

Dewey theory of experience

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Dewey's philosophy of education is closely related to his unified philosophy of pragmatism and democracy, which can be simply expressed as experience = life = education, which sets the stage for this paper. According to Dewey, efficient education is contingent on an intrinsic understanding of human nature and how they have the experiences they do, as well as the unique differences between each student. It served a pragmatic purpose, of discovery learning for a moral purpose and the self actualization of the subject as an effective member of democratic society (Trifonas and Ghiraldelli, 2004).

His theory of education largely focused on the theme of active learning by experience, in which learning was a social, rather than an individual activity. Experience, in Deweyian terms, is "the undivided, continuous transaction or interaction between human beings and their environment", as stated by Ziniewicz (1999), further elaborating that it includes not only thought but also feeling, doing, suffering, handling, and perceiving. It follows then that continuity and interaction forms the core foundation for education for Dewey.

Continuity postulates that humans are affected by experience, and learn something from every experience, both positive and negative. Accumulated learned experience influences the nature of further experiences, and hence all experiences are inextricably linked, both past and potential. Hence, continuity is the concept that each experience is stored and carried on into the future. Interaction is a further elaboration of continuity, in the sense that it defines how past experiences interact with the current situation and affects one's present experience.

As such, any situation can be experienced differently due to unique individual differences, and thus it is critically important for educators to understand student past experiences as they have no control over it. As Dewey (1902) himself states, “ Learning is active. It involves reaching out of the mind. It involves organic assimilation starting from within...” (), and indeed, inquiry was one of the core concepts of Dewey’s unified philosophy. Dewey thought that inquiry being an observable behavioral process, training in its techniques is essential in the education (of young children), and especially in the course of life-long learning.

In this context, we can also easily understand Dewey’s strong opposition to institutionalized education, in which learning took place in an artificial educational environment, where pre-ordained knowledge was delivered, not inquired for and interacted with. In summary, Dewey believed that education should not be of facts and figures. Rather, education should teach skills and knowledge which can be fully integrated into their lives as humans and citizens (of a democratic society). It should broaden the intellect, and impart problem solving and critical thinking skills, as the earlier passage on inquiry demonstrates.

References

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