

PREFACE

This volume of *Educational Change* is organized around the educational thought of John Dewey following a cue from our association's theme for the 1999 meeting at SUNY Oswego. The officers of the N.Y.S.F.E.A. reasoned that this would be an appropriate way to mark the 140th anniversary of the birth (1859) of America's leading educational thinker. It is also a testament to John Dewey's significance and enduring influence.

The papers collected in this volume reflect the views and responses by scholars to some contemporary problems and recent events in our social and educational landscape. All these essays take seriously Dewey's conviction that the education of the individual is primarily a social affair and is best understood in the context of the individual's experiences. The academic disciplines from this perspective provide us with a series of experiences which noteworthy human beings have found useful and imbued with special significance. It is no less the case with our many social institutions; these or part of these may become dull and may even cease to fulfill their intended purposes. However, at one time these experiences and institutions must have enjoyed a special meaning which John Dewey privileged with the designation of "an experience." This designation is a qualitative consideration which for Dewey characterizes all human experiences at their best. The fact that most of our actions lack this qualitative integrity that Dewey associated with the artistic as well as with the "religious" (contrasted to "religions") is a sign that we live in a world organized along the unfortunate traditional dualisms of means and ends, matter and form, substance and process, etc. For Dewey an appropriate accounting of the facts would reveal these as mere intellectual distinctions which give us only aspects or fragments of experience, however useful these are, they are still distortions. In short, such divisions taken literally would commit what A. N. Whitehead has called the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness," i.e. substituting an abstraction for the actual concrete experience. Dewey no less than Whitehead insists on the recovery of "lived experience" as the central foundation of all philosophical thought and consequently, all human affairs, and espe-

cially educational affairs.

The above brief yet simplistic overview will help to introduce the contributions in the present volume of *Educational Change*. The first, "Spiritual Education as Poetic Creation in Dewey's Religious Humanism," is the 1999 keynote address to the N.Y.S.F.E.A. at SUNY Oswego delivered by Dr. James Garrison from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The most salient feature of the article is the focus on Dewey's fundamental philosophical center which tries to salvage individual experience from the slings and arrows of the present industrial and economic order. Professor Garrison suggests that all human experiences at their best exhibit an integrative quality which he calls spiritual. Further, this qualitative character is similar to the phenomena which all successful artistic creations exhibit. Consequently, all the arts when informed by the ancient Greek notion of *Poiesis*, understood as "creation, making or calling into existence" are spiritual. This creative and integrative phenomena cannot be explained away through our ordinary relational methods. For Dr. Garrison this suggests a corollary to his main thesis, i.e., spirituality is more important than rationality. Regarding this corollary I am not as confident, as Dr. Garrison seems to be, that it is a correct rendering of Dewey's view. I suspect that Dewey would have viewed the distinction between rationality and spirituality as primarily formal. In the chapter, "Having an Experience," of *Art as Experience* Dewey states that, "It is not possible to divide in a vital experience the practical, emotional, and intellectual from one another and to set the properties of one over against the characteristics of the other." [1] Perhaps Dr. Garrison's use of rationality merely refers to reasons and structures that drive the present industrial economic order.

The second essay, "Rescuing Dewey from Anthropocentrism" by Professor Tom Colwell from New York University, is a response to Dewey critics such as C. A. Bowers. Dr. Colwell characterizes Bowers as claiming that Dewey's view of science "cannot escape the Western habit of aligning itself with rampant technological and economic progress." [2] Consequently, Bowers is suggesting that Dewey's attempt to overcome the dualistic implications with respect to differing cultures is mired in the Western historical context from which Dewey articulated his views.

Accordingly, Bowers contends that Dewey discards or excludes non-Western views and practices.

From here, Professor Colwell goes on to outline a possible defense of Dewey against Bowers' charges. Colwell's essay is a fair-minded presentation of both the strengths and weaknesses to which Dewey's language lends itself. For example, Dr. Colwell points out Dewey's ambiguous use of the term "nature" with its dual connotations one which includes humans and one which excludes humans. He suggests that a sharper presentation of Dewey's scientific methodology along with a modest program of language reform would go some way in correcting the charges of anthropomorphism made against Dewey by critics such as Bowers. This in Colwell's view is a two part process. The first part focuses on the concept of "transaction" which Dewey together with Arthur Bentley introduced as a way of overcoming the dualistic charges. But this alone is inadequate in overcoming the anthropomorphic problem and consequently leads Colwell to the second part of his proposal, the use of the term "earth-system" instead of "nature." Through these suggestions he hopes to avoid the dualistic and anthropomorphic difficulties. However, Colwell seems well aware that his suggestions do not put an end to the problem, they are offered as constructive efforts in accordance with Dewey's spirit against dogmatism of any kind, be they of an a priori or a teleological kind. Dewey's voice rings clear throughout his many writings as it does in the following from *The Quest for Certainty*. It is clear that all insight, rules, principles, etc. are viewed as flexible and tentative:

"these [standards, principles, rules], and all tenets and creeds about good and goods, would be recognized to be hypotheses. Instead of being rigidly fixed, they would be treated as intellectual instruments to be tested and confirmed – and altered – through consequences effected by acting upon them. They [standards, principles, rules, tenets, creeds, goods] would lose all pretense of finality – the ulterior source of dogmatism." [3]

The above captures Dewey's insistence on "treating any and all cultures with reasonable impartiality," since all ideas including those that form the foundations of cultures have the status of hypotheses. Whatever difficulties one may encounter in the historical process, in principle, Dewey insists that all cultural foundations have a hypothetical status. In a parallel fashion Colwell tries to address the human and non-human distinction. However, this kind of dualism is a far more difficult problem, but Colwell's flexible approach and appreciation of the linguistic nuances goes some way in developing an attitude of mind through which one may approach the divide with the more inclusive concept of earth systems.

A similar attitude of mind surfaces in the essay, "Conduct and Culture: Dewey and Cassirer," by Professor Thora I. Bayer from Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans. In it she provides an analysis of Dewey's concept of "habit" and Cassirer's concept of "symbolic form," which suggests that Cassirer's *Essay on Man* and Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct* complement each other and may be viewed as a common enterprise. Dr. Bayer argues that out of this common enterprise one may elicit principles of general education. Loosely, Cassirer's symbolic forms seem to correspond to the disciplines that commonly form a basic curriculum at many of our institutions of higher learning, i.e., myth, religion, language, art, history, science, technology, economics, law and morals; whereas, Dewey's habits are the organized and settled behaviors that collectively comprise customs. Dr. Bayer argues that Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct* may be viewed as forming a social psychology of conduct undergirding Cassirer's concept of culture articulated in his *Essay on Man*.

Professor Bayer's essay is intriguing and suggestive and I hope she will provide us with an additional study of the connection between habits and symbolic forms and address the ontological status of Cassirer's symbolic forms. This should shed light on the critical question: Are symbolic forms patterns that occur in all cultures? Further, a discussion of Dewey's habits along similar lines is equally as significant. Taking account of the fact that habits change over time as well as the fact that

habits cease to fulfill their intended consequences should have a bearing on the total analysis. These considerations are crucial in working out the principles of general education.

These ruminations bring one to the kinds of concerns and issues raised by Dr. Lee Fleischer from Brooklyn College, City University of New York, in his article, "Reflections on Teaching a Core Course: Speaking Post-Structurally of Dewey and Mead." Professor Fleischer's comments revolve around the degree of discrepancy between the paradigms (structural-functional, social conflict, and symbolic interaction) found in the core course's required text [These United States (College of Staten Island, CUNY)] and the actual concrete experience of his students ("recent immigrants who had difficulty speaking English, African-American and Hispanic students, and poor or struggling middle-class white Italian, Jewish, and Irish Americans").[4] By examining the discrepancy between these paradigms and his students' lived experience Dr. Fleischer along with his students found the text's guiding assumptions to be biased towards a structural-functional model. Further, the text discredited the social conflict model and collapsed the symbolic interactive model into the larger structural-functional one. Accordingly, the text, for the most part, constructed the individual's experiences along the lines of the established norms as defined by the dominant groups.

It is Fleischer's view that the text's guiding assumptions fail to do justice to the individual's experienced subjectivity. Thus the experienced conflicts, mixed loyalties within the individual within the groups and within the subgroups to which the individual belongs and in which the individual participates are distorted. He further suggests that the divisions and fragmentations that burden the self may be better appreciated and uncovered when approached from the perspective and language of the post-structural theorists (Lacan, Pecheux, and Foucault). From these considerations, he further suggests that Dewey fails to capture these distortions because he remains "confined within a stable notion of the self as self-consistent, grounded on dominant group norms representing business, technology and science interests." [5] Consequently, for Fleischer, Dewey does not "describe a self that is crossed, "shot through" by conflict, contradiction, and co-option of the dominant group, breaking apart its unified sense of self." [6]

It is puzzling that Fleischer finds Dewey's analysis with respect to the self, classes and hegemony lacking. Many passages in Dewey's work *Human Nature and Conduct* will force one to reconsider Fleischer's contention. The following from the "Introduction" to *Human Nature and Conduct* speak to the issue:

"We are forced therefore to consider the nature and origin of that control of human nature with which morals has been occupied. And the fact which is forced upon us when we raise this question is the existence of classes. Control has been vested in an oligarchy. Indifference to regulation has grown in the gap which separates the ruled from the rulers. Parents, priests, chiefs, social censors have supplied aims, aims which were foreign to those upon whom they were imposed, to the young, laymen, ordinary folk; a few have given and administered rules, and the mass have in a passable fashion and with reluctance obeyed." [7]

"All action is an invasion of the future of the unknown. Conflict and uncertainty are ultimate traits." [8]

In the above there is a clear recognition of the hegemonic character of the social order no less than the existence of classes. Further, Dewey is aware of the multiplicity of loyalties and demands from numerous quarters (Fleischer's groups and subgroups) which the self confronts in the transactions of every day life. Many passages throughout Dewey's writings such as the following from the chapter "Custom and Morality" in *Human Nature and Conduct* confirm it:

"For segregated classes develop their own customs, which is to say their own working morals... But mobility invades society. War, commerce, travel, communication, contact with the thoughts and desires of other classes, new inventions in productive industry, disturb the settled distribution of customs. Congealed habits thaw out, and a flood mixes things once separated." [9]

“Today such a conflict occurs between propertied classes and those who depend upon daily wages; between men and women; between old and young. . . . Never before have there been such occasions for conflict which are the more significant because each side feels that it is supported by moral principles.”[10]

It seems as though Dr. Fleischer is talking at cross purposes. I suspect Dewey would have agreed with Dr. Fleischer’s view of the divided, fragmented and even self-deluded self. However, Dewey’s project is to move beyond such an ineffective and manipulated self in order to find and provide the basis for effective and constructive action. As Dewey says, “Integration is an achievement rather than a datum.”[11]

The disordered, fragmented, conflicted self of everyday life is the “datum” Fleischer has found present in his students in the core course at CUNY College of Staten Island. If Dewey were alive today, most likely he would agree with Fleischer’s account. However, it is doubtful that Dewey “remains confined within a stable notion of the self as self-consistent, grounded on dominant group norms representing business, technology, and science interests”[12] as Fleischer claims. It seems, if I am not misled, Dewey’s entire drive is to overcome a static notion of the self, i.e. a self tied to fixed habits that result in specified routines such as those presently exhibited by business, technology, science and education, etc.

A view closer in spirit to Dewey is found in Professor David Granger’s account of his classroom experiences during his first semester (Fall 1999) at SUNY Geneseo. The self Dr. Granger finds in Dewey is a self that engages the world with stable but provisional habits. Because these stable habits are provisional they may be restructured in response to conflicts, changing conditions as well as changing priorities. It is on the energy of liberated impulses in times of conflicts and change combined with the use of intelligence that Dewey stakes his hopes for the improvement of human conditions. Dr. Granger expects decision makers to be mindful of such processes when they examine the policies, programs and practices of education programs. Using Landon Beyer’s

Creating Democratic Classrooms: The Struggle to Integrate Theory and Practice as a springboard Granger invokes Dewey's "cultivated naiveté" as a way for future teachers to seize events and situations to overcome the unhappy results of "unreflective socialization," the make-up of many a teacher's education program.

As he negotiated his way during his first semester at SUNY Geneseo Granger developed a sketch of his students: he found them reticent in the classroom, apolitical, uncomfortable with risks and experiencing intense anxiety taking tests. This should not come as a total surprise. I suspect there is a degree of discomfort with taking risks as well as with taking tests (another risk). The uncertainty of the outcome on which so much rides is enough to give one pause. Nonetheless, as Granger indicates, one must examine the landscape of education programs from the perspective that future teachers develop principles of growth and acquire habits (arts, skills) viewed as tentative and open to improvement, adjustment and even replacement. This is not easy, for it involves a struggle between an old self (what one is) and a new self (what one hopes to become), and the struggle is not free from risk or anxiety. Dewey reminds us, over and over again, the invasion of the future is riddled with conflict and uncertainty.

Finally, this volume of Educational Change continues the features initiated in previous volumes, the publication of the winning essay of the "N.Y.S.F.E.A. Essay Contest" and the publication of "Notes and Comments." The winner of the second essay contest is Sarah Dodge from Caledonia Mumford School with the "Philosophical Basis for the Use of Empirical Methods in Teaching Mathematics." The competition was funded by the office of Dr. Linda Bemier, Dean of Education at SUNY Binghamton.

In the section on "Notes and Comments" we are pleased to include first, a note by Dr. Douglas Shrader of SUNY Oneonta on "Education and the Environment: Experience, Dependent Origination, and Relational Identity;" second, a comment by Dr. Shawgi Tell of Nazareth College in Rochester, NY, on "Expanding the Conception of Prejudice in

Multicultural Education: A Theoretical Note;” and third a book review by Dr. Jennifer Manlowe of Long Island University on Timothy Glander’s (a past president of our association and presently chair of Department of Education at Rockhurst University in Kansas City, MO) book on the Origins of Mass Communications Research During the American Cold War: Educational Effects and Contemporary Implications.

ENDNOTES

[1] John Dewey, Art as Experience in Jo Ann Boydston (ed.), John Dewey: The Later Works, volume 10 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), p. 61.

[2] Tom Colwell, “Rescuing Dewey from Anthropocentrism,” Educational Change (Spring 2000), p. 15.

[3] John Dewey, The Quest for Certainty in Jo Ann Boydston (ed.), John Dewey: The Later Works, volume 4 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), p. 221.

[4] Lee Fleischer, “Reflections on Teaching in a Core Course: Speaking Post Structurally of Dewey and Mead,” Educational Change (Spring 2000), p. 32.

[5] Ibid., p. 39-40.

[6] Ibid., p. 35.

[7] John Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct (New York: The Modern Library, Inc., 1957), p. 2.

[8] Ibid., p. 12.

[9] Ibid., p. 82-83.

[10] Ibid., p. 83.

[11] Ibid., p. 38.

[12] Fleischer, op. cit., p. 39-40.