



A Brief History of Progressive Education

With Dr. Jason Edwards

Lesson 12:

Taking the Long View of Progressive and Classical Education

Outline:

“We need intimate knowledge of the past, not that the past has any magic about it, but because we cannot study the future and yet we need something to set against the present to remind us that the basic assumptions have been quite different in different periods and that much which seems certain to the uneducated is merely temporary fashion. A man who has lived in many places is not likely to be deceived by the local errors of his native village. The scholar has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and microphone of his own age.”

C.S. Lewis, Learning in War Time

“The Eagle soars in the summit of Heaven, The Hunter with his dogs pursues his circuit. O world of spring and autumn, birth and dying! The endless cycle of idea and action, Endless invention, endless experiment, Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness; Knowledge of speech, but not of silence; Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word. All our knowledge brings us nearer to death, But nearness to death no nearer to God. Where is the Life we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information? The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries Bring us farther from God and nearer to the Dust.”

T.S. Elliot

Progressive Education’s Changes to School

- A steady extension of educational opportunity
- School is now organized with more subjects.
- School is now organized with extra-curricular activities.
- School involves projects more than formal recitation.
- School has more and more use of technology.
- School has increased in size.
- School has increased in quantity.
- School bureaucracy has increased, increased specialization “Your Educational Philosophy Matters”.

Philosophical Assumptions of Medieval Culture and Education

- Culture revolves around religious authority, accentuating transcendent and eternal truth.
- Virtue is understood as permanent within a stable civilization.



- Belief in civilization as a mechanism of restraint on a sinful nature
- The teleology of culture is organized according to the preservation and commentary of the “past”.
- Society is hierarchically organized and designed for the transmission of belief, tradition, and custom.
- Formal education was administered by the Church and informal education was administered by the family.

Philosophical Assumptions of Modern Culture and Education

- Formal education is administered by the State and informal education is administered by the Media.
- Identified by its rejection of the “past”.
- Culture emphasizes “liberty” and “equality” within a changing universe and a changing society.
- Culture emphasizes a worldview of “immanence,” “process,” and “relativity”
- The “scientific method” is used to establish tentative “truths”.
- Social engineering as a solution to human problems.
- Man is viewed as either naturally good (Rousseau’s “noble savage”) or as a tabula rasa (Locke).
- Man is viewed as perfectible under the conditions of social engineering.