

DEMOCRATIC SCHOOLS

John Dewey was the primary theorist who had described democratic education. His works on the relationship between democracy and education became foundational material for the broader progressive education movement.

Democratic schools do not have compulsory uniform curricula. Instead, these schools promote learning as a natural product of all human activity. Students are given responsibility for their own education. There is no pressure, implicitly nor explicitly, on students by staff to learn anything in particular. Students are given the right and responsibility to choose what to do with their time and attention. Because the curricula are different for each student, democratic schools do not compare or rank students. There are no compulsory tests aside from those that individual governments require and those that colleges require for admission.

Some schools — mostly in the United States — offer a graduation procedure for those who wish to receive a high school diploma. Students who choose to use this option often must present a thesis on how they have prepared themselves for adulthood.

A striking feature of democratic schools is the ubiquity of play. Students of all ages — but especially the younger ones — often spend most of their time either in free play, or playing games (electronic or otherwise). No attempt is made to limit, control or direct the play — it is seen as activity every bit as worthy as academic pursuits, often even more valuable. Play is considered essential for learning, particularly in fostering creativity. The pervasiveness of play has led to a recurring observation by first-time visitors to a democratic school that the students appear to be in perpetual “recess” [1].

References:

1. Carr, W. and Hartnett, A. *Education and the Struggle for Democracy: The politics of educational ideas* // Open University Press, 1996. – 205 p.

