

The Ed School's Romance with Progressivism

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Abstract

Progressivism became the natural ideology of education professors in the twentieth century—shaping their language and the language of American education, even though it had little impact on the practice of teacher educators and researchers or on the practice of teachers in schools. And although this ideology represents an approach to issues of teaching and learning in the public schools that is well suited to the needs of education professors, it is antithetical to the aims of the current standards-based reform movement. The struggle for control of American education in the early twentieth century was between two factions of the movement for progressive education. The administrative progressives won, and they reconstructed the organization and curriculum of American schools in a form that has lasted to the present day. Meanwhile, the pedagogical progressives failed miserably in shaping what is done in schools, but they succeeded in shaping how to talk about schools. Professors in schools of education were caught in the middle of this dispute, and they ended up in a compromised position. Their hands were busy, preparing teachers to work within the confines of the educational system established by the administrative progressives and carrying out research to make this system work more efficiently. But their hearts were with the pedagogues. So they 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.