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**Mohammed Akinola AKOMOLAFE**

## **Between Perennialism and Progressivism: A Reflection on a Pedagogical Choice for Effective Child Development**



*With the task of the philosopher of education beset with several challenges and theoretical underpinnings regarding what kind of pedagogy and curriculum suits the moral and personal development of the child, various approaches have been postulated. In the present study, we prune these theories to perennialism and progressivism. There have been divergent views as to whether or not either or both of these serve the interest of the child better. What then is Perennialism? What is Progressivism? What makes each of these theories a preferred pedagogic theory for the child? Are there any places of connection and/or discord between these theories? Are they both necessarily at logger heads? In this essay, we argue that progressivism and perennialism portray shades of truth about child teaching and development that is unique and distinct to each. As human societies and social consciousness are not univocal, it is the submission of this essay that it is the task of the educator to align any of the two education theories with the yearning of the community which is where the input of education of the child is made manifest. Main persons for philosophical investigation of perennialism for us are Robert Maynard Hutchins, Mortimer J. Adler, and Sir Richard Livingstone whereas important persons for progressivism are John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and especially John Dewey. Perennialism holds the view that teachers should teach issues that are of general importance to man and focus on them. Progressivists believe that education cannot be always the same and it is always in the process of development: it must be life itself, and learning has to be linked to the interests of the child, which must be carried out by solving specific social and educational problems.*

**Keywords:** *development, pedagogy, philosophy of education, perennialism, progressivism.*

### **Introduction**

It is not an understatement to say that education is one of the indispensable backbones of any civilization. However, it is also the case that an improper application of educational theories with regards to time, place and situation

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does more harm than good to the community. This is why one of the ancient scholars of education sees education as: "That training which is given by suitable habits to the first instinct of virtue in children when pleasure and pain are rightly imparted in rational souls" [Amaele 2003: 16].

The need for a proper education and its application has attracted the attention of philosophers who have been able to provide various theories calculated to improve pedagogy and curriculum. In the face of their diverse articulations, this paper shall concern itself with the distinction between progressivism and perennialism in the discourse among philosophers of education. In essence, the study makes a comparative analysis between progressivism and perennialism in an attempt to exhume the pedagogic significance within each of them. It is only after this that one can then decipher if either or both are germane for scholarship.

For us to apprehend this task, the paper has four sections, excluding this introduction and conclusion. In the first section, the role of the philosopher of education is succinctly articulated and assessed. In the second, the function of Progressivism as a theory of education is given attention. We shall extrapolate at the end of the section the inner kernel of Progressivism. In the third part, a similar approach is revived in Perennialism. In the fourth part, the places of parallel and discord between Progressivism and Perennialism are placed side by side in order to infer whether either or both play a crucial role in our comprehension of reality.

### **An Exposition of the Goal of Philosophy of Education**

Before engaging with the meaning and subject of Philosophy of Education, it would be insightful to commence with the idea of education. Education is gotten from the Latin word 'educare', which means 'to make or mould'. Education can be viewed from two senses. These include the broad sense as well as the narrow/technical sense [Kneller 1964:20]. In the view of G.F Kneller, when viewed in the broad sense, education deals with the act or experience that helps to create a formative effect on the mind, the behaviour or character of a person or the physical ability of a person or an individual. In its technical or narrow sense, education is the process by which any society through schools, colleges, universities and other institutions deliberately transmits its cultural heritage, i.e. its accumulated knowledge, values, skills, from one generation to another [Kneller 1964: 20].

For Plato, education should deal with morality as it is what enables an individual to show the right conduct to other members of the society. Aristotle, on his part, however, believes that 'education makes an individual develop a sound mind in a sound body. He is of the view that education has to work with both the mind and the body. In modern times, education is defined based on the

schools of thought and perspectives that scholars see it and also the discipline where they belong. John Dewey, who is a pragmatist, points out that education is a necessity for members of every social group. For Jean-Jacques Rousseau, education is the development of the individual from within by interacting with the natural environment with the aim of fitting properly into the society.

Godwin Azenabor describes education as a continuous reconstruction of experience and the adjustment of the individual to the society, to nature, to his fellow human beings, and to the ultimate; education is therefore a moral, physical, mental, societal, cultural, intellectual and spiritual adjustments of an individual [Azenabor 2005: 5].

R.S Peters is of the view that for education to be seen as having taken place, it must have given what is worthwhile to those that are committed to it, it must involve knowledge and understanding and it must rule out procedures of transmission based on the teacher and the learner or student. Education creates the means through which a person can learn and it serves as a process of imparting or acquiring knowledge and the way in which one can develop the act of being prepared for the activities that will be faced [Peters 1966: 30].

Education comes in three forms. These are formal education, informal education and non-formal education. Formal education has to do with the type of education received in institutions of learning and it creates a means where the teacher and the learner can interact for the learner to receive acquire knowledge. Informal education deals with receiving knowledge that is not gotten from formal settings. It could be education from the home, religious bodies and the society at large. Non-formal education on the other hand, deals with a form of education that is though planned; it is not done in institutions as a formal programme. It is carried out through workshops and skill acquisition processes, and it is organised. What then is the task of a philosopher?

There are two senses of the term 'philosopher'. Its loose and common sense, in which any individual who cogitates in any manner about such issues as the meaning of life, the nature of social justice, the essence of sportsmanship, the aims of education, the foundations of the school curriculum, or relationship with the Divine, is thereby a philosopher. There is also a more technical sense referring to those who have been formally trained or have acquired competence in one or more areas such as epistemology, metaphysics, moral philosophy, logic, philosophy of science, and the likes [Philips & Siegel 2013]. If this bifurcation presents a problem for adequately delineating the field of philosophy, the difficulties grow tenfold or more with respect to philosophy of education.

As an academic field, philosophy of education is "the philosophical study of education and its problems...its central subject matter is education, and its methods are those of philosophy" [Noddings 1995: 1]. This is where the idea that philosophy assesses the claims of other intellectual fields becomes justified. Furthermore, Nel Noddings informs that:

Philosophy of education may be either the philosophy of the process of education or the philosophy of the discipline of education. That is, it may be part of the discipline in the sense of being concerned with the aims, forms, methods, or results of the process of educating or being educated; or it may be meta-disciplinary in the sense of being concerned with the concepts, aims, and methods of the discipline. As such, it is both part of the field of education and a field of applied philosophy, drawing from fields of metaphysics, epistemology, axiology and the philosophical approaches (speculative, prescriptive, and/or analytic) to address questions in and about pedagogy, education policy, and curriculum, as well as the process of learning, to name a few [Noddings 1995: 32].

The above is very clear showing how philosophic methods are extrapolated for the use of other intellectual cognitions. In describing the field of philosophy, and in particular the sub-field of philosophy of education, one quickly runs into a difficulty not found to anything like the same degree in other disciplines. For example, although there are some internal differences in opinion, nevertheless there seems to be quite a high degree of consensus within the domain of quantum physics about which researchers are competent members of the field and which ones are not, and what work is a strong (or potential) contribution [Phillips & Siegel, 2013]. The very nature of philosophy, on the other hand, is 'essentially contested'; what counts as a sound philosophical work within one school of thought, or socio-cultural or academic setting, may not be so regarded (and may even be the focus of derision) in a different one. Coupled with this is the fact that the borders of the field are not policed, so that the philosophically untrained can cross into it freely. Indeed, over the past century or more, a great many individuals from across the spectrum of real and pseudo-disciplines have for whatever reason exercised their right to self-identify as members of this broad and loosely defined category of 'philosophers' [Phillips & Siegel 2013].

There are thus various definitions given to philosophy of education. Nweke, R. defines philosophy of education as "The application of some fundamental and basic principles of philosophy at the service of the problems in education [Nweke 1989:8]. This definition shows that philosophy of education looks into how education is taken and how the application of the fundamental principles of philosophy can create solutions to the problems that are seen in how the process of education is carried out from one place to the other. In another definition, [Ocho 1988: 5] sees philosophy of education as "the application of philosophical principles to educational issues and problems." Simply put, therefore, philosophy of education looks into education and the principles that guide its processes in different societies and how the teacher is able to affect the learner positively.

## A Discourse on Progressivism and the Curriculum

In this section, we shall be looking at the meaning of progressivism within the parlance of education. A brief historical panorama of this concept is pertinent as we disinter its main thesis regarding pedagogy as well as the curriculum. It is calculated that this move will give an understanding of the progressive perspective to education.

Progressivism may be traced to the philosophies of John Locke and J.-J. Rousseau. However, during the twentieth century; the progressive education movement was a major part of the early twentieth century reform which was used in rebuilding American democracy through social and cultural means. The progressives believed that education will help to reduce the tension that was created through economic, social and political issues in America. John Dewey is seen to be the 'father of progressive education' and was very vital in ensuring that the idea of educational progressivism was realized. His vision of having a good society was one that was related with education being the basis for achieving it. For him, the kind of education given by the progressive will be one that moves towards giving problem-solving skills to the individuals for her/his use and for the society. The classroom, he noted, is part of the places where human relationship can be created and built upon to bring up a better society. Another contemporary progressive is American philosopher William Heard Kilpatrick.

Taking the pragmatist view that change, not permanence, is the essence of, reality, progressivism in its pure form declares that education is always in the process of development. The special quality of education is not to be determined by applying perennial standards of goodness, truth, and beauty but by construing education as a continual reconstruction of experience. Dewey notes that "we thus reach a technical definition of education; it is that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience and which increases the ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" [Dewey 1916: 89].

Some basic assumptions about progressivism include the following: that learning should be directly related to the interest of the child. Progressive educators introduce the concept of the 'whole child' as answer to what they consider partial interpretation of the child's nature [Kilpatrick 1934: 357]. Kilpatrick advocates the child-centered school, in which the process of learning is determined mainly by the individual child. He should learn because he needs and wants to learn, not necessarily because someone else thinks he should. Dewey stressing this view advised the teacher "now see to it that day by day the conditions are such that their own activities move inevitably in this direction, towards such culmination of themselves" [Dewey 1943: 31]; that learning through problem solving should take precedence over the in-

culcating of subject matter. To them if knowledge is to be significant we must do something with it, that is, it must be wedded to experience [Dewey 1916: 321]; that the teacher's role is not to direct but to advise. This is because their own needs and desires determine what they learn. Children should be allowed to plan their own development and the teacher should just guide the learning instead. The teacher merely has superior and richer experience to bring to bear on the analysis of the present situation, the teacher is virtually important as stage setter, guide and coordinator, but is not the sole source of authority [Thomas, 1946:398].

Other basic assumptions about progressivism are: that the school should encourage co-operation rather than competition. It could encourage competition provided such competition fosters personal growth. Nevertheless, it should insist that cooperation is better suited than competition to the biological and social facts of human nature; and that only democracy permits and encourages the free interplay of ideas and personalities that is a necessary condition of true growth.

From the foregoing, one can infer the progressive aim of education. For the progressives the aim and the curriculum of education should focus on the whole child, rather than on the content or the teacher. The role of the teacher is merely that of a guide as opposed to an authoritarian figure. The curriculum must be such that learning should be based on the interest of the students. Progressivism as an educational theory rejects traditional schooling that focuses on memorization, strictly organized classrooms (desks in rooms; students always seated) [Gerald 2009: 346].

The place of pedagogy in progressivism is also undeniable. Teaching in progressivism is essentially focused on the child. Here, what to teach revolves around the child's needs not around the teacher or prescribed curriculum. Also, teaching must be such that the development of the whole child is intended, like teaching the student to be good citizen and not just good learner. Progressivists ensure that what they teach is based on experience and abilities of the students. They teach in such a way that students interact with themselves and develop co-operation. Furthermore, teachers under progressive learning ensure that students are exposed to scientific and technological development as a means of improving on their social lives to encourage continuous growth. Progressivism believes so much in the scientific method [Dewey 1916: 321]. Since most progressivists are pragmatists, they believe that whatever works in practice should be given prominence, hence, the scientific method. Students are expected to pursue answers to their questions through problem-solving and critical method, and rarely expected to find their answers in a book.



## A Discourse on Perennialism, Pedagogy and the Curriculum

Perennialism as an educational theory is embedded in the writings of Aristotle and Aquinas. Among its leading spokesmen are Robert Maynard Hutchins, Mortimer J. Adler, and Sir. Richard Livingstone. Perennialism is a theory in philosophy of Education that is of the view that what a person should be taught are such that should be of lasting presence. Perennialism also takes a stance that education should focus on ideas that have lasted for a very long time over the centuries. The advocates of perennial ideas believe the ideas will always be useful in present times just like they have been useful when they were created. Thus, Perennialism focuses on personal development which it believes will enable the individual to derive other needs in the society. Perennialists try to teach ideas that are constant because they believe that the natural world which humans relate to does not change. With this, they believe that the human mind can be well developed.

Perennialists are of the view that individuals are able to bring out their capabilities by developing their abilities through reasoning. Through this, they believe that human beings will be able to get knowledge of universal truths and values which will enable them to deal with situations. Education, according to the perennialists, serves as a preparation for the activities that man will act upon, as such, the learner should be taught the existences of the world through a form of study that is structured. Perennialists also believe that the learner should be taught about behaviour control for him to be disciplined. They believe that the reasoning of the student should be enhanced. This they believe can be done by focusing on issues of universal truth.

A summary of the basic principles of Perennialism are: that despite differing environments, human nature remains the same everywhere. Hence, education should be the same for everyone. According to Robert Hutchins, the function of a citizen or a subject may vary from society to society, since it results from his nature as man. The aim of an educational system is the same in every age and in every society where such a system can exist, it is to improve man as man [Hutchins 1953: 68]. Reasoning along the same line, Mortimer Adler writes that, "There must be certain constant features in every sound education program, regardless of culture or epoch" [Adler 1939: 60]; that it is the task of education to impart knowledge of eternal truth. Education should seek to adjust the individual not to the world as such but what is true. Education implies teaching, teaching implies knowledge. Knowledge is truth, the truth is everywhere the same. Hence education should be everywhere the same [Hutchins 1936: 66]; that education is not an imitation to life but a preparation for it. School is an artificial arrangement. It is not a real life situation. The task of the student is to realise the values taught and apply them to future challenges; and that the student should be taught certain basic subjects that

will acquaint him the world's permanencies. The disciplines that students are taught, Adler noted, "...is achieved through the liberal arts, the arts of reading and listening, of writing and speaking, of thinking, since man is a social animal as well as a rational one, and his intellectual life is lived in a community which can exist only through the communication of men ..." [Adler 1939: 62].

From the above, the perennialist approach to education is obviously unique. The aim of education is to ensure that students acquire understandings about the great ideas of western civilization. These ideas have the potential for solving problem in any era. The focus of perennialism is to teach ideas that are everlasting, to seek enduring truths which are constant, not changing as the natural and human worlds at their most essential level, do not change [Hutchins 1936: 66]. Cultivation of the intellect is the highest priority in a worthwhile education. The demanding curriculum focuses on attaining cultural literacy, stressing students' growth in enduring subject like philosophy, mathematics, history, geography, political science, sociology, etc. If these subjects are highly studied and mastered, then, you would have completed the necessary training for a well-developed intellect. Since people are human, one should teach first about humans, not machines or techniques, perennialists thus place much emphasis on the teacher, no child is permitted to determine his own educational experience because what he wants may not be what he should have. The perennialists believe in the traditional schooling, lecture method that focuses on memorization, and strictly organized classrooms (Desks in rows, students always seated). Here, the student receives knowledge and most times passive about information received.

### **Comparing and Contrasting the Ideologies of Progressivism and Perennialism**

Perennialism holds the view that teachers should teach and focus on issues that are of universal importance to man. Every student is expected to have knowledge of this issue so that it is from this that they can approach other issues that concern them. On the other hand, progressivism holds the view that human beings are social and for them to learn, they have to be in situations where they get to put experience to practice. This will help the students to reason more and will also make them relate with using the right technique in different situations.

Due to the changes that are happening in the world, progressivism believes that the method adopted in its theory will enable students adapt to new ways of doing things through reasoning. Progressivism also ensures that the interests of the students are allowed to be shown while they are being taught. Progressivism will enable students use vital techniques in their approach to knowledge. Perennialism believes that education should be carried out as



a process based on the principles that man is a rational being, as such, the minds of people need to be developed so that they can be able to use it to control their actions. It also notes that knowledge is consistent universally and based on this, the focus of teaching and learning should be on the basic things that will enable them get what they need. More so, perennialism is of the view that the subject matter should be at the centre of discussion. It also views the great works of the past to be used for future knowledge with what occurs presently because it has continued to be relevant today. It sees human nature as being consistent and as such, education should be the same for everyone. It believes that educational experience helps to prepare a person for life when compared to real life experience.

Progressivism when compared to perennialism believes that the process of education should start with the purpose of the child; it believes that when it starts with this, it will enable the child to be active in his or her education. Progressivism ensures that the teacher serves as a right guide to the child. It sees the classroom to be a place where students should be developed for the large society. Progressivism also focuses on problem-solving techniques and it creates a social environment for people to relate with each other in a co-operative manner. Progressivism concerns itself with experiential learning which ensures that children learn by doing what is expected of them through practical activities. It also takes the scientific approach which expects students to give answers to questions by solving problems and thinking critically. It also focuses on intrinsic motivation so as to enable students come out with right results.

Perennialism is concerned about putting in place absolute principles in ensuring that education is given to people. These absolute principles include the view that humans are the same everywhere and their rationality should be used towards directing their nature. The teacher should impart to the students knowledge about issues that will always be relevant so that students will get themselves involved with issues that are permanent. Perennialists believe that: the state of having permanent values is better than enable people focus on what life is all about. They are concerned about this educational behaviour because they believe it will help students in realizing their educational purpose and be stable with their educational behaviour.

Progressivism believes that change and not permanence is the essence of reality. The progressivists believe that education is always in the process of development. They believe that education should be life itself and that learning should be related to the interests of the child which should be done through problem-solving. It believes that school should encourage co-operation and this will help them in the large society and that when this is done, it becomes a necessary means to achieve societal development. The perennialists believe that student should must be acquainted with Western civilization. They be-

lieve that these ideas have the ability to solve problems that could come up in any era. They teach on ideas that are always there and they seek truth which they believe are constant because to them the natural and human worlds at the most essential level are constant. So, to them, it is important to teach such principles.

Proressivists are of the view that students should test ideas through active experimentation. For them, learning is mainly in the questions that the learner brings up based on the experience he has gone through. The progressivists use the scientific method to educate students so that it will enable them to study events in a systematic way. They are able to follow and go through the process. As such, it will be easier for them to know. The progressivists believe that education should help to improve the life of people through what they have experienced. Perennialism shows that nature is constant and tries to base its educational priority on universality of humans and the issues they relate to; while progressivism emphasizes on problem-solving and individual development.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, both perennialism and progressivism, contribute to the development of education as both theories give different ideas that will ensure that education is well used. However, it is the method each of them uses in giving education that is different. Perennialism wants our focus to be on ideas that have always existed and are still relevant today because they believe that when students have such ideas, they will be able to appreciate learning more. It will help to develop their reasoning as well as their moral behaviour. It ensures that there are techniques used which will make the students to be more disciplined. Progressivism on its part has respect for individuality and has an utmost regard for science. Its focus is that students should get education that is relevant to their needs and interests because it is believed that students will learn more when they deal with issues that relate to their needs. The progressivists thus ensure that what they teach is based on the experience, and abilities of the students. They also ensure that students interact among themselves and develop co-operation. They also ensure that students are exposed to scientific and technological development as a means of improving on their social lives to encourage continuous growth. Perennialism teaches the issues that are based on the universal importance of the existence of man. The knowledge which they give is one that will enable students to embrace what relates to the basis of man and how he is the same with others. As such, students are expected to have knowledge of this and use it to ensure development. Progressivism focuses on the students and their interests and provides the means through which students can relate to new happenings. Perennialism concerns

itself with constant and enduring situations which make students to see life as having the same issue from one period to another. Progressivism grounds its own ideal on the fact that what is to be taught must be one that is relevant to the students so that they can learn based on this. The progressivists are more concerned about experiences, the need and the thought of the students. The two theories of education have different ideals which they put forward on how education should be driven, and it is on the basis of their views of educational improvement that they have brought up such ideals.

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**Мохамед Акінола Акомолафе. Між переніалізмом та прогресивізмом: роздуми про педагогічний вибір для ефективного розвитку дитини**

Завдання філософа освіти, представлене кількома проблемами та теоретичними підґрунтями щодо того, який тип педагогіки та навчальної програми відповідає моральному та особистісному розвитку дитини, постулюється різними підходами. У цьому дослідженні ми обрізаємо ці теорії до переніалізму та прогресивізму. Існували різні точки зору щодо того, чи є одне чи інше з них більш корисним для інтересів дитини. Що ж тоді таке переніалізм? Що таке прогресивізм? Що робить кожну з цих теорій переважною педагогічною теорією для дитини? Чи існують точки дотику та / або розбіжності між цими теоріями? Чи обидві вони є обов'язковими для завантаження у свідомість? У цьому нарисі ми стверджуємо, що прогресивізм та переніалізм зображують відтінки істини про навчання та розвиток дитини, яка є унікальною та відмінною для кожного. Оскільки людські суспільства та соціальна свідомість не є однозначними, в поданні цього есе завдання вихователя полягає саме в тому, щоб узгодити будь-яку з двох теорій освіти з прагненням спільноти, де має бути здійснено внесок в освіту дитини. Основними особами для філософського дослідження переніалізму є Роберт Мейнард Хатчінс, Мортімер Дж. Адлер і сер Річард Лівінгстон, тоді як важливими особами для прогресивізму є Джон Локк, Жан-Жак Руссо і, особливо, Джон Дьюї. Переніалізм дотримується думки, що вчителі повинні викладати питання, що мають загальне значення для людини, і зосереджуватися саме на них. Прогресисти вважають, що освіта не може бути сталою і завжди є в процесі розвитку: вона має бути самим життям, а навчання має бути пов'язане з інтересами дитини, що має здійснюватися шляхом вирішення конкретних суспільних і освітніх проблем.

**Ключові слова:** розвиток, педагогіка, філософія освіти, переніалізм, прогресивізм.

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**Мохамед Акінола Акомолафе** – кандидат філософських наук, Державний університет Лагосу, Лагос, Нігерія.

mohammed.akomolafe@lasu.edu.ng

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7765-5038>

**Mohammed Akinola Akomolafe** – Ph.D, Department of Philosophy, Lagos State University, Lagos, Nigeria.

mohammed.akomolafe@lasu.edu.ng

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7765-5038>