

The Rise and Fall of Progressive Education, 1890s-1990s
2024

Fall,

Instructor: Robert Hampel, Professor Emeritus, University of Delaware

Text: Short readings will be emailed (free) to the class each week

Week One: Traditional Pedagogy. Teachers talk, students listen, and knowledge is clear cut facts. Why was that regimen so widely accepted for so long? Why was recitation and memorization prized?

Reading: High school & college entrance exams c. 1875

Week Two: John Dewey's pedagogical creed. What does education focused on children's needs and interests require of teachers? Of students? How did Dewey's ideas connect with the political reforms known as progressive?

Reading: Excerpts from Dewey, Schools of Tomorrow (1915)

Week Three: The "Life Adjustment" crusade c. 1950. How was "Life Adjustment" a distortion of Dewey's ideas? Why did the critics resent this version of a practical and pleasant education?

Assignment: Watch "Dating Do's and Don'ts" on You Tube

Week Four: Open education and free schools c. 1970. Calls for less rigidity and more freedom gave rise to "alternative schools" that resurrected many Progressive ideals. Why was it hard to sustain these initiatives?

Reading: Excerpts from Teaching as a Subversive Activity (1969) and Hampel, The Last Little Citadel (1986).

Week Five: Variety and choice in high schools of the 1980s and beyond. A broad curriculum with many options for students to choose: that was the common pattern of high schools by 1980. Who did best in that setting? Who fell through the cracks?

Reading: Excerpts from The Shopping Mall High School (1985)