



A Brief History of Progressive Education

With Dr. Jason Edwards

Lesson 10: The Continuation of Progressive Education

Outline:

“That which is desirable on its own account and for the sake of knowing it is more of the nature of wisdom than that which is desirable on account of its results.”

Aristotle

“Public education is a great instrument of social change. Through it, if we so desire, we can make our country more nearly a democracy without classes. To do so will require the efforts of us all—teachers, administrators, taxpayers and statesmen. Education is a social process, perhaps the most important process in determining the future of our country; it should command a far larger portion of our national income than it does today.”

James Bryant Conant

Major Progressive Ideas and their Influence

- Progressive Education is widespread and is the “conventional wisdom” now.
- Contemporary education is professionalized. School has moved from the family and lay people to being controlled by state specialists. The U.S. government took control of the schools rapidly in a period from the 1950’s through the 1960’s. The government took control of the schools due to the Cold War with the Soviet Union, and also due to the Civil Rights Movement.
- The progressive education movement was understood to be “scientific,” and consequently, led to increased secularization in the United States. Religion is removed from schools. Faith is understood to have a marginal or non-existent relation to academics.
- One of progressive education’s lasting effects on the school is its supreme emphasis on efficiency. James Conant, former president of Harvard University, responded to the critics of the progressive education movement with a defense of progressive education, and even a call for larger and more “efficient” schools. He believed that the state should take authority over the child’s education and moral development, essentially believing that the child belongs to the state.
- Another lasting effect, by progressive education, on the school was Romanticism.
- Lastly, and perhaps, the ultimate consequence of the progressive education movement in the United States was the transition of thinking of the school in terms of intellectual training to thinking of the school as vocational training. It is perhaps not an unjustifiable generalization to assume that the



contemporary educational landscape, and consequently, the intellectual culture overall, of the United States has been governed by scientific experts, themselves in service of the state.