

John dewey essay sample

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In his book, *Interest and Effort in Education*, John Dewey (2009) investigates education. John Dewey was not a man who was content to merely educate his students. He had the mind of a social scientist. He wanted to know how people learned, why people had certain interests, and why education was important. Dewey ultimately isolated two reasons for education that were important: society benefitted as did the individual student (Dewey, 2009).

Almost 100 years ago, Dewey realized that education needed to benefit both society and individual student. The long-term benefit of education, the good of society, was recognized by Dewey as being important. He saw the value that a good education had on society. He agreed that society did benefit if its citizens were educated. But Dewey also saw that the short-term benefit, and ensuing quality, of education, was equally as important. This short-term benefit was delivered through educators ensuring that their students were having classroom experiences that were immediately valuable and also enabled students to make valuable contributions to society (Neill, 2005b).

It was Dewey that was able to demonstrate to educators that the current methods of classroom instruction were too strict and authoritarian. Students were being taught basic knowledge and utilizing their lower level thinking skills, such as rote memorization. Students were not being taught or encouraged to actually think, or engage in the use of higher level thought processes. If students incorporated some of their experiences into their learning, they could then utilize some of their upper level thinking skills, therefore making learning a more valuable and worthwhile experience. This concept of self-driven thought was an entirely new experience. Students had to be taught how to think completely and freely because they had never

been able to structure their own learning experiences before, but these students became the foundation of student-driven educational philosophy (Neill, 2005a).

One of the greatest challenges of using a student-driven curriculum was teaching educators how to account for the differences between all of the students (Neill, 2005a). The curricula need to be flexible and not too focused on the content. However, there must be a balance as enough content must be present to maintain the focus of the educational program. It is in maintaining this balance that progressive and traditional education often finds the greatest trouble and compromise (Neill, 2005b).

Dewey is often thought to be an absolute supporter of progressive education. He, in fact, viewed going too far to the progressive side as irresponsible, enabling students to have too much freedom, not enough guidance, and lacking curriculum. Dewey did see the need for some traditional structure and order to be maintained (Neill, 2005a). Rather, once the curriculum is established, then there can be the freedom to add in students' personal experiences and the progressive element as one liberating element to the overall design process (Neill, 2005b).

Once the basics of traditional and progressive education have been explored, it is also important, when studying Dewey, to add in the additional concepts of continuity and interaction for a more complete understanding of his views of education. “ Continuity refers to the notion that humans are sensitive to (or are affected by) experience” (Neill, 2005a). When humans are born, they do not know much. Most of what they learn is learned through doing. This

concept can be transferred into the classroom learning experiences and by incorporating experiences learned outside of the classroom into the classroom through recollection and discussion. People learn through experience, not just through the transfer of knowledge.

Building on the concept of continuity, interaction “ explains how past experience interacts with the present situation, to create one’s present experience” (Neill, 2005b). We interpret our present situation based on our past experiences. This would include what is being learned in the classroom setting. A teacher who is resourceful will include these past experiences into present lessons.

John Dewey may be an educational philosopher and theorist from the early 20th century. Good educators, however, still refer to his teaching today. He was one of the first to want to understand how people learned. Those basic principles still guide some basic teaching principals today.

References

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