



Progressive Education is the Opium of the Educators

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Abstract

Progressive Education, with its pedagogical desire to engage students in a taught curriculum in a *meaningful* way, is often viewed in opposition to Conventional Education. In this conceptual paper, I argue that despite and even because of this opposition, Progressive Education contributes to the stability of Conventional Education by making Conventional Education bearable for its teachers. I claim that despite its institutional rarity, Progressive Education remains hegemonic among educators because of its promise of meaningful learning for all their students that can be achieved in and out of the conventional school settings. I provide a critique of Progressive Education from the Critical Dialogue Education and Democratic Education perspectives.

Keywords Progressive education · Democratic education · Agency · Manipulation · Fascination

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A Case of Teachers' Progressive Pedagogical Desires

In the early 1980s, when I had become a Soviet schoolteacher, teaching physics in all the middle- and high- grades classes in one of the central schools of Moscow, I was lucky to meet our district teacher-methodist.¹ A district teacher-methodist in the USSR was the most respected teacher of a particular academic subject in a school district, who promoted an exchange of pedagogical knowledge and innovations among colleagues teaching the same academic subject and helped novice teachers, like me. My teacher-methodist was a short middle-aged woman, full of enthusiasm, energy, and joy about physics and teaching physics. Together with some of my colleagues in the district, who were interested in physics and pedagogy like me, we attended her exciting physics classes. Her students liked her lessons and her personally. She organized afterschool science clubs for advanced students interested in physics and tutored failing students, who liked her as well. She visited my classes on my invitation, provided her super-helpful and creative feedback, and protected my pedagogical incompetence, professional learning, and pedagogical innovations against criticism and punishments by my school administration.

“There are no bad students, there are bad teachers,” she often told me. “When you give student a two,² you are giving it to yourself.” “Little children are interested in everything, but later they lose their interest in school because of poor teaching.” “You have to find a key to each of your students’ minds and hearts, to teach them well.” “When you stop being excited about physics, pedagogy, and your students, it is time for you to change your job.” Her enthusiasm for physics, teaching, and students was a very refreshing antidote against cynicism, student (and parent) bashing, burnout, bureaucratism, deadly formalism, memorization, boring lecturing, skill drilling, assembly-line pedagogy, ideological dogmatism, instrumentalism, manipulation, and disrespect that I could hear from many (but not all!) of the colleagues in my school. It also helped me to deal with my own sense of incompetence, burnout, alienation, and being overwhelmed with many pedagogical and non-pedagogical problems that I experienced.

I struggled with many of my disengaged students. “Avoid pedagogical gimmicks, you’re a physics teacher. Try to solve all of your problems with your students through physics.” By “pedagogical gimmicks,” my district teacher-methodist meant the ways in which many, especially novice teachers, tried to “buy” good relationships with challenging students. For example, many of my Soviet colleagues tried to organize extracurricular activities and trips in order to literally bribe those students to cooperate, obey, and behave well during their lessons in exchange (cf. Sidorkin, 2002, 2009). I have observed a somewhat similar approach among novice teachers in the US as well. “Don’t do this!” she argued. “It’s not only ethically bad – manipulative – but also it rarely works in the long-run. Kids aren’t stupid.” Back then, I was ambivalent about afterschool activities that were not related to the subject I taught. I organized a movie club, where interested seniors watched some superb Soviet and

¹ Unfortunately, I forgot her name.

² In the Soviet Union, the failing grade was a 2 (an F in the US) and the highest was a 5 (an A in the US).

foreign movies and then we discussed them. I organized a rock-n-roll club where interested kids could listen to underground Soviet rock music. I organized a conceptual-art club for my 10th graders.³ I organized a club for helping me with physics experiments, although it was related to physics I taught. I organized a club where we produced an improvisational comedy performance mocking our school for a New Year's celebration. Such activities were authentic in my view, but I also felt the temptation to use these extracurricular activities as an "exchange of favors" (Smith & Matusov, 2011) for the students' compliance with my in-classroom requirements. My teacher-methodist argued that extracurricular activities unrelated to teaching the targeted academic subject must not be used as a leverage for students' engagement in the targeted curriculum. According to her, these extracurricular activities were fine and important in themselves – they must not be exploited. Students must not be manipulated. "You're a physics teacher first and most of all. You should solve all your pedagogical problems, including kids' behavior, through teaching physics."

It took me some time to realize what she meant by "solving my pedagogical problems through physics." In Soviet schools, students had to take the middle school exit exams that defined their fate after grade 8. Those who passed the exam had an opportunity to go to high school. Those who did not, went to professional training schools. The students in the school where I taught came mainly from four types of families: 1) Soviet diplomats, 2) Soviet artists (including famous underground artists), 3) Soviet workers, and 4) Soviet criminals (thieves, robbers, gangsters). In one of the 8th-grade classes, I had a male student from an intergenerational family of criminals. At the time I met this boy, all members of his family, including his older brother, were in jail, except his grandmother, who held custody over him and who herself had just been released from prison a year before. The boy rarely came to school, and he did so usually to recruit other boys in his gang, to sell stolen stuff to his peers, to avoid some dangers, or on order of the authorities as a condition of his release from an arrest for some petty crimes. To say that he was disengaged during my physics lessons – I taught mechanics in 8th grade – was to say nothing. He talked to his friends at best or publicly commented and made humiliating jokes about me at worst. Fortunately, his visits were not very frequent. I had a relatively good rapport with the rest of the class so the damage to my teacher reputation in the students' eyes was not severe. However, he troubled me a lot and disrupted my teaching. Also, I felt responsible for this educational failure.

Once, he was in my physics classroom after the lessons because he left something on his desk. I decided to chat with him. He told me how useless the school was to him in general, and my class in particular for his future. I asked him what future he was talking about. "Jail, of course," he replied with excitement. I realized that for him, Soviet jail was a rite of passage. He told me in which parts of the vast territory of the Soviet Union his family members were jailed in at that moment.

As he mentioned that his older brother was jailed in a prison in Uzbekistan, I decided to jump in to prove him wrong that physics was useless for the future imagined by him. I told him that in Uzbekistan, summer can be very-very hot – hotter than the body's temperature. I explained that Uzbeks deal with this

³ The highest grade level in the Soviet high school.

problem by wearing thick cotton robes and coats during their hot summers and drink hot tea to prevent overheating their bodies. The boy exploded in laughter. Of course, what I told him contradicted his own life experience, living in Moscow: during hot summer weather, it made a lot of sense to have a very light dress or no dress at all. He replied that he never heard such “bullshit.” He joked that I should have stopped teaching physics and instead, I should have taught fairytales. He laughed and ran away from the classroom.

However, in a few days, he came directly to my classroom after the school day was over. He was serious. He told me that he talked with “knowledgeable people” among his “hommies” (“druganý,” “koreshí,” in Russian), and they corroborated my story. Even more, they asked him to ask me to explain why that was the case. Why is it better to use “warm” clothing during the hot Uzbek summer? Wow! He really asked me for a physics lesson on the notion of heat, which was the school physics curriculum for the seventh grade in the USSR back then. My lesson, involving some experiments, demonstrations, explanations, and discussions, lasted for more than two hours. He asked many very ingenious and deep questions about heat. For example, he noticed that a thermostat that I used in my demonstration had a mirror surface inside and he asked if the heat was some kind of invisible light – invisible heat rays. Later he came a few more times asking various questions about the phenomena that emerged in him independently or after talking with his “hommies.” His attitude toward me changed after that. “You’re the only non-bullshit teacher in this school,” he told me. “Let me know if you have problems with kids or teachers. I’ll help you.” I had no doubts that he would “help,” and because of that, I never asked. He started greeting me in school and outside. He protected me against harassment by his “hommies” when I walked in the neighborhood. When he visited my lessons, he tried to be polite, respectful, and not disruptive – although it was difficult for him to quietly sit during my lessons on mechanics while still being disengaged. At that time, in the class, we studied the behavior of physical objects on incline surfaces using the formulas coming from Newton’s laws. How could I genuinely engage him in becoming interested in and studying these curricula?!

I shared my pedagogical success, new challenges, and concerns about the boy with my district teacher-methodist. “Oh, this is really beautiful!” she exclaimed. She liked very much that I connected with the troubled young man via physics. However, I told her that the boy was still disengaged in my mechanics physics classes. “You found the Big Key from his heart and mind. You connected him to yourself and to physics. For him, now neither you nor physics is ‘bullshit’ anymore. Next, you need to find small keys connecting him to mechanics, to your daily lessons.”

<<David García Romero, 2020-01-22: That is kind of against her own rules about manipulation.>>

<<Eugene, 2020-01-22: Hmmm, I think you are right, David. I suspect that she did not see finding “keys” to the student’s heart and mind as manipulation, but it seems it is. I agree with you. This probably also applies to Dewey’s notion of “psychologizing of the curriculum” and to progressivists at large, please, see below.>>

My teacher-methodist praised me for setting an implicit pedagogical goal of making this boy love what I taught. I asked her how I could connect the boy to mechanics, how I could find his interests in mechanics. She smiled mysteriously, “You already know the answer. You found his interest in the physics of heat by talking about what he was interested in. Do it again, but this time focus on mechanics.” I liked her advice. At the same time, I felt that my previous experience of talking with the boy was different. I was not trying to engage him in the physics of heat but rather in physics in general. The issue of heat came to my mind only because he mentioned his older brother spending time in a prison in Uzbekistan. Still, I decided to try.

This time, I decided to be frank with the boy. When he visited my class again, I asked him to come to me after school. “What’s up, man? Do you have problems? Do you need my help? Kids? Teachers? Administration? Homies? Gangs? Money? Girls?” “No!” I protested. “It’s not that. You are wasting your time in my classes.” He smiled, “I’m wasting my time in school. Sorry if I’m too disruptive in your lessons. I’ll try to be more discreet.” – “No, I don’t want you to be ‘more discreet.’ I want my physics lessons to be useful and meaningful for you. I want you to become interested in mechanics like you have become interested in the physics of heat. What would be interesting for you in mechanics? You know, mechanics is about movements...” He smirked, “Mechanics? Interested? Me? Let me think... Oh, yeah! I’m interested in the ‘mechanics’ of robbing a newspaper kiosk. I’m interested in learning the ‘mechanics’ of making good lock-picks. I’d love to make good flying knives. Can you teach me that? If so, I can bring my homies to your lessons. They will become your best students.” He laughed being half-serious and half-jokingly.

I should admit that all his examples indeed had something to do with the mechanics I was teaching, the applied mechanics. The fact that it was the applied mechanics and not the theoretical mechanics I was teaching did not bother me. What really bothered me was that I was setting myself on a course of helping a criminal in his future crimes. By teaching that “mechanics,” I would become his accomplice in crime.

He understood that, as well. He stopped laughing, gave me piercing look, and said dead-seriously, “But, listen to me, man. Listen well. It’s much safer for you if I stay disengaged in your lessons. Stay away from me or you’ll be burned. Of course, unless you know for sure what you are doing. I can see clearly that you are not good criminal material. Too fragile. Too smart-ass for yourself. Think twice about what you are asking for. You may get it.” He stood up and left my empty classroom, where the two of us were talking. I was shocked how much he in his 14 years was wiser and more mature than me in my 22.

<<Beth Stone, 2020-02-17: I enjoyed reading about your experiences in Russia interacting with the 14-year old boy who was only interested in furthering his career. What a story! I chuckle to imagine how if his "career" had been one sanctioned by society, his drive and passion would be applauded and celebrated. Isn't that very same drive and passion what we teachers so hope for our students?>>

I talked about my attempt to engage the boy in mechanics to my teacher-methodist. She agreed that following his interests in his “mechanics” would have been unethical and criminal. However, she thought I should keep trying. For example, she suggested creating an afterschool kite club for making kites and invite the boy. Or a robot-making club. She said that many 14-year-old boys were interested in that. “Kids are kids, even if they are criminal kids.” I had doubts. In my interaction with the boy, he was pretty determined to follow his calling for crime. And I was right. When I suggested afterschool clubs to him, he looked at me with surprise, “I thought you were a non-bullshit teacher.”

<<Ana Marjanovic-Shane, 2020-01-28: This also shows his terrific wisdom and reading through the attempts of manipulation.>>

He came for a few more times and then disappeared. Later I heard that he and his hommies were caught during an attempted robbery of a newspaper kiosk and sentenced to prison. His criminal rite of passage finally occurred as he desired.

Progressive Education as a Reply to Problems with Conventional Education

My teacher-methodist and I had a particular pedagogical desire to engage and motivate our students in the curriculum we wanted and/or were required to teach in a *meaningful* way for our students. Some conventional teachers might also have a pedagogical desire to motivate their students. However, conventional teachers’ desire is different from ours because it is not based on students’ meaningfulness with regard to taught curriculum. Instead, conventional teachers may use a system of rewards and punishments, exploitation of their good relations with the students as a leverage, an exchange of favors, appeal to the students’ sense of obligation toward their state, community, or family, and so on. All these motivators, used by conventional educators, are external, generic, and indifferent and external to the taught curriculum. External motivators are the birthmark of Conventional Education. Conventional Education generates an acute problem of student disengagement that any conventional teacher must deal with. Progressive Education is a way to address it.

My teacher-methodist and I (and many other teachers like us) wanted to induce students’ *intrinsic* motivation, *interest* in the subject matter we taught, and the *deep understanding* through our students’ *construction of knowledge* guided by the teacher.⁴ We had different ways of doing that: offering fun playful hands-on clubs and activities like making kites and robots that might suck the students in; connecting the students’ existing interests, aspirations, and needs with our academic subject, like described above; using a classroom open-ended dialogue with peers; giving choices; bringing puzzlements and provocations; having the teacher’s interest and enthusiasm for the taught academic subject shared with the students; and so on.

⁴ We also wanted to “learnification” of the students’ life – totalized transformation – totalized reduction – of the students’ everyday experiences into learning (cf., Biesta, 2013, 2017).

Like my teacher-methodist, I believed that the most interesting students were those who were disengaged because the true mastery of teaching reveals itself in making super-disengaged students become truly interested in and enthusiastic about the taught subject every day and every moment. It becomes almost a sport for a progressive teacher to make the most difficult student engaged. An innovative progressive teacher Erin Gruwell (*Freedom Writers & Gruwell, 1999*) articulated this point in the following way, “I think I gravitate to the kids who are the toughest initially. It’s a great competitive edge: can I crack that kid? It was very evident that they didn’t want to be there” (Hahn & Korngiebel, 2019).

In this conceptual essay, I want to explore this pedagogical desire of inducing intrinsic motivation in our students and its complicated relationship with Conventional Education. In my view, this pedagogical desire has been historically captured and articulated by the so-called “Progressive Education” movement, to the description of which I am going to switch now. However, I want to emphasize that many of those teachers around the globe who have this pedagogical desire are not familiar with the conceptual framework and history of the Progressive Education movement. Some, especially American, teachers may learn about Progressive Education in their normal schools of teacher education. But I suspect many others do not. Instead, they generate their “progressivism” in their professional desires, practices, and discourses by themselves as a part of their local teacher culture, creativity, and intuition as a response to the problems with Conventional Education. In a way, educators socialize themselves into a community of the educational progressivism practice.

Although, in my essay, I will contrast Progressive Education with Conventional Education, Democratic Education, and Dialogic Education, my primary focus is on Progressive Education and its relationship with Conventional Education. I do not explore in the depth Conventional, Democratic, and Dialogic Education here as I provided my critical examination of them elsewhere (e.g., Matusov, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2015b, 2021a, b).

What is Pedagogical Progressive Education?

Progressive Education tries to address the most severe problem of Conventional Education – students’ disengagement: emotional, motivational, intellectual, relational, ontological disengagement in the taught curriculum. Progressivism guides teachers how to promote intrinsic, deep, motivation in each and every student for each and every taught curriculum.

For me, there are four major scholars who have defined the pedagogical notion of “Progressive Education”⁵: The French writer and philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), the American developmental psychologist and educator Jerome Bruner (1915–2016),

⁵ Historians of education distinguished pedagogical vs. administrative Progressive Education. The latter involved the “scientific” efficiency in organizing educational institutions and processes. Although these two movements had some synergy and emerged within the political Progressive movement at the beginning of the twentieth century in the US, they also have tensions, disagreements, and incompatibilities with each other (Labaree, 2010; Tyack, 1974). Here, I focus on pedagogical Progressive Education.

and the American educational philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952). Of course, many other scholars and educational practitioners contributed to this conceptual paradigm and movement: Friedrich Froebel, Rudolf Steiner, Maria Montessori, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Paulo Freire, and Vivian Paley, among many others (Howlett, 2013). Analyzing administrative progressivism in American education of the first half of the nineteenth century, the historian Michael Katz comments for religious roots of American progressivism,⁶ “Like evangelical religion, [progressive] education had to awaken and shape the affective side of personality by delicately stimulating and cultivating the emotions. Like evangelism in religion as well, [progressive] education thus had to engage the interest and affections of the child if it was to engender a deep, personal commitment to a righteous life” (Katz, 1975, p. 45). Similarly, the UK philosopher Isaiah Berlin noticed Calvinist roots in Rousseau’s progressivism (Berlin & Hardy, 2002).

A pedagogical Progressive Education paradigm emerged in the Enlightenment and was first articulated by Rousseau and Kant and further developed and publicized by John Dewey at the end of the nineteenth century and later. In my judgment, the Progressive Education paradigm is based on the two following major tenets. The first tenet of *educational paternalism* was formulated by Rousseau in his pedagogical novel “Emile” and then justified by Kant: a progressive teacher wants the student to want what the teacher wants the student to want without the student noticing that. Using the philosophical language of Michel Foucault, Lynn Fendler (1998) argued that the goal of a progressive teacher is to subjugate the student, making them “the educated subject.” As Rousseau wrote of the child-centered, proto-Progressive, education that he advocated in contrast to a conventional authoritarian teacher-centered education,

Take the opposite course with your pupil; *let him always think he is master while you are really master*. There is no subjection so completed as that which preserves the forms of freedom; it is thus that the will [of the child] itself is taken captive [by the teacher’s hidden manipulation]. Is not this poor child, without knowledge, strength, or wisdom, entirely at your mercy? Are you not master of his whole environment so far as it affects him? Cannot you make of him what you please? His work and play, his pleasure and pain, are they not, unknown to him, under your control? No doubt he ought only to do what he wants, but he ought to want to do nothing but what you want him to do. He should never take a step you have not foreseen, nor utter a word you could not foretell (Rousseau, 1979, p. 120, italics mine).

As a Progressive educator and a physics teacher, I want the boy from the case above to want to learn physics in general, to become deeply interested and engage in all my lessons on mechanics, and to stop being interested in crime. My pedagogical goals were approved and enthusiastically supported by my district teacher-methodist. Back then, I could not find any better goals for a schoolteacher.

Ironically, Kant justified educational paternalism introduced by Rousseau by his insistence that autonomy defines human dignity (Matusov, 2020c). Kant saw the

⁶ It looks like that the administrative and pedagogical progressivism overlap in the first part of the nineteenth century in the USA.

purpose of education in fostering the autonomous agency of a student by making the student informed and rational.⁷ Since people, especially children, are often “immature,” ignorant and non-rational people cannot be left to their own devices to decide their education. Education must be compulsory – i.e., forced, foisted – along with its curriculum and instruction guided by pedagogically wise teachers. Paraphrasing the famous rhetorical question by Auguste Comte, the founder of positivism, “If we do not allow free thinking in chemistry or biology, why should we allow it in education?” (cf. “research-based education”). Teachers and society in their wisdom and scientific advances define and impose the curricular content on the students and make sure that the students would arrive at the correct endpoint tested by the universal objective reasoning mediated by exam agencies. However, according to Kant, education must be based on students’ freedom of reason. Teachers must encourage and legitimize the students’ use of their reason, however imperfect it might be, and engage the students in collective and dialogic testing of their imperfect reasoning, which under the guidance of the skillful and intellectually honest teachers will lead the students to the correct rational conclusion.⁸ The authoritarian imposition of knowledge, common to Kant’s paradigm and modern schools, is not legitimate. Having the freedom of reason, students do not have freedom from reason (except in religious education), according to Kant (1784). One of the major by-products of this guidance is the growing rationality of the students, which is the basis of their future autonomy. I have developed a nuanced critique of Kant’s educational paternalism elsewhere (Matusov, 2020b, c).

The third tenet of Progressive Education was developed by the American psychologist and educator Jerome Bruner: “...any subject could be taught to any child at any age in some form that was honest” (Bruner, 1986, p. 129). Progressive Education gives an educator hope that it is possible to find an “honest” way of teaching any curriculum for any student at any time, which my colleagues and I called the Holy Grail of Progressive Education (Matusov et al., 2019). “An honest way of teaching” is equal to student’s intrinsic motivation and engagement in meaningful learning of the academic subject that the teacher wants and/or is required to teach. The historian of the American progressivism in the early nineteenth century Michael Katz illustrated the focus on motivating students to study by appealing to their curiosity, interests, and affection to ensure the student’s cooperation with the teacher,

As one [progressive] writer stated the case, motivating children necessitated “exciting their curiosity.” The model [progressive] teacher connected “with his instruction, as far as possible, what is interesting and attractive so that the associations, formed in the minds of his pupils, will leave them in love with the subject of investigation, and in the proper time, bring them back to the pursuit with readiness and alacrity.” The pupil, of course “must be made to work; but he must work voluntarily, cheerfully, with hope.” In that way, the model for the teacher-pupil relation became the relation of parent and child at its finest both firm and affectionate (Katz, 1975, pp. 45-46).

⁷ Kant’s education is *instrumental* to serve autonomy rather than *intrinsic* having its worth in itself (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2019).

⁸ In this sense, Kant’s position fits progressive education (LaVaque-Manty, 2006).

My district teacher-methodist believed that children are interested in everything until their interests are killed in school. She encouraged me to find my “honest” way of engaging the boy in physics.

My “honest” way of teaching the boy physics was to find the boy’s own interests and expand them using physics so the boy would start appreciating physics. The long-term goal of this approach was actually to hijack the boy’s criminal interests and replace them with prosocial interests in physics. Initially, physics was instrumental for the boy to prepare for his future life in prison. However, my hope was that genuine engagement in physics would push it as the primary intrinsic motivator for the boy studying physics – the so-called “strength model” of teaching based on the student’s “funds of knowledge for teaching” (Moll et al., 1992), in contrast to the conventional “deficit model” (Cline & Schwartz, 1999). I saw a lurking possibility for this process in his interest in why Uzbeks use warm clothing during their super-hot summers. For more than two hours, the boy was genuinely and deeply interested in the physics of heat. If only I could have done it with mechanics!

John Dewey conceptualized this process of “an honest way of teaching” (cf. Bruner) as “psychologizing of the curriculum” (Dewey, 1902). The psychologizing of the “subject-matter” (i.e., the curriculum) involves finding the curriculum in the student’s “own past doings, thinkings, and sufferings,” so the targeted curriculum is seen as useful for the student for their future. Dewey argued that “The legitimate way [to motivate the student to study the targeted curriculum] is to transform the [curricular] material; to psychologize it that is, once more, to take it and to develop it within the range and scope of the child’s life” (Dewey, 1902, p. 30). These ideas can be found in sociocultural approaches to motivation (e.g., Rueda & Dembo, 1995; Rueda & Moll, 1994). For example, when a student is not interested in math but is interested in baseball, a teacher might show to the student that math can be useful for assessing the strengths of the players and the probabilities of winning and losing games.

If the subject-matter of the lessons be such as to have an appropriate place within the expanding consciousness of the child, if it grows out of his own past doings, thinkings, and sufferings, and grows into application in further achievements and receptivities, then no device or trick of method has to be resorted to in order to enlist “interest.” The psychologized is of interest that is, it is placed in the whole of conscious life so that it shares the worth of that life (Dewey, 1902, p. 27).

I think finding a pedagogical, manipulative, trick to enlist a student interest was precisely what I did when I problematized the Uzbek practice of wearing “warm” clothing in their scorching summer in response to the boy’s mentioning his brother spending his sentence in an Uzbek prison. Since the boy was mentally preparing himself to go to jail, knowing local prison conditions could be beneficial and important for him. I tried to exploit his anxieties about his future in jail to teach physics. Indeed, the physics of heat could “grow into application in [the boy’s] further achievements,” if these “further achievements” mean for him to be imprisoned in Uzbekistan.

However, in trying to engage the boy in studying mechanics, I could not accept Dewey's proposal that "no device or trick of method has to be resorted to in order to enlist 'interest.'" Morally and professionally, I could not empower the boy to be a better criminal by learning "mechanics" of robbing a newspaper kiosk, making powerful lock-picks and flying knives even though such an effort might lead to his genuine engagement in studying mechanics. I felt that in some cases, morality has to be prioritized over the genuine engagement of the student in teaching mechanics. But, of course, my case was rather extreme.

On the surface, Dewey's call for psychologizing the targeted curriculum leads to the problem of individualism. A classroom usually consists of many students having diverse past experiences, different "past doings, thinkings, and sufferings" and, thus, requiring very different psychologizing of the targeted curriculum. Short of one-on-one teaching, collective psychologizing seems near impossible. However, this is not necessarily true. My district teacher-methodist insisted and powerfully demonstrated in her physics lessons that when genuine interest in the targeted curriculum emerges in a classroom for some students, it often "sucks" other students into it through a discursive, relational, and communal process (cf. "the educational vortex," Matusov et al., 2019). For example, an American elementary school teacher, Hollylynne Drier, overheard two boys in her classroom arguing about the correctness of their spelling scores calculated by a spelling software. Each of them made only one spelling error, but the computer spelling scores were slightly different because they had different total numbers of the spelling words given each to them. The boys thought that the computer was erroneous and unfair. The teacher shared their discussion with the entire class, and many more students got involved even though initially it was not their own problem (Drier, 2000). Still, what was interesting for many other students in the classroom was the math inquiry of whether the spelling score must be the same when only one spelling error is made or different because the total numbers of the presented spelling words were different. The two boys' direct experience became mediated experience for those engaged students. In both cases, the children's immediate and mediated experiences psychologized the (emergent) curriculum aiming at math modeling the spelling scores (Matusov, 2020a).

Of course, this "sucking in" process is almost always imperfect: some students might be more peripheral or even disengaged, for some time, for some time. The goal is to engage *all students* into as many targeted topics as possible the majority of the time. In a way, my district teacher-methodist tacitly proposed a *soft* version of Progressive Education, where psychologizing the targeted curriculum plus the emergent discursive and communal processes generate powerful, but imperfect, meaningful engagement of the students in the targeted curriculum.

Also, Dewey insisted that child's psychology was organically incorporated with the integrative external curriculum of "what is worth teaching" (Dewey, 1897), scientifically pre-established by the society,

I believe that the psychological and social sides are organically related and that education cannot be regarded as a compromise between the two, or a superimposition of one upon the other. We are told that the psychological definition of education is barren and formal – that it gives us only the idea of a develop-

ment of all the mental powers without giving us any idea of the use to which these powers are put. On the other hand, it is urged that the social definition of education, as getting adjusted to civilization, makes of it a forced and external process, and results in subordinating the freedom of the individual to a preconceived social and political status (Dewey, 1897).

The integrative external curriculum preset by the society defines the students' preparation for their future life.

To prepare him [a child] for the future life means to give him command of himself; it means so to train him that he will have the full and ready use of all his capacities; that his eye and ear and hand may be tools ready to command, that his judgment may be capable of grasping the conditions under which it has to work, and the executive forces be trained to act economically and efficiently. It is impossible to reach this sort of adjustment save as constant regard is had to the individual's own powers, tastes, and interests – say, that is, as education is continually converted into psychological terms. In sum, I believe that the individual who is to be educated is a social individual and that society is an organic union of individuals. If we eliminate the social factor from the child we are left only with an abstraction; if we eliminate the individual factor from society, we are left only with an inert and lifeless mass. Education, therefore, must begin with a psychological insight into the child's capacities, interests, and habits (Dewey, 1897).

Combining the insights articulated by Rousseau, Bruner, and Dewey, the pedagogical Progressive Education involves *the call and the promise to find instruction that makes any preselected, targeted, imposed curriculum engaging and meaningful for each student.*

<<Robert Hampel, 2020-01-22: Is “any” too strong?>>

<<Eugene: Yes and no. In my view, there are two major strains of Progressive Education: 1) “hard” that would use “any,” like Bruner did, and 2) “soft” coming from Dewey who argued for the emergent curriculum within the broadly and ill-defined preset societal curriculum (see Bruner's critique of Dewey's “soft” progressivism in Bruner, 1979).⁹ See my discussion later.>>

Some powerful attractors of Progressive Education for educators

Pedagogical Progressive Education sets the noble goals of education to be genuinely engaging, meaningful, effective, and deep for each student and each preset targeted curricular topic. If fulfilled, these educational goals promise to lead to

⁹ This tension between “hard” and “soft” progressivism played an important role in the evolution of the MACOS educational project (“Man: A Course of Study”, the mid 1960s to the beginning of the 1970s), when Bruner, a co-founder of MACOS, seemed to be forced to move away from the “hard” progressivism of teaching preset big ideas and the preset abstract structures of knowledge to the “soft” progressivism of the emergent curriculum in an open-ended dialogue with the students leading the participants to unexpected ideas within predefined curricular themes (Dow, 1991).

student–teacher mutual respect, collaboration, and harmonious relations among the students. It is the foundation of making the classroom “a community of learners” (Brown & Campione, 1994; Matusov et al., 2012; Rogoff et al., 1996). Progressive Education reassures that all students can be meaningfully engage, especially ones who are economically, socially, culturally, and historically disadvantaged and oppressed. Educators who are especially concerned about social justice are attracted by a progressivist desire of making a difference in the lives of disadvantaged, alienated, and disengaged students. Progressive Education, especially in its soft version, democratizes the school curriculum by allowing diverse students’ own interests, “past doings, thinkings, and sufferings” to shape the curriculum and instruction.

Also, in the face of problems, Progressive Education returns the locus of control to the teachers: teachers’ pedagogy and teachers’ professionalism. If, as some conventional teachers believe, the problems faced by the teachers are essentially rooted in the students (or in their biology, or in society, or in the economy, or in the political system), nothing much could be done by the teachers (except seeking teaching “good students”). When the teachers get stuck with “bad students,” they might soon learn helplessness, which easily leads to the teachers’ demoralization and deprofessionalization (Hargreaves, 1994). Instead of blaming students (or society) for their laziness, stupidity, ill-intent, deficits, moral flaws, and so on, Progressive Education re-orientes the teachers toward improving their own pedagogy, finding ways to psychologize the targeted curriculum, “honest” instruction, intrinsic motivation, students’ strengths, and promoting discursive processes in the classroom. Progressive Education never lets the teacher off the hook, focusing them on improving their own teaching.

Progressive Education professionalizes teachers by firmly insisting that they are the only legitimate authors of their instruction, rooted in psychologizing of the targeted, often imposed, curriculum for each particular student in the classroom. This is because students’ “past doings, thinkings, ... sufferings,” current interests, needs, and future aspirations are unique for each student and cannot be envisioned in advance. Progressive Education leads to the powerful pedagogical notions of “individualized instruction” and “intrinsic motivation” as the educational goals of a progressive teacher.

Even if Progressive Education cannot guarantee that each and every student would pass every required high-stakes educational assessment, it promises students’ genuine engagement that reduces the possibilities for and severity of teacher-students conflicts, classroom disruptions, pedagogical violence (Matusov & Sullivan, 2020), and low classroom morale. It promises to make the mandatory collective institutional education with its imposed curriculum not only bearable but exciting for both the teachers and the students.

Is Progressive Education Doable and Desirable?

The issue of the feasibility of pedagogical Progressive Education – of whether Progressive Education can really deliver what it promises – should be better to examine in a progressive school rather than in a traditional school. In a progressive school,

teachers can control and design the curriculum in their classrooms. The teachers in progressive schools are authors of their curriculum. In contrast, in traditional schools, the curriculum is usually imposed by the state. Thus, in the Soviet Union, there was the unified, standardized national curriculum, the national sequence of the curricular topics, and the national schedule for teaching these curricular topics. As the Soviet Ministry of Education insisted, in all 11 time zones of the USSR, each class grade at each subject should study the same page of the mandated national textbook. Of course, under those conditions, Progressive Education was difficult to do.

For the purpose of this examination of feasibility and desirability of Progressive Education, I interviewed a formerly progressive elementary school teacher Beth Stone from a once progressive private K-8 school, “The Circle School,” located in Harrisburg, PA, USA (<https://www.circleschool.org/>). Both the teacher and the school were transformed from a being Progressive school (for about 6 years of its initial existence since its establishment in 1984) to becoming and remaining Democratic until today, for about 30 years by the time of the interview in the summer of 2019. My primary reason to focus on a progressive teacher, who transitioned to becoming a democratic teacher, rather than on just a progressive teacher, is because, in my view, the issue of feasibility cannot be satisfactorily addressed without consideration of the values and their desirability for Progressive Education. The contrast of and the disagreement between Progressive Education and Democratic Education about their educational values helps to do exactly that.

During our interview, Beth told me that a few years after the opening of their new school, things started getting less hectic for her both in school and in her own parenting as her two young daughters were getting a bit older and required a bit less of her immediate attention. She realized that it was time for her to try her pedagogical creativity in progressive instruction about which she had been dreaming for a long time:

Beth: ...about five years into it, I suddenly realized that things had gotten much better, that my younger daughter was old enough to be much more independent. And, I happened, we had organized the children into age groups. So, I had a cluster of six- and seven- year olds. Was that right? Yes. And none of them were extreme on either end. So, it felt like... all the children that would spend most of the day with me were reasonable, reachable children.

And so, I started indulging some of my fantasies about what the perfect school experience would be for them and for me too. So, we did things like, uh, we, I got a beef heart from the local butcher and we dissected it, and I got a heart kit from the American Heart Association so that we could put blue dye and red dye and pump through these tubes to see the past passages of the blood in our bodies.

And we did this program, it's called "One a day." So, every morning we would all sit together, and we would add a penny to a jar. We would add a day to the calendar. We had a number line going around the wall. So, we'd add one number each day and we would talk about these things as it went along.

And we had a mock whale watch: we studied whales, we adopted... well, we got brochures and read about all the different whales [and] voted on the whale, we wanted to adopt. We watched videos of whales. We even, we even chose a day where we set the room up with chairs around that video and we squirted water around to be the mist from the ocean. I mean, we just did all these things. And one of the things we did also was the kids would make a goal for every day. Like we'd have a little time in the morning, and everybody would say what they wanted to do that day.

Oh, here's another thing we did. I got a teddy bear that was pretty big and put a Circle School t-shirt on the teddy bear. And every weekend, the teddy bear would go home with one of the kids. And they... and a journal accompanied the teddy bear, and the kids were supposed to, with their parents' help, if [they] needed and most of them needed it, would write what they did that weekend. And some of them took pictures and then on Monday we would go through the journal and talk about that.

So anyway, I had all these cool things, and it was great. It was wonderful. And then I started noticing a little bit of dissent among the six- and seven- year olds. Like, ... "Are we done yet? Can we go play? Is it time to go outside?" I mean, we'd be in the middle of this, what I thought had been an amazing, wonderful adventure. And they were clearly somewhere else in their heads. Like they just, it wasn't engaging them, it wasn't grabbing their heartstrings. It wasn't... it wasn't their spark. And so I started thinking, you know, what, what's wrong with this picture?

...and it was about that time that Jim [Rietmulder, another co-founder of the school and Beth's husband] found in a book catalog, the book "Free at last" by Danny Greenberg (1991) [a founder of the first American Democratic school named "Sudbury Valley School"]. And he ordered it and gave it to the other teacher for Christmas. And she read it, and she came back after Christmas break, very excited and enthusiastic, and said, "You have to read this book." So, I did. And, I too became very enthusiastic and excited because it seemed like Sudbury Valley [School] was implementing The Circle School's philosophy better than The Circle School was. But they, they had the democracy part, which we did not. I was in charge of those six- and seven- year olds and they had lots of choices, but I was the one who gave them the choices and they had to pick what I... from what I offered.

Eugene: Could they [i.e., the students] add a choice [of their own activity] at the time or not?

Beth: I suppose if they had made a good case for their choice and the choice was in alignment with what I had planned, I would have entertained it. But if they said, we just want to go outside, I would say, well, we can do that, but not now. We'll have to wait.

Eugene: Do you remember of any... your own dissatisfaction with them. Like, this almost feels like, "Bastards!" [Eugene laughs] You know, you prepared such a wonderful [Beth laughs] learning activity and these spoiled brats just wanted to go to play.

Beth: I didn't really feel like they were "spoiled brats."

Eugene: Anything like that.... [was this] irritating?...

Beth: Yes, I found irritation.

Eugene: And what's strange for me [that you finally accepted kids' desires] because ... Usually, teachers... like progressive teachers ... because I call that pedagogy, that you ... so nicely described, very good progressive education. I call it "progressive education," but I don't know how you might conceptualize that: when you're trying to develop these wonderful, educational activities and engaged kids about like whales and so and so forth.

Because in my observation there are two types ["soft" and "hard" progressivism], maybe more than two types, but let's say the two big types of this way of doing [progressive teaching]. And in Montessori school, you might find that in some other schools, progressive schools, you can find that. Uh, one type ["soft" progressivism] is kind is creating interesting activities and see where the kids go with that. And another type ["hard" progressivism], you have a preset kind of goal and it's just beautiful activity they engaged in that and then you shape them to that goal. You [are] probably familiar with that as well. Which one was a, of these two... or maybe not those two at all, maybe something else, do you remember doing back then?

Beth: I think it was a combination, for some activities, it was like the one a day thing. It's pretty cut and dry. But writing exercises and, ... And other things were way more open-ended and, and if anything, I think I oftentimes was disappointed with them [students] not taking it further because they just wanted to go outside and play. [both laugh]

Eugene: But usually [progressive] teachers ... more stick with that. They will probably [say to themselves], "Okay, ... I need to tune up [my learning activities] better for the kids. Maybe [I need to do] a little tweaking [of my learning activities]. Or maybe they're not individualized enough. Maybe... it worked for one kid but not for another kid. Maybe for that kid, I need to ... investigate [it] a bit more." What's my question is: did you go to that pathway...? And the biggest question, of course, is why did you shift from [progressive education] completely, from that pathway?... Do you remember any struggles, any talking to some other people?

Beth: Well, I've made decisions only after I do lots and lots of research. And it doesn't mean that I don't recognize that I'm interested in something, in pursuing something. <<Beth described the process of the school's collective decision-making to transfer from a progressive school to a democratic school>>. I'm really glad that we did what we did. And I still feel like the way "The Circle School" hums along is, is ... for me and for the majority of kids... it's a great way to spend one's childhood.

Eugene: Okay. So, Beth, tell me what happened with your creativity, pedagogical creativity, when you were, you know, you were designing such wonderful [learning] activities, you probably enjoyed designing them. Also, you probably enjoyed, correct me if I'm wrong, but you probably enjoyed kids engaging in these activities, [inaudible] you recognizing something [educationally] interesting [in what the kids were doing in these activities], pushing [them] for that. Am I wrong about that or ...?

Beth: No, no, well, you're not wrong about it. But I think I have found that it's more rewarding to watch people grow and learn from, from themselves rather than me trying to direct it. And so, in many ways, it's been a relief and a release because it was very time consuming to put together all those [learning] activities.

And I now I firmly believe that there is no one template for anything for everybody. And, and so like I had those little six- and seven- year olds and some of them were, "Yeah, this is really cool!" And some of them, "Can we go play?" And some of them are just looking out the window. And you know, I just could see for myself that... It's an ego thing.

Eugene: Part of that. Yes. But nevertheless, remember that you just said, but for some of them [the children] it [the learning activity pre-designed by Beth] was great.

Beth: Yeah. And so, ... the way this model works is I have kids come to me and say, "Will you help me do such and such? Will you do this with me? Will you teach me this? Will you just be... do it with me." For example, we have... and I think that, that those, those are probably the same kids who, if we could roll back the clock and they had been in that group of six- and seven- year olds, they would have been the ones who would be enjoying what I was handing them on a silver platter.... So, I'm still available to the kids, and they can see what my, my interests are and what my skills are.... Because we're, we talk a lot about things outside of school anyway. We get to know each other. And... so, I still have those things. And I'm on a lot of corporations¹⁰ and committees and, and so... I get opportunities for that creative stuff to come out anyway.

I'm on the cooking corporation, and we are, are always getting new equipment. And it's our job as the cooking corporation to teach people in this school how to use that equipment if they want to. And so I think it's great fun to not only write like a script on how to explain, "This is how you use the food processor" and then structure little classes on how to use the food processor and have the kids do practice sessions and demonstrations. And that's, that's weird [to be so direct, enjoying a direct, conventional, instruction], but I enjoy doing it. The cooking corporation holds cooking contests several times a year. And it's really fun to figure out, okay, what are we going to have a contest about? Shall it be oriented around fruit or chocolate or, or Halloween and how will we judge it and how, what, what advice do we give the judges?

Well, we still have a good number of students who... are so easy to influence, not because they're seeking in -- no, -- because they're used to adults running the show. And I want, I feel like if I hold back a little bit, perhaps they'll get

¹⁰ "Pseudo-private organizations of students and staff [focused on promoting particular long-term interests of the participants], chartered by School Meeting to manage specialized equipment, space, and activities. Examples: Art Corporation, Cooking Corporation, Games Corporation, Gardening Corporation, Music Corporation, Science Corporation, Skate Park Corporation, Sports Corporation. Making their respective domains available to all students and staff, corporations develop and administer certification procedures for personal safety and to ensure proper use of equipment and supplies. Each corporation has its own bylaws [including a clause about self-dissolving] and officers. Some fundraise to support activities" (Rietmulder, 2019, p. 138).

over that. And then, on the other hand, I know that, that people learn a lot from modeling and so I feel like, "Well, I'll be a model for being an enthusiastic seamstress or teaching people how to knit or garden or..."

And yet, so, so it's a constant balancing act. How much how much enthusiasm should I display and how much backing off so that they can discover it for themselves. Because sometimes I read some, some examples once I think in "How to Talk so Kids will Listen" (Faber & Mazlish, 1980), maybe, I'm not sure, but ... a student... this, I think this was with a homeschooler, the kid goes to the mom and says, "Mom, I'd really like to learn more about the planets." And ... actually, it wasn't even that formal. It was maybe the kid and talking to another kid. The mother overheard it or something. The mother got it in your head. "Oh, planets!" So, the mother goes to the library and she gets 20 books on planets and she goes to the store and gets all these planet puzzles. And she finds videos on planets anyway. And she says, "Here!" And the kid says, "Ew!... I don't know if I'm up for all of this! You know, this is, this is, this has become more of your project, mom, than mine."

Eugene: Okay. ... What other transitions for... have you noticed? And, for me also, I'm looking for difficulties. Like what you're talking about like struggling of not overdoing that one way or not overdoing another way and things like that. ... Did you sometimes feel guilty about something? Like an old [progressive] habit hits you like, "Oh, maybe I'm too lazy!" Like, "Here, I'm not doing something that is supposed to do..."

Beth: I usually don't feel guilty while I'm here at school, and I'm with the kids, but I get phone calls from parents or I see them like we'll have a back-to-school picnic in September. And I guarantee you a parent will come up to me and say, "My kid really wants to learn such and such. Can't you help him?" And... I think, "How do I explain this to this parent without making it sound like I'm lazy and don't want to teach a kid how to read?" So... and always before when that kind of thing happened, I could say, "Oh yeah, I, here's what we're doing and la-la-la-la." ... But although I do remember one case where a parent called me when we did the program the first way. And she said, "My child has lost an entire year of his life, he has not learned to read and why haven't you taught him how to read and blah, blah, blah?" And that was terrible. And now... I still get the same thing, but I guess I don't feel as bad now in many ways because I honestly believe that people learn how to read with their own timetable and that you can do irreversible harm if you push it.

Eugene: Well, let me give you one interesting example. Recently, we had a meeting with a teacher from high school. But one of her internal dilemmas was that she saw a potential in a student, but the student didn't want to go where the potential was. And she felt guilty as a teacher that she's not kind of a, I don't, I forgot how she said that, "wasn't pushing or encouraging the child enough to blossom" because she saw that child would be blossoming in that, but the child said, "Ah, no," but wouldn't you feel any guilt about that?

Beth: I don't think so. Here I'm, I'm kind of free to go to that child and say, "Hey, I feel like you have the potential to be a rocket scientist. What do you think about that?" Or ... yeah. ... And, and, and my experience with them is

so multifaceted, you know, I see so many different aspects of their personalities and their behaviors that I'm not as fixated on academic stuff as I think a teacher in a more traditional setting is. And also, I have the freedom to talk to them about stuff like that.

So, is Progressive Education *feasible*? Was Jerome Bruner correct that for each academic subject, for each student, at any time, it is possible to find an “honest” way of engaging and teaching this student? Beth's and my own pedagogical experiences suggest that it is not (see also similar account of a former progressive teacher, some of whose students were not interested in his feedback on their own learning project, Danford, 2019, pp. 51–53). There are always students who won't be interested in a particular subject in general or at a given time, however sophisticated Dewey's psychologizing of this academic subject or curricular topic is or however a discursive communal process unfolds. Although human interest and motivation has certainly its plasticity, this plasticity has its limitations. A particular curricular topic might interest a person in the future but not now or in the past but not now, or never. Progressive Education seemed to work sometimes, with some students, with some curricular topics, but not always and not with all students. Why?

I have several related hypotheses of why Progressive Education aimed at exciting a student about all preset targeted academic disciplines and curricular themes is not viable. Biological evolution leans toward specialization because the universal plasticity cannot be sustainable. Universality is “Jack of all trades, master of none” – it often leads to mediocracy. A universally interested and universally capable organism cannot compete well with a specialized organism with regard to its desire and capabilities for resources. There is always a trade-off between the strength and weakness, which benefits specialization and disadvantages universality. The realization of certain interests, capabilities, and developmental trajectories by the organism may disable some other possibilities. People develop their own sustained interests and motivations that resist divergence to other interests and motivations. There is some research evidence that young children's interests and motivations are more emergent and situational than the interests and motivations of teenagers and adults (Alexander, 2005). My teacher-methodist was probably learn that older children lose interests in everything only because of bad teaching. They might lose some interests probably because their interests become specialized, sustained, and focused.

Now, let's turn to the issue of *desirability* of Progressive Education. The innovative Russian educational practitioner and theoretician Alexander Lobok¹¹ argues that even if it had been possible for a teacher to “fascinate” all students in each curricular topic that the teacher teaches, this would have been very pedagogically problematic and educationally undesirable. Since human psychological, energy, and time resources are limited, becoming interested and engaged in one subject or topic takes away a possibility from the student to be interested and engaged in something else. A super pedagogically capable and charismatic progressive educator so strongly “fascinates” their students with a particular subject matter that this progressive

¹¹ See a special issue, 50 (2012), of *Journal of Russian and Eastern European Psychology* dedicated to work by Russian educator and psychologist Alexander Lobok.

educator teaches and powerfully sets them on a specific path of related activity, such as: writing or math or science or arts or athletics, that it makes other paths, interests, passions, difficult or impossible for the students to realize.

<<Robert Hampel, 2020-01-22: A traditional educator can also do this.>>

<<Eugene, 2020-01-27: If you have in mind a charismatic teacher who “fascinates” their students by mostly through personal charisma and their own passion with the taught academic subject, like, probably, portrayed in the 1989 movie “Dead Poets Society,” I still think it is a version of progressive educator, although without Dewey’s psychologizing the curriculum. It is still an alternative way of finding an “honest” way of teaching – i.e., making the targeted curriculum meaningful for the students. In this case, a student’s encounter with the teacher’s charismatic personality, their curricular passion, and exciting learning activities can in themselves generate a meaningful and “fascinating” experience for the student. What do you think?>>

<<Robert Hampel, 2020-01-30: No, I mean some students can find powerful interests in offered learning activities with a conventional teacher. For example, as a child, I became interested in chess with a rather conventional chess coach.>>

<<Eugene, 2020-01-30: In this essay, I’m interested in teachers’ pedagogical desires and not in what makes students intrinsically interested in some subjects. However, if offering potentially interesting activities to students is a teacher’s pedagogical desire, this teacher is a progressivist, like, remember, my teacher-methodist suggested me to start kite and robotics clubs to intrinsically engage my students (and the boy) in studying physics.>>

The students become motivational captives of such a powerful progressive teacher. Lobok argues that powerful progressive educators are selfish: they want their students to become passionate about a particular academic subject only because this educator teaches it and not because it is a free and informed decision of the students. Thus, the powerful progressive educator colonizes their students’ motivation by the educator’s own selfish desire to promote the subject of their teaching. The educator robs their students’ agency.

<<Jim Rietmulder, 2020-02-09: Not only “colonizes students’ motivation” and represses agency, by diverting their attention to the teacher’s choices, but also – when this pattern is the daily norm – undermines students’ introspective skills, which then tend to atrophy. Students tend to lose their ability to know their own interests, passions, hopes, and aspirations.¹²>>

Lobok argued,

¹² In my view, Jim Rietmulder argues against a soft version of Progressive Education recently articulated by Gert Biesta, who defined education through “teacherly gesture” that “tries to say no more than ‘look, there is something there that I believe might be good, important, worthwhile for you to pay attention to’ (see Biesta, 2017). And this gesture not just focuses the attention on the world ‘out there’ but in one and the same ‘move’ brings the ‘I’ of the student into play” (Biesta, 2020, p. 2).

Yes, it is feasible to create [educational] vortexes... practically from the very beginning [in elementary school]. ... but...

... I always thought that, if I do fascinate [elementary school] children with something, I deprive them of something else. Because human life is not endless, and if I with all my charisma had enthralled them with something that I myself found enthralling, I would definitely have taken something away from them. I would have taken away multiple other possibilities. For example, I got a student captivated with math ... and now he is doing only math day in and day out. Whereas [a student] could be contemplating running water in a creek instead ... That is why I thought that I should not get them fascinated too much. I just offer a range of opportunities for a child, but I do not try to involve [the child] in all these opportunities by all means possible. The most important thing was not to captivate them with myself and not to cut off the other possibilities—not to become a “vortex” that sucks in children’s enthusiasm. I thought that it was paramount that the child could keep a distance and critically assess him- or herself. Only in that case would [the child] be able to belong to him- or herself and to build his or her own subjective trajectory. My role was to be a factor of his development, but not a milestone, or a lighthouse, and certainly not a “vortex” ... (Alexander Lobok, Case#22) (Matusov, et al., 2019, p. 191).

<<David Garcia Romero, 2020-01-22: This is not first time I become a critic of this perspective of... an educator stopping oneself. I find it a little bit paternalistic, since an educator tries to be very careful of not manipulating “poor vulnerable children.” I think the core of the case is that “fascinating” may serve to offer new paths but should not serve to “keep” students in that path. In that sense... when you as a teacher, continue together sharing the enthusiasm with a learner about a topic, this is not that much an instrumental fascinating to be feared, but it makes sense to share that interest... What I mean is: the need is not controlling oneself to be excited but letting the student to primarily regulate the rhythm of their own [learning by themselves], and, of course, being careful not doing things to “trap” the student in that concrete interest. But maybe... what students don’t deserve is that teachers calculate them to the point of being very careful. I think they deserve that teacher share their interest in an authentic way.>>

<<Anonymous reviewer, 2021-02-09, Why is it necessarily manipulative to enlist a student interest? Also, it seems that the paper warns against passionate teachers. The paper argues that powerful progressive teachers are selfish: they want their students to become passionate about a particular academic subject only because this educator teaches it and not because it is a free and informed decision of the students. First of all, I really would love my children’s teachers to be passionate about their subject and their roles as teachers, and I don’t see passionate teachers as one of our main challenges in education today. On the contrary, I see stressed teachers that almost don’t have time to be passionate because of an increasingly performative school regime, in which teachers are held accountable for student learning outcome in hitherto unseen ways. So, if we can find some passion in that system, I wouldn’t oppress it, and I

really consider passion as an important part of teaching artistry. Secondly, I got the feeling that the paper's insistence that student learning should be set completely free actually aligns quite well with the neoliberal vision of the student as a consumer - and where the customer is always right. If students have the right to define and author their own education and if students just learn what they like to learn, we are creating a hedonistic school. Is democracy unguided freedom to pursue your own interests as long as you ask critical and non-affirmative questions?>>

For Alexander Lobok, this is a critique of an educator's real progressive pedagogical desire to "fascinate" their students, to make them passionate about what the educator teaches. For Lobok, progressive education is feasible (in some limited form), and that is why it is undesirable. Even if this progressive pedagogical desire of fascination is realized for one student, one time – it might be a problem of robbing this student from their own agency. It seems to me that Lobok sees his role as an educator to expose his students toward diverse motivational possibilities, but not to fascinate them into these possibilities (see the interviews with Alexander Lobok in Matusov et al., 2019).

<<David Garcia Romero, 2020-01-22: (Elaboration of my critique above) Maybe my disagreement with Lobok goes around the meaning of "fascinating" ... In my experience, showing one's own excitement about a certain topic has more to be with showing the possibility than with "trapping" students in that concrete topic as an end itself, which I agree is selfishness from the educator.>>

<<Eugene, 2020-01-31: David, I'm ambivalent about sharing my passions with my students. On the one hand, a teacher's passion for a particular topic, practice, or idea can expose their students to something that they have not been familiar with. However, on the other hand, I sense here a danger of making students in the image of the teacher, like-minded and like-passionate. Also, I have a problem for a teacher becoming an equal learner with their students. I think the role of the teacher to help the students with whatever they need/ask to be helped, rather than to engage in critical investigation and examination of issues that are dear to the teacher's heart.

I like how Socrates solved the latter teaching dilemma in the Meno dialogue. A young aristocrat Meno came to Socrates asking him for help to investigate Meno's inquiry about the origin of virtues. In contrast, Socrates saw a better inquiry of investigating what virtues really are. After some struggle between Meno and Socrates for which inquiry better to discuss, Socrates came to his senses by saying that since Meno came to him and not he to Meno, it made more sense to follow Meno's inquiry and not Socrates (Plato & Bluck, 1961). For me, this is a guiding pedagogical reasoning that I should hold on with my passions. Of course, one of the biggest problems of the conventional (and progressive) institutional settings is that often students do not come to the teacher, but rather are forced by the institution to attend the teacher's class. This reminds with the relationship between Socrates and Meno's Slave, rather

than between Socrates and Meno (see Matusov, 2009, chapters 2 and 3). What do you think?>>

<<Lei Chen, 2020-01-26: Another thing that really makes sense to me is that Lobok says that the motivation of progressive education is only problematic when it is feasible. I hope I understood [Lobok's point] correctly: it means a teacher should only start to worry about whether they have manipulated the students' motivation when they truly have such skill, professionalism and capability to do so. When the teachers are not effective enough, they should not use "democratic education" as an excuse for their ineffectiveness. The teachers should not say, "I am not trying really hard to teach my students because the students are not interested in my subject very much." The teachers should always try as hard as they can to teach and motivate their students. They just should have a larger vision, and not exclusively focusing on the subject matter they themselves teach. [My understanding of Lobok is:] For the teachers who have the effectiveness to implement real progressive education, they should also start thinking about whether they have manipulated the students' motivation and the larger issue of students' development, and not the development in their own subject matter only. I worry that some teachers will use democratic education as excuses for their laziness and irresponsibility. >>

<<Eugene, 2020-01-27: Lei, in my view, Alexander Lobok was not interested in the feasibility of progressivism, but in its desirability. He, himself, is a very powerful and charismatic dialogic teacher. For my reading, he did not mean that one needs to become a progressive teacher first – not at all. Progressivism with its focus on "always trying as hard as they can to teach and motivate their students," so attractive to many educators, is a trap. Lobok challenged an educator's desire to become a progressive teacher.

Let me illustrate my point with a brief example. In one of my past classes, I had a student, future teacher, who was highly disengaged in my class and teaching practicum despite of my great efforts to engage her. She got a C in my class. A year later, when we bumped into each other on the campus, she told me that my class was "the best class I've ever experienced." She elaborated that in my class, through her disengagement, she realized that she did not want to be a teacher. I was ashamed of giving her a C because I realized that my pedagogical goal of education was not teach my academic subject but rather, or in addition, to help my students test their desires to become teachers. If I had not been progressivist back then, I'd have informed this student and her peers that a part of their education in my class is to test their own commitment and desire to become a teacher. They should not feel bad if at the end of the class they might decide that teaching is not for them. Currently, I think that this approach is much more sensitive and responsible than what I did back then – namely, hovering and pressing this student with my "honest" ways to engage her in cultural diversity in education (see for more discussion of the case here: Matusov, 2021b).

In my view, nothing precludes teachers to be lazy and irresponsible, even progressivism. However, it is true that some teaching paradigms, like some conventional involving blaming students for all pedagogical problems, can

promote a teacher's irresponsibility, while others, like progressivism, can focus the teacher on improving their instruction, which as Lobok nicely points out can also be a form of irresponsibility. I think that it is less important about how much efforts the teacher puts in their teaching, but how the teacher defines what is responsible teaching. Responsible for that and for whom? Progressivism puts its fidelity to the curriculum that is defined either by the society, or the state, or the teacher themselves. Democratic and some Dialogic Education pledges its fidelity to the students and acknowledges the students' final authority and ownership of their own education. What is "lazy and irresponsible" in one teaching paradigm may not be what is "lazy and irresponsible" in another teaching paradigm.

I don't need to be a progressive teacher to avoid being lazy. On the second thought, "lazy teaching" of the teacher holding back with their instruction, contributions, and engagement may be not a such a bad idea (see, Duberman, 1969; J. Smith, 2017; Tompkins, 1996, pp. 119-127). What do you think?>>

Critical dialogic educators who define the purpose of education as students' critical examination of their life, self, world, society, and education itself (cf. Socrates' motto "The unexamined life is not worth living"), object to the progressive desire to fascinate, engage, and motivate because critical examination of their desires is a part of their education (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2019). Critical questions like, "Do *I* really want it or do my culture, my milieu, my friends, my family, my teacher want me to want it? Is this desire good for me to have? Good for what? What things would I sacrifice by following this desire? What alternative desires I may want to follow instead or in addition?" and so on. Or, as Alexander Lobok put it above, "it was paramount that the child could keep a distance and critically assess him- or herself. Only in that case would [the child] be able to belong to him- or herself and to build his or her own subjective trajectory." Critical dialogic educators prioritize deconstructive rather than constructive functions of education, including the area of motivation (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2012, 2019).

<<Ana Marjanovic-Shane, 2020-02-03: The only potential drawback of this educational approach is that a student can get so paralyzed with the constant critical thinking that they cannot decide to act on anything!, ☺ ☺ Every start of a passionate fascination becomes critically demolished – because for this student nothing is and nothing can be perfect (rather than good enough). Or he/she may feel that if s/he continues with such a fascination, s/he would make a great mistake of not REALLY having being critical enough nor thought things through.>>

Using the case at the start of the article, instead of trying to engage the 8th grade boy to study the physics that I taught by using his interests in prisons and criminal activities, I should have tried to involve him in critical examination of his life and his interests including his deep interest in the criminal world and its activities.

But, is it in itself a progressive pedagogical desire to fascinate the boy with a critical examination of his life (Matusov, 2018; Matusov & Lemke, 2015)?

<<Jim Rietmulder, 2020-02-09: Yes! You and I have had this disagreement (and maybe still do). I know happy, fulfilled people who don't seem to do much (conscious) self-reflection and critical examination of their own lives. I want educators and schools to sustain conditions in which kids can "build [their] own subjective trajectory" [Lobok] without insisting on articulated self-examination. It's a second-order fascination (with process rather than content) that boosts the educator's own self-image and sense of purpose, but maybe not the student's growth.>>

<<Eugene, 2020-02-10: In my view, truly critical examination should critically examine its own premise that "the unexamined life is not worth living" set by Socrates. It can be that the unexamined life is worth living, as you observed, or the examined life is not worth living (cf. Kukathas, 2001, 2003).>>

It definitely could be for a progressive educator, if the educator aims at hijacking the student's subjectivity to make him "good" (e.g., a good citizen) by engaging the student in critical examination. However, it does not necessarily have to be. In my view, critical examination cannot be genuinely critical unless a student has the legitimate right to reject it and redefine their education in whatever way the student wants (or reject education altogether) (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2016). The student must have the final authority to reject critical examination as their own education. In the case I described above, the boy *was* interested in showing to me (and others who wanted to listen to him) that his criminal choice of life was much better, more eventful, more authentic, than mine – that he saw as being boring, submissive, conformist, uneventful, and not authentic. Back then, I chose not to involve myself in this potentially critical dialogue, probably because I feared that he might be partially right that my then life was somewhat non-authentic, and I did not know how to reply to him and, even more important, to myself. By now, I think it was a big mistake for me both as an educator and as a person, a fellow human being.

<<David Garcia-Ramiro, 2020-01-22: I think this statement here is very important for the article, because it talks about how our mistakes as teachers also have to be with our fears and/or lack of self-examination and/or compliance to the system that we find dear or in which we have to survive.

I think is important because It conceptualizes teachers as human and not agency of a functional educational system.>>

Finally, democratic educators like Neill (1960, Summerhill), Greenberg (1992, Sudbury Valley School), Rietmulder (2019, The Circle School), Stone (see my interview above, The Circle School), and Llewellyn (1998, homeschooling) argue against any imposition of curriculum, engagement, and motivation on students by any authority (the state, school boards, teachers, parents). These democratic educators argue that students should have the right to define and author their own education:

whether to study, what to study, how to study, with whom to study, where to study, and so on (Matusov, 2020c). When students cannot legitimately engage in defining and following their own goals, interests, topics, discussions, relationships, the students are excluded from practicing their lives. In conventional schools, young people cannot make a decision about whether to involve in education or not, what to study, how to study, when to study, with whom to study, how to decide their educational success, and so on. Young people spend most of their formative years in pedagogical regimes where what they do and talk about is defined, ordered, and controlled by other people. This is disrespectful and oppressive, from the Democratic Education perspective. In contrast to progressive and conventional educators, democratic (and critical dialogic) educators have their fidelity to their students and not to the curriculum. As Beth said in the interview, “for me and for the majority of kids, ... it’s a great way to spend one’s childhood.”

Democratic Education rejects the two major tenets of Progressive Education – by Rousseau and by Bruner (see above) – not necessarily because they are unachievable, but mostly because they are educationally undesirable. While Progressive Education wants to make students like what they are supposed to do and to learn in school, in the Democratic schools, students do and learn what they like to do and to learn. A founder of the first American democratic school, Sudbury Valley School, Dan Greenberg wrote:

A friend once said, "I know the exact difference between you and progressive 'free' schools."... "In your [democratic] school, you're supposed to do what you like; in the others [i.e., progressive], you're supposed to like what you do" (Greenberg, 1991, p. 101).

<<Jim Rietmulder, 2020-02-09: I think it's much more accurate to say "choose" rather than "like". [In democratic schools, students] often choose to do and learn things they don't like. (Furthermore, they often do and learn things they don't like and they have NOT chosen – for example, things imposed on them by social dynamics, vicissitudes of life, and demands of school government and society. Those are essential elements in self-directed democratic schools.)>>

<<Armando Marino Filho, 2020-02-10: I have a doubt about this: "in the Democratic schools, students do and learn what they like to do and to learn."

What is the linking between democracy and freedom to do what do you want to do? If democracy is a state where everyone has the right to take part in collective decisions about issues that affect all of them that are living together, that collective decisions don't put limits on the individuals' freedom?

Do teachers have the same right to propose and discuss with students what he thinks is important to do in a school?

If the collective of students and teachers make democratic decisions about what is important to do in a class, and everyone can decide what they want to do individually, could democracy make sense?>>

Democratic Education rejects the major pedagogical quest of Progressive and Conventional Education, which is how an educator can motivate their students to study. Instead, Democratic Education aims at supporting students' own motivation

by providing the social and political milieu of “a scaled-down society” (Rietmulder, 2019, p. 222), protected leisure, and a rich learning environment. Democratic Education reinvigorates the old Greek notion of “school” as a particular form of human leisure.¹³

The Opium

It is often assumed that Progressive Education challenges Conventional Education, based on the transmission of knowledge. In contrast to this widespread opinion, I argue that despite visible contradictions, Progressive Education highly contributes to the stability of Conventional Education by making the work of teachers in mainstream conventional schools bearable, achievable, and even exciting.

<<Jim Rietmulder, 2020-02-09: That’s a bold thesis. I wish every progressive educator would see it, take it to heart, and be deeply troubled.>>

I want to draw on an analogy of the role of the Christian Church in Medieval Europe. The Bible teaching of Christ’s love was in big contrast with the most violent Medieval practices and institutions. Similarly, the philosophy of Progressive Education is in sharp contrast with the philosophy and practice of Conventional Education. Very few Medieval monastic orders and communities tried to truly live according to Christ’s words. Similarly, there are very few progressive schools.

Still, the Christian faith (and its practice) was a very important contributor to the sustainability of Medieval practices and institutions making ubiquitous violence, exploitation, and oppression bearable for the people. Observing this function of religion, the German philosopher Karl Marx famously compared religion with opium. “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people” (Karl Marx, “Introduction to Contribution to the critique of Hegel’s philosophy of right,” 1845). Paraphrasing Karl Marx’s statement about religion, I argue that *the Progressive Education paradigm is the opium of educators*. Progressive Education is a major enabler of conventional education, keeping teachers from burning out longer by promising them a hope of meaningful education for their students without abandoning the overall conventional authoritarian pedagogical regime of preset and imposed curriculum.

The students’ life in a conventional school near completely assigned and forced by the teacher (except usually during the recess): being in school, curricula, learning activities, instruction, evaluations, communication, movements, peers, relationships with the peers, etc. (Matusov, 2015a). In a progressive school, this assignment regime of imposition and coercion is “softer,” and, as Rousseau argued, ideally has to be invisible to the students. Students can propose initiatives, but these initiatives

¹³ The Greek word “school” literally means ‘leisure’ (Arendt, 1958).

must be approved and sanctioned by the progressive teacher to be legitimately enacted by the students.

Like Conventional Education, Progressive Education distrusts the students' decision about the curriculum and education itself. Progressive Education is based on the teacher's *domination* of the student. Philip Pettit defines domination in the term of "positive liberty" (Berlin, 2017; Hayek, 1994),¹⁴ when everything is viewed as forbidden unless it is explicitly permitted by the authority, "To be a free person you must have the capacity to make certain central choices ... without having to seek the permission of another" (Pettit, 2014, p. xv). Pettit argues that an authority can be very permissive, but a person still is not free from domination because at any time the authority might revoke its permission and each time this permission must be seek from the authority. Yes, in a progressive pedagogical regime, students can make suggestions what to study, how to study, and what to do, but it is up a progressive teacher who approves or disapproves any suggestion by a student. As Beth nicely articulates this about her progressivist past in my interview above, "I suppose if they [her students] had made a good case for their choice and the choice was in alignment with what I had planned, I would have entertained it. But if they said, we just want to go outside, I would say, well, we can do that, but not now. We'll have to wait." Progressive Education has been "founded on upon the assumption that it is adults and not children who know best what and how to learn..." (Howlett, 2013, p. 88), – i.e., educational paternalism justified by Kant. "Rousseau's *Emile* was free only in so far as he was allowed by the grace and benevolence of his tutor"¹⁵ (Howlett, 2013, p. 274). To overcome progressivism (and conventionalism) is to overcome the teacher's, society's, and state's domination over the student.

<<Beth Stone, 2020-02-17: I am grateful for being introduced to some mind-set stretching ideas, in particular, your assertion that progressive education is the opium of teachers. "Fascinating" [is] right on target, but I have to say that I hadn't thought of it in that way before reading your article.>>

Progressive Education continues to impose the preset curriculum and education itself on the students. In fact, the imposition of the preset curriculum on the students is so valued by the progressive teachers that they do not see a problem with exploiting the students' subjectivities. The "hard" preset curricular endpoints represent the given toolkit of knowledge, skills, logic, structure, cognitive cultural schemes, big ideas, social justice, and attitudes that the teachers are supposed to teach their students in a meaningful way. The student must psychologically re-discover what the society has historically discovered. "The cycle of learning begins ... with [a student's] particulars and immediately moves toward [the societal] abstraction. ... insofar as possible, a method of instruction should have the objective of leading the child to discover for himself" the given abstraction (Bruner, 1979, p. 123). In contrast,

¹⁴ "Negative liberty" is defined by the assumption that a person has full freedom until it becomes limited by an authority. Positive liberty is aimed at channeling people to the outcome desired by the authority. In contrast, negative liberty is aimed at preventing people from the outcome undesired by the authority.

¹⁵ John Dewey highly regarded Rousseau's *Emile* praising Rousseau's pedagogical framework as the "keynote of all modern efforts for educational progress" (Dewey & Dewey, 1962, pp. 1–2).

the “soft” preset curricular endpoints the students’ legitimate creative socialization in the activities and practices *targeted* and *pointed out* by the educators as “good, important, worthwhile for you to pay attention to” (cf. Biesta, 2017, 2020) (e.g., holistic open-ended learning projects). A student creates their own unique voice and authorship in this creative socialization in the targeted practices. The Deweyan “soft” progressivism opens a possibility for a student’s self-directed learning, but not necessarily self-directed education (cf. “closed socialization” vs. “open socialization,” Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2012).

The Progressive Education paradigm has been hegemonic in the world of education for a long time, not because progressive educational practices are widespread – actually, far from that, but because the Progressive Education paradigm makes the harshness of the conventional education bearable by inspiring educators with a promise of the Holy Grail dream: finding an “honest” way of teaching any required curriculum for any student at any time. In his essay’s title, Alfie Kohn nicely captures the pervasive nature of Progressive Education, “Progressive education: Why it’s hard to beat, but also hard to find” (Kohn, 2015). Educational progressivism is weak in numbers but strong ideologically among educators. American historian of education Cremin (1961, p. 328) argued that Progressive Education had become the dominant language of American education since the 1950s and, arguably, it has reminded today, “In the shorthand of educational jargon, these traits are capsulized in phrases such as ‘child-centered instruction,’ ‘discovery learning,’ and ‘learning how to learn’ and ‘constructivism’ (Labaree et al., 2004, p. 90) and, I add, “intrinsic motivation.”

At the same time, progressivism has little impact on the mainstream school instruction that reminds teacher- and curriculum-centered (Cuban, 1993). Progressive schools remain few and far between (Howlett, 2013), probably fewer than about 4,500 of total 132,853 K-12 schools (or about 3.3%) in the US in 2016¹⁶: mostly among private¹⁷ and public charter/magnet schools.¹⁸

Yet, Progressive Education ideology has its strong ideological presence in higher ed schools of education teacher preparation programs and among teachers themselves. Professors of education “became the high priests of pedagogical progressivism, keeping this faith alive within the halls of the education school and teaching the words of its credo to generations of new educators” (Labaree et al., 2004, p. 90). Unfortunately, I could not find any national or international surveys or polls on the popularity of Progressive Education among teachers. However, when I conducted my own polls among preservice teachers at the University of Delaware (74 students by now), offering them the descriptions of Conventional Education, Progressive

¹⁶ <https://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/education-statistics/index.html>

¹⁷ Here is a list of private progressive schools by state: <https://www.k12academics.com/national-directories/progressive-schools>

¹⁸ Here is an incomplete list of public progressive schools <http://augusttojune.com/resources/the-whole-child-model/>. There are about 4,000 Montessori schools, <http://montessori.edu/FAQMontessori.html>; 150 Waldorf schools <https://waldorfanswers.org/WaldorfFAQ.htm>. It is difficult to assess how many individual classrooms can be run as progressive inside of schools that are otherwise characterized by conventional, transmission of knowledge, pedagogy.

Education, and Democratic Education, between 80 and 90% of the preservice teachers in each polled class preferred Progressive Education. Research on in-service mainstream schoolteachers' ideological preferences is needed.

<<Jim Rietmulder, 2020-02-09: Wow. I suppose that's better than preferring Conventional. I suppose it's one step on the path Beth followed. And yet, the conventional institutions of education are not compatible with progressive education.

Although my sample is biased, I'd say that virtually ALL of the teachers I know, and all of the hundreds who have visited The Circle School, are attracted to the central promise you identify in Progressive education: finding an "honest" (and fun, interesting) way to force feed the standard curriculum to students.>>

<<Armando Marino Filho, 2020-02-10: Thanks for write this paper. I could make an important critique of my practice. I recognized how much "Progressive Educator" I have been in my classes. It will be pretty useful to help me in my way of understanding how to improve my practice as a professor in the direction of dialogic pedagogy.>>

Modern Conventional Education often positions teachers as soulless technicians skillfully implementing evidence- and research-based instructional strategies aiming at raising test scores on high-stakes assessments and the teacher accountability. At its extreme, during their lessons, teachers are guided via wireless earphones by special instructional scripts vocalized by a prerecorded reader in the so-called "scripted curriculum" approach, which, probably, should be more appropriately called "scripted instruction" (Ede, 2006). These teacher-proof approaches stirred by Conventional Education might attract some novice, unprepared, disinterested, incompetent, burned out, and not very confident teachers (Eisenbach, 2012). However, they increasingly demoralize and deprofessionalize capable, interested, and conscientious teachers, who see a threat of becoming "pedagogical zombies" in those conventional technological approaches to instruction (Demko, 2010).

Progressive Education is not just an ideological patchwork for an educator, working in a conventional school. Rather, it is a different way of being as an educator. Progressive Education positions teachers as creative authors and designers of their own unique instruction (and, at times, curriculum) attuned to the unique psychological experiences, interests, strengths, and needs of each student (Kohl, 1970). It excites an educator to make a difference in the life of the students. Progressive Education salvaging teaching for educators from technocratism, instrumentalism, and scientism. It makes teaching a human endeavor again (although much limited), full of improvisation, creativity, conversations, subjectivities, eventfulness (and, thus, uncertainties), encounters, surprises, and so on. It is student-centered (with regard to instruction, not so much curriculum): it promises educators to reach all students in all academic subjects in all prescribed or targeted curricular topics all the time to engage each student in meaningful and exciting education. It promises to assure students' cooperation with the prescribed curriculum through students' intrinsic motivation, classroom discussions, and fun hands-on learning activities. As Tom Campbell, a principal of a conventional high school in Pennsylvania, said: "Since

the students are captive in school, the least we can do for them is to make they love what they are supposed to learn" (Personal communication, July 24, 2020).

Progressive Education is at odds with Conventional Education with regard to teachers' freedom to use instructional materials of their choice and design instruction, teachers' freedom of educational assessment (authentic formative assessment vs. standardized high-stakes summative assessment¹⁹). It pushes against organizational hierarchy and authoritarianism (discipline, top-down classroom management) and for teachers' freedom to interpret curriculum. Progressive Education and Conventional Education differ by a degree of freedom that students and teachers legitimately have for their authorship while still aiming at making the students arrive at the preset curricular endpoints. In Progressive Education, instructional freedom is often allowed for the teachers and there is usually more leeway for teachers' authorial interpretation of curricular endpoints, preset and imposed on teachers and students. This difference is important and consequential for smuggling authorial dialogic and democratic education. Progressive Education is an important, although much limited, force for the democratization, diversification, and humanization of education.

At the same time, because it agrees with the bedrock of Conventional Education with its imposed curriculum and forced education, Progressive Education barely rocks the institutional boat of conventionalism. Progressive Education agrees with the bedrock of conventionalism: imposed curriculum and forced education. Like Conventional Education, Progressive Education distrusts the students and does not allow students to own their life and education. Like Conventional Education, Progressive Education tries to motivate students to study what state, society, and teachers find important for students to study.

In contrast to Conventional Education, Progressive Education tries to make this imposed learning meaningful to the students. The dream of progressivism is to make curriculum selected by the teacher intrinsically motivated, meaningfully engaged, and deeply owned by all the students all the time. Progressive Education tries to soften educational oppression making it "more humane," more bearable, livable, and even exciting for the students and the teachers. But in the end, some students still want out of its progressive cage, which is a bit bigger and offers only a bit more breathing room than the conventional one: "Are we done yet? Can we go play? Is it time to go outside?".

Declarations

Ethics Approval This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by the author.

Conflict of Interest The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

¹⁹ "...progressivism has tended to be broadly antithetical to the ideas of testing and measurement and progressive advocates of all hues have repeatedly refused to characterize knowledge and its importance in such crudely hierarchical and quantifiable terms" (Howlett, 2013, p. 104).

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