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## Some Thoughts on John Dewey

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

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## Some Thoughts on John Dewey by Daniel Tanner, Rutgers University

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

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

## Fallacies and Failures of Dualistic Thinking

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

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

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

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

### ***Nature of the Learner***

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

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

### ***Transformation of the Curriculum into the Working Powers of Intelligence***

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

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

### ***Education and the American Creed***

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

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

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

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

**by William H. Schubert, University of Illinois-Chicago**

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