**John Dewey**

Experience and Education»»

[Page lw.13.2, blank]

[Page lw.13.3]

Preface

Dewey: Page lw.13.3

All social movements involve conflicts which are

reflected intellectually in controversies. It would not be a sign of

health if such an important social interest as education were not

also an arena of struggles, practical and theoretical. But for

theory, at least for the theory that forms a philosophy of education,

the practical conflicts and the controversies that are conducted

upon the level of these conflicts, only set a problem. It is the

business of an intelligent theory of education to ascertain the causes

for the conflicts that exist and then, instead of taking one side or

the other, to indicate a plan of operations proceeding from a level

deeper and more inclusive than is represented by the practices

and ideas of the contending parties.

Dewey: Page lw.13.3

This formulation of the business of the philosophy of

education does not mean that the latter should attempt to bring about

a compromise between opposed schools of thought, to find a via

media, nor yet make an eclectic combination of points picked out

hither and yon from all schools. It means the necessity of the

introduction of a new order of conceptions leading to new modes

of practice. It is for this reason that it is so difficult to develop a

philosophy of education, the moment tradition and custom are

departed from. It is for this reason that the conduct of schools,

based upon a new order of conceptions, is so much more difficult

than is the management of schools which walk in beaten paths.

Hence, every movement in the direction of a new order of ideas

and of activities directed by them calls out, sooner or later, a

return to what appear to be simpler and more fundamental ideas

and practices of the past--as is exemplified at present in

education in the attempt to revive the principles of ancient Greece and

of the middle ages.

Dewey: Page lw.13.3

It is in this context that I have suggested at the close of this

little volume that those who are looking ahead to a new

[Page lw.13.4]

movement in education, adapted to the existing need for a new social

order, should think in terms of Education itself rather than in

terms of some 'ism about education, even such an 'ism as

"progressivism." For in spite of itself any movement that thinks and

acts in terms of an 'ism becomes so involved in reaction against

other 'isms that it is unwittingly controlled by them. For it then

forms its principles by reaction against them instead of by a

comprehensive constructive survey of actual needs, problems,

and possibilities. Whatever value is possessed by the essay

presented in this little volume resides in its attempt to call attention

to the larger and deeper issues of Education so as to suggest their

proper frame of reference.

[Page lw.13.5]

1. Traditional vs. Progressive Education

Dewey: Page lw.13.5

Mankind likes to think in terms of extreme opposites. It

is given to formulating its beliefs in terms of Either-Ors, between

which it recognizes no intermediate possibilities. When forced to

recognize that the extremes cannot be acted upon, it is still

inclined to hold that they are all right in theory but that when

it comes to practical matters circumstances compel us to

compromise. Educational philosophy is no exception. The history

of educational theory is marked by opposition between the idea

that education is development from within and that it is

formation from without; that it is based upon natural

endowments and that education is a process of overcoming natural

inclination and substituting in its place habits acquired under

external pressure.

Dewey: Page lw.13.5

At present, the opposition, so far as practical affairs of the

school are concerned, tends to take the form of contrast between

traditional and progressive education. If the underlying ideas of

the former are formulated broadly, without the qualifications

required for accurate statement, they are found to be about as

follows: The subject-matter of education consists of bodies of

information and of skills that have been worked out in the past;

therefore, the chief business of the school is to transmit them to

the new generation. In the past, there have also been developed

standards and rules of conduct; moral training consists in

forming habits of action in conformity with these rules and standards.

Finally, the general pattern of school organization (by which I

mean the relations of pupils to one another and to the teachers)

constitutes the school a kind of institution sharply marked off

from other social institutions. Call up in imagination the

ordinary schoolroom, its time-schedules, schemes of classification, of

examination and promotion, of rules of order, and I think you

will grasp what is meant by "pattern of organization." If then

[Page lw.13.6]

you contrast this scene with what goes on in the family, for

example, you will appreciate what is meant by the school being a

kind of institution sharply marked off from any other form of

social organization.

Dewey: Page lw.13.6

The three characteristics just mentioned fix the aims and

methods of instruction and discipline. The main purpose or objective

is to prepare the young for future responsibilities and for success

in life, by means of acquisition of the organized bodies of

information and prepared forms of skill which comprehend the

material of instruction. Since the subject-matter as well as standards

of proper conduct are handed down from the past, the attitude of

pupils must, upon the whole, be one of docility, receptivity, and

obedience. Books, especially textbooks, are the chief

representatives of the lore and wisdom of the past, while teachers are the

organs through which pupils are brought into effective

connection with the material. Teachers are the agents through which

knowledge and skills are communicated and rules of conduct

enforced.

Dewey: Page lw.13.6

I have not made this brief summary for the purpose of

criticizing the underlying philosophy. The rise of what is called new

education and progressive schools is of itself a product of discontent

with traditional education. In effect it is a criticism of the latter.

When the implied criticism is made explicit it reads somewhat as

follows: The traditional scheme is, in essence, one of imposition

from above and from outside. It imposes adult standards,

subject-matter, and methods upon those who are only growing

slowly toward maturity. The gap is so great that the required

subject-matter, the methods of learning and of behaving are foreign

to the existing capacities of the young. They are beyond the

reach of the experience the young learners already possess.

Consequently, they must be imposed; even though good teachers will

use devices of art to cover up the imposition so as to relieve it of

obviously brutal features.

Dewey: Page lw.13.6

But the gulf between the mature or adult products and the

experience and abilities of the young is so wide that the very

situation forbids much active participation by pupils in the

development of what is taught. Theirs is to do--and learn, as it was the

part of the six hundred to do and die. Learning here means

acquisition of what already is incorporated in books and in the

heads of the elders. Moreover, that which is taught is thought of

[Page lw.13.7]

as essentially static. It is taught as a finished product, with little

regard either to the ways in which it was originally built up or to

changes that will surely occur in the future. It is to a large extent

the cultural product of societies that assumed the future would

be much like the past, and yet it is used as educational food in a

society where change is the rule, not the exception.

Dewey: Page lw.13.7

If one attempts to formulate the philosophy of education

implicit in the practices of the newer education, we may, I think,

discover certain common principles amid the variety of

progressive schools now existing. To imposition from above is opposed

expression and cultivation of individuality; to external discipline

is opposed free activity; to learning from texts and teachers,

learning through experience; to acquisition of isolated skills and

techniques by drill, is opposed acquisition of them as means of

attaining ends which make direct vital appeal; to preparation for

a more or less remote future is opposed making the most of the

opportunities of present life; to static aims and materials is

opposed acquaintance with a changing world.

Dewey: Page lw.13.7

Now, all principles by themselves are abstract. They become

concrete only in the consequences which result from their

application. Just because the principles set forth are so fundamental

and far-reaching, everything depends upon the interpretation

given them as they are put into practice in the school and the

home. It is at this point that the reference made earlier to Either-

Or philosophies becomes peculiarly pertinent. The general

philosophy of the new education may be sound, and yet the

difference in abstract principles will not decide the way in which the

moral and intellectual preference involved shall be worked out in

practice. There is always the danger in a new movement that in

rejecting the aims and methods of that which it would supplant,

it may develop its principles negatively rather than positively and

constructively. Then it takes its clew in practice from that which

is rejected instead of from the constructive development of its

own philosophy.

Dewey: Page lw.13.7

I take it that the fundamental unity of the newer philosophy is

found in the idea that there is an intimate and necessary relation

between the processes of actual experience and education. If this

be true, then a positive and constructive development of its own

basic idea depends upon having a correct idea of experience.

Take, for example, the question of organized subject-matter--

[Page lw.13.8]

which will be discussed in some detail later. The problem for

progressive education is: What is the place and meaning of

subject-matter and of organization within experience? How does

subject-matter function? Is there anything inherent in experience

which tends towards progressive organization of its contents?

What results follow when the materials of experience are not

progressively organized? A philosophy which proceeds on the

basis of rejection, of sheer opposition, will neglect these

questions. It will tend to suppose that because the old education was

based on ready-made organization, therefore it suffices to reject

the principle of organization in toto, instead of striving to

discover what it means and how it is to be attained on the basis of

experience. We might go through all the points of difference

between the new and the old education and reach similar

conclusions. When external control is rejected, the problem becomes

that of finding the factors of control that are inherent within

experience. When external authority is rejected, it does not follow

that all authority should be rejected, but rather that there is need

to search for a more effective source of authority. Because the

older education imposed the knowledge, methods, and the rules

of conduct of the mature person upon the young, it does not

follow, except upon the basis of the extreme Either-Or philosophy,

that the knowledge and skill of the mature person has no

directive value for the experience of the immature. On the contrary,

basing education upon personal experience may mean more

multiplied and more intimate contacts between the mature and the

immature than ever existed in the traditional school, and

consequently more, rather than less, guidance by others. The problem,

then, is: how these contacts can be established without violating

the principle of learning through personal experience. The

solution of this problem requires a well thought-out philosophy of

the social factors that operate in the constitution of individual

experience.

Dewey: Page lw.13.8

What is indicated in the foregoing remarks is that the general

principles of the new education do not of themselves solve any of

the problems of the actual or practical conduct and management

of progressive schools. Rather, they set new problems which have

to be worked out on the basis of a new philosophy of experience.

The problems are not even recognized, to say nothing of being

[Page lw.13.9]

solved, when it is assumed that it suffices to reject the ideas and

practices of the old education and then go to the opposite

extreme. Yet I am sure that you will appreciate what is meant when

I say that many of the newer schools tend to make little or

nothing of organized subject-matter of study; to proceed as if any

form of direction and guidance by adults were an invasion of

individual freedom, and as if the idea that education should

be concerned with the present and future meant that

acquaintance with the past has little or no role to play in education.

Without pressing these defects to the point of exaggeration, they

at least illustrate what is meant by a theory and practice of

education which proceeds negatively or by reaction against what has

been current in education rather than by a positive and

constructive development of purposes, methods, and subject-matter

on the foundation of a theory of experience and its educational

potentialities.

Dewey: Page lw.13.9

It is not too much to say that an educational philosophy which

professes to be based on the idea of freedom may become as

dogmatic as ever was the traditional education which is reacted

against. For any theory and set of practices is dogmatic which is

not based upon critical examination of its own underlying

principles. Let us say that the new education emphasizes the freedom

of the learner. Very well. A problem is now set. What does

freedom mean and what are the conditions under which it is capable

of realization? Let us say that the kind of external imposition

which was so common in the traditional school limited rather

than promoted the intellectual and moral development of the

young. Again, very well. Recognition of this serious defect sets a

problem. Just what is the role of the teacher and of books in

promoting the educational development of the immature? Admit

that traditional education employed as the subject-matter for

study facts and ideas so bound up with the past as to give little

help in dealing with the issues of the present and future. Very

well. Now we have the problem of discovering the connection

which actually exists within experience between the

achievements of the past and the issues of the present. We have the

problem of ascertaining how acquaintance with the past may be

translated into a potent instrumentality for dealing effectively

with the future. We may reject knowledge of the past as the end

[Page lw.13.10]

of education and thereby only emphasize its importance as a

means. When we do that we have a problem that is new in the

story of education: How shall the young become acquainted

with the past in such a way that the acquaintance is a potent

agent in appreciation of the living present?

[Page lw.13.11]

2. The Need of a Theory of Experience

Dewey: Page lw.13.11

In short, the point I am making is that rejection of the

philosophy and practice of traditional education sets a new type

of difficult educational problem for those who believe in the new

type of education. We shall operate blindly and in confusion until

we recognize this fact; until we thoroughly appreciate that

departure from the old solves no problems. What is said in the

following pages is, accordingly, intended to indicate some of the

main problems with which the newer education is confronted

and to suggest the main lines along which their solution is to be

sought. I assume that amid all uncertainties there is one

permanent frame of reference: namely, the organic connection between

education and personal experience; or, that the new philosophy

of education is committed to some kind of empirical and

experimental philosophy. But experience and experiment are not self-

explanatory ideas. Rather, their meaning is part of the problem

to be explored. To know the meaning of empiricism we need to

understand what experience is.

Dewey: Page lw.13.11

The belief that all genuine education comes about through

experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or

equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly

equated to each other. For some experiences are mis-educative.

Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or

distorting the growth of further experience. An experience may

be such as to engender callousness; it may produce lack of

sensitivity and of responsiveness. Then the possibilities of having

richer experience in the future are restricted. Again, a given

experience may increase a person's automatic skill in a particular

direction and yet tend to land him in a groove or rut; the effect

again is to narrow the field of further experience. An experience

may be immediately enjoyable and yet promote the formation of

a slack and careless attitude; this attitude then operates to

[Page lw.13.12]

modify the quality of subsequent experiences so as to prevent a

person from getting out of them what they have to give. Again,

experiences may be so disconnected from one another that, while

each is agreeable or even exciting in itself, they are not linked

cumulatively to one another. Energy is then dissipated and a

person becomes scatter-brained. Each experience may be lively,

vivid, and "interesting," and yet their disconnectedness may

artificially generate dispersive, disintegrated, centrifugal habits. The

consequence of formation of such habits is inability to control

future experiences. They are then taken, either by way of

enjoyment or of discontent and revolt, just as they come. Under such

circumstances, it is idle to talk of self-control.

Dewey: Page lw.13.12

Traditional education offers a plethora of examples of

experiences of the kinds just mentioned. It is a great mistake to

suppose, even tacitly, that the traditional schoolroom was not a

place in which pupils had experiences. Yet this is tacitly assumed

when progressive education as a plan of learning by experience is

placed in sharp opposition to the old. The proper line of attack is

that the experiences which were had, by pupils and teachers

alike, were largely of a wrong kind. How many students, for

example, 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 situations

of life outside the school as to give them no power of 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: Page lw.13.12

If I ask these questions, it is not for the sake of wholesale

condemnation of the old education. It is for quite another purpose. It

is to emphasize the fact, first, that young people in traditional

schools do have experiences; and, secondly, that the trouble is not

the absence of experiences, but their defective and wrong

character--wrong and defective from the standpoint of connection

with further experience. The positive side of this point is even

more important in connection with progressive education. It is

[Page lw.13.13]

not enough to insist upon the necessity of experience, nor even of

activity in experience. Everything depends upon the quality of

the experience which is had. The quality of any experience has

two aspects. There is an immediate aspect of agreeableness or

disagreeableness, and there is its influence upon later

experiences. The first is obvious and easy to judge. The effect of an

experience is not borne on its face. It sets a problem to the

educator. It is his business to arrange for the kind of experiences

which, while they do not repel the student, but rather engage his

activities are, nevertheless, more than immediately enjoyable

since they promote having desirable future experiences. Just as

no man lives or dies to himself, so no experience lives and dies to

itself. Wholly independent of desire or intent, every experience

lives on in further experiences. Hence the central problem of

an education based upon experience is to select the kind of

present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent

experiences.

Dewey: Page lw.13.13

Later, I shall discuss in more detail the principle of the

continuity of experience or what may be called the experiential

continuum. Here I wish simply to emphasize the importance of this

principle for the philosophy of educative experience. A

philosophy of education, like any theory, has to be stated in words, in

symbols. But so far as it is more than verbal it is a plan for

conducting education. Like any plan, it must be framed with

reference to what is to be done and how it is to be done. The more

definitely and sincerely it is held that education is a development

within, by, and for experience, the more important it is that there

shall be clear conceptions of what experience is. Unless

experience is so conceived that the result is a plan for deciding upon

subject-matter, upon methods of instruction and discipline, and

upon material equipment and social organization of the school,

it is wholly in the air. It is reduced to a form of words which may

be emotionally stirring but for which any other set of words

might equally well be substituted unless they indicate operations

to be initiated and executed. Just because traditional education

was a matter of routine in which the plans and programs were

handed down from the past, it does not follow that progressive

education is a matter of planless improvisation.

Dewey: Page lw.13.13

The traditional school could get along without any

[Page lw.13.14]

consistently developed philosophy of education. About all it required

in that line was a set of abstract words like culture, discipline, our

great cultural heritage, etc., actual guidance being derived not

from them but from custom and established routines. Just

because progressive schools cannot rely upon established traditions

and institutional habits, they must either proceed more or less

haphazardly or be directed by ideas which, when they are made

articulate and coherent, form a philosophy of education. Revolt

against the kind of organization characteristic of the traditional

school constitutes a demand for a kind of organization based

upon ideas. I think that only slight acquaintance with the history

of education is needed to prove that educational reformers and

innovators alone have felt the need for a philosophy of education.

Those who adhered to the established system needed merely a

few fine-sounding words to justify existing practices. The real

work was done by habits which were so fixed as to be

institutional. The lesson for progressive education is that it requires in

an urgent degree, a degree more pressing than was incumbent

upon former innovators, a philosophy of education based upon a

philosophy of experience.

Dewey: Page lw.13.14

I remarked incidentally that the philosophy in question is, to

paraphrase the saying of Lincoln about democracy, one of

education of, by, and for experience. No one of these words, of, by, or

for, names anything which is self-evident. Each of them is a

challenge to discover and put into operation a principle of order and

organization which follows from understanding what educative

experience signifies.

Dewey: Page lw.13.14

It is, accordingly, a much more difficult task to work out the

kinds of materials, of methods, and of social relationships that

are appropriate to the new education than is the case with

traditional education. I think many of the difficulties experienced in

the conduct of progressive schools and many of the criticisms

leveled against them arise from this source. The difficulties are

aggravated and the criticisms are increased when it is supposed

that the new education is somehow easier than the old. This

belief is, I imagine, more or less current. Perhaps it illustrates again

the Either-Or philosophy, springing from the idea that about all

which is required is not to do what is done in traditional schools.

Dewey: Page lw.13.14

I admit gladly that the new education is simpler in principle

[Page lw.13.15]

than the old. It is in harmony with principles of growth, while

there is very much which is artificial in the old selection and

arrangement of subjects and methods, and artificiality always leads

to unnecessary complexity. But the easy and the simple are not

identical. To discover what is really simple and to act upon the

discovery is an exceedingly difficult task. After the artificial and

complex is once institutionally established and ingrained in

custom and routine, it is easier to walk in the paths that have been

beaten than it is, after taking a new point of view, to work out

what is practically involved in the new point of view. The old

Ptolemaic astronomical system was more complicated with its

cycles and epicycles than the Copernican system. But until

organization of actual astronomical phenomena on the ground of the

latter principle had been effected the easiest course was to follow

the line of least resistance provided by the old intellectual habit.

So we come back to the idea that a coherent theory of

experience, affording positive direction to selection and organization

of appropriate educational methods and materials, is required by

the attempt to give new direction to the work of the schools. The

process is a slow and arduous one. It is a matter of growth, and

there are many obstacles which tend to obstruct growth and to

deflect it into wrong lines.

Dewey: Page lw.13.15

I shall have something to say later about organization. All that

is needed, perhaps, at this point is to say that we must escape

from the tendency to think of organization in terms of the kind

of organization, whether of content (or subject-matter), or of

methods and social relations, that mark traditional education. I

think that a good deal of the current opposition to the idea of

organization is due to the fact that it is so hard to get away from

the picture of the studies of the old school. The moment

"organization" is mentioned imagination goes almost automatically to

the kind of organization that is familiar, and in revolting against

that we are led to shrink from the very idea of any organization.

On the other hand, educational reactionaries, who are now

gathering force, use the absence of adequate intellectual and moral

organization in the newer type of school as proof not only of the

need of organization, but to identify any and every kind of

organization with that instituted before the rise of experimental

science. Failure to develop a conception of organization upon

[Page lw.13.16]

the empirical and experimental basis gives reactionaries a too

easy victory. But the fact that the empirical sciences now offer the

best type of intellectual organization which can be found in any

field shows that there is no reason why we, who call ourselves

empiricists, should be "pushovers" in the matter of order and

organization.

[Page lw.13.17]

3. Criteria of Experience

Dewey: Page lw.13.17

If there is any truth in what has been said about the need

of forming a theory of experience in order that education may be

intelligently conducted upon the basis of experience, it is clear

that the next thing in order in this discussion is to present the

principles that are most significant in framing this theory. I shall

not, therefore, apologize for engaging in a certain amount of

philosophical analysis, which otherwise might be out of place. I

may, however, reassure you to some degree by saying that this

analysis is not an end in itself but is engaged in for the sake of

obtaining criteria to be applied later in discussion of a number of

concrete and, to most persons, more interesting issues.

Dewey: Page lw.13.17

I have already mentioned what I called the category of

continuity, or the experiential continuum. This principle is involved,

as I pointed out, in every attempt to discriminate between

experiences that are worth while educationally and those that are not.

It may seem superfluous to argue that this discrimination is

necessary not only in criticizing the traditional type of education but

also in initiating and conducting a different type. Nevertheless, it

is advisable to pursue for a little while the idea that it is

necessary. One may safely assume, I suppose, that one thing which has

recommended the progressive movement is that it seems more in

accord with the democratic ideal to which our people is

committed than do the procedures of the traditional school, since the

latter have so much of the autocratic about them. Another thing

which has contributed to its favorable reception is that its

methods are humane in comparison with the harshness so often

attending the policies of the traditional school.

Dewey: Page lw.13.17

The question I would raise concerns why we prefer democratic

and humane arrangements to those which are autocratic and

harsh. And by "why," I mean the reason for preferring them, not

just the causes which lead us to the preference. One cause may

[Page lw.13.18]

be that we have been taught not only in the schools but by the

press, the pulpit, the platform, and our laws and law-making

bodies that democracy is the best of all social institutions. We

may have so assimilated this idea from our surroundings that it

has become an habitual part of our mental and moral make-up.

But similar causes have led other persons in different

surroundings to widely varying conclusions--to prefer fascism, for

example. The cause for our preference is not the same thing as the

reason why we should prefer it.

Dewey: Page lw.13.18

It is not my purpose here to go in detail into the reason. But I

would ask a single question: Can we find any reason that does

not ultimately come down to the belief that democratic social

arrangements promote a better quality of human experience, one

which is more widely accessible and enjoyed, than do non-

democratic and anti-democratic forms of social life? Does not

the principle of regard for individual freedom and for decency

and kindliness of human relations come back in the end to the

conviction that these things are tributary to a higher quality of

experience on the part of a greater number than are methods of

repression and coercion or force? Is it not the reason for our

preference that we believe that mutual consultation and

convictions reached through persuasion, make possible a better quality

of experience than can otherwise be provided on any wide scale?

Dewey: Page lw.13.18

If the answer to these questions is in the affirmative (and

personally I do not see how we can justify our preference for

democracy and humanity on any other ground), the ultimate reason for

hospitality to progressive education, because of its reliance upon

and use of humane methods and its kinship to democracy, goes

back to the fact that discrimination is made between the inherent

values of different experiences. So I come back to the principle of

continuity of experience as a criterion of discrimination.

Dewey: Page lw.13.18

At bottom, this principle rests upon the fact of habit, when

habit is interpreted biologically. The basic characteristic of habit

is that every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one

who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether

we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences. For it is

a somewhat different person who enters into them. The principle

of habit so understood obviously goes deeper than the ordinary

conception of a habit as a more or less fixed way of doing things,

although it includes the latter as one of its special cases. It covers

[Page lw.13.19]

the formation of attitudes, attitudes that are emotional and

intellectual; it covers our basic sensitivities and ways of meeting and

responding to all the conditions which we meet in living. From

this point of view, the principle of continuity of experience means

that every experience both takes up something from those which

have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those

which come after. As the poet states it,

. . . all experience is an arch wherethro'

Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades

Forever and forever when I move.

Dewey: Page lw.13.19

So far, however, we have no ground for discrimination among

experiences. For the principle is of universal application. There is

some kind of continuity in every case. It is when we note the

different forms in which continuity of experience operates that we

get the basis of discriminating among experiences. I may

illustrate what is meant by an objection which has been brought

against an idea which I once put forth--namely, that the

educative process can be identified with growth when that is

understood in terms of the active participle, growing.

Dewey: Page lw.13.19

Growth, or growing as developing, not only physically but

intellectually and morally, is one exemplification of the principle of

continuity. The objection made is that growth might take many

different directions: a man, for example, who starts out on a

career of burglary may grow in that direction, and by practice

may grow into a highly expert burglar. Hence it is argued that

"growth" is not enough; we must also specify the direction in

which growth takes place, the end towards which it tends.

Before, however, we decide that the objection is conclusive we must

analyze the case a little further.

Dewey: Page lw.13.19

That a man may grow in efficiency as a burglar, as a gangster,

or as a corrupt politician, cannot be doubted. But from the

standpoint of growth as education and education as growth the

question is whether growth in this direction promotes or retards

growth in general. Does this form of growth create conditions

for further growth, or does it set up conditions that shut off the

person who has grown in this particular direction from the

occasions, stimuli, and opportunities for continuing growth in new

directions? What is the effect of growth in a special direction

upon the attitudes and habits which alone open up avenues for

[Page lw.13.20]

development in other lines? I shall leave you to answer these

questions, saying simply that when and only when

development in a particular line conduces to continuing growth does it

answer to the criterion of education as growing. For the

conception is one that must find universal and not specialized limited

application.

Dewey: Page lw.13.20

I return now to the question of continuity as a criterion by

which to discriminate between experiences which are educative

and those which are mis-educative. As we have seen, there is

some kind of continuity in any case since every experience affects

for better or worse the attitudes which help decide the quality of

further experiences, by setting up certain preference and

aversion, and making it easier or harder to act for this or that end.

Moreover, every experience influences in some degree the

objective conditions under which further experiences are had. For

example, a child who learns to speak has a new facility and new

desire. But he has also widened the external conditions of

subsequent learning. When he learns to read, he similarly opens up a

new environment. If a person decides to become a teacher,

lawyer, physician, or stockbroker, when he executes his intention he

thereby necessarily determines to some extent the environment

in which he will act in the future. He has rendered himself more

sensitive and responsive to certain conditions, and relatively

immune to those things about him that would have been stimuli if

he had made another choice.

Dewey: Page lw.13.20

But, while the principle of continuity applies in some way in

every case, the quality of the present experience influences the

way in which the principle applies. We speak of spoiling a child

and of the spoilt child. The effect of overindulging a child is a

continuing one. It sets up an attitude which operates as an

automatic demand that persons and objects cater to his desires and

caprices in the future. It makes him seek the kind of situation

that will enable him to do what he feels like doing at the time. It

renders him averse to and comparatively incompetent in

situations which require effort and perseverance in overcoming

obstacles. There is no paradox in the fact that the principle of the

continuity of experience may operate so as to leave a person

arrested on a low plane of development, in a way which limits later

capacity for growth.

Dewey: Page lw.13.20

On the other hand, if an experience arouses curiosity,

[Page lw.13.21]

strengthens initiative, and sets up desires and purposes that are

sufficiently intense to carry a person over dead places in the future,

continuity works in a very different way. Every experience is a

moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what

it moves toward and into. The greater maturity of experience

which should belong to the adult as educator puts him in a

position to evaluate each experience of the young in a way in which

the one having the less mature experience cannot do. It is then

the business of the educator to see in what direction an

experience is heading. There is no point in his being more mature if,

instead of using his greater insight to help organize the

conditions of the experience of the immature, he throws away his

insight. Failure to take the moving force of an experience into

account so as to judge and direct it on the ground of what it is

moving into means disloyalty to the principle of experience itself.

The disloyalty operates in two directions. The educator is false to

the understanding that he should have obtained from his own

past experience. He is also unfaithful to the fact that all human

experience is ultimately social: that it involves contact and

communication. The mature person, to put it in moral terms, has no

right to withhold from the young on given occasions whatever

capacity for sympathetic understanding his own experience has

given him.

Dewey: Page lw.13.21

No sooner, however, are such things said than there is a

tendency to react to the other extreme and take what has been said

as a plea for some sort of disguised imposition from outside. It is

worth while, accordingly, to say something about the way in

which the adult can exercise the wisdom his own wider

experience gives him without imposing a merely external control. On

one side, it is his business to be on the alert to see what attitudes

and habitual tendencies are being created. In this direction he

must, if he is an educator, be able to judge what attitudes are

actually conducive to continued growth and what are detrimental.

He must, in addition, have that sympathetic understanding of

individuals as individuals which gives him an idea of what is

actually going on in the minds of those who are learning. It is, among

other things, the need for these abilities on the part of the parent

and teacher which makes a system of education based upon

living experience a more difficult affair to conduct successfully

than it is to follow the patterns of traditional education.

[Page lw.13.22]

Dewey: Page lw.13.22

But there is another aspect of the matter. Experience does not

go on simply inside a person. It does go on there, for it influences

the formation of attitudes of desire and purpose. But this is not

the whole of the story. Every genuine experience has an active

side which changes in some degree the objective conditions

under which experiences are had. The difference between

civilization and savagery, to take an example on a large scale, is

found in the degree in which previous experiences have changed

the objective conditions under which subsequent experiences

take place. The existence of roads, of means of rapid movement

and transportation, tools, implements, furniture, electric light

and power, are illustrations. Destroy the external conditions of

present civilized experience, and for a time our experience would

relapse into that of barbaric peoples.

Dewey: Page lw.13.22

In a word, we live from birth to death in a world of persons

and things which in large measure is what it is because of what

has been done and transmitted from previous human activities.

When this fact is ignored, experience is treated as if it were

something which goes on exclusively inside an individual's body and

mind. It ought not to be necessary to say that experience does

not occur in a vacuum. There are sources outside an individual

which give rise to experience. It is constantly fed from these

springs. No one would question that a child in a slum tenement

has a different experience from that of a child in a cultured

home; that the country lad has a different kind of experience

from the city boy, or a boy on the seashore one different from the

lad who is brought up on inland prairies. Ordinarily we take

such facts for granted as too commonplace to record. But when

their educational import is recognized, they indicate the second

way in which the educator can direct the experience of the young

without engaging in imposition. A primary responsibility of

educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of

the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions, but

that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are

conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. Above all,

they should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and

social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to

contribute to building up experiences that are worth while.

Dewey: Page lw.13.22

Traditional education did not have to face this problem; it

could systematically dodge this responsibility. The school

[Page lw.13.23]

environment of desks, blackboards, a small school yard, was

supposed to suffice. There was no demand that the teacher should

become intimately acquainted with the conditions of the local

community, physical, historical, economic, occupational, etc., in

order to utilize them as educational resources. A system of

education based upon the necessary connection of education with

experience must, on the contrary, if faithful to its principle, take

these things constantly into account. This tax upon the educator

is another reason why progressive education is more difficult to

carry on than was ever the traditional system.

Dewey: Page lw.13.23

It is possible to frame schemes of education that pretty

systematically subordinate objective conditions to those which reside in

the individuals being educated. This happens whenever the place

and function of the teacher, of books, of apparatus and

equipment, of everything which represents the products of the more

mature experience of elders, is systematically subordinated to the

immediate inclinations and feelings of the young. Every theory

which assumes that importance can be attached to these

objective factors only at the expense of imposing external control and

of limiting the freedom of individuals rests finally upon the

notion that experience is truly experience only when objective

conditions are subordinated to what goes on within the individuals

having the experience.

Dewey: Page lw.13.23

I do not mean that it is supposed that objective conditions can

be shut out. It is recognized that they must enter in: so much

concession is made to the inescapable fact that we live in a world

of things and persons. But I think that observation of what goes

on in some families and some schools would disclose that some

parents and some teachers are acting upon the idea of

subordinating objective conditions to internal ones. In that case, it is

assumed not only that the latter are primary, which in one sense

they are, but that just as they temporarily exist they fix the whole

educational process.

Dewey: Page lw.13.23

Let me illustrate from the case of an infant. The needs of a

baby for food, rest, and activity are certainly primary and

decisive in one respect. Nourishment must be provided; provision

must be made for comfortable sleep, and so on. But these facts

do not mean that a parent shall feed the baby at any time when

the baby is cross or irritable, that there shall not be a program of

regular hours of feeding and sleeping, etc. The wise mother takes

[Page lw.13.24]

account of the needs of the infant but not in a way which

dispenses with her own responsibility for regulating the objective

conditions under which the needs are satisfied. And if she is a

wise mother in this respect, she draws upon past experiences of

experts as well as her own for the light that these shed upon what

experiences are in general most conducive to the normal

development of infants. Instead of these conditions being

subordinated to the immediate internal condition of the baby, they are

definitely ordered so that a particular kind of interaction with

these immediate internal states may be brought about.

Dewey: Page lw.13.24

The word "interaction," which has just been used, expresses

the second chief principle for interpreting an experience in its

educational function and force. It assigns equal rights to both

factors in experience--objective and internal conditions. Any

normal experience is an interplay of these two sets of conditions.

Taken together, or in their interaction, they form what we call a

situation. The trouble with traditional education was not that it

emphasized the external conditions that enter into the control of

the experiences but that it paid so little attention to the internal

factors which also decide what kind of experience is had. It

violated the principle of interaction from one side. But this violation

is no reason why the new education should violate the principle

from the other side--except upon the basis of the extreme Either-

Or educational philosophy which has been mentioned.

Dewey: Page lw.13.24

The illustration drawn from the need for regulation of the

objective conditions of a baby's development indicates, first, that

the parent has responsibility for arranging the conditions under

which an infant's experience of food, sleep, etc., occurs, and,

secondly, that the responsibility is fulfilled by utilizing the funded

experience of the past, as this is represented, say, by the advice of

competent physicians and others who have made a special study

of normal physical growth. Does it limit the freedom of the

mother when she uses the body of knowledge thus provided to

regulate the objective conditions of nourishment and sleep? Or

does the enlargement of her intelligence in fulfilling her parental

function widen her freedom? Doubtless if a fetish were made of

the advice and directions so that they came to be inflexible

dictates to be followed under every possible condition, then

restriction of freedom of both parent and child would occur. But this

restriction would also be a limitation of the intelligence that is

exercised in personal judgment.

[Page lw.13.25]

Dewey: Page lw.13.25

In what respect does regulation of objective conditions limit

the freedom of the baby? Some limitation is certainly placed

upon its immediate movements and inclinations when it is put in

its crib, at a time when it wants to continue playing, or does not

get food at the moment it would like it, or when it isn't picked up

and dandled when it cries for attention. Restriction also occurs

when mother or nurse snatches a child away from an open fire

into which it is about to fall. I shall have more to say later about

freedom. Here it is enough to ask whether freedom is to be

thought of and adjudged on the basis of relatively momentary

incidents or whether its meaning is found in the continuity of

developing experience.

Dewey: Page lw.13.25

The statement that individuals live in a world means, in the

concrete, that they live in a series of situations. And when it is

said that they live in these situations, the meaning of the word

"in" is different from its meaning when it is said that pennies are

"in" a pocket or paint is "in" a can. It means, once more, that

interaction is going on between an individual and objects and

other persons. The conceptions of situation and of interaction

are inseparable from each other. An experience is always what it

is because of a transaction taking place between an individual

and what, at the time, constitutes his environment, whether the

latter consists of persons with whom he is talking about some

topic or event, the subject talked about being also a part of the

situation; or the toys with which he is playing; the book he is

reading (in which his environing conditions at the time may be

England or ancient Greece or an imaginary region); or the

materials of an experiment he is performing. The environment, in

other words, is whatever conditions interact with personal needs,

desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which

is had. Even when a person builds a castle in the air he is

interacting with the objects which he constructs in fancy.

Dewey: Page lw.13.25

The two principles of continuity and interaction are not

separate from each other. They intercept and unite. They are, so to

speak, the longitudinal and lateral aspects of experience.

Different situations succeed one another. But because of the principle

of continuity something is carried over from the earlier to the

later ones. As an individual passes from one situation to another,

his world, his environment, expands or contracts. He does not

find himself living in another world but in a different part or

aspect of one and the same world. What he has learned in the

[Page lw.13.26]

way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an

instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations

which follow. The process goes on as long as life and learning

continue. Otherwise the course of experience is disorderly, since

the individual factor that enters into making an experience is

split. A divided world, a world whose parts and aspects do not

hang together, is at once a sign and a cause of a divided

personality. When the splitting-up reaches a certain point we call the

person insane. A fully integrated personality, on the other hand,

exists only when successive experiences are integrated with one

another. It can be built up only as a world of related objects is

constructed.

Dewey: Page lw.13.26

Continuity and interaction in their active union with each

other provide the measure of the educative significance and value

of an experience. The immediate and direct concern of an

educator is then with the situations in which interaction takes place.

The individual, who enters as a factor into it, is what he is at a

given time. It is the other factor, that of objective conditions,

which lies to some extent within the possibility of regulation by

the educator. As has already been noted, the phrase "objective

conditions" covers a wide range. It includes what is done by the

educator and the way in which it is done, not only words spoken

but the tone of voice in which they are spoken. It includes

equipment, books, apparatus, toys, games played. It includes the

materials with which an individual interacts, and, most important of

all, the total social set-up of the situations in which a person is

engaged.

Dewey: Page lw.13.26

When it is said that the objective conditions are those which

are within the power of the educator to regulate, it is meant, of

course, that his ability to influence directly the experience of

others and thereby the education they obtain places upon him

the duty of determining that environment which will interact

with the existing capacities and needs of those taught to create a

worth-while experience. The trouble with traditional education

was not that educators took upon themselves the responsibility

for providing an environment. The trouble was that they did not

consider the other factor in creating an experience; namely, the

powers and purposes of those taught. It was assumed that a

certain set of conditions was intrinsically desirable, apart from its

ability to evoke a certain quality of response in individuals. This

[Page lw.13.27]

lack of mutual adaptation made the process of teaching and

learning accidental. Those to whom the provided conditions

were suitable managed to learn. Others got on as best they could.

Responsibility for selecting objective conditions carries with it,

then, the responsibility for understanding the needs and

capacities of the individuals who are learning at a given time. It is not

enough that certain materials and methods have proved

effective with other individuals at other times. There must be a

reason for thinking that they will function in generating an

experience that has educative quality with particular individuals at a

particular time.

Dewey: Page lw.13.27

It is no reflection upon the nutritive quality of beefsteak that it

is not fed to infants. It is not an invidious reflection upon

trigonometry that we do not teach it in the first or fifth grade of

school. It is not the subject per se that is educative or that is

conducive to growth. There is no subject that is in and of itself, or

without regard to the stage of growth attained by the learner,

such that inherent educational value can be attributed to it.

Failure to take into account adaptation to the needs and capacities of

individuals was the source of the idea that certain subjects and

certain methods are intrinsically cultural or intrinsically good for

mental discipline. There is no such thing as educational value in

the abstract. The notion that some subjects and methods and

that acquaintance with certain facts and truths possess

educational value in and of themselves is the reason why traditional

education reduced the material of education so largely to a diet of

predigested materials. According to this notion, it was enough to

regulate the quantity and difficulty of the material provided, in a

scheme of quantitative grading, from month to month and from

year to year. Otherwise a pupil was expected to take it in the

doses that were prescribed from without. If the pupil left it

instead of taking it, if he engaged in physical truancy, or in the

mental truancy of mind-wandering and finally built up an

emotional revulsion against the subject, he was held to be at fault. No

question was raised as to whether the trouble might not lie in the

subject-matter or in the way in which it was offered. The

principle of interaction makes it clear that failure of adaptation of

material to needs and capacities of individuals may cause an

experience to be non-educative quite as much as failure of an

individual to adapt himself to the material.

[Page lw.13.28]

Dewey: Page lw.13.28

The principle of continuity in its educational application

means, nevertheless, that the future has to be taken into account

at every stage of the educational process. This idea is easily

misunderstood and is badly distorted in traditional education. Its

assumption is, that by acquiring certain skills and by learning

certain subjects which would be needed later (perhaps in college or

perhaps in adult life) pupils are as a matter of course made ready

for the needs and circumstances of the future. Now

"preparation" is a treacherous idea. In a certain sense every experience

should do something to prepare a person for later experiences of

a deeper and more expansive quality. That is the very meaning of

growth, continuity, reconstruction of experience. But it is a

mistake to suppose that the mere acquisition of a certain amount of

arithmetic, geography, history, etc., which is taught and studied

because it may be useful at some time in the future, has this

effect, and it is a mistake to suppose that acquisition of skills in

reading and figuring will automatically constitute preparation

for their right and effective use under conditions very unlike

those in which they were acquired.

Dewey: Page lw.13.28

Almost everyone has had occasion to look back upon his

school days and wonder what has become of the knowledge he

was supposed to have amassed during his years of schooling, and

why it is that the technical skills he acquired have to be learned

over again in changed form in order to stand him in good stead.

Indeed, he is lucky who does not find that in order to make

progress, in order to go ahead intellectually, he does not have to

unlearn much of what he learned in school. These questions

cannot be disposed of by saying that the subjects were not actually

learned, for they were learned at least sufficiently to enable a

pupil to pass examinations in them. One trouble is that the

subject-matter in question was learned in isolation; it was put, as

it were, in a water-tight compartment. When the question is

asked, then, what has become of it, where has it gone to, the

right answer is that it is still there in the special compartment in

which it was originally stowed away. If exactly the same

conditions recurred as those under which it was acquired, it would

also recur and be available. But it was segregated when it was

acquired and hence is so disconnected from the rest of experience

that it is not available under the actual conditions of life. It is

[Page lw.13.29]

contrary to the laws of experience that learning of this kind, no

matter how thoroughly engrained at the time, should give

genuine preparation.

Dewey: Page lw.13.29

Nor does failure in preparation end at this point. Perhaps the

greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is the notion that a person

learns only the particular thing he is studying at the time.

Collateral learning in the way of formation of enduring attitudes, of

likes and dislikes, may be and often is much more important than

the spelling lesson or lesson in geography or history that is

learned. For these attitudes are fundamentally what count in the

future. The most important attitude that can be formed is that of

desire to go on learning. If impetus in this direction is weakened

instead of being intensified, something much more than mere

lack of preparation takes place. The pupil is actually robbed of

native capacities which otherwise would enable him to cope with

the circumstances that he meets in the course of his life. We often

see persons who have had little schooling and in whose case the

absence of set schooling proves to be a positive asset. They have

at least retained their native common sense and power of

judgment, and its exercise in the actual conditions of living has given

them the precious gift of ability to learn from the experiences

they have. 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 own soul: loses his

appreciation of things worth while, of the values to which these

things are relative; if he loses desire to apply what he has learned

and, above all, loses the ability to extract meaning from his

future experiences as they occur?

Dewey: Page lw.13.29

What, then, is the true meaning of preparation in the

educational scheme? In the first place, it means that a person, young or

old, gets out of his present experience all that there is in it for

him at the time in which he has it. When preparation is made the

controlling end, then the potentialities of the present are

sacrificed to a supposititious future. When this happens, the actual

preparation for the future is missed or distorted. The ideal of

using the present simply to get ready for the future contradicts

itself. It omits, and even shuts out, the very conditions by which

a person can be prepared for his future. We always live at the

time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting

[Page lw.13.30]

at each present time the full meaning of each present experience

are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future. This is

the only preparation which in the long run amounts to anything.

All this means that attentive care must be devoted to the

conditions which give each present experience a worth-while

meaning. Instead of inferring that it doesn't make much difference

what the present experience is as long as it is enjoyed, the

conclusion is the exact opposite. Here is another matter where it is easy

to react from one extreme to the other. Because traditional

schools tended to sacrifice the present to a remote and more or

less unknown future, therefore it comes to be believed that the

educator has little responsibility for the kind of present

experiences the young undergo. But the relation of the present and the

future is not an Either-Or affair. The present affects the future

anyway. The persons who should have some idea of the

connection between the two are those who have achieved maturity.

Accordingly, upon them devolves the responsibility for instituting

the conditions for the kind of present experience which has a

favorable effect upon the future. Education as growth or

maturity should be an ever-present process.

[Page lw.13.31]

4. Social Control

Dewey: Page lw.13.31

I have said that educational plans and projects, seeing

education in terms of life-experience, are thereby committed to

framing and adopting an intelligent theory or, if you please,

philosophy of experience. Otherwise they are at the mercy of every

intellectual breeze that happens to blow. I have tried to illustrate

the need for such a theory by calling attention to two principles

which are fundamental in the constitution of experience: the

principles of interaction and of continuity. If, then, I am asked

why I have spent so much time on expounding a rather abstract

philosophy, it is because practical attempts to develop schools

based upon the idea that education is found in life-experience are

bound to exhibit inconsistencies and confusions unless they are

guided by some conception of what experience is, and what

marks off educative experience from non-educative and mis-

educative experience. I now come to a group of actual

educational questions the discussion of which will, I hope, provide

topics and material that are more concrete than the discussion

up to this point.

Dewey: Page lw.13.31

The two principles of continuity and interaction as criteria of

the value of experience are so intimately connected that it is not

easy to tell just what special educational problem to take up first.

Even the convenient division into problems of subject-matter or

studies and of methods of teaching and learning is likely to fail

us in selection and organization of topics to discuss.

Consequently, the beginning and sequence of topics is somewhat

arbitrary. I shall commence, however, with the old question of

individual freedom and social control and pass on to the questions

that grow naturally out of it.

Dewey: Page lw.13.31

It is often well in considering educational problems to get a

start by temporarily ignoring the school and thinking of other

human situations. I take it that no one would deny that the

[Page lw.13.32]

ordinary good citizen is as a matter of fact subject to a great deal of

social control and that a considerable part of this control is not

felt to involve restriction of personal freedom. Even the

theoretical anarchist, whose philosophy commits him to the idea that

state or government control is an unmitigated evil, believes that

with abolition of the political state other forms of social control

would operate: indeed, his opposition to governmental

regulation springs from his belief that other and to him more normal

modes of control would operate with abolition of the state.

Dewey: Page lw.13.32

Without taking up this extreme position, let us note some

examples of social control that operate in everyday life, and then

look for the principle underlying them. Let us begin with the

young people themselves. Children at recess or after school play

games, from tag and one-old-cat to baseball and football. The

games involve rules, and these rules order their conduct. The

games do not go on haphazardly or by a succession of

improvisations. Without rules there is no game. If disputes arise there is an

umpire to appeal to, or discussion and a kind of arbitration are

means to a decision; otherwise the game is broken up and comes

to an end.

Dewey: Page lw.13.32

There are certain fairly obvious controlling features of such

situations to which I want to call attention. The first is that the

rules are a part of the game. They are not outside of it. No rules,

then no game; different rules, then a different game. As long as

the game goes on with a reasonable smoothness, the players do

not feel that they are submitting to external imposition but that

they are playing the game. In the second place an individual may

at times feel that a decision isn't fair and he may even get angry.

But he is not objecting to a rule but to what he claims is a

violation of it, to some one-sided and unfair action. In the third place,

the rules, and hence the conduct of the game, are fairly

standardized. There are recognized ways of counting out, of selection of

sides, as well as for positions to be taken, movements to be made,

etc. These rules have the sanction of tradition and precedent.

Those playing the game have seen, perhaps, professional matches

and they want to emulate their elders. An element that is

conventional is pretty strong. Usually, a group of youngsters change the

rules by which they play only when the adult group to which

they look for models have themselves made a change in the rules,

while the change made by the elders is at least supposed to

[Page lw.13.33]

conduce to making the game more skillful or more interesting to

spectators.

Dewey: Page lw.13.33

Now, the general conclusion I would draw is that control of

individual actions is effected by the whole situation in which

individuals are involved, in which they share and of which they are

cooperative or interacting parts. For even in a competitive game

there is a certain kind of participation, of sharing in a common

experience. Stated the other way around, those who take part do

not feel that they are bossed by an individual person or are being

subjected to the will of some outside superior person. When

violent disputes do arise, it is usually on the alleged ground that the

umpire or some person on the other side is being unfair; in other

words, that in such cases some individual is trying to impose his

individual will on someone else.

Dewey: Page lw.13.33

It may seem to be putting too heavy a load upon a single case

to argue that this instance illustrates the general principle of

social control of individuals without the violation of freedom. But

if the matter were followed out through a number of cases, I

think the conclusion that this particular instance does illustrate a

general principle would be justified. Games are generally

competitive. If we took instances of cooperative activities in which all

members of a group take part, as for example in well-ordered

family life in which there is mutual confidence, the point would

be even clearer. In all such cases it is not the will or desire of any

one person which establishes order but the moving spirit of the

whole group. The control is social, but individuals are parts of a

community, not outside of it.

Dewey: Page lw.13.33

I do not mean by this that there are no occasions upon which

the authority of, say, the parent does not have to intervene and

exercise fairly direct control. But I do say that, in the first place,

the number of these occasions is slight in comparison with the

number of those in which the control is exercised by situations in

which all take part. And what is even more important, the

authority in question when exercised in a well-regulated household

or other community group is not a manifestation of merely

personal will; the parent or teacher exercises it as the representative

and agent of the interests of the group as a whole. With respect

to the first point, in a well-ordered school the main reliance for

control of this and that individual is upon the activities carried

on and upon the situations in which these activities are

[Page lw.13.34]

maintained. The teacher reduces to a minimum the occasions in

which he or she has to exercise authority in a personal way.

When it is necessary, in the second place, to speak and act firmly,

it is done in behalf of the interest of the group, not as an

exhibition of personal power. This makes the difference between action

which is arbitrary and that which is just and fair.

Dewey: Page lw.13.34

Moreover, it is not necessary that the difference should be

formulated in words, by either teacher or the young, in order to be

felt in experience. The number of children who do not feel the

difference (even if they cannot articulate it and reduce it to an

intellectual principle) between action that is motivated by

personal power and desire to dictate and action that is fair, because

in the interest of all, is small. I should even be willing to say that

upon the whole children are more sensitive to the signs and

symptoms of this difference than are adults. Children learn the

difference when playing with one another. They are willing,

often too willing if anything, to take suggestions from one child

and let him be a leader if his conduct adds to the experienced

value of what they are doing, while they resent the attempt at

dictation. Then they often withdraw and when asked why, say that it

is because so-and-so "is too bossy."

Dewey: Page lw.13.34

I do not wish to refer to the traditional school in ways which

set up a caricature in lieu of a picture. But I think it is fair to say

that one reason the personal commands of the teacher so often

played an undue role and a reason why the order which existed

was so much a matter of sheer obedience to the will of an adult

was because the situation almost forced it upon the teacher. The

school was not a group or community held together by

participation in common activities. Consequently, the normal, proper

conditions of control were lacking. Their absence was made up

for, and to a considerable extent had to be made up for, by the

direct intervention of the teacher, who, as the saying went, "kept

order." He kept it because order was in the teacher's keeping,

instead of residing in the shared work being done.

Dewey: Page lw.13.34

The conclusion is that in what are called the new schools, the

primary source of social control resides in the very nature of the

work done as a social enterprise in which all individuals have an

opportunity to contribute and to which all feel a responsibility.

Most children are naturally "sociable." Isolation is even more

irksome to them than to adults. A genuine community life has its

[Page lw.13.35]

ground in this natural sociability. But community life does not

organize itself in an enduring way purely spontaneously. It

requires thought and planning ahead. The educator is responsible

for a knowledge of individuals and for a knowledge of subject-

matter that will enable activities to be selected which lend

themselves to social organization, an organization in which all

individuals have an opportunity to contribute something, and in

which the activities in which all participate are the chief carrier

of control.

Dewey: Page lw.13.35

I am not romantic enough about the young to suppose that

every pupil will respond or that any child of normally strong

impulses will respond on every occasion. There are likely to be

some who, when they come to school, are already victims of

injurious conditions outside of the school and who have become so

passive and unduly docile that they fail to contribute. There will

be others who, because of previous experience, are bumptious

and unruly and perhaps downright rebellious. But it is certain

that the general principle of social control cannot be predicated

upon such cases. It is also true that no general rule can be laid

down for dealing with such cases. The teacher has to deal with

them individually. They fall into general classes, but no two are

exactly alike. The educator has to discover as best he or she can

the causes for the recalcitrant attitudes. He or she cannot, if the

educational process is to go on, make it a question of pitting one

will against another in order to see which is strongest, nor yet

allow the unruly and non-participating pupils to stand

permanently in the way of the educative activities of others. Exclusion

perhaps is the only available measure at a given juncture, but it is

no solution. For it may strengthen the very causes which have

brought about the undesirable anti-social attitude, such as desire

for attention or to show off.

Dewey: Page lw.13.35

Exceptions rarely prove a rule or give a clew to what the rule

should be. I would not, therefore, attach too much importance to

these exceptional cases, although it is true at present that

progressive schools are likely often to have more than their fair share

of these cases, since parents may send children to such schools as

a last resort. I do not think weakness in control when it is found

in progressive schools arises in any event from these exceptional

cases. It is much more likely to arise from failure to arrange in

advance for the kind of work (by which I mean all kinds of

[Page lw.13.36]

activities engaged in) which will create situations that of themselves

tend to exercise control over what this, that, and the other pupil

does and how he does it. This failure most often goes back to

lack of sufficiently thoughtful planning in advance. The causes

for such lack are varied. The one which is peculiarly important

to mention in this connection is the idea that such advance

planning is unnecessary and even that it is inherently hostile to the

legitimate freedom of those being instructed.

Dewey: Page lw.13.36

Now, of course, it is quite possible to have preparatory

planning by the teacher done in such a rigid and intellectually

inflexible fashion that it does result in adult imposition, which is none

the less external because executed with tact and the semblance of

respect for individual freedom. But this kind of planning does

not follow inherently from the principle involved. I do not know

what the greater maturity of the teacher and the teacher's greater

knowledge of the world, of subject-matters and of individuals, is

for unless the teacher can arrange conditions that are conducive

to community activity and to organization which exercises

control over individual impulses by the mere fact that all are

engaged in communal projects. Because the kind of advance

planning heretofore engaged in has been so routine as to leave little

room for the free play of individual thinking or for contributions

due to distinctive individual experience, it does not follow that

all planning must be rejected. On the contrary, there is

incumbent upon the educator the duty of instituting a much more

intelligent, and consequently more difficult, kind of planning. He

must survey the capacities and needs of the particular set of

individuals with whom he is dealing and must at the same time

arrange the conditions which provide the subject-matter or content

for experiences that satisfy these needs and develop these

capacities. The planning must be flexible enough to permit free play for

individuality of experience and yet firm enough to give direction

towards continuous development of power.

Dewey: Page lw.13.36

The present occasion is a suitable one to say something about

the province and office of the teacher. The principle that

development of experience comes about through interaction means that

education is essentially a social process. This quality is realized

in the degree in which individuals form a community group. It is

absurd to exclude the teacher from membership in the group. As

the most mature member of the group he has a peculiar

[Page lw.13.37]

responsibility for the conduct of the interactions and

intercommunications which are the very life of the group as a community. That

children are individuals whose freedom should be respected

while the more mature person should have no freedom as an

individual is an idea too absurd to require refutation. The tendency

to exclude the teacher from a positive and leading share in the

direction of the activities of the community of which he is a

member is another instance of reaction from one extreme to another.

When pupils were a class rather than a social group, the teacher

necessarily acted largely from the outside, not as a director of

processes of exchange in which all had a share. When education

is based upon experience and educative experience is seen to be a

social process, the situation changes radically. The teacher loses

the position of external boss or dictator but takes on that of

leader of group activities.

Dewey: Page lw.13.37

In discussing the conduct of games as an example of normal

social control, reference was made to the presence of a

standardized conventional factor. The counterpart of this factor in school

life is found in the question of manners, especially of good

manners in the manifestations of politeness and courtesy. The more

we know about customs in different parts of the world at

different times in the history of mankind, the more we learn how much

manners differ from place to place and time to time. This fact

proves that there is a large conventional factor involved. But

there is no group at any time or place which does not have some

code of manners as, for example, with respect to proper ways of

greeting other persons. The particular form a convention takes

has nothing fixed and absolute about it. But the existence of

some form of convention is not itself a convention. It is a

uniform attendant of all social relationships. At the very least, it is

the oil which prevents or reduces friction.

Dewey: Page lw.13.37

It is possible, of course, for these social forms to become, as we

say, "mere formalities." They may become merely outward show

with no meaning behind them. But the avoidance of empty

ritualistic forms of social intercourse does not mean the rejection of

every formal element. It rather indicates the need for

development of forms of intercourse that are inherently appropriate

to social situations. Visitors to some progressive schools are

shocked by the lack of manners they come across. One who

knows the situation better is aware that to some extent their

[Page lw.13.38]

absence is due to the eager interest of children to go on with what

they are doing. In their eagerness they may, for example, bump

into each other and into visitors with no word of apology. One

might say that this condition is better than a display of merely

external punctilio accompanying intellectual and emotional lack

of interest in school work. But it also represents a failure in

education, a failure to learn one of the most important lessons of life,

that of mutual accommodation and adaptation. Education is

going on in a one-sided way, for attitudes and habits are in

process of formation that stand in the way of the future learning that

springs from easy and ready contact and communication with

others.

[Page lw.13.39]

5. The Nature of Freedom

Dewey: Page lw.13.39

At the risk of repeating what has been often said by me I

want to say something about the other side of the problem of

social control, namely, the nature of freedom. The only freedom

that is of enduring importance is freedom of intelligence, that is

to say, freedom of observation and of judgment exercised in

behalf of purposes that are intrinsically worth while. The

commonest mistake made about freedom is, I think, to identify it

with freedom of movement, or with the external or physical side

of activity. Now, this external and physical side of activity cannot

be separated from the internal side of activity; from freedom of

thought, desire, and purpose. The limitation that was put upon

outward action by the fixed arrangements of the typical

traditional schoolroom, with its fixed rows of desks and its military

regimen of pupils who were permitted to move only at certain

fixed signals, put a great restriction upon intellectual and moral

freedom. Strait-jacket and chain-gang procedures had to be done

away with if there was to be a chance for growth of individuals in

the intellectual springs of freedom without which there is no

assurance of genuine and continued normal growth.

Dewey: Page lw.13.39

But the fact still remains that an increased measure of freedom

of outer movement is a means, not an end. The educational

problem is not solved when this aspect of freedom is obtained.

Everything then depends, so far as education is concerned, upon what

is done with this added liberty. What end does it serve? What

consequences flow from it? Let me speak first of the advantages

which reside potentially in increase of outward freedom. In the

first place, without its existence it is practically impossible for a

teacher to gain knowledge of the individuals with whom he is

concerned. Enforced quiet and acquiescence prevent pupils from

disclosing their real natures. They enforce artificial uniformity.

They put seeming before being. They place a premium upon

[Page lw.13.40]

preserving the outward appearance of attention, decorum, and

obedience. And everyone who is acquainted with schools in which

this system prevailed well knows that thoughts, imaginations,

desires, and sly activities ran their own unchecked course behind

this façade. They were disclosed to the teacher only when some

untoward act led to their detection. One has only to contrast this

highly artificial situation with normal human relations outside

the schoolroom, say in a well-conducted home, to appreciate

how fatal it is to the teacher's acquaintance with and

understanding of the individuals who are, supposedly, being educated. Yet

without this insight there is only an accidental chance that the

material of study and the methods used in instruction will so

come home to an individual that his development of mind and

character is actually directed. There is a vicious circle.

Mechanical uniformity of studies and methods creates a kind of uniform

immobility and this reacts to perpetuate uniformity of studies and

of recitations, while behind this enforced uniformity individual

tendencies operate in irregular and more or less forbidden ways.

Dewey: Page lw.13.40

The other important advantage of increased outward freedom

is found in the very nature of the learning process. That the older

methods set a premium upon passivity and receptivity has been

pointed out. Physical quiescence puts a tremendous premium

upon these traits. The only escape from them in the standardized

school is an activity which is irregular and perhaps disobedient.

There cannot be complete quietude in a laboratory or workshop.

The non-social character of the traditional school is seen in the

fact that it erected silence into one of its prime virtues. There is,

of course, such a thing as intense intellectual activity without

overt bodily activity. But capacity for such intellectual activity

marks a comparatively late achievement when it is continued for

a long period. There should be brief intervals of time for quiet

reflection provided for even the young. But they are periods of

genuine reflection only when they follow after times of more

overt action and are used to organize what has been gained in

periods of activity in which the hands and other parts of the

body beside the brain are used. Freedom of movement is also

important as a means of maintaining normal physical and mental

health. We have still to learn from the example of the Greeks who

saw clearly the relation between a sound body and a sound mind.

But in all the respects mentioned freedom of outward action is a

[Page lw.13.41]

means to freedom of judgment and of power to carry deliberately

chosen ends into execution. The amount of external freedom

which is needed varies from individual to individual. It naturally

tends to decrease with increasing maturity, though its complete

absence prevents even a mature individual from having the

contacts which will provide him with new materials upon which his

intelligence may exercise itself. The amount and the quality

of this kind of free activity as a means of growth is a problem

that must engage the thought of the educator at every stage of

development.

Dewey: Page lw.13.41

There can be no greater mistake, however, than to treat such

freedom as an end in itself. It then tends to be destructive of the

shared cooperative activities which are the normal source of

order. But, on the other hand, it turns freedom which should be

positive into something negative. For freedom from restriction,

the negative side, is to be prized only as a means to a freedom

which is power: power to frame purposes, to judge wisely, to

evaluate desires by the consequences which will result from

acting upon them; power to select and order means to carry chosen

ends into operation.

Dewey: Page lw.13.41

Natural impulses and desires constitute in any case the

starting point. But there is no intellectual growth without some

reconstruction, some remaking, of impulses and desires in the form

in which they first show themselves. This remaking involves

inhibition of impulse in its first estate. The alternative to externally

imposed inhibition is inhibition through an individual's own

reflection and judgment. The old phrase "stop and think" is sound

psychology. For thinking is stoppage of the immediate

manifestation of impulse until that impulse has been brought into

connection with other possible tendencies to action so that a more

comprehensive and coherent plan of activity is formed. Some of the

other tendencies to action lead to use of eye, ear, and hand to

observe objective conditions; others result in recall of what has

happened in the past. Thinking is thus a postponement of

immediate action, while it effects internal control of impulse through a

union of observation and memory, this union being the heart of

reflection. What has been said explains the meaning of the well-

worn phrase "self-control." The ideal aim of education is

creation of power of self-control. But the mere removal of external

control is no guarantee for the production of self-control. It is

[Page lw.13.42]

easy to jump out of the frying-pan into the fire. It is easy, in other

words, to escape one form of external control only to find oneself

in another and more dangerous form of external control.

Impulses and desires that are not ordered by intelligence are under

the control of accidental circumstances. It may be a loss rather

than a gain to escape from the control of another person only to

find one's conduct dictated by immediate whim and caprice; that

is, at the mercy of impulses into whose formation intelligent

judgment has not entered. A person whose conduct is controlled

in this way has at most only the illusion of freedom. Actually he is

directed by forces over which he has no command.

[Page lw.13.43]

6. The Meaning of Purpose

Dewey: Page lw.13.43

It is, then, a sound instinct which identifies freedom

with power to frame purposes and to execute or carry into effect

purposes so framed. Such freedom is in turn identical with self-

control; for the formation of purposes and the organization of

means to execute them are the work of intelligence. Plato once

defined a slave as the person who executes the purposes of

another, and, as has just been said, a person is also a slave who is

enslaved to his own blind desires. There is, I think, no point in

the philosophy of progressive education which is sounder than

its emphasis upon the importance of the participation of the

learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his

activities in the learning process, just as there is no defect in

traditional education greater than its failure to secure the active

cooperation of the pupil in construction of the purposes involved in

his studying. But the meaning of purposes and ends is not self-

evident and self-explanatory. The more their educational

importance is emphasized, the more important it is to understand what

a purpose is; how it arises and how it functions in experience.

Dewey: Page lw.13.43

A genuine purpose always starts with an impulse. Obstruction

of the immediate execution of an impulse converts it into a

desire. Nevertheless neither impulse nor desire is itself a purpose. A

purpose is an end-view. That is, it involves foresight of the

consequences which will result from acting upon impulse. Foresight of

consequences involves the operation of intelligence. It demands,

in the first place, observation of objective conditions and

circumstances. For impulse and desire produce consequences not by

themselves alone but through their interaction or cooperation

with surrounding conditions. The impulse for such a simple

action as walking is executed only in active conjunction with the

ground on which one stands. Under ordinary circumstances, we

do not have to pay much attention to the ground. In a ticklish

[Page lw.13.44]

situation we have to observe very carefully just what the

conditions are, as in climbing a steep and rough mountain where no

trail has been laid out. Exercise of observation is, then, one

condition of transformation of impulse into a purpose. As in the sign

by a railway crossing, we have to stop, look, listen.

Dewey: Page lw.13.44

But observation alone is not enough. We have to understand

the significance of what we see, hear, and touch. This significance

consists of the consequences that will result when what is seen is

acted upon. A baby may see the brightness of a flame and be

attracted thereby to reach for it. The significance of the flame is

then not its brightness but its power to burn, as the consequence

that will result from touching it. We can be aware of

consequences only because of previous experiences. In cases that are

familiar because of many prior experiences we do not have to

stop to remember just what those experiences were. A flame

comes to signify light and heat without our having expressly to

think of previous experiences of heat and burning. But in

unfamiliar cases, we cannot tell just what the consequences of

observed conditions will be unless we go over past experiences in

our mind, unless we reflect upon them and by seeing what is

similar in them to those now present, go on to form a judgment

of what may be expected in the present situation.

Dewey: Page lw.13.44

The formation of purposes is, then, a rather complex

intellectual operation. It involves (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. "If wishes were horses,

beggars would ride." Desire for something may be intense. It may be

so strong as to override estimation of the consequences that will

follow acting upon it. Such occurrences do not provide the

model for education. The crucial educational problem is that of

procuring the postponement of immediate action upon desire

until observation and judgment have intervened. Unless I am

[Page lw.13.45]

mistaken, this point is definitely relevant to the conduct of

progressive schools. Overemphasis upon activity as an end, instead

of upon intelligent activity, leads to identification of freedom

with immediate execution of impulses and desires. This

identification is justified by a confusion of impulse with purpose;

although, as has just been said, there is no purpose unless overt

action is postponed until there is foresight of the consequences of

carrying the impulse into execution--a foresight that is

impossible without observation, information, and judgment. Mere

foresight, even if it takes the form of accurate prediction, is not,

of course, enough. The intellectual anticipation, the idea of

consequences, must blend with desire and impulse to acquire

moving force. It then gives direction to what otherwise is blind, while

desire gives ideas impetus and momentum. An idea then becomes

a plan in and for an activity to be carried out. Suppose a man has

a desire to secure a new home, say by building a house. No

matter how strong his desire, it cannot be directly executed. The

man must form an idea of what kind of house he wants, including

the number and arrangement of rooms, etc. He has to draw a

plan, and have blue prints and specifications made. All this might

be an idle amusement for spare time unless he also took stock of

his resources. He must consider the relation of his funds and

available credit to the execution of the plan. He has to investigate

available sites, their price, their nearness to his place of business,

to a congenial neighborhood, to school facilities, and so on and

so on. All of the things reckoned with: his ability to pay, size and

needs of family, possible locations, etc., etc., are objective facts.

They are no part of the original desire. But they have to be

viewed and judged in order that a desire may be converted into a

purpose and a purpose into a plan of action.

Dewey: Page lw.13.45

All of us have desires, all at least who have not become so

pathological that they are completely apathetic. These desires are

the ultimate moving springs of action. A professional

businessman wishes to succeed in his career; a general wishes to win the

battle; a parent to have a comfortable home for his family, and to

educate his children, and so on indefinitely. The intensity of the

desire measures the strength of the efforts that will be put forth.

But the wishes are empty castles in the air unless they are

translated into the means by which they may be realized. The question

[Page lw.13.46]

of how soon or of means takes the place of a projected

imaginative end, and, since means are objective, they have to be studied

and understood if a genuine purpose is to be formed.

Dewey: Page lw.13.46

Traditional education tended to ignore the importance of

personal impulse and desire as moving springs. But this is no reason

why progressive education should identify impulse and desire

with purpose and thereby pass lightly over the need for careful

observation, for wide range of information, and for judgment if

students are to share in the formation of the purposes which

activate them. In an educational scheme, the occurrence of a desire

and impulse is not the final end. It is an occasion and a demand

for the formation of a plan and method of activity. Such a plan,

to repeat, can be formed only by study of conditions and by

securing all relevant information.

Dewey: Page lw.13.46

The teacher's business is to see that the occasion is taken

advantage of. Since freedom resides in the operations of intelligent

observation and judgment by which a purpose is developed,

guidance given by the teacher to the exercise of the pupils'

intelligence is an aid to freedom, not a restriction upon it. Sometimes

teachers seem to be afraid even to make suggestions to the

members of a group as to what they should do. I have heard of cases in

which children are surrounded with objects and materials and

then left entirely to themselves, the teacher being loath to suggest

even what might be done with the materials lest freedom be

infringed upon. Why, then, even supply materials, since they are a

source of some suggestion or other? But what is more important

is that the suggestion upon which pupils act must in any case

come from somewhere. It is impossible to understand why a

suggestion from one who has a larger experience and a wider

horizon should not be at least as valid as a suggestion arising from

some more or less accidental source.

Dewey: Page lw.13.46

It is possible of course to abuse the office, and to force the

activity of the young into channels which express the teacher's

purpose rather than that of the pupils. But the way to avoid this

danger is not for the adult to withdraw entirely. The way is, first, for

the teacher to be intelligently aware of the capacities, needs, and

past experiences of those under instruction, and, secondly, to

allow the suggestion made to develop into a plan and project by

means of the further suggestions contributed and organized into

a whole by the members of the group. The plan, in other words,

[Page lw.13.47]

is a cooperative enterprise, not a dictation. The teacher's

suggestion is not a mold for a cast-iron result but is a starting point

to be developed into a plan through contributions from the

experience of all engaged in the learning process. The development

occurs through reciprocal give-and-take, the teacher taking but

not being afraid also to give. The essential point is that the

purpose grow and take shape through the process of social

intelligence.

[Page lw.13.48]

7. Progressive Organization of Subject-Matter

Dewey: Page lw.13.48

Allusion has been made in passing a number of times

to objective conditions involved in experience and to their

function in promoting or failing to promote the enriched growth of

further experience. By implication, these objective conditions,

whether those of observation, of memory, of information

procured from others, or of imagination, have been identified with

the subject-matter of study and learning; or, speaking more

generally, with the stuff of the course of study. Nothing,

however, has been said explicitly so far about subject-matter as such.

That topic will now be discussed. One consideration stands out

clearly when education is conceived in terms of experience.

Anything which can be called a study, whether arithmetic, history,

geography, or one of the natural sciences, must be derived from

materials which at the outset fall within the scope of ordinary

life-experience. In this respect the newer education contrasts

sharply with procedures which start with facts and truths that

are outside the range of the experience of those taught, and

which, therefore, have the problem of discovering ways and means

of bringing them within experience. Undoubtedly one chief cause

for the great success of newer methods in early elementary

education has been its observance of the contrary principle.

Dewey: Page lw.13.48

But finding the material for learning within experience is only

the first step. The next step is the progressive development of

what is already experienced into a fuller and richer and also

more organized form, a form that gradually approximates that in

which subject-matter is presented to the skilled, mature person.

That this change is possible without departing from the organic

connection of education with experience is shown by the fact

that this change takes place outside of the school and apart from

formal education. The infant, for example, begins with an

environment of objects that is very restricted in space and time.

[Page lw.13.49]

That environment steadily expands by the momentum inherent

in experience itself without aid from scholastic instruction. As

the infant learns to reach, creep, walk, and talk, the intrinsic

subject-matter of its experience widens and deepens. It comes

into connection with new objects and events which call out new

powers, while the exercise of these powers refines and enlarges

the content of its experience. Life-space and life-durations are

expanded. The environment, the world of experience, constantly

grows larger and, so to speak, thicker. The educator who receives

the child at the end of this period has to find ways for doing

consciously and deliberately what "nature" accomplishes in the

earlier years.

Dewey: Page lw.13.49

It is hardly necessary to insist upon the first of the two

conditions which have been specified. It is a cardinal precept of the

newer school of education that the beginning of instruction shall

be made with the experience learners already have; that this

experience and the capacities that have been developed during its

course provide the starting point for all further learning. I am

not so sure that the other condition, that of orderly development

toward expansion and organization of subject-matter through

growth of experience, receives as much attention. Yet the

principle of continuity of educative experience requires that equal

thought and attention be given to solution of this aspect of the

educational problem. Undoubtedly this phase of the problem is

more difficult than the other. Those who deal with the pre-

school child, with the kindergarten child, and with the boy and

girl of the early primary years do not have much difficulty in

determining the range of past experience or in finding activities

that connect in vital ways with it. With older children both

factors of the problem offer increased difficulties to the educator. It

is harder to find out the background of the experience of

individuals and harder to find out just how the subject-matters

already contained in that experience shall be directed so as to lead

out to larger and better organized fields.

Dewey: Page lw.13.49

It is a mistake to suppose that the principle of the leading on of

experience to something different is adequately satisfied simply

by giving pupils some new experiences any more than it is by

seeing to it that they have greater skill and ease in dealing with

things with which they are already familiar. It is also essential

that the new objects and events be related intellectually to those

[Page lw.13.50]

of earlier experiences, and this means that there be some advance

made in conscious articulation of facts and ideas. It thus

becomes the office of the educator to select those things within the

range of existing experience that have the promise and

potentiality of presenting new problems which by stimulating new

ways of observation and judgment will expand the area of further

experience. He must constantly regard what is already won not

as a fixed possession but as an agency and instrumentality for

opening new fields which make new demands upon existing

powers of observation and of intelligent use of memory.

Connectedness in growth must be his constant watchword.

Dewey: Page lw.13.50

The educator more than the member of any other profession is

concerned to have a long look ahead. The physician may feel his

job done when he has restored a patient to health. He has

undoubtedly the obligation of advising him how to live so as to

avoid similar troubles in the future. But, after all, the conduct of

his life is his own affair, not the physician's; and what is more

important for the present point is that as far as the physician

does occupy himself with instruction and advice as to the future

of his patient he takes upon himself the function of an educator.

The lawyer is occupied with winning a suit for his client or

getting the latter out of some complication into which he has got

himself. If it goes beyond the case presented to him he too

becomes an educator. The educator by the very nature of his work

is obliged to see his present work in terms of what it

accomplishes, or fails to accomplish, for a future whose objects are

linked with those of the present.

Dewey: Page lw.13.50

Here, again, the problem for the progressive educator is more

difficult than for the teacher in the traditional school. The latter

had indeed to look ahead. But unless his personality and

enthusiasm took him beyond the limits that hedged in the traditional

school, he could content himself with thinking of the next

examination period or the promotion to the next class. He could

envisage the future in terms of factors that lay within the

requirements of the school system as that conventionally existed. There

is incumbent upon the teacher who links education and actual

experience together a more serious and a harder business. He

must be aware of the potentialities for leading students into new

fields which belong to experiences already had, and must use this

knowledge as his criterion for selection and arrangement of the

conditions that influence their present experience.

[Page lw.13.51]

Dewey: Page lw.13.51

Because the studies of the traditional school consisted of

subject-matter that was selected and arranged on the basis of the

judgment of adults as to what would be useful for the young

sometime in the future, the material to be learned was settled

upon outside the present life-experience of the learner. In

consequence, it had to do with the past; it was such as had proved

useful to men in past ages. By reaction to an opposite extreme, as

unfortunate as it was probably natural under the circumstances,

the sound idea that education should derive its materials from

present experience and should enable the learner to cope with

the problems of the present and future has often been converted

into the idea that progressive schools can to a very large extent

ignore the past. If the present could be cut off from the past, this

conclusion would be sound. But the achievements of the past

provide the only means at command for understanding the

present. Just as the individual has to draw in memory upon his own

past to understand the conditions in which he individually finds

himself, so the issues and problems of present social life are in

such intimate and direct connection with the past that students

cannot be prepared to understand either these problems or the

best way of dealing with them without delving into their roots

in the past. In other words, the sound principle that the

objectives of learning are in the future and its immediate materials are

in present experience can be carried into effect only in the

degree that present experience is stretched, as it were, backward. It

can expand into the future only as it is also enlarged to take in

the past.

Dewey: Page lw.13.51

If time permitted, discussion of the political and economic

issues which the present generation will be compelled to face in

the future would render this general statement definite and

concrete. The nature of the issues cannot be understood save as we

know how they came about. The institutions and customs that

exist in the present and that give rise to present social ills and

dislocations did not arise overnight. They have a long history

behind them. Attempt to deal with them simply on the basis of what

is obvious in the present is bound to result in adoption of

superficial measures which in the end will only render existing

problems more acute and more difficult to solve. Policies framed

simply upon the ground of knowledge of the present cut off from

the past is the counterpart of heedless carelessness in individual

conduct. The way out of scholastic systems that made the past an

[Page lw.13.52]

end in itself is to make acquaintance with the past a means of

understanding the present. Until this problem is worked out, the

present clash of educational ideas and practices will continue.

On the one hand, there will be reactionaries that claim that the

main, if not the sole, business of education is transmission of

the cultural heritage. On the other hand, there will be those who

hold that we should ignore the past and deal only with the present

and future.

Dewey: Page lw.13.52

That up to the present time the weakest point in progressive

schools is in the matter of selection and organization of

intellectual subject-matter is, I think, inevitable under the

circumstances. It is as inevitable as it is right and proper that they

should break loose from the cut and dried material which formed

the staple of the old education. In addition, the field of

experience is very wide and it varies in its contents from place to place

and from time to time. A single course of studies for all

progressive schools is out of the question; it would mean abandoning the

fundamental principle of connection with life-experiences.

Moreover, progressive schools are new. They have had hardly more

than a generation in which to develop. A certain amount of

uncertainty and of laxity in choice and organization of subject-

matter is, therefore, what was to be expected. It is no ground for

fundamental criticism or complaint.

Dewey: Page lw.13.52

It is a ground for legitimate criticism, however, when the

ongoing movement of progressive education fails to recognize that the

problem of selection and organization of subject-matter for study

and learning is fundamental. Improvisation that takes advantage

of special occasions prevents teaching and learning from being

stereotyped and dead. But the basic material of study cannot be

picked up in a cursory manner. Occasions which are not and

cannot be foreseen are bound to arise wherever there is

intellectual freedom. They should be utilized. But there is a decided

difference between using them in the development of a continuing

line of activity and trusting to them to provide the chief material

of learning.

Dewey: Page lw.13.52

Unless a given experience leads out into a field previously

unfamiliar no problems arise, while problems are the stimulus to

thinking. That the conditions found in present experience should

be used as sources of problems is a characteristic which

differentiates education based upon experience from traditional

[Page lw.13.53]

education. For in the latter, problems were set from outside.

Nonetheless, growth depends upon the presence of difficulty to be

overcome by the exercise of intelligence. Once more, it is part of

the educator's responsibility to see equally to two things: First,

that the problem grows out of the conditions of the experience

being had in the present, and that it is within the range of the

capacity of students; and, secondly, that it is such that it arouses

in the learner an active quest for information and for production

of new ideas. The new facts and new ideas thus obtained become

the ground for further experiences in which new problems are

presented. The process is a continuous spiral. The inescapable

linkage of the present with the past is a principle whose

application is not restricted to a study of history. Take natural science,

for example. Contemporary social life is what it is in very large

measure because of the results of application of physical science.

The experience of every child and youth, in the country and the

city, is what it is in its present actuality because of appliances

which utilize electricity, heat, and chemical processes. A child

does not eat a meal that does not involve in its preparation and

assimilation chemical and physiological principles. He does not

read by artificial light or take a ride in a motor car or on a train

without coming into contact with operations and processes

which science has engendered.

Dewey: Page lw.13.53

It is a sound educational principle that students should be

introduced to scientific subject-matter and be initiated into its facts

and laws through acquaintance with everyday social

applications. Adherence to this method is not only the most direct

avenue to understanding of science itself but as the pupils grow

more mature it is also the surest road to the understanding of the

economic and industrial problems of present society. For they are

the products to a very large extent of the application of science in

production and distribution of commodities and services, while

the latter processes are the most important factor in determining

the present relations of human beings and social groups to one

another. It is absurd, then, to argue that processes similar to

those studied in laboratories and institutes of research are not a

part of the daily life-experience of the young and hence do not

come within the scope of education based upon experience. That

the immature cannot study scientific facts and principles in the

way in which mature experts study them goes without saying.

[Page lw.13.54]

But this fact, instead of exempting the educator from

responsibility for using present experiences so that learners may

gradually be led, through extraction of facts and laws, to experience of

a scientific order, sets one of his main problems.

Dewey: Page lw.13.54

For if it is true that existing experience in detail and also on a

wide scale is what it is because of the application of science, first,

to processes of production and distribution of goods and

services, and then to the relations which human beings sustain

socially to one another, it is impossible to obtain an understanding

of present social forces (without which they cannot be mastered

and directed) apart from an education which leads learners into

knowledge of the very same facts and principles which in their

final organization constitute the sciences. Nor does the

importance of the principle that learners should be led to acquaintance

with scientific subject-matter cease with the insight thereby given

into present social issues. The methods of science also point the

way to the measures and policies by means of which a better

social order can be brought into existence. The applications of

science which have produced in large measure the social conditions

which now exist do not exhaust the possible field of their

application. For so far science has been applied more or less casually

and under the influence of ends, such as private advantage and

power, which are a heritage from the institutions of a

prescientific age.

Dewey: Page lw.13.54

We are told almost daily and from many sources that it is

impossible for human beings to direct their common life

intelligently. We are told, on one hand, that the complexity of human

relations, domestic and international, and on the other hand, the

fact that human beings are so largely creatures of emotion and

habit, make impossible large-scale social planning and direction

by intelligence. This view would be more credible if any

systematic effort, beginning with early education and carried on through

the continuous study and learning of the young, had ever been

undertaken with a view to making the method of intelligence,

exemplified in science, supreme in education. There is nothing in

the inherent nature of habit that prevents intelligent method

from becoming itself habitual; and there is nothing in the nature

of emotion to prevent the development of intense emotional

allegiance to the method.

Dewey: Page lw.13.54

The case of science is here employed as an illustration of

[Page lw.13.55]

progressive selection of subject-matter resident in present experience

towards organization: an organization which is free, not

externally imposed, because it is in accord with the growth of

experience itself. The utilization of subject-matter found in the present

life-experience of the learner towards science is perhaps the best

illustration that can be found of the basic principle of using

existing experience as the means of carrying learners on to a wider,

more refined, and better organized environing world, physical

and human, than is found in the experiences from which

educative growth sets out. Hogben's recent work, Mathematics for

the Million, shows how mathematics, if it is treated as a mirror of

civilization and as a main agency in its progress, can contribute

to the desired goal as surely as can the physical sciences. The

underlying ideal in any case is that of progressive organization of

knowledge. It is with reference to organization of knowledge that

we are likely to find Either-Or philosophies most acutely active.

In practice, if not in so many words, it is often held that since

traditional education rested upon a conception of organization

of knowledge that was almost completely contemptuous of living

present experience, therefore education based upon living

experience should be contemptuous of the organization of facts and

ideas.

Dewey: Page lw.13.55

When a moment ago I called this organization an ideal, I

meant, on the negative side, that the educator cannot start with

knowledge already organized and proceed to ladle it out in

doses. But as an ideal the active process of organizing facts and

ideas is an ever-present educational process. 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. It is not true that organization is a principle

foreign to experience. Otherwise experience would be so

dispersive as to be chaotic. The experience of young children centres

about persons and the home. Disturbance of the normal order of

relationships in the family is now known by psychiatrists to be a

fertile source of later mental and emotional troubles--a fact

which testifies to the reality of this kind of organization. One of

the great advances in early school education, in the kindergarten

and early grades, is that it preserves the social and human centre

of the organization of experience, instead of the older violent

shift of the centre of gravity. But one of the outstanding problems

[Page lw.13.56]

of education, as of music, is modulation. In the case of education,

modulation means movement from a social and human centre

toward a more objective intellectual scheme of organization,

always bearing in mind, however, that intellectual organization is

not an end in itself but is the means by which social relations,

distinctively human ties and bonds, may be understood and

more intelligently ordered.

Dewey: Page lw.13.56

When education is based in theory and practice upon

experience, it goes without saying that the organized subject-matter of

the adult and the specialist cannot provide the starting point.

Nevertheless, it represents the goal toward which education

should continuously move. It is hardly necessary to say that one

of the most fundamental principles of the scientific organization

of knowledge is the principle of cause-and-effect. The way in

which this principle is grasped and formulated by the scientific

specialist is certainly very different from the way in which it can

be approached in the experience of the young. But neither the

relation nor grasp of its meaning is foreign to the experience of

even the young child. When a child two or three years of age

learns not to approach a flame too closely and yet to draw near

enough a stove to get its warmth he is grasping and using the

causal relation. There is no intelligent activity that does not

conform to the requirements of the relation, and it is intelligent in

the degree in which it is not only conformed to but consciously

borne in mind.

Dewey: Page lw.13.56

In the earlier forms of experience the causal relation does not

offer itself in the abstract but in the form of the relation of means

employed to ends attained; of the relation of means and

consequences. Growth in judgment and understanding is essentially

growth in ability to form purposes and to select and arrange

means for their realization. The most elementary experiences of

the young are filled with cases of the means-consequence

relation. There is not a meal cooked nor a source of illumination

employed that does not exemplify this relation. The trouble with

education is not the absence of situations in which the causal

relation is exemplified in the relation of means and consequences.

Failure to utilize the situations so as to lead the learner on to

grasp the relation in the given cases of experience is, however,

only too common. The logician gives the names "analysis and

synthesis" to the operations by which means are selected and

organized in relation to a purpose.

[Page lw.13.57]

Dewey: Page lw.13.57

This principle determines the ultimate foundation for the

utilization of activities in school. Nothing can be more absurd

educationally than to make a plea for a variety of active occupations

in the school while decrying the need for progressive

organization of information and ideas. Intelligent activity is distinguished

from aimless activity by the fact that it involves selection of

means--analysis--out of the variety of conditions that are

present, and their arrangement--synthesis--to reach an intended aim

or purpose. That the more immature the learner is, the simpler

must be the ends held in view and the more rudimentary the

means employed, is obvious. But the principle of organization

of activity in terms of some perception of the relation of

consequences to means applies even with the very young.

Otherwise an activity ceases to be educative because it is blind. With

increased maturity, the problem of interrelation of means

becomes more urgent. In the degree in which intelligent

observation is transferred from the relation of means to ends to the more

complex question of the relation of means to one another, the

idea of cause and effect becomes prominent and explicit. The

final justification of shops, kitchens, and so on in the school is

not just that they afford opportunity for activity, but that they

provide opportunity for the kind of activity or for the

acquisition of mechanical skills which leads students to attend to the

relation of means and ends, and then to consideration of the way

things interact with one another to produce definite effects. It is

the same in principle as the ground for laboratories in scientific

research.

Dewey: Page lw.13.57

Unless the problem of intellectual organization can be worked

out on the ground of experience, reaction is sure to occur toward

externally imposed methods of organization. There are signs of

this reaction already in evidence. We are told that our schools,

old and new, are failing in the main task. They do not develop, it

is said, the capacity for critical discrimination and the ability to

reason. The ability to think is smothered, we are told, by

accumulation of miscellaneous ill-digested information, and by the

attempt to acquire forms of skill which will be immediately

useful in the business and commercial world. We are told that these

evils spring from the influence of science and from the

magnification of present requirements at the expense of the tested cultural

heritage from the past. It is argued that science and its method

must be subordinated; that we must return to the logic of

[Page lw.13.58]

ultimate first principles expressed in the logic of Aristotle and St.

Thomas, in order that the young may have sure anchorage in

their intellectual and moral life, and not be at the mercy of every

passing breeze that blows.

Dewey: Page lw.13.58

If the method of science had ever been consistently and

continuously applied throughout the day-by-day work of the school in

all subjects, I should be more impressed by this emotional appeal

than I am. I see at bottom but two alternatives between which

education must choose if it is not to drift aimlessly. One of them

is expressed by the attempt to induce educators to return to the

intellectual methods and ideals that arose centuries before

scientific method was developed. The appeal may be temporarily

successful in a period when general insecurity, emotional and

intellectual as well as economic, is rife. For under these conditions

the desire to lean on fixed authority is active. Nevertheless, it is

so out of touch with all the conditions of modern life that I

believe it is folly to seek salvation in this direction. The other

alternative is systematic utilization of scientific method as the pattern

and ideal of intelligent exploration and exploitation of the

potentialities inherent in experience.

Dewey: Page lw.13.58

The problem involved comes home with peculiar force to

progressive schools. Failure to give constant attention to

development of the intellectual content of experiences and to obtain

ever-increasing organization of facts and ideas may in the end

merely strengthen the tendency toward a reactionary return to

intellectual and moral authoritarianism. The present is not the

time nor place for a disquisition upon scientific method. But

certain features of it are so closely connected with any educational

scheme based upon experience that they should be noted.

Dewey: Page lw.13.58

In the first place, the experimental method of science attaches

more importance, not less, to ideas as ideas than do other

methods. There is no such thing as experiment in the scientific sense

unless action is directed by some leading idea. The fact that the

ideas employed are hypotheses, not final truths, is the reason

why ideas are more jealously guarded and tested in science than

anywhere else. The moment they are taken to be first truths in

themselves there ceases to be any reason for scrupulous

examination of them. As fixed truths they must be accepted and that is

the end of the matter. But as hypotheses, they must be

continuously tested and revised, a requirement that demands they be

accurately formulated.

[Page lw.13.59]

Dewey: Page lw.13.59

In the second place, ideas or hypotheses are tested by the

consequences which they produce when they are acted upon. This

fact means that the consequences of action must be carefully and

discriminatingly observed. Activity that is not checked by

observation of what follows from it may be temporarily enjoyed. But

intellectually it leads nowhere. It does not provide knowledge

about the situations in which action occurs nor does it lead to

clarification and expansion of ideas.

Dewey: Page lw.13.59

In the third place, the method of intelligence manifested in the

experimental method demands keeping track of ideas, activities,

and observed consequences. Keeping track is a matter of

reflective review and summarizing, in which there is both

discrimination and record of the significant features of a developing

experience. To reflect is to look back over what has been done so as to

extract the net meanings which are the capital stock for

intelligent dealing with further experiences. It is the heart of

intellectual organization and of the disciplined mind.

Dewey: Page lw.13.59

I have been forced to speak in general and often abstract

language. But what has been said is organically connected with the

requirement that experiences in order to be educative must lead

out into an expanding world of subject-matter, a subject-matter

of facts or information and of ideas. This condition is satisfied

only as the educator views teaching and learning as a continuous

process of reconstruction of experience. This condition in turn

can be satisfied only as the educator has a long look ahead, and

views every present experience as a moving force in influencing

what future experiences will be. I am aware that the emphasis I

have placed upon scientific method may be misleading, for it may

result only in calling up the special technique of laboratory

research as that is conducted by specialists. But the meaning of the

emphasis placed upon scientific method has little to do with

specialized techniques. It means that scientific method is the only

authentic means at our command for getting at the significance

of our everyday experiences of the world in which we live. It

means that scientific method provides a working pattern of the

way in which and the conditions under which experiences are

used to lead ever onward and outward. Adaptation of the method

to individuals of various degrees of maturity is a problem for the

educator, and the constant factors in the problem are the

formation of ideas, acting upon ideas, observation of the conditions

which result, and organization of facts and ideas for future use.

[Page lw.13.60]

Neither the ideas, nor the activities, nor the observations, nor

the organization are the same for a person six years old as they

are for one twelve or eighteen years old, to say nothing of the

adult scientist. But at every level there is an expanding

development of experience if experience is educative in effect.

Consequently, whatever the level of experience, we have no choice but

either to operate in accord with the pattern it provides or else to

neglect the place of intelligence in the development and control

of a living and moving experience.

[Page lw.13.61]

8. Experience--The Means and Goal of Education

Dewey: Page lw.13.61

In what I have said I have taken for granted the soundness

of the principle that education in order to accomplish its ends

both for the individual learner and for society must be based upon

experience--which is always the actual life-experience of some

individual. I have not argued for the acceptance of this principle

nor attempted to justify it. Conservatives as well as radicals in

education are profoundly discontented with the present

educational situation taken as a whole. There is at least this much

agreement among intelligent persons of both schools of

educational thought. The educational system must move one way or

another, either backward to the intellectual and moral standards

of a pre-scientific age or forward to ever greater utilization of

scientific method in the development of the possibilities of growing,

expanding experience. I have but endeavored to point out some

of the conditions which must be satisfactorily fulfilled if

education takes the latter course.

Dewey: Page lw.13.61

For I am so confident of the potentialities of education when it

is treated as intelligently directed development of the possibilities

inherent in ordinary experience that I do not feel it necessary to

criticize here the other route nor to advance arguments in favor

of taking the route of experience. The only ground for

anticipating failure in taking this path resides to my mind in the danger

that experience and the experimental method will not be

adequately conceived. There is no discipline in the world so severe as

the discipline of experience subjected to the tests of intelligent

development and direction. Hence the only ground I can see for

even a temporary reaction against the standards, aims, and

methods of the newer education is the failure of educators who

professedly adopt them to be faithful to them in practice. As I

have emphasized more than once, the road of the new education

is not an easier one to follow than the old road but a more

[Page lw.13.62]

strenuous and difficult one. It will remain so until it has attained

its majority and that attainment will require many years of

serious cooperative work on the part of its adherents. The greatest

danger that attends its future is, I believe, the idea that it is an

easy way to follow, so easy that its course may be improvised, if

not in an impromptu fashion, at least almost from day to day or

from week to week. It is for this reason that instead of extolling

its principles, I have confined myself to showing certain

conditions which must be fulfilled if it is to have the successful career

which by right belongs to it.

Dewey: Page lw.13.62

I have used frequently in what precedes the words

"progressive" and "new" education. I do not wish to close, however,

without recording my firm belief that the fundamental issue is

not of new versus old education nor of progressive against

traditional education but a question of what anything whatever must

be to be worthy of the name education. I am not, I hope and

believe, in favor of any ends or any methods simply because the

name progressive may be applied to them. The basic question

concerns the nature of education with no qualifying adjectives

prefixed. What we want and need is education pure and simple,

and we shall make surer and faster progress when we devote

ourselves to finding out just what education is and what conditions

have to be satisfied in order that education may be a reality and

not a name or a slogan. It is for this reason alone that I have

emphasized the need for a sound philosophy of experience.