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## **The Shoulders of Giants and the Feat of Little People: An Intellectual Biographical Study of John Dewey**

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His work is far-reaching. His focus on experience, inquiry, and democracy has generated waves of profound influence on the educational community for over a century and has impacted education in both practical and theoretical ways. The person whose work I am acclaiming is John Dewey, philosopher, educator, writer and pragmatist. Dewey's unorthodox focus on social learning and reflective judgment has positioned him as a pioneer of a monumental educational revolution. Through the examination of Dewey's life and works, it is my hope to unpack and reveal his most significant educational ideas. Unlike many other forward-thinking educators, Dewey's work was respected just as much 100 years ago as it is today. Some of the major themes Dewey explores are: experimental inquiry, pragmatic instrumentalism, reflective learning, and social problem solving. This paper is a thematic investigation of John Dewey's major philosophical and pedagogical contributions. The format also includes a chronological narrative, which weaves together John Dewey's works, life events, and his influence on education. Also, incorporated is a brief literature review of Dewey's most noteworthy educational writings. The intent is to distill Dewey's major, systemic, and unwavering epistemological contributions.

### **Childhood and Early Adulthood (1859-1882)**

John Dewey was born on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1859 to Archibald and Lucina Dewey in Burlington, Vermont. His father was a successful entrepreneur in the grocery business. His mother was keen on self-reflection and religion. She was raised on a farm and held strong religious beliefs. In fact, she was identified by author Jay Martin (2002) as the "enemy of all frivolity" including drinking, playing pool, gambling, playing cards, or dancing (p. 21). With her strong sense of identity and retrospection Lucina encouraged similar traits in her children. In fact, she gave her son John a journal every year at Christmas time.

Dewey's scholarly interests were expansive and started at a very young age. Dewey was an avid reader throughout his youth (Martin, 2002). The reading provided an intellectual escape from his rapidly changing surroundings. One of the most significant changes occurring at that time was the growth of industry. The focus on industry mitigated educational enhancement efforts. As a result of the poor education Dewey experienced in school, he took his educational journey into his own hands. He read fervently and continued to expand his knowledge base in an independent and progressive way. Dewey's frustration with the formal education system reportedly served as a catalyst for his theoretical and practical work. Years later, Dewey's second wife, Roberta, speculated that his "interest in education was a reaction to his negative experiences in grammar and high school" (Martin, 2002, p. 36).

In his youth, John Dewey's maternal grandparents' farm provided an oasis. He visited the Vermont farm frequently. These visits sculpted his interest in "nature and the simpler forms of industry" (Martin, 2002, p. 14). Also, these early outdoor experiences forged a relationship that emerged frequently throughout his later educational and philosophical writings. Later in his life he frequented a country home in Nova Scotia and read and wrote outdoors. He composed several of his works and came up with quite a few ideas while interacting with nature.

After Dewey earned his Bachelor's degree, he quickly secured a high school teaching position. The position was in Oil City, Pennsylvania. This city was rapidly developing in order to keep up with the high demand for oil. Dewey worked this job for a couple of years.

However, his major passion during this time was philosophy. It is important to recognize that Dewey displayed a wide range of interests and intellectual pursuits. These interests ranged from physics and biology to religion and philosophy. Interestingly, his first published work was in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* (1882) and was entitled *The Metaphysical Assumptions of Materialism* (Dykhuizen, 1973).

### **Graduate School and Early Career (1882-1904)**

At the age of 23, Dewey started his graduate school journey at Johns Hopkins University. George Dykhuizen (1973) indicated that Dewey chose Johns Hopkins for graduate school because it had a reputation as the only institution in North America where opportunities for graduate study were comparable to European universities. Dewey found the rigor of Johns Hopkins challenging and invigorating. His dedication to the program was revealed through his academic tenacity. While he was there (1882-1884), he published three articles in addition to the completion of his dissertation. After earning his doctorate degree in 1884, Dewey was offered a position at the University of Michigan. This is where he began his intellectual journey as a professor, researcher, writer, and activist.

Dewey taught at the University of Michigan for ten years. While there, he published several of his articles and books and developed a deeper and more intentional focus on educational philosophy. In 1894, Dewey started his next job at the University of Chicago. There he established his world renowned laboratory school. The main impetus for the school, which was located right on the campus of the University of Chicago, was to put progressive educational ideas into action. The location made it a "learning" laboratory for professors, teachers, and students alike. The experimental school exclusively served elementary students. It started in 1896 with 16 students and two teachers. By 1902 it had 40 students and 23 teachers (Dykhuizen, 1973).

In response to the rapid industrial changes and educational shifts occurring in the early twentieth century, Dewey wrote two brief but powerful books: *The School and Society* and *The Child and the Curriculum*. These writings emerged from Dewey's reflection on his own experience at the laboratory school. Throughout these books, he maintains that it is important to treat the school as a community that reflects the processes occurring in the larger (out of school) society. He suggests that schools should focus on the needs of the students, not just the content, in order to encourage critical thinking in the students. In *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902), Dewey argues that an individual's direct experience grounds conceptual knowledge. He states that "...the connecting bonds of activity...hold together the variety of the student's personal experiences" (p. 6). Dewey critiques educational and philosophical dualisms such as the conflict between the child and the curriculum, interest versus discipline, practice versus theory, active learning versus passive receptivity in students, and more. He insists that good teaching is not an extrinsic focus on "external imposition" instead "it is freeing the life process for its own most adequate fulfillment" (p. 17). This freeing of the life process involves a unification of the parts of the educational system. In the *School and Society* Dewey (1899) suggests that effective education should "secure the unity of the whole" by recognizing that learning occurs both inside and outside of the school environment (p. 72). He contends that an isolation of the school is "isolation from life" and that it forces a child to "leave his mind behind" (pp. 75, 78). Dewey supports the development of a responsiveness, a hunger for learning, and a "vigor of thought and inquiry" (p. 112).

### **Columbia University (1905-1930)**

In 1904, Dewey decided to leave the University of Chicago. He chose to work next at Columbia University where he would finish out his collegiate teaching career. At Columbia University, Dewey set out to write a text book on education. Instead of writing a textbook, he wrote *Democracy and Education* (1916), one of his most significant contributions to educational philosophy. Some people call it his magnum opus, because of the way he articulated his educational theories. He insists that education should be aimed at the larger social purpose of enabling students to become effective members of a democratic society (Chiarelott, 1983a). He argues that an emphasis on applying democratic characteristics in the educational process will encourage growth, enhance experience, and promote activity.

Dewey maintains that democracy is a way of life, “controlled by a working faith in the possibilities of human nature” (Ziniewicz, 2001, p. 1). He suggests that relevant learning opportunities promote student responsibility and allow students to engage in activities that encourage the development of their civic responsibility. He proposes that these democratic characteristics will assist in the progression of both self and society. He believes that the momentum of a democratic classroom espouses the benefits of experience. Dewey held that the process of experience is capable of being educative and that faith in democracy is easily united with faith in experience and education (Chiarelott, 1983b).

### Dewey’s theory of Experience and Dualisms (1925-1938)

In 1929 Dewey launched his “experiential education” trilogy with the book *Experience and Nature* (followed by *Experience in Education* and *Art and Experience*). In this book, he declares that everyday experience is a critical component of an effective philosophical method. He asserts that, “knowledge, characterizes intelligently directed experience, as distinct from mere casual and uncritical experience” (p. v). This notion of “intelligently directed experience” emerges from Dewey’s pragmatic instrumentalism. He argues for the validity of an intentional and dynamic pedagogy rooted in meaningful experience.

Experience was the lynchpin for Dewey’s educational philosophy. Dykhuizen (1973) maintains that “one doctrine Dewey sought especially to clarify and establish was that reality is to be identified with experience” (p. 124). In *Experience and Nature* Dewey claims that everyday experience is of “irreducible importance” to philosophical method and proclaims the “value of the commonplace” (p. 249). He contends that philosophy’s task is to create and promote “a response for concrete experience and its potentialities” (p. 249). He measures philosophical quality by its *functional fitness*. The *functional fitness* of a theory reveals itself in practice. An idea is considered more functionally fit in accordance with its capacity to resolve a given situation (Alexander, Dewey, & Hickman, 1998).

*Art and Experience* (1934) emerged from Dewey’s series of ten lectures he gave at Harvard throughout the winter and spring of 1931. These lectures were sponsored by the William James Lectureship and Dewey was the first appointee (Dykhuizen, 1973). One of the threads woven throughout the book *Art and Experience* centers on the wholeness of an uninterrupted experience. He later refers to the notion of a complete experience as “integrated experiences” (Dewey, 1934, p. 55). These complete experiences contain a beginning, a continuous development, consummation, and an emotional satisfaction resulting from the experience’s “movement toward intended fulfillment” (Dykhuizen, 1973, p. 259). Dewey condenses these stages into three, and refers to them as “inception, development, fulfillment” (1934, p. 55). In the third chapter of *Art as Experience*, Dewey sets out to describe what it means to “have an experience” and provides several examples that describe the universal characteristics that make up virtually any experience.

Dewey argues that an “ounce of experience is worth more than a ton of theory” (1981, p. 499). Eldridge (2000) explores the concept of intelligence within Dewey’s experiential framework. He says “Indeed intelligence, properly understood, was the employment of mental products as means to the realization of one’s ends” (p. 65). Eldridge continues to explore Dewey’s notion of this self-actualization, by saying that “Knowledge is instrumental to the enrichment of immediate experience through the control over action that it exercises” (as quoted in Eldridge, p. 65). Dewey insists that experience is filled with products from the past. He asserts that:

Experience is already overlaid and saturated with the products of the reflection of past generations and by-gone ages. It is filled with interpretations, classifications, due to sophisticated thought, which have become incorporated into what seems to be fresh naive empirical material. It would take more wisdom than is possessed by the wisest historical scholar to track all of these absorbed borrowings to their original sources. (as quoted in Miettinen, 2000, p. 63)

Dewey (1929) continues his introduction to experiential education by explaining the utility of philosophy in practical life situations. “Philosophy, then, is a generalized theory of criticism. Its ultimate value for life-experience is that it continuously provides instruments for the criticism of those values—whether of beliefs, institutions, actions or products—that are found in all aspects of experience” (p. ix).

This idea of philosophy as an instrument for living and critical thinking sets the stage for his forthcoming theoretical footwork. Dewey asserts that life itself is a subject-matter, the “traits possessed by the subject-matters of experience are genuine...They are found, experienced, and are not to be shoved out of being by some trick of logic” (Dewey, 1929, p. 2). Dewey insists that physical experiences are just as relevant to the construction of philosophic theory as are intellectual experiences.

He suggests that the “commonplace” is a relevant contributor even to the most profound “philosophical speculation[s]” (McDermott, 1981, p. 249). In addition, he explores the idea of the indeterminate and uncertain situations. He contends that uncertainty is responsible for inquiry, which is a central component of the experiential learning model (Priest & Gass, 1997).

In the realm of dualisms, it is interesting to note that Dewey insists there should be a balance between primary experiences (action) and secondary experiences (reflection). One of his overarching educational contentions is the idea that theory and practice need to be united. He argues that an educator should be able to identify what would work best for a particular educative situation and adapt the lesson to match that need. Dr. Jasper Hunt explores Dewey’s philosophy and its connections to the philosophical underpinnings of educational theory and practice. Hunt (1995) states that, “Dewey rejects the [dualistic] idea that the world is either in a state of total flux or of total being” (p. 25). Hunt explains that Dewey refers to “both epistemological systems as falling under the heading of the *fallacy of selective emphasis*” (p. 25, emphasis added). The fallacy of selective emphasis means that it is unwise to hold tightly to just one idea because it can obscure a person’s ability to see things from other perspectives. Dewey suggests that a consequence of committing the fallacy of selective emphasis is throwing out the baby with the bathwater. He states, “There is always the danger in a new movement that in rejecting the aims and methods of that which it would supplant, it may develop its principles negatively rather than positively and constructively” (Dewey, 1938, p. 20). Dewey also rejects the “division of everything into nature and experience, of experience into practice and theory, art and science, of art into useful and fine, menial and free” (Dewey, 1981, pp. 300-301). Dewey’s focus on the significance of wholeness persisted throughout his entire career.

Again, in 1938 Dewey explores the integration of thought and action. He posits yet another attack on dualisms in his book *Experience and Education* (1938). This book addresses the misinterpretations that visionary reformists had made based on Dewey’s philosophy and earlier works. Dewey starts *Experience and Education* by stating that “mankind likes to think in terms of extreme opposites. It is given to formulating its beliefs in terms of Either-Ors” (p. 17). Essentially, he expands upon his alliance with an epistemological middle ground. He believes that unity is essential for effective education and that creating a myopic system that is either founded completely in a “traditional” or all “progressive” approach does not serve anyone’s interest. This theme of countering dualisms persists throughout all of Dewey’s writings in education, philosophy, and psychology.

### **On Activism**

Dewey’s views on education are reflected in his activism. He believes it is vital for the curriculum “to represent and present, with a certain degree of symmetry, all the intrinsic factors of human experience” (Kliebard, 2004, p. 55). Essentially, Dewey suggests that education needs to be relevant and congruent with the learner’s experiences. Jim Garrison (1997) says, “According to Dewey, all that we will ever have or know arises out of every day practical experience, and even the most abstract of theoretical inquiries must return there for final adjudication” (p. 90).

Dewey was an activist intellectual, and his practice paralleled his theory. Marilyn Much (2006) presents several examples of Dewey’s activism. Dewey lived his ideas. He was a social activist who marched in the streets to champion women’s right to vote and other civil rights. He co-founded the American Civil Liberties Union to protect constitutional rights and was a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. (Much, 2006, p. 2)

Dewey’s activism serves as an inspiration across the academy and this inspiration has survived for over a century. The anti-intellectual critics at the turn of the twentieth century were refuted by Dewey’s work.

Maxine Greene sees Dewey as practicing education with “a stress on active learning, collaboration, community, transaction, imagination, the capacity to look at things as if they could be otherwise” (2001, p. 169). Many of Greene’s writings and practices are based off of John Dewey’s work. Dewey’s notion of the “active scholar” suggests that he does not isolate himself. He says, “All is grist that comes to his [the intellectual activist’s] mill, and he does not limit his supply of grain to any one fenced-off field” (1931, p. 34). He maintains that even experiences or ideas that seem irrelevant can generate valuable knowledge. This notion crystallizes the significance of a cross-discipline scholarly orientation.

### Dewey’s Theory of Living

John Dewey felt obligated to promote democracy in the cultural context. “For Dewey, as for many other progressive figures, the job of the American intellectual was to attempt to address these ills [urbanization, industrialization and economic centralization, immigration and more] with the tools of research and publication that were becoming increasingly available” (Campbell, 1995, p. 12). Dewey’s dedication to civic action reflects his commitment to the practicality of theory. He endorses the enhancement of society through the instruments of scholarly activity. Dewey constructs his social philosophy around the notion of contributing to the “common good.”

His social philosophy is an attempt to lay out in a complete and coherent form a perspective that sees democratic society as a cooperative undertaking of interrelated efforts to advance the common good, that sees institutions as social habits that are more or less adequate to our situations, and that sees social reconstruction as the process of attempting to recognize the current institutionalized ills and to correct them. (Campbell, 1995, p. 12)

Dewey maintains that life’s primary goal is to live more fully and argues that “the goal of democracy is to increase the number of full lives” (Campbell, 1995, pp. 12-13). Dewey (1919) states that education’s aim is “not preparation for living, but for noble living” (p. 12). He supports a fluid and energizing curriculum that recognizes the educational trajectory of experience and the vitality of deliberate reflection. The evolution of Dewey’s philosophy and practice reflects his dynamic and expansive passion for practicality. Also, Dewey recognizes the practicality of emotion. Jay Martin (2002) claims that Dewey’s “main entry into the life of thought was through his emotions” (p. 3).

Early in his career (1880s and 1890s) Dewey enthusiastically supported the philosophy of German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, which maintained that “the world of fact does not stand apart from thought, but is itself defined within thought as its objective manifestation” (Fiesner, Dowden, & Field, 2006). In the early 1900s, Dewey began to reject this epistemology due to his new found allegiance to scientism. Dewey’s scientism is rooted in the scientific process and is deemed incompatible with Hegelism by various educational historians (Granger, 2003). In an effort to unify Hegelism and scientism, Dewey carved out a new philosophy that he coined *instrumentalism*. “Instrumentalism holds that the various modes and forms of human activity are instruments developed by human beings to solve multiple individual and social problems. Since the problems are constantly changing, the instruments for dealing with them must also change” (The Columbia Encyclopedia, 2004, p. 1). Furthermore, Instrumentalism advocated the benefits of truth as an instrument used by human beings to solve their problems (Chiarelott, 1983b).

In the realm of Instrumentalism, Dewey’s “research show[s] him that ideas [can serve as potential] tools to improve our situations -- and they're not set in stone or handed down” (Much, 2006, p. 1). This notion of *ideas as tools* varies from Dewey’s idea presented in the book entitled *The Way Out of Educational Confusion* (1931). In this book, he maintains that traditional education methodology consisted of “[students] who stand at the end of a pipeline receiving material conducted from a distant reservoir of learning” (p. 34). Dewey insists that instead of the traditional focus, education should focus on building upon student experiences (Much, 2006).

### Dewey’s Perspective on Democracy in the Education Process

Dewey thinks that the school should be an inclusive and supportive learning environment. He also believes that the school should serve as a “miniature community where the child lived, participated, and contributed—where, in effect, the child’s emerging individuality was at one and the same time used to enrich the social community and tested against the dictates of social reality” (Spring, 1985, p. 54).

Dewey emphasizes the significance of democracy within the arena of problem solving. He proposes a social learning model that emphasizes the strengths and abilities within a group. He believes that human interaction is critical for appropriate human development.

In the beginning of *Democracy and Education* (1916), Dewey lays the foundation for his theory of supporting a democratic curriculum. “The following pages embody an endeavor to detect and state the ideas implied in democratic society and to apply these ideas to the problems of the enterprise of education” (p. v). Dewey uses this momentum to articulate the potency of introducing freedom to the educational matrix. Liberalism is committed to an end that is at once enduring and flexible: the liberation of individuals so that realization of their capacities may be the law of their life. It is committed to the use of freed intelligence as the method of directing change. (Dewey, 1935/1963, p. 56)

This notion of freeing intelligence proves to be paramount throughout Dewey’s work and intellectual journey. Dewey was not willing to be associated with only one particular school of thought throughout his journey. He situated himself where he could be attentive to multiple perspectives. He believes that as soon as a person rigidly endorsed a certain belief (philosophically) he no longer has a practical picture of the solution.

### Dewey’s Theory in Practice

As an Instrumentalist, Dewey sees the developed educational methodologies as a valuable resource. The existing curriculum interest groups “represented the raw material from which he would [later] forge his own theory of curriculum” (Kliebard, 2004, p. 26). Dewey rarely declares a concrete position on an idea.

...Dewey’s own position in critical matters of theory and doctrine actually represented a considerable departure from the main line of any of the established movements. As such, he was not so much a central figure in one or another of these groups as someone who reinterpreted and reconstructed certain of their ideas, and, consequently, became identified in a way with all of them. In the long run, Dewey’s position in curriculum matters is best seen, not as directly allied to any of the competing interest groups, but as something of an integration and, especially, a transformation of the ideas they were advocating. (Kliebard, 2004, p. 26)

Dewey’s reconstruction is both sophisticated and subtle in design. As a result, his ideas were, “...frequently perverted when attempts were made to translate them into practice and that only during the period between 1896 and 1904, when Dewey himself undertook to test his theory by establishing the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago, do we get a reasonably accurate picture of how his curriculum would work in practice”(Kliebard, 2004, p. 27).

After Dewey’s initial laboratory school project, his notion of a democratic classroom and experiential education was misinterpreted. Kliebard (2004) points out that even though Dewey was a world class scholar that surpassed the fame of well known athletes, “his actual influence on the schools of the nation has been [misunderstood]” (p. 27). It is important, therefore, that educational theorists and practitioners develop a holistic understanding of his work. Dewey articulates the differences between theory and practice and examines two modes of practice.

There is then an empirical truth in the common opposition between theory and practice, between the contemplative, reflective type and the executive type, the “go-getter,” the kind that “gets things done”.

It is, however a contrast between two modes of practice. One is the pushing, slam-bang, act-first and think-afterwards mode, to which events may yield as they give way to any strong force. The other mode is wary, observant, sensitive to slight hints and intimations; perhaps intriguing, timid in public and ruthless in concealed action; perhaps over-cautious and inhibited, unduly subject to scruples, hesitations...perhaps achieving a balance between immediately urgent demands and remoter consequences, consistent and cumulative in action. (quoted in Miettinen, 2000, pp. 314-315)

Dewey is alluding to the primary and secondary experiences that he explained more thoroughly earlier in his career. In the *Child and the Curriculum* (1902), Dewey describes an inherent flaw in the traditional education paradigm.

He urges people to remove the “prejudicial notion that there is some gap in kind between the child’s experience and the various forms of subject-matter that make up the course of study” (p. 11). Dewey expands on his notion of experience, stating that it “reaches down into nature; it has depth. It also has breadth and to an indefinitely elastic extent. It stretches. That stretch constitutes indifference” (Dewey as quoted in Miettinen, 2000, p. 252).

Dewey posits that a central tenet in education is to promote continuity and to fight fragmentation. He suggests that a major part of this continuity is found in social interaction: “Education in its broadest sense is the means of this social continuity of life” (1916, p. 3). Dewey sees the education and the inquiry process as being inextricable. He defines inquiry as “the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole” (1938b, p. 108). He suggests that our lives move forward in a process of inquiry and that this very inquiry is what leads us to truth. In terms of the starting point of inquiry, Dewey holds that all inquiry begins in doubt and that doubt is a dynamic, “embodied and impassioned condition, a state of need and active seeking” (Garrison, 1997, p. 94).

## Research Method

For this paper, I began by reviewing Dewey’s major works: *The Child and the Curriculum*, *The School and Society*, *Democracy and Education*, *Experience and Nature*, *Art and Experience*, *The Way Out of Educational Confusion*, and *Experience and Education*. I also examined a number of his biographies. These biographies included: *The Education of John Dewey*, *John Dewey: His Contribution to the American Tradition*, *Understanding John Dewey*, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey*, and *Transforming Experience: John Dewey’s Cultural Instrumentalism*. In addition to looking at his books, I did several GAILILEO and web-based searches reviewing articles related to Dewey’s theories and his life. I also contacted the Dewey Center at Southern Illinois University. I was able to correspond via e-mail and phone with this program. The Dewey Center is an internationally known clearinghouse and archive of Dewey-based research materials. The Dewey center was instrumental in the grand task of putting all of Dewey’s works together in the digital format and the printed format.

One of the primary emphases of my investigation was on Dewey’s theory of experience. I chose this emphasis due to his significant impact on the notion of experiential education. It was intellectually stimulating to consider Dewey’s impact on the educational world. It was also interesting to examine Dewey’s dynamic shifts of thinking throughout his career.

## My Analysis of Dewey

I find Dewey’s pragmatic and experiential approach to theory and practice inspirational and insightful. His contributions to the philosophical, theoretical, and educational worlds are incalculable. There are many educational programs today that utilize Dewey’s notion of the experiential model as the cornerstone of their approach. These include programs like the Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound Schools, Project Adventure, and many alternative programs. I see the most significant element of Dewey’s work to be its ability to stand the test of time. His theories are as relevant today as they were in the late 1800s. His passion and charisma are speculated to be contributors to his popularity and time honored educational concepts. His ideas on education will continue to enrich the classrooms of the future and the present for years to come.

From the perspective of accuracy, it is important to recognize that reading a limited amount of Dewey leads to a fragmented understanding of his work. I would suggest that a majority of the criticism surrounding Dewey’s work comes from people’s incomplete understanding of his theory. It is important for scholars to develop a more comprehensive understanding of Dewey’s work. For example, many proponents of progressivism describe Dewey strictly as a progressive educator. However, Dewey believed that there is strength in the union of traditional and progressive doctrines. Similarly, many educational programs attach Dewey’s name to their mission and vision. Yet a majority of these programs base this association strictly on one of his works without considering his multi-faceted approach to education. More research on Dewey leads to a more functional knowledge of his contributions to the field of curriculum studies. It is important to view any criticisms of Dewey’s work judiciously.

An accurate understanding of Dewey's sophisticated theories involves much studying. Although I have read many of Dewey's works, there are many that I have not. Therefore, I have been careful to not make any broad generalizations or criticisms before reading all of his works.

Dewey's influence on the curriculum field is hard to quantify. However, it is believed that the Curriculum Studies reconceptualization movement is founded on the work of philosophical giants such as John Dewey (PC, William Reynolds, November 3, 2006). This makes it quite a feat for the "little people" like graduate students or educators new to the field to live up to Dewey's reputation. Educational philosophers continue to examine Dewey's notion of experience and experimentation. Several writers have attempted to distill his notion of experiential and reflective learning. Curriculum scholars who investigate Dewey's work contribute tremendously to the expansion and improvement of the educational field.

Dewey's message holds a powerful integration of dualisms and attacks the central paradigm of his time, the authoritarian teaching approach. He developed a framework for a practical and theoretical educational approach. His philosophy considers the intersections of experience and theory. He maintains that inquiry-based knowledge leads to transformation. His life work reflects his passion and his passion reveals his character. Overall, his theoretical underpinnings have sustained several years of critique and flourished in the realm of actual use.

## Conclusion

There is not only one way to summarize Dewey's multi-faceted approach to curriculum theory. Although his work is commonly misunderstood, his philosophy is found throughout the works of numerous curriculum theorists. Dewey took many risks and held that being a philosopher took guts (Martin, 2002). His educational theory is quite different from that of his contemporaries. He is known within education as "the father of the progressivism movement." However, Dewey's contribution to the realm of curriculum studies extends much further and broader than progressivism. His focus on the morphology and transformational capacities within experience are becoming more and more accepted in the curriculum field.

Dewey's belief that life itself was educational encouraged a fundamental shift in curriculum theory and practice. This shift went on to influence the reconceptualization movement. I chose to investigate John Dewey because of his impact upon the recently instated reconceptualization movement within the realm of curriculum studies. This paper utilized a mixed methods investigation of Dewey's works and life. This included a chronology that extended from his early childhood to the latter part of his collegiate teaching career. Also, this study examined several themes within Dewey's works. Finally, I composed an analysis of his work and described the research methodology that was implemented. Dewey's profound impact in the educational world is traced to his charisma and his intellect. These characteristics are robust features throughout the landscape of his personal life and professional career. He supports a pragmatic and experiential learning process over an authoritative and regimented one. Dewey's willingness to recognize that all theory is grounded in experience exemplifies his philosophical integrity and intellectual pluralism.

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