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The Head, Heart, and Hands

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The Head, Heart, and Hands

As I raked the dead grass of winter, a piece of paper scooted down our street, as often happens after the weekly trash pickup, especially when near gale force winds bear down on our little piece of prairie in early spring. I picked it up, and my heart sank as I read the worksheet of arithmetic exercises and fill-in-the-blank questions about charts and graphs. I often use the term “worksheet” when I discuss various rote means of instruction in my undergraduate history and philosophy of education class, supposing naïvely that such lifeless instruction is far away and forgotten. And yet here it was in my hands, complete with the teacher’s red-inked comments and check marks.

At this time in the semester, I share with my students why I think Pestalozzi is important, saying his name as if I am ordering a pasta dinner. Explaining his thoughts about the equal importance of the head, heart, and hands in learning, I declare that we focus too much on the head, the cognitive learning that can be measured through standardized assessments. I suggest that in spite of lip service by many of us about progressive educators from Maria Montessori to Howard Gardner, teaching about the heart, or even what Daniel Goleman calls “emotional intelligence,” still does not have its due as part of the trio.

As I spoke to my students recently about Pestalozzi, I thought about that worksheet and its confirmation that rote or at least routinized learning is still active in school curricula today. I found evidence that may help to counter this trend in the article by Rebecca Carver and Richard Enfield. These authors show us how Dewey’s philosophy is alive in the 4-H Youth Development Program. The first emblem for that organization was a three-leaf clover, standing for the head, heart, and hands. Only later was the fourth H added, initially signifying “hustle” but later changed to “health.” This contextual and holistic way of learning “in the field,” often with the “hands,” was an important practice in Dewey’s own laboratory school. It is instructive to see that Dewey’s work lives on in an agriculturally related activity outside of the school day.

Craig Kridel has compiled a series of essays written originally for a Romanian journal by that journal’s editor and several leaders of the John Dewey Society. These authors participated in the renewed popularity of Dewey in Romania for a new generation of educators in the post-Cold War era. Dewey’s work helped these educators see how schools could become sites for the exploration and renewal of democracy.

Such shared inquiry can be artistic too, of course. Patricia Goldblatt discusses

Dewey's esthetics and explores how "transformative experiences occur when people intuit new concepts that occasion seeing in valued ways." Matthew C. Flamm analyzes an abiding issue in democratic theory and practice when he argues that "conceptions of community after Dewey despair of an institutional means of recovering individuality, which is the central problem of democracy."

Though Robin Barrow's article does not discuss Dewey, his focus on the rank ordering of cultural achievements by Charles Murray, co-author of *The Bell Curve*, in his recent book, *Human Accomplishment: The Pursuit of Excellence in the Arts and Sciences, 800 BC to 1950* (2003) is an important critique of the way that pronouncements regarding culture can be made, ironically, in a cultural vacuum. Barrow argues that "nothing in Murray's lengthy book in fact relates to justification for any of the judgments." We round out the issue with a review by Shane Ralston of the Spanish translation of *The Public and Its Problems*.

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