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12/7/09

E.D. HIRSCH AND TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

As a recent graduate with a bachelor's degree in education, I was taught education begins with the child. As I entered the MAED program I still held onto those beliefs that the child is the center of education and the teacher is responsible for helping every child learn to their ability through authentic learning. As I began the first unit I related to many of the ideas and beliefs of John Dewey in regards to interactive teaching and hands-on lessons with the students. I have valued the importance of authentic learning, because in my education I always wanted to know how learning was relevant in my life and how I would benefit from it. In the first unit, one of the resources and ideas that contested my views of education and how I taught was *Traditional Education IS Progressive* by E.D. Hirsch.

Throughout the units of this course I noticed that the debate between traditional curriculum-centered education versus child-centered education was an underlying theme. In Hirsch's article he explains how knowledge-based instruction can be taught in a "lively and demanding way", and that many advanced nations use traditional education in a successful way. The article breaks down the stereotypes of traditional education versus progressive education. With the first point of that traditionalist do believe that education should be hands-on and use multisensory methods, but education should continue to teach the basics and essentials of verbal learning. Hirsch explains that many progressives want to use multisensory methods and decrease the verbal learning methods. Another topic Hirsch tackles in the article is the term "developmentally appropriate" and how progressives use it as an instinctive reaction, rather than looking at any scientific results. Hirsch explains that in other countries, teachers are educating young children of "premature knowledge" with only positive results. A third topic that he polarizes between progressive and traditional education is the idea of integrated instruction and how many schools are taking the thematic approach to instruction. Hirsch believes that this doesn't integrate knowledge, but instead fragments it and that children aren't learning the basic elements of the various subject matters. Another method that Hirsch touches on is the idea of whole-group learning and individualized learning. Many progressives believe in teaching to each individual child; however Hirsch explains that when a child is given one-to-one time, the other students aren't learning or working. Instead, Hirsch believes that when you teach to the whole-class the group is learning more at one time. In essence, Hirsch's article continuously highlighted the fact that underprivileged children hurt the most in the circumstances of progressive education. Many of the children who come to school behind in vocabulary and reading need verbal education that Hirsch believes the progressives lack in their methods.

After I read Hirsch's article I began thinking about my past schooling and my education throughout college. Somehow the traditional approach worked for me, my parents, and older generations. However, I have learned that there are many trends in education. My previous conception about traditional education was that it was boring for the students and only gave basic facts, rather than a depth of knowledge and understanding. When I read Hirsch's article, many of the points he made seemed to make sense. For instance, how the teacher can teach a subject matter in a boring way, but that the method of traditionalist isn't boring. The fact is that traditionalist and progressives have the same goal of educating students, but different methods in achieving it. The point Hirsch made about the thematic approach made me wonder the effects of it in the curriculum. I know of many schools that are switching to teaching the thematic approach as a way to integrate subject matter. Integration is a major concept that I was taught in my undergraduate years, in that teachers need to integrate as many subjects as possible to show relationships and relevance to students. All of Hirsch's ideas challenged the

ideas that I had been taught for so many years. It was interesting to read a contrasting argument and made me rethink all the methods that I have been taught.

Other articles that were presented in the first unit gave more background on Hirsch's beliefs of traditional education. In the article *Romancing the Child*, Hirsch explains how rote memorization is important in teaching Reading and Mathematics. Hirsch is a firm believer in teaching students the basic facts and fundamentals of the subject matter in order for the students to be successful in the future. When I read the article where Hirsch discusses his belief of memorization of facts in math and reading, I cringed at the idea. I remember when I had to memorize my multiplication facts and how frustrating it was, even though my teachers said that it would help me in the future. In hindsight they were right, but at the time it seemed torturous. Now, the trends in education are to show children using manipulatives how to multiply and use other math facts.

The traditional methods of Hirsch made me realize how education has drastically changed over the years. Entering this class I came in with more Dewey influenced methods of authentic and interactive education. However, after reading Hirsch, I can see how the traditional methods would work in some circumstances. I think back to my student teaching experience in a first grade classroom, and one of my students lacked letter and sound recognition, along with number recognition. The first thing I did for that student was make flashcards. Something instinctively told me that I had to get him to be acquainted with the letters and numbers just to have a starting point. This connection helps me understand that Hirsch and other traditionalists view their methods as an even launching pad for all students, no matter their backgrounds. If students lack experiences, then teachers have to provide the experience or help them understand. Also, when it came to certain number facts, it frustrated me when my students couldn't quickly tell me what $6+4$ equaled. I agree with Hirsch that it's important for the students to memorize some basic facts, which will help them better understand the depth of the concept and skill. At the start of the first unit I believed more of Dewey's ideas of progressive education, however after reading Hirsch, I would consider myself in the middle of progressive and traditional education.