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Throughout the history of education many perspectives have been formed. Several of these ideas of have morphed and reappeared into new educational theories. Regardless of the alterations in educational pedagogy, two overarching and conflicting fundamental beliefs remain. Should educators teach to curriculum standards? Or should educators meet the individual needs and interests of students? There are positives and negatives to both sides of this debate.

The traditional approach to education arose in order to meet the needs from the industrial revolution. It closely resembled an assembly line of students receiving information and being expected to absorb it. This was and still is the approach taken at some Catholic schools. "Coleman found that Catholic schools achieve more educational equity than public schools because they follow a rich and demanding curriculum; provide a structures, orderly environment; offer lots of explicit instruction, including drills and practice; and expect every child to reach minimal goals in each subject by the end of the year" (Hirsch, 2001). Along with these ideas, in a classic school setting students are given the same lessons and opportunities as their peers and are expected to reach a certain knowledgebase by a given time. It makes sense to hold students accountable to learn the given curriculum. When everyone is given the same opportunities and expectations, the school is creating a community with the same skill set. This raises some controversy. Even though meeting academic expectations are important, each student is an individual with different passions. Some students may be more artistic as opposed to being gifted in math. Ken Robinson points out that these students feel undervalued because they are not successful with the subjects that are viewed as important. This concept "in a way, dislocates very many people from their natural talent," stated Ken Robinson.

The progressive, constructive, and individualized pedagogy is a belief system centered on the individual student's needs and interests which fosters them to prosper into confident individuals in their learning community. "The most effective schools were those that constituted small communities. Students learned best while engaged in activities that involve creative problem-solving and responsibilities to fellow students. ... Each member had roles, performed tasks, and learned what it meant to be productive citizens. Learning...was not too different from life" (Dewey). When students are learning and growing they feel empowered to continue and succeed. "Constructivist routinely invoke the work of Paulo Feire as substantiation for fostering ideals of empowerment in lieu or teaching content" (Stanley, 2000). However, like most controversial debates there is a negative aspect. The "progressive educational ideas ... have led to practical failure and greater social inequity" (Hirsch, 1997). In order to be successful, in this setting, students must be active learners and intrinsically motivated. Students who do not meet this profile fall behind quickly.

Even after years of modifying and challenging educational pedagogy, the question still remains: Should schools use highly individualized curriculums or should schools focus on curriculum expectations? But what if the question is no longer how do we choose which is best, but rather how do we create strong approach to education? Ken Robinson suggests creating "a system where all schools work together. We have two systems but no one system works for everyone all the time."

In order for future generations to prosper, they need to acquire the knowledge critical to meeting the needs of society. This does not mean that each individual needs to specialize in all areas, but it does mean that each student needs to be held accountable to learning the content needed for a successful future. Each individual needs to feel empowered to pursue his or her future. "There is … considerable evidence with respect to the directive role which environmental stimulation plays with respect to the content of thought…The role of the physical and social environment [amply shapes] the child's self concept" (Harvard Educational Review, Elkind).

Perhaps the best option is to start over with a new model allowing each student to be taught and guided as an intelligent individual.   "The caring teacher strives first to establish and maintain caring relations, and these relations exhibit an integrity that provides a foundation for everything the teacher and student do together"(Noddings). Once this relationship has been established, students can be held to learning expectations, which will allow them to prosper and grow as individual learners. However no educational system is flawless, students ultimately have to be willing and open to learning. "The success of education is almost impossible since the essential conditions of success are beyond our control. Our efforts may bring us within sight of the goal, but fortune must favour us if we are to reach it" (Rousseau).