

EDTC 807: IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF CURRICULUM

Project 2

Hirsch: Conservative vs. Progressive View of Education

March 9th 2018

Aminata E. Adewumi

New Jersey City University

Author Note

Aminata E. Bamba Adewumi, Department of Educational Technology, New Jersey City University

Correspondence concerning this article should be emailed to Aminata Bamba Adewumi at edidi112@gmail.com

Eric Donald Hirsch Jr. is an American instructor and an educational traditionalist who is the founder of the “Core Knowledge Foundation” to be taught in American schools. Hirsch is best known for his writing on “Cultural Literacy” (Hirsch, 1983, 1984, & 1987), which value the importance of literacy in America's schools. According to Hirsch (1987), the main purpose of schooling is to encourage literacy as an empowering skill and regardless of age, race, or class, an individual who knows how to read and write very well can be enable to have many skills to develop in life (Hirsch, 1987). He considers literacy to be a political decision, instead of a formal skill because the political implications in the school system is unavoidable (Hirsch, 1983). Some of Hirsch’s educational theory concepts and ideas include the tests, value, achievement gap, critical thinking, knowledge, transmission, learning, and opportunity of education (see Table 1). Conservatives such as Sol Stern also supported Hirsch’s educational theory and ideas. Stern reports that the conservatives believe that the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are not the best standards for the America's school system because the Common Core is politically imposed or forced into classrooms. However, if the Common Core does not succeed, Americans will be stuck and will be faced with different curriculum that will not be great for the public education system (Stern & Wood, 2014). In addition, the progressive education movement will have more influence on America’s classrooms if the Common Core fails.

Therefore, eliminating the Common Core will harm American’s school because the Common Core is “a golden opportunity and a challenge for states and school districts to rethink what is taught in their classrooms” (Stern & Wood, 2014). Instead of the elimination, the Common Core can be well developed and have a rich content curriculum that will bring attention

and support for Hirsch's Core Knowledge curriculum. Hirsch's Core Knowledge has been verified to raise the academic performance of poor children (O'Neil, 1999; Woo, 1997). Stern states that conservative education activists should find ways to exploit the new Standards to restore a comprehensible, knowledge-based curriculum to the public schools instead of bringing down the whole progressive organization.

Furthermore, Hirsch argues that Progressives such as Dewey are one reason American students are not achieving as well as they should because of his anti-curriculum approach. Instead of educating young children to read by using the method of explicit phonics instruction, progressive educators, such as TheodoreSizer, reinforced a teaching philosophy called Whole Language or Balanced Literacy; in which teachers encouraged students to build their own knowledge. Progressives followed a "child-centered" instructional model, which believed that all student naturally should know how to read and write perfectly (Stern & Wood, 2014).

According to Hirsch, the theory of critical thinking does not really help students to be knowledgeable and literate because it does not allow students to think on their own, instead gives them intellectual tools that allowed them to fail in the American School system. However, Sizer believes that schools should teach students critical thinking, creative thinking, and mental skills. Sizer believes that students' curiosity should build the curriculum; therefore, standardized test and single subject teaching should be replaced by interdisciplinary study (Woo, 1997). Sizer believes on developing students' mind; therefore, most schools that follows Sizer's idea have less textbooks and instructors do not lecture much.

The theory of value is very important for Hirsch because of its traditional or old-fashioned value. Hirsch believes that the cultural knowledge in the school system is beneficial for students. Although,Sizer and progressive educators believe in interdisciplinary instruction, hands on activities, and cooperative learning; Hirsch emphasizes on the value of memorization, verbal instruction, recitation, and standardized tests. In addition, Hirsch believes that teachers should be in control of their class as well as teaching the whole class period (O’Neil, 1999). Hirsch’s educational theory concepts and ideas is also based on the theory of knowledge; “education’s brass ring” (Toch & Daniel, 1996). The theory of knowledge is based on old-fashioned way of teaching, such as harsh course of study, book learning and memorizing, teachers in control of their class, and many tests which support the Common Core that lead to the Core Knowledge. According to Hirsch, knowledge is “intellectual capital”, that is acquired and is viewed as ineffective and internally damaging (Hirsch, 1996, pg216). Furthermore, he argues that formalism and naturalism are half-truths and misleading to the school system. He defines Formalism as “the belief that the particular content that is learned in school is not as important than getting the formal tools which will help an individual to learn future content”. He states that naturalism is “the beliefs that education is a natural process with its own inherent forms and rhythms and is most effective when it is connected with natural and real life goals” (Hirsch, 1996, pg218). Sizer believes that knowledge should be stressed by students thinking and ability to be more creative.

When it comes to the theory of learning, Hirsch believes that learning needs effort from individual. The effort requires students to practice as well as repetitive on the lessons they are learning. According to Sizer, education should be utilized in a thoughtful way and students

should exhibit a correct habits of mind. Furthermore,Sizer believes that schools should teach less subject, but in depth and the topics should be chosen by students' interest. Finally, Hirsch's idea of opportunity is that the school is responsible for giving better opportunity and chances to all students regardless of race, gender, or race (Hirsch, 1993 & 1998). In addition, implementing the common curriculum would guide school to serve deprived students.

Table 1:

Hirsch's Educational Theory Concepts and Ideas

| Theory and Ideas | Hirsch | Sizer and Progressives |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| Common Core and Tests | <p>Stern (Stern & Wood, 2014) wants the Common Core not to fail but to be developed and have rich content curriculum so that students achievement gap can improve</p> <p>Objective tests are just, inexpensive achievement measures (Toch & Daniel, 1996)</p> | <p>Child-Centered instructional model</p> <p>Standardized tests belittle learning and does not improved on students' intellectual skills</p> |
| Critical Thinking | American education theory gives Students intellectual tools which failed to develop knowledgeable and literate students | <p>Allowing students to think critically and naturally know how to read and write perfectly.</p> <p>Critical thinking, creative thinking, and mental skills are important in schools</p> |
| Achievement Gap | Hirsch's argument as to why it exists. | <p>Balanced literacy (Stern & Wood, 2014)</p> <p>Students' achievement should be measured by doing presentation in front of class instead of standardized tests.</p> |

| | | |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Value | Students should have deeper knowledge of vocabulary and general ability to learn new things (Hirsch, September 1999; Toch & Daniel, 1996) | Single-subject teaching should be replaced by interdisciplinary study (Toch & Daniels, 1996; Woo, 1997) |
| | Value of recitation, memorization, standardized test, and verbal instruction | Attacks “lecture-drill-and test systems” of many schools (Toch & Daniel, 1996) |
| | Favors teachers using the entire class instruction (single-subject teacher) (O’Neil, 1999) | |
| Knowledge | Knowledge is an intellectual capital (Hirsch, 1996, pg19). Schooling, under Theory of Knowledge, is ineffective and internally damaging (Hirsch, 1996, pg216) | Education should stress students’ thinking skills. |
| | Knowledge is education’s brass ring (Toch & Daniel, 1996), old fashioned teaching. | |
| Transmission | formalism, Romanticism, and naturalism are not correct and half-truths | Formalism and Naturalism is valuable to the school system |
| Learning Skills | The more knowledge, the more an individual learns | Students should exhibit the right “habits of mind” and utilize knowledge in thoughtful ways. |
| | All learning needs effort and practice as well as repetition | |
| Opportunity | All students should have more chances and opportunity in life regardless of age, gender, or race | All students should have intellectual education |
| | Deprived students get more opportunity | Schools should have longer time and increase team teaching. |

Note: E.D. Hirsch and TheodoreSizer are educators who take different routes to reform in the school system.

Source: Hirsch, E. D. (1983-1999). Stern, S. & Wood, P. (2014, p26-28). Toch, T., and Daniel, M. (1996, 58).

References:

- Hirsch, E. D. (1983). Cultural Literacy. *American Scholar*, 52(2), 159.
- Hirsch, E. D. (1984). 'English' and the Perils of Formalism. *American Scholar*, 53(3), 369.
- Hirsch, E.D. (1987). *Cultural literacy, what every American needs to know*. Boston, MA. Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Hirsch, E. D. (1993). The Core Knowledge curriculum--what's behind its success?. *Educational Leadership*, 50(8), 23.
- Hirsch, E.D. (1996). *The schools we need and why we don't have them*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Hirsch, E. D. (1998). Reality's revenge: Research and ideology. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 99(4), 3.
- Hirsch, E.D. (1999, September 11). Finding the answers in drill and rigor. *The New York Times*, p. 9. Retrieved September 25, 2001, from the ProQuest database.
- O'Neil, J. (1999). Core knowledge & standards: a conversation with E.D. Hirsch. *Educational Leadership*, 56, 28-31. Retrieved March 12, 2018, from the ProQuest database.
- Stern, S. & Wood, P. (2014). Our conservative Core. *New Criterion*, 33(1), 26-28.
- Toch, T., & Daniel, M. (1996). Schools that work. *U.S. News & World Report*, 121(14), 58.
- Woo, E. (1997). Educator Hirsch winning cultural literacy debate. *Human Events*, 53(6), 14.