Editor’s Note

Welcome, readers, to the latest issue of Education & Culture. This exciting edition brings us five articles and three book reviews ranging across topics including educational reform, academic freedom, teacher education, political theory, Deweyan pedagogy and aesthetics, and, a topic not often addressed by Deweyans (or educational foundations in general, for that matter), the practice of inclusion in today’s classrooms.

Continuing a pattern of late, we open with a piece first presented as the Dewey Lecture at AERA in 2014. Diane Ravitch’s “Does Evidence Matter?” takes a direct and largely critical look at educational reform over the last several decades, highlighting No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, but touching on their antecedents as well. Once a proponent of many of the initiatives associated with these reforms—standards, increased testing, accountability, choice, and competition—Ravitch shares with us her realization, fostered by the Deweyan injunction to “keep thinking,” that such initiatives are doomed to fail and will likely further erode public confidence in public education. For, as she deftly points out, there is no concrete evidence that they will cure any of our current ills (e.g., segregation, debilitating poverty, and a sense of hopelessness in many of our schools and communities) and ever-increasing evidence that they will only make matters worse. Consequently, she calls on all of us who care about the fate of public education to get involved and use our individual and collective efforts and expertise to “join in the work of reclaiming education and improving the lives of children, families, and communities.”

Our next article, Nicholas J. Eastman and Deron Boyles’s “In Defense of Academic Freedom and Faculty Governance: John Dewey, the 100th Anniversary of the AAUP, and the Threat of Corporatization,” addresses a topic that should be near and dear to anyone who cares about the fate of the academy in the era of corporatization. In this piece, the authors discuss Dewey’s pivotal role in the founding of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in 1915 and its Declaration of Principles regarding academic freedom and faculty governance. They argue persuasively that, in the face of increasing corporatization, those in academe would do well to examine Dewey’s involvement with the AAUP, as well as his efforts to serve as a public intellectual in speaking to many issues of the day, in thoughtfully pursuing their own hard-won right to academic freedom while “reclaiming faculty governance for the public good over private interests.”

Jeff Frank’s timely and provocative “What Is John Dewey Doing in To Kill a Mockingbird?” then has us shifting gears to explore and reflect on the possible grounds and motivations behind Harper Lee’s critical portrayal of progressive education (mockingly referred to as the Dewey Decimal System) in this school favorite. As Frank sees it, this at once adds an interesting dimension to our reading of the
book and enhances our understanding of the pedagogical dynamics of progressive 
education in service of both the individual and the larger public good. A related 
theme is subsequently taken up in Cara Furman’s “‘Why I Am Not a Painter’: De-
veloping an Inclusive Classroom.” Here, Furman shares with readers her difficult,
but ultimately rewarding, journey to becoming a more inclusive educator in her 
efforts to better honor all of her students in their varied dimensions. As she ex-
plains, speaking from the margins of educational practice, “It is the story of how a 
community of first- and second-grade students, wonderful parents and colleagues,
and a very wise principal helped me to teach so that each child could pursue a 
broad range of passions. It is a story about how my students, in recognizing one 
another’s passions, created a community where everyone, including the teacher,
was celebrated.” The issue then concludes with Anne Jones and Michael Risku’s 
call for greater recognition of Dewey’s philosophy of art and aesthetics in K–12 art 
education. As the authors argue in “The Butcher, the Baker, and the Candlestick 
Maker: John Dewey’s Philosophy of Art Experience Saving Twenty-first-Century 
Art Education from Limbo,” art educators today face the very difficult challenge 
of validating the arts “as a viable and necessary component of education,” a task 
made even more difficult when modern art theory, in varying ways and degrees,
tears the arts from their origins in everyday experience. Dewey, they contend, of-
fers a fruitful way of addressing such concerns, one that reengages art teachers and 
students with the unique value and “socially shared significance of the arts,” as well 
as the “meaning of what it is to be human.”

Enjoy.

—David Granger
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