

American progressive education and the schooling of poor children: A brief history of a philosophy in practice

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Abstract

This paper provides a historical analysis of the past century of progressive education, within the general socio-political context of schooling within the US. The purpose of this review is to create a social, historical and philosophical context for understanding the current narrative of progressive education that exists in educational policy discussions today. Major scholarly works related to progressive education are situated within the political climate of the times of their publication. Over the course of this discussion an argument is presented that shows how progressive education has been related to the education and emancipation of disadvantaged children at different points according to the societal emphasis of the time. The final section of the paper proposes a radical form of emancipatory teaching that requires a wide range of abilities among teachers and is matched to elements of the moments in history when progressive education was most effective for poor children.

Keywords: Inexpert raters, generalizability theory, variability of ratings, writing assessment.

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Introduction

The beginnings of progressive education

The phrase “Progressive Education” conjures images of children exploring freely, calling their teachers by their first names and sitting in circles to express their feelings. The children in these images are generally expected to be affluent and White, drawn from AS Neill’s (1960) “Summerhill School”, a Waldorf school in a wealthy suburb or somewhere utopian in the Netherlands. The idea that progressivism is synonymous with ease may be the reason that it is often perceived as a privilege of the luxury class, yet another way that wealthy people and their children’s lives are just better, more enriched, more free. However, the roots of progressive ideology paint a more multi-faceted picture.

The first proponent of progressive education, philosopher Jean Jaques Rousseau (1783) described a child-centered, nature-based education as a method for educating the children of wealthy families whom he tutored; private tutoring for the wealthy being the only form of education at the time. A century later Maria Montessori (1897) pioneered a more structured version of progressive education as a cure all for the most deeply impoverished children of Southern Italy. The “Montessori method” that she developed enabled children considered mentally deficient to progress in their cognitive capacities until they were on par with or ahead of typically developing children from affluent families. Her approach instilled self-regulation in children who lived among the chaos of the crowded, over-stimulating slums (1967). She designed an individualized curriculum where hands-on experimentation with objects and materials within specific work centers allowed each child to focus, persist and develop skills in motor development, problem solving and emotional regulation. Today Montessori’s methods have been adapted in many ways to early childhood and elementary classrooms, but the “learning centers” that are a staple of every progressive classroom originated with her methods.

Rousseau and Montessori both believed that their approach to education would lead to a more enlightened, authentic and peaceful society. However, the details of their methods centered initially on what they each perceived as the needs of their students based on social class. In the case of “Emile”, Rousseau argued against the corruption of materialism and the superficiality of the rich while Montessori sought to protect her students from the ravages of poverty such as stress and disorganized thinking. At the core of each approach was a focus on the individualized needs, strengths and interests of the child. Both writers described the teacher as a nurturing guide. In Rousseau’s “Emile”, the teacher supported the child’s natural inclinations through the endless opportunities of the natural world. Montessori’s teacher provided a carefully planned environment designed to correspond precisely to each child’s developmental needs and natural inclinations. Therefore, while the social context of these forbearers of progressive education centered on opposite economic classes, the methods and philosophy they espoused were similar.

The glaring differences between what is assumed through American educational discourse to be an appropriate method of instruction for wealthy as opposed to poor children today (Kohn, 2011) and where progressive approaches fit into our current narrative about educating disadvantaged children can only be understood through an analysis of the field’s philosophical and pedagogical roots.

Dewey and the early 20th century

In American cities compulsory public education was introduced just prior to the 20th century as a way to assimilate the rapid influx of immigrants and to inculcate the children of the working class into the life and values of factory work (Katz, 1976). Education was seen as the means through which to prepare the future workforce and this soon gave rise to debate on the best way to educate future citizens. John Dewey challenged the idea that schooling for the masses had the sole purpose of training future factory workers. Instead he saw schools as the birthplace of a more functional, more egalitarian democracy. Stemming from his broader political philosophy of pragmatism, he argued for the idea that learning can only occur when connected to the learners’ goals and interests. He described

the learning process as exploration into topics that were funded with personal meaning. In his depiction of an ideal classroom in “The Child and the Curriculum” (1997), the teacher acts as facilitator, providing rich experiences that would naturally lead to the emergence of particular areas of interest for each child. He believed that this type of education would encourage and allow for equal participation and investment in the classroom community, thereby laying the foundation for a truly democratic society. Dewey’s (1916) educational philosophy was directly tied to his vision of an ideal society. He argued that only an inspired, personally engaged citizenry would allow for a true democracy. In his other philosophical writing Dewey (1938) applied the importance of experience and meaning to appreciating art, the nature of emotion and other philosophical topics.

Dewey’s lab school put his pedagogical prescriptions into practice. The Deweyan version of progressive education was highly individualized, with teachers serving as facilitators aiming to provide meaningful experiences to students that would transform into a broad array of knowledge and conceptual development through in-depth discovery and experimentation (Bruce & Eryaman, 2015). In the decades following his initial influence the Deweyan approach gave rise to the child-study movement. In order to understand children’s interests, the logic went, educators must watch them and record the details and subtleties of their behavior. During the early to middle 20th century, teachers, academics and concerned citizens, mostly women, who were disturbed by the effects of poverty on children, joined the child study movement as a way of documenting the need for social investment in poor families (Hall, 1903). Papers on young children’s play, their use of materials and their social and emotional expression proliferated. The most insightful “child watchers” blended the boundaries between education and psychological study (Senn, 1975). Many early descriptions of children’s behavior were incorporated into formal psychological study and gave rise to what would become the field of developmental psychology (Anderson, 1956).

Dewey’s progressive education model had wide reaching influence, inspiring play-based curriculums in small schools throughout America. Unit blocks were first developed at the City and Country school in New York City. In addition the Bank Street school of Education was founded for training teachers in progressive methods of early childhood and elementary education. These centers of progressive education focused primarily on the individual child and were less concerned with social issues. The free school/open classroom movements in Europe and the US throughout the early 20th century brought institutions of education where the child experiencing the freedom of a progressive education was almost exclusively middle class and by extension White.

Progressivism and the move towards equity

Within the civil rights movement of the 1960’s the potential freedom offered by progressive education did not escape the attention of the decade’s social activists. Many Black and White civil rights activists recognized the promise of progressive education for addressing racism and increasing social equity. George Dennison (1969), Jonathan Kozol (1967) and Ned O’Gorman (1970) wrote as White teachers turned social critic. Engaging with small, free schools in impoverished urban areas they made use of Deweyan style pedagogy to connect with children living in extreme poverty. Their teaching and writing exposed the gap between traditional schooling and what was meaningful to the lives of their students. Meanwhile many Black intellectuals were concerned by a majority of Black children being educated by White teachers (Rickford, 2011). Prior to desegregation Black schools in the south employed Black teachers who often saw their jobs as a way to nurture and uplift their race (hooks, 1994). These teachers were driven to develop the best in their Black students. The leaders of the Black power movement argued that the White teachers of the inner city saw only deficits in their Black students and discouraged them from reaching their potential (Rickford, 2016). As an answer to this issue, small Afro-centric schools were founded and propagated alongside small, free schools in the inner cities, especially in major cities like New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Oakland. Separate from, yet consistent with the mission of other grassroots efforts at progressive schooling they focused on meeting each child where they were and supporting their development as individuals (Rickford, 2016; Giddings, 2001). Highly educated Black teachers came with a fervent mission from universities and artists’ studios to staff these Afro-centric small schools. Along with nurturing students’ natural interests and gifts they sought to help children develop racial and ethnic pride. This was achieved

through a curriculum in which all Eurocentric biases, standard in traditional schools, were removed. Instead the curriculum focused on African and Afro-American history, using arts and culture from African and Afro-American society as an entry point for student engagement and learning. As a follow-up to these initial small-scale efforts cities in states with large African American populations such as Atlanta, Philadelphia, Oakland and New York saw the establishment of large scale afro-centric curriculum integrated into entire school districts in the late 70s and early 80s (Giddings, 2001).

Outside of the US, a progressive pedagogy that combined freedom and empowerment for marginalized populations was developed by Paulo Friere, a Brazilian teacher turned educational theorizer. In his book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" Freire (1968) drew on his experiences with children living in Brazilian slums to expose how standard models of education ensured a perpetual under-class. Opposite to Dewey's ideal society, Freire's analysis of the banking system that characterized education served to silence poor children and inculcate them into maintaining the role of complacent workers within an unjust system (Eryaman, 2008). According to Freire's analysis children's minds were treated as repositories for information deposited by the teacher. Meanwhile, critical thinking and creativity remained the sole purview of the ruling class. bell hooks, an African American writer and teacher raised in Southern schools prior to desegregation studied with Freire and brought the concept of social transformation through a pedagogy of freedom to the context of African American and Latino American children. "Teaching to Transgress" (hooks, 1994), blended the Deweyan ideology of education as free exploration with Freire's and the Afrocentric movement's emphasis on the classroom as a site for the challenging of social hierarchies based in classism, racism and sexism.

With this intellectual back-drop the education movement throughout the 70's was consistent with the larger grassroots rebellion against all social "standards" and traditions. Small "free" schools each with their own political and/or philosophical emphasis were founded. In New York, East Harlem saw the founding of the E. Harlem Block Schools (Far West Lab 1971), a cluster of progressive, developmentally and culturally responsive day cares supported by socially active poor Latina mothers. In Central Harlem, Ned O'Gorman opened "The Children's Storefront" in 1965, a tuition free independent school that blended Montessori methods with an emphasis on the arts (O'Gorman, 1970). O'Gorman brought in teachers of color who integrated a social justice and racial pride dimension into the curriculum. In 1974 Deborah Meier, a progressive educator who had seen the positive impact of progressive methods on middle class children, opened a small public school named Central Park East (CPE) in East Harlem with the mission of serving the neighborhood's impoverished children through a Deweyan style progressive curriculum. With the support of the Coalition of Essential Schools and the local superintendent, Central Park East 2, River East and a middle and high school were all opened nearby by Meier with the same mission less than a decade later according to a New York times article of August 22nd, 1992. These schools offered an individualized curriculum, child study and egalitarian collaboration and decision making power among school staff, administration and parents (Meier, 1995). The Ella Baker School opened independently on the Upper East Side following a similar model and borrowing teachers and curriculum from the CPE schools. The Lower East Side neighborhood of Manhattan, home to many waves of immigration, first from Europe and later from Spanish speaking Central and South America, saw the development of cultural centers such as ABC No Rio and Charas El Bohio. These centers existed to provide ethnic pride, artistic and educational enrichment to the various immigrant communities of the neighborhood.

The 1960s was a fertile time for progressive education in America. Educational theorists, such as those cited above blended a focus on freedom and empowerment, using the assumptions of progressive ideology to critique social hierarchies and to redefine schooling as a site for both meaningful pedagogy and social transformation towards a more egalitarian society (Eryaman & Riedler, 2009). The existence of small, free and culturally responsive schools provided real-life examples of lofty progressive social ideals. However this period of experimentation with schools as sites for the creation of a better society was short lived.

Back to basics and progressive backlash

In 1983, the U.S. Department of Education released the “Nation at Risk” report which disclosed startling data that America’s children were falling far behind the rest of the industrialized world, particularly in math and science. The Regan administration and the new American conservative movement considered the report to be a dire warning about the United States’ political and economic future. This led to three decades of “Back to Basics,” reforms, standards based curricula, and high stakes testing of public school students under the guise of ensuring accountability. “A Nation at Risk” also slammed shut the doors of free, small schools throughout the country and replaced them with schools focused unflinching attention to the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, especially for the poor children of the inner cities. Despite the continued call for accountability measures and high stakes testing, the achievement gap between rich and poor and Black and White only widened (Ravitch 1989).

Within the curriculum and instruction departments of graduate schools of education, such as Bank Street School of Education, New York University and Teacher’s College, Columbia, professors refused to abandon the best practices of progressive education they had been expounding to new teachers over the previous decades. Collaborations with the international English speaking world provided new insights on approaches to literacy while even more radical progressive approaches to classroom structure and organization were found throughout Western Europe (Goodman, 1981; 1986). In a backlash to the “Back to Basics” movement these progressive educators proposed the “Whole Language” approach to literacy instruction. In direct opposition to a skills-based phonics curriculum, whole language theorists argued that children had a natural capacity for literacy in the same way they did spoken language. They believed that a print rich environment and significant exposure to high quality children’s books would lead to children becoming literate naturally.

Lucy Calkins, an original scholar of the whole language approach, developed her writing workshop approach to literacy instruction out of Teacher’s College, Columbia University (Calkins, 1983). The main research based literacy intervention at the heart of the whole language methodology was missing from the version that was later promoted in the city’s public schools. This intervention, termed “Miscue Analysis” involved careful note-taking of student’s decoding strategies. Analysis of the mistakes that emergent readers made was used to provide insights into strategies and misconceptions that could guide instruction (Goodman, 1981). This aspect of the approach that would likely have made it a more widely effective teaching method was left out in wider educational policy discussions.

The “Whole Language” approach spurred intense debate. The basic skills movement comprised of education policy makers and traditional educators was horrified that a curriculum for literacy was being adopted in schools of education that would provide even less direct instruction than before. The progressive academics saw the last battle for progressive education as centered on the nature of literacy instruction (Eryaman & Bruce, 2015). While policy makers and academics argued about how to best teach literacy in published papers and conference presentations, the low literacy rates among impoverished children remained stagnant. In their zeal for progressive philosophy the predominantly White academics forgot about the equity aspect of education and the importance of tying pedagogy to the individual needs, interests and prior knowledge of each child. Lisa Delpit (1988) emerged at the heart of this debate with the article: “The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children.” Her writing exposed the race and class bias inherent in much of the way progressive methods were being taught in schools of education and implemented by White teachers with predominantly non-White low income children.

According to Delpit (1995), within a typical progressive pedagogy White middle class teachers gave little directions, expecting children to figure things out on their own. She argued that the problem for poor students of color was that their classroom and the unstated values of their teachers reflected a White middle class social context that was usually foreign to them. Without direction the children were lost, and rather than adapting to their needs, teachers gave these students labels of deficiency. Delpit advocated for culturally responsive teaching that recognized signs of children’s

ability that were culturally relevant to them, alongside explicit teaching of the ways of the middle class. This included everything from language and communication patterns to middle class cultural values, as well as direct instruction in any key academic areas that children had not absorbed from their home lives. Delpit was not against progressive methods of education, but argued for teaching that was tailored to the unique needs of every single child. This approach was closer to original progressive pedagogy than an approach that assumed all children entered school from the same cultural framework as that of their teacher. Although she did support explicit teaching of certain necessary skills, she also argued for creative approaches that would engage children through their natural interests. She proposed integrating the arts into instruction, developing in-depth and critical thinking, as well as empowering poor children to challenge hegemonies in every aspect of the school and curriculum.

As with the former misconceptions of whole language instruction, Delpit's arguments were largely misunderstood and became reduced to the idea that progressive education is only for children of the White middle class. Poor children of color were assumed to need only teacher directed instruction in basic skills to catch-up to their White more affluent peers. This narrative fit well with that of education policy makers and the larger public discourse that stemmed from the "Nation at Risk" report and continued into the decades following. Given that data collected during this time on the achievement gap highlighted the limited proficiency of poor children it was the poor and working class children who threatened to bring down the nation's economy. Progressivism was blamed for the achievement gap by policy makers and soon the general discourse on education echoed this condemnation.

Within this social context, Head Start, a national anti-poverty early childhood education program founded in the 1970s was threatened with extinction by congress if it didn't develop academic standards (Lee, Brooks-Gunn, Schnur and Liaw, 1990). The early childhood education movement supporting Head Start was comprised of a broad coalition of educators, policy makers and researchers (see citation above for example). This group combined knowledge of young children's psychology and progressive teaching practices with a commitment to social equity and the amelioration of poverty among children and families. The combination of well researched principles and well articulated practices enabled the early childhood movement to resist the most significant changes to Head Start and to effectively defend its existence. Today the best Head Start centers remain the rare educational institutions to embody a combination of progressive pedagogy, cultural responsiveness and empowerment of poor communities (Lee, 2011).

Today's narrative of progressive education and the schooling of poor children in the most segregated school system in the US

Today's elementary and middle/ high schools in high poverty neighborhoods and rapidly gentrifying ones have not received the support provided to Head Start. New York City has the most socio-economically and racially segregated schools in the country. While the majority of its public schools that serve affluent populations implement some or many aspects of progressive education, almost no progressive schools in high poverty neighborhoods exist according to an Inside Schools report of February 13th of 2013. Interestingly, an adaptation of some core tenets of the whole language approach captured by Lucy Calkins have been incorporated into the curriculum of many school districts through what is known as the Teachers College reading writing project. However, straying from the original purpose of a process based approach to analyzing children's literacy development, the current incarnation of the "reading/ writing project" is comprised of pre-packaged curriculum that focus on specific genres of literature introduced by the teacher in mini-lessons for whole class instruction.

Central Park East 1 and 2 schools in East Harlem are still standing and still true to their initial philosophy and pedagogy. However, enrollment in these schools has drawn families from all over Manhattan. They no-longer serve a predominantly low-income population. Although remaining more racially diverse than most New York City schools, CPE 1 no longer qualifies as a Title 1 school because less than 60% of their population lives below the federal poverty line according to the

website “Inside schools.org”. The off-shoot schools such as “River East” and the CPE middle/high-school were unable to withstand the pressures of the “back to basics” turn and reverted to traditional methods. In the 1990’s the Children’s Storefront School saw the forced resignation of Ned O’Gorman, their head master and founder. About a decade later the schools’ name changed to “The Storefront Academy” and the school became centered on heavy discipline and traditional instruction.

In place of the small, free schools of the 1960s and 70’s, large schools with zero tolerance discipline policies and teacher directed, skill based curriculum now dominate in low income, Black and Latino neighborhoods within New York and in similar cities. These large network charter schools have been lauded for their ability to close the achievement gap among poor Black and Latino children with intensive drilling in basic skills and extra hours devoted to study. Although reports of dishonest and even abusive practices at these schools have frequently surfaced (see Ravitch [2016] for a review), parents and policy makers continue to embrace what has been called the new “education reform movement” embodied by this brand of charter schools.

Consistent with praise for highly structured traditional curriculum that addresses the educational needs of poor children, today’s narrative of progressive education reflects the notion that such a form of education is only for the privileged. The idea is that affluent children can afford to learn less in school because their parents will pay for tutors and extra enrichment. Even families at the city’s progressive schools have mentioned feeling pressure to “supplement” academics as mentioned in a New York Times Article of May 18, 2016. In May 2017, after escalated tactics against parents fighting for the progressive version of the school garnered much media attention, the principal was removed and the school is awaiting new leadership. Yet according to data from the department of education, the poor children in the segregated traditional schools have performed no better with skills based approaches. Deprived of recess, physical education and the arts, elementary schools in both traditional public and public charter schools report high degrees of suspension, expulsion and special education referrals. Elementary schools in poor neighborhoods with high incidences of violence have been designated as “Persistently Dangerous” by local departments of education as reported by the Huffington Post in August 2014. According to local department of education public data proficiency levels in math and reading now range in single digits for schools with poverty levels of 85% and above throughout New York. Taken together these results say nothing about the efficacy of progressive education for poor children, but they do make a clear case against the efficacy of teacher centered, skills-only methods of instruction for this population.

New York City’s middle class families are moving into high poverty neighborhoods and looking at the schools and asking why they are so segregated and ineffective (Hannah-Jones, 2016). Activist parents from a variety of backgrounds have begun to draw attention to the extreme racial and economic segregation of their local public schools. In neighborhoods like Harlem and Bedford Stuyvesant, brownstone buying professionals are using their social capital to question the current state of education according to a piece in DNA info Education in October 2015. CPE 1, after frequent administrative turn-over is engaged in a war between their new principal, who believes low income children need a more traditional pedagogy and the progressive educators who founded the school as described in a New York Times article of May 18, 2016. CPE 1 parents remain divided between whether the school’s emphasis should be on its original progressive pedagogy or the original mission to serve a predominantly low- income population of students equitably.

In the midst of this, a misunderstanding of Lisa Delpit’s writing on education (cited above) was circulated among the parents and staff of CPE 1 and mentioned in the New York times article (cited above) as support for the idea that progressive education doesn’t work for children of color or for those from poor families. Delpit’s (2013) book: “Multiplication is for White People: Raising Expectations for Other People’s Children” aims to clarify some of these misunderstandings. In it she explains that her critique was never of progressive methods per se, but rather of biased assumptions that guided classroom instruction and made it virtually impossible for poor children of color to succeed in school. She argues against narrowing the curriculum for poor children and for a version of progressive education that is focused on empowerment, critical thinking and challenges to the status

quo. This version of progressive education as emancipation of poor children is reminiscent of Freire, hooks and the Afro-centric schools movement.

As policy makers look back on the failures of the back to basics movement (Carnoy and Rothstein, 2013) education is once again poised for a new approach. Many of the issues plaguing American education have not shifted since the forced de-segregation of public schools. The achievement gap between poor children and everyone else has only widened. Today's inner city schools are more racially and socio-economically isolated than ever before. Now, not only are these schools lacking in academic proficiency but are frequently sites of violence, even among children as young as kindergarten age.

A new group of Black intellectuals has arisen in today's educational climate. They are again critical of the way that American schools marginalize children of color. Ta-nahesi Coates (2015) describes his schooling as inherently alienating, while Christopher Emdin (2016) argues for an emancipatory, democratic, culturally responsive pedagogy in which teachers cede authority to students in order to prioritize an emotional and cultural connection with them.

As in the past academics and educational policy are not completely aligned. Schools of education continue to teach cultural responsiveness and critical pedagogy but the realities of the K-12 classrooms often seem far away from the intellectual discussions of teacher training course-work (Polankow-Suransky, Thomases & Demoss, 2016; Riedler & Eryaman, 2016). The public discourse around education tends to center on the most controversial and familiar debates, dealing more with political policy than details of curriculum and instruction. How then do we make way for an approach to education that was given little time to thrive to determine if it might work for poor children after all?

To date, the assumptions about the best way to educate poor children derived from the "Nation at Risk" report have influenced the schooling of that population for the past 3 decades with little effect (Graham, 2013). In contrast the progressive education movement combined with an emphasis on emancipation, social and racial equity was allowed to flourish for only a little over a decade in practice and only through disconnected pockets of grass-roots efforts, lacking systemic support.

The way ahead

To address these issues educators and social activists must first change the narrative about progressive education. Perhaps as described in the writing of the American educators of the 70's (described above), it can and will work for *all* children, but only by tailoring methods and curriculum to the needs and interests of individual children regardless of their income or ethnic background. This requires getting to know each child, not from a culturally biased norm, but from their own social and cultural context as a starting point. As Delpit argues, it is necessary to first learn the meaning of each child's language and culturally valued skill set, to then use that information as an entry point into the curriculum. As hooks recommends, teachers should view teaching as transformative, revolutionary and empowering. As Dewey cautions, learning can only happen when the material being learned is funded with personal meaning. As Montessori prescribes, the classroom environment must be carefully planned to allow for the development of every child's unique traits. Teachers and administrators must connect the practice of teaching to the philosophy and psychology of learning and reject over-simplifications. Only then can progressive education be tested for its efficacy in educating poor children.

It is hard to imagine a way to bring systemic support for large scale implementation of progressive curriculum and methods given that by nature, the type of emancipatory progressive education just described is impossible to "bring to scale". By definition the precise methods and even curriculum topics must be allowed to emerge at the intersection of student-teacher-class relationships in response to the dynamic interplay of child-teacher-school culture. The only way to provide systemic support for this version of progressive education is to support, recruit and retain teachers

who are capable of and committed to doing far more than the traditional job description requires. An emancipatory progressive educator is first and foremost in the dual role of philosopher and psychologist. They must embrace and enact the abstract philosophical principles described above, in particular concepts such as: “emergence”, “inter-sectionality”, “ambiguity” and “authenticity”. At the same time they must practice the tradition of child study, but not only as a way to become expert in each child’s unique strengths, needs and ways of being in the world, but also as a way to notice cultural trends and patterns among the class as a whole and among each of their students’ individual family backgrounds. The teacher must use phenomenological methods to critique their own assumptions on a daily basis as well as to discover the meanings of children’s behavior, and then to understand the relationship between those behaviors and the larger cultural and historical contexts of their lives. All of this is required for only the initial stage of teaching, to create unique entry points for each child into the curriculum.

The building of curriculum; weaving knowledge and skills into naturally meaningful experiences for a wide diversity of children is the reason that the emancipatory, progressive teacher must also be an artist. The creativity required to develop such a curriculum is vast. The teacher must be able to think visually, musically and through stories to engage the varied learning *and* cultural styles of each student. The teacher must use the artist’s mind to imagine all the possible breadth and depth to which the curriculum can be stretched, the sub-topics explored, and connections between them made. To ensure effectiveness the teacher must constantly assess, collect and analyze data from the classroom with the rigor of a scientist. Therefore, the emancipatory progressive teacher must also have a scientist’s mind. They must be continually engaging in the scientific process of inquiry in regards to their methods and curriculum. As they observe the impact of their interventions and planned environments on their students they must constantly tweak, adjust and in some cases abandon entirely their planned instruction. They must plan assessments that are continuous and also aggregated and they must clearly and concisely report their findings on each individual child as well as the entire class to a diverse audience at multiple points in the year. Finally, to excel as a philosopher, psychologist, artist or scientist, one must be passionate, committed and connected to the greater purpose of the work. For teachers, that greater purpose is the creation of a more equitable society. Progressive, emancipatory teachers must be fully committed to that cause before they ever enter a classroom.

Therefore, to support a system of emancipatory progressive education, policy makers and educational administrators must prepare, recruit, retain and highly resource teachers whose minds are flexible enough, whose brilliance is wide reaching enough that they can do the job of philosopher, psychologist, artist and scientist all at once, each day, every day for the entirety of their careers. If this sounds preposterous and impossible to implement, it is worthwhile to note that those countries who we trail in educational outcomes, the ones that spurred the Nation at Risk report, and the back to basics movement, have already done it. While the US was scrambling to drill skills into poor children to outpace countries in Asia and Western Europe, places like Finland, Singapore and S. Korea were committing in ever stronger ways to an educational system of emancipatory progressive practices led by teachers that fit the above description as described by a New York Times article of March 16th 2011. The fact that most indicators show those societies to be models of equity according to an article in The Atlantic of March 17th 2014 just might be the by-product of progressive education that Dewey predicted in his ideal society.

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