

# EDITOR'S NOTE

David Granger

I am pleased to offer for your insight and edification the latest issue of *Education & Culture*. Though this edition is a bit shorter than readers will have come to expect, it does feature a dynamic duo of recent John Dewey Lectures as well as two original contributions looking at Dewey's innovative perspective on the nature of human experience and its continued relevance for both democratic living and sense-making in the classroom.

The issue begins with Ellen Lagemann's 2016 Dewey Lecture entitled "The Continuing Challenge of Progressive Thought: Lessons from a College in Prison." Taking on what seems to be one of the most intractable problems of our day, Lagemann briefly sketches the crisis of incarceration and recidivism in the United States as a lead-in to discussing the promising work of the progressive Bard College Prison Initiative (BPI). BPI currently offers Bard College liberal arts degrees to inmates in six New York State prisons. Lagemann explains that the initiative's success in producing graduates and reducing recidivism is largely a function of its focus on three hallmarks of progressive thought: (1) student aspirations, (2) a pedagogy of engagement, (3) and a strong sense of community among all who are involved in the program. The transformative learning experience that this provides is, sadly, all-too-scarce in public education today and provides a compelling example of what progressive thinking might accomplish in even the most unlikely of places.

We move next to an essay based on Harry Boyte's 2017 Dewey Lecture with the intriguing title "John Dewey and Citizen Politics: How Democracy Can Survive Artificial Intelligence and the Credo of Efficiency." In this timely piece Boyte examines what he believes will be required to provide a positive response to a major question of our day raised by a number of leading scientists: "Will Democracy Survive Big Data and Artificial Intelligence?" Looking to Dewey's 1902 speech "The School as a Social Center," Boyte asserts that the answer lies in fostering "schools embedded in communities as potential 'free space'" for a kind of citizen politics and civic power that might counter the ubiquitous 'Credo of Rational Efficiency' and corrosive Manichean politics of our day.

The first of our regular articles, Kyle Greenwalt and Cuong Nguyen's "The Mindfulness Practice, Aesthetic Experience, and Creative Democracy," might be read as offering a different sort of response to some of the same anxieties addressed by Boyte. Here, the authors explore various elements of the Buddhist mindfulness practice and put them in dialogue with the habits of democratic citizenship espoused by Dewey. More specifically, they look at the possibilities for reconciling

“mindful acceptance of the present with the ameliorative habits of the democratic citizen” as a valuable dimension of a “reconstructed progressive education practice.” Our final contribution is Cara Furman’s “Making Sense with Manipulatives: Developing Mathematical Experiences for Early Childhood Teachers.” Furman begins by pointing out that math provides an invaluable tool for making sense of the world and in a wide variety of experiential contexts. In addition, she argues that the use of manipulatives in early childhood classrooms as a vehicle for “hands-on learning,” while having considerable merit, too often neglects the way manipulatives can help students make sense of mathematical concepts. Extending the point even further, the article closes with the provocative assertion that learning to “make sense is both a democratic right and necessity.”

Until next time, happy reading!

—David Granger

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