

A RESEARCH STUDY ON EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY: JOHN DEWEY

Mr. Sunil Kumar

Assistant Professor

Indus College of Education, Rohtak

ABSTRACT

In 1916 John Dewey wrote another powerful book which was written within the framework of how education was to fulfill the needs of society. The book entitled Democracy and Education defined democracy as a way of defining culture. Dewey viewed democracy as a way of government that allows for the members of society to enjoy freedom in a well organized civilization. He refers to the countries that do not use technology and mass elections to govern themselves as "savage".

According to Michael Boucher's research in the Capstone Project, this book was written in a time that World War I was underway and was promised to end all wars. Child labor laws were creating unprecedented need for schools in urban areas where there previously had been no need, and these children were in school to learn the new skills for a new non-agrarian society (1998). The events of the world at the time certainly influenced Dewey's work and helped to fuel his philosophies. Dewey theorized that societies that are more "complex" needed more complex systems to transmit the culture to the young. This transmission takes place through "communication" which comes through the social interaction between children and adults. Education was defined by these social interactions; this transmission of culture. Dewey again associates the existence of society as a living and growing entity in his statement: "Society exists through a process of transmission quite as much as biological life. The transmission occurs by means of ideals, hopes, expectations, standards, and opinions from those members of society who are passing out of the group to those who are coming into it. Without this, social life could not survive".

In his analysis, Boucher feels that Democracy and Education was above all a treatise on the purpose of teaching and it challenged teachers to work on specific areas of knowledge and become scholars in those fields. Dewey felt that teaching critical thinking skills was a far better utilization of education versus memorization of rote knowledge. "He challenged teachers to think and reflect on why they do things and to look at math, science, geography, and art as ways of learning to learn" (1998). Dewey's commitment to democratic education practices at the Dewey School was evidence of these philosophical beliefs. This school was a community of learners. Dewey was not only concerned with developing the minds of students, but also that of teacher's.

INTRODUCTION

John Dewey (1859 - 1952) has made, arguably, the most significant contribution to the development of educational thinking in the twentieth century. He was an American psychologist, philosopher, educator, social critic and political activist. Dewey's philosophical pragmatism, concern with interaction, reflection and experience, and interest in community and democracy, were brought together to form a highly suggestive educative form. John Dewey is often misrepresented - and wrongly associated with child-centered education. In many respects his work cannot be easily slotted into any one of the curriculum traditions that have dominated north American and UK schooling traditions over the last century.

John Dewey's significance for informal educators lays in a number of areas. First, his belief that education must engage with and enlarge experience has continued to be a significant strand in informal education practice. Second, and linked to this, Dewey's exploration of thinking and reflection - and the associated role of educators - has continued to be an inspiration. Third, his concern with interaction and environments for learning provide a continuing framework for practice. And finally, his passion for democracy, for educating so that all may share in a common life, provides a strong rationale for practice in the collaborative settings in which educators work.

In this paper, it is the writers intention to provide the reader with the pinnacle experiences and works of John Dewey that influence the theories and practices of the modern educational community today. This account of John Dewey's life has been researched and composed as a snapshot of the magnitude of his work which began in the 1890s, and became a lifetime of intellectual accomplishments (40 books and over 700 articles, in addition to countless letters, lectures, and other published works) which continue to play an influential role in the many fields of knowledge today.

DEWEY PERUSES HIS DOCTORATE

In September 1882, Dewey enrolled at Johns Hopkins University to begin graduate studies in philosophy. Johns Hopkins was one of the first American universities to offer graduate instruction that was considered comparable to the European universities, emphasizing original scholarly research as an expectation for graduate students and faculty members. Dewey's professors included Charles Sanders Peirce (logic), G. Stanley Hall (psychology), and George Sylvester Morris, whose interest in the work of Hegel and Kant greatly influenced Dewey. Dewey's dissertation, "The Psychology of Kant," was completed in 1884. The manuscript was never published and has never been found; however, an article by Dewey titled "Kant and Philosophic Method," published in The Journal of Speculative Philosophy in April 1884 is believed to cover some of the same material as the dissertation.

PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION

During this timeframe of the late-19th century, many educational programs began to emerge out of the American reform effort called the progressive movement with its philosophies rooted in the works of Jean Jacques Rousseau, Johann Pestalozzi, and Friedrich Froebel. Considered a pluralistic phenomenon, it embraced industrial training, agricultural and social education, and educational theorists' new instructional techniques. The progressives insisted that education be a continuous reconstruction of living experience, with the child the center of concern. (Rugg, 1960) Firmly committed to a democratic outlook, he considered the school a laboratory to test his notion that education could integrate learning with experience. Dewey cited in Edmen's book, *Makers of the American Tradition*, "the advance of psychology, of industrial methods, and of the experimental method in science makes another conception of experience explicitly desirable and possible" (pp. 195-196).

John Dewey's Laboratory School in Chicago (1896-1904), the public schools of Gary, Ind., and Winnetka, Ill., and such independent schools as the Dalton School and the Lincoln School of Teachers College, Columbia, were notable progressive institutions. The University Elementary School or Laboratory School, established by Dewey, grew quickly. Parents were drawn to a curriculum that focused on the child along with the subject matter. The learning process was just as important as what was learned, and where curiosity was encouraged (Brubacher, 1960). Unlike earlier models of teaching, which relied on authoritarianism and rote learning, progressive education contented that students must have an investment in what they were being taught.

CONCLUSION

In Dewey's extensive works throughout his life, he outlined his views on how education could improve society. The founder of what became known as the progressive education movement, Dewey argued that it was the job of education to encourage individuals to develop their full potential as human beings. He was especially critical of the rote learning of facts in schools and argued that children should learn by experience. In this way students would not just gain knowledge but would also develop skills, habits and attitudes necessary for them to solve a wide variety of problems. Dewey attempted to show the important links between education and politics. Dewey believed that active learning would help people develop the ability and motivation to think critically about the world around them. Progressive education was therefore a vital part of a successful democracy as it was necessary for people to be able to think for themselves. Dewey also argued that the development of critical thought would also help protect society from the dangers of dictatorship. Students must be engaged in meaningful and relevant activities which allow them to apply the concepts they are endeavoring to learn. Hands-on projects are the key to creating authentic learning experiences.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Boucher, M. (1998). John Dewey: Democracy and Education. Retrieved October 11, 2003, from Hamline University site www.hamline.edu/~mboucher/capstoneproject1998/dewey.html
- Blewett, J. (1960). John Dewey: his thought and influence. New York: Fordham University Press
- Boydston, J. (1979). John Dewey: the middle works: volume 7, 1899-1924. Carbondale, CA: Southern Illinois University Press
- Campbell, J. (1995). Understanding John Dewey. Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company
- Dewey, J. (1915). School and society. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press
- Edman, I. (1955). John Dewey: makers of the American tradition. New York: The Bobs-Merrill Company, Inc.
- Field, R. (2001) John Dewey: Life and works. Retrieved October 10,2003, from University at Tennessee site: The Internet Encyclopedia of Psychology: <http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/d/dewey.htm>
- InFed.Org. Archives:E-texts. (n.d.). John Dewey: My pedagogic creed. Retrieved October 10,2003, from <http://www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/e-dew-pc.htm>
- Ratner, J. (1939). John Dewey's philosophy. New York: The Modern Library