a democratic community. "It is of the nature of science," he said, "to welcome diversity of opinion, while it insists that inquiry brings the evidence of observed facts to bear to effect a consensus of conclusions." Public discussion and consensus about the conclusions of scientific investigation were essential. "[F]reedom of inquiry, toleration of diverse views, freedom of communication, the distribution of what is found to every individual as the ultimate intellectual consumer, are involved in the democratic as in the scientific method."[29]

The ideal of an open, democratic community is basic to Dewey's philosophy. While Dewey's Darwinian model suggested that the evolutionary process we are part of does not point to any final goals, the model does emphasize the importance of continuing adaptation and growth. Dewey believed continuing individual growth required a special kind of community. The "object and reward of learning is continued capacity for growth" but "this idea cannot be applied to *all* the members of a society" except in a democratic community.[30] For Dewey (as for Jane Addams), a democratic society was "more than a form of government" it was "primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience," and real communication could only be possible with the destruction of the "barriers of class, race, and national territory." A society in which people learned from each other had to be an open society.[31] Dewey's program for education was a crucial part of a philosophy that looked to the use of scientific method to achieve a democratic community.[32]

Dewey's ideas about schooling did not, of course, stand alone. At the turn of the century, when he wrote *The School and Society,* other people were also developing new approaches to education. In fact, only a few miles from Dewey's Lab School, Colonel Francis W. Parker's Cook County Normal School promoted many new practices that fit into Dewey's philosophy of education. Parker believed the school should be organized as "a model home, a complete community and embryonic democracy."[33] Like Dewey, Parker recognized the importance of starting with the natural interests of children. His child-centered pedagogy called for integrating material from the different school subjects. In the practice school at Cook County Normal, reading and writing were taught by having children create their own "Reading Leaflets." Field trips formed the basis of nature study and geography "began with first-hand knowledge of the surrounding countryside."[34] Lawrence Cremin sums up the prevailing spirit at the school: "The job of the teachers was to start where the children were and subtly lead them . . . into the several fields of knowledge, extending meanings and sensitivities all along the way."[35] Dewey visited Parker's school and obviously liked what he saw. He sent his own children there for two years before he opened his own school at the university. Although he and Parker were never close friends, Dewey recognized the value of Parker's work and he hailed Parker as the "father of progressive education."[36]

But Parker was not a philosopher like Dewey and others who were developing new theories with broad implications for schooling. One of the most important of these thinkers was the pioneer psychologist G. Stanley Hall, one of Dewey's teachers at Johns Hopkins. Like Dewey, Hall's approach to education was based on a naturalist philosophy. He also approached schooling by examining the natural needs of the child, and he was the founder of the child study movement. Hall objected to the "standardized, lockstep organization of the schools" and wanted to individualize the curriculum. But, as his biographer, Dorothy Ross, points out, Hall was a social conservative who was not "willing to abandon the authoritarian, competitive classroom."[37]

A more important contributor to thinking about schooling was the psychologist Edward L. Thorndike. Thorndike had a deep faith in science, and believed that anything that exists, including intelligence and learning, could be measured. He was one of the pioneers of the educational testing movement and one of the most significant champions of the movement to enhance the efficiency of schooling.[38]

Like Dewey, Thorndike was deeply influenced by Darwinism

and was sharply opposed to the traditional curriculum. He, too, believed that pupils learned by doing and that school problems should be devised based on the children's daily experience and on what engaged their interest.[39] One of Thorndike's best-known studies proved to be a crucial weapon for those who wanted to change the curriculum. It undermined a major argument for teaching traditional school subjects—their supposed ability to strengthen mental "faculties." In a series of experiments Thorndike demonstrated that skills developed in one specific course were not transferable to other subjects; learning Latin verbs could not improve a pupil's general ability to remember.[40]

Accordingly, like Dewey and Hall, Thorndike was highly critical of the traditional school, but he differed from Dewey in his belief that human learning was based on "simple, semi-mechanical phenomena . . . which animal learning discloses" and in his claim that these phenomena could be understood in purely neurological terms.[41] More important, Thorndike regarded intelligence as essentially fixed at birth and he was highly pessimistic about education's ability to modify individuals.[42] He differed sharply from Dewey in the elitist conclusions he drew from his thinking about intelligence. Thorndike maintained that "in the long run it has paid the 'masses' to be ruled by intelligence" and that "the natural processes which give power to men of ability to gain and keep it are not . . . unmoral." While he, too, supported the ideal of democracy, he differed radically from Dewey in his political philosophy. "The argument for democracy," Thorndike held, "is not that it gives power to all men without distinction, but that it gives greater freedom for ability and talent to attain power."[43]

Thus, while progressive education, the essential core of which was formed by Dewey's ideas, was part of a general movement to change American education in the twentieth century, it differed in important ways from other reform efforts. The quest for "efficiency," represented by Thorndike's thinking, was an important aspect of twentieth century educational reform, but the progressives were not primarily concerned with efficiency. Dewey did criticize "waste" in education, but his emphasis was quite different from that of those who promoted businesslike methods; for him the question was not "one of the waste of money . . . the primary waste is that of human life."[44]

Further, while Dewey emphasized a broad scientific approach to education, he differed from other educational reformers who defined the role of science much more narrowly. For example, one important thread in twentieth-century educational reform was the

effort to construct a curriculum scientifically by basing it on surveys of the information and skills children would need as adults. These efforts of "scientific" curriculum specialists to build a new, more efficient school program were fundamentally flawed from the viewpoint of the progressives. The curriculum experts were intent on building the schools' program on the basis of what was seen as useful for functioning in society as it was. This was contrary to the fundamental thrust of Dewey's thought, with its basic premise that all aspects of life were constantly changing. Furthermore, while progressive educators wanted the curriculum to include skills that would be useful to the learner, this was not enough. Dewey aimed at building a better society and this could not come from a program that prepared children to adjust to present conditions. Attempts to "select subject matter by wide collection and accurate measurement of data" were only appropriate, Dewey said, for those who "want schools to perpetuate the present order," not for schools that believed that a "social order different in quality and direction from the present is desirable and that schools should strive to educate with social change in view."[45]

Progressive educators were also suspicious of another educational reform that invoked the prestige of science, the burgeoning educational testing movement.[46] Dewey and other progressives were interested in identifying individual differences and in promoting the needs of the individual child (which could be determined by careful testing), but their emphasis was quite different. Unlike those who drew their inspiration from Thorndike's scientific psychology, they were wary of using tests to assign pupils to special classes. More important, they were hostile to the idea that IQ tests measured an unchangeable entity.[47]

In the 1920s, two decades after Dewey wrote *The School and Societ* a number of schools were attempting to carry out his ideas. Th newly formed Progressive Education Association provided an in stitutional framework for spreading the ideas of those committe to progressive pedagogy. It adopted a statement of purpose mad up of seven principles, most of which were fully congruent wit the principles Dewey had announced twenty years earlier. For ex ample, the organization stood for the idea that in a progressiv school "Interest [should be] the Motive of All Work" and it saw progressive teacher as "a Guide, Not a Task-Master." The organiz tion, like Dewey, viewed the progressive school as "a laborator

where new ideas could be tried out, thereby becoming "a leader in educational movements."[48]

Yet the emphasis of the progressive education movement in the 1920s was somewhat different from Dewey's. While Dewey had recognized the importance of art in the curriculum, some progressive schools now made this the very core of their curriculum. They centered their program in the arts and emphasized the school's role in promoting creative self-expression. As Lawrence Cremin points out, this "pedagogical version of the expressionist credo" reflected a broad attack on Victorian aesthetics and the "Puritanism" of American culture in the 1920s.[49]

Second, while the progressives of the 1920s agreed with Dewey that the school should recognize that the child came to school with interests that were not exclusively academic, they differed from him by standing the traditional curriculum on its head. Instead of neglecting the nonintellectual interests of their pupils, they were in danger of leaving academics out of the schools' programs.

A third important new aspect of progressive education in the 1920s was an intense concern for the psychological development of children.[50] An interest in the emotional needs of children was implicit in Dewey's call for a recognition that the child came to school with a well-developed curiosity and certain skills and interests and, indeed, Dewey played an important role in the founding of the Child Study Department in the Chicago public schools.[51] But in the 1920s some progressive schools went much further. Reflecting the new American awareness of the work of Freud, they focused on the emotional needs of children and some progressive schools began to blur the distinction between lessons and therapeutic interventions.[52]

The emphasis in progressive education in the 1920s on the artistic and psychological needs of children reflected the new concerns of American intellectuals in the period after World War I. Equally reflective of the period was the virtual disappearance from the progressive agenda of Dewey's notion that the school was to play an important role in the reform of the larger society. Social reform had no place in the seven principles of the Progressive Education Association.

In the 1930s, when organized progressive education matured and reached a high point in its influence, it underwent further changes. One of these was very much in harmony with Dewey's thought. In the midst of the depression, some progressive educators embraced Dewey's hope for social reform through education, and the 1930s marked a high point in the history of attempts to reform society through its schools.

On the other hand, as Dewey's educational ideas were adopted by more and more professional educators in the 1930s, they were subtly altered in the process of their wider dissemination. Increasingly, administrators used the language of progressive education to justify policies that were not in harmony with Dewey's goals. More important, as aspects of progressivism became part of educational orthodoxy, the potential anti-intellectualism of the movement came to the fore.

One way of describing some of these changes in progressive education is through an examination of the career of one of its most important leaders, William Heard Kilpatrick. Born in 1871 in the rural South, Kilpatrick was the son of a Baptist minister.[53] He grew up with a deep commitment to religion, but as a student at Mercer University he was profoundly influenced by Darwin's *Origin* and moved far from the fundamentalist creed in which he had been raised. Like Dewey, Kilpatrick did graduate work at Johns Hopkins. But unlike Dewey, he did not move directly into the college classroom; he became an elementary and high school teacher and principal in rural Georgia. Although he had had no formal preparation for teaching, Kilpatrick revealed a natural talent for it and an instinctive empathy and respect for children. He enlisted their cooperation rather than punishing them and innovated in a number of ways, including eliminating report cards as devices that only encouraged destructive competition and a focus on grades rather than learning. The ambitious young Kilpatrick soon accepted a faculty position at Mercer and finally moved to Teachers College of Columbia University, first as a student and then as one of its most influential faculty members.

Kilpatrick acknowledged the influence of many of the men who were shaping educational thought at the time, including Francis Parker and G. Stanley Hall, but Dewey's teachings were crucial. Dewey (who had come to Columbia in 1905), "remade [his] philosophy of life and education."[54] An extremely popular teacher and an influential writer and lecturer, Kilpatrick was to be the major interpreter of Dewey's educational philosophy.[55] While Dewey was never regarded as a sparkling teacher, Kilpatrick attracted so many students that his classes were always overcrowded. Students reported that Kilpatrick's courses changed their lives: "I see things differently now, the whole world is different." During summer sessions, so many teachers wanted to take Kilpatrick's courses that no

classroom or auditorium at Columbia could accommodate them all. One of his students reports that "[s]tudents in his classes became imbued with a missionary zeal, with a desire to act and live differently, to go back to their own environments and to change things . . . [T]he enthusiasm and the love that Kilpatrick begot from his students were beyond all imagination."[56] In the 1930s many teachers identified progressive education with the thought of William Heard Kilpatrick.

Although Dewey accepted Kilpatrick's interpretation of his thought, and wrote an introduction to a laudatory biography of Kilpatrick, there are differences in emphasis in the two men's versions of progressive education.[57] Kilpatrick was a great popularizer, but he was not a philosopher and he showed a marked aversion to abstract thought. Lacking Dewey's subtlety, Kilpatrick emphasized the practical and the anti-intellectual aspects of Dewey's thought, thereby distorting it in crucial ways.

Kilpatrick's most important contribution to educational practice was the project method in which children would learn what they needed to know as they pursued a topic that interested them. This provided an important way of overcoming the passive model of learning that both he and Dewey had rejected. In an activity curriculum, projects, chosen by children with the help of their teachers, would necessarily enlist their interests and would encourage their active participation in learning. With the project method, the artificial barriers between school subjects would be broken down. Children would learn reading, writing, arithmetic and other areas of the curriculum as they worked on a large project as, for example, the children of New York's Lincoln School did when they spent a year studying boats. The project method, as originally described by Kilpatrick in 1918, provided a balance between meeting the needs and interests of children. It recognized that teachers could play an important role in leading children to discover new interests, even resorting temporarily to compulsion "if compulsion will result in such learning that sets free some self-continuing activity . . . before harmful concomitants have been set up."[58] In his subsequent writings, however, Kilpatrick increasingly denigrated the importance of traditional school subjects. In 1936 Kilpatrick still echoed Dewey when he said the "new curriculum must . . . put first things first. The child must for us come before subject matter as such." But, in a parenthetical phrase, he revealed a crucial difference in emphasis: "Subject matter—*if any reader be concerned for it*—will be called this way better into play than is usual now."[59]

Kilpatrick's anti-intellectual stance is clear in his discussions of

his own academic field—mathematics. The problem with the teaching of mathematics was that it had been "taught . . . to too many." While he recog ized that algebra and mathematics based on algebra were "essential to civilization," he emphasized that they were "practically useless to most citizens." Certain kinds of mathematical training, he argued, were actually harmful in that they promoted the wrong kind of thinking. For example, since geometry is a closed system it requires deduction from accepted principles, a kind of reasoning that, according to Kilpatrick, is misleading when applied to the problems of daily life.[60]

Kilpatrick and Dewey differed sharply in their views of the role of academic subject matter. While Kilpatrick claimed that the proponents of the "newer type of curriculum are not . . . indifferent to subject matter" and maintained that "they need it and expect to use it," his emphasis was clearly different from Dewey's.[61] For Dewey, subject matter was important. It represented "the essential ingredients of the culture to be perpetuated in . . . an organized form" and he held that a thorough knowledge of subject matter would "protect" teachers from "the haphazard efforts" they might make if "the meaning had not been standardized." Good teachers, Dewey argued, needed to understand children but they needed first to have such a deep understanding of subject matter that it was always ready to be used in "interaction with the pupils' present needs and capacities."[62] Kilpatrick, on the other hand, put love of children first in his list of the requirements for being a good teacher.[63]

Moreover, for Dewey, as children matured they came closer and closer to being able to understand subject matter as adults did and the curriculum could become more subject-centered.[64] Kilpatrick, on the other hand, argued that the program of "teaching . . . by activities, not by subjects" was not only applicable to elementary education, but that it should replace the subject-centered curriculum of secondary schools for most students.[65]

Kilpatrick also differed from Dewey in his acceptance of the increasing emphasis of post–World War I progressivism on the role of schooling in promoting "mental hygiene," that is, creating classroom settings that promoted psychological health. According to Kilpatrick, an important result that derived from a "well-managed regime of purposeful activity . . . freed from artificial and external demands of subject matter requirements" was to prevent "personality maladjustment." The activity curriculum, he argued, followed "nature's road to mental health."[66] This was an important shift in emphasis. While Dewey argued that education should foster personal growth and that schools should be concerned with the needs

of the whole child, he did not identify teaching with psychotherapy. In his support for an increasingly psychologized school program, Kilpatrick's version of progressive education was more anti-intellectual than Dewey's.

Kilpatrick did, however, support Dewey's thought on education's role in social change and he played an important role in reviving progressive education's social reform agenda. In 1933, Kilpatrick, with a group of like-minded colleagues (including Dewey), published *The Educational Frontier*, a collection of essays which argued that the crisis of the depression challenged schools to play an important role in the required restructuring of society.[67] A year earlier, George Counts had challenged progressive educators to make their schools institutions that would "Dare . . . [to] Build A New Social Order." Kilpatrick and his group of "frontier" theorists enthusiastically supported this call, arguing that the schools should help to reshape society to make America more equal and more democratic.

The frontier group represented the most radical version of Dewey's vision. Although their efforts aroused a campaign against progressive education by political conservatives, they were quite ineffectual in achieving their goal of transforming America through the schools. Despite rhetoric proclaiming the dawn of a new age of collectivism, their naive premise that teachers could lead a social revolution against the interests of powerful businessmen and established classes understandably failed to attract many teachers. Even at the height of the movement, their journal, *The Social Frontier*, attracted fewer than four thousand subscribers. As David Tyack has noted, "[t]he everyday life of administrators and teachers did not much reflect the aspirations of educational revolutionaries."[68] But Kilpatrick and the other Social Frontier thinkers did help to restore a balance within the progressive education movement. They led an effort to recover Dewey's vision of the progressive school as an institution concerned with social reform, a vision that had been all but lost in the individualistic, child-centered, progressivism of the 1920s.

Despite the changes in emphasis, it is possible to provide a working definition of progressive education. The movement changed over time and it had distinct and somewhat different meanings for different people; it represented a constellation of ideas, not a set program. Yet it differed markedly from other contemporary educational movements, such as the drive for educational efficiency, just

as the thought of Dewey differed sharply from that of Hall and Thorndike.

The movement's philosophical basis hinged on Dewey's premise that all aspects of life are constantly evolving and that all human goals must, therefore, be regarded as provisional. This led to a belief that the schools' ultimate task was to prepare people for life and for change. Because life is flux, no single stage is superior to another; childhood should not be regarded as mere preparation for adulthood. Children have the right to live fully as children. Schools must recognize that the joys and opportunities of childhood should not be subordinated to future goals. They should use children's native curiosity, not subordinate it to an arbitrary, preselected curriculum.

Dewey's devotion to idea of continual change and his belief that individuals could play a role in molding evolutionary forces to create a better society gave schools a crucial role. But his theories stood in direct contrast to the traditional view that education was to be a tool to help children become part of the existing social system. Thus, from its beginnings, progressive education was tied to social reform. Specifically, it had a genuine compassion for immigrants and it shared Jane Addams's commitment to bettering the lot of the poor and dispossessed. It rejected the fatalism of William Graham Sumner and Herbert Spencer and held that a more humane society could be achieved through a program of action directed by informed intelligence.

While Dewey's philosophy was the basis for progressive education, behind it stood a well-established pattern of American thought. Progressives shared Horace Mann's vision of a messianic role for education, the belief that the common school could provide the alternative to social turmoil and could mitigate the effects of economic inequality. Progressive education shared the traditional American belief in progress and its liberal faith that all conflicts could be resolved by people of goodwill. Conversely, it lacked a vision of the darker side of human nature. It had no clear sense of evil. The progressives inherited the vision of Ralph Waldo Emerson rather than the darker views of Emerson's Calvinist ancestors. In the words of Reinhold Niebuhr, progressive educators were "Children of Light," laudable for their devotion to promoting the social good, but weakened by their failure to recognize the reality of evil.

While progressives were sometimes viewed by their enemies as dangerous radicals who threatened the American way of life, they saw themselves as devoted to democracy, representing the genuine American ideology of Jefferson and Lincoln. Their social radicalism

was limited by their acceptance (for the most part) of technology and industrialism as well as the private ownership of the means of production. Their political radicalism was limited by their fervent belief in reform though education rather than through conflict.

How the progressive's ideas were applied to schooling varied over time and among different educators. But in the 1920s and 1930s there was some agreement on a definition of progressive schools. First, progressives agreed that a progressive school was one that followed a child-centered rather than a subject-centered curriculum, a school which mobilized children's natural desire to learn.

Second, they agreed that it was a school concerned with meeting the needs of the "whole child," promoting children's emotional and physical needs as well as their intellectual development. This agreement, however, masked a great deal of controversy about the ideal balance between intellectual concerns and meeting other needs within the school program and on how much emphasis on subject matter should remain.

Third, there was agreement that a progressive school was one in which children would play an active role in determining the content of their education. Here, too, educators disagreed on how much real responsibility the schools could give to pupils. There was less agreement, even superficially, on a final point. Some progressives believed that a progressive school should have a program that would help children to develop in ways that would lead them to become reformers, to improve the world outside of the classroom.

Yet these disagreements were like quarrels within a family in which the members share a core of common assumptions. Even when they disagree, they appeal to this common core to justify their position on any issue. It is possible, therefore, despite disagreements, to recognize a distinct movement that was progressive education and, given this general definition, determine its influence on American classrooms.