John Dewey's Concept of the Student

Douglas J. Simpson

In this article, I have examined Dewey's concept of the student through the lens of his poetry and prose to show that his poetry clarifies his prose. I have devoted special attention to a study of Dewey's poetry to reveal his belief that students are more fragile than his prose suggests and that they need guidance in their desire for freedom to learn. His poetry also suggests that students need help to navigate society's contradictory educational currents. Without such help, they will likely suffer damaging, permanent outcomes.

L'article analyse, à travers les poèmes et la prose de Dewey, son concept de l'élève. Les poèmes de Dewey présentent l'élève comme étant plus fragile que ce que pouvait laisser supposer sa prose et comment il doit être guidé dans son désir de liberté dans l'apprentissage. La poésie de Dewey laisse entendre aussi que les élèves ont besoin d'aide pour trouver leur voie dans les courants éducatifs contradictoires de la société. Sans cette aide, ils risquent d'être affectés de manière permanente.

John Dewey's thoughts about students and learning have long interested educators, although many have failed to study his writings and have misinterpreted and misapplied his ideas (Archambault, 1964/1974, p. ix). This lack of attention to his writings extends to his poetry which has been studied even less than his prose. In this article, I address this neglect by examining in more detail some of his philosophical and pedagogical beliefs about students through attention to his poetry.

Dewey thought that the major responsibility for education fell initially upon adults, teachers, and others. He did not intend that students be held primarily responsible for their achievements or shortcomings. Instead, he considered adults responsible for creating learning conditions to promote educative experiences for children. Even so, he encouraged teachers to ensure that learners come to understand their limitations and potentialities through their critiques of student performance and other feedback (Boydston, 1976/1980, p. 28). This is not to say that Dewey did not place emphasis on the learner's initiative and involvement. He clearly stated that the teacher's guiding, directing, and navigating were impossible if the energy for learning does not come from the student: "Since learning is something that the pupil has to do himself [or herself] and for himself [or

herself], the initiative lies with the learner" (Dewey, 1933/1960, p. 36). So, too, Dewey expected the student to adapt to the curriculum as much as he expected the teacher to adapt material to the student (Dewey, 1938/1963, pp. 46–47).

When Dewey was writing his poems (1910 to1918), he was in his fifties and sixties and had completed most of his major works on education (Boydston, 1977, p. xvii). Interestingly, he did not want his poetry published. Given the aesthetic interest the poems have generated, one might conclude that his judgment of the pieces was superior to that displayed by those who had the works published. Yet, the poetry does illuminate Dewey as a person and a philosopher. In particular, the poetry partially informs the reader of Dewey's opinions of students, teaching, and education. Of Dewey the person, his poetry provides glimpses of a "loving, sensuous, playful, perceptive, and at times emotionally torn, weary, self-doubting, depressed" individual (Boydston, 1977, p. xxii). His poetry also suggests that his affection for Anzia Yezierska may not have been completely platonic. Yet in his poetry Dewey echoes, expands, and clarifies his thinking about several subjects, including philosophical anthropology and pedagogical theory.

PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Rather than pursue the full scope of Dewey's thought about the child, I have limited my comments to his opinions of the student's nature, soul, and significance. To begin with, it is worthwhile to comment on a feature of Dewey's educational theory that stems from his philosophical anthropology. Although Dewey is frequently considered a child-centred educator (Archambault, 1964/1974), this description is somewhat inaccurate because he explicitly denied this label and stated that he was better described as community-centred because he thought learning was a social activity, not an individual one (Boydston, 1981–1991, vol. 11, p. 206; vol. 17, p. 53). Community should be understood to include children, youth, and adults. On the other hand, Dewey believed "the centre of gravity" needed to shift from the curriculum and teacher to the child and her or his impulses as a member of a social group (Dewey, 1956/1990, p. 34). The following three subtopics — the student's nature, soul, and significance — are treated separately for the sake of discussion, although they overlap in Dewey's philosophy.

The Student's Nature

Dewey's ideas regarding the child evolved throughout his life, but there is a remarkable continuity in his thought on the subject. For example, he had an abiding confidence in the child's nature and ability and believed that, when educators guide a student's growth, his or her natural tendencies lead to educative experiences and to a better functioning society. *The School and Society*, published in 1899 and revised in 1915, offers Dewey's clear early statement on the child's nature (Burnett, 1976/1980, p. vii). He explained why he believed that understanding the child's nature is a starting point for education and identified four major instincts that educators should "get hold of" and "direct" toward "something better" to educate a child (Boydston, 1976/1980, p. 31). Noteworthy is his belief that the investigative and artistic instincts grow out of the communicative and constructive tendencies. His ideas are outlined as follows:

Instincts	***Manifestations***
communicative	saying, communicating
constructive	making, playing, shaping
investigative	finding out, inquiring
artistic	creating, fashioning

In addition to attributing these four *impulses* to all children — a term Dewey used as a synonym for *instincts*, his affirmation about how to understand students differed from many of his contemporaries. Dewey claimed, first, the importance of understanding the "individual mind as a function of social life — as not capable of operating or developing by itself, but as requiring continual stimulus from social agencies, and finding its nutrition in social supplies" (Boydston, 1976/1980, p. 69). This emphasis ran counter to beliefs that the mind is innate or individually created. Second, he argued that the child should be understood from the perspective of emotion and endeavour as well as knowledge and intellect (p. 69). The student is a feeling, purposive, and intellectual being who needs to be approached as a whole person. Third, he insisted that mind is not a static entity that comes fully developed but instead is "a process" and "a growing affair" characterized by "distinctive phases of capacity and interest" (p. 71). Dewey argued that education is neither a "drawing out" nor a "pouring in" but a "taking hold" of the activities that stem from instincts. These activities need to be directed toward valuable outcomes (Dewey, 1956/1990, p. 36).

In 1909 when he wrote *Moral Principles in Education* (Dewey, 1909/1975), Dewey added a new impulse, "innate tendency," to amplify the communicative instinct. "The child is born with a natural desire to give out, to do, to serve" (p. 22), a natural desire that teachers can use to cultivate character and good citizenship (pp. 9–11, 49–57). Similarly, he thought that teachers should nurture the "impulse toward justice, kindliness, and order" (Dewey, 1934/1962, p. 47). Later, he modified his thinking about the number of impulses and spoke of a "group of instinctive and impulsive tendencies" that educators ought to take into consideration (Dewey, 1916/1944, p. 194). If they would design curricula in view of these tendencies, Dewey thought of the potential outcome: "going to school is a joy, management is less of a burden, and learning is easier" (p. 194). In a still later volume, Dewey (1938/1963, pp. 67ff) mentioned a variety of impulses that need to be converted into desires and, then, the desires need to be transformed into purposes. This process of moving from impulses to desires to purposes involves a "complex intellectual operation" (pp. 68–69). Dewey listed the conditions:

> (1) observation of surrounding conditions; (2) knowledge of what has happened in similar situations in the past, a knowledge obtained partly by recollection and partly from the information, advice, and warning of those who have had a wider experience; and (3) judgment which puts together what is observed and what is recalled to see what they signify. A purpose differs from an original impulse and desire through its translation into a plan and method of action based upon foresight of the consequences of acting under given observed conditions in a certain way. (Dewey, 1963, p. 69)

When Dewey compared his thinking with what he saw in schools, he was troubled. He was especially concerned that many of his contemporaries minimized the importance of native impulses or, worse, sought to suppress them because they were considered evil. Because educators suppressed children's impulses, he believed they forced schools to be dull, disrupted learning, and created behavioural problems. In "The Child's Garden," Dewey described an adult who was suppressed too often as a child. He lamented the hardening effect of the environment upon the child and the resulting inability to recover his or her hopes and dreams because

> . . . the freezing years did harden
> And shut me in this barren field
> — Docks and thistle its only yield —
> And I cannot find that closèd garden. (Boydston, 1977, p. 19)

Dewey was not a proponent of allowing the student to do anything he

or she wished. Educators need to assist in the conversion of impulses into desires and purposes which they then could direct. If this conversion and guidance did not occur, he argued that the crude, undeveloped, and unconverted instincts of childhood would dominate the child and, later, the adult. A falsely called freedom that permits a child to pursue impulses at will does not result in a reflective and autonomous individual but instead turns her or him "loose to suffer in the lanes/Of thorn trees unpossessed as yet by man" (Boydston, 1977, p. 6). Students need to have their impulses and desires directed, converted, and transformed so that they develop insights that lead to a genuine freedom, a "freedom . . . identical with self-control; for the formation of purposes and the organization of means to execute them are the work of intelligence" (Dewey, 1938/1963, p. 67).

In poem #28, Dewey imagined a person who is strong but not sufficiently self-controlled and independent to overcome his or her burning desires and societal pressures because he or she was not adequately guided earlier in life:

He failed. Though he was strong,
He was not strong enough t' await
The final word of patient fate.
He was hurried by the restless throng
Of feverish desires to seek
The promised land of honeyed streams
Of smooth success. (Boydston, 1977, p. 19)

Although children may be eager to claim a freedom or a dream, Dewey suggested that educators should not cultivate this eagerness. He made unmistakably clear the outcomes of people yielding to undeveloped impulses and ill-advised pressures:

Through searchings for a bright remote
Paradise of joys. Then sudden walls
Closed in. The thorns were hands which smote
Him. Rocks melted. Paths were pitfalls;
The promised land swallowed in cloud. (Boydston, 1977, p. 19)

Dewey, nevertheless, believed that schooling and other forms of intentional education should strive "to free the capacities thus formed for fuller exercise, to purge them of some of their grossness, and to furnish objects which make their activity more productive of meaning" (Dewey, 1916/1944, p. 17). One of the reasons for education, therefore, is to ensure that "genuine and thorough transmission takes place, [because] the most

civilized group will relapse into barbarism and then into savagery" if society neglects its educative responsibilities (Dewey, 1916/1944, pp. 3–4). To successfully pursue desirable outcomes, Dewey thought that society needed to understand that the purpose of education was not just to transmit customs, beliefs, and occupations to the young but also to help create souls, selves, or people. Schools, therefore, are institutions of creation, not just places of transmission.

The Student's Soul

Although Dewey believed early in his life in a nonmaterial dimension of the human personality, he later decided that the soul or spirit was a social creation. Accordingly, he decided that there was no immaterial essence called the self. The self was a social construct, an outcome of the effort of the child in his or her context. He argued that the idea of a self is exactly that: an imaginative "idea" (Dewey, 1934/1962, p. 18). Moreover, he maintained that it was critical to understand that "the unification of the self throughout the ceaseless flux of what it does, suffers, and achieves, cannot be attained in terms of itself. The self is always directed toward something beyond itself . . ." (p. 19).

Many years before writing *A Common Faith*, Dewey wrote in his poem "My Body and My Soul" that human love is found in the body's love of others and that the falsely called ghost or soul of the body was powerless. He asserted:

> For love is proved in power to wait in worship, serve and give,
> And soul without body, powerless for these things, does not live,
> But pretentious ghost, filled with thoughts of self, wanders alone
> While body's love, in glad surrender, finds other's soul his own. (Boydston, 1977, p. 8)

In poem #77, Dewey asserted that an active body created the self and one became her or himself through living and making decisions: "Learning hate and love and poise in his strife" (p. 56). In the end, it is "the body's movement to and fro,/As loving, hating; it everywhere doth go/That creates a soul from soulless things" (p. 56). Dewey, therefore, argued for educational environments founded upon a belief in the guided movement and involvement of the child. The child's nature demanded such an environment for her or him to learn and to become a self. He added that education is an endeavour that was designed to see a community of inquiring selves creating themselves and one another. Children create themselves and help create others. Educators contribute to the creation of

other selves because they are an important part of the environment. Or, as others say, "each of us becomes those people with whom we work, talk, share, and grow" (Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000, p. 60). The self as a human creation, then, is a lifetime undertaking, and educators guide in part this creation as they direct impulses, assist in the conversion of impulses into desires, and are co-partners with students in the transformation of desires into reflective purposes.

The Student's Significance

If a child is not created in the image of God and not a self in an historic sense, one may wonder how there can be any value attached to the person. And if there is no significance to children beyond that given to other socially created objects, why should society value and educate children? Why spend time in meaningless activities with valueless creatures? Dewey answered that all nature was of one kind and in the process of time became significant. The significance rests in the historical development of the universe and the human race. Humans evolved and acquired the potentiality and resources to be more than mere matter because "in experiment of Time's changes wise,/Recovered, conscious now, eternal peace/And Eternity knew Death and Care her own" (Boydston, 1977, p. 36). To clarify the significance of the self, Dewey explained that nature is "the whole complex of the results of the interaction of man, with his memories and hopes, understanding and desire, with that world to which one-sided philosophy confines 'nature'" (Dewey, 1934/1962, p. 152). Boydston's observation about Dewey's poem "Creation" amplifies his viewpoint:

> *Creation* moves from a picture of pre-creation, when nothing existed but "sterile Time," through the beginning of life activity and of physical ordering, into human history that is at first indiscriminate, "careless of offspring come and gone," and, finally, to the emergence of morality and of human sensitivity to value priorities, when "Time was won to love of feeble things that die,/And turned to tender care of all that grows." (Boydston, 1977, p. liv)

Believing that evolution made possible progressive developments, wise changes, and increased capacities, Dewey concluded in "Two Weeks," "we are more than simple brute/Only in that there have entered into us/The thoughts of others" (Boydston, 1977, p. 16). Humanness is tied in part to the ability to learn from the "thoughts of others" (p. 16). Thus, Dewey asserted that, with the evolution of humankind and human thought, the universe took on meaning. He spoke in poem #31 of the significance of the

growth of human understanding and the meaning that humans gave the universe when they first appeared on earth. He claimed,

> Long time lay the world level and open,
> Sharing and parting a common motion
> Possesst by all in wide publicity,
> Meaningless thus, lacking a me and thee. (Boydston, 1977, p. 21)

He repeated this thought almost verbatim in poem #77 and hinted that human refinement emerged in humankind's seeking, searching, and meaning-making: "And when he found, or when he searched in vain,/Dull blank things grew to meanings clear and plain" (Boydston, 1977, p. 56).

For Dewey, the arrival of humans in the world, and their learning, gave significance and value to their world. With the coming of knowledge, the creation of communities, and the possibility of growth, people became significant, created meaning and values, and learned to be responsible to act upon and transmit the best available information. Because nothing was valued before humans arrived, there is no point in discussing the value of anything apart from them. Values, significance, and importance are distinctively human constructs. Specific values depend partially on particular human beings and their individual situations, cultural circumstances, and historical context. Yet, what ought to be valued by humans are those things that promote human understanding, democratic communities, and personal and social growth. Even so, these elements which vary somewhat from one historical period to another are always shaped by what others have learned. Values, therefore, are not whimsical, idiosyncratic, or arbitrary, because they grow as society learns and matures. Moral knowledge emerged from disciplined inquiry much as knowledge did in other realms. Yet, every action and decision is "always specific, concrete, individualized, unique" (Dewey, 1920/1957, p. 167) and demands that each student develop moral thinking and traits. He concluded: "[W]e are only pleading for the adoption in moral reflection of the logic that has been proved to make for security, stringency and fertility in passing judgments upon physical phenomena" (p. 165). Because Dewey was community oriented and believed each person was a member of society, he claimed that logic is fertile when it is socially or publicly developed and tested, not validated on a purely personal level. Common or universal but not absolute values emerge from public or social searches for that which is good:

> We insisted at the last hour upon the unique character of every intrinsic good. But the counterpart of this proposition is that the situation in which a good is consciously realized is not one of transient sensations or private appetites but one of sharing and communication — public, social. Even the hermit communes with gods and spirits; even misery loves company; and the most extreme selfishness includes a band of followers or some partner to share in the attained good. Universalization means socialization, the extension of the area and range of those who share in a good. (Dewey, 1920/1957, p. 206)

PEDAGOGICAL THEORY

Dewey's pedagogical theory grew from his thinking about philosophical anthropology and his related views of child development. Out of these understandings, he developed a natural learning theory and an experimentalist philosophy of education. He claimed that learning as it occurs in a good home should be the model for school learning, not vice versa. The school should learn from the student's natural learning activities and work with other education agencies to take the immature child on a trip from raw impulses to a maturing youth, progressively developing the child into someone who reflectively constructs purposes and plans to reach selected ends. Consequently, Dewey's ideas of desirable environments, education, thinking, and teaching illuminate his view of the student.

The Student's Environment

From Dewey's standpoint, one of the most important responsibilities of an educator is to build and keep constructing educative environments for students, an ongoing process. In building school environments and utilizing external ones, the teacher seeks to control variables in such a manner that the student engages in and reflects upon experiences that are educative rather than noneducative, miseducative, or antieducative. In pursuing this end, the teacher is partially guided by the goal — not "the starting point" — of initiating students into the "subject-matter of the adult" (Dewey, 1938/1963, p. 83). For Dewey, "No experience is educative that does not tend both to knowledge of more facts and entertaining of more ideas and to a better, a more orderly, arrangement of them" (p. 82).

While this idea of schooling may be simple, it is not easy. Many factors may combine to create an unfriendly environment for the natural tendencies of the student. Certainly, many traditional schools of Dewey's period did not welcome the natural propensities of children. Nor did they

seek to guide and transform them. In poem #66, Dewey stressed the critical nature of the school environment. He envisioned, as he wrote this poem, an old man asking a boy if he understood what an imaginary educator had just said to him. The boy responded by exclaiming that he had not understood a single word. The lad added that a telling approach to teaching was inappropriate for him and resulted in no learning. If, however, people genuinely wanted him to learn, the way was clear: "put me with the little kiddies and I shall learn" (Boydston, 1977, p. 48). Educators must create an environment that connects children's common means of learning or is consistent with natural learning theory. Only then did Dewey envision the fullness of the spirit of learning being present in classrooms: "the holy spirit's dove once more descend / As it hath from the beginning and shall to th'end" (p. 48).

The Student's Education

Dewey was concerned that traditional education became often detrimental to the growth of children, largely noneducative or miseducative, or worse, antieducational (Dewey, 1916/1944, p. 196). He defined a noneducative experience as one having no impact on the immediate or future growth of the child or society. He defined a miseducative experience as one that intentionally or otherwise directed a person away from personal and social growth. He defined antieducative experience as one that exploited children or stunted their inquiring tendencies. In his writings Dewey urged educators to create, develop, and sustain learning environments in schools and communities that increasingly displaced non-, mis-, or antieducative ones. He specified that educative experiences had to meet a variety of criteria, involving a genuine problem of interest to the learner, a worthwhile activity within itself, a stimulus for new questions and more information, and an ordered experience to allow sufficient time for development, based upon a continuity of past, present, and future considerations (Dewey, 1933/1960, pp. 218–219).

In his poetry, Dewey wrote often of miseducation and antieducation. In one piece, he mentioned a child who had barely met his personified and defied Education (Boydston, 1977, p. lxiii, pp. 51–53) but was very familiar with studies that supposedly prepared him for a distant future. He described Education as calling and seeking the child, and, on occasion, the child as seeking the voice of Education. But the child, who is both the sought and the seeker, had doubts about his or her relationship to Education, confessing:

And tho I knew 'twas me you called,
I shrank afraid, appalled;
I thought it was not proper nor polite
For one like me to dare to claim a right
To speak with you . . . . (Boydston, 1977, p. 52)

The student's desire to converse with Education, the god from above, was thwarted at nearly every turn by an adult-constructed wall. The child was "captured in illusion" by "outward things said clear;/And about was the confusion/Of all the grown up persons said" (Boydston, 1977, p. 52). These adults warned the child against listening to Education before the appropriate time:

It is forbid
That you should hear till lid
Lifts from the things immured
I' the past; nor is it to be endured
That you should hear direct
Before the hull of your mind be o'erdecked
With stiff well seasoned boards
Brought from dry scholastic hoards. (Boydston, 1977, p. 52)

The proper time for the student to listen was only after he or she had been thoroughly socialized and his or her mind had been endlessly prepared (Boydston 1977, pp. 52–53). By the time these social boards had been nailed in place, adults had built "a thick wall" between the child and educative experiences, a wall that blocked and distorted Education's call. Indeed, Education's call "Arrives suppressed, altered in sense/Through medium, sound-proof, dense" (p. 53). Sadly, then, the forces of school and society often combine to erect "learning's fence" to hide the student from rich educative experiences and transform him or her into an alien in a distorted world: "In lands where we are foreign born/Living protected, safe, — and forlorn" (p. 53). The student's natural curiosity and adventuresome spirit were misshaped and, thereby, he or she was turned into an alien.

The Student's Thinking

If educators are to replace injurious social practices with educative opportunities, Dewey argued that a corrected view of the young student's abilities was necessary: the child is a natural and multitalented learner who does not need to be drawn out or have educators pour anything into her or him. Instead, Dewey averred that the child is "running over, spilling

over, with activities" (Boydston, 1976/1980, pp. 24–25) and that educators should direct these activities. But the battle to interpret children as Dewey did was not easy to win because many adults believed that children had limited intellectual abilities. Rather than seeing them as active, thinking beings, these adults saw them as passive vessels waiting to be filled or creatures that needed their interests extracted. Dewey countered by saying "the native and unspoiled attitude of childhood, marked by ardent curiosity, fertile imagination, and love of experimental inquiry, is near, very near, to the attitude of the scientific mind" (Dewey, 1933/1960, p. v). He manifested a similar attitude in his poems, revealing his admiration for nature and nature's gift: mind. In "Thy Mind," he delighted in the person who continued to grow in understanding:

Thy faithful mind reflecting clear
All charming forms, or far or near,
Draws from that high peak its dignity,
And from those depths strange mystery. (Boydston, 1977, p. 13)

He revealed both his admiration for the mind and his naturalistic ontology in poem #34 where he compared his view of human thought to an example of holy ground found in Hebrew scripture:

My mind is but a gutt'ring candle dip
With flick'ring beams the wind doth blow around;
Yet the scant space thus lit is holier ground
Than that where prophet did his sandal slip. . . . (p. 23)

But Dewey knew that thinking is not easy and that certain environments made it more difficult. In "Pulse in an Earthen Jar," he went even further and expressed doubt about a student's ability to recover from the detrimental consequences of being fully immersed in an unreflective, oppressive culture:

I think he is dead;
They have smothered him.
Does he dream when the soft wind sighs
At four in the summer's morn?
I think he is dead.
They have choked and stifled him. (p. 25)

The smothered, the choked, and the dead are those who have had their impulses and inquiries squelched by others. They do not dream of

possibilities nor think of solutions, much less think clearly, cogently, and coherently. In short, they never learn to think. And for Dewey the only kind of thinking is thinking for oneself. Educators, therefore, must not smother students but create learning environments to provide authentic problems that cultivate thinking (Dewey, 1916/1944, p. 303). Paradoxically, he also thought thinking could be stimulated in negative kinds of settings. Life need not be good or enjoyable for a child to learn to think. The injustices and oppressions of the child may awaken powers that a life of ease does not: "[only] when thinking is the imperative or urgent way out, only when it is the indicated road to a solution" does it occur (Dewey, 1920/1957, p. 139). When writing about children's mistreatment, he stated (poem # 86) that only those who rebel learn to think. And they are happier than those who never "felt the lash/'Cross their defenceless backs" (Boydston 1977, p. 64). Dewey (1920/1957) later amplified his thinking:

> Men [and women] do not, in their natural estate, think when they have no troubles to cope with, no difficulties to overcome. A life of ease, of success without effort, would be a thoughtless life, and so also would a life of ready omnipotence. Beings who think are beings whose life is so hemmed in and constricted that they cannot directly carry through a course of action to victorious consummation. Men [and women and children] also do not tend to think when their action, when they are amid difficulties, is dictated to them by authority. (pp. 138–139)

While noting a potentially important pedagogical stimulus, Dewey is no doubt remiss in this context of not mentioning that the traumas of life do not necessarily provoke children to think and that they can overwhelm the young. Dewey did not warn sufficiently of the overall harmful impact of the mistreatment of children.

The Student's Teacher

Dewey's ideal, the seasoned teacher, is a liberally educated, pedagogically competent, content-loving, student-sensitive, community-understanding, and scientifically thinking person. He envisioned a teacher who assumes a set of responsibilities, including those suggested by his analogies of the teacher as learner, intellectual leader, partner, guide, wise parent, navigator, social servant, prophet, physician, salesperson, engineer, pioneer, artist, researcher, orchestral conductor, gardener, farmer, watcher, helper, starter, director, organizer, mediator, and interpreter (Simpson & Jackson, 1997). For Dewey, then, there are overlapping professional, classroom, school-

wide, political, and community dimensions to what a good teacher should understand and do. Becoming such a person is neither a straightforward task nor an effortless one but such is critical if students are to be well served. Teaching is "the supreme art," a demanding undertaking that requires continual development (Boydston, 1967–1972, vol. 5, p. 94).

Unsurprisingly, Dewey was critical of the student experiences many districts and teachers prescribed, and was particularly disapproving of teachers and schools that were so immersed in the past they manifested little understanding of present-day students. He summarized his objections as follows:

> How many students . . . were rendered callous to ideas, and how many lost the impetus to learn because of the way in which learning was experienced by them? How many acquired special skills by means of automatic drill so that their power of judgment and capacity to act intelligently in new situations was limited? How many came to associate the learning process with ennui and boredom? How many found what they did learn so foreign to the situation of life outside the school as to give them no power or control over the latter? How many came to associate books with dull drudgery, so that they were "conditioned" to all but flashy reading matter? (Dewey, 1923/1963, pp. 26–27)

Dewey clarified his view of the desirable teacher, not only by his explicit and positive comments but also by his criticisms of the weaknesses of the traditional teacher and the excesses of the progressive teacher. His poetry moved beyond his other writings to reveal a loathing for a certain kind of teacher: the pedantic teacher who destroyed the natural learning inclinations of students. The mind of the teacher, in "To a Pedant," has storerooms stocked with ostentatious ornaments, a covered pool in a marble hall with no sign of life, cabinets with numerous pigeon-holes and other indicators of debt to "stale antiquity's refurbished store," a dining hall with four-hundred-year-old "cold banquets," a library with second-hand "substitutes for thought," and a "pompous sentinel" to ensure the present did not invade the past. The sentinel stood

> With garb of horn and fossil shell,
> To catch, arrest and smother
> Any chance idea or other
> That might find its stray unbidden way
> To those dim musty purlieus gray. (Boydston, 1977, p. 78)

Dewey wanted a different model for students. He did not want teachers who displayed knowledge for others to see, who shielded themselves from ideas that might breathe new life into their thinking, who interpreted fresh

experiences in terms of musty categories, who protected themselves from the present by hiding in antiquity, and who consumed remote intellectual fare in chilly banquet halls. Nor did he want teachers who frequented repositories that were filled with hand-me-down ideas and who guarded themselves from contemporary discoveries. He wanted teachers — and students — who understood that knowledge was always developing, that open-mindedness was necessary to continue learning, that reflection upon current and emerging understandings was invaluable, that searching for new insights from the past and present was necessary, that seeing and explaining the relevance of knowledge was an essential part of teaching, and that thinking for oneself was the only sure way to remain intellectually alive.

Why was Dewey so critical of the pedant? Beyond the obvious reasons, he understood that teachers were an important part of the living curriculum and that students were prone to adopt and develop the attitudes, dispositions, and understandings of their teachers. He obliquely but forcefully argued for the development of a particular kind of student by warning against the pedant. Predictably, his most dramatic warning was to professional educators, the guardians of antiquated, intellectual collections and pedagogical practices:

> What avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his [or her] own soul: loses his appreciation of things worth while, of the values to which these things are relative; if he loses desires to apply what he has learned and, above all, loses the ability to extract meaning from his future experiences as they occur? (Dewey, 1938/1963, p. 49)

CONCLUSION

A study of Dewey's poetry and its illumination of his concept of the student is not likely to change what many think about his controversial opinions. Indeed, the new insights, fresh meanings, and powerful expressions found in his poems may simply confirm the prior judgments of many critics. To claim, therefore, that the relevance of his ideas for the future depends in part upon how much his readers agree with his philosophy is almost not worth saying. Yet, this point cannot be ignored. Those who think Dewey's philosophical beliefs about students and pedagogy are seriously flawed can hardly be expected to welcome his poetic assertions. On the other hand, some may agree with much that he thought and still object to his views of human impulses, self, and significance. Moreover, his theory of

self may leave critics wondering how a balanced approach to the creation of the self by both the child and the school can be ethically and operationally accomplished. How can so many creators of a child's self leave room for her or his personal identity and integrity? So, too, those who argue that Dewey had an "ultrasocial conception of individuality" will not be comforted by his poetry (Ryan, 1995, p. 319). Similarly, those who are immersed in contemporary psychological theory and research may doubt the validity of Dewey's classifications and descriptions of original impulses and their relevance for schooling. Further, those who have learned from postmodernism may question his tendency to universalize student impulses. For a variety of reasons, both his critics and proponents may challenge his assumption that all students need to be physically as well as intellectually active. Does this belief imply too much, i.e., does it question the learning abilities of the physically challenged? Likewise, contemporary thinkers may believe that Dewey placed too much emphasis on a student's natural learning propensities and too little on how a school and a student develop an adult mind. Acquiring an adult mind, critics may insist, is too complex an undertaking to be guided by natural theory of learning alone.

Of course, one may agree with aspects of Dewey's concept of students and pedagogical thought while objecting strenuously to some of his basic assumptions and beliefs. Rightly understood, for example, it may appear that his attention to students, teachers, knowledge, and society is a healthy counterbalance to fashionable trends that sweep certain quarters. These fashions sometimes take the form of emphasizing teachers or students, knowledge or students, or some other dichotomy. These components were important to Dewey because he viewed each as a critical part of the educational enterprise. Growth is an interactive process that involves educators, students, knowledge, and the broader environment.

Dewey's attention to means and ends may also be important in environments that tend to overemphasize either methodology or outcomes. He was interested in the means of education as well as the outcomes. The ethical justification of the means — the lack thereof being a primary source of smothering, choking, and destroying students — was as important as the rationale to pursue a set of ends. He may also raise our sights in the area of ends in a way that too few politicians and bureaucrats appreciate. For instance, he was interested in moving beyond narrowly defined student performance standards to nurturing reflective children and youth who are contributors to the development of healthy societies. Stressing the ends of personal and community growth may be a healthy counter force to the overemphasis of some on the relationship of schooling to economic outcomes. Arguably, Dewey's treatment of non-, mis-, anti-, and educative

experiences can be a helpful concept as educators make curricular decisions. For Dewey, one experience was not necessarily as good as another because he strongly believed that some experiences nurtured scientific thinking better than others and some contributed to personal and social growth in ways that others did not. He was, likewise, aware that environments and cultures affect students' thinking in positive and negative ways. While open to debate and new developments, he was secure in his belief that some environments manifestly inhibit the reflective development of students more than others (Dewey 1933/1960, pp. 121*ff*).

Nothing less than what Dewey himself recommended will determine the relevance of his concept of the student and related pedagogical thought. That is to say, reflection — "Active, persistent, and careful consideration of . . . [his] beliefs . . . in the light of the grounds that support . . . [them] and the further conclusions" to which they lead — on his view of students and teachers as communities of inquirers will determine the appropriateness of his ideas (Dewey, 1960, p. 9). His poetry offers no escape from reflection about students and teaching. Indeed, it pushes even more dramatically for reflection: "By love of learning, let me find/My own last essence, Mind" (Boydson, 1977, p. 61). This love of learning is not fully understood if anyone thinks it is always a joy to reflect and forgets that learning has its share of pain brought on by probing deeper into issues, questioning beliefs, searching for alternative perspectives, and thinking through options (Boydson, 1977, p. 58). If Dewey's concept is sound, it is the student's nature and, ideally, destiny to experience the joys and pains of inquiring, reflecting, and learning. But the pain should come from educative learning experiences, not from walls that schools and society create to stymie the learning and development of the student.

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