origin, theory and practice: dewey's early philosophy

jack morgan
s. samuel shermis

Despite the widespread belief that John Dewey's educational theories have little application to classrooms, they are, in fact, a direct outgrowth of ten years of testing in the laboratory school at the University of Chicago. Between 1894 and 1904 Dewey used this experimental elementary school as a means of expressing a philosophy that he had developed first on a Vermont farm and then as a student of philosophy. The ideas that the world was to see in *School and Society, Democracy and Education, How We Think* and *Interest and Effort in Education* were formulated as Dewey, his wife and a staff of creative teachers originated and tested ideas about curriculum, administration, method and learning theory.

background

In an article in 1952 commemorating the life of John Dewey, William Heard Kilpatrick tried to get to the heart of the connection between the man's life and his philosophy. "The simple, practical living of his family and community's," the "grassroots" approach to life, and an absence of "class distinctions," asserted Kilpatrick, ". . . gave to Dewey his deeprooted inclination toward democracy, his common-sense joining of thought and act, and his deep interest in morality and the welfare of men."[1]

What was the nature of the early experiences that seemingly predisposed Dewey to reach his later philosophical conclusions? What was there in his childhood that enabled him to see the integrity of education, democracy and philosophy?

Dewey's parents, Archibald and Lucina, were successful middle-class descendants of three generations of Vermont farmers. Archibald had broken with the family tradition of farming and operated a grocery and tobacco shop. He was apparently fairly intelligent and possessed a large library which was available to young John. His mother was a devout

Congregationalist whose religious activities such as the founding of a Mission Sunday School and charitable works, e.g., visiting the homes of the poor and the sick, must have provided an example of social concern for Dewey. Although Dewey was later to reject his early Calvinist religious orientation, the intellectual stimulation from reading and the social awareness of his mother made a permanent impact on him.

Dewey's home, Burlington, Vermont, was in 1859, the year of his birth, a town of about 10,000 citizens, who were, according to one scholar, "public spirited and culturally minded," and according to another, could ". . . have been a model for Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*."[2] Quite possibly, both descriptions are accurate. The typical small town of the nineteenth century was both closely-knit and well integrated, and grass roots democracy was more of a reality and less of the slogan it became. Too, it is also quite possible that Dewey, in his later years, perceived the narrowness, rigidity and anti-intellectualism which he was later to criticize in many works. That Dewey's early small town experiences had much to do in forming his mature conception of democracy and community is well known; that it may have had something to do with his rejection of all forms of strait-jacketed thinking, whether it was Calvinism or Marxism, is less obvious.

Dewey's daughter Jane asserts that ". . . his boyhood surroundings played a large part in forming John Dewey's educational theories. . . ."[3] Dewey was, said Jane Dewey, a bashful bookworm who also managed to find time to help with family responsibilities and enjoy the canonical childhood activities. He helped with chores in the home and on the farms of relatives, sold papers, tallied lumber in the lumber yard and assisted in his father's store.[4] Living only three blocks from Lake Champlain, John and his brother David camped and explored the lake from end to end. In addition, he fished, hiked in the summer and ice skated in the winter. John's excursions into French Canada introduced him to the language—which was to prove of invaluable use later in his study of the French Enlightenment philosophers Montesquieu, Descartes, Bodin, Rousseau and others. In 1900, when Dewey looked at the industrialized city, he lamented the absence of the kind of experiences that were at once enjoyable and instructive.[5] The school, he came to feel, should provide the continuity between life and learning that he himself had seen and which, he felt, a greatly changed society had taken away from children.

For Dewey, there was an inherent educative value in the work and play of the rural setting he had known. One learned not only of real events, he learned also the values of consistency, reliability and dependability. Speaking recently, Professor George Counts, who also shared the rural life Dewey had known, quipped that the "milch cow" was an extraordinarily educative institution: One could not say, "I'll skip milking her today and make up for it twice tomorrow."[6] The

environment, in a sense, required one to develop certain habits, and from the environment one learned about nature and about human behavior. It was precisely this that Dewey missed. He is accused of simply being nostalgic about a way of life that had passed. It seems unlikely that he would have wished to "go back" to small town, rural life; it seems more likely that he wished some of the values of this way of life to be a part of the school.

By contrast with the meaningful work and play, his classroom experiences were thin and unsatisfying. The school he knew was haphazardly organized, the teachers were largely untrained and the curriculum was unsystematic. The recitations, repetitions of memorized answers, were dull and uninspiring. ". . . his yawns and fidgeting mingled with those of his classmates in unconscious protest against the monotony which he was forced to endure."[7] Still, Dewey finished eight years of elementary school in five and completed the Burlington High School classical, college prep curriculum in three years.

The University of Vermont was an improvement. Relatively advanced for its time, it offered courses in four departments.[8] Despite a faculty of only eight professors, Dewey succeeded in finding some intellectual stimulation in Mr. H. A. P. Torrey. After a conventional beginning, including even twelve demerits for creating a disturbance,[9] Dewey began in his last year to find himself intellectually. This was devoted almost entirely to philosophy, for, said Dewey, ". . . it fell in with my own inclinations, and I have always been grateful for that year of my schooling."[10] Dewey came across a physiology textbook by Thomas H. Huxley, the supporter of Darwin and himself an evolutionist. For Dewey, whose later philosophy reflected a concern for change and flexibility, this work must have been an eye-opener. Following graduation, Dewey became a public school teacher. He taught one year in South Oil City, Pennsylvania, and one year in Charlotte, a village near Burlington.

The year 1881 seems to have been important, for during this time Dewey read, wrote philosophy and discussed ideas with Professor Torrey in tramps through the woods. Apparently Dewey reached the conclusion that he should go into philosophy as a career, and accordingly, he decided to enter John Hopkins for graduate work.[11] This was, in fact, a risky decision, for there was little opportunity for philosophers outside the ministry. However, with the encouragement of the great Hegelian, Professor William Torrey Harris, Dewey began to write and to contribute articles to philosophy journals.[12] Also influential at this time were Professors George S. Morris and Granville Stanley Hall. G. Stanley Hall, among others, showed Dewey the connections between psychology and philosophy.[13]

After graduation from Johns Hopkins in 1884 (although in his old age Dewey's memory slipped and he stated that he *began* Hopkins in

1884) Dewey continued to read philosophy systematically. Increasingly, Dewey became concerned with the need to join philosophical speculation with practical activity. He read thoroughly of German idealists, English and Scottish empiricists, French rationalists and classical realists. At the same time, he was making the acquaintance of many of the leading political, social and educational reformers of that time. His growing awareness of the problems occasioned by industrialism, urbanism, patronage politics and other critical issues reflected itself in his lectures. The effectiveness of his lectures, however, is subject to debate. To some of his students his originality and depth were inspiring examples of a mind coming to grips with significant problems. To others he was disorganized, insensitive to his students and violated all of his own educational prescriptions. When, in 1886, he married Alice Chipman, a social reformer, he joined forces with a remarkable woman who was to prove an invaluable assistant and co-worker. Mrs. Dewey was, at Dewey's request, appointed an administrator of the Laboratory School.

Gradually his thoughts turned to education. That was not surprising, for Dr. Joseph Rice had published his famous survey of school systems, and the deficiencies of education—like the deficiencies of the city, the medical schools, the packinghouses, the corporations and the politicians —were beginning to impinge on the public awareness. Dewey began contact with public schools as his work at Michigan University required him to visit public high schools throughout the state to determine their competency to send students to the University. Says Jane Dewey of this period, "Dewey's interest in general education was stimulated by the visits he made, . . ."[14] He joined the Schoolmasters' Club of Michigan, an organization designed to promote continuity between high school and university education.

In sum, Dewey's early life in a small, democratic community where he inbibed the values of social interchange, cooperation and useful service made him realize the inherent disvalue of the authoritarian, undemocratic and lifeless school. The contrast between an education from a living environment and schooling in a dead curriculum predisposed Dewey to attempt to experiment with classrooms that combined life and learning. By 1894 Dewey was ready to translate his ideas into action at the University of Chicago. His interest in education, philosophy and psychology culminated in an effort to ". . . combine psychological principles of learning with the principles of cooperative association which he derived from his moral studies."[15]

The purpose of the laboratory school, according to two teachers who taught there during Dewey's tenure, was two-fold: "1. to exhibit, test and verify and criticize theoretical statements and principles, and 2. to add to the sum of facts and principles in its special line."[16] The laboratory school, therefore, was designed to test Dewey's belief, first, that

psychological principles could be applied to education and, second, that a school could be pervaded by a genuine democratic atmosphere.

interaction

Seemingly the most significant principle Dewey employed was what became known later as interaction or transaction. This philosophical concept which Dewey apparently derived from the studies of anthropologists, biologists and sociologists of his time, was later to be ramified into a major metaphysical principle.[17] Interaction came to have various meanings for Dewey. First, it was a dissolution of any and all absolutes, and dualisms. To conceive of the world as if everything were separated into two irreconcilable, antagonistic principles—good-evil, sacred-profane, natural-supernatural, liberal arts-vocations, and so on—was to Dewey a misreading of facts. For Dewey, interaction meant that events, previously held oppositional, were organically related. Walking is a matter of both feet and ground; breathing a matter of both human respiration and air.[18]

To see an interactive relationship between events, said Dewey, is to eliminate the misleading dualism of "method" and "content." Content has traditionally been held as a body of knowledge and method as the means by which content is transmitted. This misconceives both method and content. "We can distinguish," says Dewey, "a way of acting, and discuss it by itself; but the way *exists* only as a way-of-dealing-with material."[19] That is, the "dualism of method and subject matter" fails to describe the complete process: a body of subject matter *also* consists of a means by which the facts, data, principles and generalizations are acquired. In looking at the process this way, Dewey anticipated the recent curriculum emphasis on structure by Bruner and others.

An important characteristic of Dewey's notion of interaction was that the time-honored view of reality as arranged hierarchically was at odds with other educational values. For several thousand years Western philosophy—particularly emphasized in Aristotle—had assigned fixed and rigid positions in an assumed hierarchy of existence. Lovejoy describes this in detail in his *The Great Chain of Being*.[20] Whether we talk about hierarchy of God, angels, man, animals and inanimate objects or the hierarchy of school board, superintendent, principal and teacher, we seem unable to escape an hierarchical ontology. We should begin to look at reality not as "higher" or "lower" but as separate and distinctive but related events. A superintendent is not metaphysically higher than a teacher nor is literature metaphysically superior to social studies. Teachers have different but not less useful functions than administrators, and there is nothing inherent in one subject matter that makes it better or purer than another. To hold otherwise is to stigmatize one with inferiority and direct resentment at the other.

Dewey's early attempts to think through the meaning and implica-

tions of interaction—the completed theory seems to have come in 1925 with *Experience and Nature*[21]—suggested a laboratory school radically different from the existing schools. As administrator Dewey did not dominate his teachers. Although Dewey drew heavily upon the subject matter experts at Chicago to improve the lab school curriculum, his teachers spent much of their time devising appropriate teaching techniques. The constant experimentation and modification of the school suggested that Dewey did not worship any tradition as absolute.

The principle of interaction is that man does not "determine" the course of history, as any Great Man position holds. Nor is man the passive tool of his environment, as many forms of environmental determinism maintain. In 1900 Dewey described the use of biography as a touchstone in which ". . . the child's imagination pictures the social defects and problems that clamored for the man and the ways in which the individual met the emergency. . . ."[22] This is neither environmental determinism nor a Great Man theory. The problems "clamored for the man" and the individual devised ways to meet the emergency. This, then, is the interactive notion that both elements—man and environment—must be studied in their interrelationship.

intelligence

"I don't remember studying or learning anything. I don't remember going through the process of learning to read, but I read."[23] This statement from a former pupil in the laboratory school illustrates the practical application of a theory of intelligence. The student appears to be saying that, without being aware of having exerted effort, he learned. He learned, Dewey would say, because he was involved in some problem relevant to his goals and values. Drawing upon his own childhood experience, Dewey realized that when an individual's interest is aroused, he expends the effort required to learn. Such a brief description prefigures what eventually became a highly complex theory of interest and effort, the thought process and the essential meaning of scientific experimentation.

The meaning of intelligence, which occupied Dewey's attention for many years, was to be related eventually to the scientific method of knowing. A science, says Dewey, denotes both a process of knowing and also a constellation of attitudes. Scientific inquiry means a habit of mind that emphasizes formulation of problems, hypothesizing, careful observation, controls and checks, tentativeness, reliance upon induction and deduction and constant reference to consequences. In Dewey's words, these are the ". . . methods of analytic, experimental observation, mathematical formulation and deduction, constant and elaborate check and test."[24]

Dewey reached this description from his reading of scientists, both physical and social. However, it was the method and implications of

the social sciences which primarily occupied his mind. The social scientist's method, which he believed could be used to transform a pretechnological rural society into a democratic community, could be utilized by teachers to train students in the habit of reflective thinking. In the past, Dewey thought, we have relied on the force of tradition, in comparison with which intelligence has ". . . had a weight which . . . is feeble."[25] We cannot continue to rely on tradition, however, for the cultural lag is generating problems that have become increasingly lethal. What is needed, he thought, is the translation of the scientific method to classrooms.

Intelligence, or the habit of trained reflection, begins when an individual is involved in a problem wherein he must exercise choice. Teaching, therefore, ought not begin with external subjects to be memorized, regardless of a child's past experience. "The material is not presented as lessons, as something to be learned, but rather as something to be taken up into the child's own experience, through his own activity. . . ."[26] One laboratory school visitor reported a class discussion centering around the question of whether George Washington or John Smith was the greater man. To come to a decision on this question requires the utilization of data: that is, factual material, past experiences and present observations are all integrated in a value context. Dewey states, "Intelligence converts desire into plans, systematic plans based on assembling facts, reporting events as they happen, keeping tab on them and analyzing them."[27]

Why was the "method of intelligence" or the "experimental method" necessary for education? A rapidly changing society puts a premium on flexible thinking. To refuse to change in the face of a changing social and physical environment creates constant friction and antagonism within a person and between persons. It is the school's task to teach the habit of flexible and careful thought that will enable the mature adult to make the kinds of adjustments which are required. That is, the method of intelligence, which his followers often called "reflective teaching," is mandated by the nature of social change within our culture. Reflective teaching was designed to produce both the flexibility of mind and the predisposition to deal with the social problems that arise from rapid change. The emphasis, which he discussed fully in *How We Think,* was on teaching as problem-solving.

In his laboratory school Dewey apparently attempted to implement this position. Children would select significant problems for themselves and would gather and apply relevant information. One child's curiosity about popping corn developed into a physical science project. Another child's interest in respiration suggested a detailed examination of the lungs of a calf.[28] A class's concern with sand and pebbles brought from the lake formed the starting point for a study of water deposition and erosion.[29] By beginning with the child's own immediate interests, the

laboratory school teachers guided the class toward more sophisticated and increasingly more abstract study and thought. The immediate interest—contrary to what has been often repeated about Dewey—was the starting place, not the end in itself. The interest was the means by which the reflective process began.

the meaning of vocation

To Dewey, such persistent dualisms as thought and action, and liberal and vocational, were disturbing anachronisms. In his analysis, the distinction between thought and action arose from an aristocratic, caste-ridden social structure. From Classical times, the assumption had been that the aim of education is an individual who enjoys and is capable of abstract thought and contemplation. It seemed to Dewey that this simply reflected a two-class system in which an aristocracy had the leisure time for contemplation and a servant class performed all the menial tasks. Such a dualism, thought Dewey, was incompatible with a democracy.[30]

Just as action had been held inferior to contemplation, a "vocational" curriculum was held inferior to a "liberal" one. A liberal education was one held to be appropriate for a freeman, i.e., an aristocrat; it may also be defined as one which is inherently liberating, that is, which frees one for greater intellectual activity, for greater appreciation of beauty. A vocational curriculum has been thought of as narrow, technical training which simply prepares one to do some kind of work.

To Dewey, there was simply no valid reason why this must necessarily be so. Through the serious study of vocations, one might undergo considerable intellectual growth. What is needed to understand a vocation is, in fact, an infinitely expandable series of principles and generalizations. For instance, the sewing of a button is not simply a self-terminating activity: it suggests a study of cotton and woolen fibers, and this in turn suggests a variety of studies, such as physics, geography and history. Therefore, depending upon how one defines the term "vocation," vocational studies may be liberating—in the sense of broadening one's intellectual horizons.[31] Secondly, a proper appreciation of vocations is necessary in a democratic society. We suffer, Dewey thought, from the ancient holdover of the notion that work is degrading: such a belief is appropriate to a static, caste ridden society, but not to an open, industrialized one where work is inherently important.[32]

democracy

For Dewey democracy denoted generally a progressive and ever-widening sharing of the cultural heritage. Dewey recognized that the previous caste and class ridden social systems had prevented just this sharing.

> What does democracy mean save that the individual is to have a share in determining the conditions and the aims of his work; and, that upon the whole, through the free and mutual harmonizing of different individuals, the work of the world is better done than when planned, arranged, and directed by a few, no matter how wise or how good the intent of that few.[33]

In addition to a rejection of an aristocracy—even an aristocracy of intelligence and ability—Dewey thought that democracy had specific reference to decision-making:

> From the standpoint of the individual, it consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the group to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the group sustains.[34]

The training of the capacity to direct "activities of the group to which one belongs" should begin early. For instance, May Roote Kern, a teacher in the laboratory school, reports the inclusion of such sharing.

> The children suggest several subjects, from which they choose one as the topic for their song. If the group is unified, this selection is simple; if of diverse interests, several votes have to be taken before the members agree upon a subject. The young children usually select an experience personal to themselves.[35]

Other instances of democratic procedures could be found in his school. He stated that "association and exchange among teachers was our substitute for what is called supervision. . . ."[36] He recognized that supervision, as it was practiced at that time, was generally highly authoritarian and arranged on an hierarchical basis. The democratic substitute for this was what he called *conjoint association,* an awkward term by which Dewey meant sharing, communality, fraternity.

In the actual operations of the school, parents were thought to be essential. His parent-teacher organization was apparently one of the first in this country. His own leadership of the training school was, according to general consensus, democratic. While he attended the teacher meetings, ". . . the development of concrete material and methods of dealing with it was wholly in the hands of the teachers."[37] The selection of textbooks Dewey regarded as the professional responsibility of teachers. To assign ". . . the selection of text-books, etc., in the hands of a body of men who are outside the school system itself, who have not necessarily any expert knowledge of education and who are moved by non-educational motives"[38] Dewey felt to be unprofessional. But, to transfer textbook selection to "the authority of the school superintendent" is to adopt the "principle of autocracy."[39] The conclusion: "The remedy is not to have one expert dictating educational methods and

subject-matter to a body of passive, recipient teachers, but the adoption of intellectual initiative, discussion, and decision throughout the entire school corps."[40] The cure for autocratic and undemocratic practices said Dewey, ". . . is appeal to a more thorough-going democracy."[41]

To Dewey the reflective method was almost inherent in a democracy. At one point he said,

> Until the emphasis changes to the conditions which make it necessary for the child to take an active share in the personal building up of his own problems and to participate in methods of solving them . . . mind is not really freed.[42]

The "methods of solving" problems seemingly were the "methods pursued by the scientific inquirer."[43] That is, the decision-making process —which Dewey saw as the heart of democracy only in his later years— required that freed intelligence which Dewey increasingly came to equate with the scientific method.

Dewey was, of course, not unique in having grown up in a small town democracy. Nor was he unique in appreciating the values inherent in the New England town meeting. The uniqueness lay in his connecting democracy with schools. He recognized the paradox of an autocratic school in a democratic society. A school in which administrators issued dicta to cowed teachers, who in turn tyrannized over passive students, seemed indefensible. In his own administration of the laboratory school and in the theory that became part of *Democracy and Education* twelve years after he left Chicago, Dewey raised the question of the meaning of democracy in education.

conclusion

The influence of John Dewey's professors and colleagues in forming his pragmatic philosophy is, by now, well known. Recent Dewey scholars such as Arthur Wirth[44] and Reginald Archambault[45] have discussed such men as George Sylvester Morris, William Torrey Harris, William James and George Herbert Mead. We also have some idea of the influence of Dewey's philosophical antagonists, Herbert Spencer, Wilbur S. Jackman and Josiah Royce. We even have some insight into Dewey's emergent synthesis arising out of the conflicting beliefs of his mentors and colleagues. What we seem to lack at this time is a clear appreciation for the part played by his early environmental influences in the formation of his later philosophical position.

Seemingly, Dewey's modesty, which did not permit him to expand fully on his personal life, and recent scholarship, which has tended to emphasize, quite understandably, the influence of his intellectual contemporaries and precursors, has made us forget a necessary fact: Dewey did not enter his career as professor, reformer and philosopher without

having been, in some way, predisposed in that direction. We should like to speculate briefly on what we take to be this predisposition.

First concerns the intellectual content of his early life. Most of us have poignant memories of our early childhood years and of the books which somehow stimulated our imagination or permanently colored our point of view. It would be useful if we had more insight into some of the literature that Dewey was reported to have read. His lackluster work in elementary and public high school was probably a function of the dullness of the schools. It seems likely that Dewey was intellectually awakened before his graduate years at Johns Hopkins. There is more importance in Archibald Dewey's library than has been acknowledged.

Second, we believe that Burlington probably exercised a double effect on Dewey. Scholars have tended to concentrate on his small town origins as significant only in his desire to reinstate the democratic community. This is undoubtedly true, but it is probably only part of the story. What is known about the repressiveness and rigidity of small town life has been celebrated by novelists and sociologists for more than a half century. In all likelihood, Dewey knew of Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street* and Alexis de Tocqueville's "tyranny of the majority" first hand. That is, Dewey probably understood that the intellectual rigidity, parochialism and constraint were more descriptive of Burlington, Vermont, than of New York. Dewey's lifelong concern with freedom, and especially academic freedom, probably grew out of his observations that grass roots democracy had about it a generous measure of repressive anti-intellectualism.

Third, there is another way of looking at Dewey's early elementary school years. That they were probably as dull as his biographers have noted is doubtless quite true. However, from an historical perspective this may have been a very good thing. Had Dewey received a quality education along the lines of the Boston Latin Grammar School or an excellent academy or high school in which well-trained and intelligent teachers inculcated a reverence for the classics, he might not have become a philosophical originator. With a satisfactory early education, he might have developed as did Royce or Santayana or some other gifted defender of the intellectual and educational status quo. Quite possibly his "yawning and fidgeting" had a beneficial effect: It predisposed him to impatience with dead formalism and to sympathy for the children who had to endure it. And without this, he would not have been impelled to experiment with a new set of educational methods.

Fourth, we need to ask more about the meaning of that one year hiatus between the time Dewey completed his first two years of public school teaching and his entrance into Johns Hopkins. That year, 1881, must have been crucial, yet little of it is known. He read quite a lot, did a little writing and had long "tramps" through the woods with Professor Torrey. This is not very much to say about a year in which

Dewey made his decision to study philosophy as a profession. This decision, as Dewey said later, was obviously risky, for outside of a theological career there was little demand for philosophy. The very meagerness of data makes us raise a number of questions: What kinds of commitments was he making? Why was he developing an interest in philosophy? What were his reflections on the past and hopes for the future?

Finally, it is important to correct, or at least modify a number of criticisms that have been made of Dewey and his position. We wish to divide Dewey critics into three types. First are Catholic philosophers who object, understandably, to Dewey's relativist position and his undisguised anti-authoritarianism. An example of such critics include Neil McCluskey, *Public Schools and Moral Education* (New York, 1968). Second, there are those educational theorists who are basically sympathetic with Dewey but feel that at times he did not go far enough, or that his conclusions were sometimes faulty. See, for example, Theodore Brameld, *Toward a Reconstructed Philosophy of Education* (New York, 1956), and George Counts, *The Prospects of American Democracy* (New York, 1938). The third type of critic appears to base his conclusions on a misconception of Dewey. For instance, Richard K. Morris' criticism of Dewey as an inductivist empiricist, in Morris' *Education and Scientific Inquiry*,[46] appears to be a confusion of Dewey's epistemological position with the positions of Bacon and Newton. Dewey was not a Baconian or Newtonian inductivist. Other critics have accused Dewey of harboring a laissez faire position. This is also untrue, and is perhaps the result of equating Dewey's social philosophy with that of William Heard Kilpatrick. Dewey is not a laissez faire advocate: at no time did he believe that children should be allowed to do as they wish.[47]

Critics such as Arthur Bestor, Admiral Hyman Rickover, Dr. Max Rafferty and Russell Kirk have long charged Dewey with creating an educational theory that is fundamentally anti-intellectual. This is difficult to refute, for much depends upon what is meant by "anti-intellectual." Dewey was clearly opposed to a fragmented curriculum and to the teaching of intellectual disciplines apart from one another and apart from the intellectual problems that generate them. He did advocate a problem-centered curriculum, and this has indeed lent itself to misrepresentation or vulgarization. But again, it appears that many criticisms that have been directed at Dewey might more properly be aimed at Progressive Education—a movement that developed quite apart from Dewey's guidance.

Finally, there is the belief that Dewey spun his theories in an ivory tower atmosphere, without any basis in experience. The considerable volume of literature cited in this article indicates that Dewey dealt not only with philosophical abstractions but that he directed and participated in all of the details of running a school, buying furniture, raising funds, hiring faculty, preparing curricula and gathering data on the

behavior of children. In doing research on Dewey for a doctoral dissertation, one of the authors discovered numerous advertisements inserted by Dewey in educational journals. These advertisements requested that teachers send him anecdotal reports on some specific child behavior which they had observed. We may argue today that this is a somewhat unsophisticated way of gaining information, but it clearly demonstrates that Dewey wished to base his position on empirical descriptions.

If John Dewey is the seminal figure in American education and philosophy he is taken to be—and the recent surge of books and articles on Dewey would seem to indicate a revival of interest in his thinking—then it behooves us to understand as much of him as we can. To understand Dewey requires us to examine the context in which he wrote and thought. This context is not only the philosophers and books from which Dewey found inspiration, although they are undeniably relevant. The context is also his early life, the matrix from which developed his receptivity to democracy, democratic education, freedom of inquiry and interactive philosophy. It is not enough, we think, to approach Dewey as if his thinking began with the twentieth century. We must look at his youth, his formal education and his experiences as head of the Chicago laboratory school. To do this most effectively, we must begin to ask fresh questions of familiar data.

University of Louisville
Purdue University

footnotes

1. William Heard Kilpatrick, "John Dewey and His Educational Theory," *Progressive Education,* 30 (October, 1952), 5.
2. Robert L. McCaul, "Dewey's School Days, 1867-75," *Elementary School Journal,* 63 (October, 1962), 15.
3. Jane Dewey, "Biography of John Dewey," *The Philosophy of John Dewey,* Paul A. Schilpp, ed., Volume I (Chicago, 1939), 6.
4. McCaul, "Dewey's School Days," 19-20.
5. Dewey's attitude toward the city is summarized in Morton and Lucia White, *The Intellectual Versus The City* (New York, 1962), Chapter X, "The Plea For Community: Robert Park and John Dewey."
6. Professor George Counts, "Education and the Great Transition In American Society," speaking before the History of Education Society, Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois, October 28, 1966.
7. George Dykhuizen, "An Early Chapter in the Life of John Dewey," *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 13 (October, 1952), 519.
8. Jane Dewey, "Biography," 8.
9. Dykhuizen, "Early Chapter," 570.
10. John Dewey, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," *Contemporary American Philosophy,* George P. Adams and William Pepperell, eds., Volume II (New York, 1930), 13.
11. *Ibid.,* 16.
12. Arthur Wirth, *John Dewey as Educator* (New York, 1966).
13. See Frederick Eby, *The Development of Modern Education* (Englewood Cliffs, 1952), Chapters 23 and 24.
14. Jane Dewey, "Biography," 47.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Katherine C. Mayhew and Anna C. Edwards, *The Dewey School* (New York, 1936), 3.
17. See S. Samuel Shermis, "Interaction In the Writings of John Dewey," an unpublished master's thesis, University of Kansas, 1960. Abstracted in *The University of Kansas Bulletin of Education,* 15 (February, 1961), 70-76.
18. Also discussed in Ernest E. Bayles, *Democratic Educational Theory* (New York, 1961).
19. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York, 1961), 165.
20. (New York, 1960.)

21. (New York, 1929.) This work appears to be Dewey's only systematic treatment of metaphysics. In it one will find—with a heavy expenditure of effort—Dewey's mature thinking on the principle of interaction.

22. John Dewey, "The Aim of History in Elementary Education," *The Elementary School Record* (Chicago, 1900), 199.

23. Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School,* 405.

24. John Dewey, "Science, Folk-lore and Control of Folk-ways," *The New Republic,* 53 (November 9, 1927), 316.

25. John Dewey, "The Psychology of the Elementary Curriculum," in *The Elementary School Record,* 227.

26. Dewey's use of the term *intelligence,* which was by no means consistent or always clear, is discussed in "Intelligence and Its Corollaries," Chapter IV, in Shermis, "John Dewey's Social and Political Philosophy: Its Implications for Social Studies Education," an unpublished dissertation, University of Kansas, 1961.

27. John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York, 1922), 255.

28. Harriet A. Farrand, "Dr. Dewey's University Elementary School," *Journal of Education,* 48 (September 15, 1898), 172.

29. George P. Brown, "Dr. John Dewey's Educational Experiment," *The Public School Journal,* 16 (June, 1897), 543.

30. A recent analysis of Dewey's treatment of philosophical dualism is Philip Phenix, "John Dewey's War on Dualisms—Its Bearing on Today's Educational Problems," *Phi Delta Kappan,* 16 (October, 1959), 5-9.

31. John Dewey, *The School and Society* (New York, 1899), 65.

32. Dewey treats this problem at some length in his *Individualism Old and New* (New York, 1930) and *The Public and Its Problems* (New York, 1927). See also his *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York, 1922) and *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York, 1920).

33. John Dewey, "Democracy in Education," *Elementary School Teacher,* 4 (December, 1903), 197.

34. John Dewey, *Public and Its Problems,* 146.

35. May Roote Kern, "Elementary Music Teaching in the Laboratory School," *The Elementary School Teacher,* 4 (September, 1903), 18.

36. Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School,* 371.

37. *Ibid.,* 367.

38. John Dewey, "Democracy in Education," 195.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.,* 196.

42. *Ibid.,* 201.

43. *Ibid.,* 200.

44. Arthur Wirth, *John Dewey As Educator.*

45. Reginald Archambault, ed., *Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899 By John Dewey* (New York, 1966).

46. (New Haven, 1951.)

47. See an analysis of the difference between Dewey and Kilpatrick in Ernest E. Bayles, *Democratic Educational Theory* (New York, 1960), especially Chapter 15, "John Dewey and Progressivism."

selected bibliography

For the reader who is unacquainted with Dewey, the most important works are: **How We Think** (Boston, 1910 and 1933), especially the section called "Reflective Thinking," i.e., thinking that is patterned after the scientific method; **Democracy and Education** (New York, 1916), perhaps Dewey's best known work, a still vital analysis of the relationship between democratic philosophy and school subjects; **Reconstruction in Philosophy** (New York, 1920), an analysis of the origins of democratic theory; **Philosophy of Education** (originally entitled **Problems of Men**) (New York, 1946), a collection of essays, some of which are fairly complex, on educational problems; **Experience and Nature** (New York, 1929), Dewey's definitive metaphysical position and his most elaborate argument against dualisms; **School and Society** (Chicago, 1899), a very early work, originally a series of three lectures on school curriculum administration and architecture; **Human Nature and Conduct** (New York, 1922), a series of essays written while Dewey was reporting on revolutions in Europe and Asia for **The New Republic; The Public and Its Problems** (New York, 1927), a series of essays on American social problems during the first two and a half decades of the twentieth century.

Those who wish the most recently published scholarly works on Dewey should know that Southern Illinois University, at Carbondale, Illinois, is the center of Dewey research. At this institution Dr. JoAnn Boydston edits **The Dewey News-**

letter. Also at Southern Illinois University is the Dewey Project, headed by Dr. George Axtelle. The aim of this project is the collection of all of the published and unpublished works of Dewey, a task that is estimated to last many years and fill approximately seventy-five volumes. As yet there is no definitive collection of Dewey's letters and unpublished works. However, interest in his philosophy has increased, new items are constantly being discovered, and it is clear that the Dewey Project will succeed in locating all of Dewey's ideas in one collection. For a list of some of the recently discovered letters and speeches, see the forty-six item bibliography in **The Dewey Newsletter,** Volume II, No. 3, July, 1968.