

Progressive Ideals and Experimental Higher Education: The Example of John Dewey and Black Mountain College¹

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*Universities, like families and like nations, live only as they are continually reborn, and rebirth means constant new endeavor of thought and action, and these mean an ever renewed process of change.*²

When pragmatic philosophy found its voice in education during the years just before and after 1900, John Dewey met widespread agreement with his conviction that experience and individuality could be channeled toward learning that was more meaningful than the usual fare in American schools.³ However, Dewey generally reserved his "progressive" education thoughts and discourse for elementary and secondary schooling. He found higher education an unlikely candidate for change, fuming, "I have never been able to feel much optimism regarding the possibilities of 'higher' education when it is built upon warped and weak foundation."⁴

Nevertheless, as the progressive movement inspired by Dewey and others moved on to classroom experimentation and professional networking, Dewey's ideals of individual freedom and discovery in education caught the imagination of educators in colleges and universities. Fearing the liberal arts curriculum might be lost in a flurry of disciplinary fragmentation and course election that put more emphasis on the development of specialized knowledge and less on the development of students, critics of higher education began to promote progressive experimentation during the 1920's. A variety of distinctive colleges—labeled "experimental" for their untried innovations in teaching and curriculum—took hold at this time, quite admittedly adopting at least some of the progressive principles pioneered by Dewey and his colleagues.⁵

From Deep Springs College in California to Sarah Lawrence and Bennington in the Northeast, and many in between, higher education spawned small and important test cases of individualized student programs, experiential learning in the classroom and community building outside the classroom. One of the most widely publicized and highly regarded of these experimenting endeavors was Black Mountain College, founded near Asheville, North Carolina, in 1933. While the ideals of the progressive movement are

apparent at many of its distinctive sibling institutions, Black Mountain—through direct contact with John Dewey—offers a particularly vivid example of the transfer of those ideals to experimental college settings.

Dewey and the Experimenters

When John Dewey chaired the 1931 "Conference on Curriculum for the College of Liberal Arts" at Rollins College, he pleaded ignorance of the thorny issues to be pondered by the gathering of prominent educators from liberal arts colleges. "All my recent years have been given to graduate teaching," he insisted on the opening morning of the four-day meeting. "I have had practically no college teaching." However, he did allow that the lack of experience might give him "the degree of ignorance necessary to make me a suitable Chairman of this meeting."⁶

Characteristically, Dewey had observed carefully as his own children attended college, and he noted this to the group at Rollins as his most noteworthy source of thought about undergraduate education. Maintaining that his children were offered "a deadly scheme" of six courses, two hours at a time, in their freshman years, he recalled telling them, "I didn't care about their slighting some courses, but I did hope they would find some one thing they were interested in to which they could really devote their thoughts and mental operations."⁷

Dewey's professed limitations concerning his understanding of undergraduate education may have provoked more than a few smiles among the impressive group of educators invited to Winter Park, Florida, to debate the ideal liberal arts college curriculum. Several of them already viewed Dewey and the progressive education movement as a source of insight and an inspiration to experimentation in undergraduate liberal education. Among the probable smilers around the conference table was Constance Warren, president of nearly two-year-old Sarah Lawrence College, a brave and thoughtful experiment committed to progressive ideals in women's education. Also attending—and perhaps smiling—was Beatrice Doerschuk, Sarah Lawrence's academic dean. The college's central commitments to individual student interests and learning settings governed by democratic principles were so rooted in Dewey's philosophy of education that president

Warren eventually would insist, "This college does not claim to have discovered anything new in educational philosophy. The principles of so-called 'progressive education' on which it was founded have long been known and practiced on the secondary school level."⁸

Also present at the Rollins conference was Antioch College president Arthur Morgan, who had recently saved his institution from the brink of bankruptcy with an experimental work-study curriculum that sacrificed neither liberal learning nor preparation for employment. Morgan was fond of quoting Dewey's educational philosophies in *Antioch Notes*, the college periodical he started in 1923. Eagerly supportive of a progressive aim for undergraduate education, he noted of the American college:

Its business is to orient and to integrate personality, to develop the entire mind and character of the student. Unless it sees its vital work and does it, the college will be ground out of existence between the upper and nether millstones of the graduate school and the junior college. All its endowments will but prolong the process.⁹

Dean Max McCann of Lehigh University, Dr. James Harvey Robinson of the New School for Social Research, and Dr. Goodwin Watson of Teachers College were among the other conference participants who could readily trace experimentation in higher education to the spirit of educational inquiry spurred by Dewey's prolific writing and speaking.

Deviation, Adaptation and Experimentation

The conference attendees at Rollins reflected an environment of experimentation that permeated post-secondary liberal education during the 1920's and 1930's. While the student-centered ideals of progressivism contributed at least some of the direction for change, the examples set by educators who tested those ideals in new laboratory schools and in reforms at existing schools also encouraged some college educators to make the transition from vocal to visionary.

The completely transformed Antioch College and the newly founded Sarah Lawrence College soon were joined by additional experimenters. Bennington College in Vermont opened its doors in 1932 with progressive educator William Kilpatrick at the helm of its board of trustees and with a commitment to community ideals, practitioner faculty members, art fully integrated into the curriculum, and self-directed learning. Bennington president Robert D. Leigh noted in his 1929 prospectus document, "Educational Plan for Bennington College," that the institution would follow the lead of progressive schools in adopting the aims of, "individuality, direct experience, serious interest, initiative,

creative and independent work, and self-dependence."¹⁰ Black Mountain College in North Carolina was founded in 1933 with central themes of democratic governance, student interest and independence, art central to the curriculum, and in-classroom experience. Ninety-year-old Olivet College opted for experimental status in 1934 when a new president, Joseph Brewer, replaced its traditional curriculum with tutorials and an emphasis on "allowing each student to find the subject of his particular interest."¹¹ In 1935, Bard College (formerly St. Stephen's) surfaced as an experiment along the Hudson River conducted by Teachers College faculty. Another complete make-over occurred at Goddard College, a traditional college in Vermont which in 1937 recast itself as an experimental learning community.¹²

Several other endeavors during that heady time of experimentation included those prompted by educational philosophies that appeared substantively opposed to Dewey's ideals: Alexander Meiklejohn's Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin, St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, and Robert Maynard Hutchins' College of the University of Chicago. Although the text-centered curriculum of these rigorous programs aimed at training students in "a common stock of fundamental ideas"¹³ and sparked much debate between progressive and neo-classic educators, they shared at least some common ground with the "progressive" experiments centered on student interest. Both types of experiments aimed for an intellectually mature and self-disciplined individual whose education served as preparation for responsible life in a democratic society. Additionally, they converged on issues of interdisciplinary approaches to ideas and the engagement of students and faculty together in teaching and learning.¹⁴ Dewey himself, who became a party to outraged philosophical debates in the press with Hutchins and Meiklejohn, was able to find common ground when he penned a review of Meiklejohn's 1932 book, *The Experimental College*:

Another aspect of this book is its contribution to the art of teaching—its discussion of what goes on, or may be induced to go on, in the contact of mind with mind. To the teacher, the chapters devoted to this topic are most enlightening. . . . It is a contribution to the philosophy of American education. The discussion of the theory is, of course, the more pointed and the more significant because, unlike most such discussions, it comes to us as the philosophy of an actual undertaking, not as a full bolt from the blue of abstraction. Moreover, the educational ideas presented are tied up with a clearly thought-out conception of the nature, the defects and promise, of American culture and life.¹⁵

Admittedly, the spirit of maverick reform and renewal in American higher education was not newly conceived in the progressive education era. But the earlier history of

innovation had largely been a history of deviation and adaptation. The classic British models of higher education were reworked into Colonial colleges. Later, these and newly-founded institutions emerged as universities fashioned along the lines of German models. The earliest land grant institutions were innovative, to be certain, but they adapted to social and economic realities more than they experimented with methods of education. A very different and distinctive early example of pioneering in higher education, Berea College, founded in 1855, was not so much an experiment in education as an important experiment in extending higher education to students from impoverished Appalachian families, including women and blacks.¹⁶ It was left to the experimental colleges of the early twentieth century, however, to go beyond adaptation of other models or deviation in who and what was taught. Those colleges drew from a base of philosophical inquiry about the aims of all education and the place of education in society, and they found strength of purpose in an era that embraced pragmatic applications of progressive thought.

Black Mountain College: Progressive Roots

While John Dewey's inquiry and discourse are evident in helping to establish an environment that nurtured new thought and practice in higher education, his direct involvement is less noteworthy in any specific cases where he may have been instrumental in the founding or flourishing of higher education experiments. However, as a frequenter of conferences and convocations and as a noted listener to others' ideas, he had ample opportunity for very direct contact and influence among higher educators of the progressive persuasion. One of those was John Andrew Rice, the brilliant, audacious and iconoclastic founder of Black Mountain College, whose acquaintance with John Dewey would help to inform and enrich his own thoughts about education, would encourage several campus visits by Dewey, and would lead to Dewey's appointment to the Black Mountain College board of visitors, an informal advisory group.

Rice, in fact, also was present at the curriculum conference at Rollins College in 1931. He was not an invited guest, however, but a member of the Rollins faculty who observed the proceedings from the sidelines. Among his best friends on the Rollins faculty were psychology professor John Malcolm (Mac) Forbes and physics professor Ted Dreier who had been roommates at Harvard and who could both count John Dewey among their close family friends. Forbes had been particularly instrumental in convincing Dewey to chair the curriculum conference. In keeping with a lifelong tendency to bask in his own outspoken candor, Rice later fumed to historian Martin Duberman:

The curriculum conference was taken over by this jackass from Columbia, Goodwin Watson. He had a clique consisting of the president of Sarah Lawrence and her dean. So every time Watson said, "I think it's raining outside," the sun might be shining but they were applauding. So he took over the whole show, and John Dewey never said a word. He just sat and listened. He was a wonderful listener.¹⁷

At Rollins, where he arrived in 1930 after stormy exits from positions at University of Nebraska and New Jersey College for Women, Rice taught Latin and Greek language, literature, history, and philosophy, employing a Socratic manner that encouraged discussions to deviate widely from standard classics fare. With an innovative bent that embraced block scheduling and discouraged lecture and recitation, Rollins seemed an appropriate match for Rice, a former Rhodes Scholar whose Oxford days had convinced him that students were adults who needed to be put in charge of their own learning.¹⁸ At Rollins he could range at will through the type of classroom dialogue that had prompted a student at Nebraska to label him, "the most stimulating student influence at the University of Nebraska and the late '20's," and to recall, "We students used to remark that we were sure, not that Mr. Rice looked like Socrates, but that Socrates must have looked like Mr. Rice."¹⁹

Many, if not most, of Rice's students at Rollins found him humorous, supportive, intellectually stimulating, and caring. Within a few years, however, some discovered his candor could become insensitive and his impatience abrasive. A number of faculty colleagues concluded the same. And when Rice began speaking publicly about what he viewed as administrative hypocrisy at the college (noting, for example, that 30 percent faculty pay cuts occurred while large new buildings were being constructed), Rollins president Hamilton Holt called for his resignation. When it was not forthcoming, Holt terminated his appointment in the spring of 1933.²⁰

Students and faculty took sides; additional faculty were fired for their support of Rice; and a well publicized AAUP investigation followed. Arthur O. Lovejoy, who headed the AAUP on-site team, reported the extremes of Rice's complex persona:

In the Committee's judgment his dismissal eliminated from the faculty a teacher who appears on the one hand to have done more than any other to provoke questioning, discussion, and the spirit of critical inquiry among his students, and on the other hand, to have aimed, with exceptional success, at constructive results both in thought and character. . . .

Professor Rice has unquestionably much disturbed the harmony of the local community and seriously offended a number of his colleagues and other persons. . . .²¹

Rice and several of his dissident Rollins colleagues, as well as a handful of loyal student followers, talked from time to time about education and their thoughts about an improved liberal arts college. The idea of shedding the heavy hand of upper administration was, predictably, high on the list of priorities. Also on the list: Students in charge of their own learning destinies, emphasis on the practice of arts, senior level (approximately second two years) studies devoted to guided projects rather than classes, elimination of grades, the use of outside examiners to approve readiness for graduation, and full community participation in governance.²² Rice was determined that the best way to prepare students for life in a democracy was to help them develop maturity and responsibility of both emotion and intellect. He frequently railed against the German university influence for its emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge, insisting, "What you do with what you know is the important thing. To know is not enough."²³

Particularly instrumental in integrating Rice's experiential learning about higher education with the thoughts of other scholars was his Rollins faculty colleague Ted Dreier. Silver spoon born and Harvard educated, Dreier came from a large New York family of industrial barons, art patrons, and social reformers. The family had been friendly with the family of John Dewey since Ted Dreier was a youngster, and Dreier was intrigued by Dewey's progressive ideals. Dreier arrived at Rollins to teach physics the same year (1930) as John Andrew Rice, and the young Dreier and Rice families became friends and neighbors. The two faculty members often engaged in lengthy discussions about what Dreier later characterized as "our common interests in life and education."²⁴

Although he was not one of those fired in the aftermath of the Rice fracas, possibly owing to the presence of his wealthy aunt, Margaret Dreier (Mrs. Raymond) Robins, on the Rollins board of trustees, Dreier resigned in protest, in principle, and in friendship. He quickly became crucial in the planning and development of Black Mountain College—as a masterful money manager, as a sounding board for Rice's thoughts about education, and as someone who eventually would encourage John Dewey to visit.²⁵

In their deliberations during the summer, the group of former Rollins professors was sometimes joined by Rice's brother-in-law, Swarthmore College president Frank Aydelotte, credited with importing and adapting the Oxford honors system to American higher education. Aydelotte urged Rice to establish a new and experimental college, and was especially encouraging of a plan to enable faculty to oversee the operation without any trustees.²⁶ Other colleagues found a campus—a summer conference and camp facility for the YMCA located near Black Mountain, North Carolina, and available for lease from mid-September through May.

Donors committed \$15,000. A group of 21 students and eight faculty were recruited, including Josef Albers who arrived at Black Mountain from Germany as the first Bauhaus master to immigrate to the United States. On September 25, 1933, two months before the AAUP report would be published to exonerate Rice and censure Rollins, the doors opened on one of the most significant experiments in American higher education.²⁷

Several chroniclers of Black Mountain College have mistakenly emphasized its founding as somehow connected with a search for "community."²⁸ Black Mountain, however, was founded first and foremost as a place of innovation in education. If a sense of community evolved from its small size (never more than 100 students), its relatively remote location, and its use of democratic and participatory principles, that was considered incidental to its educational mission. Rice stressed that the college had little in common with earlier experimental utopian communities because it was not an end for the satisfaction of participants, but a means for education:

One of the difficulties we have here is that the students and faculty come here with the idea that this is going to be an ideal community. And when this idea goes haywire, as it always does, they get disturbed on that score. . . . Here, our job is to have people do what they came to do and then leave.²⁹

Only after he became founder and rector of Black Mountain College did Rice have much contact with notable educational scholars and thinkers of his time. As he attended meetings and conferences, he came to particularly admire John Dewey, Arthur Morgan, and Scott Buchanan and Stringfellow Barr of St. John's College.³⁰ Prior to that time, Rice's education about education came through experience and conversation. At the Webb School, a preparatory school in Bell Buckle, Tennessee, he had learned from his revered teacher, John Webb, a respect for Socratic method and listening above lecturing. As an undergraduate at Tulane University, he had encountered Carnegie units to measure student progress and received what he called "my introduction to numerology in education."³¹ At Oxford, he had noticed that students would work very hard when given substantial latitude, few rules, and individualized academic guidance in pursuit of their education. As a University of Chicago graduate student who never finished his PhD dissertation, he had decided, "Research is the report of what one has found out rather than of what one knows."³²

The Dewey Visits

John Dewey made the first of three visits to the college during the winter of 1935, and John Andrew Rice became

fond of him immediately.³³ Rice decided that Dewey compared favorably to his beloved teacher John Webb of Webb School, later recalling, "John Webb and John Dewey are the only men I have known who never questioned the individual's right to be alive. They took that for granted, and began from there."³⁴

For his part, Dewey found an enjoyable escape in the retreat like setting of western North Carolina's rolling mountains. The Black Mountain campus was set on a gentle slope that yielded spectacular views across a wooded valley to the small town of Black Mountain and seemingly endless ridges beyond. Another early visitor to campus, Henry Miller, later wrote, "From the steps of Black Mountain College in North Carolina one has a view of mountains and forests which makes one dream of Asia."³⁵ On his visits, John Dewey was lodged, like most faculty and students, in the immense main building, Robert E. Lee Hall. With a central portico supported by eight columns—each four feet in diameter and three stories high—the white board and stone structure appeared as a lasting monument to southern plantation architecture. It housed classrooms, offices and dormitory rooms and was surrounded by additional smaller buildings tucked in among the streams and flowering trees profuse on the 80-acre property. John Dewey found himself very far away from bustling New York City. He also enjoyed contact with a close-knit community of faculty and students (by then approximately 45) who ate meals together, put on plays and concerts together, staged art shows and held regular Friday evening formal dances in the cavernous great room of Lee Hall.

John Andrew Rice drew encouragement from what he noted of Dewey's emphasis on teaching and learning, rather than on institutions and movements. When he expressed to Dewey his fear that all the excitement and experimentation at Black Mountain might eventually become pedestrian, Dewey reassured, "As long as you keep your eye on the individual, that won't happen."³⁶

Rice and Dewey shared a concern that good ideas change when they become popular movements, and Dewey found himself frequently warning about the problems of progressive education in the hands of zealots. Pointing out the differences between freedom to learn and anarchy in the schools, he insisted that students cannot mature toward life in society when, "in some progressive schools the fear of adult imposition has become a veritable phobia," and where educators demonstrated "enthusiasm much more than understanding" of progressive concepts.³⁷

When John Andrew Rice had similar concerns, his response reflected his characteristic cynicism. After visiting a number of progressive schools, he wrote his friend and fellow Rhodes scholar Elmer Davis, "Progressive education, when it is stupid, is much more stupid than the other kind."³⁸

He was particularly rankled to hear Black Mountain College called "progressive," a label first attached by an announcement of the college's opening in *The New York Evening Post*, headlined "Progressive Education Becomes Collegiate."³⁹

While Black Mountain College shared progressive ideals concerning the roots of learning, its founders continually struggled to define the boundaries of freedom, to instill responsibility, and to establish habits of discipline. They hit upon the idea of placing art central in the curriculum for just that purpose. Headed by Josef Albers and eventually becoming the icon by which Black Mountain College was best remembered, the art program was envisioned primarily as a route to disciplined processes, and only secondarily as development in creativity or aesthetic appreciation. Rice explained the concept to author Louis Adamic:

Nearly every man is a bit of an artist, at least potentially a person of imagination, which can be developed; and, so far as I know at this moment, there is but one way to train and develop him—the way discovered, not by me but by Black Mountain College as a whole. Here our central and consistent effort now is to teach method, not content; to emphasize process, not results; to invite the student to the realization that the way of handling facts and himself amid the facts is more important than facts themselves.⁴⁰

Rice's vision and Albers' implementation of the art program suited well Dewey's insistence that in-classroom practice and manual training could and should be part of formal education. For Dewey, these ideas were closely allied with his commitment to democracy in education; the practice of art and other manual work should be included because that was where at least some students might have greatest interest or ability.⁴¹ Rice and Albers did not disagree, but went further: the practice of art should be undertaken by all students—be they budding economists, future journalists or promising print makers—to instill habits of discipline and observation.

Students at Black Mountain attended only two required courses: "Plato I," taught by John Andrew Rice as a free-wheeling conversation in front of a fireplace or out on the portico of Robert E. Lee Hall; and Albers' first-level art course in working with materials and form. Beyond those, they chose from studies in music, literature, economics, mathematics, languages, history, drama, and a range of special topics. Each student was assigned an advisor who helped her/him design studies to match interests. Tutorials were used when only one or two students had an interest in an area not covered by available courses.⁴²

Dewey regularly attended Albers' classes when he visited, watching the master artist who could teach so eloquently and effectively with just an occasional word of comment about pieces he had assigned to train students in

the exploration of the most basic forms and materials. On one of his visits, Dewey brought along his good friend Albert Barnes, the noted and eccentric art collector from Marion, Pennsylvania, who was eager to meet Albers. Thirty years later, John Andrew Rice still remembered that Barnes arrived with "the most divine whiskey I've ever tasted, a whole case full of it."⁴³

On another visit to the campus, in 1936, John Dewey attended Rice's Plato class each day for two weeks, but said very little and offered teaching suggestions only when pressed, leading Rice to conclude:

John Dewey was the only man I have ever known who was completely fit and fitted to live in a democracy. He sat and said nothing; but something happened when he was there. . . . He had respect for the process of learning. He had it because he had respect for people.⁴⁴

Dewey's visits to Black Mountain were marked by no seminars or speeches. In fact, Dewey was not known as an inspiring classroom teacher. He lectured at length to his own graduate students, rarely entertaining questions. His material was so well organized that students often found in their notes passages that later appeared verbatim in Dewey's books. One of his students at the University of Chicago recalled a guest lecture by Jane Addams as the single occasion where general classroom discussion took place during a Dewey course.⁴⁵

At Black Mountain, Dewey attended classes, listened in community meetings, conversed with faculty over cocktails or dinner and volunteered little comment about the teaching and learning he observed at the maverick college. His most important feedback to Rice and other faculty very likely was the role model he created—caring enough to fully take part, but too caring to instruct or advise until asked.⁴⁶ Dewey also socialized freely with Black Mountain students. Norman Weston, who had transferred to Black Mountain from Rollins, remembered trips to "Roy's," the students' favorite beer joint in the town of Black Mountain, with Dewey and groups of faculty and students. Weston recalled Dewey as "jolly good company over a beer—warm, wise, and in good humor."⁴⁷

When Rice took Dewey and a group of students to a regional meeting of the Progressive Education Association in Atlanta, the students were surprised by the flurry Dewey caused. However, they saw that the royal treatment did not change the John Dewey they knew when he cut an official luncheon to join them at a beer parlor.⁴⁸

The Serendipity of Effect

It is impossible to accurately gauge John Dewey's impact on education at Black Mountain College or other similar institutions. Clearly, he never actually caused a new and distinctive liberal arts college to start up or take a

particular philosophical direction. However, it is also clear that the experimental colleges of the 1930's and 1940's were progressive in nature at a time when Dewey had called attention to the need for and possibilities of progressivism in education. Their founding philosophies shared Dewey's ideals of learning from student interest and experience and learning for democracy.

When Robert Maynard Hutchins' book, *The Higher Learning in America*, was published in 1936, Dewey took up pen against Hutchins' appeal for higher education that, largely through great texts, aimed at refining the intellect by creating a body of shared knowledge among the intellectual. Several issues of *Social Frontier* recorded the debate. Likewise, John Andrew Rice, debating Hutchins' proposals in the pages of *Harper's*, wrote an eloquent statement about the place of experience in education, including:

Why exclude from general education all but one means of getting experience? Why include what can be printed and leave out what must be seen or heard? To some, Aeschylus and the sculpture of Chichen-Itza are in quality very near together. But we are to exclude one because it cannot be got from a book. . . . It comes down to this: with all experience excluded except the experience of reading and thinking, with observation and experiment left out, the proposed education is to be got through spoken—or what is more remote—printed language. The assumption seems to be that there is a one-to-one correspondence between language and thought.⁴⁹

Undoubtedly Dewey—person, philosophies, or both—helped Rice and other educators give voice to their ideas and practices. Dewey's example, as the philosopher and educator with a decided preference for seeing ideas through to action, helped to demonstrate the possibilities to others. Most simply, Dewey contributed to raising the level of debate about higher education in America and to raising the possibility of experimentation.

To John Andrew Rice, Dewey also was an impressive, unforgettable individual. Notably, for example, until he met John Dewey, Rice almost never—if ever—spoke of the social implications of education. His concerns had been within the classroom and within the institution of higher learning, and he had given scant thought to education's essential role in social democracy, a cornerstone in Dewey's philosophy.⁵⁰ By 1937, however, with a touch of his characteristic audacity, Rice was able to put education in its social and political context to appeal:

We ought to begin to consider education as a thing concerned at least in part with how people feel. If we do not, somebody else will, and all our structure of thought will disappear as quickly as it has in Nazi Germany. There was a country where the universities were concerned with pure thought, where the keenest thinking of the modern world was being done. And yet

not a word was heard from the seats of learning when the house painter appeared and roused the Germans to feeling. While intellection was being sharpened and polished, savagery was going its way, waiting for a chance.⁵¹

The Dewey visits provoked a great deal of thought among Black Mountain faculty about the processes of their work. Shortly after his first visit, Rice suggested the faculty embark on a weekly series of discussions on teaching and learning, with rotating responsibility for chairing and agenda setting. Thoughtful discussions and heated debates occurred as early discussions centered on method, especially the value of lecture versus discussion and the value of limiting feedback on student work. Later topics included "the imperialism of teaching," "boundaries and dangers of personalities" and "deduction versus induction."⁵²

If John Dewey and his progressive ideas had some effect on the thinking of those who helped to found or shape experimental colleges, Black Mountain College offers an instance of the nature of that effect—direct and stemming from personal example, as well as indirect and stemming from prominent debates and institutional examples of the time. When Black Mountain College closed in 1956, it was more for lack of funds, management and unified purpose than for lack of roots in a firm philosophical base.

Of course, if John Dewey had been asked about his role in experimental higher education, he might have demurred about its importance. In doing so, he could rely on a statement he made at the 1931 curriculum conference at Rollins:

All education is experimental, whether we call it that or not. We simply can't help that and we are experimenting with very precious and valuable material in the lives of these young people. We may think or try to convince ourselves that there is not experimental element in the situation, but practically everything we do, every course we lay out, every class we meet, is in its effects an experiment for good or for bad. . . .⁵³

Notes

- Excerpts from an earlier draft of this work were presented at the 1995 American Education Research Association annual meeting as "John Dewey and Experimental Colleges." The author thanks L. Jackson Newell and Frederick Buchanan of the University of Utah, Craig Kridell of the University of South Carolina, and James Wallace of Lewis and Clark College for their comments during progress on this article.
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- See *Democracy and Education* (New York: MacMillan, 1916) and *Experience and Education* (New York: MacMillan, 1938).
- John Dewey in "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," in G.P. Adams and W.P. Montague, eds., *Contemporary American Philosophy* (New York: MacMillan, 1930), 22.
- The philosophies of distinctive colleges founded early in the twentieth century are covered from varying frameworks in Gerald Grant and David Reisman, *The Perpetual Dream: Reform and Experiment in Higher Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) and Barbara Townsend, L. Jackson Newell and Michael Wiese, *Creating Distinctiveness: Lessons From Uncommon Colleges and Universities* (Washington, D.C.: The George Washington University, 1992).
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- Ibid., 3.
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- Arthur Morgan, *A Compendium of Antioch Notes* (Yellow Springs, Ohio, 1930), 220.
- Robert Leigh, "Educational Plan for Bennington College (1929), in Thomas Brockway, *Bennington College: In the Beginning* (Bennington, Vt.: Bennington College Press, 1981), 35.
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- For a discussion of the common elements in progressive and neo-classic education, see Mervyn Cadwallader, "The Uses of Philosophy in an Academic Counterrevolution: Alexander Meiklejohn and John Dewey in the 1980s," *Liberal Education*, 70 (4, 1984): 275-291.
- John Dewey, "The Meiklejohn Experiment," *The New Republic*, 17 Aug. 1932, 23-25.

16. Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977); Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History, 2nd ed.* (London: The University of Georgia Press, 1990); Lawrence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970).
17. John Andrew Rice, interview with Martin Duberman, June 10, 1967 (audiotape in the collection of William C. Rice).
18. Information about Rice's teaching is drawn from letters, memos, and reports in the Faculty Papers, Rice file, Rollins College Archives, Winter Park, Fla., and from the Black Mountain College Papers, Faculty Files, Section III, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, N.C. Rice's philosophy of experimental education is summarized in Louis Adamic, "Education on a Mountain," *Harper's Monthly Magazine* (April, 1936): 516-530, and in John Andrew Rice, "Fundamentalism and the Higher Learning," *Harper's Monthly Magazine* (May, 1937): 587-597.
19. Josephine Frisbie, "Rice Vs. Socrates," letter to the editor in *Time*, 14 Dec. 1942, 9.
20. Warren Kuehl, *Hamilton Holt: Journalist, Internationalist, Educator* (Gainesville, Fla.: The University of Florida Press, 1960); John Andrew Rice, *I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Harper, 1942).
21. Arthur Lovejoy and Austin Edwards, "Academic Freedom and Tenure: Rollins College Report," in *Bulletin of the AAUP* (Nov. 1933), 424.
22. Black Mountain College Papers, Faculty Files, Section III, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.; Louis Adamic, "Education on a Mountain," 516-530; John Andrew Rice, *I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century*.
23. Rice, "Fundamentalism and the Higher Learning," 595.
24. Ted Dreier, interview with the author, April 5, 1993.
25. *Ibid.*; Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain College: An Exploration in Community* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1972); Mary Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987); Katherine Reynolds, "Socrates and Serendipity: Unlikely Beginnings of an Uncommon College," *North Carolina Literary Review* (Greenville: East Carolina University; Spring, 1995): 23-34.
26. Frank R. Rice, interviews with the author, 13 February 1993, and 25 November 1995.
27. Ted Dreier, interviews with the author, 5 April 1993 and 4 May 1994. Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain College: An Exploration in Community* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1972); Mary Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987).
28. See, for example, Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain College: An Exploration in Community* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1972) and John C. Ellert, "The Bauhaus and Black Mountain College," *JGE: The Journal of General Education* 24 (1972): 145-152.
29. Rice, qtd. in Adamic, "Education on a Mountain," 525.
30. Rice, *I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century*.
31. *Ibid.*, 225.
32. *Ibid.*, 297.
33. Dreier interviews; Norman Weston, interview with the author, 13 April, 1993; Rice, *I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century*.
34. Rice, *I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century*, 331.
35. Henry Miller, *Black Spring* (Paris: Obelisk Press, 1936) 286.
36. John Dewey, qtd. in Rice, *I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century*, 324-325.
37. John Dewey, "How Much Freedom in New Schools?" *New Republic*, 9 July 1930, 204.
38. John Andrew Rice, letter to Elmer Davis (1 May 1934), North Carolina State Archives, section III, box 5, Raleigh, N.C.
39. David Gow, "Progressive Education Becomes Collegiate," *New York Evening Post*, 30 Sept. 1933, 3.
40. Rice in Adamic, "Education on a Mountain," 518.
41. John Dewey, "Lecture VI, January 12, 1899," in Reginald D. Archambault (ed.), *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899 by John Dewey* (New York: Random House, 1966) 59-67.
42. Black Mountain College: 1933-34 Catalogue," 1933, Black Mt., N.C.; Duberman, *Black Mountain College*; Grant and Reisman, *The Perpetual Dream*; Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*.
43. John Andrew Rice, interview with Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967 (audiotape in the collection of William C. Rice).
44. Rice, *I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century*, 331.
45. Reginald D. Archambault (ed.), *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899 by John Dewey* (New York: Random House, 1966), xxxiv-xxxv.
46. Margaret Loram Bailey, interview with the author, 10 May 1993; Dreier, interview; Weston, interview; Rice, *I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century*.
47. Weston, interview.
48. Rice, *I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century*, 334; Weston interview.
49. Rice, "Fundamentalism and the Higher Learning," 588.
50. Frank A. Rice, interviews with the author, 13 February 1993 and 6 April 1994; John A. Rice, "Black Mountain College Memoirs," ed. William C. Rice, *The Southern Review* 25 (July 1989) 569-585; Sue S. Riley, "John

Andrew Rice and Black Mountain College" (typescript for a reunion speech, San Francisco, 1992, in S.S. Riley personal papers).

51. Rice, "Fundamentalism and the Higher Learning," 590.
52. Black Mountain College Faculty Meeting Minutes, 7 September 1936; 28 September 1936; 19 October 1936. Black Mountain College Papers, Faculty Files, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.
53. Rollins College, "Curriculum Conference Proceedings," Typescript, 19 Jan., 1931, 8, conferences and meetings files, Rollins College Archives.