

Morning Hour October 14, 2015: Progressive Education

Suggested reading: Alfie Kohn's article, [Progressive Education: Why It's Hard to Beat, But Also Hard to Find](#). This article breaks down the progressive ideas that might not be evident to parents.

Dyanthe began by describing the work that teachers do that is not visible to parents.

Descriptive reviews: teachers meet with each other and share their thoughts and observations. This a form of professional development that is inquiry based.

There are two main categories for this.

One will focus on one child and a question that has come up. This is not a process about judging a child but rather a way of looking and thinking about the whole child. In this way teachers open a conversation about how to consider each child individually. Example: a few years ago teachers met to consider how one child could engage more fully in class. The teacher described the student fully including mannerisms, habits, passions. One idea that was put forth was that the child was comfortable being introverted and perhaps it was the adults who were not OK with it.

The other category is a practice of the teachers. Example: There is a DOE mandated way for principals of a school to evaluate teachers. The question was how does this work or not work with the teaching style of progressive education at TNS and Dyanthe is planning a review with teachers.

Student Portfolios: A folder for each child that contains a collection of work and shows their growth during their time at TNS. This requires that every teacher contribute to the portfolio of the children they teach.

Question: How can parents become more involved in Portfolios?

The Alfie Kohn article, , [Progressive Education: Why It's Hard to Beat, But Also Hard to Find](#) asks if the school is committed to being progressive or just comfortable embracing some progressive values? Read the full article for in depth definitions, I have just taken a sentence or two from each description. The values as described by Kohn are:

Attending to the whole child: Help children become good learners and good people.

Community: Children learn with and from one another in a caring community

Collaboration: Emphasis on Collaborative problem solving.

Social Justice: A sense of community and responsibility is not confined to the classroom. There is commitment to diversity and improving the lives of others.

Intrinsic Motivation: When considering (or reconsidering) educational policies and practices, the first question that progressive educators are likely to ask is, “What’s the effect on students’ *interest* in learning, their desire to continue reading, thinking, and questioning?”

Deep Understanding: The point is not merely to challenge students — after all, harder is not necessarily better — but to invite them to think deeply about issues that matter and help them understand ideas from the inside out.

Active Learning: ...learning is a matter of constructing ideas rather than passively absorbing information or practicing skills.

Taking kids seriously: Progressive educators take their cue from the children — and are particularly attentive to differences among them. (Each student is unique, so a single set of policies, expectations, or assignments would be as counterproductive as it was disrespectful.)

How do we as a Progressive School get teachers on board with Progressive Education? This involves professional development (see above discussion of Descriptive Reviews), hiring teachers with progressive background either in their own education, their studies or professional experience and Teacher’s retreat in the spring.

PROS (New York Performance Standards Consortium) This alternative testing during the NY State testing period. Last year 80 percent of families of TNS opted out of Standardized tests up from from 40 percent the year before and 7 students the year before that. At TNS this test (which takes a lot of preparation on the part of the teachers) included collaborative work vs a top down model where students are asked not to share information with each other or help each other during the evaluation.

Community Discussion included these questions:

Is there currently a tipping point with standardized testing that will result in their becoming less important to which Dyanthe said, “it is up to families!” The verdict is not out but clearly the opt out movement has traction right now.

How can Parents support progressive education and learn more about it? Answer in part is listen to your children and explore questions with them.

How does progressive education effect African American Children negatively in that when these children are competing throughout their lives the standards are higher. Their grades have to be higher, their scores have to be higher....

Another related question about how are TNS students preparing for standardized tests (SAT test specifically) and the answer was they are not being prepared for them now. That will come when they need to be.

Children notice differences whether they are learning styles, color, disabilities so how do we as a community teach them to negotiate and or understand difference in a meaningful and respectful way? Discussion of process that is similar to "supervision" in therapy where individuals look deeply into their own attitudes and beliefs and actions so they can better model good behavior for their children.

This led to a discussion of how children are taught to speak and act and what they do on the playground or when by themselves and how does our community address ideals and actions in the community. How can we as a community learn to speak with our children about difficult subjects? How can we as a community give them skills to discuss and explore difficult subjects?

Can we have more experiences together as families? The Sing is a wonderful tradition because students of all grades and families are together.

One parent spoke beautifully about the experience of her kindergarten aged child last year who transferred late in the year. The child had been at a school that required homework in every subject every night which resulted in the student not being interested in school to a sense of wonder and enthusiasm now. She said her child is now so motivated and full of life because his concept of learning has expanded so much since starting at TNS.

Another parent spoke about feeling alone now that her child spends so much time away from the family with teachers and friends.

In closing a long time parent said that these discussions are wonderful but unless a parent has something they really care about and they commitment to make it happen... this work does not get done.