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Unit 1.15 Dewey

To teach or not to teach that is the question. Or more specifically, what is the best way to get students to learn and what exactly should they be learning? Ever since schools have been created professionals from all walks of life have been trying to figure out what to teach, how to teach it, and how to make sure what is being taught is learned. Needless to say, not everyone agrees. This “fight” to improve the education of American children and the sides that have been taken can be compared to two boxers taking turns swinging at each other in a ring. And like every boxing match no matter who comes out the victor everyone comes out of the fight with some bruises.

In one corner of the boxing ring is the “traditionalist”. The traditionalist has been trained thoroughly by his coach. His coach is always center stage, teaching him all the information that he needs to succeed. Most of the time the traditionalist is listening and observing the coach as the coach walks around the room. The coach has high standards and a solid knowledge-based education that keeps the boxer on his toes. This coach expects his boxer to be well-rounded in all subject matter and uses rote activities and memorization tests to make sure of it. When this boxer hits the ring, he will know what to do.

In the other corner of the boxing ring is the “progressive” boxer. The progressive boxer has a coach that guides him along as he learns the ropes. The coach is always there when he needs to ask a question or get verification on something but not at the forefront. The progressive’s coach is not fully focused on the subject matter but wants the boxer to be well-rounded and possess qualities that will not only make him a smart boxer but an all-around good citizen. The boxer spends more time doing, than listening and enjoys every minute of it.

As a classroom teacher I understand the importance and impact of both sides of this fight. You want your students to learn what is important but who says what is important? Is it the dates and names of past Americans or is it how to be an honest, empathic, creative citizen? Then, once you think you know what is best to be taught how do you teach it? Should you lecture and drill the students or should you let the students discover the information for themselves using hands-on activities while you observe and assist?

I feel blending both the traditionalist and the progressive way of teaching is essential. I want to tackle my lessons using different varieties of teaching methods. Why can’t I lecture and then allow hands-on activities to enhance what I am teaching? I also want clear benchmarks and standards so I know what I should be teaching and I want to integrate those standards and benchmarks with helping my students become good citizens that the community will benefit from. Will blending both sides together be the best solution to the decline impacting the American Educational system today? Maybe or maybe not but one thing is for sure—we don’t want to bruise the future citizens of America any longer.