

Differences Between Traditional and Progressive Education

This chart, from Independent Schools, a magazine of the National Association of Independent Schools (edited by FCEC), is a helpful guide in understanding the differences between traditional and progressive education.

Traditional Education

School is a preparation for life.

Learners are passive absorbers of information and authority.

Teachers are sources of information and authority.

Parents are outsiders and uninvolved.

Community is separate from school, except for funding.

Decision-making is centrally based and administratively delivered.

Program is determined by external criteria, particularly test results.

Learning is linear, with factual accumulation and skill mastery monitored by benchmark assessments that are based to predict performance on standardized tests.

Knowledge is absorbed through lectures, short projects, worksheets, and texts.

Instruction is linear and largely based on correct answers.

Progressive Education

School is a part of life and creates outcomes that serve the community.

Learners are active participants, problem solvers, entrepreneurs and planners.

Teachers are facilitators, guides who foster thinking.

Parents are the primary teachers, goal setters, and planners, and serve as resources.

Community is an extension of the classroom.

Decision-making is shared by all constituent groups.

Program is determined by mission, philosophy, and goals for graduates.

Learning is spiral, with depth and breadth as goals measured by growth academically, emotionally, physically and ethically.

Knowledge is constructed through direct experience, creating real world products, and social interaction.

Disciplines, particularly language and math, are separated.

Skills are taught discretely and are viewed as goals.

Assessment is norm-referenced, external, and graded.

Success is competitively based, derived from recall and memory, and specific to a time/place.

Products are the end point.

Intelligence is a measure of linguistic and logical/mathematical abilities.

School is a requirement.

Instruction is related to central questions and inquiry, often generated by the children.

Disciplines are integrated and taught through the exploration of nature, creating real products for the Student Market and community service.

Skills are related to content and are viewed as tools needed to provide community service or create a real world product.

Assessment is benchmarked, has many forms, and is progress-oriented.

Success is determined through application over time, through collaboration.

Products are subsumed by process considerations.

Intelligence is recognized as varied, includes the arts, and is measured in real-life problem-solving.

School is a challenging and fun part of life.