Progressivism In Education: The Evolving Face Of Education In 21st Century

Abstract

The development of technology and increased competition has led to several challenges faced by children of all age groups. As such, education plays a very crucial role in the life of an individual. The progressive growth and development of any nation depends upon the education system structured to reshape the young minds. Modern times has reflected growth in the literacy rate. There has been more awareness among the people. With the changing scenario, the schools failed to adapt to the fast-changing needs of the society and fill the ever-increasing gap between education and personal experience of the children as individuals. This demands progressive growth of the students not only confined to the knowledge and information from the textbooks but on various resources to develop their social skills and make them responsible citizens to serve the society. In the words of John Dewey, “Education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living.” The changing demands of society paved way to progressivism in education. This will not only prepare them for future but also enhance their social understanding and develop their critical thinking a well as problem-solving capabilities to deal with the complex world.

Keywords:

Child-centered approach, critical thinking, problem solving, learning by doing, personalized learning

Education helps a child to know his real self and his potential. It is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. In the ancient times, the students in Gurukul have imparted practical training also apart from education. Teaching was regarded as a respectable profession. There was a time when a teacher was considered to be a Guru. His respect in society was supreme and the students worshipped the teachers and sought their blessings regularly. Today it is a pitiful condition that neither parents nor students respect the teachers nor the teachers hold such qualities of teachers of past era. Present education system makes difficult for the teachers to handle children due to numerous factors. This is high time to build strong and healthy bonding between students and teachers which keeps on missing with time.

Progressive Education- The concept and meaning

The concept of Progressive education is not new but has gained momentum in the 21st century. Education broadens the vision of the intellectual level of an individual and should be regarded as a multi-dimensional approach in the modern era to cater to the fast-changing needs of the society. It is a child-centered approach and focus on the holistic development of a child. It aims to make the teaching-learning process enjoyable and enrich the experience of an individual beyond the walls of the school thereby improving the quality of life of the students. It prepares the children to face the challenges of life and use the opportunities in the best possible manner

as they come their way.

Progressive education leads to a creative environment for the children and direct the immense potential in the children according to their interest, capability, knowledge and experience. Dewey's influence on education was evident in his theory about social learning. He believed that school should be a representative of the social environment and that students learn best when in natural social settings (Flinders & Thornton, 2013). John Dewey, states-progressive education is "a product of discontent with traditional education" which imposes adult standards, subject matter, and methodologies. It should include socially engaging learning experiences that are developmentally appropriate for young children".

Principles of Progressive Education

Progressive Education works on following principles:

1. Orientation on the needs of children
2. Personalized learning using the available resources
3. Social learning-as a method and a goal
4. A child-friendly environment to enhance learning involves interests, previous experience and capability of students
5. Creative transfer of knowledge
6. Balance the pace of space in society with the pace of change in education
7. Deep understanding and ability
8. Addressing performance assessments in an encouraging manner
9. Aims to prepare students actively in the democratic society
10. Discourage learning confined to text books and encourage learning involving various resources
11. Selection of subject matter beneficial to meet societal needs

The "progressivism" concept works involving the development of a child as an individual by transforming the information/ knowledge based on his interests, capability and needs. "If the child is thrown into a passive role as a student, absorbing information, the result is a waste of the child's education". This helps to maintain his interest in studies but also be beneficial to improve his productivity and performance in the field of his interest.

Progressivism in Education…….defining new heights of education

The present information age demands a revolutionary change in the existing machinery of Education to comply with the fast-changing needs of society. It involves collaborative learning based on many parameters such as critical thinking, problem-solving, decision making, and expertise in a particular field etc. At the end of 19th century, "Progressivism" started strengthening its roots with time. In U.S, it affected cultural, political, educational issues etc resulting in changes in the work culture. It was an attempt to improve overall quality of a child as an individual taking into account his mental and physical health and overall well-being, providing education to the children in a flexible way. For Dewey, education is not preparation for life, but a part of life itself helping students to think beyond their limitations and make them better citizens. They become self reliant, learn to anticipate the nature of societal problems using their real-time experience and latest technology as well as available resources and come up with better

solutions. He believed in the active participation of the citizens in democratic society. This can be achieved if education imparted through school reflects the community life.

Following a “learner-centered approach”, the role of teachers should be not only of providers of education restricted to the walls of the school but act as facilitators to develop the ability of problem-solving and decision making. The concept of “Progressivism” directs the students towards active learning through role play, group discussions and project method and brings an individual closer to society. The vision of education should be broad. 21st-century education should mark school curriculum beyond the school boundaries and should be coupled with creativity and information at a global level enriching the learning environment. This comprehensive approach changes the life of a student in school and as an individual makes him/her self directed, self-confident, self-reliant and establish a strong place in the society.

The problems faced by the individuals in the community mainly arise due to their inefficiency in their social and communication skills. With Progressive education, the children will become capable not only to take their decisions at school level but can also be a part in the decision-making process at home or in society. Their contribution can be valuable in establishing healthy bonding between them and the society. It enhances their social and personal skills like time management, social interaction, task management, communication skills, prioritizing their tasks, optimum use of available resources etc.

The responsibility lies with the schools/colleges/university to produce more successful students as individuals. This requires good and successful teachers as they acts as a role model for the students. One of the key differences in progressivism in education today compared to traditional education is the teacher’s role. In the present times, considering individual differences, the role of a teacher acts as a crucial tool to coordinate the resources necessary for facilitating the children’s experience in school and assist him to enrich his abilities of critical thinking and problem solving. e.g Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) was one of the most effective practitioners of the concept of progressive education. He believed that education should be a 'joyous exercise of our inventive and constructive energies that help us to build up character”.

It motivates students with passion for learning new things and adapts to new situations with confidence. It provides an opportunity to experience real world situations and enhance their skills according to their potential. They learn to lead a healthy life followed by team spirit, systematic planning, creativity and decision making. Schools provide a valuable change in the lives of students. The education system of any nation is a crucial indicator of development. Unfortunately, in our country, the education system still follows a traditional pattern based on rote learning. There is lack of adequate discussions between the teacher and the taught on the topics covered in curriculum. Moreover, the biased attitude of the school authorities towards children further makes it difficult for teachers to handle classrooms situations and modify the behavior of students. The school and college teachers (on temporary basis) are paid comparatively very less or not given salaries regularly due to which they lack interest to put more efforts to meet various demands of the school/colleges. On one side, there is paucity of better teaching opportunities for good teachers. On the other side, there are more opportunities for recruitment of teachers due to many obligations who may not be competent enough. In the present times, there has been shortage of quality teachers too. Moreover, the teachers are pressurized to produce best results inspite of many odd factors. This results in failure of teachers to establish a rapport with the students. Teaching has largely become a profession for women. At times, due to manifold responsibilities, women prove less professional. One of the

reasons for this could be the remuneration. There is certainly a change after the seventh pay commission but, still the best of students with professional competence especially the males do not prefer teaching as a profession and consider it as one of their last choices.

Contributions of John Dewey in the field of Progressive Education

The “Progressive Education Movement” started during the late 19th century in the United States by John Dewey, a great philosopher, psychologist and educational reformer. He was regarded as a principal figure in this movement from the 1880s to 1904. It inspired American public schools from a budding idea to the regular norm. It aimed to tune educational philosophy and concrete school reforms with the changing needs of the society.

John Dewey, father of Progressive Education pointed out that the strict authoritarian approach of traditional education was overly concerned with delivering preordained knowledge, and not focused enough on students’ actual learning experiences. He insisted that education requires a design that is grounded in a theory of experience. He sides neither with traditional education, nor with progressive education, but with the understanding of how humans have the experiences they do, and how this understanding is necessary for designing effective education system. Beginning in 1897 John Dewey published a summary of his theory on progressive education in School Journal. His theoretical standpoints are divided into five sections outlined below.

What education is

According to John Dewey, Education is the “participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the race”. He further added that “education should take into account that the student is a social being. The process begins at birth with the child unconsciously gaining knowledge and gradually developing their knowledge to share and partake in society.

Dewey considers the psychological form as the basis of educational process in comparison to the sociological form. The basic instincts of children support their knowledge with everything building upon it. This forms the “basis of Dewey's assumption that one cannot learn without motivation”.

What the school is

Dewey believed education as an integrated part of the society and should be concerned with the community on the whole. “Education fails because it neglects this fundamental principle of the school as a form of community life. It conceives the school as a place where certain information is to be given, where certain lessons are to be learned, or where certain habits are to be formed.” Further, he added “Education is the process of living and is not meant to be the preparation of future living”.

The subject matter of education

Dewey believes that the school curriculum should be designed to understand the society in a better way. According to him, “The study of the core subjects (language, science, history) should be coupled with the study of cooking, sewing, and manual training”. Furthermore, he

feels that “progress is not in the succession of studies but in the development of new attitudes towards, and new interests in, experience”.

The nature of method

The method used should consider the powers and interests of the children. John Dewey thinks that the result is a waste of the child's education if it is only restricted to absorption of information provided to him through school/teachers if confined only to books. But the concept of “progressivism” will take the students to reach new heights of understanding the same concept by inculcating in him the capability to the student will be transform his knowledge into new forms, images and symbols.

The school and social progress

For John Dewey, education regulates “the process of coming to share in the social consciousness,” directing towards social progress.

Conclusion

In 1840, “Progressive Education Movement” was initiated in response to the limitations of the formal education institutions and traditional system of education. It aspires to develop the potential of an individual as a student and enhance the intellectual, emotional, social and mental capabilities. It promoted creativity and art in the school curriculum apart from the course. Progressive education provided an environment where students were taught to connect themselves with society and develop their problem-solving and critical thinking. It aimed to train the students making them self-reliant using project method, understanding the nature of the problem, action programmes etc beneficial for society and extends beyond bookish knowledge.

Following the child-centered approach, educators who believed in “progressivism” in education, pointed out the importance of diversity, multiculturalism, multiple intelligences, cooperative and collaborative learning. Education was not only confined to the boundaries of the school but also represented society as a whole. It follows the assumption that the students can understand life and learn in a better way if it involves their interests and fosters equality in education. It regards each and every student as an individual learner with different potential, learning abilities and interests should be given opportunity to grow socially, intellectually, emotionally, financially and spiritually and improve his personality through education.

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