

Acknowledging the Fiftieth Anniversary of John Dewey's Death

An Homage from Romania

Compiled by Craig Kridel

Abstract

In 2000, the Romanian journal *Paideia* published a series of essays to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the death of John Dewey. Three articles—by Peter Hlebowitsh, then the editor of *Education and Culture*; Daniel Tanner, then the president of the John Dewey Society; and William Schubert, past president of the JDS—were prepared and translated into Romanian for publication. *Paideia* editor Nicolae Sacalis has contributed an article describing Dewey's influence in Romania. In “The Writings of John Dewey in Romania: Policy and Pedagogy,” Sacalis describes the interest in pragmatism of the Romanian intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s and how Dewey's writings became important to the government's education leaders and school practitioners. Dewey's popularity was so great that a comprehensive overview of his work was published to honor and acknowledge his eightieth birthday. The writings of Dewey were silenced thereafter but not forgotten. His works reappeared in the 1970s for a new generation of Romanian educators, and since the 1989 revolution, his writings have received even greater popularity, leading to the commemoration of his death by *Paideia*.

Introduction

In 2000, I was contacted by Nicolae Sacalis, editor of *Paideia*, who wished to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the death of John Dewey with a series of essays in a forthcoming issue of his Romanian education journal. I recommended to Professor Sacalis that the leaders of the John Dewey Society could be invited to contribute to *Paideia*, and their essays would offer a fitting introduction and expansion of Dewey's writings from an American perspective. Three essays were prepared and translated into Romanian for publication. This issue of *Paideia* was well-received

by Sacalis's readership, and during subsequent conversations William Schubert suggested that JDS members might be interested in reading the original three essays. Also, Schubert maintained, many JDS members would not have necessarily expected a Romanian education journal to commemorate an anniversary date related to John Dewey and would be interested in a description of the "status" of Dewey's work in Romania. After a series of conversations with A. G. Rud, the current editor of *Education and Culture*, Sacalis was invited to prepare an essay describing Dewey's writings in Romania, published here along with the original three essays by Peter Hlebowitsh, Daniel Tanner, and William Schubert.

Dr. Sacalis, university professor at the National University of Theatrical and Cinematographic Arts (Bucharest), director of the Popular University Ioan I. Dalles (an open university institution in the Danish tradition), president of the National Association of Popular Universities (Asociatia Nationala a Universtatilor Populare, a nongovernmental organization), and founding editor of *Paideia* (established in 1993), has maintained a lifelong interest in the work of John Dewey and American education, a topic that caused him some degree of suffering during the Ceausescu dictatorship. He has written of his discovery of books by Dewey in a "special library" while studying philosophy and pedagogy at Bucharest University in 1968. Sacalis states that he made quite a commotion by presenting Dewey's life and ideas in a university seminar, and since that time he has been active working with others in the translation of Dewey's ideas and books into Romanian, including *Democracy and Education*. We thank Professor Sacalis for re-introducing Dewey to a generation of Romanian educators and for inviting members of the JDS to commemorate the life and death of John Dewey.

***The Writings of John Dewey in Romania: Policy and Pedagogy* by Nicolae Sacalis, Popular University Ioan I. Dalles, Bucharest**

William James could be considered the first great American academic to introduce pragmatism to Europe. A French translation of James's lectures, *Le Pragmatisme*, was published in Paris in 1925 and received widespread acclaim. With an introduction written by one of France's most important philosophers, Henri Bergson, *Le Pragmatisme* soon became popular in the intellectual circles of Europe, including Bucharest, and "this American novelty" known as pragmatism began to exert its influence in Romanian culture. Two years earlier, however, John Dewey's *The School and the Child* (*Scoala si Copilul*, 1923) appeared in Bucharest. Translated into Romanian by George Marinescu, director of the Scoala Normala (College of Education) in Bucharest and a very important educator who would soon become a general inspector of the Romanian Ministry of Education, *Scoala si Copilul* represented the Romanian version of the European edition, published by the Swiss psychologist Eduard Claparede, the champion of "new education" in Europe. With an introduction written by Claparede that outlined the innovative pedagogy of John Dewey,

Scoala si Copilul was well received by Romanian teachers and educators and was quickly released in a second printing. From the interest generated by *The School and the Child*, there appeared a Romanian edition of *Schools of To-Morrow* (*Scolile de Maine*), written by Dewey and his daughter, Evelyn Dewey, and translated by George Simeon, who was also a general inspector in the Ministry of Education. Interestingly, the writings of John Dewey were first introduced to Romania not by academics but by two senior-level administrators in the Ministry of Education.

This is not to say, however, that Dewey's ideas were unknown or overlooked by the Romanian intellectual community. Among the most important academics who were examining and discussing Dewey's ideas was Stefan Barsanescu, who, in his monumental work *Unitatea pedagogiei ca stiinta* (*The Unity of Pedagogy as a Science*, 1936), had given a comprehensive account of Dewey's writings. Also, Petre Comarnescu, who had studied in the United States, wrote about Dewey's logic in a 1927 issue of the journal *Revista de Philosophies* (*Review of Philosophy*), and Mihail Ralea, a graduate from the Sorbonne, presented a number of lectures about Dewey and American pragmatism in 1928 at the University of Bucharest. Yet it seems that Romanian teachers and school administrators were well ahead of Romanian academics in learning and implementing the latest American philosophical and pedagogical ideas.

In the following decades American pragmatism in Romania would grow so widespread that in recognition of Dewey's eightieth birthday in 1939 a book dedicated to this special event was published. *John Dewey: ca Pedagog: Viata si Opera* (*John Dewey as Pedagogue: His Work and His Life*), appearing in 1940, offered an excellent examination and thorough introduction to Dewey's life and ideas. It should be noted that the author, Romanian professor Nicolae Cretu, took his Ph.D. degree from a German university (University of Jena). At a time when German influence was predominant in Romania and Eastern Europe, Cretu would actually write an entire book about an American philosopher who was a foe of Nazi propaganda and ideology. Yet Dewey's eightieth birthday represented an important cultural event for Romanian educators. I doubt there were many other countries, if any, that produced a similar work as a celebration of Dewey's birthday.

Dewey's Appeal for Romanian Education

Undoubtedly the presence of Dewey's philosophy in Romanian school and society was related to the growth of urban and industrial society, brought about by the development of Romanian capitalism, and to a more practical and dynamic approach of education and human nature. But with the many very appealing aspects of Dewey's philosophy, his ideas resonated even more for Romanians because we were looking across the Atlantic for a new philosophy as a means to emancipate ourselves from the dominance of Western European culture, especially French and German, and to combat the very active communist ideology that was coming from the East.

Romania had been for centuries on the frontier and at the crossroads of the

great Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, Austrian and Russian empires. And as a frontier country, Romania had borne the influences arising from these major powers but at the same time had always looked for other innovative ideas. Dewey's philosophy and American pragmatism offered such new cultural horizons. Cretu, in his publication, *John Dewey: ca Pedagog: Viata si Opera*, certainly recognized not only the pedagogical importance of Dewey's work, but also the geopolitical importance of pragmatism. Recall that in 1939 the Ribbentrop Molotov Pact was signed and Europe was falling under the control of the two big powers: Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Unfortunately Romania, more than other countries, was squeezed between these two major powers and, like Poland, would lose its national integrity. Dewey's writing seemed to offer a third path between the old classical idealism of the Greek and German traditions, which was very entrenched in Romanian universities and academia, and the new Marxist socialism, which was spreading under the Soviet influence.

For Romanian scholars, pragmatism became not only a new way of thinking but also a different way of acting and a new way of life. Cretu would describe at length the connection between pragmatism and the American character and way of living. The pedagogical implications became obvious as Cretu discussed how in America everybody worked and how the young, the 20-year-old, tended to become independent and leave the family, a social custom that in Romania seemed unacceptable. Further, work, even physical labor, was not embarrassing in America, as it was viewed in Europe, and, as Cretu stated, for Americans "work, responsibility, liberty and dignity call you and get into your soul from all places" (1940, p. 25).

Once these premises were described, Cretu proceeded to discuss the more professional aspects of Dewey's philosophy. The logic of inquiry occupied an important component of his study. Why? Because pragmatism recognized both the role of experience and the role of ideas in the process of knowing, and represented a step forward for Romanian academics in contrast to the old European metaphysical quarrel between rationalism and empiricism. By this new logic of inquiry, Dewey severed the Gordian knot with one stroke, and Cretu, with great joy, proclaimed to Romanians that they could exit from the Platonic cave of ignorance.

Cretu, like Dewey, was not only a philosopher but also a pedagogue and academic. What he admired most were the pedagogical and practical consequences of Dewey's philosophy, which, for him, became "a science of education" and the main instrument to improve the human condition. Ultimately, Dewey's philosophy of education would remind Cretu of Plato's words: "There is nothing more divine than education; only by education does man become a human being" (1940, p. 83). What a beautiful liaison between two great philosophers over the centuries! We should remember, ironically, that these words were written at a time when the hideous and tragic aspects of World War II began to spread through Europe.

The Silencing of Dewey's Works

With the Yalta Accord, Romania would fall under Soviet influence and into a socialist-communist ideology, and during the subsequent Cold War Dewey's presence in

Romania came to an abrupt end. The Soviet pedagogues Anton Makarenko and Ivan Kairov, and Marxist-Leninist ideology, were put in their place. The shift is interesting from a broader perspective, too, since it displays, once again, that politics is often stronger than philosophy. Dewey had visited Russia in 1928 and was welcomed as a great philosopher, and his impressions about Soviet Union had been favorable. At that time, he believed that the Soviet revolution had brought about “an outburst of vitality, courage, confidence in life” (Westbrook, 1991, p. 477). In turn the Soviet state was also eager to emulate certain aspects of America and its achievements.

Later, especially, after his participation as chair of the Trotsky Commission trials Dewey’s ideas would change, and with the Cold War his writings were expelled from the Soviet camp, as Plato was expelled from Syracuse centuries ago. It seemed that the politicians enjoyed the company of philosophers, but only from a distance. Pragmatism was forbidden, seen as a philosophy of American imperialism. Needless to say, in Romania this new ideological orientation was also adopted, and overnight Dewey’s ideas were buried and his books were moved to forgotten library annexes.

This silence continued until the early 1970s when my colleagues Ion Gheorghe Stanciu and Viorel Nicolescu and I published the *Antologia Pedagogiei Americane* (*Anthology of American Pedagogy*), and Viorel Nicolescu and I translated Dewey’s *Democracy and Education* (*Democrație și Educație*). A few years later, *Trei scrieri despre educatie* (*Three Writings about Education* including *The Child and the Curriculum*, *The School and Society*, and *Experience and Education*), edited by Ioana Herseni, V. Nicolescu, and O. Oprica (1977), was released. After years of Marxism, Dewey’s views sounded fresh and innovative. Romania, from the outskirts of an immense empire, was looking for new horizons and new ideas. Policy and philosophy, again, were working together as American thought was at least a part of the Romanian consciousness. Marxism was still the official philosophy but, meanwhile, Dewey’s ideas and works had become part of the common pedagogical wisdom.

Dewey: The Friend of the People and the Friend of Gods

After the revolution of 1989 and the end of blatant political oppression and censorship, there were no longer problems in talking about pragmatism. Unfortunately, however, too many Romanian educators began invoking Dewey’s ideas in what became a fashion. But recent publications are once again attempting to clarify what pragmatism means and its implications for Romanian education. An outstanding anthology of Dewey’s works, *Fundamente Pentru o Stiinta a Educatiei* (*Fundamentals for a Science of Education*), edited by Viorel Nicolescu (1992), was published, and articles about Dewey have appeared, especially in *Paideia*, that are introducing a new generation of educators to pragmatism. I was pleased to published essays by Professors Hlebowitsh, Tanner, and Schubert as a way to acknowledge the fiftieth anniversary of his death. Finally, it seems that the great advocate of democracy has been vindicated, and in Romania democracy has won one more battle. For Roma-

nians, Dewey is more than a philosopher and a great scholar. He is history and politics, and he is a friend of mankind and, as Plato would say, a friend of Gods.

References

- Barsanescu, S. (1936). *Unitatea pedagogiei ca stiinta*. Iasi: Alexandru Terek.
- Cretu, N. (1940). *John Dewey: ca Pedagog*. Institute de Aerte Graphic, Cartea de aur: S.A.R..
- Dewey, John. (1923). *Scoala si copilul*, translated from French by I.G.Marinescu, with an introduction by E. Claparede. Bucuresti: Case Scoalelor.
- Dewey, John and Evelyn Dewey. (c. 1925). *Scolile de maine*, translated by G. Simeon. This book is quite rare due, unfortunately, to the Communists' coming to power. Many libraries were burned, especially those with Western books, and many books of American philosophy, notably *Scolile de Maine*, were destroyed. Some people even burned their own books, afraid, much like those in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Also, "special libraries" were formed where books were deposited, never to be found again.
- Dewey, J. (1971). *Democrație și educație*, translated by N. Sacalis and V. Nicolescu. Bucuresti: E.D.P.
- Herseni, I., V. Nicolescu, and O. Oprica (Eds.) (1977). *Trei scrieri despre educatie*. Bucuresti: E.D.P.
- James, W. (1925). *Le Pragmatisme*. Paris: Ernest Flammarion.
- Nicolescu, V. (ed.) (1992). *Fundamente pentru o stiinta a educatiei*. Bucuresti: E.D.P.
- Stanciu, I. G., V. Nicolescu, and N. Sacalis. (1971). *Antologia pedagogiei americane*. Bucuresti: E.D.P.
- Westbrook, R. (1991). *John Dewey and American Democracy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

John Dewey and the Idea of Experimentalism **by Peter S. Hlebowitsh, University of Iowa**

Widely known as a philosopher of American democracy, John Dewey always possessed a strong interest in schooling. Philosophers historically have made their marks by writing their views on logic, ethics, religion, truth, aesthetics and even reality, but very few have exercised their analytical acumen on the topic of schooling. Dewey, however, could not escape the connection that schooling had to his philosophical views, especially in relation to the concept of democracy; he even directed his own laboratory school at the University of Chicago, a rare activity for a philosopher indeed! Dewey, it should be said, also had substantive things to say about the social currents of his time, including issues related to the suffragette movement, labor unions, birth control, world peace, social class tensions, and societal transformations in Mexico, China, and Russia (Dworkin, 1954). A complete collection of Dewey's works is contained in a thirty-seven-volume work edited by Jo Ann Boydston (1979).

In 1902, based on his work in his laboratory school, Dewey put forth what he believed to be the three crucial factors in the learning process: (1) the nature of the learner, (2) the values and aims of the society, and (3) the wider world of knowledge represented in the subject matter. This was his way of saying that all good teaching must be attuned to (1) the character of learners (their interests, problems, developmental nature), (2) the highest values of the society (democratic principles of cooperation, tolerance, critical mindedness, and political awareness), and (3) the reflective representation of the subject matter (the knowledge in the various disciplines that helps the teacher present material that resonates with both learner and society) (Dewey, 1902). These factors are not discrete, but work together as interrelated and complementary elements. Thus, the learner had to be seen in the context of the society, forcing a consideration of the needs and interests not just of the learner but also of the learner living in a democracy. Similarly, the choice of subject matter in the curriculum had to be made based on what was most worth knowing for a learner living in a democracy.

Dewey's ideas about the school curriculum can be cautiously classified as experimentalist-progressive (Tanner and Tanner, 1987). But how does experimentalism begin to represent a philosophy that identifies itself with democracy? And why the term "experimentalism," which seems to connote some strange association with specialized laboratory techniques? The answer to these questions starts with an understanding of what Dewey saw as the main basis of all education, which he described as that "reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experiences" (1916, pp. 89–90). To understand experimentalism, one must understand this idea. To simplify matters, the "reconstruction or reorganization of experience" is really just a way of saying that one must learn from one's experience in a fashion that avoids repeating mistakes and that contributes to one's ability to make more informed decisions in the future. The implication is that learning is a process of experiential growth, always in the state of becoming and, if properly managed, improving, but never achieving completeness or finality. Such a view of experience, however, does not emerge idiosyncratically. Some method of thinking or a process of intelligence has to be used to help regulate it.

To Dewey, this method of intelligence could be found in the scientific method. The scientific method applied to learning in school has several advantages from the standpoint of an experimentalist. First, it holds all truth up to ongoing inspection, a principle running counter to the conservative belief in the eternal value and truths of the Western canon. The tentative nature of truth puts extra emphasis on the process of inquiry and the use of evidence and reasoned argumentation in decision-making. Second, the scientific method is designed to be responsive to the improvement of existing conditions. It is a problem-resolution method that tests new ideas in the interests of producing improvements. This makes it an elegant method for democracy because it poses problems as opportunities for new understanding and insight. Finally, a scientific method of thinking hones the very im-

portant skills of reflective thinking, a required condition for informed participation in a democratic society. Thus Dewey's insistence on seeing education as a "reconstruction of experience" could be seen as motivated by a desire to teach students a method of intelligence that gives them an effective handle on their personal and public lives. Inculcating students in the attitudes, habits of mind and methods of scientific inquiry could not only give students, as Dewey phrased it, "freedom from control by routine, prejudice, dogma, unexamined tradition, [and] sheer self-interest," but also "the will to inquire, to examine, to discriminate, to draw conclusions only on the basis of evidence after taking pains to gather all available evidence" (1938, p. 31).

The practical consequence of positioning the "reconstruction of experience" in the center of the school experience is a problem-focused curriculum that highlights the importance of inquiry-based learning. This obviously calls for a very different conception of subject matter than what one might witness in a more conservative philosophy. There is no single body of content that claims to have a warrant on intelligence among experimentalists. In fact, traditional subject matter lines are dissolved and are reconstituted topically, according to the problems and the purposes of the educational situation. Because life problems are not easily placed in disciplinary subjects, a premium is put on the interdisciplinary construction of subject matter. The cliché that "knowledge is power" has very definite meaning among experimentalists. The power is not in the contribution that knowledge makes to one's mind, but in its contribution to one's behavior. To know that the act of smoking, for instance, carries certain side effects that increase the odds of contracting serious illness can be interpreted as mindful knowledge (one could know it, but still smoke) or as knowledge that exists in the actions of life (one knows it and acts accordingly). The experimentalists stake their claim with the latter.

The focus on behavior is especially important, because as a philosophy of democracy, experimentalism ultimately judges the effects of schooling against some standard of betterment or progress in the life experience. This is a principle associated with the roots that experimentalism has in a broader philosophical tradition known as pragmatism. The pragmatist's prejudice is to affect the here and now, to look at life as a matter of present significance, and not as a matter that has some ultimate judgment at the pearly gates of heaven or some other transcendental place. This is a way of keeping focused on experience and on the kind of intelligent conduct that will produce the prize of progress. The whole child must be educated, not just his or her mind. The curriculum, as a result, is comprehensive in its ambition, is interdisciplinary in its overall organization, and is activity-based in its sense of experience. And because the school is the engine of democracy, considerable emphasis is placed on the value of the shared experience and the communion of values, outlooks and problems that helps to amalgamate the nation as a people of democracy. To Dewey, democracy was less a political concept than a moral one. Dewey, in this sense, became the chief voice for the values and morals of American pragmatism, a role that likely led George Herbert Mead to observe

that “in the profoundest sense John Dewey is the philosopher of America” (Morris, 1970, p. 8).

References

- Boydston, J.A. (Ed.). (1979). *The complete works of John Dewey*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Dewey, J. (1902). *The child and the curriculum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. New York: Free Press.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Dworkin, M. (1954). *Dewey on education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Morris, C. (1970). *The pragmatic movement in American philosophy*. New York: George Braziller.
- Tanner, D. & Tanner, L. (1987). *The history of the school curriculum*. New York: Macmillan.

Some Thoughts on John Dewey

by Daniel Tanner, Rutgers University

“It should be a commonplace, but unfortunately it is not, that no education—or anything else for that matter—is progressive unless it is making progress.”

So wrote John Dewey in his last piece of published writing before his death on June 1, 1952 (Clapp, 1952). Dewey proceeded to review some of the successes of progressive education, but he also noted the lack of progress in many quarters, and the difficult road ahead for the democratic transformation of school and society.

Fallacies and Failures of Dualistic Thinking

For Dewey, the progressive education movement, as part of the wider democratic social movement, can never rest as long as it is committed to the improvement of the human condition. Throughout his life, he exposed the contradictions and conflicts of dualistic thinking, which impeded the method of intelligence and prevented problem resolution and solution. He prophetically exposed the Soviet fallacy in holding that democratic ends would emerge from undemocratic means. He exposed the fallacy in the belief that restrictions on civil liberties are necessary to protect American democracy and that gains in social welfare are made at the expense of individuality. In the present-day wake of international terrorism, the American public is led to believe by its leaders that security can only be protected through sacrifices in civil freedoms. But Dewey made it clear that democracy is the best guarantor of freedom and security.

Dewey advanced the needed interdependence of knowledge and exposed the hazards of knowledge dualism—such as the divorce between the sciences and hu-

manities—decades before C. P. Snow addressed the issue and exposed its inevitable losses to humanity if the branches of knowledge are isolated or set against one another.

He warned researchers in the behavioral sciences against setting a divide between qualitative and quantitative research in educational investigation, for he held early in the twentieth century that all research must be grounded on an intellectually coherent and inclusive system of ideas of quality and must employ appropriate techniques if the results are to attain generalized significance.

Nature of the Learner

John Dewey orchestrated a theory of democracy and education on a global scale. Yet some of his deepest and farthest-reaching insights and realizations on human nature and behavior grew out of his observations of children in his brief work in his laboratory school. Just imagine a curriculum built upon what Dewey identified as the four impulses of children—the social, the investigative, the constructive, and the expressive/artistic—or what may be termed the fourfold functions for developmental learning.

Dewey anticipated Piaget by decades—and he went further, for he systematically interrelated the design and function of the school curriculum to child and adolescent development. He anticipated and contributed to the emergence of modern cognitive/developmental psychology in answer to the warring sects in psychology that impeded progress in understanding the nature of the learner in a free society.

Transformation of the Curriculum into the Working Powers of Intelligence

John Dewey systematically conceived of and demonstrated the means for constructing the school curriculum so as to advance the learner's growth in the processes of reflective thinking or in the method of intelligence for the social and personal problem-solving necessary for productive citizenship in a democracy. He conceived of education as the process through which experience is reconstructed for growth in the meaning of experience, and in advancing the ability to direct the course of subsequent experiences. Hence the process of education empowers the learner in the control of his/her destiny by transforming the curriculum into the working power of intelligence. He provided educators with a paradigm revealing how the success or failure of educational reform hinges on the extent to which the curriculum is in harmony with the nature and needs of the learner and the democratic prospect.

Many authorities on Dewey fail or refuse to recognize that what they regard as his greatest single work, *Democracy and Education* (1916), systematically integrates educational theory and democracy through the very structure and function of the school curriculum. Indeed, he defined philosophy as the general theory of education. Through education and its agency of curriculum, the rising generation develops its fundamental intellectual, emotional and instrumental dispositions toward life in all of its manifestations.

Education and the American Creed

More than any other figure of the past century, Dewey promoted and strengthened the belief in education as the principal conclusion of the American creed. Among the multitude of cultures that find conflict in American and global society, Dewey envisioned an overarching intercultural education to build a sense of unity through diversity.

He conceived of community not as a group set against other groups by special interests, but as a cosmopolitan association of people who draw their strength through finding common cause through their diverse talents. He never doubted the democratic prospect and was an activist for virtually every democratic social movement—educational opportunity, human rights, child welfare, academic freedom, and social justice. He advised his fellow philosophers that they should study the problems of humanity rather than the problems of philosophy.

Throughout his life and over the course of a half-century since his passing, John Dewey has been vilified, honored, betrayed, vindicated, attacked and defended. But when all is said and done, he gave America and the world the most provocative, comprehensive, and powerful vision for human progress through democracy and education for the twenty-first century. He was a man for his times and a man for all times. He knew full well that progress is never made. By its very nature, progress is in the making.

References

- Clapp, E. R. (1952). *The use of the resources in education*. New York: Harper & Row.
 Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. New York: Macmillan.
 Tanner, D. & Tanner, L. (1987). *The history of the school curriculum*. New York: Macmillan.

Teaching John Dewey as a Utopian Pragmatist While Learning from My Students

by William H. Schubert, University of Illinois-Chicago

When I speculate on the major contributions of John Dewey to education, I think of his integration of dualisms, his unification of theory and practice in principled action, and his utopian vision. As a professor in the area of curriculum studies, I try to teach these three dimensions of Dewey to graduate students.¹ Sometimes, to generate student interest in a lecture on Dewey, I semi-jokingly claim to have psychic powers that enable me to get in contact with the spirit of Dewey. After the blinking of classroom lights and asking the class members to chant Dewey's name several times, I find myself depicting Dewey's life and ideas as if his spirit has taken over my voice. While space here does not permit an elaborate rendition of this rather bizarre act of teaching, I will simply relate the three above-mentioned contributions. I do want to note, however, that on many occasions my students have taught me much about how to teach about (and *to be*, in the case of role-playing) John Dewey.

For each of Dewey's contributions that I want to mention below, I will show how a student has enlightened me about that dimension. To learn from one's students is clearly a hallmark of Dewey's philosophy of education. To listen to the strengths brought into class by students has, for me, been a dynamic source of ideas over the years. The inspiration of student insights illustrates the value of beginning with Dewey's *psychological* (i.e., the interests and concerns that students derive from experience) and its relation to Dewey's *logical* (i.e., organized knowledge, disciplinary and personal-practical). Because of my own study and experience (Deweyan *logical*), I can often add to student interests and concerns (Deweyan *psychological*) to help an idea evolve through subsequent pedagogical relationships.

In the mid-1980s, a graduate student, Charles Smith, told me about an undergraduate philosophy class he had taken at another university. In that class the professor (whose name I do not know) suggested a strategy for understanding the significance of Dewey's contributions to education and philosophy. His message was to simply substitute the word *is* for the word *and* in Dewey's book titles. I tried it and thought it enlightening.

I thought of my long study of Dewey's life and work. Many of Dewey's book titles are, indeed, two key words or concepts joined by the conjunction *and*. Take, for instance, his educational *magnum opus*, *Democracy and Education* (1916), wherein the message becomes democracy *is* education, and conversely, education *is* democracy. Let us consider his earlier books, derived from the renowned laboratory school that he designed and developed at the University of Chicago from 1896 to 1904. Converting those titles, we have the school *is* society and society *is* the school from his classic 1900 book, *The School and Society*. From the 1902 companion book, *The Child and the Curriculum*, we are spurred to ponder meanings of the child *is* (perhaps even read *as*) the curriculum and the curriculum *is* the child. Much later, in his retrospective look (*Experience and Education*, 1938) at what happened in his name under the label of *progressive education*, Dewey argued that the issue runs deeper than a mere contention between advocates of progressive education and traditional education. He and philosopher of education Boyd H. Bode of Ohio State University separately were loan advocates who attempted to resolve the dualism that ultimately divided and broke the spirit of the progressive education movement, and with it the Progressive Education Association (PEA). Some members of the PEA advocated child-centered (or child study) as the organizing center of their work, while others called for social reconstruction.² Again using the *is-for-and* strategy in Dewey's 1938 call for unity, we should consider the deeper meanings of education *as* (or *being*) *experience* and reciprocally the question could become: What if we come to see that experience itself *is* education?

Broader ramifications of this *is-for-and* strategy can be traced in Dewey's corpus of philosophical works; consider for instance the idea that character *is* event when reflecting on Dewey's essays from the *New Republic* and elsewhere, published under the title *Characters and Events* (1929). Think, too, of the ramifications of experience being nature, and nature as experience, in his *Experience and Nature*

(1929), perhaps the closest he came to writing a metaphysical statement. Or consider his metaphysics of human beings (*Human Nature and Conduct*, 1922), which could inspire a discontinuance of the image that human nature is not merely the fount from which conduct flows, but that human nature *is* in fact conduct. Indeed, if pragmatist Dewey aligned firmly with pragmatist predecessor Charles Sanders Peirce's admonition that the meaning of a proposition resides in the consequences of acting on it, it would seem to clearly follow that conduct is the truth or meaning of human nature. What we do is what we are. The *is-for-and* strategy continues to challenge us along the same lines when we consider Dewey's *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935), as we observe that liberalism (to be more than shallow rhetoric) must be known by the instantiated social action that it *is*. Similarly, thinking of *The Public and Its Problems*, it is not the public over here and the problems it faces over there; rather, it is the larger vision of public that creates and incorporates problems, must struggle with them, and tentatively strives to resolve them. Finally, Dewey's *Philosophy and Civilization* (1931) and *Freedom and Culture* (1939) stimulate similar integrations of potential dualisms. Can there be genuine culture that *is* not free? Can there be renditions of civilization that *are* not couched in philosophy? Can life be truly civilized only if it *is* philosophically reflective as it continues to re-create itself? Clearly, one could take the *is-for-and* strategy too far, but within proper balance it is a pedagogical heuristic that I think valuable for extending the spirit of Dewey.

In the early 1990s Ann Lopez wrote her Ph.D. dissertation on an investigation of Deweyan progressive practices in three contexts of urban education: an inner city school, a dance school, and a home-based education project. As revealed in the above integration of dualisms, Lopez helped me understand more fully that theory and practice were *one* in the course of action. One must look at, even embody or take into oneself, the action in order to understand the theory implicit in it (Lopez, 1993). Again, we can return to Peirce's notion that the meaning of a proposition resides in the consequences of acting on it, and in Dewey's reconstructed titles character is event, human nature is conduct, liberalism is social action, education is experience, democracy is education, the school is society, and the child is the curriculum. It may not be mere coincidence that George Dykhuizen's *The Life and Mind of John Dewey* (1973), a long-time definitive source for details of Dewey's life, also has *and* in the title. If this *and* were converted to *is*, it could imply the existence of mind that encompasses life and/or the existence of life that is only made alive by the mind embedded in it.

In any case, to understand the philosophy of John Dewey, we must see Dewey as a public intellectual who took difficult and controversial stances that illustrate (no, perhaps that *are*) his philosophy. When he created the Dewey School (lab school), his philosophy was to integrate philosophy, psychology, and pedagogy in practice. When he worked with the founder of social work, Jane Addams, at her settlement house (Hull House) in Chicago, his philosophy embodied the struggle of the poor and oppressed for a better life. When he left Chicago for New York and

Columbia University in 1904, his philosophy was a statement of resistance against an inappropriate coupling of teacher training with the experimental derivation of educational ideas. By opening the door of his New York home to Maxim Gorky in 1906, he illustrated a courageous philosophical stance in the face of many American authorities, who saw Gorky as a radical socialist striving for support for causes deemed immoral and un-American. More of the political and economic strands of his philosophy were revealed as he helped to found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909, the American Association of University Professors in 1915, and the American Federation of Teachers in 1916, and to promote the Women's Suffrage Movement from 1906 to 1919. In 1929, Dewey became president of the People's Lobby and chair of the League for Independent Political Action, and in 1937, he served as a member of the Commission of Inquiry into the Charges against Leon Trotsky, who was exiled in Mexico. He traveled widely to lecture and consult for extensive periods of time in other countries, e.g., Mexico, Turkey, China, Japan, and Russia, as well as visits to several European countries. Frequently, Dewey defended the rights of both citizens and visitors to the United States to express ideas that even he disputed, such as those of Bertrand Russell on marriage and morals.

All of these actions, and many more, reveal deeply lived dimensions of Dewey's philosophy. I try to teach students that what his pragmatism or progressivism in education meant must be seen in actions he took as well as in books and articles he wrote. Sometimes, personal actions can be more revealing than political stances. Between the time Dewey left Chicago for Columbia, his family took an extended trip to Europe, where his eight-year-old son, Gordon, tragically died from typhoid fever; on the same trip they adopted an eight-year-old Italian boy, who became a full member of their family, and much later (in his seventies) a Vietnam War protestor. When Dewey was in his late eighties, he and his second wife were distressed at the plight of children orphaned in Europe during World War II, and they adopted two children, a brother and sister from Belgium. Again, Dewey's life is the story of his philosophical conviction, the theory embodied in his action.

Finally, I want to mention a little-known article that Dewey published in the *New York Times* in 1933.³ The article is titled "Dewey Outlines Utopian Schools." It was introduced to me by a former doctoral student, Michael Klonsky, who has become director of the Small Schools Workshop in Chicago, a consultancy that helps schools in Chicago and throughout the United States to divide into small, more meaningful communities. Klonsky was intrigued by a point in the second paragraph of the piece wherein Dewey said that the educational environments he saw in his utopian vision housed "not much more than 200 people, this having been found to be about the limits of close, interpersonal acquaintance on the part of people who associate together." While Klonsky valued a source of legitimacy from a renowned philosopher for his small school efforts, I was more interested in other matters that Dewey found in his venture into educational utopia. There is much to build on in Dewey's short article, and I hope to do a much longer treatment of this

document. However, I see the main idea behind it as a radical critique of the competitive economic system that sustains most state, private, and parochial schools as we know them throughout the world today. In essence, Dewey finds that the great culprit behind nondemocratic education is the *acquisitive society*. An attitude of acquisition—the capitalistic ethos, if you will—penetrates our being in ways we scarcely realize. It staunchly prevents the kind of education that Dewey proposes as most desirable.

I use the term *education* instead of *school*, because Dewey's utopian vision holds that the teaching-learning environments that would bring greatest growth are not schools as we know them. His first sentence, in fact, is: "The most Utopian thing in Utopia is that there are no schools at all." He goes on to describe beautiful places where children and adults can grow together, where the very idea of purposes or objectives is not in the vocabulary, where instructional method is not necessary because learning is natural and needs to be nurtured rather than restricted, and where standardization and the surveillance of testing are anathema. The contemporary (then and now) form of education in the sorting machinery of schools (with its standards, goals, tests, and sordid comparisons) is a function of acquisitiveness. The remedy for this mis-educational state of affairs Dewey learned from the Utopians: "they said that the great educational liberation came about when the concept of external attainments was thrown away and when they started to find out what each individual person had in him from the beginning, and then devoted themselves to finding out the conditions of the environment and the kinds of activity in which the positive capacities of each young person could operate most effectually."⁴

In honor of the fiftieth year since John Dewey died, I advocate that we devote great energy to understanding why we are so far removed from his utopian vision, and much more importantly, how we can move toward it with courage and dedication.

Notes

1. See Schubert (1986) and Schubert, Lopez-Schubert, Thomas, and Carroll (2002) for elaboration on how I have developed a Deweyan perspective in the teaching of curriculum studies.

2. See Bode (1938).

3. First published in *New York Times*, April 23, 1933, Education Section, page 7 from an address on April 21, 1933 to the Conference on the Educational Status of the Four-and Five-Year-Old Child at Teachers College, Columbia University. Now available in Dewey, *The Later Works, 1925–53* (vol. 9, 1933–34), edited by J.A. Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989).

4. *Ibid.*, page 139.

References

- Bode, B.H. (1938). *Progressive education at the crossroads*. New York: Newson.
 Dewey, J. (1900). *The school and society*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.
 Dewey, J. (1902). *The child and the curriculum*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.
 Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. New York: Macmillan.
 Dewey, J. (1922). *Human nature and conduct*. New York: Henry Holt.

- Dewey, J. (1927). *The public and its problems*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Dewey, J. (1929). *Characters and events*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Dewey, J. (1929). *Experience and nature*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Dewey, J. (1931). *Philosophy and civilization*. New York: Minton, Balch & Co.
- Dewey, J. (1933). Dewey outlines utopian schools. *New York Times*, April 23.
- Dewey, J. (1935). *Liberalism and social action*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Dewey, J. (1939). *Freedom and culture*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- Dykhuisen, G. (1973). *The life and mind of John Dewey*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Univ. Press.
- Lopez, A.L. (1993). *Exploring possibilities for progressive curriculum and teaching in three urban contexts*. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Illinois at Chicago.
- Nathanson, J. (1951). *John Dewey: The reconstruction of the democratic life*. New York: Frederick Ungar.
- Schubert, W.H. (1986). *Curriculum: Perspective, paradigm, and possibility*. New York: Macmillan.
- Schubert, W.H., Lopez-Schubert, A.L., Thomas, T.P., and Carroll, W.M. (2002). *Curriculum books: The first hundred years*. New York: Peter Lang.

Craig Kridel is a professor of educational foundations and curator of the Museum of Education at the University of South Carolina. Email: craigkridel@mindspring.com.