Conservative versus Progressive View of Education

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| IDEA | E.D. Hirsch | Dewey |
| Achievement Gap | Hirsch believes that low-achieving students have barriers that prevent them academically and socioeconomically through the lack of the cultural knowledge that is shared by a literate society. | Dewey believes that students have “situations”. In the situation of the classroom, students’ present learning experiences are dependent upon the interaction of the external conditions of the school environment (i.e. teacher, peers, content, and curriculum), and the internal experiential conditions of the student. The experience can be either positive or negative, depending on how the present experience promotes/diminishes the potential for growth in future experiences. |
| View of Education | **Conservative**  E.D. Hirsch’s view on education is that students’ must first learn basic knowledge, or background knowledge, before building upon it with more difficult skills and critical thinking. | **Progressive**  Dewey believed in child centered learning which focused on student interests. He viewed education as problem solving, which did not end in the classroom. Education is a process of living and not a preparation for future living |
| The Role of Teachers | Hirsch views teachers as an expert in their subject area and should be the driving force in the instruction. He believes that teachers should provide children with the knowledge and skills needed for academic progress—despite home background. | Dewey views the role of a teacher as an expert in teaching, not necessarily their content area. He believes that teachers should act as facilitators in the classroom as they guide student learning while keeping it child centered. |
| Related Theories of Learning (Psychological Orientations) | **Behaviorism**  Behavior shaped by design and determined by forces in environment. Learning occurs as result of reinforcing responses to stimuli.  **Social Learning**  Learning by observing and imitating others. | **Cognitivism/Constructivism**  Learner actively constructs own understandings of reality through interaction with environment and reflection on actions. Student-centered learning around conflicts to present knowing structures. |
| Cultural Literacy | Hirsch believes that effective communications require shared culture and that shared culture requires transmission of specific information to children. Literacy is no autonomous empty skill, but depends upon literate culture. | Dewey believes that only by accumulating shared symbols, and the shared information that the symbols represent, can we learn to communicate effectively with one another in our national community |
| Educational Philosophy | **Realism**  Reality exists independent of human mind. The world of physical objects is the ultimate reality. The focus is on the body. | **Pragmatism**  Reality must be experienced. Students must interact with the environment in order to learn. |
| View of the Classroom | Hirsch believes that teaching should be “directed and monitored, a primary responsibility of the teacher, secure learning will not occur" (Hirsch, 1996, p. 87). | Dewey’s ideas were rooted in democratic ideas. Teachers and students must learn together and have an equal voice in the overall learning experience. |
| Theory of Knowledge | Knowledge, according to Hirsch, is "intellectual capital" (Hirsch, 1996, p. 19) - that is "the knowledge and skill a person possesses at a given moment." The more knowledge and skill a person has, the more they can acquire. | For Dewey, knowledge is not information passed down to students for future use, but instead knowledge is understanding based on past and current experience, used constantly to test previous conceptions and inform new practices (Roberts, 2003). |

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