

21st- century learning, educational reform, and tradition: Conceptualizing professional development in a progressive age

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Progressive education has been a tour de force over the last century with respect to public education, wrestling with humanism for control of curriculum and educational policy.¹ We are in the midst of a progressivist educational tide. To substantiate this claim, I juxtapose progressivist rhetoric from the interwar period in Ontario's history with its most present incarnation, known by the moniker *21st century learning*. Progressive education is at once a response to modernity and an aspect of modernity. As a response to modernity, it manifests our existential angst about the accelerated rate of change affecting the social landscape of life. As an aspect of modernity, accelerates our alienation from the constantly changing world in which we live.

Progressivist educational ideology as articulated historically and contemporaneously concentrates on three aims: a) focus on the individual learner's aptitudes and interests rather than upon a rigid curriculum developed in a bygone age; b) engage the learner actively in the construction of knowledge, a process prohibited by the memorization and examination of content; and, c) commit to relating school life to the modern world and its concerns, not to the affairs of a world of the past (Christou, 2012). In other words, progressives seek to focus on the individual child as an emerging being rather than upon a traditional curriculum, they endeavour to make schooling adaptive to the needs of these individuals with a world wrought with flux, and they are committed to relating school life to the modern, evolving, and rapidly-transforming realities of social existence. Schools as conceived and as constructed historically are no longer relevant to a modern age.

These themes are garnered from historical research considering the first half of the twentieth century, but they are also central to the arguments of contemporary progressivists, who are also the proponents of 21st Century learning. The century to come is qualitatively and quantitatively inimitable to the previous one. Schools need to be re-conceptualized. We must prepare our youth for the world of the future by engaging them actively with technologies available to us in the present. The world that they will inhabit is not the world of the past that we inhabited.

¹ Theodore Michael Christou "We Find Ourselves in the World of the Present: Humanist Resistance to Progressive Education in Ontario," *History of Education Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2015): 273-293.

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Ronald Wright's 2004 Massey Lecture, *A Short History of Progress* develops a two-pronged argument. The first is relatively uncontroversial: the social world that we inhabit is changing. The second is bolder, but also more exciting: the social world that we inhabit is changing at an increasingly accelerated rate, which renders the taken-for-granted world unrecognizable to us with alarming quickness. From the Palaeolithic era to the end of the last ice age, a span consuming 99.5% of human existence, tools and cultural ideals replicated themselves, evolving at a staggeringly slow pace. "Nowadays," Wright argues, "we have reached such a pass that the skills and mores we learn in childhood are out-dated by the time we're thirty, and few people past fifty can keep up with their culture – whether in idiom, attitudes, taste, or technology – even if they try."²

The first progressivist wave overtook Canada during the interwar period, intensifying in the years following the Depression. Half a decade after Alberta introduced of a revised *Programme of Studies* for public schools in 1936, every province in Canada had transformed its formal curriculum, infrastructure, and examination structures. A new and progressive age was on the horizon, and it demanded that school life adjust to meet the needs of a contemporary world. This world was altered by the transformative effects of modern warfare, as experienced in the trenches of Europe, as well as by immigration, industrialization, and urbanization.

The second wave of progressive education followed the first by approximately thirty-five years; an indicative example is Ontario's *Living and Learning* document, which was submitted to the public in 1968. More commonly referred to as the Hall-Dennis Report, a name associated with the two chairs of the committee that drafted the document, *Living and Learning* offered a wide set of recommendations, which challenged educationists to focus on the individual learner's inclination towards self-discovery and exploration, to limit competition, to re-vision classroom spaces, and to abolish corporal punishment. Educationists wrestled to make sense of new technologies in the classroom, such as television programming, and conceptions of individual rights and responsibilities.

The third wave of progressivist thinking, 21st Century learning, is a tidal force in education today. Whilst mediated within a discourse that concentrates upon the transformative influence of technology on our existence, the rhetoric of 21st Century learning is thoroughly progressivist in its philosophical orientation towards the place of schools in society. Curriculum revisions are undertaken across Canada, in most cases concentrating on disciplinary thinking rather than content memorization and on the alignment between school learning and life beyond the classroom. The debate surrounding Ontario's new Health and Physical Education curriculum, which introduced subjects related to sex education and gender that were intended to reflect contemporary Ontarian society despite protests by ratepayers that felt the subjects were controversial, is indicative of a century-long tension between progressivist and traditionalist thought. The former, as noted previously, explicitly aims to modernize education, while the latter resists the impetus to jump at various provocations that modernity advances.

Throughout the history of Canadian public education, progressivists have largely defined the pedagogical aims that they espouse in opposition to tradition; tradition, in this

² Roland Wright, *A Short History of Progress* (Toronto, ON: House of Anansi Press, 2004), p. 14.

sense, bears a definitively negative connotation. According to progressivist sensibilities, noted above, extant school structures were derived in, and are associated with, a bygone and obsolete social context. The schools of today should help students understand and live in a modern world rather in a world that has passed. Nearly nine decades ago, John Dewey (1938) articulated a challenge to progressivist educators that still resonates; he felt that the dichotomy of “traditional” and “progressive” schools is problematic.³

Dewey dared progressivists to be more critical of their own pedagogical principles and claims, but also to articulate an educational philosophy that was not defined primarily in opposition to another set of ideas, which is generally depicted in caricature. Progressive educators who had proceeded according to this principle of continuity had neglected questions central to the pedagogical project. Dewey was noting a reactive element to reformist rhetoric, which exposed an instinctual response to the present.

Even as it acknowledges its internal inconsistencies, progressivist rhetoric drives forward an agenda that yokes progress to skill development, which relates to the marketplace as depicted in its present place and as projected into the future. This is consistent historically.⁴ What distinguishes 21st Century learning is its concentration upon information and computer technologies. This concentration is not led entirely by educational associations, as technology corporations are intimately involved as partners. One might consider, as a case in point, *Canadians for 21st Century Learning and Innovation*, or *C21*. Ten of the twelve founding members of *C21* are corporations.⁵ Their vision for instruction reads as follows:

Teachers adopt modern instructional practices, including the teaching of 21st Century competencies, integrating technology with pedagogy, harnessing the power of social media for learning and offer learners interconnected learning experiences, choices, and opportunities.

Faculties of Education in Canada adopt 21st Century learning based pre-service teaching standards and integrate ICT into their own pedagogies and classrooms. Provinces adopt 21st Century teaching standards for in-service teachers and provide the tools, resources and training required for teachers to be innovative, teach 21st Century competencies, integrate technology with pedagogy and better engage their learners.⁶

Professional development, it follows, out to adhere to this vision. It is unsurprising that producers of technology products consider argue that their commodities are essential to

³ John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1938), p. 20.

⁴ Theodore Michael Christou, “Progressivist Rhetoric and Revised Programmes of Study: Weaving Consistency and Order out of Diverse Progressivist Themes in Ontario, Canada,” *Curriculum History* 13, no. 1 (2014): 61-82.

⁵ These corporations include: a) one that arranges for educational excursions internationally, but also online language learning, Education First; b) five publishers, Scholastic Education, Pearson, Oxford, McGraw-Hill/Ryerson, and Nelson; and c) four from the technology industry, Dell, Microsoft, SMART Technologies and IBM.

⁶ Canadians for 21st Century Learning and Innovation, “Shifting Minds: A Vision and Framework for 21st Century Learning in Canada.” Accessed at: <http://www.c21canada.org>, pp. 17-18.

the future of education. What is more curious is the close alignment between the rhetoric of these technology corporations and educational stakeholders.

The Ontario Public School Boards Association (OPSBA) has also called upon the province to embrace the call for 21st Century Learning, and to commit to greater integration of technology:

This paper is a call for the Government of Ontario and the Ministry of Education to lead the way in establishing a vision for Learning and Teaching in a Digital Age. Student and teacher use of technology in their everyday lives and the possibilities this creates for expanding the integration of 21st century skills into our learning and our instructional practices is at a tipping point. Many other jurisdictions have moved vigorously ahead to define a vision to guide education well into the 21st century and we urge Ontario, which is a leader in student achievement and in education in so many spheres, to take up this challenge. This call is not inspired by considerations of funding but by a conviction that it is critical to define how we will move to keep pace with rapidly evolving technology to ensure our students are globally competitive. This is a matter of public confidence in our education system. Students, teachers, parents, school boards – all our education stakeholders – are ready to embrace this vision.⁷

If this final assertion is true, then there are immediate implications for all these stakeholders with respect to the ways that they conceptualize and structure teachers' professional development. The OPSBA argues that Ontario is lagging behind the times and that, as a consequence, it risks losing the public trust whilst simultaneously compromising the competitiveness of its students in an increasingly progressive world. This plea depicts a future in which Ontario's future is bleak and the province is out of pace:

It is tempting to turn this on its head and speculate about what will happen if we do not embrace change. A graphic illustration of this would be the North American automotive sector which in 2008 has revealed itself to be a dinosaur that has ignored its environment and failed, not only to anticipate what its customers would want, but even to respond to them when they made their wants known through their defection to small, environment-friendly automobiles made in Asia and Europe.⁸

OPSBA's call, further, challenges the province to take action on an educational vision that is enthusiastically accepted by all of Ontario's educationists. Rhetorically, this is classic bandwagoning wherein the public is associated with the customer and the province as the service provider; the public wants educational reform, and the province must pay heed. The OPSBA does not offer warrants for its claims that the public supports educational reform, if the public supports the financial investment in technologies, or if keeping pace with society is even possible. The context is established rhetorically, not empirically. Yet educators may

⁷ Ontario Public School Boards Association, "A vision for learning and teaching in a digital age." Accessed at: http://www.opsba.org/files/OPSBA_AVisionForLearning.pdf, p. 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

question the ways that this rhetoric affects the ways that they pursue professional development opportunities and the opportunities that they have to disagree with the OPBSA's vision for instruction.

Looking to Ontario's past, the rhetoric of progressive education was equally concerned with the relationship that schools had with modern, contemporary society. Rather than looking towards technology as a means of dealing with the future, educationists turned to other innovations and program revisions, including the introduction and elaboration of technical education, domestic science, and vocational guidance. "Modern industrial and progressive conditions have made vocational guidance imperative," announced an editorial feature in *The Canadian School Journal* in 1932, and "without proper guidance both the individual and the state may suffer loss."⁹ This sparked somewhat more of a backlash from traditionalists who felt that education was reforming too much and too quickly in its effort to keep pace with modernity. The curriculum had survived social evolution in the past, and it could be a bulwark that would help Ontarians deal with their future.¹⁰ "I wonder how far we must go," lamented one voice, "before we begin to realize that modern education is gradually turning its back on all that is cultural and thereby betraying its most fundamental purpose."¹¹

Progressive schools were depicted as having an important role to play in the promotion of commercial, technical, and industrial progress in society.¹² With this in mind, students needed to learn many of the basic principles of industry, including business ethics, retail practice, contracts, taxation, and banking.¹³ Progressive education was thus characterized as the adjustment of educational facilities to give students training in the skills they would need in their vocations.¹⁴ If school learning was to be more closely related to life in business or industry, the business model was an apt one for school organization.¹⁵ C. L. Burton, President of the Robert Simpson Company, announced that "educational objectives, so far as business is concerned, should be set with a view of preparing those who will enter the ranks of industry and business enterprise for their future work."¹⁶ Burton depicted children as a natural resource that could be used to stimulate future progress in society. While today's popular imagining of the future conjures a world that is wired, digital, and negotiated by technological means, particularly in the workplace, Ontarians between the two World Wars saw their future in industry.

If technology is today's metaphor for social progress, as well as the principal means by which we could reform schools to address this progress, industry was both the medium

⁹ "Vocational training and vocational guidance," *The Canadian School Journal* (November, 1932), p. 371.

¹⁰ Theodore Michael Christou, *Progressive Education: Revision and Revising Ontario's Public Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

¹¹ L. J. Bondy, "The Present Situation in Modern Languages in Our Schools," *The School* (October 1938): 121.

¹² See, for example, "Vocational Education," *The School* (January 1929): 425–26

¹³ J. L. Jose, "Is Business Practice Meeting the Community Needs?" *The School* (January 1941): 389–91.

¹⁴ "Education of 90% of the Pupils for 10% of the Jobs," *The Canadian School Journal* (July 1929): 1.

¹⁵ J. Ferris David, "Secondary Schools and Their Relation to Business," *The Canadian School Journal* (April 1933): 28.

¹⁶ C. L. Burton, "Business as an Objective," *The Canadian School Journal* (October 1932): 340.

and the message for many Ontarians during the interwar period.¹⁷ The depiction of schools as a factory and children as resources is entirely consistent with many efficiency progressivists' characterizations of the educational process. Just as "the earth's resources were progressively tapped to the world of trading," Burton noted, children could also be used to stimulate industrial development.

Revisiting 21st Century rhetoric, one notes the echo of a historical anxiety about school's relationship to contemporary society with respect to vocation and industry; a group called Action Canada reports:

Fuelled primarily by technological advancements and geopolitical developments, the pace of change in the twenty-first century exceeds even that of the Industrial Revolution ... In order to remain competitive in an increasingly sophisticated and integrated global economy, Canadian industries must be able to efficiently and effectively adjust to emerging technologies, practices, and environments. This places new demands on the labour market for a dynamic workforce that is highly adaptable in the face of change. But the implications of accelerated change are by no means limited to the economic context. The consequences of historically unprecedented shifts in areas such as climate, technology, and demography are – at a minimum – tantamount to those in the global economy. By extension, they too demand resilient societies capable of adapting to new situations.¹⁸

The Hamilton-Wentworth School Board has published an extensive report on its plans to reform education. This thoroughly progressivist claim is rooted in a concern that society is "changing at an unprecedented rate," and "our current education system is based on an out-dated industrial model."¹⁹ The District argues that it has an important role to play in securing that students are prepared for the future, and that technology, along with a new emphasis upon social learning, have made traditional modes and media of learning, including textbooks, dubious.

This argument must be read against its historical antecedents in order to be framed appropriately as an echo of the past. In 1934, Duncan McArthur, who had just assumed a role of leadership within Ontario's Department of Education, stepping into the roles of Deputy Minister of Education and Chief Director of Education in the newly-elected Liberal government of Mitchell Hepburn, stated that traditional aspects of education such as examinations and textbooks had become vestigial; they were a challenge to social and democratic learning, which had:

been permitted to creep into our schools through practices designed originally to satisfy a thoroughly legitimate demand of parents to know the rate of progress of their children. Instead of measuring the extend of the development within the child of interest and initiative, of effort and appreciation, our system of gradation too

¹⁷ Kieran Egan, *Getting It Wrong from the Beginning: Our Progressivist Inheritance from Herbert Spencer, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget* (New Haven, CT & London, UK: Yale University Press, 2002), 2

¹⁸ Action Canada, "Future Tense: Adapting Canadian Education Systems for the 21st Century," p. 4. Accessed at: http://www.actioncanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/TF2-Report_Future-Tense_EN.pdf.

¹⁹ Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board. "Education for the 21st Century: Here, Now and Into the Future." Accessed at: <http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/aboutus/strategic-directions/education/documents/Full-Report.pdf>, p. 1.

frequently has become the men's of self-glorification of the child or of its parent, and the creation of an attitude of mind which is fundamentally selfish and anti-social.²⁰

Textbooks were particularly problematic, leading “to the encouragement of the formation of habits of mind which cannot be regarded as otherwise than undesirable.”²¹ The author of a textbook himself, McArthur was concerned with the practice of concentrating upon content, proscribed within textbooks; this practice not only promoted a passive form of learning, but when combined with high-stakes testing led to an individualism in learning, which was a challenge to the social realities and interdependence that was necessary with a healthy democracy. McArthur would be a driving force behind the introduction of Ontario's revised *Programmes of Studies*, and would set the tone for the province's efforts to reform schools for a new, progressive age of schooling.²²

Returning to the Hamilton-Wentworth School Board's testament to educational reform for the future of society, one must note an important repetition about the antiquated structures of Ontario's schools; it makes a set of historical claims, which ought to be seen in their entirety:

Schooling today continues to be based on an out-dated, industrial-aged model that does not meet the needs of 21st century learners. Historically schools have been very traditional and slow to innovate. Our models of curriculum delivery; our school calendar; and our organizational structures date back to the beginning of the 1900's. Schools have been modelled [sic] on the Scientific Management theory that reflected the assembly line method of production. (e.g. a subject specialist teacher, teaching the same material in successive periods; students sitting at desks; schools as primary 'sorters' of future career roles). The idea was, much like a car on an assembly line, to create a model of students that would be able to enter the workforce with the same skills. Although in other primary areas of society such as health care, transportation, and communication there has been dramatic changes since 1900, education systems remain essentially unchanged.

Often the best rationale we can offer for current practice is “we've always done it this way.” Consider the 10-month school calendar. It is based on a time when young people were needed in the summer to help harvest crops. Despite the fact that that agricultural model is only needed in some rural pockets of our society, we continue, year after year, with the 10-month school calendar.

There is a need for schools to remain in sync with the world around them and the learners within them. Students need to be involved in real, relevant experiences that recognize how they learn.²³

The School Board's historical claims are made without warrants. These are pursued by

²⁰ Duncan McArthur, “Education for Citizenship”, *The School*, December 1934, p. 264.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

²² Theodore Michael Christou, “The Complexity of Intellectual Currents: Duncan McArthur and Ontario's Progressivist School Reforms,” *Paedagogica Historica* 49, no. 5 (2013): 677-697.

²³ “Education for the 21st Century: Here, Now and Into the Future,” p. 2

another unwarranted claim, which, in Lamarckian character, argues that students' brains have evolved as a result of their engagement with the digital age. What Darwin described as a slow, generational process of evolution is hastened to fit within a decade:

Digital Age students are profoundly different than those who graduated only 10 to 15 years ago Student brains are different than those of their teachers, administrators, parents and employers – most of whom graduated before the digital age. To harness their current gifts – gifts deemed necessary to compete in the global economy – we must change how we educate on every level.²⁴

The Ottawa Catholic District School Board corroborates the claim that students today are qualitatively different than anyone else. In its own statement, Ottawa Catholic District School Board states that schools are unsuitable means of educating students, whose digital brains are qualitatively unique:

Today's students are different from the students that our system was created to educate. The new digital learners are immersed in technology and they expect to use digital tools as part of their educational experience. Brain based research provides evidence that today's generation of students are "wired" differently than previous generations. Instructional strategies are evolving to reflect the needs of 21st century learners. The question we need to ask is not about what equipment to purchase or install, but rather what skills do our students need to succeed. The class of 2020 is currently sitting in our primary classrooms. These students will graduate from a learning environment and culture that espouses 21st century skill sets and tools.²⁵

The argument is thoroughly progressivist. Extant schools are obsolete and educationists must look to the world of tomorrow in order to decide what skills and development will be useful. Nearly eight decades prior, Joseph McCulley, noted progressivist and Headmaster of Pickering College argued:

Children must be freed from any authoritative concepts or any blind worship of tradition or the status quo. In their school days they must have some opportunity to learn how to choose,—to choose between opposed alternatives that path which will ultimately be good for the maximum good of all. Biological structures and civilizations themselves which have shown an inability to adapt to new conditions have perished; the school of tomorrow must, above all things, turn out citizens who are capable of facing their very different problems intelligently, courageously and with sympathy for all living beings.²⁶

McCulley identified conflicts relating to religious surety, moral codes, financial stability, political faith, and the breakdown of a strong agricultural community as sources of tensions

²⁴ *Education for the 21st Century: Here, Now and Into the Future*, p. 3. See, also, Kelly, F., McCain, T. & Jukes, I. 2008. *Teaching the Digital Generation: No more cookie-cutter high schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. On page 20, the document cites Frank Kelly, T.M. (2008). *Teaching the Digital Generation*. Nelson Education.

²⁵ Ottawa Catholic School Board, "Toward 2020: Connecting with our Students." Accessed at <http://www.ottawacatholicschools.ca/images/learningtech/oc-schools-pdf-towards2020.pdf>, p. 1.

²⁶ Joseph McCulley, "Education in an Age of Insecurity," *The Canadian School Journal* (April 1937): 140.

in society that reflect upon schools. Further, he argued that “security in all these areas and many others has been shattered by our rapidly changing age ... no longer is the classical and traditional curriculum carefully divided off into subject matter areas, sufficient to provide any understanding of the problems of modern life.” McCulley is concerned with schools as a driving force in social life and with progressive education as a means of affecting social evolution.

The twin forces of evolution and revolution are thus invoked iteratively in the rhetoric of progressive education. This is apparent, once more, in the OPBSA’s position:

A high proportion of teachers in Ontario classrooms graduated from teacher education programs in an era when technology, if it was a factor at all, was seen as an esoteric bell or whistle. Many have incorporated some of the advantages of the wired world into their personal lives and from there into their professional practice in the classroom. Many have not. Most faculties of education have not rushed to embed the resources of technology in their programs and professional development offerings for teachers, more often than not, adhere to traditional class and workshop modalities. Technology as part of teacher education was not on the agenda four years ago. Faculties are realizing they need to help teachers be better prepared. The notion of elective courses on use of technology is old school thinking. The pressure is to embed technology in effective classroom strategies.

A common challenge for faculties of education is that their pre-service candidates do not often have access to hook up notebooks in their practicum schools where the host teachers are teaching in a traditional manner.²⁷

Society has evolved; education needs a revolution. Teacher education and, by broader implication, all teachers’ ongoing professional development, are called to abandon “traditional” notions of teaching and learning. Teachers who serve as mentors for teacher candidates are the exemplars of tradition. The implication is clear: professional development should concentrate on technology, and educational institutions should “rush” to embed technological resources into their infrastructure. Thus, the generational gap is not only one that separates specially-evolved children who are in the classroom today from their teachers, but it also divides teacher candidates from practicing teachers.

Teachers who are practicing today must develop fluency with current digital technologies or, one presumes, make space for teachers who will. Professional development, it follows, must concentrate upon the 21st Century. Uxbridge Public School, for instance, notes:

In Ontario, we are educating a generation of children and youth who have no memory of a world without the Internet, without instant access to information, and without an array of media at their fingertips. Effective learning in school engages

²⁷ Ontario Public School Boards’ Association, “What if? A 21st Century Classroom Scenario.” Accessed at: <http://www.opsba.org/files/WhatIf.pdf>, p. 11.

students in modes of thinking, exploration and, knowledge-building that are relevant to their experiences growing up in the 21st Century.²⁸

Teachers are challenged to adapt to the new age but not to problematize the new age or to ask what it means to be human in a world that seems new and peculiar. The Uxbridge Public School pursues its argument by citing Dewey as the standard bearer of this progressivist agenda:

The school-based inquiry process at Uxbridge Public School reorients teacher professional development using a contemporary version of Dewey's (1965) idea of creating "intensive, focused opportunities to experiment with aspects of practice and then learn from that experience". More to the point of this inquiry was, what did we, as educators, learn from students about 21st Century learning with visual technology that could improve our current professional practice in the classrooms of our school.²⁹

Dewey's pragmatist framework and his articulation of the need to act intelligently in the present as a means of developing habits of mind that will be useful in an uncertain future resonate in contexts ripe with rapid social change. John Dewey's *My Pedagogic Creed* claimed education "is a process of living and not a preparation for future living."³⁰ He was keenly aware of the social realities that were radically changing in North America, particularly after World War I.

John Dewey was, in the words of Lawrence Cremin "sensitive to the movement of things around him;" he "wanted schools to use the stuff of reality to educate men and women intelligently about reality. His notion of adjustment was an adjustment of conditions, not to them."³¹ As a pragmatist, Dewey invoked an active approach to learning that helped students find the best solution to the problem at hand.³² Solutions to future problems could not be derived today. It was only possible to practice intelligent and authentic problem-solving today and cultivate those habits and practices that will be useful tomorrow. This necessitated a careful and deep understanding of contemporary social life. Education had a social role to play, which:

Requires a searching study of society and its moving forces. That the traditional schools have almost wholly evaded consideration of the social potentialities of education is no reason why progressive schools should continue the evasion, even though it be sugared over with aesthetic refinements. The time ought to come when no one will be judged to be an educated man or woman who does not have insight into the basic forces of industrial and urban civilization. Only schools which take the lead in bringing about this kind of education can claim to be progressive in any

²⁸ Uxbridge Public School, "21st Century Learning." Accessed at: <http://uxbridgeps.ddsbschools.ca/21st-century-learning.html>.

²⁹ John Dewey (1965). "The Relation of Theory to Practice in Education," in M. Borrowman (Ed.), *Teacher Education in America: A Documentary History* (pp. 140-171). New York: Teachers College Press.

³⁰ John Dewey (January 16, 1897). "My Pedagogic Creed," *The School Journal* 54 (3): 77-80.

³¹ Lawrence A. Cremin (Summer, 1959). "John Dewey and the Progressive-Education Movement, 1915-1952," *The School Review*, 67 (2): 170.

³² John Dewey and Evelyn Dewey, *Schools of To-Morrow* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1915), p. 249.

socially significant sense.³³

Preparing students to deal with the uncertain world of the future entails engaging them thoughtfully with present, uncertain world. Professional development for teachers, then, within a Deweyan framework, would indeed concentrate educationists attention upon the world at hand. This would involve thinking upon the world as it is, and studying it. This does not entail transforming teachers' brains, but their habits of mind and practice. By concentrating upon the world around them thoughtfully, teachers can then deal with the world of the future, whatever that may be.

Dewey's response to the problems of modernity is consistent with the very problems of modernity. It is, perhaps, a very part of modernity. We cannot know the future, yet we must concern ourselves with this future and its social realities howsoever they manifest themselves within particular contexts. There are no eternal truths and persistent solutions, but there is a pressing concern to deal with the present, as this is the only means of facing the future intelligently and well.

How, then, might we conceptualize and speak about professional development in a progressive age? Perhaps, in light of the history of educational rhetoric surrounding teachers and schools, educators must endeavour to be aware of the ongoing tension between progressivist and traditional rhetoric, which has polarized discussions about teaching, learning, and policy. Returning to Dewey's *Experience and Education* may be helpful, as this text opposes the dichotomy that emerges between the two ideological camps. So-Traditional education, for Dewey, lacks a holistic conception of the learner and focuses instruction on content with disregard for process. Progressive schools, on the contrary, tend to be reactionary and concentrate on activity and process at the expense of disciplinary thinking. The either-or thinking characterized by each extreme form of education contextualized in the broader history of educational theory, which is "marked by opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without."³⁴ This opposition, he continues: "so far as practical affairs of the school are concerned, tends to take the form of contrast between traditional and progressive education."³⁵

The dichotomy between presentations and conceptions of 'traditional' and progressive schools is problematic:

The general philosophy of the new education may be sound, and yet the difference in abstract principles will not decide the way in which the moral and intellectual preference involved shall be worked out in practice. There is always the danger in a new movement that in rejecting the aims and methods of that which it would supplant, it may develop its principles negatively rather than positively and constructively.³⁶

³³ John Dewey, "How Much Freedom in New Schools?" *New Republic*, 63: 206.

³⁴ John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, p. 17.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Progressive educators who had proceeded “on the basis of rejection, of sheer opposition” had neglected questions central to the pedagogical project, including:³⁷

What is the place and meaning of subject-matter and of organization *within* experience? How does subject-matter function? Is there anything inherent in experience which tends towards progressive organization of its contents? What results follow when the materials of experience are not progressively organized?³⁸

These questions, I wish to argue, should be the fundamental ones in the composition and orientation of teachers’ professional development. Technology, as a means to an end, may facilitate the posing of questions and the articulation of answers. It is, perhaps, of secondary concern. According to Dewey, educational experiences are the bases of learning, but experience is not inherently meaningful or necessarily educative for everyone. The pedagogical value of any professional development experience is instead, judged by its effect upon an individual learner’s present and future, and the degree to which it enables him or her to contribute positively to the world around them as an educator.

Progressivists must be sufficiently critical of their own underlying principles. It does not suffice to say that the world has changed and that, as a consequence, educationists must reform schools. What does social evolution mean for education? How might we live ethically and well within a world that seems to be spinning evermore quickly on its axis? How might professional development help educationists understand, make sense of, and challenge the extant state of society, rather than just adjust to it? Deprived of these *prima facie* questions, professional development in a progressive world will be, in Dewey’s words, “as dogmatic as ever was the traditional education which it reacted against.”³⁹

³⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 20.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 22.