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**Special Issue**  
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***Antecedents of Educating for Democracy***

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## **Editorial for the Series of Three Issues: Progressive Education: Past, Present and Future**

**Bertram C. Bruce**  
University of Illinois

When we issued the Call for Manuscripts on “Progressive Education: Past, Present and Future” we failed to anticipate the enthusiastic response. Even after selecting only the best submissions, we soon realized the need for a second, and then, a third issue. The first issue focuses on the Past (Volume 9, Number 1, co-editor: John Pecore; February, 2013); the second on the Present (Volume 9, Number 2, co-editor: Brian Drayton; June, 2013), and the third on the Future (Volume 9, Number 3, co-editor Maureen Hogan; October, 2013). This reflects not only a widespread interest in understanding what progressive education has meant and what it can mean, but a yearning for better ways to think about pedagogy in these times.

### **Complexity, Chance, and Change**

The Past/Present/Future classification recognizes our living in a complex and evolving world. Progressive education ideas can be traced back to the earliest writing on education. But these ideas received a renewed interest in the 19th century, as the developing sciences portrayed a universe of complexity and change. Among others, Charles Sanders Peirce (1892) was deeply impressed by the role of chance in developing diversity and complexity in the world, especially in the human mind: “I have begun by showing that *tychism* [Peirce’s term for irreducible chance and indeterminism] must give birth to an evolutionary cosmology, in which all the regularities of nature and of mind are regarded as products of growth (Peirce, 1892, p. 86). These views were consonant with those of the emerging sciences, especially Darwinian theories of evolution and the new physics.

Peirce’s theories, first articulated in the early 1870’s in a Cambridge, Massachusetts philosophical discussion group known as the Metaphysical Club (Menand, 2001, p. 227), were a major influence on William James, John Dewey, and other pragmatists, whose work in turn influenced progressive educators. Dewey (1938) showed that complexity and change meant that education could not be reduced to a formulaic preparation for life, it needed to be life itself, messiness and chaos included. Progressive educators sought to realize Dewey’s vision through valuing diversity, building on the interests of the learner, organizing learning in larger, more holistic units, connecting school and society, and developing citizenship. Progressive educators combined an awareness of the past with a recognition of change and future possibilities (Benedict, 1947a). The pragmatists and progressive educators in the US had influence around the world, but they were far from the only developers of progressive education ideas, as can be seen in this series.

### **Historical Perspective**

A division such as Past/Present/Future is somewhat arbitrary, especially so given that many of the articles explicitly incorporate a longitudinal or diachronic perspective. Moreover, the emphases in progressive education on reflection, on integrating inquiry of the child with that of cultural heritage, and on the forward-looking, growth aspects of learning make it risky to relegate any of the articles into one box of past, present, or future. Moreover, any division is problematic. Progressive education saw learning as occurring throughout the lifespan, Sites for learning include schools, but also work and play. The usual dichotomies such as theory versus practice, thinking versus action, science versus art, or formal versus informal were exactly what many progressive educators have sought to counter. The Past/Present/Future distinction is similarly problematic.

In a recent essay, Lewis Lapham (2012) shows some ways around dichotomous thinking about the past, which is often conveyed in schools and popular discourse. One of

those is between the view of history as a detailed, and verifiable account of past events with little room for interpretation and of history as a consensual hallucination. Lapham reminds us that history requires both careful attention to detail and continual reconstruction. He makes an effective case for the idea that history is necessary for a critical, socially engaged intelligence in our lived times. This means history that grows out of meticulous study of the details, along with an openness to counter-intuitive or disturbing ideas, and investigation of the curious gremlins that challenge our preconceptions. He cites Faulkner's "The past is never dead. It's not even past" (Requiem for a Nun), on the way to showing how making sense of the past is part and parcel of making sense of the present.

We use the present to construct our past, just as we use our past to construct our present. For Lapham, then, the past is the phoenix in the attic. No matter how we engage with it, our uses of history shape what is to come. As he puts it, "History is work in progress, a constant writing, and rewriting as opposed to museum-quality sculpture in milk-white marble." This does not mean anything-goes relativism. Instead, it is a call to realize that our past journeys and future maps are embedded in who we are right now. Unfortunately, that realization seems lacking, and the desire to learn from our past is all too meagre for the needs of today.

### **The Eight-Year Study**

Few parents, or citizens, would be satisfied if children could successfully answer multiple-choice questions requiring narrowly focused skills, but failed to develop intellectual curiosity, cultural awareness, practical skills, a healthy philosophy of life, a strong moral character, emotional balance, social fitness, sensitivity to social problems, or physical fitness. What a tragedy then, if the focus on skills per se (as with the US's No Child Left Behind) were not even necessary! What if one could help the whole child develop, including teaching basic skills? What if our current irrational obsession with testing actually stood in the way of the things we truly value?

Instead of narrowly defined subjects, schools based on progressive education used broad themes of significance to the students, in which "[t]he starting point of the curriculum would be life as the student saw it" (Benedict, 1947, p. 14). Here, students would be engaged in inquiry as a way to make sense of themselves and the world around them. We can see variants of the core ideas in many disciplines and learning settings today, e.g., language learning (Brown, 2004), agriculture and web-based learning (Bruce, Dowd, Eastburn, & D'Arcy, 2005), the sciences (Edelson, Gordon, & Pea, 1999), university learning (Prince & Felder, 2007), and geography (Spronken-Smith, et al., 2008).

Moreover, progressive schools were community-based. This idea of community-based schools was key to the Progressive Education movement, especially in its later years, as members realized they needed to do more than promote child-centered learning in an individual sense. Benedict (1947, p. 17) says that "The schools believed they belonged to the citizens of the community". Progressive educators spoke of two visions for schools. In one, the old school, there is a fence surrounding the building; activities of the school are separate from those of the world around it, and as a result, schooling is separated from the actual life of the children. In the new school, the building is substantially the same, but it is connected to sites for recreation, housing, jobs, health, government, and by implication, all aspects of life. Rather than simply supplementing schools or being a venue for future activity, the community would become the center of learning. Jane Addams (1910) had seen Hull House as a protest against a restricted view of education and as an institution attempting to learn from life itself (Cremin, 1988). This was all part and parcel of a commitment to democracy in Dewey's sense of a continually reconstructed idea of associated living (1939), and of schools as microcosms of democratic institutions.



The societal view was true not only for “community schools” per se (Clapp, 1939), but for all schools, urban or rural, large or small, primary or secondary. Today, many of these ideas have survived under rubrics such as “civic engagement,” “public engagement,” “community-based learning,” or “service learning.” But often those ideas are seen as one-way or limited in scope, as in a single course. It’s worth revisiting the earlier progressive visions to understand better how schools and universities could better fulfill the high hopes we place upon them.

One of the best program evaluation studies ever conducted was the Eight-Year Study of progressive education conducted between 1932 to 1940 (Aiken, 1942). Thirty high schools participated. The students from the experimental schools did only slightly better on standardized test scores, but they showed major improvement in other areas, including intellectual competence, cultural development, practical competence, philosophy of life, character traits, emotional balance, social fitness, sensitivity to social problems, and physical fitness. Students from the most progressive schools showed the most improvement, more than those in the somewhat-progressive schools, and much more than those in traditional schools.

Outcomes of the study included better forms of student assessment, innovative research techniques, new ideas for curriculum, instruction, and teacher education. But above all, it provided an answer to the questions above: It is possible to help the whole child develop, without losing basic skills. In fact, schooling can be conceived in such a way that teachers and community members are learners as well. Doing that appears to be the best way to help the individual learner, not drilling on perceived deficits, as we do now. And yes, the irrational obsession with testing actually stands in the way of teaching the things almost every parent, teacher, or citizen truly value. No one advocates replicating the schooling of the 1930’s in the US, much less in diverse contexts around the world. But the lessons of those innovative progressive schools may still be relevant today.

### **This Series**

This series is timely given current debates about the purpose and form of education in an era of rapid technological change, globalization, demographic and political shifts, and growing economic inequities. Across a wide range of topics, age or grade level, area of the curriculum, and setting, the articles ask, “What have we learned about pedagogy that can support democratic, humanistic, and morally responsible development for individuals and societies?” It is a natural followup to the Special Issue on Education for Active Citizenship (International Journal of Progressive Education, Volume 8, Number 3, 2012).

Many of the articles show how progressive education has evolved. They address questions such as: What has progressive education been? What is it today? What could it become? Some articles focus on particular approaches as exemplars of challenges or opportunities for progressive education. Others focus on the historical or philosophical basis for progressive education. Some articles focus on progressive education as it was enacted in early 20th century US, but others extend that view in interesting and important directions. There are also critiques of progressive education in general, or of particular efforts to realize it. The special issues develop these and related ideas, considering both the past successes and failures of progressive education, as well as current work and future possibilities. Authors present their own conception of progressive education as well as a justification for why the particular examples or issues chosen fit within that conception.

## **Editorial for Progressive Education: Antecedents of Educating for Democracy**

**John L. Pecore**

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**Bertram C. Bruce**

University of Illinois

Progressive education is a pedagogical movement that emphasizes student-centered learning experiences and that incorporates aspects such as learning by doing, valuing diversity, integrated curriculum, problem solving, critical thinking, collaborative learning, social responsibility, democracy, and lifelong learning. An important feature is the situation of learning within social, community, or political contexts, which more broadly links progressive education with efforts today by some educators who actively promote critical pedagogy and democratic education. Recently, core progressive ideas appear in the social justice youth development model.

### **Roots of Progressive Education**

In the US, progressive education is often seen as beginning with the 1870s child-centered school reform of Francis Parker and reflected in the educational philosophy of John Dewey. Promoted by the Progressive Education Association from 1919 to 1955, the movement continues to influence some aspects of school reform and pedagogy today through efforts to foster project-based learning, whole language, hands-on learning in mathematics and science, and by organizations such as the Progressive Education Network (PEN). But as an approach to pedagogy, progressive education is in no way limited to the US or the early 20th century. The ideas grew out of work in other countries, and can be traced back to the earliest theories of teaching and learning.

Some other examples may be useful to consider: In France, the *Ecole Moderne*, developed from the work of Célestin Freinet, showed how to realize the social activism side of progressive education. In Italy, Loris Malaguzzi and the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education are another manifestation, demonstrating among other things the importance of art in learning. Paulo Freire's work in Brazil on critical literacy, later extended to many other countries, is another contemporary example, one that emphasizes the political as well as the pedagogical. Similarly, influenced by his experiences in South Africa, Mahatma Gandhi developed a conception of basic education that resonates with progressive education. It was concerned with learning generated within everyday life, relied on cooperation among individuals, and aimed at educating the whole person, including moral development.

It is worth noting that progressive education invariably seeks to go beyond the classroom walls. Thus, the work of Jane Addams and others at Hull House to work with new immigrants might be considered as progressive education, even if it is not situated within a traditional school (Addams, 1910; Cremin, 1988). Participants in Hull House learned from one another, drawing on their diverse backgrounds and experiences. They also connected their learning to the problems of the day, such as poor working conditions, substance abuse, and the spread of disease. Both the individuals and the organization as a whole were seen in terms of a growth model of learning.

Myles Horton and the Highlander Folk School focused on social activism with adults, but a case can be made for their work as exemplifying the progressive education ideals. Students there studied labor conditions and laws, voting rights, and peace, connecting understanding and action. Similarly, there is much work in museums, libraries, community and economic development, online collaboration, and other areas of informal education that may express progressive education more fully than what we see in schools today.

Historically, schools and colleges of education were places of ideas, research with

lab schools, and experiences in informal learning environments. Progressive educators have focused on educating students for full engagement with the problems of today as the future is unknown. Accordingly, students who have been encouraged to critically think about the present are best positioned to solve the unforeseen problems they are certain to encounter in the future.

### **Education for Democracy**

However, within the last few decades, a growing conservative viewpoint shaped by some business leaders and implemented by more stringent Federal education policies has shifted the conversation to focus on educating students for the production of future workers for corporate America (Boyles, 2004). The business model of schooling emphasizes accountability, which is often reduced to high-stakes testing of basic skills rather than creativity or complex problem solving. A corporate model of management has taken over schools by installing CEO-style leaders with little experience in education in top education positions. Where once a major movement within US public education aspired to developing a critical, socially engaged intelligence appropriate to democracy, most of today's schools appear to narrow education to skills preparation for global capitalism.

While Dewey valued individuality and personal freedom, he argued against the excessive individualism of modern capitalism due to the lack of social responsibility and lack of any collaborative aspect of democracy (Miller, 2007). According to Dewey, the purpose of education is progress and students should learn through democracy by engaging in learning that fosters the development of democratic citizens. For progressives, a democratic person is a social conception where democratic education provides opportunities for participation in democratic life (Biesta, 2007).

Many progressive schools of today, mostly private and some charter, involve students in the governance and decision making process. These schools practice democracy by giving voice to students through town hall meetings and having a student serve on all school committees and on advisory boards. To bring about change, students work through their student representatives, sign petitions and may even organize a protest. However, since these schools self-select like-minded members of the community with a common goal, an absence of diverse opinions can exist, providing a false reality of the democratic practice. Still, democracy requires teaching. Thus, democratic education deliberately engages students in experiencing democracy through intelligently participating in collaborative real-world problem solving. For society to be prepared for democracy, its children must be trusted with responsibilities in school. According to Miller (2007), democratic schools develop children that "are capable of remarkable intelligence, compassion, maturity, collaborative problem solving and social responsibility when given a chance" (p.5). Students do not need wise adults to govern and instruct them, they need wise adults to resourcefully guide their intelligence while taking an active role in self-governance.

### **This Issue**

In this first of a series of three special issues dedicated to exploring the legacy of progressive education, we include nine articles that draw on the past of progressive education as a way of looking at relevant present day educational issues. Dewey's views of the past were mediated by concerns of the present: "We naturally remember what interests us and because it interests us. The past is recalled not because of itself but because of what it adds to the present" (*Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 3). To learn about the history of progressive education, and in that context engage in critical dialogue about the aims of education and what educating students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should entail.

We first present three articles addressing the role of critical discourse in higher education. In "Anti-Progressivism in American Education," Wayne Urban presents three mid

20<sup>th</sup> century critiques of progressive education in teacher education faculties. He writes about the decline of academic standards in colleges of education and the need for a commitment by education faculties in making colleges of education intellectually places and academically rigorous. The next article is a case study of the Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education, “The Turning of One’s Soul”—Learning to Teach for Social Justice: The Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education (1950–1964).” Here Carol Rodgers explores that teacher education program’s experiment to help students understand and care deeply about issues of race and social justice, including issues of environmental sustainability. In “The Role of Moral Principles and Ethics in Fostering Democratic Ideals,” Gregg Jorgensen turns to John Dewey’s theories of ethics and moral education. He asks how personal and political beliefs become part of our national debate and how to foster democracy through education. Jorgensen highlights the possibilities of using widely available media and morally complex contemporary issues to stimulate critical thinking in the social studies classroom.

The next article looks at learning in informal settings. In “Can Museums Teach Art? Barnes, Dewey and The Art of The Steal,” Walter Feinberg helps us to understand the controversy over the move of Albert Barnes’s multi-billion dollar art collection to downtown Philadelphia, a controversy based in part on competing visions of what art is. Barnes thought that the purpose of art, and especially his own collection, was to educate. A viewer of an artwork needs to be aware of the problem that the artist was addressing and the tools afforded by the artist’s tradition. The article examines Barnes’s understanding of art, as inspired by and then further developed by Dewey, along with the interesting differences in their theories. These ideas have important implications for aesthetic education and the role that aesthetics plays in a democracy.

The following two articles provide some historical context for democratic education. Leonard Waks analyzes the roots of Progressive Education. His “Dewey and Progressive Education, 1900-2000” considers Dewey’s ideas underlying the experimental school Dewey founded. As 21<sup>st</sup> century progressive educators connect with the lineage of historical tenets, Waks analyzes specific aspects of Dewey’s work and raises key questions. Then, Tom Little’s “Progressive by Any Other Name: The Relationship Between 21st Century Education Principles and the Historical Tenets of the Progressive Education Movement,” begins with the first annual meeting of the Progressive Education Association (PEA) in 1919, and traces the changing nature of development of progressive education principles. Little shows the close proximity of progressive tenets to 21st Century educational attributes and goals. In so doing, Little showcases the relevance of progressive education in schools today.

We close the issue with three articles that present several examples of democratic education. In “Co-Creating a Progressive School: The Power of the Group,” Chris Collaros, Fred Burton, and Julie Eirich discuss how the Wickliffe Progressive Elementary School, which has a 40-year tradition of progressive influences, drew on the history of progressive education to develop its set of Ten Principles of Progressive Education. These principles, as illustrated with actual curriculum and experiences of school-age children and teachers, are important ideas to consider in creating and sustaining a progressive school. In “Where’s Wonder?” Fred Burton notes the lack of joy, passion, and imagination for today’s students. He reflects on ideas from some major progressive educators: David Hawkins, Eleanor Duckworth, and Ken and Yetta Goodman and connects those ideas to the current context of school reform. Fred reminds us that standards and high stakes tests are not all there is to education and that wonder has an important place. Finally, Liba H. Engel looks at the work of Janusz Korczak in “The Democratic School and The Pedagogy of Janusz Korczak: A Model of Early Twentieth Century Reform in Modern Israel.” She examines the way in which Korczak’s pedagogy, which was established in the first half of the twentieth century in Europe, is implemented in a contemporary Israeli school, called the Democratic School.

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## **Anti-progressivism in Education: Past and Present**

**Wayne J. Urban\***

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### **Abstract**

This essay takes a look at what I call anti-progressivism in education or, more particularly, criticism of progressive education that was so vocal and visceral that it earns a label, at least initially, of anti-progressivism. After a brief introduction discussing the terms in general, I look at three instances of anti-progressivism in the 1950s and 1960s, in works by Arthur Bestor, Jr. published in 1953., and by Richard Hofstadter and James Bryant Conant, both published in 1963. My analysis of each reveals them to be works produced as part of a larger battle over the control of teacher education at American universities. Also, I argue that these works were by authors operating at least somewhat within a progressive tradition, rather than by outsiders to the tradition. The contours of this inter-academic progressive criticism of progressivism are then elaborated on and I close with a look at how this all relates to the contemporary situation in American teacher education.

**Keywords:** academic disciplines, anti-intellectualism, anti-progressivism, teacher education

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### **Progressivism and Progressive Education**

Progressivism and progressive education are not easy concepts to define or delineate. In fact, the larger progressive reform movement within which progressive education was located, the veritable cataclysm of reform initiatives in late nineteenth and early twentieth century economic, social, and political affairs, is seen by some scholars as so amorphous as to be useless as an explanatory concept, at least in historical scholarship.<sup>1</sup> Yet such a final discard of the concept ignores its utility, in a careful account which is aware of its variety and tendency to contradiction, as an explanation of historical events, as well as its use in analyzing contemporary situations. Progressivism can be subdivided into an organizational change thrust, a search for political empowerment for individuals and groups, an attempt to control and contain economic privilege, and/or a movement to ameliorate the social consequences of industrialization.<sup>2</sup> If one makes the choice to subdivide and categorize, however, one also must come to terms with the tension, if not opposition, between various categorizations. This is a crucial element to help understand the argument made later in this essay.

For an example of tension or contradiction in understanding the concept, if one looks at progressivism in American economic affairs, one is confronted with the continuity and discontinuity between its particulars. The trust busting of Theodore Roosevelt was in reality not an attempt to break up economic trusts but rather a move to regulate them in the national interest. Roosevelt's approach can be compared and contrasted with that of Woodrow Wilson, which was to break up the trusts in favor of more small scale enterprises that would compete with each other and, thereby, curb the exploitation of those huge economic organizations. Similarly in American politics, the approach of broadening the franchise, through movements such as women's suffrage, or the great reform trio of the era, the initiative, referendum, and recall, can be contrasted with administratively oriented movements to combat political corruption, particularly in American cities. This drive sought to establish a more professional and publicly focused administrative apparatus by replacing private services with public utilities, and replacing elected, frequently corrupt, politicians with trained administrators such as city managers and city commissioners.

In education, the variety of plans and policies that came to be called progressive is elegantly described, in all its variety and contradictions, by Lawrence Cremin. In his landmark *The Transformation of the School*, Cremin weaves a progressive educational tapestry that includes developmentally grounded movements to free children from a variety of constraints, organized parents and teachers working together and separately to pursue the welfare of children and teachers, and various administrative reforms, often claiming a scientific rationale, to systematize and thereby improve the operation of increasingly large and complex school systems.<sup>3</sup> The same contradictions that underlay the larger progressive movement can be found in an educational progressivism that tried both to liberate and to contain the child, to use science to indicate what would work and thereby to constrain what was not "scientific," and to improve teaching and teachers through the sometimes contradictory thrusts of occupational organization, objective evaluation, and increased educational credentialism.

Yet, in education, as the debate over what worked most effectively evolved through the middle of the twentieth century, one prototypically progressive line of thought and action

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<sup>1</sup> Peter G. Filene, "An Obituary for the Progressive Movement," *American Quarterly* 22 (Spring, 1970): 20-34.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel T. Rodgers, "In Search of Progressivism," *Reviews in American History* 10 (December, 1972): 113-32.

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1967* (New York: Random House, 1961).

became relatively clear; the movement to diversify the school curriculum to allow it to include non-academic studies and concerns alongside of the basically academic approach to education that had characterized American schools through most of the nineteenth century. More specifics about this educational progressivism will emerge in the following discussion of three of its most vocal critics, Arthur Bestor, Richard Hofstadter, and James Bryant Conant. Before discussing each of these critics individually, it must be said that they are but three of many who decried the developments in American education toward a more non-academic, or extra academic approach. Readers might want to offer their own examples of critics of progressive education, say people like Admiral Hyman Rickover or the noted political conservative and advocate of basic education James D. Koerner.<sup>4</sup> The reasons for my choice of Bestor, Hofstadter, and Conant will become clear in the discussion of each author and his ideas.

### Arthur Bestor

Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., was born in Chataqua, New York, in 1909. Bestor was the son of a historian who had taught at the University of Chicago at the same time that John Dewey was a prominent member of the faculty and who would make a name for himself as an adult educator.<sup>5</sup> Bestor was educated at a variety of progressive schools in New York City, most notably spending his high school years at the Lincoln School of Teachers College, Columbia University, which he described “as one of the most progressive schools in the country.” Bestor characterized Lincoln as featuring the best of John Dewey’s pedagogical methodology in service of a rigorous academic curriculum. He described the faculty at Lincoln as a community of “brilliant” people dedicated to “the teaching of the basic disciplines to the highest perfection possible in the light of modern pedagogy.”<sup>6</sup>

The Lincoln School was not the only experience Bestor had in his educational career with esteemed “progressive” educators. In the 1930s, while finishing his doctorate in history at Yale University, Bestor was a member of the faculty at Teachers College, the institution acknowledged as the leading place in which progressive education was developed theoretically and evolved into more practical applications in schools. While Dewey, then on the Columbia University faculty, was influential at Teachers College when Bestor worked there, as were acknowledged progressive educators and Teachers College faculty members such as William Heard Kilpatrick and Harold Rugg, Bestor’s closest colleagues at Teachers College included William C. Bagley and Merle Curti. While Bagley was an acknowledged leader of the essentialist movement that was then emerging in American educational circles as critical of some educational progressivism, he did not consider his views to be in opposition to progressive education at its strongest, and as practiced by most of his colleagues.<sup>7</sup> Curti, author of the landmark educational history that was published in the first half of the twentieth century, *The Social Ideas of American Educators* (1936), took a position on the evolution of American education that was largely in harmony with the views of John Dewey and the social reform wing of Teachers College in the 1930s, known then as the social reconstructionist educators.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Bestor cannot be said to have been an opponent of progressive education during his time on the Teachers College faculty.

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<sup>4</sup> Hyman G. Rickover, *Education and Freedom* (New York: Dutton, 1959) and James D. Koerner, *The Miseducation of American Teachers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963).

<sup>5</sup> Burton Weltman, “Reconsidering Arthur Bestor: A Postmortem for the Cold War in Education,” *Eric Document ED 433 276* (1999), United States Department of Education.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur E. Bestor, *The Restoration of Learning* (New York: Knopf, 1955), 140, 141.

<sup>7</sup> J. Wesley Null, *A Disciplined Progressive Educator: The Life and Career of William Chandler Bagley* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Merle. Curti, *The Social Ideas of American Educators* (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield Adams, 1935).



Bestor, in his own mind at least, had an understanding and appreciation of educational progressivism at its best, when its innovations and insights were turned to the task of helping students acquire the academic understandings necessary to success in the developing world of the United States in the middle of the twentieth century. What Bestor could not abide, however, was a near completely child-centered educational progressivism that discarded the academic disciplines in a never-ending search for educational change. Though critics of this type of progressivism were working and writing in the 1930s and 1940s, a development in educational thought and practice of the latter decade galvanized a new round of criticism, scathingly discussed in 1953 in Bestor's signature work, *Educational Wastelands*.<sup>9</sup> That development was the life adjustment movement, led by Charles Prosser an official in the federal bureau of education. Prosser first put his ideas in print in 1939, when he argued that the high school curriculum had to be drastically expanded in order to accommodate the goals and interests of the increasing numbers of new students who were entering.<sup>10</sup> Prosser claimed initially that life adjustment courses and activities were a supplement to the academic curriculum of the high school, a supplement that would serve the over half of the high school enrollment that was not being served by academic courses or vocational courses geared to preparation for the trades. Prosser believed that the over fifty percent of students needed studies that addressed issues of how one was to live, and to prosper, in a modernizing society.

Though Prosser seldom advocated total replacement of academic studies, his reservations toward academic studies increased to the point that he came dangerously close, in the mind of opponents of his approach, to such a policy. His ideas were refined over a decade and published in 1951 in *Life Adjustment for Every Youth*, where he laid out the particulars, and the benefits of his approach to the high school. Through courses devoted to home, family, and society studies, Prosser argued that students would learn real lessons for life, lessons far superior to the abstract and often foreign ideas they encountered in the formal academic curriculum, and the too specific and often menial skills learned in existing vocational education courses.<sup>11</sup> Bestor was appalled by the ideas of Prosser and the steps that had been taken in American public schools and, particularly, in schools of education in American universities that were training teachers for those public schools, to attack the academic curriculum.

In 1953, Bestor lambasted the empty headedness of life adjustment and other anti-academic approaches taken in American public schools, approaches learned in the departments and schools of education which trained their teachers. He found the epitome of what appalled him in progressive education in the words of a junior high school administrator in the state of Illinois who Bestor quoted at length in his book.

Through the years we've built a sort of halo around reading, writing, and arithmetic. We've said that they were for everybody . . . for rich and poor, brilliant and not so mentally endowed, ones who liked them and those who failed to go for them. Teacher has said that these were some things everyone should "learn." The principal has remarked. "All educated people know how to write, spell, and read. . . ."

. . . When we come to the realization that not every child has to read, figure, write and spell . . . that many of them either cannot or will not master these chores. . . , then we shall be on the road to improving the junior high school curriculum.

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<sup>9</sup> Arthur E. Bestor, *Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in our Public Schools* ((Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1953).

<sup>10</sup> Charles A. Prosser, *Secondary Education in Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939).

<sup>11</sup> United States Office of Education, *Life Adjustment for Every Youth* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1951).

... If and when we are able to convince a few folks that mastery of reading, writing, and arithmetic is not the one road leading to happy, successful living, the next step is to cut down the amount of time and attention devoted to these areas in general junior high school courses.<sup>12</sup>

Bestor was greatly offended at what he considered the naked anti-academicism of this junior high school principal from Urbana, Illinois. Urbana, one of the two cities in which the University of Illinois operated, was a strategic location for the ideas like those of this junior high school principal that Bestor wanted to publicize and criticize. One reason for choosing an Urbana school administrator was his likely association with the College of Education at the University of Illinois, perhaps the leading target of the analysis in Bestor's volume. In fact, Bestor leveled much of his criticism at Illinois's education faculty, especially but not solely Harold Hand, for his advocacy of life adjustment and other avowedly child or society-centered approaches to education—approaches that disestablished academic studies as the primary purpose of American education. Bestor described the ideas of school administrators like the Urbana principal and professors of education like Hand as the work of “an interlocking directorate” which held increasing sway over American education, kept academics and interested citizens at arm's length from school decisions, and thereby profoundly threatened the intellectual health of the nation. Educationists on university faculties and other progressive educators reacted strongly, harshly, but basically ineffectively to Bestor's charge that they were leading the nation astray.<sup>13</sup> While educational journals were willing to publish critical reviews of Bestor's book, Bestor himself chose to ignore the criticism and to pursue his campaign against educational progressivism largely successfully, in the court of public opinion.

Bestor left Illinois for the University of Washington not too long after publishing his attack on educational progressivism in 1953, and a second attack two years later.<sup>14</sup> The situation in Seattle was not the same as it had been in Illinois, and Bestor went on to develop a specialty in constitutional history that took him away from educational affairs. This did not prevent his works, or his ideas, from maintaining a strong position in the public discourse surrounding American education. That strength was enhanced in 1957, when the Russian launching of its Sputnik satellite shook American politicians and citizens, causing them to eventually blame the schools more than any other agency for what was perceived as the decline of the United States in the midst of its cold war with the Soviet Union. Though the resort to blaming the schools was an overreaction, if not a distortion, of the situation, it served the political purpose of taking attention away from areas of American society such as the economy, the political system, or defense policy, a purpose that surely enhanced the tendency of the nation's political and economic leadership to jump on the anti-progressive education bandwagon.

### **Richard Hofstadter**

The second example of anti-progressivism considered here was published by Richard Hofstadter in 1963, six years after the Sputnik controversy that sparked passage of NDEA, and ten years after Arthur Bestor's *Educational Wastelands*. Criticism of progressive education was a consistent, if not constant, theme in American intellectual life in the decade between Bestor's, and Hofstadter's, volumes, waxing more strongly in some years but never waning significantly. Richard Hofstadter was a Professor of History at Columbia University when he published *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, a book which won a Pulitzer Prize in the non-fiction category.<sup>15</sup> Only one of four substantive sections of Hofstadter's book is

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Bestor, *Educational Wastelands*, 299-300.

<sup>13</sup> Weltman, “Reconsidering Arthur Bestor.”

<sup>14</sup> Bestor, *The Reconstruction of Learning*.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Knopf, 1963).

devoted to progressive education, however. The other three consider the realms of religion, politics, and business in America. The theme of each of these sections, and the section on progressive education, is that developments in religion, politics, business, and education provide a wide range of examples of ways in which the excesses of democracy in American history have come to threaten the necessary work of intellectuals in our society.

Hofstadter's account of progressive education argued that it is best seen as a contemporary version of the American commitment to popular education, a movement which he approves in principle. Hofstadter noted, however, that popular education has had severe negative consequences for the life of the mind in the nation. He argued that popular education, which he more often called mass education, was characterized by a stress on quantity over quality and a lack of a commitment to education as an intrinsic good in favor of a commitment to education for its utilitarian values. His discussion of life adjustment education followed for the most part Bestor's critique of a decade earlier. What he added was a contextualization of life adjustment in relation to earlier curricular priorities in the American high school. Germane here is the 1895 Committee of Ten report of the National Education Association which defended, though in an expanded form, the classical curriculum of the nineteenth century high school; and the Cardinal Principles NEA Committee report of 1918, which severely critiqued an academic emphasis in public education and argued in favor of more vocationally relevant and socially ameliorative studies such as citizenship education, leisure pursuits, and home and community concerns.<sup>16</sup> The movement toward utility and away from intellectual priorities intensified greatly in the life adjustment movement of the 1940s and 1950s, which Hofstadter critiqued just as vehemently as had Bestor.

Hofstadter addressed directly, and critically, the legacy of John Dewey and its relationship to the excesses of progressive education. Hofstadter knew that Dewey saw through programs like Life Adjustment education and Hofstadter was too much a knowledgeable historian of ideas to charge Dewey himself with anti-intellectualism. However, he stressed Dewey's relationship to the progressive educational failure to link the liberation of the child which it advocated to any consistent intellectual purpose. While it surely was not Dewey's goal to abandon intellectual purpose, according to Hofstadter, anti-intellectualism was encouraged by educators in thrall to Dewey who intensified his positing of growth as the animating and only end of the educational process and his inability to reign in those who pursued that growth in distinctly and consciously anti-intellectual directions such as the abandonment of the importance of subject matter. While a full account of Hofstadter on Dewey, concentrating on growth as proposed by the master and built on by his disciples, is beyond the scope of this paper, one must acknowledge that Hofstadter was a rather astute analyst of ideas, including those of Dewey, and an even more astute analyst of the deterioration of Dewey's insights in the hands of his disciples. It is also the case, however, that Hofstadter largely ignored Dewey's own critique of progressive education, published in 1938.<sup>17</sup> Finally, I would note that Hofstadter's critique of Dewey and progressive education owed much to scholarly evaluators who operated within the progressive camp, such as Boyd Bode, and William Bagley, discussed earlier. And, as we all know, including Hofstadter, Dewey himself was increasingly critical of progressive education as it evolved an expansively utilitarian agenda based on the "needs" of the child and, or, society. Yet Hofstadter saw the sins of the disciples as adumbrated in the ideas of the master, a judgment, it should be noted, that he certainly was not alone in making.

The third topic that Hofstadter took as a theme in his discussion was the teacher. In this discussion, Hofstadter stressed how a major consequence of developing a teaching force adequate in number to staff the burgeoning ranks of the public schools was a marked

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<sup>16</sup> Edward A. Krug, *The Shaping of the American High School, 1890-1920* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964).

<sup>17</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier Books, 1963 [1938]).

deterioration in the quality of teacher preparation. He depicted the modern teaching force as a group with little social advantages in its background, enduring low pay which often necessitated a second job for those who were the primary breadwinners in their family, and which had experienced an estrangement from academic subjects and commitments in its preparation for work. In discussing that estrangement from serious academic work in teacher training colleges and departments, Hofstadter wondered: "To what extent able students stayed out of teaching because of its poor rewards and to what extent because of the nonsense that figured so prominently in teacher education. . . ." While he could not isolate cause and effect in discussing teachers, he concluded that it was crystal clear that "teachers did not have enough training in the subjects they intended to teach. . . ." <sup>18</sup>

Hofstadter was a severe critic of teacher training in American colleges and universities, particularly the training of high school teachers. He decried the development of the normal school from a less than college-level institution which trained elementary teachers, concentrating on pedagogical studies and issues, into teachers colleges that trained high school teachers and school administrators, but still concentrated on pedagogy in their studies. The problem, especially in training high school teachers, was the increasing distance between education and subject matter faculties, particularly in institutions like the teachers colleges which had a tradition of "professional" study honed in the elementary school training curriculum. Education faculties, for Hofstadter, had too much autonomy, a situation poignantly illustrated by the quip well known around Columbia University that 120<sup>th</sup> Street, the street that separated Teachers College from Columbia University, was the widest street in the world. This led to a situation where professional educators "were left to develop their ideas without being subjected to the intellectual discipline that might have come out of a dialogue with university scholars." <sup>19</sup>

There is ample evidence to make the case that in both Bestor and Hofstadter, the denigration of education faculty, and the progressive educational ideas which animated much of their work, was a product of academic snobbery as much as it was the result of rigorous study of the situation. That case is well illustrated in the work of the third critic of progressive education that I will consider in this essay, James Bryant Conant.

### **James Bryant Conant**

Chemistry professor and department head at Harvard, president of that august institution for twenty years, scientist involved with the development of the nuclear bomb in World War II, and diplomat operating in Germany in the post-war years, James Bryant Conant had enjoyed a long and illustrious career when he turned his full attention to the American high school in the late 1950s. <sup>20</sup> Previously, Conant had had some experience in k-12 education as a member of the National Education Association's Educational Policies Commission on five different occasions in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. <sup>21</sup> As part of his consideration of k-12 education that began after his diplomatic career, Conant turned his attention to teacher education with a formal study, the results of which were published in 1963. <sup>22</sup> It is this work that is the primary focus of discussion here.

Early in *The Education of American Teachers*, Conant laid bare the relations between much criticism of teacher education and an arts and sciences orientation, such as that held by Bestor and Hofstadter. Conant remarked:

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<sup>18</sup> Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism*, 318.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>20</sup> James Bryant Conant, *The American High School Today: A First Report to Interested Citizens* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959).

<sup>21</sup> Wayne J. Urban, "The Educational Policies Commission: Notes for an Autopsy," *The Sophist's Bane* 3 (Fall, 2005): 15-30.

<sup>22</sup> James Bryant Conant, *The Education of American Teachers* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963).

Early in my career, as a professor of chemistry, I became aware of the hostility of the members of my profession to schools or faculties of education. I shared the views of the majority of my colleagues on the faculty of arts and sciences that there was no excuse for the existence of people who sought to teach others how to teach. I felt confident that I was an excellent teacher and I had developed my skill by my experience, without the benefit of professors of education. I saw no reason why others could not do likewise, including those who graduated from college with honors in chemistry and who wished to teach in high school.<sup>23</sup>

Conant went on to add that he had co-authored a high school chemistry text with his high school chemistry instructor, a further indication of his own educational expertise. He concluded this discussion with the following report: "When any issues involving benefits to the [Harvard] graduate school of education came before the faculty of arts and sciences, I automatically voted with those who looked with contempt on the school of education."<sup>24</sup> Later in the volume, Conant reported that "Many academic professors believe that the courses given by professors of education are worthless, and that the degrees granted students who have devoted much of their time to these courses are of little value."<sup>25</sup> Conant went on to state that his prejudicial view of education faculties was tempered somewhat during his Harvard presidency (1933-1953), when he entered into serious discussions of educational problems and issues with leaders of the Harvard education school, especially Henry Holmes and Francis Spaulding. Elsewhere in his writing, Conant also noted that his suspicions of professional educational study and the professional educators who conducted such studies were tempered further by his terms on the Educational Policies Commission.<sup>26</sup>

In *The Education of American Teachers*, Conant credited education professors with an "emphasis on education for citizenship, on the socially unifying effects of the comprehensive high school, and on the public schools as instruments of democracy, the recognition of individual difference, and the need for including practical courses in high school elective programs . . ." and concluded that these all were characteristics "which I applaud."<sup>27</sup> Note that the particulars that Conant cited here can easily be seen as a summary of much of what had come to be identified as progressive education by the middle of the twentieth century. Thus, it seems fair to say that, for Conant, teacher education, as conducted in most schools, colleges, and departments of education in the twentieth century, conveyed a progressive educational ideology, though one which differed in specifics and in emphases from place to place. Further, Conant had learned some respect for this progressive ideology in his contacts with professors of education, at Harvard and with school administrators in the National Education Association. Yet in spite of this recognition, the balance of Conant's book was devoted to recommending a reduction in courses and experiences in formal educational study for most school teachers, and particularly for high school teachers, in favor of more study in general education courses in the arts and sciences, and in a subject matter major.

Conant did add one relatively new wrinkle in his volume on teacher education, calling for more power for lay school board members in teacher employment and retention and making recommendations about how that power should be wielded. He stated that it should be lay people, school board members, who had the final say in teacher employment and personnel policies. Even so, Conant was not shy in recommending specifically what courses and experiences teachers in training for work in the school should have in terms of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>26</sup> James Bryant Conant, *My Several Lives: Memoirs of a Social Inventor* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

<sup>27</sup> Conant, *Education of American Teachers*, 6.

their preparation. Foremost for Conant was subject matter knowledge. He thought that every prospective teacher, including elementary teachers, should have a concentration in an academic subject that is taught in the schools. Next, and almost as important, was practice teaching. He had several recommendations about the practice teaching experience, including the qualifications of the cooperating teacher in the schools and the clinical faculty member from the education department or college who would jointly supervise the practice teacher. Conant's invocation of the words clinical faculty member linked educator preparation with the clinical experiences of medical and other more prestigious professional schools. He also gave his study a scientific cast, including a number of appendixes detailing a variety of characteristics of the teacher education program he was studying.<sup>28</sup>

Yet the scientific aspects of Conant's work seem best evaluated as unconvincing, or perhaps a veneer. No sampling procedure was applied in choosing his institutions, other than their being in the sixteen most populous states, and Conant was happy to simply assume that findings from his sample could be generalized to teacher education institutions as a group. Further, his appendixes and a few tables within the text were all descriptive counts of various aspects of teacher education, with no statistical technique or other rigorous analysis added to refine the findings. And at too many strategic points, Conant would resort to conclusions blatantly impressionistic in nature. For example, in discussing student comments on teacher education, he remarked that "I could not ignore their [students'] repeated comments that most of the educational offerings were 'Mickey Mouse' courses."<sup>29</sup> In a chapter discussing the nuts and bolts of teacher preparation programs, he opined that there was no close correlation between intellectual ability and teacher excellence, and added the following: "I still maintain that *we should endeavor to recruit our teachers from the upper third of the graduating high school class on a national basis*. Why? Because the courses in the academic subjects that I believe important as part of a general education must not be pitched at too low a level or too slow a pace."<sup>30</sup> Conant's easy resort here to his personal beliefs as a basis for policy recommendations occurred elsewhere in his account of teacher education and offers some reason to question the acuity of his analysis and recommendations.

Conant's emphasis on education of the gifted students in high school echoed a major concern of both Bestor and Hofstadter, though Conant was especially interested in giftedness in mathematics and the sciences, while the other two saw giftedness in areas such as their own study of history and other humanities and the social sciences, as well as in the sciences. Yet none of the three offered any evidence to support their common sense conclusion that separate educational experiences for gifted students were superior in their accomplishments to existing arrangements where the gifted took courses along side of their less academically gifted or talented fellow students. And the frequency of Conant relying on his beliefs and opinions, as well as the opinions of students, citizens, or academic professors about formal education courses and experiences, leads me at least to question the grounds undergirding his convictions and the warrant he had for making his numerous recommendations about teacher education. Having said this, however, I want to indicate in the conclusion to this essay that I am not in complete disagreement with the opinions of Bestor, Hofstadter, and Conant about the weaknesses of teacher education and the relation of those weaknesses to progressive educational ideology.

### Conclusion

Before considering my own views of the critics, I want to make the point first that Bestor, Hofstadter, and Conant all had reason to see themselves as part of the progressivism that they were critiquing. Though none of the three addressed this issue directly, Bestor's own

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 81.

educational background and his work at Teachers College in the 1930s, Hofstadter's interactions with Lawrence Cremin and other members of the Teachers College faculty and his publications about the accomplishments of progressive reformers and progressive academics,<sup>31</sup> and Conant's association with mainly progressive, professional educators on the Educational Policies Commission and interactions with his own Harvard education faculty all point to their nuanced understanding of the larger phenomenon of progressivism. This, however, stands in marked contradiction to their rather un-nuanced criticism of teacher education professors and courses. Bestor and Hofstadter were writing critiques, near polemics, and did not necessarily see themselves as bound by the scholarly demands of balance and fairness that characterized most of their other scholarship. Conant did not see himself as a partisan or polemical critic, instead taking the stance of friendly critic of teacher educators as well as friend, and milder critic, of arts and sciences faculty such as Bestor and Hofstadter. Yet Conant's reliance on beliefs and opinions, his own as well as those of students and other academics, belies the objectivity and scientific mantle he tried to adopt in his analysis. What this all means is that a good part of the criticism leveled against education faculty, and the progressive educational ideology that they professed, even though it came from three people not opposed to progressivism in principle, was in large part a reflection of a long-standing academic bias against educational studies and professors of education.

Having offered this brief criticism of the critics of progressive teacher education, let me close with a more lengthy assessment of the strength of their position, an assessment like that of Bestor, Hofstadter, and Conant, based on my own experience and little more. Over my four decades on education faculties, beginning in 1968, I have found that much of what I have seen would support the criticisms made by our three authors. The decline of academic standards in many education courses, the embrace of things like Power Point and other easy technological advances to the point that they are used ritually without any real serious effect, and the often intellectually questionable positions taken by students, and more troublingly by faculty colleagues are things I would point to as fodder for the anti-education critics.

I can't really say that I have ever considered Colleges of Education, at least the ones I've worked in, to be fundamentally intellectual places. I'm not sure that they should be but I am confident that they should be more intellectual than they are. I don't want to discount the notion of academic snobbery in characterizing education faculties as anti-intellectual, but I also want to suggest that the situation is one in which more than academic snobbery is operating.

One place to look for evidence about colleges of education is in the dissertations their doctoral students have produced. I won't cite titles here, but I would like to say that I've been on more than a few in my career that came close to being a joke. And I've seen plenty of others that appear, by title, to be an academic joke. I'll let readers provide their own examples. The area of curriculum and instruction is particularly susceptible to questionable dissertations, but I would not exempt the foundations area, or any other sub-specialty in education from critical scrutiny.

More important than dissertation titles is a turn which has been taken in the foundations of education, history, philosophy, and sociology of education, in the last few decades that I think can be seen as progressive in one sense and anti-intellectual in another. That trend is toward interdisciplinarity in the foundations, although one can argue that foundations of education was begun as an interdisciplinary field, and I have defended that development early in my career.<sup>32</sup> Interdisciplinary, however, is not the same thing as anti-

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<sup>31</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Knopf, 1955) and Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (New York: Knopf, 1968).

<sup>32</sup> Wayne J. Urban, "Social Foundations and the Disciplines," *Teachers College Record* 71 (December, 1969).

disciplinary or adisciplinary, two characteristics of too much of the writing in foundations fields today.

More specifically, the field of foundations has evolved over the years away from faculties with disciplinary specializations in history, philosophy, sociology, anthropology of education and towards training in fields such as curriculum theory, cultural studies, diversity studies, multicultural studies, etc., etc., etc. If there is any common intellectual grounding to these fields, and I'm not sure that there is, it would be critical theory, as developed originally in the Frankfurt School in the 1930s and brought to the United States in that decade as a result of the Nazi ethnic cleansing of Germany.<sup>33</sup> Critical theory, as practiced by Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, and others, was a formidable intellectual field. Critical educational studies as practiced in the twenty-first century, is to me considerably less intellectually formidable. I would think that it should be closely allied to philosophy of education and less closely but still allied to history of education. And much critical work in educational studies takes place in philosophy of education journals. But it has simply replaced philosophy of education too often, rather than enriched it.

I realize that my own views are no more rigorous or evidentiary-based than those of Bestor, Hofstadter, or Conant. However, they are offered from a perspective of rather intimate involvement with the many unreconstructed progressive educators working in colleges of education. The main tenet, or perhaps the main result, of the work of such educators is the debasement of academic study, or at least the relegation of such study to a place in importance beneath the concerns of timeliness and relevance. One does not have to invoke dubious concerns such as international economic competition to worry about the academic state of American schools. Much good work still goes on in those schools<sup>34</sup> and a good bit of it is in the school subjects that are also academic disciplines in colleges and universities. Yet the tendency away from academic disciplinary concerns is now taking place even within the disciplines themselves, through academic ideologies such as post-modernism. If teachers, and the trainers of teachers, abandon academic work completely, something that I do not think has yet happened, it does not bode well for the future of our society. Asking education faculties to embrace a commitment to academic rigor in their work does not seem to be too much to ask. It seems to me that refusing to embrace such a commitment does not bode well for the future of education faculties.

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<sup>33</sup> Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Boston, Little Brown, 1973).

<sup>34</sup> David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle, *The Manufactured Crisis: Myth, Fraud, and Attack on America's Public Schools* (New York: Addison Wesley, 1995).



## **Coming to care about teaching for social justice: The Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education (1950-1964)**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores one teacher education program's experiment in "turning the souls" of its students to help them understand and care deeply about issues of race and social justice, as well as issues of environmental sustainability. The Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education, (1950-1964) a small, "reconstructionist" program, was based upon Deweyan principles of choice, discovery, and student-generated learning and had as its underlying tenet a commitment to "change the world." These goals created a tension between the value of student independence and the program's political values and commitments. Nonetheless, students discovered reasons for education that lay beyond themselves, their experiences, the classroom, and their traditional notions of school. By immersing students in experiences that moved them emotionally, exposing their own, often disturbing, limited and limiting assumptions, students developed a willing accountability for changing their world. They came to care about social justice.

**Keywords:** Teacher education, social justice, Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education

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## Introduction

[Transformation rests] neither on an agreement about what justice consists of nor on an analysis of how racism, sexism, or class subordination operates. Such arguments and analyses are indispensable. But a politics of conversion requires more. Nihilism is not overcome by arguments or analyses; it is tamed by love and care. Any disease of the soul must be conquered by a turning of one's soul. This turning is done through one's own affirmation of one's worth—an affirmation fueled by the concern of others. A love ethic must be at the center of a politics of conversion.

Cornel West (1993) *Race Matters*

The time-honored term for preparing those who work in the field of education is “teacher training.” The term implies the acquisition of a bag of tricks, the memorization of right answers and right methods, a concentration on techniques. In contrast, the Putney Graduate School uses the term “teacher education,” to imply not only great skill but the development of great love and great awareness. To prepare for teaching is a rigorous undertaking.

Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education Catalogue (c. 1950)

In this article<sup>1</sup>, I explore one teacher education program's experiment in “turning the souls” of its students to help them understand and care deeply about issues of race, social justice and environmental sustainability. The Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education (PGS), which ran from 1950 to 1964, was a small program connected to the Putney School of Putney, Vermont, founded by Carmelita Hinton, head of the Putney School, and directed by Morris R. Mitchell. The program was based upon John Dewey's principles of learning through reflection on experience and Theodore Brameld's “reconstructionist” principles of education for social justice. Specifically, PGS students learned through direct engagement with “places of quiet revolution,” (including Miles Horton's Highlander School, Citizenship Schools on the Sea Islands, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Harlem settlement houses, and examples of sustainable land development) with the aim of making society a more humane and harmonious place. Significantly for PGS and its curriculum, the program was book-ended by the Civil Rights Movement of the early 1950s and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Through a program that included living together in a mixed-race, mixed-nationality, mixed-age, and mixed-gender residence, studying and meeting leaders in the Civil Rights Movement, traveling together in a van over a period of several weeks to various sites of civil action in the deep South, and reflecting regularly on all these experiences, the program aimed to graduate “transformed” individuals, ready to act in the world to change it.<sup>2</sup>

In taking a radical stance, especially in conservative post World War II America, the program operated within an ecology of tensions. These tensions included seeing teachers as independent, critical change agents in a context that endorsed conformity; advocating for progressive education in a context of efficiency; and committing to social justice in a context of fear, institutional authoritarianism, and conservatism (Tyack, 1974, Tyack & Cuban, 1995). There were also tensions within PGS between the more radical ideals of the program, embodied by Morris Mitchell, and the more modest goals of his students, many of whom “just wanted to learn to teach.” True, they had chosen a radical program, but in many cases they were looking for a more interesting version of the familiar—school teachers to teach school subjects in school buildings. But Mitchell had different ideas. In effect, he believed that students would learn to teach by being students of a curriculum of social change and personal transformation, a view not necessarily shared by all of his students.

In this study I show that, despite a frequent lack of congruity between Mitchell's goals for his students and theirs for themselves, students' experiences in the program forced them to encounter themselves and the limitations of their understanding, and in the process assume an authority as both change agents *and* teachers. I show that, even though Mitchell's

personality and commitments wielded a tremendous amount of influence over what and how his students learned, these factors were, ironically, counter-balanced by the very independence of thought and action that he nurtured in them and structured into the curriculum, as well as by his genuine love for and faith in his students, even as they disappointed him.

The vivid and often dramatic historical threads that wove themselves through the fifties and early sixties were integral to the personal transformations that occurred at PGS. Often to their own surprise, students discovered reasons for education that lay beyond themselves, their experiences, the classroom, and their traditional notions of school.

Finally, I address a gap in the historical literature that David Cohen (1989) has called “virgin territory”—“historical studies that can reference teachers’ encounters with students over academic subjects...what teachers and students did together” (pp. 394-398). Though Cohen is talking about encounters between schoolteachers and their students, the same historical lack exists for teacher educators and their students. Through access to a number of documents including students’ Cumulative Files (which included journals, papers, study plans, schedules, responses from teachers, class notes, and personal and collaborative accounts of the trips South), letters from students, as well as Morris Mitchell’s papers, and interviews with graduates and others involved in the program,<sup>3</sup> I have been able to develop an account of what Morris Mitchell and his graduate students “did together.” The details of their encounters, as told through documents and interviews, paints a picture of teacher-student interaction and learning that bears little resemblance to the traditional teacher-student encounters Cohen probably had in mind. Yet the record conveys the deeply personal, conflicted, and often dramatic nature of a teacher education program that aimed at transformational learning and teaching for social justice.

### **Teaching for Social Justice**

Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2004) notes that society’s beliefs and values about the purposes of education provide the context for teacher education policy today. She observes that contemporary policies of accountability, particularly the “relentless focus” on high stakes testing for both students and teachers, point to a number of assumptions: “teaching is a technical activity, knowledge is static, good practice is universal, being prepared to teach is knowing subject matter, and pupil learning is equal to higher scores on high-stakes tests” (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 161). Education is thus seen as the most efficient way to “grow the economy,” turn out productive workers, and compete successfully in the global economy, a policy strikingly redolent of the 1950s. Teaching for social justice, by contrast, emphasizes a different set of values. From this stance, the purpose of education is seen as preparing “all people for meaningful work and for free and equal civic participation in a democratic society,” and teaching is regarded as “an intellectual activity, knowledge ... as constructed and fluid, good practice is contextual, and pupil learning includes academic achievement as well as developing critical habits of mind and preparation for civic engagement” (ibid, p. 161).

Related to teacher education for social justice is an approach to teacher education that focuses on a “critical pedagogy of place.” David Gruenewald (2002; 2003) challenges advocates of social justice teacher education to broaden their scope to include environmental stewardship. A critical pedagogy of place, writes Gruenewald, “aims to evaluate the appropriateness of our relationships to each other, and to our *socio-ecological* places... [and] to pursue the kind of social action that improves the social and ecological life of places, near and far, now and in the future” (italics in original, 2002, p. 9). He advocates taking children and teachers out of the limited space of classrooms, and immersing them in the spaces where

they live. By creating a connection to a place – and, I argue, the historical events that are the lifeblood of a place – a commitment to the welfare of those who inhabit the place is created.

While many of today's teacher education programs use the terms "social justice," "diversity," and even "critical pedagogy of place," in their descriptions of themselves and the courses they offer, too often they are add-ons without the requisite, deep-structure transformation necessary, not just in a program curriculum, but in teacher educators themselves.

To be long-lasting, such learning requires personal transformation. As Cochran-Smith (2004), Linda Darling-Hammond *et al* (2002), and others (Ladson-billings, 2001; Nieto, 2000; Liston & Zeichner, 1996; Author, 1996; Weiler, 2002) have noted, becoming a teacher, or teacher educator, committed to social change requires a fundamental shift in the way one views the world, one's place in it, and one's relationship to others. This is not accomplished in a course, or even in a year, but over a lifetime of conscious teaching and shared inquiry and reflection. To make a difference, they note, teachers must care from the inside out — rather than because they should — about social justice issues. At PGS accountability became a personal matter of will, rather than an external matter of policy. Students' learning experiences awakened a passion and vision within themselves, which are at the heart of good teaching, where souls are turned.

### **Structure of the Article**

I begin with a brief portrait of Morris Mitchell and the Graduate School program. I then offer a brief description of the teaching and learning that occurred there, followed by an account of students' experiences on the Study Tour. Although the graduate school curriculum took a number of forms, (seminars, short field trips, visiting lecturers, and apprenticeships) the most powerful was the Study Tour. The object was to insert students into the midst of social and environmental problems—from racism to strip mining—and to introduce them to innovative responses. I conclude with a brief discussion and implications for progressive teacher education today.

### **Morris Mitchell**

Morris Mitchell's philosophy of education and his ideas for its implementation were shaped by his family and his experiences as a young student, as a soldier in World War I, and as a new teacher in Ellerbe, South Carolina. These experiences were then given theoretical shape by contact, both direct and through their writings, with John Dewey, William Heard Kilpatrick, and Theodore Brameld.

Born in 1895, Mitchell grew up in a family of educators. His father, Samuel Chiles Mitchell (1864-1948), was a professor of history, first at the University of Richmond (1895-1908), and then at Brown University (1908-1909), and later became president of the Universities of South Carolina (1908-1913), and Delaware (1914-1920). He was also a long-time trustee of the Negro Rural School Fund of the Anna T. Jeanes Foundation (1908-1937).<sup>4</sup> He made his three sons and daughter aware of how their privilege—financially modest as it was—contrasted with those less fortunate than they. Their father's conviction that it was the moral duty of educated whites to play an instrumental part in changing the lot of the Southern poor became their own. Morris Mitchell as well as his two brothers, both of whom became active in education and civil rights in the South, committed themselves to making a difference.

Young Mitchell was not a strong student. He had difficulty doing the prescribed tasks, sitting still, and paying attention. His mother, in a diary entry, tells the story of nine-year-old Mitchell's tale of his own misbehavior.

"Today at school," [Mitchell said], "they were all making *more fuss!* And Miss Kate kept ringing the bell and trying to get order, and *trying* to get order; and you ought to've heard her calling, '*Morris!*' And they *wouldn't* stop!"<sup>5</sup>

He deeply resented "forced" education,<sup>6</sup> and was asked to leave two different schools, one public, and one private. Mitchell finally graduated from high school in 1912, after which he attended the University of South Carolina, the University of Virginia, and Delaware College. In April of 1917 he entered the army and trained for service in World War I, returning after the war to graduate from Delaware College in June of 1919.

Mitchell's time in the army shaped him profoundly. "The *only* thing I know," he would pronounce after his return from the front, "is that I will NEVER have anything to do with war."<sup>7</sup> While in France as a lieutenant, he saw many of his men killed and wounded. Mitchell himself nearly perished from gas poisoning and serious wounds. He was sent to Panges les Eaux and St. Armand <sup>8</sup> to recover, and although he begged his commanding officers to send him back to the front, and believed strongly in the "priceless cause" of the First World War, the experience transformed Mitchell into an ardent pacifist.

Mitchell returned to the States after the war and settled in the small town of Ellerbe, North Carolina, where he accepted his first teaching job. It was in Ellerbe that he first made efforts to blur the lines between community and school. Rather than teach "subjects," Mitchell (Mitchell/Chaffee, 1928) asked his students to find out what their small town needed, and their curriculum arose from the needs of the town, which, among other things, included constructing their own school. Their curriculum arose from the needs of the town. This included constructing their own school. He and the town, led by his students, raised money to buy the land and the materials for the school. They used shrubs from the surrounding forest for the school's landscaping. "Even the derricks by which they erected great scissor rafters, weighing a ton each, were of [the students] own contriving," recalled Mitchell (*ibid*, p. 499). He gradually built the population of the school from a mere dozen students to enough to require three teachers in his first year there. According to his own account, about half of the graduates of Ellerbe School went on to become teachers. Mitchell felt this was due to the fact that the learning which they had experienced there was laced with the purpose of improving the community. The method proved durable. A *Reader's Digest* article written in 1937 describes how, nearly 20 years later, the school's learning experiences and community's development still meshed. "They learn by doing," wrote the author, who had visited Ellerbe.

The curriculum wanders over into life, eats big chunks of it, and comes back into the classroom permanently enriched. I saw a class spending one of its periods giving blood tests to a neighbor's chickens, and another which went outdoors to study Caesar and fight battles with the Helvetians in North Carolina's sand. I saw an arithmetic teacher's classroom, in which the children were about to start a bank with money printed by the school press [which also served as the town's source of printed material.] (p. 40)

Such synergistic relationships between schools and communities, whereby the development of the community was the job of the school and its students, and the development of students the job of the community, remained themes throughout Mitchell's career.

Mitchell earned a doctorate at George Peabody College for Teachers at Vanderbilt University in Nashville in 1926. During this time he also studied for a year under John Dewey at Columbia Teachers College. It was his exposure to Dewey and Dewey's ideas as well as those of William Heard Kilpatrick, that first gave Mitchell the confidence that the kind of learning he had facilitated in Ellerbe was not only legitimate but was also articulated and endorsed by the nation's leading educational philosophers. In particular, he drew upon Dewey's belief that education was the reconstruction of experience through a process of reflection, and upon Kilpatrick's application of Dewey's theory in the project method. The project method placed the "purposeful act," an activity in line with a child's own goals, in a "social environment" which looked toward the welfare of the group. Such views saw the world not as static, with a fixed set of facts to memorize, but as changing, whereby knowledge was constantly being reconstructed.

### **The Putney Graduate School**

The Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education (also known as Glen Maples) was founded in 1950 by Carmelita Hinton, then director of the Putney School, a private, progressive, college preparatory school located in Putney, Vermont. Hinton conceived the Graduate School along the lines of the Shady Hill Teacher Apprentice Program in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she had taught. Shady Hill operated under the direction of Katharine Taylor who came to Shady Hill from a teaching position at the Francis W. Parker School in Chicago. Shady Hill's model for teacher education placed student teachers in the midst of the life of the school. As a progressive program, discussion focused largely on children and their learning. As Taylor put it, they asked not "What did I teach today?" but "What did students learn?" and heeded the difference between the two questions.

Mitchell came to Glen Maples on the recommendation of Edward Yeomans, a Shady Hill colleague and friend of Hinton, who had met Mitchell at the Macedonia Cooperative Community in Georgia where Mitchell had lived and worked. To the surprise and often the chagrin of both Hinton and the board, however, once Mitchell started, he took the Graduate School in a different direction from what Hinton and her faculty had expected. This underlying tension between Mitchell and the Putney School undoubtedly added to the other tensions that the Graduate School students experienced during their time at Glen Maples. Mitchell sought to immerse students in experiences that would provoke them to reflect on themselves and their beliefs, schools, school systems, and, most importantly, society and its problems. It promoted self-knowledge, learning with others in community, working towards social change with a global perspective, and reflection on experience as a means of developing an awareness that lifted them beyond the boundaries of self and the comfort of the familiar. Hinton and the Board were progressive, but looking for something more conventional and closer to home—a program that would prepare teachers to teach their students, rather than a critique of their own methods and beliefs.

Mitchell recruited students from countries as diverse as India, Pakistan, Sweden, Kenya, Jamaica, and Haiti. Every class was multi-racial and international and included men and women, students from the inner city and rural areas, students from the Deep South, married students and their families, single students, and students from working- as well as middle-class backgrounds. When students were unable to pay tuition, Mitchell found benefactors, arranged no-interest loans, or simply allowed students to attend for free.<sup>9</sup>

Mitchell designed the program so that the curriculum was determined in large part by the students themselves, guided by their personal interests, and also determined by Mitchell and his vision of what the world needed. This remained one of the essential tensions in the program. He believed in a student-generated curriculum that adhered to the needs and

interests of students, and yet he was passionately attached to changing the world according to his values.

Mitchell believed that skillful teaching began with self-knowledge. To teach children in a “crisis world” demanded traditional [teacher] skills and interests but also

new concerns and abilities: a wide knowledge of the world and its peoples, an involvement in human problems, and the skill to lead others to knowledge and involvement; a deep sense of the fundamental unity of mankind and at the same time of its vitalizing diversity, and the need and ability to communicate that sense; an informed understanding of the active nature of learning and of ways to encourage that activity; least tangibly but most importantly, such self-knowledge and awareness as will furnish a constant and secure base for the interaction of one human being with others such that they, too, will gain awareness and the security of deep self-knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

Mitchell often said to his students that “a teacher teaches who a teacher is. (...) To know what he is purveying, [a teacher] must know himself as deeply and honestly as he can.”<sup>11</sup> To this end he required students to “test their purposes by working to carry them out,” documenting these activities in an on-going portfolio called the Cumulative File, and meeting regularly with both him and their classmates for “counseling sessions” focused on their work.<sup>12</sup>

To prepare his students in the basic skills of school teaching alone was clearly too limited a goal for Mitchell. A degree from Putney, he wrote, “demonstrated [a graduate’s] preparation and readiness for leadership in a school, a community project, a social agency, an industrial organization, or some other place where education can aid in the reconstruction of human society.”<sup>13</sup> He felt strongly that the way to educate teachers for such a role was to immerse them in experiences that would move them emotionally, compel them to understand deeply, and ultimately act to change the contexts in which they lived and worked.

The program, which generally ran from September to June, included seminars where students examined progressive, “reconstructionist,” and traditional approaches to education as well as big ideas like urban decay and renewal, environmental sustainability, and Civil Rights. In addition, there were short and long trips to what Mitchell called “places of quiet revolution” — progressive schools, rural Vermont sustainable wood lots, and settlement houses in New York City. There were also apprenticeships of the students’ choice. These took place in progressive elementary and high schools, like the Putney School, in non-traditional schools for adults like the Penn Community Center in the Sea Islands or the Highlander School, in social agencies like the Settlement houses in New York, and other places where social change through education was a priority. The year ended with a summation of the students’ learning through the writing of a master’s thesis. The final days of the program consisted of in-depth, group-generated evaluations of the program and suggestions for the following year.<sup>14</sup>

Not surprisingly, there were no grades at Glen Maples. Instead, students kept portfolios that included autobiographies, outlines of short- and long-range plans, seminar papers, journal accounts of trips, and reflections on daily living and learning. Mitchell saw these Cumulative Files as the place where structured reflection on experience would happen. The following description mirrors closely Dewey’s (1933) own description of the reflective process:

The cumulative file is of great importance. It documents for each student his own learning: the encountering of obstacles and their preliminary analysis; the choice of the most promising possibilities; the testing of one or several of those possible

solutions; the eventual answer arrived at and the progress which that answer makes possible. As a reconstruction of such experiences, the writing of the cumulative file constitutes a vital learning activity in itself.<sup>15</sup>

The file also provided a starting place from which to explore and articulate one's philosophy of education. Most importantly for Mitchell, it served as the foundation from which students would take action to change society. Mitchell wrote,

In arriving at his own philosophy, [the student] is expected to study and evaluate the philosophies of others, always in the light of his growing awareness of himself, of the world around him and its problems, of the potentialities of education to aid or lead in the reconstruction of society. (*Ibid*, pp. 14, 15)

While the curriculum was student-generated, Mitchell did have a method. It grew out of his understanding of Dewey and Dewey's concept of reconstructing experience through systematic reflection. (See Rodgers, 2002 for a full discussion of Dewey's view of reflection). So while the experiences would shift according to the year and the group, the method of learning from them remained consistent.

Mitchell felt that all of these learning experiences comprised a foundation from which students would learn how to teach. He believed that "the method of teaching [was] in the learning." His sights, it appears, were not set on preparing teachers as much as they were focused on preparing human beings. While it can be argued (as Mitchell did, persuasively) that there is no difference—that we teach who we are—there are elements of pedagogy that must be explicitly named and not just absorbed through osmosis. The rudiments of teaching and an understanding of learning can be found in the phenomena of learning, but they do not announce themselves; they must be teased out with the guidance of those who have reflected on the teaching-learning relationship and see it clearly. There is ample evidence that Mitchell *did* see the relationship clearly, but his priority was that his students understand social issues rather than pedagogy. The following section explores students' experiences in one aspect of the PGS curriculum, the Study Tour, which illustrates the kind of learning and teaching experience that happened outside the walls of the classroom.

### **The Study Tour**

For this study, I interviewed eleven Glen Maples alumni from the first to the last (1951–1965) class, and many classes in-between. Those whom I interviewed were largely determined by whom I could locate after nearly fifty years. However, I believe that the group I interviewed is broadly representative of those who attended Glen Maples. The group consisted of men and women, U.S. citizens and foreign students, black and white, those who loved the program and those who had a harder time with it, although I usually could find both in the same person.

The Study Tour brought together all aspects of the program. It forced students to live and travel and make decisions together as a community and it brought them face-to-face with social problems like racism and environmental devastation, but also quiet yet powerful efforts at social change. Inevitably, it put students in contact with themselves—their beliefs and assumptions, both noble and disturbing.

The Study Tour usually headed to the Deep South. While no two trips were the same, they shared the theme of social change through education. In the pages that follow, I give a brief overview of the fall term and preparation for the tour, and then patch together episodes from several different trips, drawing on Mitchell's records as well as material from students' Cumulative Files and interview accounts.



The Study Tour served as a testing ground for the ideas introduced in the fall (namely, an introduction to reconstructionist education—Brameld, Dewey, and Kilpatrick—and an overview of current social concerns) both in terms of the social movements the tour explored and the educational structure that the tour represented.

Caroline Pierce,<sup>16</sup> a member of the sixth Graduate School class, and her cohort traveled South in the spring of 1956, not quite two years after the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision had been rendered (May 17, 1954). She and her twelve classmates<sup>17</sup> loaded into two Volkswagen vans to see what that decision meant for the South. According to Pierce, before setting out on the trip, the group, along with Mitchell, had agreed to several things: any place where they ate or slept would have to accept the whole group; they would always eat inside a place rather than settle for a take-out meal; and, they would encounter any racial aggression with non-violence (CR, interview, March 1997). In this group's case, they did not wait long for an opportunity to put their resolutions to the test. The chef in their first restaurant in Maryland, according to Pierce, burst from the kitchen and headed towards John Fallon, the African-American member of the group. Waving a long butcher knife in John Fallon's face he yelled, "Get your f--- black ass out of here!" Rather than risk putting John Fallon and themselves in danger, they left the restaurant. Later, in a separate incident in Georgia, white men driving a truck full of manure followed Pierce and John Fallon. They reportedly threw manure at the two by the shovelful as they drove by. John Fallon and Pierce, clinging to their promise of non-violence, kept on walking. Pierce said that Mitchell used these incidents and others like them to "push the borders" of the group's understanding. According to Pierce, he constantly asked probing questions: "What would make a man do something like that? What are the forces of the community that may have influenced his behavior? How did it make you feel? What are the different ways we might have responded?" Questions like these put students "at the edge of their knowing," drawing from the emotional depths of their recent experience. There was, in the words of one, a deeply "felt need" to put meaning to such experiences.

On that second day of Pierce's trip the group covered 240 miles, from Bergen, New Jersey to Washington, D.C., starting at 7:30 in the morning and ending at 9:30 that night, with visits to four separate towns. The previous day the group drove to New York City from Putney, visited the United Nations, attended a briefing there, met with William Heard Kirkpatrick in his home on Morningside Drive, dined at Teachers College, and, according to Pierce, met with a gentleman named Mike Giles in Englewood, New Jersey to talk about "conflict episode analysis with reference to present racial tensions in the South," finally arriving, exhilarated but exhausted, in Bergen.

Two regular Study Tour destinations were Myles Horton's Highlander Folk School<sup>18</sup> in Monteagle, Tennessee and the Citizenship Schools along the coast of South Carolina. Mitchell admired Horton's approach to education. It represented to him the best kind of marriage between education and social change—a reconstructionist ideal. Myles Horton was a man of principle combined with action (or what Friere [1970] would call action-reflection or *praxis*). Horton's most significant work was with labor unions in the 1930s and 1940s and with the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s.

Study Tour groups met with Horton, sat in on his seminars, and listened to tapes of seminars, including one of Rosa Parks, who was trained at Highlander, "telling how," recounted Pierce, "being tired and disgusted, she took that first step which resulted in the Montgomery bus boycott."

Highlander was also responsible for helping to found the Citizenship Schools of the 1950s and 1960s. Citizenship Schools were started so that adults—primarily Southern

blacks—would have a place where they could come to learn to read in order that they might be able to vote. Bernice Robinson, a beautician and participant at Highlander, and the niece of Septima Clark<sup>19</sup>, was the first teacher in the first of these schools. Building on Clark's pedagogy that sought to "teach [children] the words that they used everyday" (Horton, 1990, p. 115), Robinson and her students:

developed the curriculum day by day. They learned to write letters, order catalogs and fill out money orders. They made up stories about the vegetables they grew and the tools they used. "They tell me a story," Mrs. Robinson told us [at Highlander], "a story which I write down, then they learn to read the story. It's their story in their words, and they are interested because it's theirs." (p. 103)

Graduate School students visited one of these schools in Frogmore, on St. Helena Island, off the north Georgian coast. Philip Torrey, a member of the class of 1963, wrote enthusiastically of his experience at the school in Frogmore, sponsored by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), explicitly making his own connection between what he experienced there and the ideas he had gotten from his studies at the Graduate School:

Classes of the SCLC Teacher Training program were such thrilling exhibitions of the real dynamics of teaching that I could scarcely believe my eyes and ears. This is exactly what we have been talking about at Putney: This is the reconstruction of education. A purposeful, direct approach to the educational problem at hand with forceful, clean, step-by-step procedures toward getting the job done with no deviation and no claptrap. The intriguing technique of teaching by asking, not telling, is beautifully demonstrated by Dorothy Cotton. She said, "Teachers do not tell but ask; this is the art of teaching. Let students agonize over it, with the teacher to only guide them to stay on the point; let them testify and teach themselves. Then they will never forget."<sup>20</sup>

It is not difficult to understand that participation in such a historically and personally significant event, whose purpose reached beyond those involved to the very shaping of society, would make an impact strong enough to radicalize participants. *Being there* mattered. Torrey was able, in Woodhouse and Knapp's (2000) words, to "connect place with self and community."

Another regular stop on the tour was Ducktown, Georgia. Ducktown was a ruined copper mining town. By all accounts, the devastation of Ducktown, by then abandoned and bleeding from the erosion of its red clay soils, was horrifying. "Caverns of hell!" wrote Hank Carson. No vegetation, little life of any kind, and terrific poverty. The injustice of the plight of those living in Ducktown compared to those who had come, mined, and grown rich, leaving little of the wealth behind, made Carson's group intensely angry. "No amount of reading," they wrote, "could leave such an impression. ... If a picture is really worth a thousand words, then an experience is worth a thousand books."<sup>21</sup> They continued,

As we drove over the red and dry plains of Georgia, we saw the dark faces of intimidated Negroes who lived in poor unpainted sheds, the sun shining through the rotten boards. But less than a hundred feet from these miserable dwellings we saw the beautiful brick house of the landlord.<sup>22</sup>

This experience was countered by visits to the Guntersville Dam of the Tennessee Valley Authority. The access to electricity that resulted from a sustainable use of natural resources, as well as the natural beauty of the area, contrasted with the ecological devastation and economic disparity of Ducktown. However, there is evidence in the record and in interviews, that his students did not always share Mitchell's passion for the TVA. "Those damn dams," as one alumna put it. Environmental issues resonated less with students than did Civil

Rights, perhaps because Civil Rights were more obviously human in dimension and directly applicable to their own experience, whereas dams and strip mining seemed too big and too far from their own lives.

One of the most powerful of the group's experiences with Civil Rights was their impromptu trip to Montgomery, Alabama in December of 1956 to participate in the one-year anniversary of the bus boycott. Apparently one member of the group took off to visit Montgomery on his own. Inspired by the interracial workshops on non-violent protest he had witnessed at Highlander, the student felt moved to see the results of such work up close. He not only witnessed the bus boycott, but also had the chance to talk directly with Martin Luther King and Ralph Abernathy. He was so excited by this contact and by what he found happening in Montgomery, that he came back and asked the group to return with him. In their group Cumulative File, students wrote of the group process by which they decided to go to Montgomery as well as the experience itself. The process of democratic group decision-making and student-generation of an emergent curriculum represented two other aspects of the experience of the Study Tour, as the group noted in their collaborative account of the trip:

When this message was brought back to the group, a situation developed that is indicative of the kind of education that is offered at Glen Maples. ... The group sat down and weighed [reasons for not going] against the reality of the opportunity to study concretely how a creative principle, the principle of non-violent resistance, was being applied in a constructive way and how it was being effective in bringing about social change. ... We felt very strongly at that moment the value of an education where students and teachers in a given and very real ... situation together take on responsibility for the formulation of the program. The curriculum is "emerging," it evolves out of circumstances and is adaptable to the needs of the student group. This particular instance is only an example of what happens fairly often within the general structure of the Graduate School's program. Thus it was that Dr. Martin Luther King became the teacher of this school for a few days.<sup>23</sup>

This is compelling evidence of students assuming agency, first, for their learning, second, for the curriculum, and third, for effecting change in the place and time that they inhabited. And yet, as powerful as this experience surely was, whether the decision-making process was truly democratic was called into question by at least one graduate. Carson confides that when it came to "decisions," the word should always be put in quotes. "Morris made the decisions and then spent sometimes hours or even days, trying to get the one or two dissenters to agree. We quickly learned to go along and save the time."<sup>24</sup> This could be evidence of Mitchell's strong will, or it could also be Carson's misinterpretation of a consensus method that grew out of Mitchell's grounding in Quaker practices and beliefs.

To his credit, as powerful as an encounter with King was, Mitchell was careful that his students talk with proponents of opposing views, or perhaps it was a way of underscoring the importance of King's work. To this end, he arranged a meeting with Sam Englehardt, Alabama state Senator and executive secretary of the state's White Citizens' Council, which was formed in opposition to school integration after *Brown v. Board of Education*. Students found the meeting "more than overwhelming." They characterized the senator as "arrogant, ignorant, suspicious and extremely defensive" and found the visit "disconcerting and pathetic."<sup>25</sup> It appears that, rather than rounding out their understanding, the encounter seems to have drawn a stark portrait of good and evil. Although no one would argue about who was on the right side, there is no evidence that the complexities of the issues (fear, economic threats, threatened social order, or unwitting complicity) were explored. Yet the emotional impact of the visit is undeniable.

This was followed up by discussions with two local scholars, one a sociologist who was studying the effect of non-violent protest on the people of the Civil Rights Movement, and the other a professor of religion who discussed the role that Christianity played in the movement. In addition, the group was housed with “prominent Negro families” in the city. Discussion with these men and women, all involved with the Civil Rights movement, added yet another layer to students’ understanding. They left Montgomery with the feeling that the success of the Civil Rights movement depended not on any particular group but “with the masses of the people who have found new dignity and unity in their constructive protest against injustice. The buses run empty through the streets of Montgomery, and only the masses can keep them empty.”<sup>26</sup>

For one member of the group, Nan Fields, the trip to Montgomery was the most significant visit of the Study Tour, but still took second place to her experience traveling through the South in a van in a mixed-race group. As a Southerner herself, the “laboratory of human relations” that the “race relations” part of the trip represented held special meaning. It related to her personal past, to her present sense of herself, and to her future teaching. (Fields went on to teach elementary school for 40 years.) The depth of the emotional content of the experience caused her to “reconstruct” her past as a Southerner, and in essence, to change her relationship to that old self. In the passage below she makes sense of that past and her own reactions. She states the importance of bringing long-held assumptions to light, stressing the role that emotion and genuine interracial interaction played in her transformation.

[The racial situation] was, for me, a truly educational experience. By racial situation I do not mean just Montgomery. Montgomery, as an isolated experience, would have had much less meaning. My “education” came from experiencing Montgomery in the context of our entire experience as an interracial group. Growing up as a Southerner, I absorbed as a child the Southern view toward the Negro. However, a change such as [I have experienced] seems to involve the emotions far more than the mind. (...) When [growing up], I lived within a group for whom discrimination was a basic assumption. I had never been able to know or even meet the Southern Negro in a social situation.

She goes on to describe how she was brought out of herself and the sphere of her past experience by having to live and work closely with people different from herself. In addition, she was able to connect the “stultification of the Negro” with the social context—segregation and racism—that caused it.

This trip introduced me, for the first time, to a direct experience of the tragedy and stultification of the Negroes caused by [segregation and racism]. For the first time I have an emotional understanding of the effect of segregation on a human being’s view of himself. This came through both the experience of living and traveling as a Negro [lives and travels] and through coming to know some of the members of the Negro community of Montgomery, and discussing their own experiences with them. Such experiences could not help but bring about a personal change.

Finally, she links her awareness with the imperative to act.

... I think that the average person will resist any threat to the *status quo*. He will not change his attitudes unless forced to by some type of pressure. An unbelievably immoral situation is now existing, which must be corrected. It is not only right to do so, it is a grave responsibility.<sup>27</sup>

On the trip Fields not only encountered the realities of the situation, but she also encountered herself. She told me the story of being asked to cut the hair of her African-

American classmate, Carson. “I caught myself feeling revolted, and I was so ashamed,” she recounts. She and Carson were close friends, and yet this old and deep response, learned from years of listening to other voices, put her in undeniable contact with the truth of her own prejudice. But what mattered was not so much the fact of the prejudice as her acknowledgement of it, and her pushing through and beyond it, with the love and respect she felt for him. This, it seems to me, speaks of the real work of turning the soul: putting students in relationship with others different from themselves, within the context of compelling places and events (outside the classroom), and ultimately with themselves. Clearly, Fields, as a result of her experiences, felt accountable *from within* rather than because of externally imposed standards of accountability.

In a concluding section of the group Cumulative File on the Study Tour of the autumn of 1956, students, in their reports on the Tour, listed the ways in which the trip had been valuable. Among a list of 22 items were the following four, which indicate a marked shift in awareness of the group resulting from the Tour:

- The comprehension of the imperative need of conserving our natural resources as a responsibility to future generations;
- The awareness of the glaring discrepancy in places in side-by-side wealth and poverty;
- The realization that education is as broad as life and an ever-continuing process;
- The belief that school and community are interacting, [and that] each should build the other.<sup>28</sup>

The group concluded their evaluation of the trip by noting that it had been “transformative.” Not only did they have knowledge that they did not have before, but their “whole beings” were changed in ineffable ways by the knowledge they gained and the way in which they had gained it.

Our whole beings have reacted in this intensive learning experience. We have strengthened our belief in considering both sides of questions, and in working out solutions through understanding and cooperation. The effect on us is so complex and profound that it is impossible to convey it completely by the written word.<sup>29</sup>

### Conclusion

To educate a teacher is an enormous, and always incomplete, endeavor. The Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education did not provide a solution to the problem of how to educate teachers for social justice, but it does provide insight into how teacher education might teach teachers to *care* about teaching for social justice.

While many teacher education programs today advocate a critical stance, insisting that their teacher-students be committed to looking at the “social and political consequences of [his or her] teaching” (p. 59), how teacher-students *come to hold* these commitments remains a question. What if students of teaching don’t care? Is in-depth consideration of such issues enough to awaken a dormant social consciousness or create one where none existed? The Graduate School experiment suggests that commitment to issues of social justice – a willing accountability – comes not from program requirements but from a place of internal authority that is the outgrowth of personal transformation, and that such transformation is the result of personal encounters with issues of the time – and history – through direct contact with the people and places that embody those issues.

For change to be lasting, for souls to be turned, teacher-students must have direct experience with compelling contemporary issues, engage in internal and communal reflection,

articulate their own needs and plans, and be guided by teacher educators and mentors who are doing the same, all of which will give them insight into themselves, the society in which they live, and institutions in which they work, and ground them in the authority of their own experience and reflection.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>This article is based on a longer article, “The Turning of One’s Soul”: Learning to teach for social justice: The Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education (1950-1964), published in 2006 in Teachers College Record, [108(7), pp. 1266-1295]. It is published here with permission from Teachers College Record.

<sup>2</sup>From “Report to the Trustees: Putney Graduate School,” For the Meeting, March 28, 1953, 6. The Mitchell papers, #3832 in the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.

<sup>3</sup> These “others” included colleagues of Mitchell’s from Putney and Friends World College, the Putney town moderator at the time the school existed, an alumnus of New College at Columbia Teachers College where Mitchell taught, Putney School faculty, and Mitchell family members.

<sup>4</sup> The Mitchell papers, #3832 in the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.

<sup>5</sup> From Alice B. Mitchell’s record of her children, September 3, 1899. Personal Collection of Alice Blachly.

<sup>6</sup> Alice B. Mitchell, *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Mitchell’s niece, Alice Blachly, daughter of his sister, Mary Clifford, February, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> This was probably a conflation that should have been St.-Amand-les-Eaux, a picturesque village with thermal baths, located in the Département du Nord, not far from the places of battle.

<sup>9</sup> The Mitchell papers, #3832 in the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill. This was another source of friction between Mitchell and Hinton and the board.

<sup>10</sup> From the Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education Catalog, (nd), pp. 3, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Jay Stone, February 20, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> From the Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education Catalog, (nd), p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Some of these evaluations were taped and are part of the historical record. In all cases they were used to plan the next year’s program.

<sup>15</sup> Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education Catalogue, (nd), p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> All names have been changed.

<sup>17</sup> These included five women and seven men; one Indian, one African American, two Swedes, and one Swiss; graduates of Hunter College, Bard College, Goddard College, Principia, the University of Chicago, McGill, Sarah Lawrence, Brooklyn College, the University of Basel, and Case Institute of Technology; all students were between the ages of 24 and 39.

<sup>18</sup> The Highlander Folk School, now the Highlander Research and Education Center, was founded in 1932 by Myles Horton, Don West, and James Dombrowski. In its early days Highlander provided training and education for the labor movement throughout the Southern United States, and the Civil

Rights Movement. It trained, among others, Rosa Parks, members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Septima Clark, Martin Luther King, Jr., John Lewis and Ralph Abernathy.

<sup>19</sup>Septima Clark was a key figure at Highlander. She was a black woman from the Sea Islands who was educated at Teachers College in the 1930s and later at Highlander. She worked tirelessly for Civil Rights and eventually helped Horton to direct the Center. (Horton, 1990).

<sup>20</sup> Philip Torrey, "The Sea Islands," *Group Cumulative File*, 1963-1964, 92. Personal collection, Todd Bayer.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> From the "Reports on the Southern Study Tour of school, community, and regional development, November 1 to December 8, 1956," 10.

<sup>23</sup> Nan Fields, Cumulative File, "Reports on the Southern Study Tour, Nov. 1 to Dec. 8, 1956," 17. Antioch College Records, Yellow Springs, Ohio.

<sup>24</sup> Hank Carson, e-mail correspondence with author, May 15, 1997.

<sup>25</sup> Nan Fields, *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Cumulative File, "Reports on the Southern Study Tour, Nov. 1 to Dec. 8, 1956," 19. Antioch College Records, Yellow Springs, Ohio.

<sup>27</sup> Nan Fields, "Evaluation of the TVA Study Tour, 1956," 4. Antioch College Records, Yellow Springs, Ohio.

<sup>28</sup> From the "Reports on the Southern Study Tour of school, community, and regional development, November 1 to December 8, 1956," pp. 25, 26.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

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## **Moral Problems as Issues-Centered Social Studies Education: Discovering Dewey as a Guiding Foundation**

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### **Abstract**

By considering ethics and morals from a vantage point in which personal and political beliefs become part of our national debate, students could form the habit of political discussion in much the same way that representatives of social and political groups prepare and respond on a daily basis to an ever inquiring media. I will explore several examples of media, including social media, confronting, debating, and disseminating in new ways challenging issues facing today's global communities. As a solid counter-point to social media, indeed all media impact, in a rapidly changing global environment, Dewey provides important messages to encourage today's educators to actively bolster a reflective thinking, issues-centered approach founded on ethics and morals. Dewey's writings on ethics, morals and democracy can open the door and allow students to become socially and politically engaged in the myriad of issues confronting 21<sup>st</sup> century citizens.

**Keywords:** John Dewey, ethics and morals, reflective thinking, public and social media, issues-centered education

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## Introduction

World cultures today are impacted by an era of continually evolving media communications. Technology has enhanced traditional media creating global communication portability and instantaneous updating. Formal media has morphed into social media. Are the thoughts and actions of our students positively or negatively affected by 21<sup>st</sup> century media? Is media impacting our ideas of ethical and moral behavior? How does today's media relate to notions of what John Dewey would define as "good judgment" in a global society from world perspectives?

Can our educators prepare students to sort through the ethical and moral implications of the messaging behind 21<sup>st</sup> century political, economic, and social issues and events? With increasing frequency these occurrences are comprised of evolving or instantaneous aspects of communities and individuals which vary in scope and intensity across the globe. The underlying concern for educators is how to develop citizenship education in a way that critiques the nature of media and its possible effect on students. Is it possible to provide them with reliable tools to determine the ethical and moral implications of actions which are depicted in formal media presentations or spontaneous happenings? Encouraging students to acquire the ability to critique the ethical and moral implications of the media, as opposed to merely accepting what is outwardly or even unofficially declared to be right or just, should become a component of teaching practices. The projected outcome is to enable students to confront ethical and moral problems relating to issues portrayed as right or wrong. I will argue that by considering ethics and morals from a vantage point in which personal and political beliefs become part of our national debate, students can form the habit of political discussion in much the same way that representatives of social and political groups prepare and respond on a daily basis to an ever inquiring media.

In *Ethics*, Dewey and Tufts (1908) stressed that it was ideal to present students with an examination of unresolved questions. Dewey (1909) observed in *Moral Principles in Education* that students need to be presented exercises in forming and experimenting with conclusions or suppositions in order to develop and increase their judgment skills. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1916) argued that "morality is concerned with conduct" (p. 402). Along this line, issues such as how representatives of political parties allege governments should conduct themselves, how governments actually conduct themselves, and how aspects of social media engage with government as a growing community dimension, could and should be considered as ethical and moral issues in today's classrooms. Dewey's writings on ethics, morals and democracy can open the door and allow students to become socially and politically engaged in the myriad of issues confronting 21<sup>st</sup> century citizens.

I will examine real world media encounters in the United States, Egypt, and Africa which present ethical and moral dilemmas surrounding political, social, and economic events. I will explore several examples of public media, including social media, that confront, debate, and disseminate in new ways the challenging issues facing today's global communities. These discussions will involve questions concerning the role and size of government, how No Child Left Behind is viewed in this context, and how political and social actions around the world are presented and discussed through social media. These cases will illustrate how developing ethical and moral principles in students creates the opportunity to encourage and grow democratic ideals in communities. Reflective thinking skills—in this instance the ability to apply a critical lens to media and the use of media—is the foundation for determining who or what is considered to be ethically and morally acceptable in any given society.

I will review various scholarly opinions such as Michael Apple, Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Donald W. Oliver and James P. Shaver, Anna Ochoa-Becker, William Stanley,

Ronald Evans, and others who support a Deweyan rationale for education. Social media, or any media, can be a foe or a friend. Our students need the best framework to make a well founded determination. I argue that John Dewey—that is, a Deweyan and issues content form of education—builds a path to forming the ethical and moral judgments enabling citizens to reach critically determined decisions.

I argue that in light of the many contentious issues currently confronting this nation, perhaps Dewey's (1909) approach to moral principles in education—and especially his ideas concerning conditions that he deemed necessary “for the formation of good judgment” (p. 55)—should be reevaluated and at long last implemented in our schools. One reason is substantiated by the way national and global media, and in recent times social media, actually engages in using Dewey's basic approach. That is, the recognition that the method of investigation and critical thinking advocated by Dewey is often adopted by global media as well as social media. This is often accomplished through the types of topics and questions regularly presented to politicians and “opinion makers” as well as to global communities. His methodology is also demonstrated by the way in which the public seeks through various types of media the very type of experimentation that Dewey found lacking in the schools.

*Case Study: A Primary Function of Government*

For example, on December 18, 2011, ABC News and the Miller Center of the University of Virginia presented a nationally televised debate. The debate took place in Washington, D.C. and involved what Christiane Amanpour described as, “the intellectual heavyweights of both parties.” Congressman Paul Ryan and ABC's George Will were the participants for the right and the left was represented by Congressman Barney Frank and former Clinton Labor Secretary Robert Reich.

Christiane Amanpour of ABC News, acted as moderator. She introduced the debate and framed the overriding issues of the day challenging American democracy by posing fundamental questions: “Has the federal government become too big, too sprawling? Americans have always been weary of Washington...with poll after poll showing trust in government is at an all-time low....And what about this conundrum, people who oppose big government still want to collect their entitlements?”

In response, the representatives from each major political party spoke at length with ethical and moral principles underlying their respective statements. However, their responses were not formed in terms of moral principles. Instead each argument was framed as what may be described as political opinions or broad scoped philosophies of a political nature with moral assumptions at the heart of their statements. For example, a brief portion of the transcript reads as follows:

RYAN: This time last week I was in Helmand Province with our Marines in Afghanistan. They're out there fighting for our liberties and our security, depriving safe havens for terrorists who can come and attack again. You might not like that. You might have a problem with that.

FRANK: They go far beyond it. The point is--

RYAN: It is a primary function of the government.

FRANK: You're talking about the construction of society -- I'm in favor of the military stopping bad things from happening and shooting bad guys, (inaudible). But they are far beyond that, into construction of societies and in trying to build. Look, we're still in Iraq—

The problem with discussions like this is that even the issue “what is a primary function of government” does not lend itself to easy or simple answers. Many of our students may assume this type of issue entails an absolute, unequivocal, and unassailable multiple choice (a), (b), or (c) answer. Yet, to our military troops in harm’s way, their families, and our nation, the answers are much more complex. What may appear on the surface to be a simple issue about a primary function of government is not static as an idea, nor is it easily addressed as demonstrated in the verbal exchange between Representatives Ryan and Frank.

In reality, this issue is fraught with ethical and moral considerations. That is, even in this two-way exchange of a few words, Ryan and Frank provide divergent ideas that center around contrasting viewpoints on moral and ethical questions concerning what is, in essence, right or wrong when it comes to what should be the functions of our federal government. This includes deeply embedded underlying assumptions and beliefs both as to what is morally and ethically proper for federal government involvement when it comes to protecting its citizens during times of terrorism as well as concerning the manner in which our nation should conduct itself in its dealings with other nations across the globe. In fact, in the revised edition of his work with Tufts on *Ethics*, Dewey (1932) observed that without reflective thinking existing beliefs regarding right or wrong create a barrier to moral theory. He found that moral theory “emerges when men are confronted with situations in which different desires promise opposed goods and in which incompatible courses of action seem to be morally justified” (p. 164). Dewey’s view represents an apt description of Ryan and Frank’s confrontation over their opposing positions.

More importantly, one statement by Dewey (1909) is especially germane when questions of the size and role of government are debated across the world. He believed the degree that history teaching enhanced ethical value “will be measured by the extent to which past events are made the means of understanding the present,—affording insight into what makes up the structure and working of society to-day” (p. 36).

#### *Case Study: A Place to Begin a Classroom Discussion or Debate*

As a place from which to begin a discussion that is centered on issues of social justice, the transcript of a debate on December 18, 2011, between ABC’s George Will and economist Robert Reich focuses on several basic issues that stem from the question of: Is government too big? The transcript provides the opportunity to closely examine the skillful application by one of the debaters of Dewey’s approach on the ethical value of teaching history. To initiate the live debate, Will cites Thomas Jefferson. George Will arguably did so to contrast past historical events involving Jefferson’s view of limited government against those who are in favor of a more expansive government today. In so doing, Will presents Thomas Jefferson’s view of government as both the starting, and in many ways, the ending point of his primary discussion. By way of introduction, George Will states: “Jefferson understood that you can have a government with minimal attention to the absolute essentials....we want government to build roads, we want government to defend the shores, we want government to deliver the mail.” Will’s position is that Thomas Jefferson’s experience with and insights into the workings of government could be illustrative of and provide evidence toward a historical understanding of how government could operate in the eyes of many who prefer a less intrusive role for government today.

In Will’s opinion, American citizens should remember Thomas Jefferson’s approach toward government—and concern themselves only with what Will claims Jefferson found to be the “absolute essentials” of government. Will’s case for limited government might be described as Deweyan, particularly when contrasting views using historical examples from debaters on the opposite side of the issue are added. For instance, Dewey (1909) concluded

that history teaching requires adopting the position of presenting past events so as to portray historical situations with a present nature that possesses larger aspects.

Following his points about Thomas Jefferson, George Will talks similarly of Ronald Reagan. However, in this case Will delivers an additional moral and ethical value or principle that he attributes to Reagan's approach to small or limited government. Specifically, he presents the argument that under Reagan the concept or outgrowth of limited government involves embracing respect for the institution of government itself. Continuing on this theme, Will expands on what he considers to be an essential part of government that he believes and argues all American citizens want:

WILL: "But after it [government] does the essentials, understand what Ronald Reagan did. When Ronald Reagan said we're going to have less government—under Reagan, respect for government, something we all want, respect for government rose as government's role declined."

Will attempts to use history as a reference point and as evidence to support his position regarding the nature of society today and in particular how American society is affected by the size and role of government.

### ***The Debate Continues: Big Government's Effect on Equality***

Both George Will and Robert Reich continue their verbal sparring, allowing Reich an opportunity to retort.

WILL: "And most of all, big government today harms equality. It harms equality because concentrating power in Washington, in big government, it makes itself susceptible to the rent-seeking by big, muscular interest groups. The only people who can come to Washington and bend the government to private purposes.

REICH: "And indeed George, you have said over and over again, and Paul Ryan, you have said, is that yes, there is too much crony capitalism, there is too much of big corporation and the rich and Wall Street. But you seem to believe that if you got rid of government, then somehow individuals would not be imperiled by those same forces....Let's get serious about what we're talking about. And let's make sure that we understand we're living in a society where people care about jobs, they care about wages. They can't get ahead because so much wealth and income are at the top and taxes are not paid at the top to finance education and health care and infrastructure that everybody depends on to get ahead. Upward mobility is being slowed because of that inequality, and that inability of us to actually have the effect we the people, not we the corporations, not we Wall Street, not we the rich want to have."

### ***Case Study: The Government in the Shape of No Child Left Behind***

A different example entailing the size and role of government involves No Child Left Behind (NCLB). One perspective on NCLB is found in Andrew J. Rotherham's exclusive interview with George W. Bush on January 12, 2012. Rotherham, a Time magazine education columnist, met with former President George W. Bush on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of No Child Left Behind. In their dialogue, Bush speaks about what he believes is the success of the legislation and provides his rationale as to why, in his opinion, it has become an opportune punching bag for many. This excerpt from the interview provides a succinct synopsis:

Q: Mr. President, 10 years in, what's your take on No Child Left Behind?

Bush: "First of all, I am extremely proud of the effects of No Child Left Behind. For the first time, the federal government basically demanded results in return for money. It started by saying, We expect you to measure [student performance]. As a result, there has been a noticeable change in achievement, particularly among minority groups. And I am proud of that accomplishment..."

Q: In your view, how much of the criticism of the law is about specifics, and how much is just partisan politics?

Bush: "In some circles, punching No Child Left Behind is a way to basically say, I'm against Big Government. In fact, No Child Left Behind is a way to promote efficient government. In a lot of these debates, you don't hear real detail or analysis about how to improve the law. In essence, its No Child Left Behind is big government. Well, No Child Left Behind basically says, If you're going to fund [schools], like we've been doing for years, we in the federal government ought to demand accountability, which seems to me a very conservative principle. Yet some conservatives are saying No Child Left Behind is an improper role for federal government."

An opposite point of view on NCLB is presented in a national cable television interview during the May 26, 2012, Melissa Harris-Perry cable television program on MSNBC. At that time, Daniel Denvir, a reporter for the Philadelphia City Paper—whose website claims "the award-winning alternative weekly"—criticized the current educational policy in effect. The transcript reads:

DENVIR: We need to allow—we need to allow teachers to actually teach if we are going to inspire this love of learning in students and this lifelong intellectual passion. What the No Child Left Behind high stakes testing regime has unleashed in our schools is the exactly the opposite. Curriculums have been eviscerated. Literature, American history, arts, music, science, and everything that's not being tested is being cut. Even P.E. [physical education] and recess.

In these two different personal interviews the concept of social efficiency is pitted against the idea of opportunity when it comes to the love of learning. Dewey (1925) developed his theory of criticism in the last chapter of *Experience and Nature*. He pointed out that as soon as one began to talk about values and define them, one was involved in criticism. For Dewey, criticism required inquiry into the conditions and consequences of the object valued.

In their critiques of No Child Left Behind, former President George W. Bush argues for considering NCLB as exemplifying social efficiency while reporter Daniel Denvir arguably follows Dewey's (1925) theoretical process. Bush argues the value of accountability as a social efficiency principle. Denvir speaks of lifelong learning in terms of a value, whose outcome should be protected as well as exemplified in the schools. Then Denvir defines lifelong learning in terms that exemplify what life will look like when that opportunity is lost. He deftly uses his voice as a reporter to set the stage for his criticism. Although neither of these viewpoints addresses the exact nature of the inquiry into the conditions and consequences of No Child Left Behind, the fact that one spokesperson is a former President and the other is a reporter for a respected newspaper leads the viewer to assume with some assurance that both have not only inquired into the issue but also reliably investigated the requirements and concerns of No Child Left Behind as well as the value of lifelong learning as an outflow of education.

However, Denvir concludes that the consequences of this current national education reform not only eliminate academic courses he considers important from schools across the country, but also that these curriculum cuts will have an enormous impact on the interest and motivation of our future citizens to eventually become engaged in lifelong learning. Thus, the value of accountability in the schools is presented as confronting head on the value of the subjects in the schools that are being reduced or eliminated under the No Child Left Behind reform. Denvir argues that the issue of accountability as a value can in fact adversely impact students by producing citizens who through lack of opportunity to take subjects such as art, music and physical education may not have the motivation to even want to be engaged in lifelong learning.

This cable television interview presents the notion that the school subjects that remain untested in this era of accountability are in a strong sense undervalued especially when they are simply ignored or completely cut from the curriculum solely because they are not being tested under NCLB criteria. In Denvir's opinion, a wide range of academic subjects and opportunities are either greatly diminished or entirely lost in this era of educational reform. This is a significant factor in today's public education that potentially may result in long-term and catastrophic effects on the very quality of life our country cherishes and promotes. After all, literature, American history, arts, music, science, physical education, as well as access to recess, are defined by Denvir and many others as components essential to "inspire the love of learning" for a lifetime.

The reason this may be important to this discussion is that in the end, Dewey would appear to agree with Denvir's view on NCLB. Today, the No Child Left Behind legislation currently in place arguably fails due to the intense focus on teaching to the test which is counter to the promotion of reflective thinking in the way Dewey advocated over one hundred years ago. One reason is that a significant portion of Denvir's concerns are addressed in Dewey's thoughts on aesthetics. *Experience and Nature* relates Dewey's (1925) philosophy in theory of aesthetic experience. Dewey's expressed that "Knowledge is a word of various meanings.... 'science' may signify tested and authentic instance of knowledge. But knowledge has also a meaning more liberal and more humane" (p. 161). Later, in *Art as Experience*, Dewey (1934), expressed that

In art as an experience, actuality and possibility or ideality, the new and the old, objective material and personal response, the individual and the universal, surface and depth, sense and meaning, are integrated in an experience in which they are all transfigured from the significance that belongs to them when isolated in reflection (p. 297).

In support of Denvir's promotion of lifelong learning, Dewey (1938) emphasized the desire to continue learning was a primary attitude to instill in students. If the impetus to learn wanes to any degree, it is not a small consequence. Indeed, the student loses his/her natural capacity to be able to deal with the many situations presented throughout life. However, Ronald W. Evans (2004) laments that: "Rather than an inquiry-and issues-centered approach to instruction, the current trend is toward an emphasis on content acquisition" (p. 175).

#### ***Case Study: Social Media and Egypt's Government***

Next, I will turn to the intense effect of social media on a political crisis that reached into the world's view. The political chaos that erupted in Egypt in mid-2010 has yet to be resolved. It has also not been totally absent from public media since the initial instantaneous explosion of public outcries and demonstrations. The global population became a public group of media watchers. At that time Wael Ghonim was a Google marketing executive, Egyptian born and living in Dubai, who inadvertently became an activist in support of the

Egyptian citizens through social media. While casually browsing through Facebook pages, he stumbled across the Facebook images of an Egyptian man brutally beaten to death by the Egyptian police forces. Personally reacting to the video, Gronim launched his own Facebook page. He quickly wrote that the man, Khaled, was killed that day and expressed that if he did not defend Khaled's horrific death then Gronim himself might be the next one killed.

Gronim's (2012) book, *Revolution 2.0 The Power of the People Is Greater Than the People in Power: A Memoir*, poignantly tells the story of his journey into activism. His Facebook page was joined by 300 people within minutes of launch and over the next three months grew to 250,000. His phrase "Today they killed Kahled" became the Egyptian public outcry. Gronim's Facebook writings continued advocating his idea that oppression was the life experience of all young Egyptians who were denied rights and freedoms. Ghonim was well on his way to reflecting Paulo Freire's, one of few people who is considered to have in reality changed the world, notions about the oppressed lower class tier of the Brazilian class structured society. Freire (1969) believed "that education could help men to assume an increasingly critical attitude toward the world and so to transform it" (p.34). In a related context, both Dewey and Freire advocated that the solution for achieving democratic ideals was education reform. Specifically, they advocated reforming teaching in a strikingly similar manner. In fact, Gadotti (1994) observed: "Ever since he wrote his thesis...Paulo Freire has referred to John Dewey, quoting his work *Democracy and Education*" (p. 117). Their mutual notion that teaching critical pedagogy goes far beyond the confines of textbooks has carried forward.

Gronim's method of informing or educating the public is dramatically different than Freire's long term efforts to educate people in small communities through personally orchestrated culture circles and extensive writings. The culture circle was a pedagogic program designed by Freire to assist members of the community, people of all ages regardless of their educational background and who largely constituted the second tier of citizenship of Brazil, to both attain a critical thinking approach and to put it into actual practice in their lives. Freire's critical pedagogy to educate citizens in methods to evaluate and effect changes in their social status represents an extended educational process.

Today, is social media education of the public equally effective? Is it an enhanced educational tool? Or, in reality, would the Egyptian public's reactions to political and social oppression have been improved if the Facebook browsers had taken a step back and applied critical thinking before moving into action? Boisvert (1998) offers the idea that "The citizens can tend toward the 'mass' or they can tend toward the 'public.' Dewey's political philosophy seeks to articulate the conditions appropriate for encouraging the latter" (p. 94).

#### *Case Study: The Kony Circumstances and the Impact of Social Media*

With this Deweyan notion in mind, YouTube is another social media outlet making an impact on global communities. Reporting for the New York Times from Kampala, Uganda, on March 8, 2012, Josh Kron and J. David Goodman write retrospectively that Jason Russell, then a 24 year old University of Southern California graduate who had studied film production, was a witness to an attack by Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army. Their article states that as a direct response to his personal view of the atrocities: "Mr. Russell would dedicate the next nine years of his life, often in obscurity, to making them [Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army] a household name."

According to their report, Russell's initial timeline for communicating to the world public his position regarding the events involving Kony's atrocities became tremendously accelerated by postings on YouTube. The New York Times reporters quickly determine that "diplomats, academics, and Ugandans who have worked assiduously on the issue for decades



without anything close to the blitz of attention that Mr. Russell and his tight-knit group of activists have generated.” More importantly, the authors point out that the video, posted for only three days, experienced in excess of 50 million YouTube and Vimeo viewer hits that in one single day raised donations in the hundreds of thousands of dollars “rocketing across Twitter and Facebook at a pace rarely seen for any video, let alone a half-hour film about a conflict in remote central Africa.”

What made the public’s attention to this subject even more remarkable, according to the New York Times reporters, was the idea that Jason Russell “clearly tapped into a vein of youthful idealism.” As indisputable evidence, they indicate: “YouTube said the popularity was driven by viewers in the United States and those younger than 25.” Their news report further details “Many parents, including at least one in the State Department, discovered the video only after their children showed it to them.” The news account adds that after being “bombarded with messages from the campaign’s supporters” even celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey, Rihanna and Ryan Seacrest posted messages about it.

The report then points out that Russell is the co-founder of a group called Invisible Children. The authors continue by noting that, although this group’s work resulted in a documentary that was “gripping and evocative” and “alarmed many veteran observers of the devastation Mr. Kony and his fighters have left in their wake over the years,” critics of Russell’s group and their documentary surfaced. They report: “Not until halfway through the film does Mr. Russell mention that ‘the war’ he describes is no longer happening in Uganda, where he sets the documentary. The Lord’s Resistance Army left the country years ago....”. Their report also notes an additional critical complaint that the documentary is silent on human rights violence committed by the Ugandan armies while at the same time the film implies that upward of 30,000 children serve in Kony’s military. The actual result is, as the authors report, that since leaving Uganda, Kony’s resistance army group was dramatically reduced to a few hundred but even this limited group continued to intensely harass civilians.

In response to this criticism, the New York Times reports that Russell indicates he “has not made the most nuanced or academic of films.” The article also reports that in Russell’s video attempt to chart his “personal odyssey to tell the world about Mr. Kony’s reign of terror and bring it to an end,” Russell actually admits that “he may have boiled down the issues, but that is what it takes to captivate so many people.” Russell reiterates his belief that: “No one wants a boring documentary on Africa.” Based on this idea, he adds: “Maybe we have to make it pop, and we have to make it cool.” The reporters note that Russell contends: “We view ourself as the Pixar of human rights stories,” most likely implying a comparison of his Invisible Children group to the Hollywood film studio known for their striking and fictional animated dramas.

It is very likely that John Dewey can provide thought provoking insight for the public to reflect on this New York Times report that portrays Russell and his campaign against Kony as engaging in a personal narrative with partly true and partly untrue depictions, as well as having serious errors of omission along the way. Teachers and students alike may find food for thought as they consider the role that ethics plays in the work people do in pursuit of ends that justify, in their mind, the means when it comes to what might be described as the common good. While democracy encompasses multiple meanings, if it holds a moral component, Dewey (1920) argued that “it is found in resolving that the supreme test of all political institutions and industrial arrangements shall be the contribution they make to the all-around growth of every member of society (p. 186).”

In addition, reporters Kron and Goodman indicate that critics point out the tremendous funding enjoyed by Invisible Children is largely used to pay “officer salaries, filmmaking costs and travel, as opposed to on-the-ground programs to help rebuild the lives

of people traumatized by decades of conflict.” Dewey (1908) illustrated the manner in which the ethics of this posture can be considered in the classroom. In maintaining that society holds responsibility for providing for the common good, he pleaded that individuals needed to acquire well founded ethical and moral notions in order to be able to form their own opinions and judgments as independent citizens. In doing so, they would not become acquiescent to publicly held points of view or passive to private interests.

Important to this discussion, Dewey’s consideration of ethics clearly becomes amplified by the concerns that Kron and Goodman highlight in their New York Times article. The authors point out that activism efforts involving international conflicts have produced both benefits and unanticipated outcomes such as recent experiences in the Darfur region. At the same time, they state: “many analysts also argue that the one-sided way activists painted the conflict—highlighting the Sudanese government’s crimes against villagers while largely ignoring the atrocities committed by rebels—ultimately made it harder to negotiate an end to the crises.”

Dewey (1908) noted a similar ethical conflict between people. Using the sub-title “Moral Democracy,” he articulated the idea of individuals striving to do good for others has been historically moved forward as an inheritance rooted in political, religious, and charitable organizations. Dewey argued that moral principles become embedded in these entities. When an individual strives for the social good whether the premise is political, religious, or charitable without soliciting mutual cooperative efforts from others, then the efforts may be held in disregard and result in disappointment. Dewey believed that willing “cooperation must be the root principle of the morals of democracy” (p. 304). The very cooperation that Dewey espoused can also result in fruitful discussions that fall under the term slacktivism surrounding current issues such as the Kony video. The March 8, 2012 New York Times reports:

Some have called the video [Kony, 2012] a pitch-perfect appeal to so-called slacktivism, a pejorative term for armchair activism by a younger generation, often online. But rather than eschew such digital action, the video takes it as one of its primary goals. Making Mr. Kony infamous, after all, is just a click away.

#### *Case Study: The Kony Video Enters the Classroom—Lessons from the Media*

In a lesson plan titled “Activism or Slacktivism? The ‘Stop Kony’ Campaign as a Teachable Moment” the Kron-Goodman report resurfaces on March 13, 2012, in The Learning Network of the New York Times. Sarah Kavanagh, Holly Epstein Ojalvo and Katherine Schulten present this lesson plan intended to assist students in critically evaluating the spectrum of the Kony 2012 issues. This lesson suggests showing photographs and videos of brutality wrought in Africa by Joseph Kony and the Lord’s Resistance Army. The lesson cautions that the slide shows, videos and articles contain graphic material that may not be appropriate for all students. This warning to teachers is in response to the intense depiction and graphic subject matter contained in the “Kony 2012” video and the “Stop Kony” campaign that was and is featured on YouTube.

Their lesson plan outlines six activities designed to develop a better understanding of the social media campaign waged by Russell against Joseph Kony and his Lord’s Resistance Army within the context of the current social, economic, and political situation in Africa. Using video techniques as a learning tool, the lesson sections encourage students to “create their own explainer videos that they can share with the school community and family and friends, either live or online (or both).” Or, they had the option of writing a textbook addendum comprised of both pictures and text to tell the story of the Ugandan Acholi war. One section demonstrates methods of engaging students with Kony 2012 criticisms by

creating a video response to criticism they found to be “‘oversimplified,’ ‘inaccurate’ and ‘proposes superficial solutions’.” The students are instructed to concisely sum up the Kony issues, briefly explain their criticisms and cite their resources as well as pointing video viewers to reliable resources to look for additional information.

In the “Considering ‘Slacktivism’” section of the lesson, students are encouraged to gain a variety of perspectives on the influence of Stop Kony and other awareness campaigns driven by social media by reading views from experts such as commentator Malcolm Gladwell and columnist Roger Cohen, as well as offer in text and video their ideas about how the Invisible Children group reacted to critical assessments. After evaluating specific questions about whether or not such types of awareness campaigns either promote slacktivism or promote actual change, the students are encouraged to “adopt the persona of an expert, activist, or writer to engage in a roundtable discussion” around questions regarding notions such as whether they should devote more time to listening to people who need their help rather than suggesting probable solutions. Then following this discussion, students are asked to compose “an Op-Ed article or blog post, or make a video, that outlines their own opinion on the Stop Kony campaign.”

Under the heading “Raising Awareness About an Issue,” students are encouraged to “create a video modeled after the “Kony 2012” video aimed at raising awareness about an issue they care about.” They should consider issues such as “How will they highlight the voices and agency of the marginalized?” Students are also encouraged to “examine how the Kony video went viral and glean lessons from the video’s popularity to make a plan to disseminate one or more of the videos.” Other lesson sections involve students in creating their own videos using Kony 2012 as a model and also in reviewing and comparing different social media campaigns that address current problems or issues. Again, the students are asked to share their results and discuss both the limitations and the power of social media in promoting specific causes.

Under the section, “Looking into History,” students are encouraged to review life before the internet or telephone to consider “how did people become aware of conflicts taking place in other parts of the world? How were they engaged in causes?” The students then work in small groups. Each group adopts a conflict from the past that is cause associated and attempt to uncover how the specific cause or causes actually reached the awareness of the general public. As an added dimension to this section, students are encouraged to share their discoveries of historical conflicts using social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and others.

This lesson example from the New York Times Learning Network suggests an approach to teaching and learning that appears to be consummate Dewey. In his discussion on education’s role in teaching moral principles, Dewey (1909) stressed that introducing every possible approach was needed to capture students’ attention and improve their capabilities to create, build, and produce ways to increase their opportunities to change an absorption in self-endeavors into social service efforts. In this particular lesson plan, the authors, at every step of the process and in every question posed to students, strongly encourage active engagement and, for the most part, the design of the lesson that gives confidence to students to become social, and more critically thinking citizens.

In the case of Kony 2012, the proverbial rest of the story reveals a more dynamic moral principle dilemma of two opposing viewpoints regarding a tragic situation for humankind and a third world country. Despite the significant pro and con reactions to the same video production, the moral contradictions are ripe for critical analysis and evaluation from independent views as the Learning Network lesson plan encourages. Dewey (1908) poignantly and astutely described this type of travesty: “The inherent irony and tragedy of

much that passes for a high kind of socialized activity is precisely that it seeks a common good by methods which forbid its being either common or a good" (p. 304).

This Dewey passage may actually serve as his forward looking reflective thinking on these types of 21<sup>st</sup> century media presentations.

### ***Historical Perspectives on Methods to Challenge Social Issues***

Dewey (1909) observed in *Moral Principles in Education* that students needed to be presented exercises in forming and experimenting with conclusions or suppositions in order to increase their judgment skills. The emphasis, according to Dewey, should be placed on the students selecting problems and executing their own solutions as a final test. This process would allow the student to determine a proposed solution's potential to succeed or to fail. At this juncture, the student would then be able to assess the value of his or her ideas. In a manner similar to the 21<sup>st</sup> century social studies issues centered community, Dewey inquired: "Does the school, as a system, afford at present sufficient opportunity for this sort of experimentation?" (p. 56). Dewey's own response was that unless the school maintained a focus on active investigation and critical thinking it could not provide the nurturing environment needed to form judgments "which is an integral factor in good character" (p. 56).

Dewey has been closely followed by Paulo Freire and Harold Rugg as well as others such as Michael Apple, Henry Giroux, Stanley Aronowitz, Peter McLaren, Maxine Greene, E. Wayne Ross, William Ayers, Donald Oliver, James P. Shaver, Alan Griffin, Gordon Hullfish, William Stanley, Shirley Engle, Anna Ochoa-Becker, Ronald W. Evans and others. All are notable in their advocacy for teaching critical thinking to examine and problem-solve issues—issues that Dewey believed should be of immediate interest to the student and of vital importance to society.

Michael Apple (1990) advocates that teachers prepare their students by arming them with the "political and conceptual tools needed to face the unequal society in which they also live" (p. 104). He echoes several predecessors. For instance, Harold Rugg's philosophy of education involved the use of first-hand evidence and eyewitness descriptions of powerful events or selections from original source materials. In his textbooks, some chapters started with the descriptions of significant events or an original story aimed at engaging students' interests. Typically, these chapters included sets of exercises and questions. Rugg also frequently used pamphlets to creatively present rhetorical questions, illustrations, cartoons, photographs and other types of presentation tools to communicate facts in an interesting as well as relevant manner to students. The pamphlets provided a good vehicle to raise issues, problems, or questions (Evans, 2007). In analyzing public issues, Oliver and Shaver (1966) point out that:

Clarification of evaluative and legal issues...becomes a central concern. At this point in the curriculum the student is not taught to believe or accept certain values but rather to clarify his evaluative commitment and to understand the relationships among the justification of a value position, the clarification of a definitional issue, and the proof process involved in a factual issue (p. 115).

In 1976 Anna Ochoa presented a paper at the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) annual meeting that intensely discusses the values that should guide social studies teachers' conduct and ethics. At that time, Ochoa cites Richard S. Peters, a British philosopher whose primary works are in political theory, philosophy of education, and philosophical psychology. She discusses Peters' ideas for specific criteria to follow for teachers' conceptual development, intellectual and character development, and learner consciousness development. A second source that Ochoa cites focuses on democratic ethics

emphasizing peoples' human self-respect and rational processes. She strongly advocates that teachers need to cultivate informed and ethical evaluations to formulate action while at the same time preserving their students' right to learning and privacy.

For Ochoa (1976), the purpose of education is for teachers to apply these particular resources in order to develop students who have acquired the skills, knowledge, and values to be effective contributors in a democratic society. Ochoa discusses the dilemmas encountered by teachers—administrative curriculum restrictions, as well as little support from parents and from communities—in their efforts to empower students through critical thinking. Today, these more or less traditional dilemmas are significantly increased by the impact of social media on students, parents, and, in general, on all citizens. Apple (1990) steps forward to pose this critical question for educators: “one of the most fundamental questions we should ask about school processes is what knowledge is of most worth” (p. vii). With this idea in mind, Deron Boyles, Tony Carusi, and Dennis Attick (2009) assert “there are groups promoting education reform in order to perpetuate status quo norms of power and privilege” and “there are other groups who wish to dismantle such privilege under the auspices of social justice” (p. 30).

From a different perspective, humanization without liberation was meaningless to Freire (1973). This notion was the power behind his “banking method” metaphor in teaching (1970). That is, to simply view a student as an empty vessel in which teachers deposit preapproved information from a top-down hierarchy ignores Freire's commitment to freedom. Freire understood that without discussing liberation, the status quo remained. Freire (1970) wrote that teachers “must be partners of the students in their relations with them” (p. 75). He supported this idea by stating: “The teacher cannot think for her students, nor can she impose her thought on them” (p. 77).

In similar fashion, Ochoa (1976) enters into a discussion on Richard S. Peters' notion that effective teaching requires that teachers reveal reasons to the learner. She reiterates that students should not be treated as mechanical robots or as containers of stimulus connected responses. Stated another way, James P. Shaver and William S. Strong (1982) emphasized that teachers hold the responsibility to establish a well founded educational setting. However, they stressed that teachers “should heed Dewey's caution that they ought not act arbitrarily as “magistrates” and impose objectives and activities alien to their students (Dewey, 1964a, pp. 153-155; 164c, pp. 9-10).

Several years later, Anna Ochoa-Becker (2007) identifies current research that shows teachers, particularly in the social studies, “can be more effective by engaging young citizens in issues...that are of interest to them and ones that can be connected to broader and more complex controversies” (p. 62). Ochoa-Becker states that teachers cannot “do so by covering more of the textbooks nor by delivering new and better lectures or by repeatedly testing” (p. 62).

Ochoa-Becker (2007) takes a strong position in favor of developing and maintaining democratic schools and classrooms as supported by this recent research. She admits only some teachers and a small number of schools have been receptive to these studies. According to Ochoa-Becker, countless, if not in fact the majority of schools and classrooms have not made an effort. She admonishes that schools and classrooms that are fostering an environment for democratic ideals “may be as important as the formal curriculum. Perhaps more so” (p. 61). Teachers and educators, however, are not solely responsible. Without the support of families and parents, communities, preschools, public media, religious and social groups, teachers will be precluded from making significant progress.

In order to move forward, educators need to turn from a traditional authoritarian teaching role to a new and different teaching approach that creates conditions where serious intellectual activity can take place. At the same time, Ochoa-Becker (2007) cautions that “important ideas and information must be subject to continuous scrutiny by members of the class and the teacher” (p. 218). She proposes that an issues-centered decision making curriculum can start with one teacher, a pair of teachers, or a departmental group of teachers. This curriculum change needs the support of administrators and department chairs. This redesigned teaching role creates an open classroom environment that fosters exchanging ideas and keeps a continued discussion in a civil manner. Thus, Ochoa-Becker advocates an issues-centered decision-making curriculum in which “neither the teacher nor the textbook should serve as the ultimate source of authority regarding the credibility and validity of knowledge” (p. 217). Ochoa-Becker suggests that strengthening of democracy “refers to improving democracy’s policies and practices associated with social justice” (p. 4).

### Conclusion

Today’s citizens receive information and news in a variety of 21<sup>st</sup> century formats. Even the standard printed form of international, national, and community newspapers can be viewed in daily, minute-by-minute electronic transmissions. And, then there is all forms of live, instantly received if one so chooses, electronic media communication of news and worldwide information. The importance of current events or news items, in Dewey’s estimation, is dependent upon the actual issues presented by public media relative to what any social consequences there may or may not be. The meaning and intent of the news imported by any type of media vehicle cannot actually be established without placing the new in relation to the old—to what has actually happened and been incorporated into the events unfolding. In discussing the types of information presented and the manner in which it was organized, Dewey (1927) adroitly pointed out “when we ask about the intellectual form in which the material is presented, the tale to be told is very different” (p. 180).

I would argue that little is discussed in the public schools on such topics, or similar topics, using an issue centered teaching approach involving moral principles. One reason may have been identified by Dewey years ago. His concern was that, while the teaching of reading, writing, and math was being accomplished, there remained skepticism in his opinion regarding building a moral foundation in students. In Dewey’s estimation, while the general population maintains a belief in moral laws and rules, a distinct disconnect exists in society regarding the practical application of morals to everyday life.

To this point, Dewey (1909) believed that morals were not merely a specialized part of life. He emphasized the need to instill morals in individuals in a manner to become part of their personal habits. Dewey believed that the moral and ethical foundation behind issues of the day should be considered on a constant basis through habits of mind. On a different but related note, Eric B. Freedman (2007) offers his perspective that in order to enhance students’ skills “to make informed political judgments, teachers ought to present multiple positions on salient public issues and train students in a method of analyzing those positions” (p. 467). Freedman also discusses critical pedagogy as one way to teach social justice. In so doing, he takes the position that he can “help Freirean educators achieve the task laid out for them: to teach for social justice without engaging in indoctrination” (p. 457).

In writing a journal article to answer the key question about whether or not social studies teachers should strive to transmit the status quo or to transform teaching approaches, William H. Stanley (2005) admonishes that schools are responsible for formally training students to be citizens. At the same time, he advises that notions of democracy and action-oriented citizenship are a learning process. Stanley further advises that “Democracy is also a process or form of life rather than a fixed end in itself, and we should regard any democratic

society as a work in progress” (p. 282). In a chapter titled “John Dewey’s Vision of Radical Democracy,” Richard J. Bernstein (2010) writes that Dewey believed: “The great hope for nurturing individuals who will be sensitive to social injustice and for developing the flexible habits of intelligence required for social reform is democratic public education” (p. 86). In this regard, Evans (2010) poses a key question: “to what extent is schooling leading students to question social injustices and to develop deep dreams of fairness and equity?” (p. 240).

By considering ethics and morals from the vantage point in which personal and political beliefs become part of our national debate, students most likely could form the habit of political discussion as well as interest in much the same way that representatives of the various social and political camps prepare to respond to the inquiring media on a daily basis. Anna Ochoa-Becker (1996) reminds us that results from assessments, surveys, and polls consistently indicate “that many citizens lack the knowledge and/or commitment needed to take advantage of democratic principles in today’s complex world” (p. 7). It is reasonable to consider reintroducing Dewey in order to address Ochoa’s concern. Dewey (1908) stressed that it was ideal to present students with an examination of unresolved questions. Dewey (1916) argued that “morality is concerned with conduct” (p. 402). Along this line, it would appear logical that how our federal government conducts itself, in addition to how representatives of the two major and other political parties believe the federal government should conduct itself, now and in the future, as well as the myriad of global governments and issues that surround us could and should be considered as moral issues open for discussion. I believe such discussions can be effectively facilitated in today’s classrooms by using Dewey’s approach to ethics and moral problems structured as issues-centered education. Robert Westbrook (1991) argued that

Dewey had no doubts that the democratic character he hoped children would develop was morally superior to all other possibilities; this was the first principle, the postulate, of his ethics. His critique of oppressive benevolence, however, indicated that the child had to develop this character for himself if education was to be truly moral (p.107).

Today, over 100 years after Dewey first spoke of ethics in education, it is time that moral principles be discussed and debated in the schools. Certainly the role that governments should play in response to terrorism and to social development in our global community is viable, critical classroom discussion material. Active investigation into what students can identify as actual problems that are being debated in real time concerning the proper function of the government would promote critical thinking. In turn, when the classroom educator fosters an environment to develop the ability to form and ascertain good judgments, then democratic ideals supporting the future of citizenship and character education are cultivated as well (Ochoa-Becker, 2007; Evans, 2007, 2004; Evans & Saxe, 2007, 1996; Parker, 2003, 1996; Engle & Ochoa, 1988; Newmann and Oliver, 1970; Hunt & Metcalf, 1955 and 1968; Oliver & Shaver, 1966; Engle, 1960).

After all, Dewey (1909) expressed his belief that: “The teacher who operates in good faith will find every subject, every method of instruction, every incident of school life pregnant with moral possibility” (p. 58). This includes considering the ethical and moral dimensions of ongoing political debates. Let’s pause now and return to 100 year old ideas for social studies education. As a solid counter-point to social media, indeed all media impact, in a rapidly changing global environment, Dewey provides important messages to encourage today’s educators to actively bolster a reflective thinking, issues-centered approach founded on ethics and morals.

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## **Saving a Progressive Vision: Moving the Barnes Collection<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the progressive understanding of art advanced by Albert Barnes, and asks how the educational vision for his large collection of art might be preserved as it has now moves from its location in the idyllic suburban setting in Merion, PA to the hustle and bustle of central Philadelphia. I submit that the vision will be endangered unless the intent of the collector, Barnes, is clearly understood. For Barnes the collection was for the purpose of educating and not just for viewing. While the move in itself need not diminish this purpose it will take considerable attention to realize the education vision in the way that Barnes intended. In the process of making this argument I examine the mutual influence of Albert Barnes and Dewey on progressive views about aesthetic education and also on their views about the role that aesthetics plays in democracy. I conclude with my own impression of the new home for the Barnes.

**Keywords:** Barnes, Dewey, Art, Progressive education, Aesthetic experience

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## Introduction

*After the Donor's death no picture belonging to the collection shall ever be loaned, sold or otherwise disposed of except that if any picture passes into a state of actual decay so that it is no longer of any value it may be removed for that reason only from the collection.*

The Barnes Foundation By-laws, Article IX Management of the Corporation, Amended Dec.6, 1922. [http://www.barneswatch.org/main\\_bylaws.html](http://www.barneswatch.org/main_bylaws.html)

The first time I visited the Barnes collection it was still in Marion, a suburb of Philadelphia shortly before its move to the center of Philadelphia in the midst of the controversy that has surrounded the long-standing attempt to break Barnes's will and change the location of the collection. The second time it was in Philadelphia a few months after the move was complete. Once inside it was hard for me to tell the difference between the old and the new space and experts agree that the interior space of the collection's new home is a stunning rendition of the old. The walls are the same fabric and color as in Merion, and the curators have reproduced the arrangement and spacing of the paintings exactly as Barnes had done just prior to his death in 1952. The decorative items and hardware pieces are situated in exactly the same way as in Merion. The minor material changes, for example the lighting and comfortable restaurant, are improvements.

The controversy surrounding the move involved legal questions such as whether it violates Barnes's Will and if so whether the violation was justified. And while the controversy continues the care that has gone into the collections new home and the meticulous way in which the curators have reproduced Barnes's arrangement of paintings and artifacts has muted much of the criticism. For example, consider the title of the review by a former critic of the move, Roberta Smith in the New York Times. "A Museum, Reborn, Remains True to Its Old Self, Only Better."<sup>2</sup> Most of the remaining critics are largely concerned with the legal/moral question: was it justified to break Albert Barnes's explicit instructions in his Will not to remove any picture from the collection. The debate over whether the indenture of trust in his Will was followed was certainly the main point of the highly controversial film, "Art of the Steal"<sup>3</sup>, which came out in 2009, a couple of years before the new facility was completed. *The Steal* develops the case that major Philadelphia Foundations, such as the Pew and Annenberg, together with the Philadelphia art establishment, colluded to violate the collector's Will and to steal the collection for the sake of tourism. Both the boosters and the critics of the move see fidelity to Barnes's intentions as the main issue here. To the former fidelity is achieved by a new arrangement that is virtually indistinguishable from the old. To the critic fidelity entails nothing short of maintaining the collection in its original home. While these are important questions the deeper issue concerns neither the move nor the arrangement but Barnes's educational vision for his collection and whether this vision will be maintained given the new situation, and the viewing experience the new environment promotes. This question goes deep into the roots of progressive education and Barnes's relation to one of its principal figures, John Dewey. It also goes well beyond the physical arrangements of the paintings or the way the space is illuminated. This essay is an attempt to reconstruct that vision, a vision where educational enlightenment was the central aim of the collection.

## Background: Barnes and his Art

Albert C. Barnes, who distained museums for their pretentiousness and snob appeal, died in 1951 and willed his extensive collection of art works to his educational foundation in Merion leaving an additional multimillion dollars to care for the building and the artwork. Over time the money proved to be insufficient and the collection was in danger of disintegrating.

Born into a poor family, the son of a butcher who lost an arm in the Civil War, Barnes boxed to support his way through the University of Pennsylvania medical school. He later made a fortune as an inventor and industrialist and then began collecting art. He is said to have selected, bought and arranged every single one of the paintings himself. The collection contains classical Greek and Egyptian art as well as those of well-known nineteenth and twentieth century artists, some of which have been stored since Barnes bought them in the 1920's. What is displayed, a fraction of the total collection, was quite amazing from anyone's standpoint. What is displayed, a fraction of the total collection was quite amazing from almost anyone's standpoint. The collection includes 181 by Renoir, 69 by Cézanne, and 59 by Matisse. There are works by Van Gogh, Gauguin, and El Greco, Goya, Manet, Monet, Modigliani, Utrillo and Picasso. Today many regard the collection as priceless and refuse to place a value on many of the individual works. However, a general consensus is that the entire collection would be worth about twenty five billion in today's US dollars. Indeed it is reported that there are more Renoirs in the Barnes collection than in the entire city of Paris.

Some critics of the move claim that when the endowment ran out of funds it should have been relatively easy to have sold a few of the works, especially those in storage, to save the collection. Those in favor of the move point out that Barnes's Will stipulated that nothing was to be sold or loaned unless so deteriorated that it was valueless. They argue that this made it difficult to use the collection itself to raise the funds required to support it. Moreover, the Will also stipulated that the arrangement of the art and artifacts, which he had personally prepared, should not be changed.

As the endowment dwindled the trustees, five of whom were appointed in accordance with Barnes's will by Lincoln University<sup>4</sup>, at the time, a prominent but not wealthy Black Institution located in the Philadelphia area, were severely limited in their options to maintain the original arrangements. Indeed they had to get Court permission to allow some of the works to travel elsewhere to raise money needed to save the building from deterioration.<sup>5</sup>

A number of schemes were hatched to keep the Barnes collection in Merion. For example, the collection was opened to the public on a limited basis, but more parking had to be secured, and this infuriated the neighbors who objected to the disruptions that this introduced into their quiet wealthy suburban community. Eventually a suit was successfully brought limiting parking in the neighborhood, hence limiting the options for increasing public access.

In fact Barnes's intentions were more complicated than can be gleaned from a surface reading of the Will and the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Annenberg Foundation maintained that in moving the collection to Philadelphia they were honoring a deeper intent than merely maintaining the collection in its original building. The Head of the Pew Foundation argued:

"I believe that art in the public domain ought to be accessible to all who want to see it." Dr. Barnes, Ms. Rimel said, wanted the collection to be accessible to "plain folk." And, she added, he wrote an "if all else fails" clause, which suggested that if ever his restrictions made life for the Barnes impossible, the collection could be moved to Philadelphia.

Ms. Rimel called the idea of a Pew takeover "nonsense." Rather than control the Barnes, "we are passing the baton to the Barnes, which is building a national board."<sup>6</sup>

In fact, Rimel has part of the story exactly right. Barnes did want the collection available to "plain folk," but not just as a collection to be passively admired. Barnes had a fervent commitment to the education of the working class even before the formation of his Foundation. As an industrialist in the early 1900's, when a ten-hour workday was the norm, Barnes instituted a six-hour workday, and sponsored educational lectures for his workers. In

addition, years before African and African American art received significant recognition from the art establishment, Barnes was collecting it and promoting its aesthetic worth.

Certainly, his collection in Merion it was not very accessible to the vast majority of working people and blacks, most of who lived elsewhere. Still, Barnes promoted his Foundation as an educational organization and not a museum, and there are a number of ways other than direct viewing that could serve this group. Educating teachers is one of them. As with many educational institutions the Barnes Foundation was very restrictive—one might say even dictatorial—in determining who could view the collection. It required an application for admission and Barnes did delight in turning down the rich and powerful on a seeming whim. In Barnes's view he was doing exactly what all private, educational institutions were doing: discriminating against some and accepting others, only his may have been the earliest example of a "reverse discrimination" practice. During his lifetime private schools and colleges openly discriminated against workers children, Jews, Negroes, and women, e. All of which was perfectly legal. Barnes did the reverse, and favored working class students and provided greater access to those of color, and independent of religion.<sup>7</sup>

Rimel's mistake is to collapse the distinction between a museum and an educational institution that Barnes had worked hard to maintain. For Barnes this collection was first and foremost for educations. Certainly he ran his admissions process in an unorthodox and dictatorial way, which favored the working class. When he wanted to be particularly insulting, Barnes might sign the rejection letter, using the name of his dog, or require an IQ test, as he did when the President of Bryn Mawr College applied to see the collection. (As far as I know she did not did take it.)<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, he was quite permissive when it came to the application of working class people. James Michener, as a student at Swarthmore, applied, was rejected, reapplied pretending to be an "illiterate" steel worker and was admitted to view the collection.<sup>9</sup> Otherwise, as with most educational institution, the collection was restricted to the general public and this restriction lasted until the early 1960's, nine years after Barnes died, when its tax-free status was challenged. Yet the challenge could succeed only by collapsing the distinction Barnes wished to maintain between a museum and an educational institution.

The supporters of the move of the collection to Philadelphia agreed to keep the arrangements of paintings, furniture, and artifacts intact, but the educational reasons for doing so may have been obscured. The arrangement was important for Barnes because he felt that it augmented the educational intensity of the viewing experience. As George Hein put it: "The arrangements were a deliberate, calculated manner of juxtaposing and complementing works of art so that similarities and differences in form would be better understood by the students. Barnes changed the arrangements from time to time, but the intention was always to provide the best pedagogic arrangements he could develop."<sup>10</sup> Barnes was skeptical about the value of modern museums and not just because he saw them as palaces for idle admiration, and false worship, which he did. He was also skeptical because he saw them advancing a passive conception of seeing, and because he believed that museums had a pernicious influence on art education.

For Barnes the purpose of his collection was for not for museum aims but for educational ones. Hence, for example, the odd metal pieces placed carefully around the paintings are intended to illustrate some shared qualities among the paintings they accompany. And even though the original collection was located in a quiet suburb, the idea was to provide a setting where educators and art lovers could learn to see in new ways, and then extend that way of seeing to others who might not have the means or the time to come to Merion.

As the court battles went on the educational mission of the collection was obscured. One of its students correctly argued that it was not a gallery, or even just a collection of papers. It was an educational institution and thus deserved its status as an exclusive and tax-exempt enterprise.<sup>11</sup> Immediately after his death, a court was unwilling to assess the educational status of the Foundation and in 1953 it upheld its tax-exempt status as well as its right to restrict the public from viewing the collection. The question for the Court, however, was not whether it was an educational enterprise, or whether it was a good educational enterprise. It was simply who had the right to sue. On this account it allowed that only the state could do so. This court opinion was modified in 1961 when restricted public access was granted, and for the first time critics were also allowed in to assess the works.

Many who praised the collection<sup>12</sup> were not impressed by its educational program, which was faulted for failing to turn out “a single painter of value,” or any notable art historians. Thus, for these critics Barnes failed to meet their standard measure of educational value. Yet the rationale behind this judgment may well be the reason that Barnes both detested the art establishment and feared that they would gain control of his collection. For here the issue is not art but a philosophy of art education. The clash is not about what is great art, but rather it is about the purpose of art education. Barnes was not concerned with turning out great painters or scholars, as he was criticized for failing to do. His concern was elsewhere.

### **Art as Education: Barnes and Dewey**

Barnes was interested in education from the very beginning of his career as an industrialist. Well before he met John Dewey Barnes began to implement Dewey’s ideas in his factory. He involved his racially integrated, minimally educated work force in his chemical plant<sup>13</sup> in planning and organizing their work, and in doing so reduced the workday from ten hours to six hours. With the time saved Barnes provided workers with lectures on a variety of topics and authors including works by Dewey. Interestingly the lectures were not on technical matters intended to improve productivity but rather on topics in psychology, philosophy and aesthetics. In addition, many of his art purchases were displayed for his workers to view. The Foundation grew out of these lectures and exhibitions of paintings for Barnes’s workers and its charter was granted in 1922. Dewey continued to influence Barnes’s views and served as the first educational director of the Foundation, an honorary position with no responsibilities.

Barnes struck up his personal relationship with Dewey when he took a seminar from him at Columbia University in 1918. The two were an odd couple. Even those who did not agree with Dewey’s pragmatic philosophy generally praised him for his gentleness and kindness. And while Dewey had many philosophical disagreements, he seemed to have made few real enemies. In contrast Barnes is seen as a tyrant who tried to impose his taste on others and would do anything he could to humiliate those who disagreed with him, or did not share his vision. For example, about the writing of the famous art connoisseur, Bernhard (Bernard) Berenson, Barnes Writes: His work “would be unworthy of serious attention except for the regrettable influence his writings have had in filling our Universities with bad teaching on art and our public galleries with bad Italian paintings.”<sup>14</sup>

And again referring to Berenson, “The host of bad paintings in the public galleries of Boston, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Detroit and other cities, especially in the Johnson Collection in Philadelphia, show the sad results of the expert-dealer author-university method of propagating counterfeit thinking and counterfeit art.” Barnes objects to Berenson’s “mechanical standards and his reliance on irrelevant sentimentalities in his judgments of paintings.”<sup>15</sup>

Besides their very different personalities there is something quite un-Dewey like in Barnes's appropriating his collection to maintain a Dorian Grey-like monument to his values and tastes. For Dewey standards evolved and grew with changing time and circumstance. To try to freeze time in the way that Barnes's will does is inconsistent with the spirit of Dewey's philosophy. Yet despite vast differences in temperament, and perhaps more subtle ones in philosophy, the Barnes collection in Merion stood as a continuous exemplar of Dewey's (and Barnes's) understanding of art as education.

What joined Dewey and Barnes was a certain understanding of democracy, and the view that people learn through shared activity.<sup>16</sup> Barnes not only sat in on Dewey's 1918 seminar, he financed a controversial study by Dewey and his graduate students on the immigrant Polish community in Philadelphia.<sup>17</sup> After that, their close relationship developed. While Dewey is often credited with influencing Barnes, there is evidence that the influence was mutual, especially where specific artists are concerned. The preface to Dewey's *Art as Experience*, a book dedicated to Barnes, includes a striking acknowledgment of Dewey's debt to Barnes crediting him not only with influencing his own ideas, but also comparing Barnes's work to "the best that has been done in any field during the present generation, that of science not excepted."<sup>18</sup> While Dewey did have a reputation for personal generosity, unconditional praise was largely reserved for a few like-minded philosophers like William James. And given the accomplishments in science during this time Dewey's praise for Barnes is truly amazing.

A close reading of other works by Dewey suggests that Barnes may have initiated a brief detour in Dewey's overall views. While in some respects Dewey's *Art as Experience* is continuous with other aspects of Dewey's philosophy, it also seems to endorse a kind of value absolutism that is consistent with Barnes but that contrasts quite markedly with Dewey's other works on values.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the wider outline of their view on art is largely the same.

Both believe that to intelligently appreciate a work of art, the viewers need to put themselves into the situation out of which the artwork arose. This does not mean that we must understand the personal situation of the artists, their relation to their spouse, or children, etc. Indeed for Barnes this kind of information is a distraction. What it does mean is that we need to be aware of the problem the artist set out to address and the intellectual tools and techniques that the artist's tradition has provided to address it.

### **Barnes on Education**

Barnes and Dewey shared a concern about the quality of art education, the area that the Barnes Foundation was meant to advance. For both Dewey and Barnes art needs to be understood as education. For both art teaches us how to experience the world of everyday life more fully. For Barnes and Dewey learning to paint and learning to "appreciate" painting is akin to learning to see. Here is where the greatest danger for the loss of the Dewey/Barnes's vision is likely to occur with the Foundations move to a museum setting.

For Barnes and his colleagues at the Foundation, art education failed on two fronts, first at the specialized art academies and then again in the public schools. In both cases the problem was a "demonstrable inability to see."<sup>20</sup> For Barnes, traditional museum experiences and institute trained students were wrongly taught to think of painting as representing fixed rules and patterns or historical or moral narratives. Barnes's staff, like Barnes, was committed to exposing this "charade," and was infused with his combative spirit, a factor that assured the Foundation would have some enemies in high places. Without naming antagonists Mary Mullen, one of the staff, accused the instructors from well-known academies of an inability to



see anything more than the decorative character of the work, and writes of “the “utter blindness in people who are supposed to know something about art.”<sup>21</sup>

For Barnes the art establishment had sabotaged public education in Philadelphia by promoting a “free-expressionist” art program where “zest and eagerness for expressing is allowed to go unhindered, come what may.”<sup>22</sup> This criticism of art education is mirrored in Dewey’s later criticism of what he saw as the excesses of progressive education.<sup>23</sup>

In his criticism of the “free-expression” school of art Barnes cites, as he often does, Dewey as his authority, and in the same essay he quotes Dewey’s public statement denouncing the same museum exhibit. And, as mentioned above, Dewey in his now classic *Art as Experience*, frequently cites and quotes Barnes approvingly. Dewey’s vision was complex, and he was fortunate to have in Barnes, a person who not only shared his vision but who had the material means and the intellectual capacity to instantiate it in an institutional form. To be generous, even Barnes’s combativeness could be likened to the mother eagle protecting her newly hatched chicks, his theory of art, from stronger predators, until they developed their own strength.

### **The Vision: Art Education as Learning to See**

Dewey rejected both formalism (the view that there was a formula that determined the goodness of a work of art), and romanticism (the view that authentic art was an objectification of a subjective experience). The art object neither stood apart from everyday human activity as an object for contemplation alone, nor was good art a matter for every person to determine for herself. Dewey saw art as intimately and organically connected to human life in the way building a dam is organically connected to being a beaver, or building a nest is to being a robin. If we could understand and feel the world as the beaver or the robin, then the dam or the nest would have the quality of a consummation. It would be what the swimming or the flying, the twig gathering and the weaving is for—together, and as a whole -- these undertakings would constitute what Dewey called “an experience”. The goodness of the dam, or the nest, or a fine meal, or a wonderful painting involves a rhythm of doing and undergoing. Without this completion activity is fragmentated and perhaps futile, without meaning. As Thomas M. Alexander so nicely puts it:

Dewey . . . searches for the aesthetic initially by consciously ignoring works of fine art. The origin of art is not to be found in the desire to become housed in a museum. Instead, art originates when life becomes fulfilled in moments of intelligently heightened vitality. When the potentialities of experience are intentionally utilized toward such a complete end, the sense of its own meaning becomes intrinsically present as a consummation of the event... In *an experience*, we genuinely come to inhabit the world, we dwell within the world and appropriate its meaning.<sup>24</sup>

Through art, individuals and their culture makes sense of themselves. Art gives expression to the controlling forces of a culture.

For Dewey seeing is not just a contemplative act, and the eyes are not simply a conduit for impressions on the retina and then the brain. Seeing is an organic act. It engages us in experience. In his classic work in psychology, “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology”<sup>25</sup> Dewey refutes the idea that the stimulus is one thing, the idea another and the response a third. A child reaching for a candle is “seeing- for-the-sake-of -reaching”. The seeing and the reaching are not two separate acts. They are a part of one co-coordinated purposeful activity. And the stimulus is not something that can be defined outside of the subject. A loud noise is one thing when studying in a library and another when in Wrigley Field rooting for the Cubs.

Perception is tied up with emotion, and with the rhythm of appointment, disappointment and satisfaction. The child who sees, reaches, and misses is disappointed, while the child who adjusts and reaches again is satisfied. Obviously there is more to art than reaching and touching. There is acting and undergoing, or, as Dewey put it: "Art is the living and concrete proof that man is capable of restoring consciously, and thus on the plane of meaning, the union of sense, need, impulse and action characteristic of the live creature."<sup>26</sup> Of course humans are more complex than birds and beavers and so too is their experience. "As an organism increases in complexity, the rhythms of struggle and consummation . . . are varied and prolonged, and they come to include within themselves a variety of sub-rhythms. . . . Fulfillment is more massive and more subtly shaded."<sup>27</sup> In everyday life, the lives we lead at home and at work, there are many distractions and interruptions making it hard to take full advantage of the possibilities perception provides. Thus, fulfillment is interrupted or partial and often gives way to fragmented meaning. For Dewey and Barnes art addresses this fragmentation of meaning in two ways. First, it provides the experience of fulfillment where all of the parts of the object are "interdetermined" and where learning to see, as opposed to recognize, is to perceive this interdetermination from the standpoint of the artist and the process of its creation. To appreciate a work of art we need, as Barnes puts it, to place ourselves into the situation out of which the work of art sprang<sup>28</sup>. This does not mean that the viewer needs to know about the artist's personal life—Picasso's relation to women, Van Gogh's relation to Gauguin. It means that the viewer must understand the problems the artist confronted as artist; the tools and traditions available, the color possibilities, shapes and the reason the artists put them in relation to one another in the way that he did—what Dewey and Barnes call the form of the work. Perceiving entails understanding the possible paths the artist might have taken, the constraints that were operating and the reasons for making some choices and not others. Barnes and De Mazia call this "learning to see pictures": "Learning to see pictures as records of enriched experience is of necessity slow, even when interest is genuine and application wholehearted. A set of habits essentially new and of a very special character must be gradually built up to supplement those ingrained in us."<sup>29</sup> But "learning to see pictures" also functions to teach us to see better the objects of everyday life. As Dewey puts it: "We are carried to refreshed attitude towards the circumstances and exigencies of ordinary experience"<sup>30</sup> and Barnes expresses the same idea when likening the congruence of a painting to that of a well-designed automobile or piece of furniture.<sup>31</sup> Hence, the second function of a work of art is to help us learn to see the everyday workings of life more intensely. This purpose is what Dewey calls its instrumental function. In both cases the movement is from felt discrepancy to harmony.<sup>32</sup> The interdetermination of parts in an artwork also expresses the unique individuality of the artist. As Dewey explains:

Every work of art uses a medium associated with different organs. Art intensifies the significance of the fact that our experience is mediated through these organs. In painting, color gives us a scene without mixture of the other senses. Color must then carry the qualities given by the other senses, thus enhancing its expressiveness. There is something magical in the power of flat pictures to depict a diverse universe, as also in the power of mere sounds to express events. In art media all the possibilities of a specialized organ of perception are exploited. Seeing, for example, operates with 'full energy' in the medium of paint. Medium is 'taken up' into it and remains within the result.<sup>33</sup>

Color, contrast, shape and form and the relations between them constitute the tension and resolution that comprise the rhythms of a human life. Learning to see then is learning to understand how such tensions and resolutions are reflected in color, shape and shade on a flat surface. Thus art is *education* in ways of seeing both with and through every day life to something deeper, perhaps more universal. But then learning to see is hard work, where new habits must be acquired and old ones, such as sentimental associations, discarded.

### **The Dangers of a Museum**

One of the features of the Barnes collection that many people comment on is the rather odd arrangement of the different works, and it might be hard for a typical museum patron to understand why works from very different periods might be placed next to one another and with no identifiable marker. A Dutch master may be placed alongside of a modern painting and both alongside a craft object like a simple chair. Barnes's idea was to use these arrangements as illustrations of some of the perennial qualities of art—form, or color or rhythm and to enable students to grasp the continuity of traditions across time and space. Matisse captured this idea exactly when he wrote in 1930.

One of the most striking things in America is the Barnes collection, which is exhibited in a spirit very beneficial for the formation of American artists. There the old master paintings are put beside the modern ones ... and this bringing together helps students understand a lot of things that academics don't teach<sup>34</sup>

Matisse was correct in calling it a "collection" and *not* a museum. For Barnes museums provided labels that encouraged memorization, rapid identification and nurtured snob appeal. It would be generous, but perhaps not too far off the mark, to see Barnes's rudeness to the American art establishment, and his dismissal of establishment canons as protective moves designed to guard his vision from the habits of the art establishment. This certainly could explain why his decisions about displaying works of art excluded anyone who might have had an eye that was "refined" in a traditional way. He tried once in his public exhibition in 1923 at the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Art to engage the establishment and was slammed for his taste.

If Barnes was hard on the art establishment and its critics it likely was not only because he distrusted their motives, but also because he distrusted their encrusted habits. He was burnt once in the scathing reviews the critics gave to his first and only showing in 1923—where they dismissed the Renoirs and Cézannes as inconsequential or worse. He certainly was in no mood to subject himself again to such abuse now that his collection was recognized -- Matisse said it was the only place to view art in America<sup>35</sup>. He did not think that the "experts" were educable. True, his continuing rudeness was a grand way to thumb his nose at the establishment that had belittled his work, but it was also an expression of frustration at the unlikely possibility that this establishment could ever be taught to see art, in the way Barnes thought art should be seen.

Even without his early rejection Barnes might have been weary of museums. To place a work in a museum often prompts a certain kind of behavior and promotes certain kinds of habits. A museum-goer will often look at a painting for a brief moment, identify the object in the painting, and go up to the wall and read the card: "'Blue Boy,' Picasso" after which he then moves on. The next trip in the museum, when he passes the painting, he can think or say, "Oh! That is Picasso's Blue Boy." For Barnes and Dewey this mere recognition is not enough. Dewey puts it this way:

Bare recognition is satisfied when a proper tag or label is attached, "proper" signifying one that serves a purpose outside the act of recognition—a salesman identifies wares by a sample. It involves no stir of the organism, no inner commotion. But an act of perception proceeds by waves that extend serially throughout the entire organism. There is, therefore, no such thing in perception as seeing or hearing plus emotion. The perceived object or sense is emotionally pervaded throughout.<sup>36</sup>

Hence for both Dewey and Barnes the aim of art education is not recognition, but seeing. Seeing is not passive as recognition is. It requires work and tutoring. It is not something that occurs just in museums but in life. Seeing is not just contemplative, although there are contemplative moments. Nor is it subjective appreciation. Rather, seeing, like art, is a creative experience where the potentialities of nature are discovered and realized through guided action.<sup>37</sup> As if, perhaps, the beaver could look at the twigs and mud around him and contemplate a dam, and then, after his dam is built, step back and say, now that is a damn good dam, meaning that all the potentials of the material were put in use and that from now on any beaver that wants to build a dam better take a look at this one—because this *is* a dam. For Dewey the seeing involves not the bare impact of color and shape on the retina, but a movement—back and forth—from the material to the vision, to its execution. Each step, each movement works toward a whole and the whole is comprehended as the culmination of these movements.

For both Dewey and Barnes, inquiry, whether intellectual, scientific or philosophical, has an aesthetic quality about it, as do other acts of everyday life.<sup>38</sup> Walking, bending, pouring, embracing all can be done with care and grace, or not. Yet in each case there is also another purpose—to get to the store, to pick up a shoe, to quench a thirst, to comfort a crying infant. The difference between these experiences in everyday life and the aesthetic response to a work of art is the difference between something that happens along the way and something that is the very purpose of the activity. The thirst will be quenched even if some of the tea is spilled and the child comforted even if her parent's embrace is not as graceful as some other parents. For the aesthetic experience, what counts is the integration of the experience on its own account. The aesthetic experience is like these experiences in everyday life because it fully involves the self. One might say it is not just the self having an experience; it is the self as experiencing. In seeing art one enters it. As Dewey puts it:

To perceive a beholder must create his own experience. And his creation must include relations comparable to those which the original producer underwent. They are not the same in any literal sense. But with the perceiver, as with the artist, there must be an ordering of the elements of the whole that is in form, although not in detail, the same as the process of organization of the creator of the work consciously experienced.<sup>39</sup>

There are two activities that come to my mind when reading the above quote. The first is sports. Here the fan may follow the path of the ball or the runner with the intensity similar to the players themselves. Indeed, the true fan will know a great deal about the tradition of the game; be able to put this play into a historical context; compare it to others similar games, and project the potential of the present situation onto the next play, and then make a judgment about the goodness or badness of the actual next move. The other activity is jazz where the audience enters into the music, by tapping their feet, clapping their hands, applauding at the intervals so that music and applause merge. Of course painting creates different educational challenges.

### **Contradictions and Possibilities**

A new building for the Barnes collection might or might not serve the collection as well as the old. However, the threat to Barnes's vision is neither in the building nor in the move itself or even in the arrangement of the works of art. Rather it is in the practices of some museums and the habits of some museum-goers. Barnes and Dewey agreed that the aim of art education was enable the student to refine and the act of seeing. He held that some art was a better expression of this act than others, and that some arrangements were more effective in shaping this refinement and enrichment than other arrangements. Thus, good art is also good education. And he felt that good seeing brought out the essential reality of the thing.

Rembrandt and Renoirs did this better in his mind than Botticelli and other artists whose work he labeled as superficial and decorative.

Perhaps what is most interesting and most revealing about his vision is that he does not confine it to seeing art. It is the vitality, the dynamic character of the reaction that is evident by the “familiar warmth and glow pervasive of the whole self when a new experience is born. . . . The prevalent tendency to confine aesthetic enjoyment to a work of art has no sound psychological foundation.”<sup>40</sup> Aesthetic enjoyment can include a piece of furniture or even a nice automobile. The object then of art education is not just to recognize art, but learn to see, and seeing involves understanding the moves that result in one arrangement, color, form, etc rather than another. Barnes believed that such learning is unlikely to happen in a museum, given its task to move people in and out and to get the biggest artistic bang for the buck. He preferred retail, even boutique art not the wholesale dynamite block-busters that characterize many of today’s museum exhibits. Dewey actually held a more moderate view and in a talk given in 1944 expressed the hope that new methods or reproduction would enable many more people to be exposed to great art. Nevertheless the guiding vision for both was education and growth not passive contemplation, or worse, memorization.

There are difficulties that arise from confusions within Barnes’s vision, partly as a result of his snobbish dogmatism, and partly as a result of his unquestionably exquisite taste. His saving grace, given the difficult character that he was, is that he actually had a lot to be snobbish about. Nevertheless, despite his closeness to Dewey and his idea of democratic education it is more than Barnes’s personality that is autocratic. Dogmatism is present in his conception of great art. He emphasized a kind of deep structure that he believed good art has and other “art” does not, and that great art has more of than good art. He held, for example that the rhythmic sequence of themes and variations in Beethoven’s symphonies were reflected again in Renoir’s art.<sup>41</sup> Here Barnes seems to emphasize some *essential* rhythms and forms and in doing so sounds more like Plato than Dewey, at least Dewey as he expresses himself in his social and political thought.

These essential elements enable Barnes to make his strong judgments about who should be in and who should be out and why. For Barnes Monet, although not bad, is not up to the standard of Renoir or Cezanne. Yet Barnes never qualifies his opinions with, “in my judgment” or “in my mind” or “in my opinion” or, “I believe”. In other words, he rarely reflected the tentativeness of judgment that was associated in other places with Dewey’s philosophical method. Part of his arrangement of art objects and furniture together was to display the shared qualities, the rhythms, textures and the like that they had with great art.

Yet there is also that side of Barnes, I think the more Deweyian side, that sees the aesthetics in the composition of a bolt or the curve of a car, where the role of art education is to help us all see this better. As Dewey puts it: “We are carried to a refreshed attitude toward the circumstances and exigencies of ordinary experience. The work, in the sense of working, of an object of art does not cease when the act of perception stops. It continues to operate in indirect channels.”<sup>42</sup>

It is hard to see how these two sides—essentialism of the art object and Barnes’s dogmatic hierarchy of artistic quality, on the one hand and the affirmation of beauty in the curve of a Chevy on the other—go together and Barnes fails to address the question. It would seem that an education guided by this essentialism would require something quite special, and is a vision, which if true, is endangered by the move to a big museum, especially if it did not take care to provide a special educational environment. Further, this affirmation seems somewhat less precious, and is one that is actually promoted by some contemporary museums when they give a common place object, say Duchamp’s “Fountain”, or McQueen’s “Static,”

a place of prominence. Both of these works, however, are better understood in the Deweyian dialogical frame than the Barnes's monological one.

### **The Move and the Vision**

There are potential issues that will need to be addressed if a progressive vision is to be maintained. To enter the new building for the Barnes collection is clearly to enter a museum not a school. There is no elaborate application process, as Barnes required, and the place is so crowded that one needs to order tickets well in advance. Once there it is really hard to concentrate on seeing pictures in the way Barnes would have liked since, as with other blockbuster shows, people are virtually stepping over one another as they compete for viewing space.

From an educator's point of view the contemplative simplicity of the interior space is compromised by the crowd as it move through the different rooms. Whereas Barnes had an *educational* reason for arranging the paintings the way he did—some element of form, color, or line that he wanted students to see—now, in the absence of his educational vision, many of the walls just seem cluttered as one wonderful painting lures the viewer away from another, and one reaches for the catalogue located on the benches to identify the artist and the name of the work—an exercise that Barnes wanted his students to avoid. These catalogues are a necessary addition for a museum but Barnes did not believe that labeling artist and work is the most important feature of art education. Indeed although it is claimed that Barnes had a particular reason for the arrangements of the paintings and for the placement of the hardware around trying to figure out what his reason might have been distracts from the viewing experience. Merion's intimate and restricted setting was a more likely place to replicate Barnes's pedagogy and help students mirror his way of seeing than the hustle and bustle of a new building in Philadelphia. This new building has become much more a museum and much less a school, and it is a museum that is haunted by Barnes's ghost.

The question then is what aspect of Barnes's or Dewey's vision might the new location endanger, and here I want to suggest that there is a subtle difference between the two. Both Barnes and Dewey believed that great art could teach us how to see, and to reach beyond the immediate art object to perceive the everyday world in a deeper and richer way. The difference is that for Barnes the individual seeing was the most important feature of the experience and it is clear that given his understanding of the underlying structure of the object he was certain just *how* we should see. The new location does not do violence to this feature of Barnes's vision for each one of the viewers largely goes their separate way untouched by the experience of the other. Barnes's vision here would be violated only for those who did not come to see in the right way—i.e. in his way. Given Barnes's devotion to Dewey's understanding of education it is incomplete.

Dewey's philosophy had the potential to understand the experience somewhat differently, and Dewey would likely be more understanding of the move. Although his *Art as Experience* reflects much of Barnes's ideas, Dewey's larger educational philosophy emphasizes the importance of community and has a significant dialogical (as well as "scientific") dimension which might best be expressed in small groups engaged in conversation about their experience with the artwork rather than in trying to simply comprehend and mirror Barnes's way of seeing. Sadly, in honoring Barnes's mechanical directions for painting the walls and hanging the pictures his monological dimension is intensified while Dewey's dialogical opportunities are reduced.

It would take an imaginative curator to suggest that more dialogical opportunities be developed in the new facility but it is certainly not impossible. To achieve this aspiration would require that the objects not just replicate Barnes's arrangements. It would require

educational experiences focused on students and not just museum goers and that helps students understand the relationship between art and life as Dewey understood it and as Barnes tried to display it. It would also require a staff that does not draw a sharp distinction between art, education and life, and, that can rescue Barnes from Barnes by appreciating the paradox of a man who warned against deifying art, but then dictated a Will that deified his *arrangement* of his art objects.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>My appreciation to Kazuyo Nakamura from Hiroshima University. Also I am indebted to George Hein for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

<sup>2</sup>Roberta Smith, "A Museum, Reborn, Remains True to Its Old Self, Only Better, *New York Times*, May 17, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/18/arts/design/the-barnes-foundation-from-suburb-to-city.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>3</sup>"*The Art of the Steal*" Don Argott (director) Philadelphia: 9.14 Pictures, 2009.

<sup>4</sup>Lincoln later was partly taken over by the state.

<sup>5</sup>George Hein notes in our correspondence that "The authority granted by orphan's court in the early 1990's to break the trust agreement was the first breach of Barnes's stipulation. The 20 million raised was to be spent on security and air-conditioning (maybe also building repairs?) Every time the Foundation wanted to spend, they had to get permission from the court, which involved lawyers' fees and time."

<sup>6</sup>Judith H. Dobrzynski, "A Foundation Head Central to the Philadelphia Story" *The Wall Street Journal*. Feb 8, 2007. <http://www.judithdobrzynski.com/2988/a-foundation-head-central-to-the-philadelphia-story>

<sup>7</sup>Abe Chanin is an example of a poor Philadelphia kid who had talent that Barnes admitted to his classes, sent to Europe and got him going as an artist and art educator. My appreciation to George Hein for this information

<sup>8</sup>A year before he died he explicitly rejected any ties to the Philadelphia elite organizations. "No Trustee," he wrote, "shall be a member of the faculty or Board of Trustees or Directors of the University of Pennsylvania, Temple University, Bryn Mawr, Haverford, or Swarthmore Colleges, or Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts." From James Panero, "outsmarting Albert Barnes" *Philanthropy Round Table*, [http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/topic/donor\\_intent/outsmarting\\_albert\\_barnes](http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/topic/donor_intent/outsmarting_albert_barnes).

<sup>9</sup>E. Garfield, "The Legacy of Albert C. Barnes Part 1: The Tempestuous Life of A Scientist/Art Collector", *Essays of an Information Scientist*, Vol: 5, p. 387-394.

<sup>10</sup>George Hein private correspondence, March 14, 2012.

<sup>11</sup>Garfield Part 2 p. 459

<sup>12</sup>Not everyone was so impressed, including the Chairmen of the fine Arts Departments of both Harvard and The University of Pennsylvania who claimed to have detected some forgeries while others found some of the paintings sub par and of minor significance. (Garfield Part 2, 459-461).

<sup>13</sup>Barnes was the co-inventor of Argyrols, an important product for preventing blindness in infants. The company was very successful, and he sold it just before the depression, and at a time just before the price of art was to fall.

<sup>14</sup>Albert Barnes, "The Esthetics of Bernhard Berenson, in Dewey, J. Barnes, A. et al. (Merion PA: *Art and Education*, Barnes Foundation Press, 1929), 223.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>De Mazia, V. Barnes, A. "The Esthetics of Bernhard Berenson, in Dewey, J. Barnes, A. et al. *Art and Education*, (Merion: Barnes Foundation Press, 1929), 223.

Barnes and De Mazia, "Expression and Form" in Dewey, Barnes, et al. 169.

De Mazia, V. "An Experiment in Educational Method at the Barnes" Foundation, in Dewey, Barnes, et al. 134-144

<sup>17</sup>Feinberg, W. *Reason and Rhetoric: The Intellectual Foundations of Twentieth Century Educational Reform*; (New York: Wiley, 1974.)

<sup>18</sup>Dewey, J. *Art as Experience*, (New York: Capricorn, 1934) p. viii.

p. Ibid., viii.

<sup>19</sup>Dewey, *Theory of Valuation*, (Chicago: International Encyclopedia of Unified Science, 1939).

<sup>20</sup>Mullen, M. "Problems Encountered in Art Education" in Dewey, Barnes et. al p. 252

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 254

<sup>22</sup>Barnes in Dewey, Barnes, 1929

<sup>23</sup>Dewey, *Experience and Education*, (New York: Collier Books, 1938).

<sup>24</sup>Thomas M. Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience and Nature: The Horizons of Feeling* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987) XIX

<sup>25</sup>John Dewey, "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology", (*Psychological Review*, 3. 1896) 357-370.

<sup>26</sup>Dewey, 1934 p. 25

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 23

<sup>28</sup>Barnes in Dewey, Barnes 1929

<sup>29</sup>Barnes and De Mazia

<sup>30</sup>Dewey, 1934, p. 139

<sup>31</sup>Barnes, in Dewey, Barnes 1929, p. 151

<sup>32</sup>Barnes and De Mazia, in Dewey, Barnes et al. p. 161.

- <sup>33</sup> Tom Leddy, "Dewey's Aesthetics" (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Sept. 21, 2011)  
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dewey-aesthetics/>
- <sup>34</sup> Roger Kimball, "We Appeal to You, "Betraying a Legacy: The Case of the Barnes Foundation, *The New Criterion*, June 1993, <http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/Betraying-a-legacy--the-case-of-the-Barnes-Foundation-4775>
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> Dewey, 1934, 53
- <sup>37</sup> Alexander, 102
- <sup>38</sup> Dewey, 1934, 55
- <sup>39</sup> Dewey, 1934, 54.
- <sup>40</sup> Barnes and De Mazia, 151.
- <sup>41</sup> Barnes and De Mazia, 169
- <sup>42</sup> Dewey, 1934, 139.

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## John Dewey and the Challenge of Progressive Education\*

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### Abstract

In *The School and Society* John Dewey noted new tendencies in education, e.g., manual training and nature study. He raised two related questions: (1) how are we to *understand the* new educational trends as reflections of the *social context*—as an *inevitable* effort to bring education into line with the broader pattern of change in industrial society? And (2) how are we to *build upon and direct* them and align them with *democratic social ideals*? Analogous questions arise in today's era of economic globalization, and information technology networks, as we observe new educational trends from collaborative learning to charter schools, and even virtual schools.

This essay reviews Dewey's answers to questions 1 and 2 in *School and Society*, and then uses them as a template for an analogous inquiry into today's situation. I raise two parallel questions: (1) how may we understand *our* new educational trends in relation to the global network context? And (2) how may we build upon and direct these new educational trends to realize the *contemporary* democratic aspirations of a global network society?

**Keywords:** John Dewey, Progressive Education, Social Context, Information Society

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\* I prepared this essay to mark the 100th anniversary of *The School and Society*. This paper was originally presented at a meeting of the European John Dewey Society in Rende, Calabria, Italy, in 2000 and published in the proceedings, under the title John Dewey and Progressive Education: 1900-2000, Larry A. Hickman, Giuseppe Spadafora, eds. *John Dewey's Educational Philosophy in International Perspective: A New Democracy for the Twenty-First Century*, Carbondale, SIU Press, 2009. I have subsequently used it as a programmatic guide for further studies of the contemporary situation of progressive educational change, which will be found in the bibliography. The essay has been revised and updated for this publication.

## Introduction

In 1899 John Dewey delivered three lectures on the ideas underlying his experimental school. His revision of the stenographic record of these lectures was published as *The School and Society* in November 1899 with a publication date of 1900.<sup>1</sup>

Noting new tendencies in education - the introduction in the schools of manual training, nature study, and expressive art - Dewey considered them from a "social" vantage point. In doing so, he raised two related questions: (1) how are we to *understand the* new educational trends as reflections of the *social context*—as an *inevitable* effort to bring education into line with the broader pattern of change in industrial society? And (2) how are we to *build upon and direct* them and align them with *democratic social ideals*? Dewey did not think this latter result was at all inevitable - rather it presented a daunting challenge. The first question Dewey saw as a *sociological* precursor to the second, which he saw as a key problem for American *social philosophy* in the industrial era.

Analogous questions arise today in contemporary global network era, as we again stand witness to a fundamental social and technical transformation. Economic globalization, information technology networks, and postindustrial "knowledge" workplaces have prompted new trends in education - cooperative, collaborative, and other forms of active learning; interdisciplinary group projects; Internet-based curricula; charter schools, and even virtual schools, school districts, and universities. Some of these have been couched in a language reminiscent of Dewey and even explicitly in terms of continuities with Dewey's progressivism.

I start this essay by reviewing Dewey's answers to questions 1 and 2 in *School and Society*. I then go on to use his treatment of them as a template for an analogous inquiry into the contemporary situation. I raise two parallel questions: (1) how may we understand *our* new educational trends in relation to the global network context? And (2) how may we build upon and direct these new educational trends to realize the *contemporary* democratic aspirations of a global network society?

### Part 1: The School and Industrial Society

Dewey dealt with his preliminary sociological question 1 with just a few paragraphs. He saw the social trend controlling all others at the end of the nineteenth century to be the application of science in industrial production, harnessing forces of nature on a vast and inexpensive scale, creating global markets for American industrial goods and cheap and rapid communications and transport networks. This factory system had gathered people from the ends of the earth into America's industrial cities (MW.1.6-7). It replaced the home and neighborhood system of production, in which industrial processes had "stood revealed" to all, and every member of the household, including young children, had defined tasks. The child participating in household occupations acquired "habits of industry, order, and regard for the rights and ideas of others, and the fundamental habit of subordinating his activities to the general interest of the household" (MW.1.24). The old system thus trained child instincts regarding both *the physical realities* and *social responsibilities* of life.

The introduction of the factory system created a void in both areas. With households and neighborhoods destroyed as centers of production, only the schools remained available as agencies to provide this basic grounding in real-world experience and social responsibility. This was the challenge set for a "progressive" education.

Acknowledging that inherited classroom conventions (fixed seats, mechanical recitations) made it hard to introduce progressive methods employing natural materials and child-centered activities into the schools, Dewey argued that teachers were nonetheless being overwhelmed by the energies of the new urban students that were formally channeled into

family-based activities. Teachers were thus being *compelled to* introduce these new methods merely to engage those irrepressible instincts now neglected at home (MW.1.9). Teachers were acting in self-defense – coping with the classroom situation was the actual driving force for progressive change in actual classrooms. But when asked to justify these new practices, teachers did not speak of relieving their own burdens, but instead adopted a less self-serving rhetoric about the *utility* of the new methods as preparation for home and factory life.

Having explained why the new tendencies were in fact gaining ground in the urban classrooms, Dewey then turned to question 2: how *should* educators *build upon* and *direct* these new tendencies? He rejected the utilitarian justifications - training for life and work in industrial society - as "unnecessarily narrow" (MW 1. 10). Ideally, the school is an instrument for the development of individuality for all citizens; manual occupations in school should serve no direct utilitarian functions.

The justification for progressive methods should be educational, even academic. As components in the community life of the school, the new activities organized around the theme of "occupations" engage the four vital instincts—social, intellectual, constructive, and expressive—no longer engaged at home (MW.1.30). By serving as focal points of school learning, occupations become channels, permitting child instincts to be expressed in ways "permeated throughout with the spirit of art, history and science" (MW.1.19). Occupations are inherently positive and social; they are touched and reinforced by the social environment, they focus intellectual, constructive and expressive energy over weeks and months rather than the few minutes of typical school chores and childhood amusements (MW.1.92—95). They are, in short, natural bridges linking children as given by Nature to children as enduring educational aims prescribe they should become.

But even this *educational justification* was "still too narrow" for Dewey. The *social* feature of occupations is the "the fundamental fact": their use as focal points of school life converts the school into an "embryonic society," introducing a "spirit of free communication, of interchange of ideas, suggestions, results" (MW.1.11). This in turn forges a new form of social discipline that students can carry forward together from school to future social life (MW.1.19-20), leading to a democratic form of industrial society.

Dewey emphasized that the physical and social structures of schools were inhospitable to the progressive methods - that they enforced a passive attitude good only for "listening," not for doing (MW.1.22). Its typical features are "passivity of attitude, mechanical massing of children, uniformity of curriculum and method" (MW.1.23).<sup>2</sup> Schools were antidemocratic, lending themselves only to authoritarian, top-down communication, not to cooperation in defining and resolving common problems. A progressive education would thus require a thorough transformation of space and time utilization, authority relations, and design of school plant and learning activities.

In chapter 3 of *The School and Society*, Dewey provides corrective diagrams (charts 2-4, MW.1.45, 49, 52) of appropriate school layouts in relation to the surrounding social and natural environments, based on his work at the experimental school. In this scheme, environmental factors—the home and neighborhood, gardens and fields, commerce and industry, and the university—surround the school and connect the pupils to natural energies of the outside world that can stimulate their organismic instincts. Practical areas (e.g., textiles shops, kitchen) are at the boundary of the school plant and its natural environment. These are grouped around the new teaching-learning areas that replace traditional recitation classrooms. These areas in turn are organized around the library as the central information source.

In Dewey's scheme, the natural environment is directly and conspicuously connected to the practical areas: for example, the gardens and fields supply foodstuffs for the kitchen. In

place of classrooms (MW.1.33-34), Dewey prescribes a "social clearing house" situated between practical areas at the outside and the library at the building's core (MW.1.51-52), where children confront problems arising from "occupations" in the practical areas, share experiences, and exchange ideas. Rather than instructing and monitoring, teachers criticize and redirect practical work along new lines, or point children to the library for additional necessary information (MW.1.29-34).

Dewey did not shy away from the monumental difficulties involved in such a fundamental structural transformation of the school. While he saw *some* loosening of rigid structures to be "inevitable," he envisioned the thorough transformation of the school required to make it an agency of democratic social reconstruction to be a most daunting challenge. He conceived pragmatism as a comprehensive philosophical and practical *project*, consisting first in framing up a rhetorically powerful democratic idea that clarified the opportunities in "the new education," and then enlisting progressive intellectual and educational leaders in a broad social and cultural movement to place the ideals embodied in the new education into "complete, uncompromising possession of our school system" (MW.1.19).

### **Part 2: The School and Global Network Society**

How, then, are we to view our contemporary educational situation? I here undertake an inquiry analogous to Dewey's for our new century. The first question is how to account for contemporary educational trends in relation to the global network context. Once again, as in 1900, the entrenched physical and organizational structures of schooling appear maladaptive in the emerging situation of knowledge content, distribution, and utilization. To draw the picture in broad strokes, postindustrial "knowledge work" in the global "knowledge economy" is organized in projects of indeterminate time periods; knowledge and information codes are interdisciplinary and constantly shifting; work processes are self-regulated by decentralized, cross-functional or interdisciplinary teams supervised indirectly by dint of information communicated via networks to managers; knowledge and networked information are used by workers even in formerly routine roles such as in manufacturing and transport. Knowledge is now actively circulating throughout the global economy, as business is conducted at "the speed of thought." More static "bodies of knowledge" can be reduced to computer software and manipulated and combined in creative and unpredictable ways by work teams. It is not sufficient for knowledge workers merely to "possess" such "bodies of knowledge;" they must now act on them or transform them.

Dewey is worth quoting at length on this point. He says "there is all the difference in the world whether the acquisition of information is treated as an end in itself, or is made an integral portion of the training of thought. The assumption that information that has been accumulated apart from use in the recognition and solution of a problem may later on be, at will, freely employed by thought is quite false. The skill at the ready command of intelligence is the skill acquired with the aid of intelligence."<sup>3</sup> Dewey's point is reinforced by psychologist Raymond Cattell's contrast of *crystallized* intelligence – the use of acquired knowledge and ability to reason using learned procedures, and *fluid* intelligence – the ability to reason broadly, form concepts, and solve problems based using novel or unfamiliar procedures. Conventional schools and the curriculum produce a specific sort of learning in which memory, classification, and routine verbal-logical problem solving plays a large role – they foster 'crystallized' knowledge, not the 'fluid' knowledge needed by today's network users and knowledge workers. In the knowledge work environment, however, where problems are novel and unstructured, crystallized intelligence is of negligible value and may at times even interfere with fluid intelligence. As Dewey insists, we acquire fluid intelligence only in contexts where fluid intelligence is required and used.

Thus the new educational trends, including active and cooperative learning, interdisciplinary projects, networked distance learning, and global corporate universities, can be accounted for as more or less conscious attempts to bring learning in line with the changing pattern of life and work activities in global network society. At the same time, students are surrounded by the high-technology culture - interactive computer software and games, mobile Internet phones. High-tech interactive media and computer information systems in schools are thus increasingly necessary merely to bring schooling into line with their out-of-school experiences and expectations. Sue Bastian, an educational technology consultant, argues that through networked computers "students are going to have access to stuff that a teacher can't control, [and] the more that happens, teachers are going to have to organize their lessons around it."<sup>4</sup>

Bastian's argument neatly recapitulates Dewey's observation that teacher self-defense has been the prime mover in the transformation of the classroom. And just as they did a century ago, educators once again are justifying these innovations by appealing to familiar but outmoded rhetorical categories: cooperative learning improves math and spelling skills; Web-based instruction is cost-effective. Like those offered in Dewey's time, these justifications are either "painfully inadequate or sometimes even positively wrong" (MW.1.9). Justifications in terms of preparation for the global economy are closer to the mark, but are once again "unnecessarily narrow" in conceiving education in its merely economic capacity.

This brings us to question 2: how are educational leaders to build upon current educational trends to realize our *contemporary* democratic aspirations? In addressing this question I restrict myself to three preliminary observations growing out of the three themes in Dewey's lectures of 1899: (1) *structural transformation* of the school, which is needed to (2) *connect natural processes with children's instincts*, so that (3) educators can shape pupils' activities *to foster democratic habits*.

### **Structural Transformation**

Despite Dewey's considerable influence with educators, intellectuals, and the educated public, and despite the pressures imposed upon older school conventions by new groups of students, the methods he prescribed were not widely adopted and imposed no fundamental change in the schools. While specific "active-learning" practices were adopted by many teachers, most continued to teach as they had before. The schools made merely incremental changes that succeeded only in bringing education into line with the antidemocratic, hierarchical structures of industrial society.<sup>5</sup>

It is possible that such incremental changes will again suffice, that the global network situation will not *compel* fundamental educational change in *any* direction. Bidwell and Dreeben surveyed the development of school organization and curriculum since 1880, finding that in the institutionalization of education, "subject matter forms a sequential, differentiated block structure, and school organization forms an arrangement of students, teachers and material resources that is adapted to the curricular block structure in which instruction is embedded."<sup>6</sup> These structures are precisely those Dewey sought to transform in order to introduce active learning organized around the theme of "occupations," as Bidwell and Dreeben properly note. Yet they show that the structures have remained "remarkably stable" and "remarkably durable" despite equally remarkable changes in school participation rates, educational philosophies, and the educational policies of governments. And they conclude that "it is not easy to foresee substantial changes in them" (p. 360).

This pessimistic conclusion, however, can be questioned. Unlike the situation a century ago, when industrial growth provided an expanding market for unskilled labor, the current school pattern is economically maladaptive - unskilled full-time jobs with union

protection and benefits are gone, and the schools are incapable of generating "knowledge workers". As a result there is pressure not just from progressive intellectuals and educators but also from political/corporate elites *and* ordinary citizens for fundamental change – though of course their images of change differ. Corporate and political elites support networked classrooms, charter schools, and virtual schools, thinking these will generate knowledge workers; the working class clamors for charter school and school vouchers and even turns to home-schooling because it can see no hope for effective reform of mainstream public education.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported a decade ago that the global network situation is forging fundamental change precisely along lines prescribed by Dewey.<sup>7</sup> The author, Robert Cwiklik, observed that according to many experts the "essence" of Dewey's experiential program "really never took root in U.S. schools" (He may have been thinking of Cuban, Bidwell, and Dreeben). The failure of previous reform efforts, Cwiklik says, may have been due to the daunting task of amassing and orchestrating educational resources from real life—the gardens and manual tasks and community activities required for Dewey's kind of progressive education. This critique echoes the well-known critique of progressive education by Joseph Schwab.<sup>8</sup> But according to Cwiklik, many educators now believe that network computer technology "could open the way for a re-introduction of progressive teaching methods," and "progressive methods coupled with computers have already achieved promising results in some schools."

Thus, my first observation: fundamental structural change may not be *inevitable*, but it is *possible*, and it is more likely now in the computer network era than in Dewey's progressive era.

### **Nature and Child Instincts**

Despite the efforts by Dewey and progressive reformers, schools today remain enclosed spaces, no more directly connected to their surrounding natural and social environments than those of Dewey's time. And they still lack practical areas and "social clearing houses" to make use of materials drawn to the school from outside. They are still unable to draw upon many vital instincts of children and channel them in socially responsible activities. Thus, the central problem of education in the industrial era, of bringing the child's inner nature into effective contact with the objective demands of the natural and the social environment, still remains unaddressed today.

But the problem we now face is even more profound than Dewey's. He could speak of natural and occupational processes that "stood revealed" to all in the pre-factory system and were still available in the industrial period to "touch" the child and reinforce learning through school occupations. Even city kids had parents and grandparents familiar with traditional skills of gardening, sewing, husbandry, building construction, and so forth. But in our era of postindustrial cities and factory farms far from population centers, in which industrial processes have been removed to the third world, not much of the real world "stands revealed" to, or "touches" our children at all. And when Dewey speaks of the compensations for the child of city life, "the increase in toleration . . . larger acquaintance with human nature . . . greater accuracy of adaptation to differing personalities, contact with greater commercial activities" (MW.1.8-9), he is thinking of the industrial city of 1900, not the socially isolating suburbs and inner-city ghettos and gentrified enclaves of the fragmented contemporary postindustrial metropolis.<sup>9</sup>

Some educators think a neo-progressive blend of constructivist methods and information technology can address this problem. They think that the wealth of information about the natural and social worlds available on computer software and the Internet can

effectively connect the school with out-of-school life. I agree with them - the Internet is an essential educational resource and the platform for a revolutionary transformation of the schools. But I resist some of the neo-progressive claims.

Larry Hickman, director of the Center for Dewey Studies, has argued that "all of the elements of Deweyan pedagogy are at least potentially available within an educational situation that takes advantage of the Internet. There is the possibility of active participation in the definition and resolution of problematic situations that are relevant to the student's own needs and interests. There are opportunities for students and teachers alike to participate in the construction of broadened avenues of communication in which new meanings are generated. . . . There are learning experiences that are not sequestered from living . . . but that constitute life itself and the living of it."<sup>10</sup>

I am in complete agreement with Hickman on these general claims. However, he goes on to make further claims that go too far. He asks us to consider children following an around-the-world sailing race, with boats wired for Internet communications. The children communicate with the captains via e-mail about marine life and ocean currents. Hickman concludes that such experiences are "precisely the kind of activities that Dewey was undertaking at his Laboratory school ... in the 1890s." The problem here is that while E-mails from sailors and digital videos of their boats may be fun, but the kids are hardly experiencing "sailing"—they don't even get wet! Just where is nature?<sup>11</sup>

Other neo-progressive educators have pinned their hopes for information technology on cyber-simulations of natural and social processes. They see these as easy-to-orchestrate substitutes for real-world experiences that can stimulate children's instinctive needs just as well as, for example, gardening and building and weaving did in Dewey's school. We might imagine someone building on Hickman's sailing adventure and suggest sailing in a simulator as a school activity. Cwiklik in "Dewey Wins!" quotes Linda Darling-Hammond saying that such software as *Sim City 2000* "is a 21st century analog of Dewey's 'let's grow a garden together.'" But is it?

Let's consider a situation in which a computer screen or virtual reality interface points inward at the school's external boundary, encircling practical areas where students work with teachers or peers at computer-mediated work stations, from which they can be directed back to the first area, now serving as a computer-aided information learning center.

At first glance, the objection to this picture is that a virtual garden can't provide foodstuff that kids can prepare for lunch, and kids on separate terminals are not doing anything "together." And if they did, it would *still be* a simulation, not the real thing. No matter how engaging these "virtual" experiences may be, children remain as distant from real life as they are in their dreams.

Few will, on reflection, find the mediated experiences proposed by this model plausible as adequate replacements for those in Dewey's model of the experimental school, and significantly, Dewey would not be among them. He says that vital organismic life is "the great thing" (MW.1.37). He adds, "We cannot overlook the importance for educational purposes of the close and intimate acquaintance got with nature at first hand, with real things and materials, with the actual processes of their manipulation, and the knowledge of their social necessities and uses. . . . No number of object-lessons, got up *as* object-lessons, . . . can afford even the shadow of a substitute for acquaintance with the plants and animals of the farm and garden acquired through actual living among them and caring for them" (MW.1.8). Sailing in a simulator is simply not "the great thing".

The reality of life in nature is the "great thing." Dewey returns to this key point again and again. One possible response some cyber-educators might offer is that Dewey's naturalist concern is antiquated and irrelevant. As Bill McKibben observed in *The End of Nature*, when our technologies determine the climate and ecosystems, these so-called natural systems become "artifacts" and we live at the "end of nature." When we have to reengineer the streams and genetically alter salmon so they can swim upstream, salmon are no more "natural" than software. In our culture of "real virtuality" new technologies have radically blurred the line between artifacts and nature - virtuality and reality. Does anything beyond nostalgia lead today's progressive educators to share Dewey's concern about contact with nature or "the real world?"

Well, raining cherry harvester operators on computers with virtual reality software may now be more efficient than on-site training with real harvesters. The bother is that one cannot *live* among and *care* for virtual cherries, or *eat* them. No matter how immersive the virtual reality training programs may be, eventually the harvesters must break away from them and get into real orchards. Virtual sex with cyborgs may at some point be even hotter and more engaging than the "real thing." But we would hardly expect it to generate bonds of affection - we would and should worry if it did. Simulations can create a *subjective sense* of doing something real and even *subjective satisfactions*. But healthy people want more than the *subjective sense* of living; they want actually to live, to *experience* life—to act, to enjoy, to suffer, and to grow. And preparation for real life ultimately requires learning and acting in real-life settings.

Thus my second observation: reality has not been erased or eclipsed, but it can be obscured by networked information technologies. Access to mediated versions of reality is not connection to real life. 'Cyberspace' is a hoax. While the Internet can serve as the integument of real life, can connect us together for cooperation, collaboration, and collective action, the virtual world is not "the great thing". We ignore the complex relations between the "screen" and the world at our peril.

### **Embryonic Democracy**

The problem of shaping education as an embryonic form of democracy today presupposes an answer to a prior question: what vision of democracy is suitable for the global network era? Once more, the problem we face is more profound than that confronting Dewey and the progressive-era reformers. Painting again in broad strokes, the problem is that in today's global economy narrow economic concerns are driving shared noneconomic educational values to the margins. Schooling as a public enterprise advancing common goals is getting shoved aside by a neo-liberal regime seeking to privatize public education and impose corporation-operated charter schools emphasizing rote learning and standardized testing – and vocational over civic aims. This project is enticing to groups experiencing economic hardship and is splintering support for democratic public education. Multinational corporations are coordinating the project through campaign contributions, cooperative efforts of their philanthropic foundations and through the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). These efforts have weakened the democratic role of national and state governments and in particular have granted corporations inappropriate influence over educational policy. And all of those involved in the enterprise know it; faith in democratic government as an effective instrument of popular will is declining.

And forging a democratic consensus faces an even larger problem: different groups in contemporary society have in response to the hegemonic culture been forming conflicting, postmodern identities. In our postmodern era, large-scale, liberal "metanarratives" of social progress for all, such as Dewey served up in *The School and Society*, are greeted with



skepticism or even ridicule. If neo-progressive educators have little more to say about "democracy" than about "nature," it may be because they do wish to be laughed off the stage.

Most progressive-oriented educators today do demand equal access to high-technology educational opportunities and claim that constructivist methods are effective for learners from disadvantaged groups. If their project succeeds, more members of disadvantaged groups will attain knowledge jobs and move from underclass ghettos to suburbs or urban enclaves. But while the project addresses the question of fair access to knowledge work in the global economy, it neglects the question of power in setting the future orientation of society, by overlooking the growth of corporate power over the democratic state and its public functions. And this may render the project of access to schooling self-defeating. The wage-spreading and social polarization in network society resulting from global capitalism can only be addressed by political means, but our two-party system has failed to provide channels for progressive political action.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile economic globalization is increasing the extra-educational social factors – unemployment, poverty, depression and hopelessness – that explain most of the school failure of the "have-nots."

In short, the global network society possesses a weak and dependent state, a weak conviction among the public that the state can be an instrument of good, a splintering institution of public education, and at best a weak and contested vision of the common good as a guide. This leads to my third observation: public intellectuals, educational leaders, and democratic publics face a most daunting challenge merely in formulating shared social and human ideals as plausible as Dewey's were in his time, much less placing them into "complete, uncompromising possession of our school system."

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The first edition of 1899 contained chapters 1-3, plus the current chapter 4 as an appendix. The second edition of 1915 deleted the appendix and added five chapters based on articles by Dewey appearing in the *Educational Record* in 1899-1900. The critical edition of 1976, in the *Collected Works of John Dewey*, Middle Works 1, 1-110, has restored the appendix as chapter 4. Page references in the text are to this edition. To the extent possible, my exposition of the text relies solely on material in the three lectures of 1899.

<sup>2</sup> A year later, in *The Educational Situation*, he expanded on this idea. Mechanics of school organization such as "the grouping of children in classes, the arrangement of grades, the machinery by which the course of study is made out and laid down, the method by which it is carried into effect, the system of selecting teachers and of assigning them to their work, of paying them and promoting them . . . really control the whole system even on its distinctively educational side." The result is that "the more mechanical features of school work [are almost compelled] to lord it over the more vital aims," rendering the desire to develop physical, mental, and moral powers of individual children "either ridiculous or tragic" (MW.1.267-69).

<sup>3</sup> Dewey, *How We Think (first edition)*, New York: D.C. Heath, 1910, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> In R. Cwiklik, "Dewey Wins!: If the 'New' Teaching Methods Pushed by High-Tech Gurus Sound Familiar, It Isn't Surprising," *The Wall Street Journal*, (November 17, 1997), R19.

<sup>5</sup> Larry Cuban, Curriculum Stability and Change, in P. W. Jackson (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Curriculum*, New York: Macmillan, 1992, pages 216-247.

<sup>6</sup> C. E. Bidwell and R. Dreeben "School Organization and Curriculum", *Handbook of Research on Curriculum*, pages 345-362.

<sup>7</sup> Cwiklik, see note 4.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Schwab, The Impossible Role of the Teacher in Progressive Education, *School Review* 67, 2, 1959, 139-159.

<sup>9</sup>See for example Larry Bennett, *Fragments of cities: the New American Downtowns and Neighborhoods*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990; Saskia Sassen, *Cities in a World Economy*, fourth edition, Sage, 2011; Ray Suarez, *The Old Neighborhood: What We lost in the Great Suburban Migration 1966-1999*, NY: Free Press, 1999.

See for example, Bennett, *Fragments of Cities*; Sassen, *Cities in a World Economy*; and Suarez, *Old Neighborhood*.

<sup>10</sup> See Hickman, Johndewey.edu, in Hickman and Spadafora, eds., *John Dewey's Educational Philosophy in International Perspective: A New Democracy for the Twenty-First Century*, Carbondale, SIU Press, 2009

<sup>11</sup> Hickman also asks us to consider an example involving out-of-school experimentation as well as use of the Internet. This case lies beyond the scope of the argument I am making here, as it does not use Internet to get around the difficulties of orchestrating out-of-school experience—the problem often seen as contributing to the failure of the schools to implement progressive methods. The problem here is that the real-world orchestration difficulties remain in spite of the Internet; educators were unable to prevail over these without the Internet, and the Internet does not help to overcome them.

<sup>12</sup> The Occupy movement, operating beyond the political parties and rejecting their attempts to co-opt it - is one of the most striking political developments of our time. See also Van Jones, *Rebuild the Dr*

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## **21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning and Progressive Education: An Intersection**

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### **Abstract**

The seminal tenets of progressive education bear a striking resemblance to the newly fashionable principles associated with a new movement known as “21<sup>st</sup> Century Education. This article traces the development of progressive education principles, starting with the founding of the Progressive Education Association, and shows their close proximity to 21st century educational attributes and goals. It demonstrates how the principles underpinning progressive education emerge over and over again as operative and successful educational practice, and how 21st century reformers may benefit from turning attention to other principles of progressive education to fully prepare students for the future.

**Keywords:** tenets of progressive education; 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning; education trends

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## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning and Progressive Education: An Intersection

In 1919, at an organizational meeting in Washington, D.C., the Board of Trustees of the newly created Progressive Education Association (PEA) adopted its founding tenets (See fig 1). For three decades, these principles and the progressive education movement would fundamentally alter the course of American education. And then in the 1950's a conservative swing of politics rendered the movement out of favor with the American education establishment.

**Fig. 1 - Progressive Education Association (1919)**

### Founding Principles

- Freedom to develop naturally.
- Interest the motive of all work
- The teacher as a guide, not a task-master
- Scientific study of pupil development
- Greater attention to all that affects the child's physical development
- Cooperation between school and home to meet the needs of child-life
- The progressive school as a leader in educational movements

In his definitive history of progressive education, Lawrence Cremin of Teachers College, Columbia, eulogizes the passing of the movement and chronicles the factors that contributed to its demise (Cremin, 1961). Among the reasons, Cremin cites strife and fragmentation among its leaders; inherent negativism toward social reform movements; the burden of progressive practices on teachers; a swing toward conservatism in post-war political and social thought; and, a failure to keep pace with the transformation of American society (Ibid, pp. 347-352).

In the late 1950's and throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, education trended toward a more traditional approach focused on the transmission of knowledge and development of academic skills. The teaching model returned to one featuring direct instruction, with student assessment primarily based on normative standards. This trend continued into the modern era and was promulgated in American education through the passage of a federal school reform policy guided by conservatism—the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001 (ESEA), known as *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*. (See U.S. Department of Education, 2001). NCLB supports the premise that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve student success and achievement. The Act requires states to construct assessments in basic skills, and administer these assessments to all students at select grade levels in order to receive federal school funding.

As perceived failures with NCLB emerged through the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Hursh, 2007), educators realized that a narrow focus on standardized testing was not significantly increasing graduation rates or preparing students for the challenges that lie ahead after graduation. These weak outcomes, alongside the notion that America is losing its position as a capital as a world economic and intellectual leader, has motivated reformers to discover the skills and resources required for a complex and rapidly changing society

(Wagner, 2008), (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). The resultant new movement, referred to alternately as 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education or 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning, has captured elementary and secondary school leaders throughout the country (EdLeader21/Kay, 2012).

Proponents of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning seek to address how American education can keep pace with the prolific advances in technology and the globalization of our society (2009, Trilling and Fadel). They have sought to discover the proclivities and skills that are necessary in a globalized era (Wagner, 2008), drawing from interviews with and reflections from the captains of the technology industry and the international business world. The notion that America is losing capital as a world economic and intellectual leader has motivated educators to construct the new 21<sup>st</sup> century educational model.

There is a growing consensus around a framework (see Fig. 2) of 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills (Ravitz, et. al, 2012):

...models of teaching and learning that are project-based, collaborative, foster knowledge building, require self-regulation and assessment, and are both personalized (allowing for student choice and relevance to the individual student) and individualized (allowing students to work at their own pace and according to their particular learning needs). Each of these elements has a strong base of prior research linking it to positive outcomes for students in terms of development of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills (Shear, et al., 2010, p. 3).

#### **Fig. 2- 21st Century Skills**

- Critical Thinking
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Creativity and Innovation
- Self-Direction and Independence
- Global Connections
- Using Technology as a learning tool

In contrast to the knowledge-based curriculum of the previous generation, the resulting focus on communication, collaboration, communication, creativity and innovation has required a deep reflection on teaching practices. To implement reform, districts need to identify the teaching strategies that will provide the best foundation for students as they enter a changing work force. They are discovering that fostering these skills requires a wholesale overhaul of conventional American educational pedagogy.

And yet, the seminal principles and practices of progressive education bear a striking resemblance to the newly fashionable principles associated with “21<sup>st</sup> Century Education”. Progressive Educators might wonder if the foundation of their movement has been co-opted by the modern day educational establishment. Dressed in a new suit, these ideas have been around for over a century.

In a lecture to students at Columbia University in the 1940’s, John Dewey’s words resonate loudly today: “The world is moving at a tremendous rate – no one knows where. We

must prepare our children not for the world of the past – not for our world – but, for their world – the world of the future.” (Kandel, 1941)

Though Lawrence Cremin justifiably sounded the death knell of the Progressive Education Association (PEA) in the 1950’s, a feint pulse has been beating throughout the twentieth century and many progressive schools survived and flourish into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The progressive movement enjoyed resurgence in the late 1960’s and ‘70’s with the advent of the Open Education Movement (1970, Silverman). In 1986, the Network of Progressive Educators, the successor to PEA, at its annual conference in Weston, Massachusetts, published an updated version of the founding principles (see figure 3).

### **Fig. 3 - The Network of Progressive Educators (1987)**

#### **Principles of Progressive Education**

- Curriculum Tailored to Individual Learning Styles, Developmental Needs, and Intellectual Interests
- The Student as an Active Partner in Learning
- Arts, Sciences, and Humanities Equally Valued in an Interdisciplinary Curriculum
- Learning Through Direct Experience and Primary Material
- A Focus on Multi-Cultural and Global Perspectives
- The School as a Model of Democracy
- The School as a Humane Environment
- Commitment to the Community Beyond School
- Commitment to a Healthy Body through Sports and Outdoor Play

What lineage, if any, can be drawn between the fundamental and historical practices and tenets of progressive education and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Educational framework? This article highlights the reemergence of progressive theories in modern day educational practice and the strands of progressive education that have over time played a major influence on American education.

#### **Project Based Learning**

21<sup>st</sup> Century Education features a teaching pedagogy known as Project Based Learning (PBL). Efficacy research indicates students whose teachers implemented PBL as a teaching strategy gained significantly in the overall development of 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills (Ravitz, 2012). PBL seeks to stimulate student interest and engagement by immersing students in complex and challenging problems and tasks that resemble the circumstances of real life. The methodology uses inquiry surrounding real world problems to help students master content knowledge, and contributes to the development of communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. (Thomas, 2000).

The historical roots of PBL can be found in the work of William Heard Kilpatrick of Teachers College, Columbia, who in 1918 wrote *The Project Method*, the seminal treatise on what came to be known as project based learning. Kilpatrick was one of the progenitors of progressive education and sat, along with John Dewey, on the faculty of Columbia Teachers College, where he was introduced to the concept of project learning by Dewey. He defined the project method as a purposeful act and encouraged its integration into teaching practice as “the typical unit of instruction.” Kilpatrick drew heavily from the work of Edward Thorndike, the progenitor of the educational psychology movement, whose early studies researched human motivation and learning (Thorndike, 1903). According to Kilpatrick, done well, the project method corresponds to the ‘interest span,’ of students, or “the length of time during which a set will remain active; the time within which a child will – if allowed – work at any given project.” (Kilpatrick, 1918. p. 15). For Kilpatrick, stimulating student interest was key to effective teaching (Beyer, 1997).

An early practitioner of the project approach was Carleton Washburne, who served as the superintendent of Winnetka Public Schools from 1919 – 1943. Washburne, a protégé of Frederic Burke, systematically reconstructed the educational philosophy and practice of the district into what became known as the Winnetka Educational System (Washburne & Marland, 1963). A champion of progressive education through the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Washburne describes the project approach by illustrating various activity-based curricular experiences where children were immersed in real world endeavors. First graders learning about the postal system by creating a school post office; fourth graders learning the fundamentals of astronomy by viewing the night sky through a telescope and constructing a solar system to scale in the school gymnasium; sixth graders learning about the Middle Ages through dramatic productions. These projects were sustaining activities for district students for many decades and continue today as Winnetka is one of the few public school districts implementing progressive teaching practices (Washburne 1952).

On a wide scale, PBL emerged as a staple of teaching practice as the Open Education Movement arose in the late 1960’s. Practitioners of the “open classroom” approach utilized projects to encourage student conceptual development. In the open classroom, students experience less overt structure and have freedom of movement and choice of activity. Lessons are organized around small groups and the teacher acts as guide and facilitator as the need among students arises. Within this format, teachers and students engage in projects that can expand the learning beyond the acquisition of information to a direct, hands-on relationship with the subject (Silberman, 1973, pp. 36-42).

The historical antecedents of PBL have been evident throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and are a primary pedagogical feature in progressive education. The latest 21<sup>st</sup> Century incarnation of PBL emphasizes the deep understanding of concepts and the importance of purposeful activity. The lineage to the work and discoveries of William Heard Kilpatrick is direct and enduring.

### **Critical Thinking**

The emphasis of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning on critical thinking has ancient roots that trace back to the time of Socrates who patterned a strategy for probing philosophical questions and justifying answers and solutions (Paul, Elder and Bartell, 1997). Indeed, the inclination to ponder deeply may well be viewed as a human instinct and education throughout time has drawn upon the imaginative resources of humans to think and resolve problems.

Practitioners of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education consider critical thinking and problem solving essential to learning. Students should become facile “reasoners,” able to apply inductive or deductive thinking as appropriate to a given challenge; they



should be able to make sound judgments and decisions and solve problems by asking questions and bringing innovative thought to situations (Trilling & Fadel, 2009, pp. 50-54).

The theories of John Dewey have been imprinted on this aspect of educational thought. He suggested that learning must involve reflective thought, which he defined as “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conditions to which it tends” (Boris and Hall, 2005).

Indeed, as progressive education emerged in the early 1900’s, critical thinking was paramount in the work of most practitioners. In his 1916 essay on education, Abraham Flexner, the founder of the Lincoln School in New York wrote: “In education, as in other realms, the inquiring spirit will be the productive spirit” (Flexner, 1916). Flexner and other progressives believed that education should confront and grapple with the broad social issues of the day, engaging students in solving problems, which emerge from a child’s real experience, and not simply from abstract, hypothetical situations. Similarly, the “Dalton Plan,” fashioned by founder Helen Parkhurst in 1919, student assignments were designed to “...stimulate reflection, inquiry and an authentic encounter with human questions...” (Semel, 1987)

### **Cooperative Learning**

A fundamental of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education is the clarion call to encourage collaboration among students. In the educational setting, this skill is best realized through the practice of cooperative learning, defined as students working together to accomplish shared goals (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Effective use of this practice emphasizes students working collectively in small groups to achieve academic objectives. Students tap into the skills and resources of one another, while the teacher functions as a facilitator (Slavin, 1990). The methodology features the reliance on equal participation among students to achieve its ultimate learning objectives (Chiu, 2000). Cooperative learning yields positive results in content mastery, communication skills, team building, classroom climate, and social development (Kagan, 1989). Punctuating this point, Jonathan Martin (Martin, 2010) argues that a critical role of the learning institution is to provide unparalleled opportunity for this cooperative learning:

Increasingly, education’s value-add is and will be in the coaching and troubleshooting when students are applying their learning, and in challenging students to apply their thinking to hands-on learning by doing and teaming: so let’s have them do these things in class, not sit and listen. We know that collaboration is a critical skill set which can’t be developed easily either on-line or at home alone– let’s have students learn it with us in our classrooms. Let every classroom be a collaborative problem-solving laboratory or studio.

Applying cooperation to 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills becomes important as technology allows for collaboration across vast distances and the professional environment in many occupations calls for a high level of group functioning. Not only is it necessary for students to understand the basics of cooperating with others, they must adjust to cultural differences. Students must demonstrate that they can work effectively in a diverse setting and be flexible in working toward a common goal (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Cooperative learning can be traced to the progressive education movement in the Winnetka, Illinois Schools. Carleton Washburn wrote:

...the progressive school tries to help children and youth to learn to adjust to each other and the world around them. It tries to give them training in co-operative thinking and working. It tries to guide their self-expression into channels that will not stand in the way of the purposes of the group or the larger society, but that will contribute a share toward them. (Washburne, 1952, p. 22)

Children worked in groups to design projects and each student had a particular role to play in order for the activity to be successful. Students shared their experience and knowledge, and assisted one another in completing the project.

Indeed, John Dewey was a proponent of students collaborating as it reflected more closely the exercise necessary for understanding democracy. He encouraged schools to be equipped “with the instrumentalities of cooperative and joint activity” (Dewey, 1922), in contrast to the sole reliance on lectures. Cooperative learning became part of the DNA of progressive education.

There arose in the early days of the progressive education movement, schools relying heavily on the notion of applied learning to build collaboration among students. At the City and Country School, Caroline Pratt constructed meaningful jobs for students that would serve the larger school community. She held the view that students in the school were interdependent and must share equally in the responsibilities and decisions within the institution. Students created a post office, a manuscript printing service, a school store, and served as waiters and cleaners in the school lunch room (Hendry, 2008). These jobs built in students a degree of independence, while allowing them to work with their classmates on practical, everyday tasks that served the entire school community.

### **Individualizing Instruction**

A major strand of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Educational pedagogy is the notion that students can learn at their own pace and, as learners, should be encouraged to develop independence and autonomy. More teachers are finding ways to organize curriculum and manage programs in order to provide one-on-one instruction. They recognize that students learn and develop at varying rates. New technologies support this effort as on-line instruction-based curricula is being developed to assist teachers inclined to eschew direct instruction in lieu of online content delivery (Martin, 2010).

Clearly, individualizing instruction has been around for centuries. However, one of the earliest reflections of formalizing individualized instruction on a large scale in American schools occurred in 1912 at the San Francisco Normal School, where teachers were being trained under the leadership of Frederic Burk. For its day, an innovative component of teacher training was to place student teachers in real classrooms. One of Burk’s supervising instructors noticed that the students were functioning on varying levels in their understanding of mathematical concepts. She devised a system of creating separate exercises for individual students, to accommodate their particular learning needs (Washburne & Marland, 1963). This system of individualization became popular among progressive educators, as the desire increased to learn more about individual students and their interests (Dewey, 1913).

The inclination to study and understand the needs of individual students arose during the early progressive movement. In the 1890s, Dewey expected his teachers to reflect and write their observations about the children at the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago. Other schools followed suit. A voluminous trail of student work, teacher and administrative records, and journals from the Lab school is preserved in the library at Columbia Teachers College (Cremin, 1961). The archive underscores the devotion to serving

individual students. Resonant with the goals of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning, when the students had graduated from Dewey's lab school they had:

...amassed a wide range of knowledge; they had developed a multitude of skills and sensitivities, manual and social as well as intellectual. They had learned to work both cooperatively and independently and could express themselves clearly and concisely. They had on countless occasions put new found knowledge to the test, and they had made a clear beginning in all of the major fields of knowledge (Cremin, 1961, p. 140).

This approach became manifest in many progressive schools that opened in the period between 1910 and 1920. Lucy Sprague Mitchell and Harriet Johnson (Bureau of Educational Systems, later to become Bank Street College), and Caroline Pratt (City and Country School) were early practitioners of the notion that schools could vary from a prescribed curriculum to achieve educational goals. These progressive educators held the imperative that teachers must understand children individually in order to meet their learning needs. These educators were adapting curriculum and changing the classroom practices according to what they believed was best for the children under their care (Burghardt, Davis, Bashforth, 2012).

### **Self-Direction and Independence**

The traditional structure of American classroom teaching practice has featured lecture and direct instruction. A classroom structure of pupils facing the front of the classroom where the teacher conducts class is de rigueur in most schools at the elementary and secondary level. In contrast, the emerging aspiration to promote in students a high degree of independence and self-directed learning is an underlying principle for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education causing educators to re-think classroom pedagogy. The approach empowers students to take responsibility for their own learning and build the motivational foundation to drive learning (Abdullah, 2012). As new technologies afford teachers the opportunity to move further and further away from lectures and whole group instruction, self-directed learning becomes a baseline requirement for success in the classroom. The use of innovative technologies such as podcasts, video-clips, online instruction, and live online discussions is changing the shape of American classrooms and requires a reasonably high level of self-direction for students to achieve success. These changes in pedagogy and use of technology represent a major sea change in teaching practice, now evidenced on an international level (ICT Cluster, 2010).

Lawrence Cremin recounts the publication in 1892 of a series of articles written by Joseph Meyer Rice in *The Forum*, a monthly published in New York. Rice traversed America, visiting hundreds of schools and classrooms and his report represented an excoriation of the American educational system of the day. In one telling account, Rice observed in a New York school that students were forbidden to move their heads. He quoted the principal: "Why should they look behind when the teacher is in front of them." Though certainly an extreme example, this anecdote characterized what Cremin cleverly alludes to as "Dr. Johnson's injunction to the 'fatal dullness of education'" (Cremin, 1961, p. 3-4). By the late 1880's, the enormous challenge of providing an education to all Americans resulted in the standardization of instructional strategy. Teachers ruled with iron hands.

The eighteenth century philosopher Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi had argued that children should be freed to pursue their interests. Powers of intuition, observation and judgment should be cultivated by releasing students from the grasp of their teachers. (Kilpatrick, 1951; Silber, 1965). Pestalozzi is often cited as a major historical figure contributing to the progressives' inclination to shift the emphasis to a more child-centered approach to education. Dewey was explicit in his support of this philosophy: "The

educational center of gravity has been too long in the teacher, the textbook, anywhere and everywhere except in the immediate instincts and activities of the child himself” (Dewey, 1900). Dewey advocated an activity-oriented approach to teaching, where children could work independently and learn through direct experience. His inclination to understand and inspire the interests of the child was fostered more in a classroom encouraging children to be self-directed.

Helen Parkhurst, who founded the Dalton School in 1919 (originally called The Children’s University School) held similar views. She synthesized the ideas of Washburne and Dewey into what became known as “The Dalton Plan,” a system which allowed students to work at their own pace, allowing them “to pursue and organize their studies their own way.” Parkhurst intended to foster in students an understanding of the responsibilities of living in a democracy. She had the students working collaboratively in interactive activities, encouraging the development of independence and social awareness (Semel and Sandovnik, 1999).

### **Global Competency and Awareness**

An essential component of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning is for students to develop a high level of global competency and awareness about the world in which they live. To be globally competent is to possess the dispositions necessary to have productive and respectful relationships with people from diverse geographical locations. Further, it is the awareness of global issues and an interest in solving problems on a global scale (Reimers, 2009).

Tony Wagner depicts the need to develop “collaboration across networks” a necessary survival skill for individuals entering the global work force. According to Wagner: “The skillfulness of individuals working with networks of people across boundaries and from different cultures has become an essential prerequisite for a growing number of multinational corporations” (Wagner, 2008).

The increased availability of professional development opportunities for teachers to learn strategies for fostering global awareness has encouraged more schools to emphasize global awareness as a curricular objective. The occasion for students traveling abroad at the secondary and postsecondary level has become readily available (Martin, P. 2009), while new technologies such as Skype allow students to pursue on-line relationships with students from other countries.

The Progressive Education Association pursued an active interest in the international progressive education movement, however there is little evidence that the early progressive schools turned significant attention to matters of global awareness. The tendency among many immigrant cultures to assimilate into American culture was a discouraging factor to any global awareness being reflected widely in schools. Other than foreign language instruction and study of geography, there was little emphasis in this area.

Attention to global matters seemed to emerge in the 1960’s as international studies became more prominent in American colleges and universities. Students were graduating from college with a heightened interest in global affairs, while the politics of the day focused more attention on international relationships. Though this development brought more attention to global awareness in the classroom, there is no direct link to the progressive school movement as schools of many different philosophical colors came to embrace these programs.

### **Using Technology as a Learning Tool**

The ubiquity of technology in the 21st century requires that students develop a wide range of technological skills. Media, library, communication and technology literacy are primary to 21st Century Education (EdLeader21/Kay, K. 2012). Educational models are springing up, putting a new face to the elementary and secondary school classroom. The respective role of teachers and students is changing, as teachers become guide and facilitators, while students often direct their own learning. At the New Tech School of Napa (California), students:

learn in an innovative and professional environment fostered by the use of advanced learning methods and technology. Both staff and students understand the commitment necessary to implement a rigorous and relevant curriculum, one in which technology, standards, and skill development are embedded (from the school website).

The utilization of technology in schools can allow for problem-solving and design-oriented learning projects, which support student initiative and discovery. Technology, for example can be used for advancing the goals of a school's global education program by tapping into the potential of connectivity resources; students have easier access to a range of scientific research and can engage in real-world projects that address various problems emerging in the medical or other scientific fields of study (Trilling and Fadel, 2009, pp. 152-155).

Obviously, technological advances that have taken place since the dawning of the progressive education movement have been exponential and comparisons would be specious, at best. However, the parallels that can be made between 21<sup>st</sup> Century education and the early days of progressive movement are best found in the approach to science, industry, and innovation embedded in the educational philosophy of the day.

Because of its impartial nature, Dewey viewed the role of science as paramount for a democratic society (Makedon, 1991). Because he believed in bringing scientific inquiry to the nature of the individual and the social nature of the human environment, Dewey viewed children as inherently active, with the impulse to explore, construct, and create (Butts, Cremin, 1953). His "activities" approach to school curriculum led to a wider implementation of active science discovery in progressive schools.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, under the Gary Indiana Superintendent William Wirt, the school district was transformed into an early exemplar of progressive education. Journalist Randolph Bourne wrote of the Gary school: "Those who follow Professor Dewey's philosophy, will find the Gary schools –as Professor Dewey does himself – the most complete and admirable application yet attempted, a synthesis of the best aspects of the progressive schools of tomorrow" (Cremin, 1963. P. 155).

In the Gary schools, science laboratories and a rich science curriculum became accessible to all students. A forward looking and innovative educator, Wirt's Gary Plan introduced a work-study-play plan, where students would rotate through activities in blocks, allowing access for all students to all features of the educational program. Wirt mobilized the entire campus (gymnasium, shops, laboratories, playground and auditorium). He promoted the teaching of the industry and technology of the day – manual arts, shops – students actually repaired and built things for the school. In Wirt's words, students would participate, "in a real industrial business in an environment similar to the old-time industrial home and community"(Volk, 2005). In Gary, teachers were preparing students for life in the industrial age.

The industrial arts constituted a major emphasis in education during the progressive education movement, as information and communication technology does so today. The inclination in its day to prepare students for the world of 1915 or 1920 was innovative, as education had been relatively static for over a half-century. As is the case today, reform educators were interested in addressing the needs of society and the rapidly changing industrial world. Progressive educators were at the forefront of this new educational model.

### Conclusion

Principles and practices of progressive education have remained a constant influence throughout the past century. Time and again, effective teaching methodologies emerge which can trace their lineage to the progressive education movement. Though the “progressive” label has largely fallen out of current wide-scale use, a careful examination of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Educational practice reveals striking similarities. The early pioneers of the progressive movement influenced not only the American educational system of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but their lineage continues to flourish into the rapidly changing world of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and the age of technology and information.

No doubt, the principles of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning will bring great value to the educational system of the future. I would posit, however that there are elements missing from the current approach that are deeply embedded in the progressive education tradition that might prove critical to the ultimate success of 21<sup>st</sup> century reformers, and should be vetted thoroughly. These include social and emotional development, commitment to social justice, and the promotion of diversity and equity. As we turn our attention to those skills and attributes that will serve the needs of our society in a competitive global economy, we must also remember that the changing world requires that educators hold in trust the obligation to attend to the character and values of the youth in our care.

We can graduate students who are well versed in technology, able to think and solve problems, and understand how to work collaboratively. However, in such a rapidly changing and complex world, the equal need exists for our students to understand the virtues of justice, caring, and compassion. Our diverse society thrusts our youth into a world where cultural competency, moral integrity, and strong character have stakes as high as any other 21<sup>st</sup> Century skill. Today’s reformers may seriously consider turning to the work of progressive education for guidance on how to *fully* prepare our students.

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## Co-Creating a Progressive School: The Power of the Group

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Wickliffe Progressive Elementary School

### Abstract

Drawing on the past and current practices of a group of educators that just celebrated its 40th year as a progressive elementary school in a suburban public school system, the article begins by considering the role that various groups have played in sustaining the school's success for over four decades. These groups include a long-term university partnership, practitioners of whole language, and parents. Then, after describing the critical role of two important group created documents, the Ten Principles of Progressive Education and a triangular graphic depicting the Curriculum of Progressive Education, the authors describe the relationship of how the power of these groups have used the documents to intentionally stay centered as well as move them "off balance" in order to continue to evolve and strengthen their progressive education practices. Finally, the article shares two classroom examples where teachers use the group and the documents to conduct authentic curriculum classroom studies.

**Keywords:** progressive elementary schools; collaborative inquiry; integrated curriculum; educational partnerships

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*For excellence, the presence of others is always required.*  
Hannah Arendt

*It is nearly midnight, and we, along with over four hundred parents, teachers, and former students, have just completed a two-day event celebrating forty-years of progressive education, known as the “Informal Program”<sup>1</sup> in our public school district. This anniversary is no small thing given the program’s history of internal and external struggles over the decades. However, more often, the power of the group has sustained and grown progressive education in our politically conservative community. During the last forty years, many progressive schools, particularly public ones, have closed or have been restructured and returned to what most of us think of as traditional, subject-centered schooling. So as tonight’s celebratory evening ends, we paused and wondered: Why is the Informal Program still standing and might the answer to this question serve to help other progressive educators working in schools today?*

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After reviewing the Informal Program archives which consists of forty years of local news coverage, conversations with former students, parents, and teachers, as well as back issues of *Thought Ramblings*, a newsletter authored by the principal-directors of the program that focuses on the interplay of theory and practice, it is clear that our success is due to neither a purely top-down or bottom-up change model. While traditional business leadership literature has often pointed to a charismatic, “lion like” figure leading an organization to glory (Murphy, 1988), this has not been the case for us. Nor has the Informal Program emerged and sustained itself solely because of energy garnered from the grassroots level. Instead, in looking back, the process that has sustained the program over the years has not been because of heroic leaders from the top or bottom; rather, our journey resembles a murky alchemy of *groups* held together by a *learning relationship* to one another (as opposed to hierarchical power).

What was the nature of these learning groups and who exactly were they? Our conception of a learning group is heavily influenced by work of the Making Learning Visible project at Project Zero, a research group in the Harvard Graduate School of Education. We have documented our longstanding partnership with Project Zero’s Making Learning Visible initiative elsewhere in a research report and companion DVD (Burton, et al, 2011), but for our purpose here, our use of the phrase *learning group* is characterized by two of the four features of a learning group outlined by Krechevsky and Mardell (Project Zero, 2001, pp. 286).

- 1) Members of learning groups are engaging in the emotional and aesthetic as well as the intellectual dimensions of learning
- 2) The focus of learning in learning groups extends beyond the learning of individuals to create a collective body of knowledge

These groups, three of which we will describe in more detail below, have over time collaboratively created an ongoing “collective body of knowledge” where university faculty, public school educators, and parents have co-created and developed pedagogical ideas and given them a push in our school as well as serving to challenge our conceptions of teaching and learning. In addition to deliberately creating organizational “noise” – i.e. creative disturbances that challenged our thinking -- these groups have also played a supportive role at times by backing the program faculty at many critical moments in our history. At other times, these groups supported us by their simple presence - e.g. as former students return to the school as parents and enroll their own children. However, not all of these learning groups

were physically present working with us at the school; instead, they were proximate as movements and were *historically* felt. Finally, it should be noted that these groups didn't just have a cognitive affect on the development of our school. We want to make it clear and even overstate that our relationship with the various learning groups was an alchemic mixture of thought, action, *and* feeling over time.

Today, we still consider ourselves American open educators heavily influenced by the Informal classroom practices of the British primary schools (McKenzie, 1975). Although in our early years, we read books by John Dewey we had an easier time understanding and sharing with parents the progressive wisdom found in the writings of Vito Perrone (1989), David Hawkins (1974), Roland Barth (1991), and various monographs from the North Dakota Study Group (1970s). Along the way, we have always had a great desire, and sometimes a desperate need, to stay connected to other progressives beyond our school and state. Consequently, we were delighted in the 1980s to have learned about the Progressive Educator Network (PEN), a loosely organized national forum for those committed to child-centered learning. In the spring of 1988, twelve teachers from our program attended the PEN Conference held in Chicago (and again more recently in 2011). Organizations like PEN and Project Zero continue to contribute to the thinking, development and vitality of our program to this day.

As we reflect back on our four decades of progressive education, there are three examples of learning groups that have especially served to sustain, challenge, and inspire us: a local university partnership, the "whole language" literacy education movement, and parents.

### **The University Partnership: A Theory-Practice Learning Group**

Although there were important precursors to our program's founding, that is, teachers and parents who provided the spark for the beginnings of the Informal Program, it was a long term partnership with faculty members in the College of Education at The Ohio State University that continually fanned the flame of our program for our first twenty years. When our school district officially started the Informal Program in 1972, OSU launched a field-based, teacher education program called the Educational Program for Informal Classrooms (EPIC). Prior to that time, OSU had established a tradition of supporting progressive education in that its College of Education had housed a progressive University School that had started in 1930. EPIC, with its emphasis on preparing pre-service teachers to plan learning experiences around integrated themes of study emerging from children's interests was a beneficial arrangement for our program. Many of these university faculty members also conducted teacher workshops in using children's literature to teach reading, writing and spelling instruction that was grounded in their daily lives, as well as ways to immerse children in concrete science process activities.<sup>2</sup> In addition to providing the Informal Program teachers with a series of ongoing workshops, this university partnership sustained our program over the years by providing us with student teachers who were being taught basic tenets and practices of progressive education. We of course provided the university with a progressive school setting for pre-service teachers who were often hired by our school district to teach with us in the Informal Program.

### **Learning Groups From Afar: The Whole Language Movement**

While The Ohio State University faculty members and our teachers formed a day-to-day, close working relationship with each other, we also found inspiration from movements that became part of our teaching and learning sociocultural context. During the 1960s and 1970s, there was a great deal of exciting research in the area of children's language and literacy development taking place. For us, the work of two language researchers and

advocates of whole language education, Ken and Yetta Goodman, had a profound effect on our practice and program. In the Goodmans, we had found a voice from afar that not only championed how we were teaching reading and writing through authentic, curricular experiences rooted in children's interests, but we were also using their research to legitimate and provide evidence to school district officials and parents about our practices. Although we were not always using the term "whole language," we were certainly using the spirit and practical advice that was emerging and growing from numerous TAWL (Teachers Applying Whole Language) groups, a national network of teachers, parents, and university faculty that the Goodmans had inspired. This work complemented what we were learning from our OSU faculty, friends, and mentors and also resulted in leading us to other new voices in literacy learning (e.g. Graves, 1983; Holdaway, 1979).

### **The Co-Educator Learning Group: Parents**

When we began the Informal Program, some parents in the school district were fascinated and curious about our progressive approaches. However, many who decided to place their children in our school started out with us as a bit skeptical. Still other parents, those who didn't have children in our school, developed an adversarial stance with a few parents even working to stop the spread of this "new thing." In all, most parents who chose to enroll their children in our program were products of traditional education themselves. It's what they were familiar with and what they understood as school. So while they cheered us on, many of these same parents became friendly critics who continually asked us to reassure them, explain what we were doing and why, and generally pushed us to reflect more deeply about our organizational structure (e.g. multiage classrooms) as well as our daily classroom practices. Many of the questions that parents asked forty years ago are still being asked today. These questions represent recurring anxieties. These are questions like: "How can we be sure our children will be learning without spelling tests?" "What happens when my child leaves this school and goes to the more traditional middle school?" and "Why isn't my child bringing home any papers?" These were and are fair questions. Sometimes we chose to answer these questions by organizing parent workshops, placing them in the role of active learners. At other times we found it helpful to organize meetings in which other parents, ones that had been associated with the Informal Program for several years, shared their perspectives and answers to these questions. The result has been a learning group where both parents and teachers learned from and with each other and worked through the various practical knots and dilemmas of living and learning in a progressive, child-centered classroom. Also, as a result of teachers and parents learning together as co-educators, our program gradually gained support and legitimacy. These parent experiences filtered out into the larger community through social groups and conversations.

Over the years, we've tried *not* to view our parents as partners because often when school personnel say this, what they *really* mean is: "We want you as parents to raise money for the school, get homework returned on time, and do other things like read to your child every night for twenty minutes." Instead, in our better moments, we see parents as co-educators, who are members of our learning group and through collaborative and sometimes very spirited conversations, we learn from and with them.

### **The Importance of Staying Centered and Moving Off Balance**

Groups can be dangerous. We have tried not to forget one of the lessons learned from reading Lawrence Cremin's (1966) seminal book and history of progressive education, *The Transformation of the School*. In this book, Cremin lists seven reasons that led to the death of the progressive education as a movement. His seventh reason, that "progressive education collapsed because it failed to keep pace with the continuing transformation of American Society" (p. 350), has become especially important to us. Perhaps one key to

answering the question we posed earlier, “Why are we still standing?” after all of these years, is that we’ve made serious efforts as a learning group to develop a core set of Ten Principles (see Appendix A) that serve to keep us centered and insure that we rise above our individual interests. They help us to remember that we, as a group, are contributing to something larger than ourselves. At the same time, and this is the danger, we want to keep Cremin’s advice in mind and avoid becoming insular. We developed a program motto to keep this creative tension in front of us: “Living the progressive tradition today.” The idea here is that we want to be, simultaneously, centered and off balance.

For the last two school years, our staff has developed a “throughline” – i.e. a set of two provocative questions that we return to periodically to keep us “off balance” and learning as a group. They are:

- 1) How are we interpreting the Progressive tradition today?
- 2) What happens when our learning community collectively faces the continuing challenge to interpret the Progressive tradition in today’s culture?

Part of being simultaneously centered *and* off balance is engaging in ongoing deliberations about our own practices and beliefs. Throughout our history, from our program’s beginnings in 1972, we have continuously questioned ourselves through the development of core beliefs, principles and provocative questions. In 1997, the year of our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we engaged in a year long, spirited conversation and debate that resulted in the draft and adoption of The Ten Foundational Principles of Progressive Education found at the end of this article. These principles have served to keep us centered through some educationally turbulent times for the past fifteen years.

By placing our beliefs about teaching and learning at the center of our work, we are able to navigate the challenges presented by state and federal mandates. We are more likely to consider what we can control rather than what we cannot. For example, currently in Ohio, the impending reality of a Third Grade Reading Guarantee as well as the implementation of a statewide teacher evaluation system that relies heavily on student performance as measured by state achievement tests to rank and sort teachers affords many opportunities to become discouraged and disheartened. Yet, as we turn our attention toward facing these challenges, new ways of working together are emerging and energizing our group learning. For example, we have just begun a series of what we are calling “Making Use of Documentation” conversations (also known as MUD meetings since it can be messy!). These conversations allow us to take what we have learned in our work with Project Zero’s Making Learning Visible research, including the use of documentation practices and protocols, and apply what we have learned to collaboratively examine the work of both individual children as well as classroom and grade level data to inform our practices. This doesn’t replace the pressures we are experiencing, but it does buffer them somewhat and put in place a practice that it is grounded in children’s work and thinking.

Similarly, as the standards movement has led to the ranking of schools and school districts, we have had to be mindful of the additional emphasis on how children perform according to the state assessments. The Informal Program never debated the importance of defining standards. As the standards movement has grown, we have strived to keep our principles and view of curriculum at the center, believing that doing so would result in our children performing well on state assessments measuring their achievement of state standards. In fact, children in the Informal Program have achieved at the state’s highest level on the State Report Card in each of the last ten years.

Our Ten Principles push us to collectively wrestle with the realities imposed upon

public school educators.

Currently, as this article is being written, we are critically revisiting the Ten Principles to consider if they still capture our thinking about how we work with children and one another in our school. Are we living up to the principles? Do they still challenge us and provoke our learning? What other voices and perspectives should we consider (e.g. parents, students, fellow progressive educators throughout the world)? While these questions are sometimes inconvenient for us, we recognize that the process of raising them has been an important reason for our existence the last forty years.

### **Visualizing and Living a Progressive Curriculum**

A second framework that has guided our progressive practices is a representation of four distinct yet inter-related layers of the curriculum: 1) compassion, civility and community, 2) the subject or content-centered curriculum, 3) the interdisciplinary curriculum, and 4) the emergent, authentic curriculum. This framework, visually represented as a triangle and called The Curriculum of Progressive Education (See Appendix B), was inspired in part by Dewey's (1938) statement in *Experience and Education*:

The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are mis-educative. (p.25)

In addition to Dewey's emphasis on educative experience, we also found Sobel's (1994) conception of the "authentic curriculum" useful. These ideas and the curriculum represented in the triangle have inspired us to pose and consider provocative questions such as: What is the difference in good progressive education and summer camp?

While creating a visual representation of the progressive curriculum has been important in helping us to communicate our practices with each other and those beyond our school walls, it is the lived examples and curriculum stories that breathe life into the symbols. The following stories of two classroom studies, what we are calling the *The Pencil Problem* and *I Can Make a Difference*, illustrate how both the Ten Principles and the Curriculum of Progressive Education triangle informed and captured the learning of children and adults. Each also has something to say about the power of learning groups in the classroom.

### **The Pencil Story**

What happens when a teacher carefully listens to her students for opportunities to follow their interests and capitalize on the promise of an authentic learning experience? In Susie Nybell's third grade classroom, children's dissatisfaction with the pencils received as part of the school supply sale resulted in authentic learning about economics, mathematics, persuasive writing and how to go about affecting change.

Early in the year, students were noticing a number of problems with their new pencils from the Dixon Ticonderoga Pencil Company. Students began to share things like: "The lead breaks and falls off while people are writing and when you have the pencil and it falls, it cracks open. The pencils are hard to sharpen, and when you're erasing with these pencils, erasers just snap off."

Observing their frustration, Ms. Nybell wondered aloud with them regarding what they might be able to do about these problems. Students decided to survey other third, fourth and fifth graders in the school and found that most of the classes were similarly dissatisfied overall with their recently purchased school store pencils. They decided to write a business

letter to the president of Dixon Ticonderoga. Before doing so, they found and watched a video produced by Ticonderoga about how to make pencils. When questioned about their work after the study was over, one student shared that “We wanted to learn about how they make pencils to see if we could figure out what they were doing wrong.” The business letter was sent and classroom life resumed.

Thinking they would hear back from the Ticonderoga’s president “in three weeks maximum”, another frustration began to gradually set in. One student complained, “We’ve waited forty days!” while another classmate sighed, “We’ve almost forgotten about the pencil company.” Then, after eight weeks, students were met with an unexpected surprise. As one student said, “We thought it was a normal day when we walked into the room. Then we sat on the rug and Ms. Nybell said there were boxes waiting for us downstairs.” Ticonderoga had sent 1,440 pencils in response to the student letter. Ms. Nybell had received a phone call from Ticonderoga and learned they had moved the factory and had made some personnel changes. The third graders were thrilled and in written reflections made comments like: “We were so happy! They were amazing pencils! When we put them in the pencil basket, they overflowed! We loved our new pencils.”

When Ms. Nybell’s third graders delivered the new pencils to the other classrooms they had surveyed, they found that “It was fun handing out the new pencils because everyone was surprised. Handing out the pencils turned out to be a big success!” As students reflected on the learning experience in the digital learning story they later wrote and produced, their thinking went beyond what they had learned in the traditional content-sense. One girl shared how she “had become angry because the old pencils had broke and wouldn’t sharpen” and another felt “super happy because I was helping other people.” Others remarked that what they learned was “if you have a problem, fix it!” Finally, the learning story ends with these words from yet another student: “I was surprised that a world-wide company would respond to a third grade class from Columbus, Ohio. I learned that even though you are young, you can still change many things.”

*The Pencil Problem* is an example of the depth of learning that can occur when teachers carefully listen and pay attention to what their children are saying, thinking about, and doing. To be certain, a number of discipline-centered state standards and grade level indicators were met during the study such as: 1) collecting information, organizing it, and using it to make decisions; 2) developing a clear main idea, a purpose and an audience for writing; and 3) determining how to make decisions in our economic system. But in what way did the notion of emergent, authentic curriculum play a role in *The Pencil Problem* and what impact did it have on learning? When asking Ms. Nybell to reflect on this question, she stated that:

Emergent curriculum is possible with an understanding of the state standards at my grade level and being observant and flexible enough to follow the children’s interests. I also have to be willing to not know where we will end up, which is increasingly more stressful with the current emphasis on standardized testing. We were lucky in this case because our project culminated with gratifying results, going “full circle” from frustration and dissatisfaction with our pencils to pro-active consumers and finally satisfied customers. I have to believe that the authentic aspect of this project led students to a deeper understanding of the economic concepts laid out in the Ohio state standards than any textbook or paper and pencil test could have provided.

In our representation of the Curriculum of Progressive Education, authentic and emergent curriculum rests at the top of the triangle as a way of showing its place of importance for student learning. It also occupies the smallest surface area and has led us to reconsider how

we might represent it in such a way that it occupies not only the largest space symbolically, but that it also touches all other aspects of the model. These experiences not only connect to the curriculum, but go beyond it. The emergent curriculum can be thought of as an inside-out process. It is not driven by a dry scope and sequence chart or by textbooks, characteristic of an outside-in process. Instead, it begins with the unique chemistry of the interests and passions of children and teachers.

*The Pencil Problem* also illuminates many of the Ten Principles that serve to ground our work with children. Referring to these Ten Principles, Ms. Nybell's students were engaged in "*producing rather than solely consuming knowledge.*" Third graders developed surveys, produced graphs that depicted the results of these surveys, and wrote business letters that caught the attention of Ticonderoga executives. Ms. Nybell carefully "*guided child-choice and decision-making,*" noticing their concerns and asking the questions that drove the emergent project. She also skillfully "*raised their social consciousness by having them confront the issue*" they were facing and helped them find a civil and effective way to go about having it addressed. Other principles including "*the flexible use of time and space*" (this learning did not occur in 45 minute blocks at the same time every day and in fact took place over several months) and "*valuing reflection and self-evaluation by the children*" were also important aspects of *The Pencil Problem*.

### **I Can Make a Difference**

Around the corner from Ms. Nybell's third grade classroom, Molly Hinkle's fifth grade students were concerned about a different problem: the school cafeteria had no recycling program. The seeds for this concern had been unknowingly planted months beforehand.

In September, students participated in a five-day, all-day, field trip experience at the Stratford Ecological Farm in central Ohio. During this experience, their awareness of ecological conservation issues was brought sharply into view. A particular aspect of the Stratford experience that resonated with them, according to Mrs. Hinkle, included *Messages from Stratford* strategically placed around the farm and drawing attention to specific energy resource concerns. One sign in particular struck a chord with many of the fifth graders. It was a message placed above the restroom sink about the importance of using only one paper towel after washing their hands.

Upon returning from Stratford, fifth graders were inspired to write their own "messages" as part of a display located just outside their classroom door. Some students began wondering about the lack of recycling in the school environment, including the school cafeteria. Their group discussions soon led them to explore other complex conservation issues within the school, including the use of electricity and water, overuse of air conditioning, a library that is difficult to heat, and the need for composting in the cafeteria.

Working under the curriculum study theme of *I Can Make a Difference*, and the essential questions of "How does our use of energy and resources today impact tomorrow?" and "How do we respond to a problem?" students began exploring the entire school and conducted an efficiency and energy audit. In doing so, they discovered problem areas that were photographed and posted on a classroom wiki. This enabled students to learn from and with one another and expand their view of school as an institution that they attended to school as *their* community. As the study progressed, students interviewed a variety of school and district-level personnel, including the Executive Director of Business Services and the Director of Informational Technology, to learn about the problems they had documented, allowing them to gain a wider perspective and context for the existing problems they had defined. Finally, students narrowed their focus by selecting one problem that most interested



them and engaged in research that helped them learn more about the causes behind the problems and develop solutions.

As in *The Pencil Problem*, the *I Can Make a Difference* example helps illuminate the depth of learning that can occur and the connection to the Ten Principles. Mrs. Hinkle listened carefully to her students and observed their work in order to “*guide child-choice and decision-making.*” This study also showed how the teacher worked to “*integrate thematic units of study and foster authentic learning opportunities.*” Science concepts of energy, resources, and conservation were integrated with scientific inquiry, social studies research methods, as well as literacy skills like reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

The *I Can Make A Difference* study also served as an example for how to “*structure experiences that actively engage the child in producing rather than solely consuming knowledge.*” To fund the solutions they had generated, fifth graders wrote and were awarded a service-learning grant to begin a cafeteria composting process for the fall of 2013. In addition to composting buckets, they established a garden area for the compost that would be collected. The grant also allowed them to purchase recycling tubs to be placed throughout the playground, outdoor field areas and in the cafeteria.

The program’s eighth principle, “*we value on-going reflection and self-evaluation by both children and adults*” is demonstrated through Mrs. Hinkle’s comments about this yearlong journey:

The learning was authentic in every way – it grew out of a five-day environmental experience we had in September at Stratford Ecological Farm and followed and then expanded upon their concern about a lack of recycling in the school cafeteria. Students viewed the lack of a recycling program in the cafeteria as a real problem. While our focus remained small, these are real-world issues that are confronted every day in larger arenas.

It would be presumptuous of us to say that our Ten Principles and Curriculum of Progressive Education are at the center of *everything* we do *every* day of the school year. Our classrooms spend a great deal of time preparing for and taking an endless series of state tests as well as numerous assessments required by our school district. In addition to time spent assessing, teachers now also participate in required district professional development centered in the new Common Core Standards. These external factors, referred to by many teachers as “pressures” create a tension when held alongside of our principles, symbols, and group learning conversations. These challenges push us off-balance and we’re not always happy about this. However, we cannot overlook the fact that these very same challenges and our responses of adapting to them creatively may be a contributing factor to our program’s success over the past forty years of existence. Indeed, these pressures and our willingness to embrace them through group learning serve as a catalyst for re-centering our work together. We are a learning community that embraces the power of group learning and we acknowledge the critical role that core principles and symbols play in these conversations. We hope by doing so, we will be around for another forty years.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Informal Program, a name taken from the “informal classrooms” of the British Primary schools that appeared after WWII, was started by parents and teachers forty years ago in Upper Arlington, a small suburban public school district located in Ohio. It is housed in two, K-5 elementary schools. There are 248 children that attend Barrington Elementary School which also shares the building with district’s traditional program and Wickliffe Progressive Elementary School, a once empty school building that had to be opened due to increased numbers of parents choosing the program for their children.

<sup>2</sup> It is also significant that one of the faculty members who founded EPIC, children's literature expert Charlotte Huck, had attended a progressive school in New Trier, Illinois as a student. Moreover, another OSU faculty member who became vital to EPIC was language researcher Martha King who had on several occasions visited the "informal classrooms" in the British Primary school at a time when many Americans were flying across the ocean to observe these intriguing examples of child-centered education. Finally, Marlin Languis, an OSU professor with an expertise in science education reform of the 1960s and early 1970s also contributed a great deal as he conducted science workshops for our teachers.

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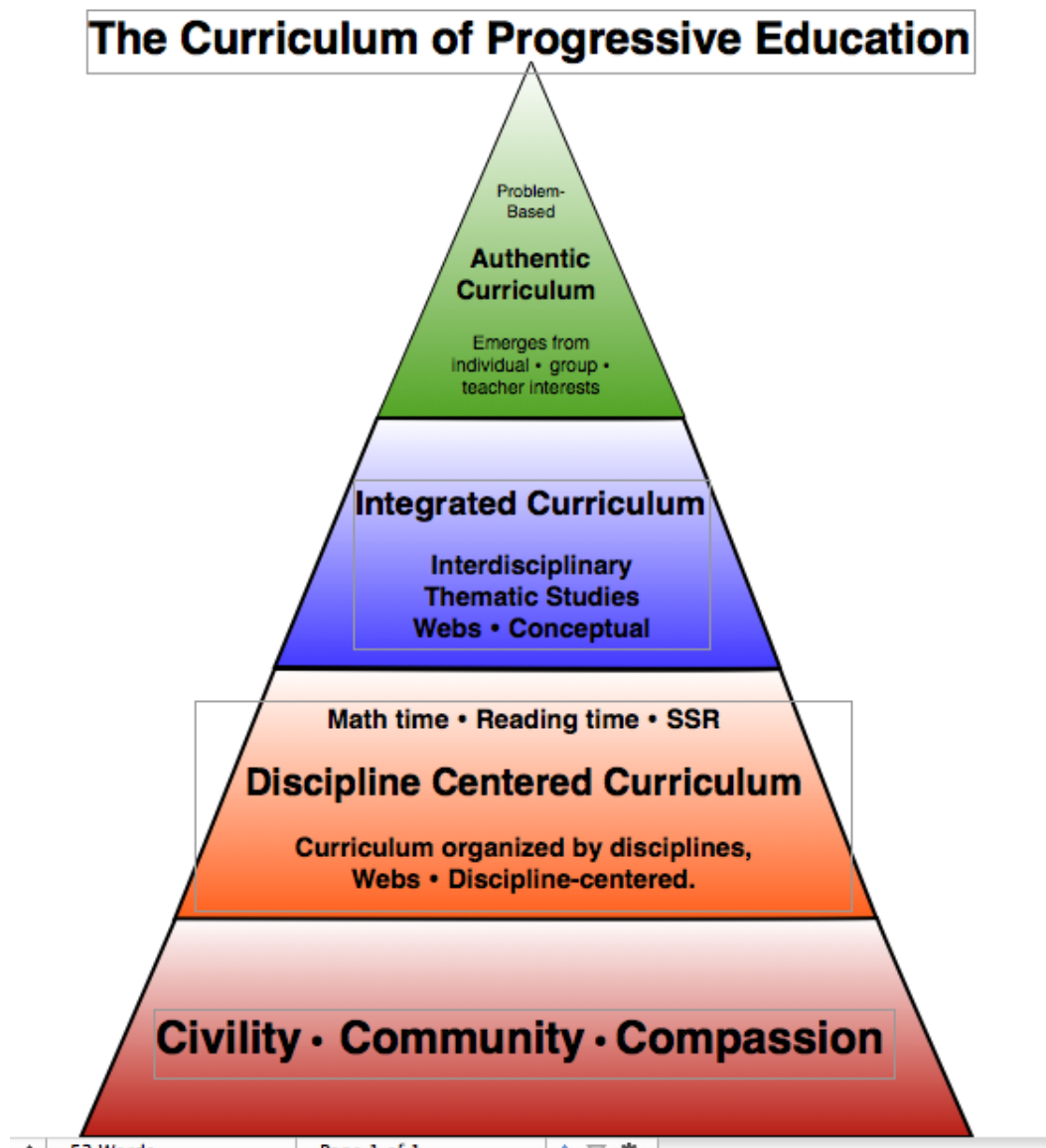
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Appendix A

**Wickliffe Progressive Community School  
Ten Foundational Principles of Progressive Education:**

1. We structure experiences that actively engage the child in producing rather than solely consuming knowledge.
2. We integrate thematic units of study and foster authentic learning opportunities.
3. We provide opportunities for the arts to occupy an integrated place in curriculum as an essential way to acquire and express knowledge.
4. Teacher and children use time and space in a flexible manner.
5. We respect diversity among children and variation in their development.
6. We collaborate with parents as co-educators in meeting children's needs.
7. Teachers raise children's social consciousness by encouraging them to examine and confront complex issues within society.
8. We value ongoing reflection and self-evaluation by children and adults.
9. We guide child-choice and decision-making.
10. We view our school as a center for teaching and learning for all ages.

Appendix B



## **Where's Wonder?**

**Fred Burton**

Ashland University

### **Abstract**

After 36 years of working as a progressive educator in American schools, the author notes the near absence of joy, passion, and imagination that today's students experience. He asks, "Where's wonder?" In this essay, the author makes a case for the role of wonder in learning as he reflects on his work with schools and museum educators at the Columbus Museum of Art's Center for Creativity. After sharing his own perspectives on wonder, he further explores and frames the idea by reconsidering two concepts from two major philosophers and practitioners of progressive education: 1) the late progressive philosopher and physicist David Hawkins and 2) educator Eleanor Duckworth. Drawing inspiration from the preschools of Reggio Emilia, the author then makes a special case for wonder as a group endeavor that contributes to something larger than the individual.

**Keywords:** role of play in education; progressive education history; arts in education

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*Stand aside for a while and leave room for learning, observe carefully what children do, and then, if you have understood well, perhaps teaching will be different from before.*

Loris Malaguzzi  
*The Hundred Languages of Children* (Edwards, 1988)

*At a large state university, undergraduate students completing their Bachelor of Fine Arts degree are enrolled in their final class, a senior seminar in painting. They are painting in the classroom and several appear hesitant. With little success, the instructor has spent much of the semester encouraging them to be more playful and to take risks as artists. While in the process of painting, more than one student asks, "Can I do this?" and "Do you want this?" Others have looks of frustration and annoyance on their faces when the instructor invites them to use the materials to explore some of their ideas.*

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*On a special day devoted to celebrating reading in an elementary school, an adult is invited to be a guest reader to a third grade classroom. Upon finishing reading aloud Tomie DePaola's (1996) retelling of an old folktale, Strega Nona, a somewhat shy, quiet girl walks over to the adult and thanks him because last year her teacher said they were too old to be read aloud make believe stories.*

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*On a school field trip to a museum of art, a group of fifth graders are following a docent who has brought them face to face with a painting that is filled with color and emotion. The docent asks them to share what they see, think, and wonder about as they peruse the painting. They excitedly raise their hands and offer up comments like "Wow, look at the swirls!" "It makes me think of my crazy bedroom," and "I wonder if the artist was lonely?" Before others can speak, the teacher who has been following this particular group, steps in, asks for quiet, and redirects the children's attention as she begins to "explain" the painting.*

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*A university researcher designs an elaborate qualitative study of curiosity in schools that are well funded and not overcrowded. The study seeks to compare the manner in which children's level of curiosity differs, how the classroom physical environment elicits more or less interest and curiosity, and to understand how classrooms within and across schools compare in their level of curiosity. The study was unable to meet any of these objectives because there was such an "astonishingly low rate of curiosity in all of the classrooms" (Engle, 2011).*

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As a progressive educator for the past 36 years, I have intentionally spent my time, often simultaneously, in both elementary schools and at the university. In my best moments, I have learned many things from classroom teachers, children, parents, and university professors, especially where and when these lived theoretical and practical worlds converge. But through the years, I'm also finding disheartening examples of teaching and learning like the ones above. I'm guessing readers of this essay who spend time in schools could point to their own examples. These dismal anecdotes may come a little too easily and although they may evoke a feeling of anger or dismay, it is rare that they completely and utterly surprise us.

So, as I reflect on education today, I would like to pause for a moment and consider the following question: “Where’s wonder?”

### Wondering About Wonder

Rather than spend time in a detailed deconstruction of wonder itself, I simply want to ruminate about it and invite you to do so too. That said, when I think of wonder I associate it with being amazed, perplexed, imaginative, creative, losing track of time, or what Csikszentmihalyi (1996) calls “flow.” I also think of wonder as various states of the mind and heart. Happiness, joy, and delight are some of the more obvious emotional side effects of wonder. But so are being annoyed or overwhelmed in both good and bad ways (e.g., seeing the Grand Canyon for the first time or the horrific amazement in the moment right before witnessing an automobile accident about to happen). When I think of wonder I also think of “educere,” the Latin root word of education meaning to “draw out.” While I believe that you can’t normally pre-plan, prescribe, and complete a traditional lesson plan for wonder (e.g., “upon completing this activity all children will have an 85% understanding of wonder”), I do think you can create the *conditions* for it.

Perhaps wonder is a bit like “good art.” We may not always be able to articulate why it is good with precision, but we know it when we see it. For example, in the photo below, there are two images of four-year-old Greta as she makes “circles” and “letters.” After each mark on her paper, she sits back, looks at her work, laughs, and has a wondrous look on her face as she leans back to delight in her work.



Photo Credit: Annie Pribonic

Even if we were completely unfamiliar with what Greta was doing, chances are we would still be able to ascertain that something wondrous was happening. So wonder may not only be an internal state of the mind and heart, but something made visible by children and adults, something we can visually read and recognize.

Sean Foley is a painter. I would also call him a philosopher, but he would deny this. The subject of his work as an artist often centers on states of wonder such as the fantastic, the mysterious, and the horrific. He had this to say about wonder during one of our recent conversations over lunch:

It is the inexplicable, a place between the known and unknown...a place where initially, language fails us like when we first saw planes flying into the Twin Towers on September 11th. Or for example, when looking at the sketches of faces done by various artists. In some of their sketches we see that the looks on people's faces during moments of horror and wonder are the same. It's a time that the brain can't quite compute what is happening. It doesn't know yet what it doesn't understand. And it is incredibly important. It's a split second of purity, not quite knowing or thinking. It is how we encounter works of art. There is a beauty to being wrong in suspense and in doubt.

Many of those I work alongside of in education would respond that they do not see or have the time for the "beauty" of being wrong or the "purity" of not knowing. I suspect that those of us in close contact with teachers, parents, and policy makers wouldn't be surprised if they thought of these ideas as crazy talk. But don't we in society need artists and art for just that reason? To illustrate this, one need only think of Jules Verne, the French author whose novels of science fiction featured underwater travel and flying through space *prior* to the inventions that allow us to do these things today.

Artists, like most of us who are trying to learn or understand something, do so by making sense of lived experience. Yet, wondering isn't just making sense of lived experience; it is lived experience. Like art making, wonder just may have value in and of itself. And also like creating art, there is a good deal of rigor involved on both the student and the teacher's part. Wonder requires us to draw on thinking dispositions such as observing closely, living with ambiguity, perseverance, and being curious. Wonder is both a noun (e.g., the feeling of being surprised) and a verb (e.g., to think curiously). However, both forms of speech are interrelated and wouldn't you agree that we could use a lot more of either or both in education today?

### **Progressive Provocateurs of Wonder**

Regardless of whether we think of wonder as a noun or verb or whether we simply intuitively know it when we see it, let us consider for a moment what it looks like in practice and how it might serve both individuals and a larger community of learners. In doing so, I would like to briefly share two interrelated ideas of two progressive educators: David Hawkins and Eleanor Duckworth.

#### **David Hawkins: "Messing About"**

The late David Hawkins was, among other things, a philosopher, a MacArthur Foundation "genius grant" winner, a Dewey scholar and someone who was fascinated by how young children learned, especially when it came to science. In the late 1970s, I first met him and his wife, Frances (a teacher) while participating in a series of professional development workshops held at the Mountain View Center in Boulder, Colorado. As a first year teacher who had just moved from Ohio to Wyoming to begin my career, I was familiar with some of Hawkins's ideas through reading his essays in Charles Silbermann's book, *The Open Classroom Reader* (1973) as well as from my undergraduate teacher training at Ohio State University which had a year-long program for pre-service teachers that was completely devoted to the "informal classrooms" of the British Primary school. I was also an avid reader of the educational journal *Outlook*<sup>1</sup> that featured writers like Hawkins.



In February of 1965, Hawkins wrote an article entitled “Messing About in Science” which was published by the journal, *Science and Children*, and has been reproduced in various places including in his book called *The Informed Vision: Essays on Learning and Human Nature* (2002). In this article, Hawkins, observing that his university students often struggled with understanding astronomy, found it useful to devote time to having them play with scientific ideas, concepts, and materials, a time he thought of as “Kindergarten Revisited” (2002, p. 67). He realized that taking time to play proved to be time well spent in regards to their understanding of physics.

Hawkins became a member of the Elementary Science Study (ESS), a curriculum development initiative funded by the National Science Foundation. The ESS project brought children, PK-12 teachers, and university professors together to design science curriculum materials for young children.<sup>2</sup> For two years he closely studied children’s science learning and used the phrase “messing about,” (Hawkins, 1965) as an important phase of playing with laboratory materials.

Hawkins thought that characterizing messing about as “unstructured” was misleading for it suggested to some a chaotic classroom at best or at worst, a waste of time. Instead, he believed that time invested in messing about was important intellectual work in which materials and equipment (e.g. pendulums) could be explored in order to “construct, test, probe, and experiment without superimposed questions or instructions” (Hawkins, 2002, p.68). Through his observations of children and deliberation with colleagues working on the ESS project, Hawkins determined that messing about for long periods of time was essential for: 1) allowing children to build background knowledge and generate questions, puzzles, and ideas through engagement with materials and the diverse perspectives of others that predictably surface while working together; 2) honoring that children, before entering formal schooling, also bring a set of prior knowledge to the school with them; and 3) cultivating the development of individual dispositions of rigorous, disciplined observation, perseverance and exploration which he viewed as the “essence of creativity.” (2002, p. 71).

As a young teacher I found Hawkins’s notion of messing about an exciting way to promote the intellectual development of students, but I also understood that the teachers and administrators I worked with were uncomfortable with the notion that children would have the power to direct their own learning to a significant degree. As teachers and administrators we agreed that we were responsible for managing classroom behavior *and* teaching the curriculum. Unfortunately, over time the idea of classroom control and teaching the curriculum came to be viewed by teachers and administrators as a singular concept: *controlling the curriculum*. Hawkins’s idea of messing about challenges this all too prevalent adult-centered conception of teaching and learning where it appears there is little room for wonder. Yet, for many progressive teachers in the open classroom of the 1960s and early 1970s, it came as little surprise that children who were allowed to explore materials, wonder about the way things work, generate questions, be perplexed by emergent puzzles, and encouraged to follow their interest, time for wonder and messing about were indispensable springboards to teaching, learning, and emergent curriculum opportunities.

As Hawkins observed children messing about with pendulums at ESS, he noted that, “In spite of or because of! - this lack of direction, these fifth-graders became very familiar with pendulums. They verified the conditions of motion in many ways, exploring differences in length and amplitude, using different sorts of bobs, bobs in clusters, and strings, etc. And have you tried the underwater pendulum? They did!” There were many discoveries made...” (2002, p. 70). He understood that devoting time (not just at the beginning of an inquiry, but at other stages of the process as well) to messing about allowed children to dig deeper into content. He believed such time was critical to not only covering the curriculum, but also “uncovering” it. Finally, he knew that “all of us must cross the line between ignorance and

insight many times before we truly understand” and that messing about was an essential phase of instruction that allowed us to “cross that line, over and over” (Hawkins, 2002, p. 70). Hawkins knew that wondering and possessing a sense of wonder was a conduit to deepening our understanding of content as well as children themselves.

### **Eleanor Duckworth: “The Having of Wonderful Ideas”**

Eleanor Duckworth, a former student and a translator of Jean Piaget’s work, is perhaps today best known and respected as a progressive teacher, researcher, developer of curriculum and science educator. She is also an astute and articulate observer of children and adults who are engaged in thinking and inquiry. Like Hawkins, she was also associated with the Elementary Science Study curriculum reform group where she served as a staff member. While working on the ESS project, Duckworth experienced a bit of her own cognitive dissonance. She had studied the classic Piagetian experiments of children’s abilities to conserve, classify, and seriate, but was uncertain whether or not these ideas could be helpful in the day to day life and experience of actual classrooms.

While Duckworth carried with her a strong Piagetian theoretical framework, her most startling insights about the nature of wonder came through actually observing and teaching children in classrooms, what she called “the difficult part” which in her view meant “finding ways to interest children, to take into account different children’s interests and abilities” (1972, p. 220). For Duckworth, the having of wonderful ideas meant observing children and giving them multiple experiences in “testing out ideas that she or he finds significant” and that such opportunities become the “essence of intellectual development” (1972, p. 230). If those of us who teach in university settings or K-12 schools would, like Duckworth, consider our student interests and abilities as a *starting point*, perhaps there would be more wonder in our classrooms. Our conception of teaching might be viewed less as telling and more of what Reggio *pedagogista* Carlina Rinaldi calls the “pedagogy of relationships and listening” (Project Zero, 2001, p. 79).

Duckworth saw teacher acceptance of children’s ideas as one key to promoting the sort of generative play that creates the conditions for the having of wonderful ideas. Along with acceptance, however, Duckworth noted that a teacher also needed a skill or disposition to nurture a sense of wonder in children. In working with children, Duckworth acknowledged that she (and many of her fellow teachers) “had a certain skill in being able to watch and listen to children and figure out how they were really seeing a problem” (1972, p. 220). Notice her use of the word “problem” in the previous sentence. Wonder and genuine inquiry often start with a problem and while many of these problems are self-contained within a discipline, they may also originate from something larger than the individual such as an interest in social justice within and beyond the immediate classroom.

In order to cultivate wondering that has both depth and breadth, Duckworth believes teachers should not only be ready to accept children’s ideas, but to do so with the express purpose of raising “questions that made sense to them and to think of a new orientation for activities which might correspond better to their way of seeing things” (1972, p. 220). Of course, to effectively accept children’s perspectives, we would do well to ponder and surface our own. For example, today we might ask how our own evolving ideas of justice, race, and a virtuous society affect our pedagogical response to children’s conceptions of these same ideas. As a teacher, how am I, in Duckworth’s words (1972, p. 224), “providing a setting which suggests wonderful ideas to children -- *different* (italics mine) ideas to different children -- as they get caught up in intellectual problems that are real to them?”

Of course, all of this takes time. This advice to make time to observe and try to understand how children are viewing a problem may seem utterly impossible and foreign

when considering how we approach pedagogy today. As teachers, we are so accustomed to moving children through various standards, the curriculum, or the university syllabus instead of making time to probe the depths of disciplinary content or pursue generative questions from students be they young children or adults. Even if the thought of making time for wonder doesn't seem foreign to us, it most likely will at least seem daunting. In fact, at this point, I can imagine a teacher asking, "Do I really have time to do this?" The short and somewhat glib answer is "no." In my own work with teachers, I am not hearing them say "Fred, we have way too much time, can you help us use it?" Furthermore, most parents I know are experiencing the press of time as well. However, acknowledging this tension does not change the convenient delusion of thinking we can race through material (or the syllabus) and pretend that deep learning will result. As Pat Carini, co-founder of the Prospect School, once told me, "speed is the enemy of quality."<sup>3</sup> I wish it weren't so.

### Wondering in Packs

There is no need to assume that only individuals engage in these problems. I would now like to close by suggesting that the value of wondering goes beyond something that only benefits the individual. Sean Foley, the painter-philosopher I referred to earlier, sees wonder "as the gateway drug to learning" and from our brief examination of progressive provocateurs, the case for making time for wonder can be found in the work of Hawkins and Duckworth as well. However, I would like to add here that I believe that for wonder to reach its highest expression and deepest potential, it is best done in groups. Here in the United States we have elevated and overstated the role of individualism. It is part of our historical narrative and myth. The rights of the individual in familiar cases such as carrying guns, taxation, and health care often supersede considerations of what is best for the larger group. Thinking of the group does not come naturally to many of us. Consequently, I do not want to understate the social and educational value of wondering *together*.

When thinking about wondering together, we have many things to learn from the Italian preschools of Reggio Emilia. One thing of value that we may take from Reggio educators is that if wonder is to lead to some sort of growth, be it individual or social, it is best done in the presence of others. As a participant at the Reggio Institute and an observer of their schools in Italy, I was especially struck by how often we in the United States falsely assume that the individual and group are two distinctly divided (and divisive) entities. In addition to separating the two in our minds, we often believe that placing them together may have a negative, or to use Dewey's terminology, a "miseducative" effect (Dewey, 1938).

For example, as a former principal of an elementary school whose classrooms were organized in multiage age units (e.g. first and second graders together in one class), I recall having had numerous conversations with parents who were concerned that their child in second grade would be academically "pulled down" by the mere fact of being around and having classmates in the first grade. Despite these misgivings, it is misguided to frame wonder (or learning) in an either/or fashion i.e., either it benefits the individual *or* contributes to the group, but never both at once. Steve Seidel, the former Director of Harvard's Project Zero, a research group that has developed a collaborative, working relationship with Reggio educators over the years, says it poetically when he writes that: "...the individual may be best served by frequent opportunities to be part of intentional, purposeful, learning groups. It is possible to see the group as holding the individual in its arms with care, respect, and love rather than as some large and cold container in which the individual's rights, needs, and identity are inevitably lost and which crushes the spirit of the individual" (Project Zero, 2001, p. 313).

As individuals see, think, and wonder about the group's thinking made visible, there is a potential to provoke further learning and inquiry that is cognitive, social, and ethical.

Consequently, when considering the power of wonder, we should speak of individual *and* group learning rather than individual *or* group learning.

### **Following Wonder**

A reasonable question that teachers and administrators sometimes ask is: “What comes after wonder?” More specifically, what might a teacher, parent, or museum docent *do* with wonder? My initial response is “nothing” since I believe in the value and motivational power of the experience itself. However, as an educator, I understand and agree with the desire to build on wonder as an opportunity to promote deeper understanding and to raise new questions that create additional pathways leading to further learning. Those who have created the conditions of wonder can perhaps best extend it by “stressing dialogic skill” (Easley, 1990). After all, conversation is the main currency of our profession. Drawing on science education, Easley provides us with examples of extending wonder by creating conversations through “peer group dialogues.” In these dialogues the teacher listens closely to children’s ideas, serves as moderator that actively seeks out alternative perspectives, and at times draws on a “little dramatization, playing the devil’s advocate, or other theatrics” in order to spur on the building of ideas through discussion (Easley, 1990, p.85). It is through such conversational learning communities that we may move from wonder and begin co-constructing important conceptual understandings together.

### **Finding Wonder in Museums, Schools, and Relationships**

I am not a cynic. Although I began this essay with some pretty disheartening anecdotes about the prospects of wonder in formal and informal educational settings, I would like to end by sharing some examples of hope. They are examples of people in places who appear to be resisting the larger systemic forces that tend to take the “life” out of lived experiences. After sharing examples from a school and a museum, I will close with an observation of a father and his young son who I observed wondering together in a museum.

#### **Wonder...in Museums**

After a great deal of deliberation, gritty fundraising, and an inspiring vision, the Columbus Museum of Art (CMA) in Columbus, Ohio completed an ambitious renovation that dedicated over one fifth of its space to opening a Center for Creativity where wonder is valued, promoted, and made visible.

*As part of their training and education, a group of twelve medical students from Ohio State University stand in front of a painting. Rachel, a staff member from the museum, poses questions for them as they look at one painting for forty-five minutes. After spending time sharing their close observations regarding what they think they see, they begin to wonder together about what they would ask the artist to find out more. They ponder the vibrant colors and shapes and then reflect together on the significance and relationship to their own interpretations as well as those emerging collectively in the deliberations of the group. They walk away surprised and delighted that their group “thought ramblings” have yielded new insights that they as individuals had not noticed. They share that the experience has encouraged deeper, attentive looking, critical thinking, and developed their capacity for empathy.*

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#### **Wonder...in Schools**

Columbus Collegiate Academy is an urban middle school located in a part of the city characterized by high poverty and crime. The school places a high value on wondering about the world.

*At Columbus Collegiate Academy teachers are collaborating with Emily, a Columbus Museum of Art education staff member. Their focus is to explore social issues that matter to students through creative experimentation and as Emily says, "individual and group wondering." In a small, crowded classroom, Emily and the teacher are having a discussion with seventh graders. Four weeks earlier, Emily had brought several socially charged works of art from the museum's collection with her. The students have not only spent time wondering about the art itself, but after small group conversations, have made connections to their lives situated in their community -- poverty, homicide, abortion, and suicide, are all topics generated by the students. Today, they are reflecting on their own works of art in an exhibition that they have created around the various issues that are critical to them. Students reflect and think aloud about each other's chosen social issue as expressed through artwork that they have made. One boy, Wendell, keeps walking back and forth between three different student prints that represent three separate issues -- drugs...abortion...homicide. Suddenly, his face turns from perplexed to pleased. He looks at his friends and says, "Hey, people in our community might do drugs at a young age which could lead them to make bad choices like having an abortion and that would make some people mad because they see that as homicide. Another boy understanding the connection Wendell has just made says with some admiration, "sweeeet." Another student remarks to Emily "I think I understand how someone else feels about a social issue and that if you care about something, you can stand up and do something about it." Emily smiles and says to me, "Creativity and wonder do not exist in a right and wrong world; it is in the beautiful and interesting gray areas."*

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### **Parents Wondering With Children**

Occasionally, I use the museum for what I call an "artful loitering tour." On this self-guided tour I simply go to the museum with no specific purpose in mind and wander around to see what strikes me. Something always does. On one of my tours I observed a father with his four-year-old son in a room of art and art materials called the Wonder Room. It's a space at the Columbus Museum of Art specifically designed so that adults and children can play with materials and ideas together. In this room, the father and son are standing in silence gazing at an assemblage of metal objects attached to a magnetized wall. They were at the beginning stage of creating a creature of some sort using one of the large metal, magnetized heads in the room.

After scanning over the objects for some time, the young boy excitedly said, "I know, let's make the eyes with this." The "this" was a large, single piece of metal with a 30 milliliter spoon on one end and a 15 milliliter spoon on the other. As his father watched, the boy attached the measuring spoon to the head. The boy then stepped back, looked at what he had done, and seemed somewhat puzzled, noticing that the different sized measuring spoons had resulted in eyes that were not the same size. Next, with a matter-of-fact tone in his voice, the boy turns to his father and says, "It's OK, they're not like my eyes, but we're making this up, aren't we Daddy?" To which the father promptly replied, "Yep, we're dreaming this up together."

The two of them, together, continued to "dream" and make up various faces. You have to appreciate what they were doing on many levels. They were collaborating, making connections to themselves and the world (i.e., eyes are mostly the same size), using flexible thinking (but eyes don't have to be!), stepping back and reflecting on their work, and formulating new plans together. However, what most impressed and inspired me was that they were taking their time. No rush. No preconceived notions of making things the right way. They were simultaneously engaged, relaxed, and perplexed at times. Just "messaging about" together. Valuing each other and the work they were doing.

Parker Palmer writes that “teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart -- and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be” (1998, p. 11). In the act of asking “Where’s wonder?” our attention is directed to finding it or even imagining it in small pedagogical spaces. And it is in such spaces that we may fill the hearts of children, teachers, and schools with some desperately needed passion, joy, and imagination.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Although no longer in print, almost all of the issues of *Outlook* can now be found on the The Hawkins Center website, (<http://hawkinscenters.org>).

<sup>2</sup> This idea of bringing children, teachers from all levels, and university professors together to develop curriculum sounds somewhat odd today since politicians, special interest groups, and corporations appear to have as much influence on the curriculum development process as teachers.

<sup>3</sup> This was a personal conversation during her visit to Wickliffe Elementary School.

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**The Democratic School and the Pedagogy of Janusz Korczak: A Model of Early Twentieth Century Reform in Modern Israel**

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**Abstract.** This article explores the history and pedagogy of Janusz Korczak within the context of his contemporary early Twentieth-Century European Innovative Educators which include Maria Montessori, Homer Lane, A.S. Neill, and Anton Semyonovitch Makarenko. The pedagogies of the aforementioned are compared and contrasted within the literature.

**Keywords:** Janusz Korczak, Montessori, Lane, Makarenko

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## Introduction

Like many of his contemporary twentieth century educators such as Maria Montessori, Homer Lane, A.S. Neill, and Anton Semyonovitch Makarenko, Janusz Korczak advocated an educational experience based on the child's own nature. Korczak also encouraged full development of the child by having the children become active learners who took initiative and responsibility for their education in a cooperative, self-governed environment. Within Korczak's cooperative learning laboratory, the child presumably became socialized into the democratic process. In this respect, Korczak was pursuing a goal similar to some of his European contemporaries. By providing a democratic educational laboratory which fostered the child's independence, like-minded early twentieth-century innovative educators also hoped to affect a type of adult consistent with new democratic thinking, although they tended to differ somewhat in how they interpreted democracy.

Similar to his contemporary Montessori, Korczak trained as a pediatrician. Korczak attributed his method of educational inquiry to his medical training. Endless observations, weight curves, development profiles, growth indices, and prognoses of somatic and psychic development provided Korczak with data to refine his innovative educational philosophy, based on his "experience at work, under given conditions, in a given terrain, with children" (Korczak, 1920/1967, p. 324). Scientific research, with the emphasis on the school as laboratory, furnished the basis of Korczak's theory and practice as well as encouraged him to further his efforts to unravel the mystery of "the great synthesis of the child" or the natural development of the child and adolescent (Korczak, 1920/1967, p. 318).

Korczak's educational philosophy took shape in a period when Europe was experiencing a profound disillusionment. In many respects, that philosophy was a response to European political, social and cultural changes that were emerging during his lifetime. Like many contemporaries, Korczak hoped that the spread of self-governing schools would lead to the understanding of the democratic process which would in turn make a harmonious society possible (Lawson & Peterson, 1972).

## Biographical Sketch

Henryk Goldszmit (a.k.a. Janusz Korczak) was born July 22, 1878 in Warsaw into a prominent Jewish family. The emphasis in the home was on Polish national patriotism and general European culture. When he was 11 years old, his father became seriously ill, leaving Henryk to support the family; he did so by tutoring young children. He went by to study medicine at the University of Warsaw, receiving his medical diploma in 1903. By then he had already begun to establish a literary reputation under the pseudonym of Janusz Korczak. His first book, *Street Children*, was published in 1901.

Upon graduation from medical school, Korczak began practicing as a pediatrician at the Warsaw Children's Hospital where he became known for his dedication and sense of responsibility to the children in his care. Korczak supplemented his medical education with study in the clinics of Berlin, Paris and London.

In 1904-1905, Korczak served as a medical officer in the Tsarist army in the Russo-Japanese War. It was the first of four wars in which he actively participated in this capacity. His war experiences influenced his attitudes towards children. Korczak believed that the true victims of all wars were the defenseless children of the world who bore no responsibility for the carnage. And Korczak would be their defender.

From 1901 until 1909, Korczak volunteered his services to the Summer Camps Society for Warsaw's poor children. In 1912 he became director of the Jewish orphanage,



Orphans Home, at 92 Krochmalna Street. Several years later he became director of a Catholic orphanage for working-class children, Our Home. Throughout this period he continued to write for and about children. It is interesting to note that except for the four years he spent at the front during World War I, Korczak spent the rest of his life with *his* children. He was determined to provide his orphans with the security and all-encompassing love.

From 1909 to 1915, Korczak was affiliated with the Flying University which later became known as the Polish Free University, an underground institution dedicated to keeping alive Polish culture and history then being threatened by Imperial Russia. He was also a lecturer at the National Institute for Special Pedagogy, at the National Teacher's Training Institute, at the Nursery School Teacher Seminary as well as during pediatrician and special school teacher's symposia. In addition Korczak assisted in legal cases involving juvenile delinquents.

In 1934, Korczak initiated a radio program, "The Old Doctor" in which he told stories to children and had conversations with callers, both children and adults. Due to the acceleration of anti-Semitism in 1939, the radio program was discontinued.

On November 29, 1940, due to a Nazi edict, Orphans Home relocated inside the Warsaw Ghetto where Korczak continued his pedagogical efforts including holding pedagogic seminars for the teachers and directors of the Ghetto's new schools. Orphans Home served two hundred of the Ghetto's fifty thousand elementary-school age children.

Despite offers from Aryan friends to hide Korczak on the "Aryan" side of Warsaw, Korczak remained with his children. On August 6, 1942, together with two hundred of his orphans and staff, Korczak walked with quiet dignity to the *Umschlagplatz*, to the trains which took them to the gas chambers of Treblinka. He perished without fully expounding his nearly 30 years of pedagogical experiments at Children's Republic (the name given to Korczak's pedagogical experiments). He died without fully expounding his pedagogy. His pedagogy remains scattered in a wide variety of writings.

### **Interpretations of Korczak's Pedagogy**

Despite Korczak's premature death and the difficulty of encapsulating his educational philosophy, interest in Korczak's pedagogy has intensified in recent years (Lewin, 1997, Page 16)

Reading Korczak is not an easy task. Joseph Arnon (1973), an educator in Orphans Home, contends Korczak writings are, "both in content and form, suffused with a surrealistic atmosphere that combined the most realistic regard for exactitude and detail with the most dreamlike, imaginative and suggestive states" (Page 32).

It is important to note essential to understanding the interpretation of Korczak's pedagogy is the fact that his life story and pedagogy are intertwined. For example, one key aspect to Korczak's pedagogy is making moral decisions. For Korczak, moral decisions are important in creating a world where children will be treated seriously, no longer oppressed and with rights.

According to Larry Brendtro and Denise Hinders (1990), *When I Am Little Again* (Korczak, 1925/1992) contains the germ of Korczak's pedagogical philosophy: educational reform will transform society into democracy. Educational reform based on an individual's physical, social, and mental development could result in the bettering of society-at-large.

As an educator, Korczak was skeptical of educational “recipes” and prescriptions. Korczak regarded education as an individual, creative dynamic process which is also dependent on place, time, and environmental conditions. Hannah Mortkowicz-Olczakowa (1965) maintains “we give no prescription” (Page 11). In other words, the educational process is dynamic. Continual scientific experimentation provided the basis for Korczak’s educational “system”.

Joseph Arnon’s (1983) term for the basic premise of Korczak’s “system” is pedagogical love. Arnon understands Korczak’s pedagogical love to be a particular kind of reliable dependence a child has on an adult. Pedagogical love is attained when the child respects and trusts the adult-educator because the adult-educator creates a “happy atmosphere and refrains from the compulsive use of authority” (Arnon, 1983, Page 27). Thus, the relationship between adult-educator and child is a product of mutual understanding, trust, and caring. As an adult-educator, Korczak promoted and provided an atmosphere of equality where he strove to be detached rather than emotional in his or her interaction with children. Arnon further contends that such love should be “concretely expressed and through personal example” (ibid.)

In *The Gates of Light*, Cohen (1994) expresses pedagogical love to be a gift. According to Cohen, pedagogical love may be defined as the educator’s attitude and behavior toward the child which should be that of a knowledgeable adult friend to a younger companion. At all times, the educator must respect and appreciate the efforts and work of the child. Cohen maintains that the educator acts as adviser, mentor, and facilitator. Thus, a dialogue develops, and a bond of trust results.

Another important aspect of Korczak’s (1919/1967) “system” was freedom which he claimed was necessary for the child’s “harmonious development” (Page 250). Similar to Montessori, Korczak understood the child’s need to have freedom of movement. In an essay entitled “The Human Spirit as Orphan”, Henryk Grynberg (1979) interprets Korczak’s freedom as entailing choice and the expression of Western-type parliamentary democracy within the Children’s Republic. Grynberg (1979) represents Korczak as “a fighter against any physical or psychological child abuse, and particularly against molding children in accordance with any state, religious or social class interests (Page 39).” To Korczak (1919/1967) a child was “a person born to be free (Page 250).” Cohen (1994) maintains that even the physical structure of Children’s Republic was designed in such a manner to “leave room for equality and freedom” (Page 89). Cohen (1994) and Grynberg (1979) are in agreement that Korczak understood individual freedom as not infringing on the rights of others.

### **Korczak’s Methodology**

Observations of children in various situations, such as performing work related tasks, followed by analysis led Korczak continually to modify his pedagogical practice (Rotem, 1997). Often Korczak’s “method” began with a minor detail observed or a child’s question from which he extrapolated to diversified and general problems. Edwin Kulawiec (1980) writes that Korczak’s chief research method relied heavily on ethnographic data collection: fine detailed descriptive data based on direct observation of children at work, at play, at chores, while they slept and so on, as well as measurements, weights, and statistical records of the development of hundreds of children, in an effort to better understand the child (Page 364). Ethnographic methodology, postulates Szlazakowa (1978), was the basis for Korczak’s unfinished attempt to unravel what he called the “Great Synthesis of the Child” (Korczak, n.d./1967). Szlazakowa (1978) refers to Korczak’s method of data collection as the study of the “whole psychophysical phenomena”, where biological, medical, psychological and pedagogical data was integrated (Page 12).

In his essay “The Child in the Family”, Korczak (n.d./1967) stated the fundamental assumption of his pedagogy: a child is a complete human being, of intrinsic worth, although on a different level from that of an adult. In another essay entitled “The Boarding School”, he (n.d./1967) further elaborated that there are no children, only people with different conceptual scales, different ranges of experiences, and different emotional reactions. Hence, children must be treated in a fair and responsible manner. Further, the child is not just something to be molded into an adult (Grynberg, 1979, Page 39) Korczak understood the child to be a seed complete with a genetic code. The image of a child as a seed emphasizes the spontaneous, inner values that a human being brings with him or her into this world (Bereday, 1979). Because the child comes with such inner values, it is impossible for the educator to expect nor would it be appropriate to desire total submission from the student. According to Magnes (1979), children were thought to be rational and creative beings capable of achieving self-control and making decisions.

### **Korczak’s Major Works**

Among his 1000 publications, Korczak’s major works include *How to Love a Child* (Part I: 1919/1967; Part II: 1920/1967), *King Matt the First* (1922/1986), *When I Am Little Again* (1926/1992), *The Child’s Right to Respect* (1925/1992) and *The Ghetto Diary* (1957/1978). An analysis of his works helps bring his pedagogy into focus.

Korczak understood the child to be the “most perfect feature of an otherwise flawed world” (Rosenshaft, 1979, Page 55). Further he contended it is the responsibility of adults to “rise to the child’s level of purity and innocence” (ibid.) Korczak based his relationship with his children on mutual respect and cooperation. His orphanages were run by an elaborate system of rules in which a Children’s Parliament governed the Code of the Court of Peers and the Court of Peers.

Pedagogy offered an opportunity to nurture the whole child whereas medicine was limited to curing the concerned sick child. Based on the medical model, Korczak’s “science of teaching” (Korczak, 1920/1967, Page 3) involved observation in the classroom which was transformed into a research center as well as an educational institution. A variety of disciplines including psychology, medicine, physiology, nutrition, sociology, ethnology, history, poetry, and criminology (Page 481) provided solutions for pedagogical problems.

Korczak formulated his pedagogy at a time that corresponded to burgeoning interest in child development. Prior to this time, childhood was believed to be preparation for adulthood. Korczak (n.d./1967) explained that children were not seen “just as we were unable to see the woman, the peasant, the oppressed social strata and oppressed peoples” (Page 165). Children were not recognized by adults because their earnings were inconsequential. Consequently, children had to yield to the demands of adults on whom they were dependent. In contrast, Korczak advocates the importance of the child and childhood, demanding indelible rights for the child such as the child’s right to the present and the right of the child to be what he is. He maintains that children possess not only common sense but human volition which merit serious consideration.

As an educator, Korczak maintained that he was incapable of removing earlier childhood scars and wounds and therefore understood the limitations of education (Korczak, n.d./1967, 1924/1967, 1926/1967). In his essay entitled, “The Little Brigand”, Korczak (1924/1967) articulated the conditions, “light and warmth, freedom and joy of life (p. 532) which he hypothesized would enable the child to begin the self-improvement process.

### **European Innovative Educators and Their Experimental Schools: Between the World Wars**

In the section that follows, the ideas of four contemporaries of Korczak's, Marie Montessori, Homer Lane, Anton Makarenko, and A.S. Neill, are presented as representative of the kind of experimental pedagogy that was taking root in Europe in the period between the wars. The purpose of this section is to link Korczak's pedagogical ideas to his European context and to help situate him in the context of pedagogical reformers of his time. These experimental pedagogues understood education to be an integral part of the construction of a new democratic society and maintained a confidence in the ability of education, properly conceived, to encourage future citizens to take an active, responsible role in the development of the new progressive democratic order. In some respects, the schools they founded differ considerable, but they all sought to encourage in one form or another, the participation of students in their own learning and governance. It was assumed that a measure of self-governance would be critical in instilling a democratic way of thinking.

All four of these experimental educators, also sought to escape the influence of corrupt social institutions by an appeal to the natural order of development in the child. In this regard, careful observation and recording of children's behavior at different developmental stages provided the scientific data necessary to create new schools based on child and adolescent development and the nature of learning. Like some American child-centered schools, these European experimental schools were designed to harmonize with the child's interests, needs and learning patterns. In this way the natural powers within the child would be released. While the emphasis on child growth and development differed from the emphasis on democratic self-government, it was not inconsistent with it.

In addition to providing opportunities that allowed each child to develop his or her innate gifts, the new schools often incorporated a judicial and legislative system wherein the characteristics of initiative, independence, and resourcefulness could be nurtured. Such participation provided an opportunity for the members of the innovative schools to gain the confidence to act and think for themselves. Participation in self-government was designed to provide a better understanding of the democratic process. In this way, creative self-expression and participation in democratic governance were blended.

#### **Maria Montessori's Casa Dei Bambini**

Like other experimental educators of her generation, Maria Montessori (1870-1952), believed it was radically necessary to change traditional education in order to create the sort of person capable of establishing a new democratic order (Montessori, 1949/1972, p. 23). Montessori's pedagogical ideas evolved into what became known as The Montessori Method which was based on what she thought were the principles of modern science. On January 6, 1907, in the slum-ridden San Lorenzo district of Rome, Montessori opened Casa dei Bambini (The Children's Home) for children between the ages of three and seven. Casa dei Bambini provided an experimental laboratory in which scientific observation allowed her to conclude that children's development, including education, was a gradual and 'natural' process. Montessori defined education as the active interaction by the human individual with a carefully designed environment.

According to Montessori, education needed to develop a child's initiative, independence, individuality, and self-direction; self-determination replaced obedience and dependence. Multi-age grouping, according to Montessori, provided an opportunity for a child to cooperate and share, thereby fostering responsibility, caring and unselfishness, attributes she considered necessary for the evolution of a self-determined individual.

Montessori claimed such attributes were consistent and necessary for the new democratic citizen.

According to Rex Lohman (1988), there is little research to substantiate Montessori's assertions; however, he believes that The Montessori Method provided "the means for both social growth and individual growth which leads to confident and responsible participation in a democratic culture" (Page 6). For example, the use of specially constructed didactic apparatus materials were designed to lead to confidence and self-control. Confidence and self-control presumably enabled an individual to become an active, creative participant in the democratic process.

According to Jane Roland Martin (1992) The Montessori Method stresses the very essence of democracy. In a home learning environment imbued with "care, concern, and connection" (p. 34), children's individuality is recognized and nurtured. Children also feel connected to one another and concerned about their welfare. Individual self-determination replaces obedience in the traditional school. Citizens nurtured in such an ideal home environment, according to Martin, will do what needs to be done to maintain, improve, and enhance everyone's lives.

Natural development, according to Montessori, occurred in successive levels or stages of independence and self-regulation known as "sensitive periods". "Sensitive periods: correspond to specific ages when a child's interest and mental capacity are particularly receptive to certain stimuli or didactic approach. Montessori contended that "it is necessary to offer those exercises which correspond to the need of development felt by an organism" (1911/1964, Page 358). Therefore, the educator in The Montessori Method observed much in an effort to facilitate the awakening of the child's intellectual life which is dependent on Montessori's didactic apparatus. Repetition of a didactic exercise, according to Montessori, leads to self-development, the external sign of which is self-discipline.

### **Homer Lane's Little Commonwealth**

Democratic self-governance was much more visible in Homer Lane's (1876-1925) educational methods for delinquent youth than in Montessori's. Self-governance, according to Lane, defined the educational process which took place at the Little Commonwealth (1913-18), located in Dorset, England. Members of Lane's Little Commonwealth were delinquent children and adolescents, born and reared in city slums, most of who were over the age of fourteen and under eighteen; the population never exceeded forty. The Little Commonwealth, a democratic self-governing community, was based on Lane's (1949) faith in the innate goodness of children as well as their ability to devise creative solutions to their problems. Goodness, according to Lane (1949), was equated with being true to one's inner law which guided a person's progress toward "the perfection of the universe" (Page 196). Lane developed "a living community" (Bazeley, 1928, Page 8), a micro-universe, wherein children initiated the methods that governed their individual and social development. For example, weekly General Meetings provided an opportunity for adult and child to cooperate in the decision-making process concerning academic and social policy; however, voting privileges were extended only to children fourteen years or older. The legislative body ran the weekly General Meetings. Motions were brought up, seconded, and voted on. The approved motions became policy. An example of such a rule is "one week shall elapse after resignation of an officer before action shall be taken on the resignation of an officer before action shall be taken on the resignation" (Wills, 1964, Page 138). Offices were held for six month. The two most important offices were those of Chairman of the Legislative and Judge of the Judicial Meeting; there were also offices of Clerk and of Treasurer. Elections were bi-annual.

Another example of democratic self-governance at the Little Commonwealth was the Citizens' Court which was presided over by an elected judge. The judge could also use power of contempt of court for anyone declared out of order during a hearing. Lane himself was once ordered out for being in contempt of court. The most severe punishment appears to have been "close bounds" (Page 137) which was automatically inflicted on any person who lost his or her job. Members on "close bounds" were not allowed beyond the courtyard; during working hours, members were not allowed out of the courtyard. A third aspect of democratic self-governance at the Little Commonwealth was its working life. Due to economic necessity, work rather than schooling became the basis of the Little Commonwealth's self-government (Bazeley, 1928, Page 80). In this way, the life of each individual child was inseparably bound up with the work of the community. Each child was responsible for contributing to keeping the community solvent as well as supporting him or herself by paying for food, clothing, and recreation.

Like other early twentieth century experimental educators, Lane sought to respect the child's natural pattern of development. In *Talks to Parents and Teachers* (1949), Lane outlined four stages of child development which included "infancy", the first three years; "the age of imagination", the third to seventh years; "the age of self-assertion", the seventh to eleventh years; and "the age of loyalty", transition from the eleventh to fourteenth years and then adolescence until about the seventeenth year. Lane looked to the child to initiate the methods that govern his or her development. Thus, Lane's understanding of the natural order of child development, together with his deep belief in the innate goodness of children, worked in tandem to create Little Commonwealth. Most of the members of the Little Commonwealth were, according to Lane's stages of development, in "the age of loyalty", and wherein the social and co-operative instincts are primary. According to Lane, at such a stage, self-governance is an appropriate educational tool to employ, provided that the choices are of interest to the child. Such choices included Lane's suggestion that the responsibility for a course syllabus and the allotment of time to the parts of it ought to be a co-operative, group effort which should be discussed and decided on by the student body of a particular class.

In an effort to assist character and personality development of the child reared in the Little Commonwealth, Lane redefined the role of the teacher. The relationship between teacher and student was one of "pure democracy" (Lane, 1949, Page 122). The teacher renounced his or her authoritarian position, replacing it with "being on the side of the child" (Page 8) which Lane explained to be love or the ability to interact with the child so that the child feels the adult loves him or her and approves of him or her.

### **Anton Makarenko's Gorky Colony**

Democracy for Anton Semyonovitch Makarenko (1888-1939) meant something different from other European experimental educators. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Makarenko expressed the need for shaping the orphan to a particular pattern, "The New Soviet Man", based on the laws of social development of the teachings of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. For example, in conformance with Communist doctrine which emphasized the breaking of the influence of the corrupt social institutions associated with the older order, Makarenko transplanted the *besprizorniki* (orphans) into "educational collectives".

Makarenko described Maxim Gorky Colony (1920-1928), an "educational collective", in what has become known as his magnum opus, *The Road to Life* (1951/1973). Maxim Gorky Colony was created as an autonomous, self-governing educational institution for *besprizorniki* or youth left homeless due to World War I, the Russian Revolution, and Civil War. According to Makarenko, the collective environment provided the necessary conditions which would enable the *besprizorniki* to work at social self-education, thereby transforming them into contributed members of Communist Soviet society.

In *The Road to Life* (1951/1973), Makarenko delineated Gorky Colony as the ideal environment for nurturing “The New Soviet Man”, a human being imbued with ideals such as mutual responsibility and collective governance. The self-governing Gorky Colony was in effect a mini-society, a model of Communist society wherein the individual *besprizornik* developed his or her personality, qualities, aptitudes, and abilities as well as experienced the relationship between him or herself and the new society (Zilberman, 1988, p. 42). In addition to the classroom, educational activities such as participation in the General Assembly which took place outside of the traditional classroom, contributing to the development of the individual *besprizornik* within the cohesiveness of the group.

Although self-government was essential to the functioning of the Gorky Colony, its form was Marxist. For example, although each *besprizornik* was given one vote in the General Assembly, at times, in an effort to influence an important vote, propaganda techniques including indoctrination and “programmed guidance” were used (Cohen, 1994, p. 307). Another example of Marxist influence was Makarenko’s introduction of challenging situations for Gorky Colony to keep the group moving forward toward an ideal which he had drawn from the revolutionary movement. The challenges arose from Makarenko’s own interpretation of the needs of the group rather than from the group itself (Bowen, 1962, p. 103).

The life of Gorky Colony included relationships and types of activities that were typical of the Marxist version of democratic society (Filonov, 1994, p. 81). For example, the collective fostered communal relationships by granting the individual *besprizornik* rights such as the right of a young and weak *besprizornik* to be protected from the older and stronger *besprizorniki*. Another example of democratic activities included *besprizorniki* participation in the self-government of Gorky Colony. This included membership in permanent work detachments to which each *besprizornik* belonged. They were presided over by a boy chosen by election, called a commander, mixed detachments of *ad hoc* committees, and the commander’s council which functioned as the main executive body with Makarenko as the ex-officio chairman. The position of commander of the mixed, temporary detachments rotated providing an opportunity to become leaders. In addition, Makarenko created individualized *besprizornik* assignments, “selected with regard to the uniqueness and potentialities of each individual” (Gordon, 1978, p. 79). Thus, the integrity and identity of the individual *besprizornik* was fostered through their democratic participation in the construction of the communal experience, Gorky Colony.

Work provided a cohesive basis for the Gorky Colony. In conjunction with the teachings of Lenin, Makarenko coordinated classroom teaching with work on behalf of the common work of the people (Monoszon, 1978, p. 18). Socially useful work, according to Makarenko, facilitated the development of a Socialist consciousness as well as the development of a Socialist consciousness as well as the development of joyful respect for and obedience to authoritative leadership. *Besprizorniki* were responsible for their own work activities including the distribution of profits, setting wages, and the organization of consumption. By participating in cooperative activities such as labor, Makarenko believed the *besprizornik* would acquire an appreciation and willingness to enter into the larger society’s communist mode of life.

According to Makarenko, discipline was the result of “correct education” (Yarmachenko, 1978, Page 90). In Makarenko’s educational system, the virtues of duty and discipline took the place of “interest” of other contemporary experimental educators. The needs of the group were transmitted to the individual members of the group, who in turn took on themselves the responsibility of meeting these needs, thereby disciplining themselves. Thus, “peer pressure” from the collective contributed to discipline processes, the individual acted in accordance with the collective’s policy. Although Gorky Colony was impelled by a

different social vision from Lane's Little Commonwealth, both schools sought to mold a model a future citizen by providing appropriate experience in self-governance. In this respect, Neill's work differed from Montessori, Lane, and Makarenko who drew their populations from the lower rungs of the social order. He also was reluctant to enunciate a specific social ideology. A.S. Neill (1960) maintained that the aim of life is to find happiness. Consequently, he understood his primary job as "not the reformation of the society but the bringing of happiness to some few children" (Pages 23-24).

Summerhill's student body comprised about forty-five boys and girls, ages four through sixteen. Neill believe that children would be able to resolve most of their difficulties themselves. To Neill, that process of resolution defined education as a continuous process of self-creation. A child's self-creation at Summerhill was bound by Neill's axiom (1960): he or she could do as they pleased as long as it was neither dangerous to him or herself nor annoying the freedom of others.

Summerhill had a life and purpose of its own (Stewart, 1968, p. 292). Neill accepted Lane's fundamental premise of "being on the side of the child", but Summerhill also was designed to foster a democratic "way of life" (Hemmings, 1972, Page 174), organized around rearing happy children and developing communal relationships. In Summerhill, the rights of the individual child were bound by the demands of the democratic, self-governing society (Neill, 1972). Like the boundaries of a child's self-creation, a child's actions in the pursuit of freedom could be interfered with by the community if said actions encroached upon the freedom of others. Thus, if Jared throws rocks which may endanger others, other children have the responsibility to stop him. In doing so, according to Neill, the children undergo a lesson in social education: as long as Jared is interfering with the freedom of others, the crowd is within its rights to restrain him.

Within the democratic context of Summerhill, student participation in activities such as the weekly General Assembly Meeting facilitated their development of characteristics such as acceptance of others, cooperation, justice, and sincerity as well as provided firsthand experience with democracy. Neill (1960) claimed that the educational benefit of "practical civics" (Page 55), known as the weekly General School Meeting, was of more value than a week's curriculum of courses. A genuine democracy, according to Neill, included relationships in which adults and children enjoyed equal status. As equals, adults were available to facilitate the natural development of the child but did not set the standards. In such an environment, Neill believed the child could attain an education whose end result would be a happy, balanced adult.

Summerhill provided self-government designed to facilitate experience with democracy and justice as well as communal responsibilities. According to Neill (1993), democracy should not wait until the age of voting; self-government was of "infinite value". Like other experimental schools, Summerhill's self-governing community tried to balance the rights of the individual and the community. Each member of the community, whether five or eighty-four, was permitted one vote in the weekly General Assembly Meeting wherein school and social policy was suggested, discussed and voted on (Neill, 1967, Page 37). Adult and child alike were subject to the rules passed by the General Assembly Meeting. According to Ray Hemmings (1972), the rules made by the children were "sacred to one another" (Page 76). Such high regard for their peers' rules led to greater observance of Summerhill's rules and regulations by the children. Punishment for breaking the rules resulted in fines. The General Assembly Meeting provided an arena for practical experience for cooperation, justice, public speaking, and personal development and socialization. The General Assembly Meeting helped create a self-governing democratic community spirit whose ultimate test of success was happiness of the individuals.



To Neill (1960), happiness is the aim of life, could be found through “true interest” (Page 24). In an atmosphere of love, joy, and complete approval, Summerhill provided an experience of democratic, self-government. A happy childhood, suggested Neill, was the basis for a happy adulthood imbued with self-reliance, self-respect, assertiveness, and independence (Neill, 1920). Neill offered no prescription for basic general education. He (1960) maintained that all children are “innately wise and realistic” (Page 4) and therefore, able to accept responsibility for their independence, their actions, as well as their academic and emotional development. Although Summerhill is often associated with the idea that children were simply allowed to do as they please (classes were optional), Neill actually was aiming to create a model community and a model citizen. Like Montessori, Makarenko, and Lane, he tried to provide the basis for self-discipline providing them with the opportunity to govern themselves in a school setting.

### **Conclusion: European Innovative Educators and Their Experimental Schools**

Educational innovators such as Montessori, Lane, Makarenko, and Neill provided an alternative response to authoritarian control as the basis of running a school. They assumed education to be an instrument of progressive change which could bring about a “new world”. Their schools sought to imbue the “new man” with characteristics of cooperation, activism, and a tenacious searching and experimenting. Their schools incorporated a miniature community in the interest of building new social and political order. Varying definitions of the new social and political order resulted in an assortment of experimental schools. Montessori envisioned a new social order through the release of human potentialities. A child educated by The Montessori Method would be self-directive as well as possess the vision to shape humanity’s destiny. Lane developed “a living community”, a micro-universe wherein members gained experience in the methods of democratic self-government. Makarenko molded his students to meet the needs of Communism. Neill’s cure for the sickness of society was allowing freedom for children to be themselves and to govern themselves. The development of character, suggested Neill, was more important than the ability to learn facts and figures.

Reverence for the child was central to these experimental educators. In different ways, they all sought to respect the child’s natural order of development. The Montessori Method is based on belief in the child’s creative potential, his or her drive to learn, and the child’s right to be treated as an individual. In The Little Commonwealth, Lane was always “on the side of the child”. He respected the child to the point that he looked to him or her to initiate methods in keeping with the child’s development. In addition, Lane claimed the children’s experience of providing for themselves contributed to a “good society”. Makarenko was guided by Gorky’s optimistic belief that in all men lies potential good. He refused to view any of the children in Gorky Colony as disturbed or delinquent. The chief feature of Summerhill is self-government but individual happiness was the ultimate goal. Everyone had equal rights, including the opportunity to vote at the parliament. The students are both ego-conscious and at the same time, community-conscious.

While it is difficult to create sweeping generalizations that apply to all of them, all four of these experimental educators had in common the assumption that education was the key to the attainment of democratic ideals. This would be achieved not so much by instructing them directly in these ideals as by creating a democratic school environment. These experimental educators, in varying degrees, were seeking to create a lived democracy in a school setting. In part, this entailed respecting each child’s distinctive individuality by attending to their natural order of development, but it also meant creating a sense of group solidarity through direction participation in decision-making and governance. In general, these were also the foundations which Korczak built his own experimental schools.

While there are obvious differences, Korczak was influenced by the same ideals that lay behind the work of Montessori, Lane, Makarenko, and Neill. In a sense these ideas were part of a European *Zeitgeist* that included a fundamentally optimistic view of human nature and a belief in the power of education to nurture and develop human capacity to the fullest. Out of the disillusionment that followed in the wake of World War One came the belief that a new education could address the failures in the human spirit that the War exposed. Under the right circumstances, a new democratic order would emerge out of a new education.

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## Miscellany

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