

Constructive vs. Progressive View of Education

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Constructive vs. Progressive

E.D. Hirsch and Alfie Kohn have two opposing views when it comes to the core values that make up education’s infrastructure. Below, Table 1 displays Hirsch’s conservative viewpoint and compares it to Kohn’s progressive thinking. Both philosophies will be cross-referenced and opposing views will be highlighted below.

Table 1

Big Idea	Hirsch	Kohn
<p>Philosophy on Standards-Based Education and Testing</p>	<p>E.D. Hirsch promotes standards-based reform for education. Hirsch endorses Common Core, as he believes it fosters students to interact with quality literature. Raising the standard of education monitors the progression of student achievement and success, instead of simply promoting students who have not met standards. Hirsch (1999) feels that holding students to requirements underlines the value of a quality education.</p>	<p>Alfie Kohn strongly believes that the government’s agenda for implementing standards-based education is rooted in wanting a more competitive global economic workforce. Kohn’s ideology is that the “top-down approach” does not promote educational goals, but rather has objectives ingrained in financial gain; control in governmental and corporate levels (Cody, 2012). Kohn (2000) considers testing “damaging” to minorities and low-income families, who tend to have limited access to additional resources.</p>
<p>Common School Culture</p>	<p>Hirsch (1999) argues that ethical values such as “civic duty, honesty, perseverance, respect, kindness, and self-reliance” will play a huge role in the lives of children as they get older and are expected to be “economically independent.” For this reason,</p>	<p>Kohn (1999) points out that if scholars are going to be told what they need to know, then for that mere reason, they will not have a thirst for self-discovery. Kohn (1992) adds that students will be discouraged to look for</p>

	<p>Hirsch claims that there are fundamental facts, historical figures and significant dates that all students should know that are instrumental to establishing a common school culture. Hirsch (1987) adds that these facts are pertinent to ensure that scholars obtain a uniform level of background knowledge, which will become useful schema as they develop.</p>	<p>knowledge, as they are becoming accustomed to value competition and individualized achievement. The culture that will be established with memorization will be one of division, not of community and collaboration.</p>
<p>National Testing Content</p>	<p>Hirsch (2009) strongly believes that the content on standardized tests should assess the material covered in schools. Testing should be used as a tool to gauge growth in knowledge. The content of what is tested should be relevant to the subject matters taught in class. When similar material is covered nationally, there will be fewer inequalities if children transfer from one school to another. Uniformity will develop similar metacognitive skills in every child.</p>	<p>According to Kohn (2001) national curriculum is concentrated on “political principles, not pedagogical insight” (2001). Having a “one-size-fits-all” curriculum diminishes the quality of education. In addition, having a national curriculum would discourage digging deeper into pedagogical practices as teachers have to regurgitate a “bunch o’facts” agenda in the classroom (Kohn, 2001), instead of meeting students where they are academically.</p>
<p>Assessments and Grades</p>	<p>Hirsch (1996) cites that when students obtain a grade for a class, they tend to work harder to achieve a higher score; he blatantly states, “research has clearly shown that students learn more when grades are given.” Hirsch (1999) adds that assessments and grades allow students to acquire skills needed for a well-rounded academic experience. Being able to tap into one’s schema to retrieve</p>	<p>Kohn (1999) strongly believes that teaching to a test and the “drill-and-kill” model restricts a child’s ability to develop critical thinking skills. In addition, Kohn (2006) claims that Hirsch’s study is outdated by over twenty-five years. Today’s children cannot be compared to the way life was decades ago.</p>

	information for application is a skill acquired through assessments and grading.	
Achievement Gap	Hirsch (2006) feels that literacy and reading comprehension should be addressed assertively in classrooms across the US; this practice will break the ignorant ideologies that hold people “slaves to emotion” (Hirsch, 1999). He believes that the achievement gap that exists in our education system targets the economically disadvantaged. Furthermore, Hirsch (1999) strongly affirms that progressive practices cause social injustices to occur.	Kohn (2011) strongly believes when teachers teach to pass the standardized test, they are widening the achievement gap among students. Kohn (2007) adds that achievement gaps go hand in hand with targeting minorities, and children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Kohn (2007) feels that remediation is not the solution to closing the achievement gap, but rather stakeholders should concentrate on rigorous, pedagogical practices.
Early Childhood Education	Hirsch prides himself with his Core Knowledge publication that points out what children should know in order to be successful in life overall; this list begins at the tender level of preschool. Hirsch (1999) strongly supports early childhood instruction, as it is a way for children to gain “intellectual capacities”. Hirsch mentions how many preschoolers that come from “professional families” are at a greater advantage because they are exposed to more heightened vocabulary at home. Therefore, schools should mimic the same or greater level of vocabulary with a more traditional, structured learning atmosphere for scholars.	Kohn (1999) strongly considers that if young children are exposed to a structured academic environment, it can be harmful to the child’s overall development. Furthermore, Kohn applauds curriculum that is more open and flexible that incorporates play and freedom. Kohn (2009) declares, “Tightly structured, traditionally academic models for young children provides virtually no lasting benefits and proves to be potentially harmful in many respects.” Kohn believes a rigid learning environment can hinder natural curiosity.

<p>Vocabulary Lessons</p>	<p>Hirsch has a strong stance on the importance of teaching rigorous vocabulary to students from a very early age. Hirsch (2006) believes that a great deal of understanding from various texts is largely a result of the amount of vocabulary a child knows. A child’s level of comprehension is reflected by the amount of vocabulary he/she knows as well; therefore, Hirsch believes that curriculum should incorporate a vast amount of vocabulary skills to improve literacy.</p>	<p>Kohn does not endorse rote memorization for vocabulary. Instead, Kohn (1999) promotes teaching vocabulary, grammar and punctuation in a manner that is infused in literary concepts within the text. Kohn feels that while vocabulary is embedded in the text, it should be processed with students for best results so that students benefit from contextual evidence.</p>
<p>Social Equity</p>	<p>Hirsch (2006) strongly believes that economically disadvantaged students benefit most from a curriculum that is filled with knowledge-based content. Hirsch (1999) affirms that schools must place themselves in a position where they have to compensate for students from culturally impoverished upbringings, so that they can have a fighting chance in the global economic workforce. To achieve social equity in schools, Hirsch believes that constructive practices must be adopted in more schools.</p>	<p>Kohn (2011) proposes that the added pressures of improving test scores impact social equity in the classroom because the emphasis is shifted away from authentic learning, which usually impacts students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, external factors such as a child’s homelife, gender, access to community resources, status, and other outside factors play a huge role in a child’s overall success. Kohn (1993) states that until triggering external factors are addressed, a child will make very little progress in school.</p>
<p>Note: Table 1 compares and contrasts the educational viewpoints of E.D. Hirsch and A. Kohn.</p>		

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