

In both excerpts of Dewey's *The School and Society*, Dewey depicted the school system as a tool to instruct students as one entity instead of individually. He emphasized the focus on listening versus discovering in schools. When he visited a dealer to inquire about desks and specific materials for "educational, artistic, and hygienic" purposes, the dealer says that "these are all for listening" when referring to the same materials (Dewey 31-32). Dewey pointed this out to the reader to guide us to the realization that schools are mass labeling aspects of schooling that should not be labeled but used as tools to guide the child to discovery and purposeful learning.

For a long time I hadn't understood exactly what we meant every time we talked about Dewey's 'democratic classroom' ideals. After reading these excerpts, I began to understand and really admire what Dewey put forth into the discussion on education. He said that "the moment children act they individualize themselves; they cease to be a mass and become the intensely distinctive beings that we are acquainted with out of school, in the home, the family, on the playground, and in the neighborhood" (Dewey 33). I really admired this observation because he hit the nail on the head as far as our ideals of critical pedagogy are concerned. He was truly an advocate for 'honoring their world' and having students be the guides of their own education. This statement really reflects the title of the book as well. He combined 'the school' and 'society' to signify that both should be examined side by side to honor the individuality of the child within their education.

In the second excerpt from Dewey's book, Dewey seemed to narrow his scope a bit more. He really emphasized the home and cultural life of the child and how that affects how and what they learn. As children come in to the classroom, they have already attained some knowledge and skills from living in a community and in a home. Dewey realized the importance of

recognizing this and drawing from students' previous knowledge as they learn in their classrooms. This again circles back to Dewey's perception of students being educated passively versus individually. I found it especially interesting when Dewey brought back the idea of "language instinct" from the first excerpt and how pointless recitation is within the classroom as compared to learning through experience (Dewey 43). He described this as the "simplest of social expression[s]" and only scraping the surface of helping students comprehend and gain ownership of knowledge (Dewey 43).

When it came to motivation in the classroom during this time period, Dewey agreed that "[discipline and character building]" were required within the process (Dewey 7). However, he combined these ideas with keeping the interests of students in mind. When teachers are using students' interests to help motivate them and give them the freedom to make decisions within their education, there is a difference between simply indulging their interests and using them as a directive education. If students have no direction when learning, they may never gain the important life skills that are needed to adapt to an ever changing society.

Nell Noddings outlined Dewey's model of problem solving in a helpful way, which I believe would point to a modern day school system similar to independent studies in college. She described how "thinking begins with a nagging sense that something is problematic, something is unsettled" (Noddings 29). Then the thinker has to create a plan to test a hypothesis. During each stage, "the thinker considers alternatives" (Noddings 29). Lastly, the plan must be enacted to produce results. Dewey's idea of allowing the student to make decisions lends itself to this problem solving model. If students are encouraged to think for themselves, create a plan and a question to answer, then they will truly gain their own knowledge. If we had a Dewey music school, I think there would be a huge amount of student directed music groups, peer

tutoring in courses, and diversity in education. The diversity would be created by the variety in student interests. Possibly curriculum and syllabi might be student creations to a certain extent.

#### References

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