


 The logo for 'insights' features the word 'insights' in a serif font. The 'in' is lowercase and enclosed within a dark grey circle, while 'sights' is in a larger, all-caps serif font.

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 Editorial: Dewey as Teacher

Jon Bradley

"What shall I do to be forever known;
 And make the age to come my own?"
 (Abraham Cowley, 1618-1667, *The Motto*)

I have always enjoyed the brashness of senior teacher education candidates. For the most part, these are bright, creative and academically sound young people who have chosen to make classroom teaching their career. Generally, they are often idealist in their opinions, and tend to view situations in blacks and whites as opposed to the many coloured hues that come with age and experience.

Jennifer was quite agitated. "Damn! Why could the man not just say things in a simple and straightforward manner? I am not asking much, you know, a little clarity would have gone a long way here!" Jennifer's angst was directed at an article by John Dewey. Struggling with his less than linear language and wandering mode of inquiry, Jennifer and her group were grappling to not just make sense but to rephrase his central tenets for an upcoming class presentation.

I must admit to a little bit of self-serving smugness as I listened in on Jennifer and her small group as they debated and attempted to place this Deweyan notion into their twenty-first century still evolving professional world. Reading Dewey can indeed be a challenge for some while others seem to lose themselves in his thoughts and processes. As I prepared to steal away to eavesdrop on another group, Jennifer again burst forth with: "I bet he was a lousy teacher himself. He probably put his own students to sleep!"

Interesting, I pondered: "What was Dewey like as a teacher?" I knew, for example, that his own public school teaching experience

had been a very brief two or three year sojourn and that "as he had had no professional training or practice in classroom teaching, his inexperience must have at times been apparent to teacher and students alike" (Dykhuizen, 1973, page 21). However, Dykhuizen goes on to note that "reports from former students indicate that Dewey was well-liked and respected by his students" (page 21). In a somewhat contrary view, Westbrook (1991) has noted that "by conventional standards, he was a miserable teacher" (page 378) while Rockefeller (1991) sardonically states that "he did not have the reputation of being an exciting lecturer" (page 276).

Irwin Edman (1896-1954) attended several Dewey lectures while a junior graduate student at Columbia in 1915. At that time, Dewey would have been in his mid-fifties and well-known to both the academic and non-academic worlds through his many publications and speeches. Taken from a chapter titled "Former Teachers" (*Philosopher's Holiday*, 1938), the following rather long and rambling remembrance still resonates today. Edman does more than simply provide a snapshot of Dewey; he demonstrates Dewey's magnetism and insight as a teacher. In the final analysis, Edman presents a most intimate and first-person portrait of Dewey the teacher.

"A figure more widely known outside purely academic circles was and is John Dewey. In 1915 his name was already, if not a household, certainly a schoolroom word. His *How We Think* was used in all the normal schools of the country, and even fashionable ladies dipped into his far from easy books. I had read almost all of Dewey I could get a hold of by the time I was a

senior, but it was not until my first year as a graduate student that I heard, or, I believe, saw him. His familiar figure and speech, seeming at first that of a Vermont farmer, the casual gait, the keen but often absent eyes, seem so familiar now that I can scarcely believe I did not know them before.

I admit the first lecture was quite a shock, a shock of dullness and confusion, if that can be said. It was at any rate a disappointment. I had not found Dewey's prose easy, but I had learned that its difficulty lay for the most part in its intellectual honesty, which led him to qualify an idea in one sentence half a page long. In part also it lay in the fact that this profoundly original philosopher was struggling to find a vocabulary to say what had never been said in philosophy before, to find a diction that would express with exactness the reality of change and novelty, philosophical words having been used for centuries to express the absolute and the fixed. Once one had got used to the long sentences, with their string of qualifying clauses, to the sobriety, to the lack of image and of colour, one sensed the liberating force of this philosophy. Here was not an answer but a quest for light in the living movement of human experience; in the very precariousness of experience there lay open to the perplexed human creature the possibilities that peril itself provocatively suggested. I had found here, as have so many of my generation, a philosophy that, instead of laying down a diagram of an ideal universe that had nothing to do with the one of actual human doings and sufferings, opened a vision of conscious control of life, of a democracy operating through creative intelligence in the liberation of human capacities and natural goods. In *How We Think* I had learned that thinking itself was simply a discipline of the animal habit of trial and error, and of the possible human habit of imagination and foresight. In *Democracy and Education* I had gathered that it was

not in the forms of democratic government that true democracy lay, but in the substance of intelligent co-operation, largely dependent on education. Dewey was not easy, but once one had mastered his syntax, a vision of a liberal and liberated commonwealth was one's reward, and a philosophy that was not only a vision but a challenge.

I was naturally prepared, therefore, to expect something of intellectual excitement from the lectures in "Psychological Ethics." Intellectual excitement was the last term to describe what I experienced that September afternoon. The course came, in the first place, directly after lunch. It was well attended; there were even more fashionably dressed society ladies, for Dewey had become a vogue. But this famous philosopher who had written so much on "Interest in education," as the essence of the educational process, could not, save by a radical distortion of the term, be said at first hearing to sound interesting. He had none of the usual tricks or gifts of the effective lecturer. He sat at his desk, fumbling with a few crumpled yellow sheets and looking abstractedly out of the window. He spoke very slowly in a Vermont drawl. He looked both very kindly and very abstracted. He hardly seemed aware of the presence of a class. He took little pains to underline a phrase, or emphasize a point, or, so at first it seemed to me, to make any. Occasionally he would apparently realize that people in the back of the room might not hear his quiet voice; he would then accent the next word, as likely as not a preposition or a conjunction. He seemed to be saying whatever came into his head next, and at one o'clock on an autumn afternoon to at least one undergraduate what came next did not always have or seem to have a very clear connection with what had just gone before. The end of the hour finally came and he simply stopped; it seemed to me he might have stopped anywhere. But I soon found that it

was my mind that had wandered, not John Dewey's. I began very soon to do what I had seldom done in college courses – to take notes. It was then a remarkable discovery to make on looking over my notes to find that what had seemed so casual, so rambling, so unexciting, was of an extraordinary coherence, texture, and brilliance. I had been listening not to the semi-theatrical repetition of a discourse many times – a fairly accurate description of many academic lectures – I had been listening to a man actually *thinking* in the presence of a class. As one became accustomed to Dewey's technique, it was this last aspect of his teaching that was most impressive – and educative. To attend a lecture of John Dewey was to participate in the actual business of thought. Those pauses were delays in creative thinking, when the next step was really being considered, and for the glib dramatics of the teacher-actor was substituted the enterprise, careful and candid, of the genuine thinker. Those hours came to seem the most arresting educational experiences, almost, I have ever had. One had to be scrupulously attentive and one learned to be so. Not every day or in every teacher does one overhear the palpable processes of thought. One came to enjoy and appreciate the homely metaphor, "the fork in the road," the child and his first attempts to speak, the New England town meeting, instead of the classical images one had been accustomed to from more obviously eloquent lips. Moreover, if one listened attentively one discovered apophthegm and epigram delivered as casually and sleepily as if they were clichés. I remember one instance. It had been rather a long lecture designed to show that the crucial tests of the morals of a group came in what that group regarded as violations of its conventions. The bell rang. Professor Dewey began to crumple up his notes. "And so," he said, "I think sometimes one can tell more about the morals of our society from the inmates of its jails than

from the inmates of its universities.” The student next to me who had been semi-dozing stirred in half-alarmed surprise.

I learned later in a seminar to see Dewey’s greatest gifts as a teacher, that of initiating inquiry rather than that of disseminating a doctrine. The subject matter of the seminar was innocent enough and removed from the immediacies of current controversy. It was a year’s course, meeting every Tuesday afternoon, on “The Logic of John Stuart Mill.” The seminar remains in my memory, it must be added, not simply for John Dewey or John Stuart Mill. It consisted, looking back on it and indeed as it appeared then, of a very remarkable group. It included two now well-known professors of philosophy, Brand Blanshard of Swarthmore College and Sterling Lamprecht of Amherst, Paul Blanshard, later to become Commissioner of Accounts under Mayor La Guardia, and Albert C. Barnes, the inventor and manufacturer of Argyrol and collector of French paintings, even then a grey-haired man who used to come up from Philadelphia every week with his secretary expressly to study philosophy with his friend John Dewey.

I do not suppose Professor Dewey said more than five percent of the words actually uttered in that seminar. For the latter consisted largely of papers presented by various members of the group. But one remembered what he said. The subject matter was obviously close to him, for had not Mill been one of the great nineteenth-century leaders of the empirical school of thought; had he not been, in his way, a pragmatist and, like Dewey himself, a liberal? But one notices particularly Dewey’s gift for pointing to the exact difficulty or the exact limitations of a man or a paper; his capacity for sympathetically seeing what a student was driving at, even when he did not quite succeed in saying it, and Dewey’s candid expression of his own position or his own prejudices.

One instance of Dewey’s frankness comes to mind. There was among the group a young lady who had come from England where she had studied philosophy with Bertrand Russell at Cambridge. She listened patiently for weeks to Dewey’s varied insistence that the truth of an idea was tested by its use. One day she burst out toward the close of the seminar in the sharp, clipped speech of the educated Englishwoman: “But, professor, I have been taught to believe that true means true; that false means false; that good means good and bad means bad; I don’t understand all this talk about more or less true, more or less good. Could you explain more exactly?”

Professor Dewey looked at her mildly for a moment and said: “Let me tell you a parable. Once upon a time in Philadelphia there was a paranoiac. He thought he was dead. Nobody could convince him he was alive. Finally, one of the doctors thought of an ingenious idea. He pricked the patient’s finger. ‘Now,’ he said, ‘are you dead?’ ‘Sure,’ said the paranoiac, ‘that proves that dead men bleed...’ Now I’ll say true or false if you want me to, but I’ll mean better or worse.”

There are all kinds of talents that go to make up a great teacher. Among those not commonly noted in the textbooks are simplicity and candour. These qualities in Dewey even an undergraduate could recognize and understand. “

I am not sure of the last time an industrialist attended weekly philosophy lectures at my institution; accompanied by his secretary, yet. Further, I cannot remember any of my colleagues over my quarter-century in academia ever chatting about the society ladies who attended their lectures.

Notwithstanding these rather striking oddities, I wonder how many of us will have autobiographies written by former students in which we are described in such glowing and almost reverent terms? Yes, Jennifer, John Dewey was a wonderful classroom

teacher who made his students think, ponder and grapple with large, complex and messy societal issues. Easy? No; but certainly memorable!

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Finding Useful John Dewey Resources on the Internet

Craig A. Cunningham

In the first two installments of this series, I explored some of the many internet resources devoted to the life and work of John Dewey. The first article looked at established, institutional websites, and the second looked at sites maintained by Dewey scholars and “fans.” This third article looks specifically at websites maintained by Dewey critics. All three of these articles are available in “clickable” form on the author’s website, at <http://craigcunningham.com/dewey>.

According to Google.com, the phrase “John Dewey” appears on more than 159,000 web pages. I’ve described some of the most useful of those pages in the previous two articles in this series. Many other pages only mention Dewey in passing (or as part of lists with William James, or Edward Thorndike, or Walter Lippman). Most of the substantive appearances of Dewey’s name on the Web contain praise for Dewey’s ideas, or at least recognition that he was an important figure in 20th century philosophy and public life.

However, as one looks more carefully through the pages mentioning Dewey, one discovers that a substantial minority are not at all praiseworthy or even neutral. Rather, Dewey is repeatedly blamed for some of the worst ills of modern society. Having been struck by the consistency of this finger-pointing, I decided to spend some time looking at these critical pages, in the hopes of better understanding both the origins of and the sustained interest in large scale Dewey-bashing.

What comes clear from this review is that Dewey’s ideas about education, ethics, and democracy—seemingly peaceful and benign to those of us

with progressive tendencies in our values and communities—are on the front lines in an increasingly vituperative “culture war” between progressivism and the forces of reaction.

According to what appears to be a consistent “party line” about Dewey, his ideas about education have resulted in a recent surge of juvenile violence, a marked reduction in subject-matter knowledge and basic skills among America’s children, a pernicious increase in state control of education and of thought, and an epidemic of dishonesty in business and public life.

The criticism comes from at least two types of institutions which may—if their shared complaints are any indication—be allied just beneath the surface. These are conservative Christian educational organizations, usually affiliated with evangelical Christian churches located mostly in the nation’s South; and economic conservatives, represented by radically capitalistic voices such as those found in *Capitalism Magazine* and the so-called objectivists devoted to the philosophy of Ayn Rand. The churches despise Dewey’s naturalism, tolerance, and humanism, while the capitalists fear his commitment to public institutions and economically-oppressed groups, and the objectivists his situational understanding of truth and goodness. All of these groups are suspicious of his socialist tendencies, of the ways that his educational philosophy have been interpreted in progressive schools and curriculum materials, and of the threat he poses to anyone holding an allegedly universal truth.

Representative of the first group is the Faith Christian Ministries in Oliver Springs, Tennessee. Its website, at <http://www.faithchristianmin.org>, contains a number of articles about education written by the Director, Dr. Paul Cates. The articles elaborate a comprehensive philosophy of education devoted to using the Bible as a teaching manual for homeschooling and schooling in private, religious

schools. The articles repeatedly blame the “atheistic, materialistic, educational concoction of John Dewey” for all that is ineffective and immoral about public schools.

According to Cates and many other online critics, Dewey’s ideas were tried out in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and 40s, but were eventually rejected because the experiment “developed a nation of juvenile delinquents.” The reason is because Dewey opposes any form of discipline, whether from school, church, or home. “The promulgators of progressive education are opposed to discipline because they seem to be convinced that the only reason that their super-man has not yet evolved, is due to the restrictions imposed by every preceding generation on the succeeding one. And these restrictions were transmitted through the rules and regulations imposed by the school, the church, and the home. This goal appears to be their great dream. If they could eliminate the discipline imposed by these three agencies, nature would be free to continue its process of evolution.” While the Soviets wisely gave up progressivism after their experiment, the American public was “brainwashed by the worshippers of John Dewey,” and “the progressives had acquired such a strangle-hold in the field of education that no one could expect to advance in that field unless he or she burned incense to John Dewey.”

Equally pernicious has been the “outcome-based education” movement, which proposes “cookie-cutter” performance standards that represent a “dumbed-down egalitarian scheme that stifles individual potential for excellence and achievement by holding the entire class to a level of learning attainable by every child ... ‘Cooperative learning’ is stressed by organizing virtually all learning activities into group activities. Group thinking is in; individual thinking and capitalism is out. Instead of absolutes, students determine what ‘they’ consider values (acceptable) to them. There are no absolutes....It is

fostered by psychologists (sic) who know virtually nothing about education and curriculum. These ‘experts’ know nothing about scope and sequence in determining educational objectives for children.” Dewey’s most egregious sin? Promulgating a system devoted to student interests instead of facts. “In an OBE system, academic and factual subject matter is replaced by vague and subjective learning outcomes... Facts are the bedrock of all things we need to know. Facts are the foundation. Without a foundation, the building will not stand.” Children’s interests, on the other hand, are fleeting and more a matter of whim than of God’s will.

Further, outcome-based education is “socialist,” because “Students learn that the ‘state’ provides their needs, and become dependent on the ‘state.’” Because outcome-based education envisions universal educational standards, it “thus is dedicated to the establishment of globalism. National sovereignty should be under the control of a world authority, according to OBE.” The result: “teachers ... will be required to fit the ‘role performance’ in order to obtain and renew certification. This ‘role’ may be odious to some teachers. They will be expected to go with the flow and fit the new mold of the reinvented school of education reformers’ dreams. They will be required to violate their conscience and convictions in numerous instances outlined above, such as demonstrating that they know how to refer their students to the local in-house or down-the street school-based sex clinic for condoms and abortion referrals.... In the near future, teacher certification will not be possible for the true God-fearing, Bible believing Christians.”

It is not clear to me how Dewey’s so-called “situational ethics”—described as “relativism” and blamed for undermining the traditional authority of the Bible—is consistent with the allegedly universalistic goals of outcome-based education. But both relativism and universalism

are—according to Cates—diametrically opposed to the will of God, and are causing the world to fall into sin and despair. Cates’ solution? Homeschooling with a back-to-basics curriculum involving mental discipline and a commitment to finding God’s ultimate purpose for each individually. “A God-centered pattern of education demands that the Christian educator spell out clearly the processes involved in the total structure of the curriculum. This means all procedures and processes must be based on a definite theory of knowledge... the Bible is to be the point of reference from which we can evaluate all other areas and sources of knowledge.”

A representative of the second type of website critical of John Dewey is Capitalism Magazine’s site at <http://campmag.com>. Many articles are available that discuss contemporary threats to the capitalist way of life. Dewey is blamed specifically for the rise of teen violence (<http://campmag.com/article.asp?ID=11>). The progressive emphasis on children’s social interests to the detriment of intellectual interests has undermined the ability to make distinctions between right and wrong. “The Progressive philosophy maintains that the cause of social strife is the unwillingness of an individual to sacrifice his or her convictions to the group. The insistence on distinctions such as ‘true versus false’ and ‘right versus wrong’ generates social conflict. If only children did not hold strong ideas, disagreement and conflict would evaporate in the sunshine of social harmony. Truth, therefore, is socially fractious, while ignorance is bliss. Hence, what the Progressives mean by ‘socialization’ is the surrender of one’s mind, of one’s independent knowledge and judgment — to a ‘group consensus.’ According to Dewey, “The mere absorbing of facts and truths is so exclusively individual an affair that it tends very naturally to pass into selfishness. There is no obvious social motive for the acquirement of mere

learning, there is no clear social gain in success thereat.” This particular quote, by the way, is used again and again by the anti-Dewey folks to prove that he is opposed to the teaching of facts or of truth. (See also <http://www.aynrand.org/medialink/anarchy.html>).

The author offers a solution: “Fundamentally, schools must institute a radical reversal of policy. What they need to teach is not “socialization,” but cognition. Schools need to encourage individual, independent judgment and to provide the factual knowledge and the reasoning skills that a rational mind requires.” Dewey’s approach is taken to represent the opposite approach. (Of course, there is never any discussion of Dewey’s concept of intelligence, or of his strong distinction between the ‘valued’ and the ‘valuable.’)

A careful look at the Capitalism Magazine website reveals an underlying commitment to the “objectivist” philosophy of Ayn Rand (See <http://www.capitalism.org/tour/index.htm>.) The basic principles of objectivism are stated as: “Reality is Absolute; Reason is man’s [sic] means of survival; The individual is sovereign; Man is an end in himself, not a slave to the ends of ‘society’; To live in a society man needs rights; Rights are moral principles; The initiation of physical force renders a man’s mind useless; Government’s job is to project rights; Government has a monopoly on the use of physical force; The powers of the state shall never be used to initiate force; and A rule not of men, but of objective laws.” The site also claims that Capitalism is “the progressive ideal,” and represents the only social system that is “true, both in philosophical theory and in economic practice.” Nowhere is democracy mentioned, nor any sense that individuals share interdependency within society.

The Ayn Rand institute maintains a site with numerous articles written from an objectivist viewpoint. Many of these articles contain the exact same criticisms as the articles on the

Capitalism Magazine site. One article (<http://www.aynrand.org/medialink/businessmenhonesty.shtml>) claims that Dewey's "vicious philosophy" of pragmatism has caused the current crisis of business dishonesty. "For more than 100 years our intellectuals, specifically our college professors, have been teaching students, including, future businessmen, that no absolute principles or standards exist, that you cannot be certain of anything, that the future is unknowable, that it is okay to try anything without thinking, that the truth is simply that which works at the moment, and that which works is what makes you feel better right now. In other words, there is nothing really wrong with dishonesty.... Anyone who questions this philosophy is mocked as a dogmatic, narrow-minded, preachy moralist. Pragmatism is an open invitation to fraud—after all, you might get away with it and the money makes you feel good."

According to this article, an effort is needed to replace pragmatism with "an objective system of morality that identifies what virtue is and how one should practice it. Only two, but radically different, types of moral absolutism exist today: religion, with a morality based on faith, and Ayn Rand's philosophy of Objectivism, with a morality based on reason. Both advocate the virtue of honesty, but only Objectivism demonstrates why honesty is a virtue and dishonesty self-destructive." Here objectivism, like the other primary source of criticism of Dewey (that is, Christian fundamentalism), reveals itself as essentially dogmatic.

The Ayn Rand web site also includes articles specifically devoted to educational topics, such as the debate between whole language and phonics (<http://www.aynrand.org/wars.html>). Dewey is identified as the intellectual father of the whole language approach, which believes "that the child must be encouraged to follow his feelings irrespective of the facts, and to have his arbitrary 'opinions' regarded as valid. On this premise, the

child is told to treat the 'whole word' as a primary, and to draw his conclusions without the necessity of learning the underlying facts. Another article (<http://www.aynrand.org/medialink/school.shtml>) decries Dewey's influence on the intellectual rigor of elementary schools. "More and more, our schools are de-emphasizing "subject-centered" learning and concentrating instead on the student's emotional capacity and social activities. Encouraging "self-expression" is deemed more important than teaching the distinction between objectively right and wrong answers. Many classes present little or no lecturing by the teacher, featuring instead group discussions in which all opinions — no matter how arbitrary — are held to be equally valuable." This is epitomized in the emphasis on self-esteem and the progressive movement to eliminate ability grouping. Why have the schools given up the goal of intellectual training? "The Progressive theory, originated by the American philosopher John Dewey, rejects the very idea that the purpose of education is cognitive training. Dewey and his followers believe that schools are places where the child vents his emotions and, above all, is 'socialized.'" The article again quotes Dewey about the importance of social interests. Since the progressives "believe that their goal is not to teach the young how to think, they see no need to teach intellectually rigorous subjects. Rather, their goal is to guide students toward some happy medium between 'self-expression' and obedience to the group — i.e., between mindless emotionalism and equally mindless conformity.

In another article (<http://www.aynrand.org/medialink/op-eds/selfesteem.txt>) the same author claims that "in the view of our Dewey-inspired educators, logic is a 'straitjacket.' Students are taught by "progressive" educators that there are no rigid principles in life, and that emotion, not reason, is one's link to reality. Thus, if a child is somehow made to feel good about himself, he is good—irre-

spective of whether there exists any objective basis for that conclusion." This approach has produced "such nightmarish phenomena as inventive spelling, whereby a fourth-grader who spells 'favorite' as 'ffffit' is lauded by the teacher for expressing a 'creative feeling.'... "Erase the concept of truth—these educators maintain—and a child will never discover that he is thinking or acting wrongly. If he is taught that anything he does is right because he feels it, he will always 'feel good' about himself."

The objectivist criticism of Dewey is shared by people who devote themselves to saving the world from the influence of psychiatry and psychology. One identifiable group is the "Foundation for Truth in Reality," which runs a website called "Say No to Psychiatry" (<http://www.sntp.net>). The site includes numerous articles claiming that Dewey and others are part of a vast conspiracy called "The Order" that is attempting to take control of people's minds through experiments based on the doctrine of behaviorism. For example, one article http://www.sntp.net/education/sutton_dewey.htm) claims, "Looking back at John Dewey after 80 years of his influence, he can be recognized as the pre-eminent factor in the collectivisation, or Hegelianization, of American Schools....Dewey's education is not child centered but State centered, because for the Hegelian, 'social ends' are always State ends." Interpreting Dewey's quote that education is "not a preparation for future living," the article describes Dewey as primarily interested in creating conformity to "the State as the absolute": "The Dewey educational system does not accept the role of developing a child's talents but, contrarily, only to prepare the child to function as a unit in an organic whole - in blunt terms *a cog in the wheel of an organic society*. Whereas most Americans have moral values rooted in the individual, the values of the school system are rooted in the Hegelian concept of the State as the absolute... for Dewey man has no individual rights. Man exists only to

serve the State. This is directly contradictory to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.”

That Dewey is a behaviorist is proven through a reference to Dewey’s claim that the function of the teacher is to design educational experiences (<http://www.sntp.net/education/education.htm>), and reference to the fact that his student, John Watson, disavowed the mind entirely. Dewey’s own “experiments with children” at the Laboratory School are further evidence of his evil intent (http://www.sntp.net/education/leipzig_connection_7.htm). Once again, reference is made to Dewey’s quote about social interests being paramount over “exclusively individual” intellectual interests.

According to the anti-psychiatry web site, Dewey’s intended transformation of the educational system is nearly complete. “There are no ‘education specialists’ who aren’t now actually behavioral psychologists or psychiatrists. The field of psychology has very much taken over the public school system, and is doing its best to take over private schools. Through covert tactics, extensive lobbying efforts, and setting government mandated ‘educational standards’, even home-schooling may have to conform to the dictates of psychologists.” The implication—borne out through a careful reading of additional articles from the website, is that the psychologists desire this conformity so that certain unnamed interests may take over the world without dissent. Specifically, the system is “dumbing down our students so they will work for lower wages to allow American businesses to compete in the world market” (http://www.sntp.net/education/OBE_1.htm).

What ties each of these types of criticisms together is nostalgia for a remembered past in which schooling was intellectually rigorous and demanding, focused primarily on the teaching of facts and truth and the formation of mental discipline, leaving social and moral development to homes and churches. Central to this

memory is the importance of local control, and with it the freedom for ordinary persons—without fancy intellectual credentials or complicated theories of human development—to conduct schooling in the manner in which they see fit, without interference from government bureaucrats or university “experts” who seek to impose their will on local communities. According to this view, everything local is true, and wise, and good, while everything remote—especially that which comes out of eastern urban universities—is to be feared and avoided at all costs.

What is interesting to me about the anti-Dewey critics is that none of them seem to have actually read Dewey or tried to understand the context of his statements about the importance of social interests or education as life rather than preparation for life. Rather, the critics seem to be reading only each other, borrowing the quotations that seem most pernicious, in an attempt not just to smear Dewey’s reputation but to draw into question the entire educational system and the academic theories that support it. The lack of real detail about Dewey’s writings or values, and the willingness to use broad labels such as “progressive” and “behaviorist” so loosely, are evidence—it seems to me—that Dewey’s role for these critics is not that of the thoughtful philosopher making a serious attempt to reconstruct schools to meet contemporary needs, but rather that of a nearly blank screen upon which the critics can project their own fears and insecurities. Dewey has become the sacrificial lamb, subjected to the projected shadow of the right wing, allowing them to demonize entire professions and institutions without fear that their followers might actually look at Dewey’s work to see for themselves whether he is as evil as they say.

It seems to me that Dewey’s critics have mischaracterized him as an enemy of reason and of the individual. On the other hand, Dewey certainly does vociferously reject their

atomistic metaphysics of individuality and their claims to an unbiased understanding of absolute truth as revealed in the Bible or unfettered “reason.” A careful reading of *Democracy and Education* or *Human Nature and Conduct* reveals numerous passages where Dewey undermines the simplistic views expressed by these critics. So, while they mischaracterize him and demonize him, their choice of the mind-mannered philosopher as the target of their criticism is not without merit. For Dewey provides an intellectually rigorous pathway out of absolutism and into a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of rights, freedom, law, and morality. It might just behoove these critics to keep their followers away from Dewey’s books, by painting them so starkly as enemies of reason. This might be the best chance they have to keep their flocks away from realizing that things are not as simple as they seem.

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The Mission of the JDS: An Addendum

William Van Til

In the July 2003 issue of *Insights*, I read with interest and appreciation immediate past-president Daniel Tanner's fine "Mission and Vision of the John Dewey Society" and Editor Jon G. Bradley's compelling "Call for Submissions". Perhaps some members might respond in *Insights* as to their own thinking on the mission and progress of the John Dewey Society?

Recently, I expressed my own views on this in response to an invitation from Donna Breault to write some "admonitions and challenges to current professors of education" in the inaugural volume of *Sophist's Bane*, a journal of the Society of Professors of Education.

"Professors of education constitute a large percentage of the small John Dewey Society. From 1947 to 1973, the period when I worked most closely with the JDS, it seemed to me that two types of activities characterized its program. As I reported in *Educational Theory* in the Summer of 1993, one type was related to theoretical considerations in order to broaden the base of knowledge. This included sponsorship of *Educational Theory*, the Ohio State University Studies in Educational Theory, and the John Dewey Lecture Series.

The second type explored social and curricular issues and problems in order to help members to make decisions and follow through with social action. This included the original Yearbook series, the magazine *Insights* for free trade in ideas, and the John Dewey Society meetings at the ASCD conferences where panelists discussed the year's most controversial issue. Both types had their proponents. 'Extensions of knowledge' activities were of primary interest to philosophers,

historians, sociologists, curriculum theorists, and comparative educators while 'activist' activities were of primary interest to practitioners in curriculum, supervision, and administration whether at work in school systems or in universities.

Depending on the predilections of the board, the Society's program continues to lean one way or the other. To me, it seems that both emphases are approaches worthy of the Society's support. Especially promising would be experiments in interrelating the two emphases."

As Chairperson of the John Dewey Society's Commission on Communication of Democracy established in 1947 (and referred to by Tanner as a precedent in the Society's activism on social issues) and as an activist past-president from 1964 to 1966, I look forward to the forthcoming work of the John Dewey Society's Commission on Social Issues named in 2003; a Commission of the Society under the Chairmanship of Richard Gibboney.

Reference:

Van Til, William. (2002). "Admonition and Challenges", *The Sophist's Bane*, (1, 1), pages 12-13.

William Van Til is the Coffman Distinguished Professor of Education Emeritus of Indiana State University and, as well as a past-president of the JDS, the founding editor of *Insights*.

Four Gems of Dewey's Advice to Teachers: Reinforced

Hillel A. Schiller

How can we give a clear sense of John Dewey's advice to incipient and even veteran teachers so that they can be made so curious about his contribution to the art of teaching that they will rush to read more of his insightful instruction?

I think if we made clear some of his major insights succinctly, each should be so intriguing that they would pique interest enough to explore them more deeply. Wishful thinking? Maybe. But here goes!

I have selected what I consider to be super-conceptions that vivify his practical vision of how to educate concretely. They are:

1. His definition of the "Educative Act."
2. His sense of the relationship of "percepts" to "concepts"
3. His belief in the power of the image.
4. His sense of the connection of Method to Content.

1. The Definition of the Educative Act

Dewey wrote that every act of teaching to be truly "educative" must involve *interaction* and *continuity* (Dewey, 1938, 1998). For him the "educative act" defined by these conceptions springs directly out of the nature of human experience. They are basic to the enrichment of this experience. We live in the midst of countless interactions and partake of myriad continuities. They represent the most dynamic conditions of human life and thus they are at the disposal of teachers when zeroed in

upon for the purpose of educating.

As the most significant processes of the educative act assuring interaction and establishing continuities are subtle yet powerful processes for teachers to understand and to be engaged with seriously. Both conditions are subtle because not all interactions provoke positive educational experience; and there is little true continuity in teaching methodology especially in our traditionally regimented and fragmented curricula.

Dewey had a lot to say about these ideas. But we can only call attention to them here. "The two principles of continuity and interaction are not separate from each other," Dewey wrote, "They intercept and unite. They are, so to speak, the longitudinal [vertical] and lateral [horizontal] aspects of experience. Different situations succeed one another. As an individual passes from one situation to another, his world, his environment, expands or contracts. (42)

"Continuity and interaction in their active union with each other provide the measure of the educative significance and value of an experience. The immediate and direct concern of an educator is then with the situations in which the interaction take place." (43)

Dewey goes on to relate continuity to "habit" (26) He goes beyond the ordinary conception and biological meaning of habit to be a more less fixed way of doing things. He illuminates a deeper conception of it to mean "the formation of attitudes, attitudes that are emotional and intellectual; it covers our basic sensitivities and ways of meeting and responding to all the conditions we meet in living." (27)

We can advance what Dewey alludes to for the teaching process by introducing the concept of the "cognetic" role of the teacher (Schiller, 1982). The term cognetic is a neologism made up by fusing the meanings of 'cog' and "net" both representing the making of a connection and a bringing together. A cog transfers power in a gear train and a net con-

nects and holds together whatever is held within its pattern of connected strands. Thus I have defined "cognetic" to mean anything that makes a connection.

So the cognetic teacher helps to make a true connection between her or himself and the student, or between the student and a book, a subject, an idea, a feeling, or another person. This crucial process often means engaging students' interests and attempting to stimulate a student's imagination.

Both continuity and interaction imply cognetic behaviour. But establishing certain continuities are not always advantageous and not all interactions are meaningful in a positive way. The dynamics of both must have a direction gauged to enrich the educational experience, to help the student to *grow* emotionally or intellectually (Dewey, 1938, 1998, p. 28). This is what makes for a truly educative act.

The direction provoked by a specific interaction means not only establishing a connection that offers emotional acceptance and builds self-confidence, but also shows the way continuities within subject matter are sought. It is of particular importance to a methodology used by means of which attention is called to the introduction of factual or ideational information. Methodology involving questioning can demonstrate to the student how curiosity builds new knowledge.

This can happen by cultivating the process of contextual perceiving in students—here is the primary process for engineering continuities of subject matter (Schiller, 1982). Contextual perception, I believe, is the major search process to cultivate in every student. It springs from natural curiosity. It is the ultimate learning process—the engine for all students to use to expand and deepen their knowledge. A goal of teaching, it should be a principle technique—a pedagogic thrust—in the design of interaction and in the development of continuities inherent to any educative act. To urge contextual perceiving can

be a teaching objective in the building up to an instructional moment, or to a “peak experience,” as Maslow would have it (Maslow, 1968). Here is a specific direction for an interaction to take. The urge to perceive contexts would encourage the development in students of specific forms of continuity that would build relevant information into their thinking. ng.

This leads us to the next gem of Dewey’s advice to teachers.

2. His sense of how “percepts” relate to “concepts.”

Dewey’s sense of the relationship of the image to the idea is offered in his short but potent essay “How Do Concepts Arise from Percepts?” published in 1891, when he was more the psychologist than a philosopher (Dewey, 1965)

Dewey deals with how the knowledge of or “meaning” of a triangle is developed. It is a vertical mental process of moving the sensing of the shape of a triangle from the environment into consciousness of its characteristic form. We see at once that for Dewey the “percept” means an image drawn within by perceiving a particular triangle.

“The concept is the *power*,” Dewey wrote, “which a particular image has standing for or conveying a certain meaning or intellectual value... the concept is something which the image does; some meaning which it conveys... What meaning?” (181) His answer asks another question of how does the concept originate from the percept. His answer is that: “the concept arises from the percept *through realizing the full meaning* implied but not explicit in the percept. For example, take the percept of a triangle... there is a principle involved in the triangle; that the triangle, like everything else in the world, is made up of a certain principle that is embodied in it... What shall we call this principle?... which constitutes the particular thing a triangle [is], rather than a pumpkin or a stovepipe... The concept ‘triangle,’ in other words, is

the way in *which three lines are put together*; it is a *mode* or form of construction. Except as we know this mode of formation our idea of a triangle is exceedingly imperfect.” (131-132). Here is an unusual example of Dewey’s belief in the efficacy of “doing”!

What Dewey explains here is the nature of the concept as an abstraction, as it is drawn from the particular way every triangle must be constructed in order to be understood. However he has an odd way of considering the imaged triangle as an abstraction (which we cannot go deeply into here). We believe every image of a triangle is more than merely a conceptual abstraction. The internalized image represents or “reproduces” if you will the actual structure of a triangle. It is the specific visual (imagic) form of exactly recorded concrete knowledge. As such it is more than an abstraction. It is an extraction, the registering intuitively in the brain of a triangle’s shape (in miniature) drawn from reality!

(Schiller, 1982).

Nevertheless, we can accept his belief that once one gets the idea of the concept triangle, that is learns the process of how to make a triangle, one carries that knowledge into every particular triangle one sees. “The concept becomes an enriching of the meaning of the percept” (Dewey, 1965, 183). Concomitantly, what we have here is another way of saying what Piaget calls “accommodation,” the absorbing of new information by the learner which records the universal nature of the triangle.

(Flavell, 1963).

In this same essay Dewey deals briefly in another direction for continuity to take. This is particularly significant in dealing with curricula. It is the cognetic process of establishing the thrust of horizontal contextual perception. It is a new mode of learning for the learner to adopt. How can teachers instill this mode of learning—to stress and build horizontal continuities?

Simply said it is the method by which cognetic interaction becomes interdisciplinary instruction. It offers Dewey’s approach to synthesizing or integrating knowledge—contextualizing perception. I can deal only briefly with Dewey’s suggestion because he presents only a hint of his thrust in this essay. Nevertheless, it gives a clear picture of what building horizontal continuities can consist of.

First he offers an enigmatic statement. “In ideal, in complete development, the percept and the concept would have the same content.” (183) He then excuses himself by saying that it would “exceed my limits here to show this to be the case.” Yet he goes on to suggest what the “complete knowledge of a particular object” is by using the example of a given maple tree.

Perceiving every detail in the image (percept) of the maple (implying noting its shape, the form of its leaf, its bark’s texture, color, species, etc.) is not enough, he wrote... One must learn how this tree came to be so, which implies learning the general principles ordering the growth of tree life (the concept). This would entail learning about the circumstances and conditions under which tree life became deciduous or nondeciduous; and further how deciduous differentiated into maple, oak, beech, etc. Complete knowledge of the maple would also have to include the particular circumstances under which *this* particular maple appeared, which of course would necessitate an ecological survey.

So here we have in a nutshell Dewey’s offhand way of telling us that botany, biology, taxonomy, climate, plant evolution, and specific ecological factors become an important part of learning about how and why maple trees exist in certain types of forest or dot suburban lawns. This is his prescription for truly achieving the cognetic process of horizontal contextual perceiving. Here it is achieved by a synthesizing or integration of knowledge; by the need to pursue information drawn from particular

sciences. It can begin with the image of a particular tree.

And so we come to Dewey's next gem.

3. Dewey's belief in the power of the image.

It is clear from the previous section that Dewey thought that the "image" was of particular importance to the educator. Why? We can do no better than to quote his exact words as they appear in his "My Pedagogic Creed" (Dewey, 1897, 1959).

I believe that the image is the great instrument of instruction. What a child gets out of any subject presented to him is simply the images which he himself forms with regard to it.

I believe if nine tenths of the energy at present directed towards making the child learn certain things, were spent in seeing to it that the child was forming proper images, the work of instruction would be indefinitely facilitated.

I believe that much of the time and attention now given to the preparation and presentation of lessons might be more wisely and profitably expended in training the child's power of imagery, and seeing to it that he was continually forming definite, vivid, and growing images of the various subjects with which he comes in contact in his experience.

Little did Dewey know how significant his recommendation was. For some

100 years later, another psychologist delineated an enriched, synthesized form of the image. Akhter Ahsen characterized it as the "Eidetic image" and described it as a unified entity made up of three integral parts. I can only briefly sketch here Dr. Ahsen's well researched definition of his tripartite Eidetic image. His model demonstrates the fundamental power

in the nature of imagery that Dewey only intuited. Yet this power can affect the act of learning in either positive or negative ways.

Ahsen bases his new sense of the image as a psycho-biologic reality on the work of the psychologist Wilder Penfield, whose electrical stimulation of parts of the temporal lobe of the brain revealed total recall of past experience—the resurrection in toto of visually experienced memories (images) lying long dormant in the brain. All of these images have some emotional content and are of special significance to the individual. Ahsen noted that many of these images cause pathological conditioning that result in various types of neuroses. After defining the Eidetic image, Ahsen for years has been administering highly effective therapy using his imagery based technique (1973).

Ahsen maintains that that every experience of a sensory image (I) is always accompanied by a somatic or emotional response (S) and as well has a significant meaning (M) to the individual. This composite ISM is the Eidetic image. The experience can be explored in terms of revealing the extraordinary dominating influence of the emotion, the image, or the significance in the individual's response at the time of its occurrence.

We cannot go further into Ahsen's work here other than to observe the importance for the educator to realize how significant the emotional response of the student must be to images absorbed from the environment of the classroom, from the personality of the teacher, and/or from teachers' methods of instruction (Schiller, 2000).

Thus Dewey's prescription to pay attention to imageries becomes even more important than he imagined. We can now understand and have an advanced sense of the significance of their emotional content. This is relevant now more than ever before as regards the effect of an emotional response can have upon students' imaginations—which we know can be inhibited by rising anxieties (Jones,

1968). And particularly as may be related, for example, to the excessive testing that has become the recent mode in the United States.

Now on to the last of Dewey's prescient insights that I emphasize.

4. Dewey's sense of the connection of Method and Content

Dewey underscores his classic volume *Democracy and Education* as "An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education" (Dewey, 1916). He provides two separate chapters in it entitled "The Nature of Method" and "The Nature of Subject Matter." Yet he begins the former chapter with a topical heading, "The Unity of Subject Matter and Method" (164)

He at once describes the separation as a form of inherited philosophical dualism. This view considers subject matter as something outside the mind and which must be impressed upon the mind by various methods. That somehow the methods of learning have been judged to be isolated processes with "no knowledge of the subjects to which the methods are to be applied." (165). This assumption that somehow method is separate, Dewey believed, has made "instruction and learning formal, mechanical and constrained" (179). What follows then, he describes, is misuse of a vital quality of thinking in which there is no true interaction spurred, for example, by curiosity or imagination.

Since the thought processes attempt to accommodate subject matter in deliberate and intentional ways, any notion of a split between the way information is ingested and its content, Dewey states, is radically false. "Method means that arrangement of subject matter which makes it most effective in use. Never is method something outside the use of the material" (165). The teacher's role is to employ or devise methods for the most effective way to connect subject matters meaningfully. The teacher must not think of subject matter as external to method, but rather the

efficient treatment of it with a minimum waste of time and energy. "Method is not antithetical to subject matter; it is the effective direction of subject matter to desired results." (165). There are different ways to accomplish this.

But first Dewey points out four "evils" in education that stem from the isolation of method from subject matter. (i) The neglect of concrete experience.

"There can be no discovery of a method without cases to be learned. The method is derived from the observation of what actually happens, with the view to seeing that it happens better next time" (168). (ii) Then there are false conceptions of discipline and neglect of student interest. Here there are three ways of establishing a relationship (a) utilize excitement (b) make not paying attention painful (c) appeal directly to put forth "will" without giving any reason (iii) Present subject matter as just something to be learned and not engaging the effect of it to satisfy curiosity or fulfil some experience. (iv) Reduce method to cut and dried routine, follow mechanically prescribed steps.

"Nothing has brought pedagogical theory into greater disrepute than the belief that it is identified with handing out to teachers recipes and models to be followed in teaching. Flexibility and initiative in dealing with problems are characteristic of any conception to which method is a way of managing material to a conclusion. Mechanical rigid woodenness is an inevitable corollary of any theory which separates mind from activity motivated by a purpose." (170)

Since space is a premium, the best I can do at this point is to implore you the reader to read or reread Dewey's two chapters and thereby to glean more exactly the wisdom he elaborates for considering anew the integration of method and content.

Surprisingly, there is a statement in his chapter "Experience and Thinking," appearing just prior to the chapters noted above that bears directly upon my suggestion:

To 'learn from experience' is to make a backward and forward connection between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in consequence. Under such conditions, doing becomes a trying; an experiment with the world to find out what it is like; the undergoing becomes instruction—discovery of the connection of things (140).

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There will also be two paper sessions, a session on a Deweyan response to pressures on public education in our time, a business meeting open to all members of the Society, and our annual reception open to all AERA attendees. Further details forthcoming in *Insights*.

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The range of activities outlined by your Board of Directors for the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 years is quite exciting. Powerful sessions are slated for both AERA and ASCD, and your two Society publications (*Education and Culture* and *Insights*) are offering colleagues and friends of the John Dewey Society professional space to discuss their ideas.

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