


 The logo for 'insights' features the word 'insights' in a serif font. The 'i' is lowercase and enclosed within a grey circle. The rest of the letters are lowercase and in a larger, black serif font.

A publication of
*The John Dewey Society for the
 Study of Education and Culture*

C O N T E N T S

1

Editorial

Jon G. Bradley

2

Late Night
 Reflections on
 Last Week
 and on
 John Dewey

William Doll

4

Winners and
 Losers in Current
 School Reform

George Willis

7

Dewey, Scheffler
 and the Debate
 Over Continuity

Alan G. Phillips, Jr.

*It is not so much consequence what you say,
 as how you say it. Memorable sentences
 are memorable on account of some single
 irradiating word"*

(Alexander Smith, 1863, *Dreamthorp*).

Insights was founded in 1964 by William Van Til as a vehicle that would offer all members of the John Dewey Society an equal opportunity to engage in the "prompt, informal free trade in ideas". He went on to forcefully note in his editorial introduction to that inaugural issue that "We need to share terse and hard-hitting ideas on our current concerns and our opinions".

While much has changed in the five decades since *Insights* was launched, the need for the free exchange of ideas, positions, notions, and the necessity to engage in vibrant controversy certainly has not lessened. Some may well argue that there are even more serious challenges facing public education and democracy today. For example, the assault upon our environment - physical, moral and ethical - as well as the onslaught of apparently popular and politically motivated movements that demand standardization and compliance, force those of us in positions of leadership and scholarship to engage the issues head on.

Insights is a unique publication that draws its strength and inspiration from the members, associates and friends of the John Dewey Society. The range of issues discussed, the rigor of the positions taken and the suggestions advocated will, in their totality, most certainly advance the fundamental

character of free speech within a democratic society. Perhaps even more seriously than originally envisioned by the founding members so long ago, the cusp of the twenty-first century appears to be in need of a strong dose of ethical debate on evolving fundamental societal issues.

Your colleagues in this volume have taken up the challenge to engage in serious debate and passionate self-reflection! I encourage others to add their voices. Perhaps the only constant that we may look forward to is that of "change itself"; and what a strange world may evolve if we do not publicly and in print react to and engage those very concepts that we may rile against in private. John Dewey was never afraid to take strong ethical positions on all manner of occasions and, over his long lifetime, was often severely criticized for advocating and defending his often contrary grounded points of view.

Insights will be published three times during the academic year. Its success depends largely upon your willingness to submit articles, book reviews, ideas/works-in-progress and personal reflections and to engage in that creative and fascinating hunt for Smith's memorable "irradiating word".

Jon G. Bradley
 Editor
 <jon.bradley@mcgill.ca>

Late Night Reflections on Last Week and on John Dewey

William Doll

Last week, I was trying to develop two interconnecting ideas: (1) that which we consider “natural” is really historical, hence having a beginning and possibly an ending; and (2) the “naturalness” of our school happenings are really tied down to a time period and way of thinking we are rapidly leaving. The “methods” paper you’ve read is designed to show the history of that we take for granted - our “methods” started at a certain time, say with Peter Ramus (mid 1500’s) and have continued into our just industrial society. The fit between the Ramus-Tyler frame has been quite good but what do we do now?

We are no longer in a modernist mode, we are in a post mode: post-industrial, post-patriarchal, post-colonial, post-structural, post-modern; maybe even post-schooling. The question we face as educators is how do we educate in such a post frame? We have been trained to work in and think in and be in a non-post frame. New skills will be required.

Does John Dewey (1859 - 1952: look at those dates!) offer any help? I believe so! In chapter seven, “The Democratic Conception in Education”, in *Democracy and Education* (1966/1916) he asserts that new times will require “modification of traditional ideals...

traditional subjects...[and] we [should] try not to fit the child (or learner) to the curriculum but begin with the child, securing direction and development in the immature *through their participation*” (page 81, emphasis added).

How, how, how do we achieve this goal of having learners participate in their own development? By following orders only? By adopting someone else’s goals? By being imposed upon?

Dewey says the just mentioned activities do not lead to a healthy society. For him, a healthy society, a democratic society, is one where the emphasis is “put upon whatever binds people together” (page 98). But this binding must free not fetter: “The very idea of education [is] a freeing of individual capacity in a progressive growth directed to social aims” (page 98). This last sentence is, I believe, one to ponder. What does it mean? How can it be accomplished?

Dewey follows this chapter with number eight: “Aims in Education”. Here he argues that aims should not be “determined by an external dictation” but should “arise from the free growth of [one’s] own experience” (page 101). Akin to my own sense of ‘rigor’, Dewey says:

“The more numerous the recognized possibilities of the situation, or alternatives of action, the more meaning does the chosen activity possess...[for] where only a single outcome has been thought of, the mind has nothing else to think of; the meaning attaching to the act is limited” (page 103).

So, for Dewey, learners need direction, guidance and aims, but these need to be brought forth by those in power (us, as teachers) in ways that free others to develop their own pow-

ers in a way that promotes both further growth and social well being - for us, our society, our environment.

As teachers, this is our challenge. It may just be that the activity we call “schooling” does not, under present conditions, aid us in this challenge. We may well need to be our “own creators”.

References:

- Dewey, John. (1966/1916). *Democracy and Education*. New York: Free press.
- Doll, William. (in press). *Beyond Methods: Teaching as an Aesthetic and Spiritful Quest*. In Elijah Mirochnik. (Editor). *Passion and Pedagogy*. New York: Peter Lang Publishers.

William Doll teaches at Louisiana State University and can be contacted at <wdoll@lsu.edu>.

Winners and Losers in Current School Reform

George Willis

An Introduction to the Accountability Game:

Americans like games and contests of all kinds. Furthermore, they seem increasingly to like to gamble on them. In the case of athletics, not only are the results of such games reported widely, but a veritable industry has grown up devoted to analyzing and to predicting the winners and losers of future competitions. While not as exciting or as colorful as most athletic competitions, school reform is now one of the biggest games citizens of the United States are gambling on.

Although the game has been played differently in the past (emphasizing, for instance, the development of intellect and understanding), school reform now centers on attempts to standardize schools throughout the nation and to apply technocratic means to increase their efficiency. Both presidents Bush (the elder) and Clinton have urged national adoption of such largely unreachable goals as “Every school in America will be free of drugs and violence...”. Numerous voices now clamor for a national curriculum, uniform teacher training and licensure, increased reliance on computers, and intensified testing of students - all to ensure that the United States maintains certain levels of economic productivity. The think-

ing runs that if someone is held responsible for achieving a specific goal, that goal should be reached.

All this is justified under the name “accountability”, a misnomer for what is usually a form of rewards or punishments, such as payment by results. In Rhode Island, when a local superintendent of schools signed a contract that will pay him monetary bonuses if average student scores in his district on statewide tests reach certain plateaus, no thought seemed given - nor money made available - to others who might be far more instrumental in any increase in scores. At the same time, this news was heralded inaccurately in the media as the first time accountability had been tried in Rhode Island schools, surely a step in the right direction.

Accountability, of course, is a two-way street, and providing rewards or punishments to those people who have only partial control over results (as is almost always the case with schooling) is risky at best and often unethical. Applied this way, accountability (by whatever name) is destructive of shared purposes and leads to what have been called its three A's: anxiety, anger, and alienation. Moreover, applied in the long term, accountability leads to its four F's: frustration, fear, failure, and fraud.

In Texas, as but one example, officials of several school districts have faced criminal prosecution for manipulation of average school wide scores obtained on tests required by the state. We can expect to see more and more instances of possible fraud concerning student testing.

So, both the stakes and the risks are high in the game of current school reform. Even though there are no

scoreboards or league standings that tell us exactly how we are doing, the winners and losers are not hard to identify or predict. In general, the winners are those people who gain power, prestige, or money from the game; the losers are those people who have their power or autonomy slip away.

The Winners:

The winners in this power game fall into four general groups. The first of these groups is politicians. During the last two decades, politicians have found that criticizing public schools as “failing” is a no-lose proposition. They can then take credit for having uncovered an urgent social problem in need of fixing and, usually, for having identified the fix. They can shift all responsibility for actually carrying out the fix to the shoulders of educators. They will continue to do all of this, and, if they continue to be abetted by the media, will continue to win elections.

The second group of winners consist of governmental agencies such as the federal Department of Education and the many state departments of education. They will be given increasing bureaucratic oversight of school reform. With the complicity of politicians, they will make and enforce increasingly complicated rules and regulations. Their numbers and prestige will increase, as will their budgets.

The third group is standardized test-makers. They will be seen as increasingly essential to reform, and their tests will exert influence over how time, energy, and money are spent in local schools. Controversies over narrowness and validity of such tests will lead to perpetual revisions.

Their numbers also will increase, along with their business profits.

The fourth group consists of professional technocratic reformers, experts, and consultants. These are people who will claim to know how actually to get things done in the schools. Depending on the consistency of their claims with the general ethos of current school reform, prestige and money will be thrown at them. They may be the biggest winners of all, though perhaps temporarily.

The Losers:

The losers are much more numerous than the winners. In fact, current school reform takes power from the many and gives it to the few. The losers in this game can also be classified in four groups.

The first group is teachers. They will be the biggest losers. Their power, autonomy, and ability to make professional decisions will continue to be diminished in a process of de-skilling that has already begun. They will be forced to teach to mandated and standardized tests despite the dubious nature of such tests and the many more worthwhile things that should be attended to in their classrooms. They are set to take the blame for any alleged shortcomings of previous reforms or when the promises of current school reform fall short, as they inevitably will.

The second group is students. They also will be big losers. They will be led to believe that getting higher scores on standardized tests is an end in itself and synonymous with good education. They will lack initiative, motivation, and other basic values and skills necessary for serious academic work. They are destined to

become disillusioned when they reach the realities of college-level work or of life in the community.

The third group includes parents and other interested members of local communities. Their loss is straightforward and easy to explain. They will lose control of their local schools to remote politicians, experts, and technocrats.

The fourth group is the largest of all. It is American society itself. Society will lose the vigorous, pluralistic school system that has served it well for nearly two centuries. As uniformity and technocracy increase, society will lose creativity, initiative, and humane values (such as tolerance) that have historically promoted excellence and American democracy. It will get conformity, mediocrity and indifference.

Prediction:

One further prediction about the gamble of current school reform concerns the most likely scenario it will follow. Emphasis on standardized testing of students will create an increase in scores. However, this increase will be due to testing to the tests themselves and to the initial efforts of teachers to meet such demands. Other desirable outcomes of schooling will be shortchanged. Nonetheless, the increase in test scores will neither be as great as hoped for or promised by reformers. Still, the reformers (essentially the four groups of winners noted above) will insist on trying the same reforms over and over again, only each time demanding that everyone try harder. Results will remain disappointing until widespread disillusionment eventually sets in and creates a new

round of different reforms and reformers. Until the game of current school reform runs its course, however, real education will decline while alienation, the raw edge of school violence, and the passive resistance of students to the meaningless characteristics of the game hold sway.

George Willis teaches at the University of Rhode Island and can be contacted at <geowil@uri.edu>.

Dewey, Scheffler and the Debate Over Continuity

Alan G. Phillips, Jr.

Dewey's Bedrock Assumption

A recourse to continuity is characteristic of John Dewey's response to philosophical problems created by older epistemologies or scientific viewpoints.¹ As noted by Thomas M. Alexander, "Dewey never fully developed his theory of continuity. But he constantly appeals to it at crucial moments in most of his writings" (Alexander 1987, 98). H. S. Thayer says the following about this recurrent appeal:

"Dewey once argued that the social is the inclusive philosophical category. But that category rests upon the idea of continuity, to which Dewey uncharacteristically assigns an almost "absolute" character in speaking of it as something like a necessarily true principle... (Thayer 1968, 174n30)".

Commenting on what he refers to as Dewey's "experimental" phase, Raymond D. Boisvert says, "The assumption of continuity is prevalent in Dewey's thought and critical to a proper understanding of his position" (Boisvert 1988, 68-69). Boisvert's remark addresses Dewey's understanding of everything from the nature of creative expression to the often-complex relationship of learning to inquiry in education.

Dewey's bedrock assumption of continuity surfaces when he combats recurrent dualisms between common-sense and science, art and rationality or religion and naturalism. Philip H.

Phenix contrasts the Deweyan recourse to continuity with dualistic theories in his article "John Dewey's War on Dualism." He observes, "Dualism presupposes the idea of discontinuity—of sharp breaks, unrelieved contrasts, absolute distinctions, and unbridgeable gulfs. In place of this idea Dewey substituted the principle of continuity" (Phenix 1966, 43).²

For Dewey, continuity underpins many of the concepts central to his educational theory and his book *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*. First of all, continuity affects the growth and ongoing development of individuals and knowledge. As Alexander observes, "...Continuity [for Dewey] ...means growth, which involves a creative theory of temporality" (Alexander 1987, 61). Secondly, continuity links experience and nature, foreground and background, theory and practice, various interactions, as well as all lived situations. Thirdly, continuity entails forward movement from earlier to later stages in an ongoing process. Fourthly, throughout Dewey's work, continuity is presumed as one of the "generic traits" of the natural world.

In *Art as Experience*, Dewey maintains, "Experience occurs continuously because the interaction of live creature and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living" (Dewey 1934, 35). Dewey also evokes continuity when he explains what he means by a "naturalistic theory" in his *Logic*. He says:

"As it [the term "naturalistic"] is here employed it means, on one side, that there is no breach of continuity between operations of inquiry and

biological operations and physical operations. "Continuity," on the other side, means that rational operations grow out of organic activities, without being identical with that from which they emerge" (Dewey [1938] 1991b, 26).

Later in the *Logic*, Dewey anticipates potential problems for his understanding of continuity, saying, it "is not self-explanatory" (Dewey [1938] 1991b, 30). Nevertheless, in spite of such difficulties, he attempts to explain the concept in terms of growth, development and the movement from simpler to more advanced forms or activities. He notes:

"The primary postulate of a naturalistic theory of logic is continuity of the lower (less complex) and the higher (more complex) activities and forms...its meaning excludes complete rupture on one side and mere repetition of identities on the other; it precludes reduction of the "higher" to the "lower" just as it precludes complete breaks and gaps. The growth and development of any living organism from seed to maturity illustrates the meaning of continuity" (Dewey [1938] 1991b, 30).

This assumption of continuity in nature is based on Dewey's interpretation of Hegelian philosophy, developmental psychology and evolutionary biology. Drawing from these three sources, Dewey binds together ideas about linear time, direction and complexity of growth with his conception of continuity. He acknowledges his debt to these intellectual influences at many points in his work. For example, in *Democracy and Education*, Dewey maintains that "...the philosophic significance of the doctrine of evolution

lies precisely in its emphasis upon continuity of simpler and more complex organic forms until we reach man" (Dewey [1916] 1968, 337). Later, in *Experience and Nature* Dewey observes that nature "...is characterized by histories, that is, by continuity of change proceeding from beginnings to endings" (Dewey 1929, xvi). He explains that "...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" (Dewey [1938] 1959, 27). This interpretation also finds support in *Art as Experience* when Dewey states that "experience occurs continuously because the interaction of live creature and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living" (Dewey 1934, 35).

In his educational theory, Dewey often characterizes the learner's growth in terms of linear, sequential movement from earlier stages to later ones or from immaturity to maturity. If guided adequately, the more immediate interests of childhood eventually give way to adult interests in longer-term goals and objectives. In *Experience and Education*, he says, "The principle of continuity in its educational application means, nevertheless, that the future has to be taken account at every stage of the educational process (Dewey [1938] 1959, 47).

This continuous movement in education is also mirrored in Dewey's general theory of inquiry which depicts the growth of specialized knowledge in terms of initial movement from commonsensical meanings to those

abstract, specialized ones used in mathematical and scientific domains. In both theories, continuity is depicted in terms of forward movement from earlier to later stages of growth.

According to Dewey, thinkers strive to understand the continuity of situations through their efforts at transforming any problematic situation through the construction of meaning. They can understand natural processes better by consciously choosing to focus on continuity's role in all interactions. Dewey explains, "When process is seen to be the 'universal' in nature and in life, continuity, extensive spatially and temporally, becomes the regulative principle of all inquiry that claims to be scientific" (Dewey [1952] 1989, 413).

Thus, for Dewey, continuity is presumed as a universal trait of nature, yet it is also established in situations that appear troubled or are on the verge of losing their otherwise natural cohesion. Alexander explains, "When we respond to things not simply as 'had' but as 'known,' for Dewey, this connotes *our active effort to establish continuity and meaning in experience and to control it*" (Alexander 1987, 116; emphasis added). In this passage, Alexander notes that continuity functions in both a regulatory and metaphysical capacity in Dewey's philosophy.

Israel Scheffler's Natural Discontinuities

Israel Scheffler often criticized Dewey's work for failing to adequately recognize the often-useful discontinuities between theory and practice, problem solving and problem finding, or narrow student interests and broad social concerns. In his essay entitled "Educational Liberalism and Dewey's

Philosophy," Scheffler says, "Dewey's approach, I think, often runs the risk of mistaking valid distinctions for 'divorces,' 'splits,' and 'sharp divisions' to be uniformly washed away..." (Scheffler 1973a, 154). Here, Scheffler is concerned with what he regards as Dewey's overreaction to and characterization of analytical distinctions. This concern also finds expression in *Four Pragmatists* where Scheffler explains "...The notion of continuity is exaggerated in Dewey's treatment," and concludes that "...discontinuities and distinctions are as natural as continuities, and they need also to be acknowledged where they exist" (Scheffler 1974, 250-251).

Specifically, one distinction Scheffler regards as valid is the one made between conflicting situations of continuity. In other words, for Scheffler different trajectories or lines of continuity can be seen as discontinuous with each other, or put another way, he finds it helpful to view some continuous situations as distant or temporarily removed from each other. Whether or not they are actually discontinuous apart from human constructions of them, Scheffler considers periodic breaks between educational and scientific processes to be as natural as perpetual unions between them.³

Scheffler also regards the differentiation between individual and cultural continuity as a valid distinction. He explains, "The processes by which new physical cells replace the old in the individual organism are responsible for preserving biological continuity. The processes by which new members of a culture replace the old guarantee cultural continuity" (Scheffler 1991, 50).

Cultures and individuals, according to Scheffler's account, often have their own lines and time frames of continuity which are attached to different, often conflicting, aims and purposes. He observes:

"For individual continuity, there are fairly definite biological criteria and the range of variation consonant with continuity is fairly well given, for example, in descriptions of the life cycle. For cultures there are no similarly definite criteria, no known laws of growth or normal patterns of life cycle" (Scheffler 1960, 54).

According to Scheffler, conflicts within each sector of continuity can occur, just as periodic breaks between them are realized. He explains, "The continuity of any culture may be furthered in different, and conflicting ways, in accord with different standards of continuity that may be chosen" (Scheffler 1991, 51). The moral differences between such standards can be discussed abstractly, but in Scheffler's view, they often have important consequences for educational practices and policy decisions.

Insistence on cultural continuity is not a sufficient goal for education according to Scheffler, nor is the hasty attempt to establish continuity where cultures clash over values or competing goods. In order to make this point clear, Scheffler envisions an extreme scenario where the recourse to continuity offers a dubious solution to a problematic situation. He envisions a situation where continuity's maintenance involves passive acceptance of reprehensible political conditions on the part of a passive population. In such a case, what is deemed functional entails educational

processes that maintain a continuous equilibrium of oppression and dogma (Scheffler 1960, 56).

A similar scenario is imagined by H. S. Thayer when he examines a case of continuity linked to regressive movement, one not allied to something like educative growth or developmental progress. He says, "...If we overlook that kind of continuity that occurs after growth, namely, the gradual death and degeneration of organic processes, we will be tempted to identify continuity with the morally valuable, desirable, and good" (Thayer 1968, 461).

Scheffler concedes that educators who advocate continuity's establishment and maintenance as a positive educational goal might avoid such unpleasant implications by appealing to "obligations that are independent of social continuity" or by interpreting continuity in a different manner (Scheffler 1991, 52). Still, in spite of such ad hoc modifications of the concept, Scheffler expresses misgivings about frequent appeals to a functional conception like continuity for all educational situations where diverse value commitments clash. On this matter, Scheffler resonates with Eamonn Callan who concludes, "By itself, the idea that education is a matter of continuous learning provides us with little guidance in teaching or policy-making" (Callan 1982, 20).

In spite of criticisms like this one, Scheffler often praises the Deweyan emphasis on continuity for a variety of educational domains. He says, "His [Dewey's] way of looking at things together which are commonly held apart, of seeing continuities where others take gaps for granted, must be

held a fruitful philosophical approach, justified by its consequences in his own work" (Scheffler 1973a, 153-154). Later, Scheffler says, "Continuities are certainly important in education, and Dewey's emphasis on bringing together the humanistic and the technical, the elementary and the advanced, the disciplinary and the problematic elements of the educational process is a salutary one" (Scheffler 1974, 250-251).

At several junctures, Scheffler emphasizes the importance of Dewey's notion of continuity for understanding the relationship between developmental phases of human growth. In *Of Human Potential*, Scheffler says, "...The educational life of the child is continuous," and he explains such continuity by pointing out the fallacy of regarding a student's educational experience in terms of discrete temporal segments defined by school curriculum and pedagogical practices (Scheffler 1985, 113). Scheffler argues against philosophical approaches that regard a child's schooling as "exhausting the temporal limits of education," and he emphasizes recognition of "the temporal continuity of education" with wider concerns of life as a major policy consideration (Scheffler 1985, 113).

Therefore, on the one hand, Scheffler wants to uphold continuity of student learning with adult life outside of the school, yet he backs away from what he regards as Dewey's exaggeration of the continuity between specific educational domains or between situations of general learning and specialized inquiry. Scheffler embraces aspects of

Dewey's recourse to continuity while other elements are held at bay.

Jerome A. Popp discusses this apparent break with the Deweyan conception of continuity in his book *Naturalizing Philosophy of Education*. He examines Scheffler's logical distinction between beliefs that lead to learning and assertions that convey knowledge (Scheffler 1973b); thus, Popp explains, "For Scheffler, learning is the process that produces belief and is preepistemological in the sense that learning is the process that achieves one of the conditions of knowing but is not itself one of these conditions" (Popp 1998, 20). Popp points out that, for Scheffler, belief is fixed by learning "which teaching can bring about" and should become acquainted with separate conditions of knowledge justification (Popp 1998, 21).⁵ According to this account, learning and the acquisition of knowledge are not necessarily continuous, and this leads Popp to accuse Scheffler and other analytic philosophers of perpetuating a sort of "malpractice" which bears responsibility for separating philosophy from important educational decisions and practices (Popp 1998, 21).

Likewise, Dewey also considers the practical and ethical implications of a prolonged separation of learning from processes of knowing. Rather than accepting such a conflicted situation as indicative of an irreconcilable break or natural discontinuity, Dewey's tendency is to reinterpret such an impasse in terms of his theory of inquiry where it is seen as a problematic situation to be resolved at some point in time. Thayer notes:

"Cleavages, breakages, or gaps in natural processes, if they are acknowledged to occur at all, are viewed with a certain alarm, as is, for example, that which is "static"—while it might not be a positive evil, it may be an obstacle to change, to continuity, and to growth" (Thayer 1968, 462).

Scheffler often has a hard time reconciling Dewey's focus on continuity with the role of the problematic experiences or unanticipated breakdowns that call forth the use of intelligent inquiry. If one of the goals of Dewey's *Logic* is to intelligently anticipate the viability of future adaptations in light of past learning, how is this compatible with Dewey's recognition of experiences that frequently surprise or upset the forward movement of development? How should one approach experiences that often necessitate a complete reevaluation or reconstruction of previously functional habits of thought? Such experiences involve situations where suppressed impulses break forth from established or constrictive habits (See Dewey 1922, 101). This portrayal of spontaneous habit reconstruction often appears to be at odds with the intelligent anticipation of a habit's shortcomings (Scheffler 1974, 223-224). It seems to pit ongoing impulsive interests against those that draw on the benefits of inquiry and intelligent foresight. Scheffler explains

"The continuous flow of impulse is not available for general use in advance reconstruction of potential breakdowns foreseeable only in imagination. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Dewey's psychological views are incapable of adequately

supporting his moral advocacy of continuous reform based on a rational prevision of consequences" (Scheffler 1974, 226).

Another way of putting this is in terms of a tension between resilient habits and the necessity of continuous habit reconstruction in Dewey's work. Scheffler asks how it is possible to reconcile those beneficial disruptions that provoke habit reconstruction with a depiction of intelligent habits that continually assimilate anticipated, unexperienced difficulties. According to him, this represents a significant example of two strands in Deweyan thought that cannot be regarded as continuous, and it is yet another case where recourse to a common philosophical notion falls short of explanatory power for the thinker who employs it.⁶

Addressing Critics of Continuity

Dewey's emphasis on the continuous engagements between problems and knowledge, student interests and society, as well as those between theory and practice, addresses some of the criticisms raised by Scheffler and other critics who push for a recognition of natural breaks and discontinuities in the world of experience. These critics argue that many oppositions in education are unavoidable and not easily rendered "continuous" by a reexamination of older philosophic assumptions. For example, even before Scheffler criticized Dewey, Morton White noted:

"It is instructive to remember that this passion for dividing the universe and the ways of knowing about it is not peculiar to the devout and the transcendently inclined, for even

logical positivists and analytic philosophers share that passion. Even Dewey, who does so much to combat this kind of thinking, has written things that suggest that he was not wholly free from its influence" (White 1957, 249).

Likewise, D. C. Phillips makes a similar point when he explains that the Deweyan emphasis on contextual wholes or situations does not avoid the analysis and selection of which holistic contexts or situations to count as relevant or important for educational purposes. In his book *Holistic Thought in Social Science*, Phillips points out that when thinkers, like Dewey or Hegel before him, de-emphasize divisions and analysis and focus on systemic wholes, they, nevertheless, engage in analyses of selected systems. In other words, the selection of relevant systems entails "severing some interrelationships" or introducing discontinuities, the very thing looked down upon by various opponents of dualistic thinking (Phillips 1976, 63).

Richard Rorty, in his essay "Dewey's Metaphysics," contends that Dewey's attack against dualisms through an analysis of continuity is misguided and a hindrance to his overall enterprise of philosophical criticism. He explains:

"Dewey, in short, confuses two ways of revolting against philosophical dualisms. The first way is to point out that the dualism is imposed by a tradition for specific cultural reasons, but has now outlived its usefulness...The second is to describe the phenomenon in a nondualistic way which emphasizes "continuity between lower and higher processes" (Rorty 1977, 62).

Of course, defenders of Dewey would point out that by emphasizing continuity Dewey is not denying the functional importance of logical activities like analysis, categorization or selective perception. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey emphasizes this point. He says:

"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" (Dewey [1938] 1959, 105-106).

Likewise, in his revised version of *How We Think*, Dewey spends considerable time explaining the importance of analytical distinctions for scientific thought. He observes that "scientific method employs analysis" which consists in "...breaking up the coarse or gross facts of observation into a number of minuter processes not directly accessible to perception" (Dewey [1933] 1986, 272). Furthermore, Dewey maintains that the scientific attitude entails processes involving "...analysis and synthesis, or, in less technical language...discrimination and selection" (Dewey [1933] 1986, 273).

By emphasizing continuity as a bedrock assumption in his pragmatic philosophy, Dewey is reacting against ideas that attempt to permanently reify the distinctions between student interest and social growth, theory and practice or commonsensical and scientific activities. For Dewey, prior assumptions of commonly accepted rifts between activities labeled learning or inquiry should be open to question and subject to critical intelli-

gence. Throughout his work, Dewey wants to retain the functional validity of distinctions and analyses without placing them beyond reproach and criticism or allowing them to characterize all experiential possibilities.

He also seeks to introduce continuity into situations that are judged to be unnecessarily plagued by conflict and oppositions. According to him, "Wherever continuity is possible, the burden of proof rests upon those who assert opposition and dualism" (Dewey 1934a, 27). In a passage from *Experience and Education*, Dewey says, "Continuity and interaction in their active union with each other provide the measure of the educative significance and value of an experience" (Dewey [1938] 1959, 43).

Distinctions can be useful, but they must be weighed next to continuities that are judged as being more natural and relevant in problematic situations. Difficult choices must be made, but the decision to downplay the import of continuity is a costly one from Dewey's vantage point. According to Dewey, a workable philosophy is one that always struggles to capture what is best in useful categories and systemic wholes. For the most part, Scheffler does not disagree with this sentiment.

Perhaps, it is fair to say that the difference between the two philosophers on this matter is one of degree and emphasis. Clearly, both acknowledge the importance of analysis and recognition of continuity at different points in their work. It is likely that a careful exploration of specific educational contexts should serve as a necessary prologue for those who seek guidance from continuity or its disruption.

Notes

I would like to thank Ralph Page, Walter Feinberg, Nicholas Burbules and James D. Wallace for the assistance they offered me as I grappled with this topic. Any errors here are not to be attributed to their philosophical genius.

1. The examination of problems related to the notion of continuity has a long history in philosophy. This preoccupation extends to areas as diverse as the phenomenology of perception to competing notions of infinity in mathematics. Probably one of the earliest treatments of the continuity problem arises in Zeno's (5th century B.C.) paradox which denies that, in spite of appearances to the contrary, continuous motion can occur because one must traverse an infinite number of points before reaching one's destination.

My concern with continuity is primarily addressed to the debate between Dewey and Scheffler and how this might impact on educational practices. However, by doing this, I will not presume to "solve" some of the other very technical problems related to continuity.

2. Alexander points out that Dewey's attack against dualisms does not consist in an assertion of the identity of opposites (i.e. a monistic solution for dyads). He notes, "The most common error is the confusion of continuity with identity. To assert continuity is not the same as asserting identity." (Alexander 1987,95)

3. In his ongoing debate with the philosopher Nelson Goodman, Scheffler says the following about "worldmaking": "Whether there is or is not an object satisfying a version of our making is thus not, in general, up to us. Whether a world answers to a version is, in general, independent of what we may wish or will." (Scheffler 1997,196)

Where conflicting continuities are concerned, it is likely, given this statement and others like it, that Scheffler would not answer the question about whether or not such conflicts represent naturally irresolvable conflicts of irreducibly plural domains.

4. Although Scheffler finds a distinction between philosophy and practice helpful at some points, he maintains, "...The linkage of philosophical and practical concerns must nevertheless be maintained; the continuity of theoretical understanding and the questions of practice must still be confirmed." See his article "Philosophy and the Curriculum" in *Reason and Teaching*.

5. Another way in which this position of Scheffler's can be expressed is that in order to inquire successfully into the nature of X I have to learn something about X. However, in order to learn about X, I do not necessarily have to inquire into X. For example, I may have heard about X without making an effort to inquire into X, or I may have accidentally encountered X. I would like to thank Walter Feinberg for giving me this example and insight into Scheffler's position.

6. Dewey does acknowledge that this is a problem, even though he does not trace the implications of this difficulty to his reliance on continuity. At the outset, in his *Logic*, he mentions the following "predicament" for inquirers: "There always exists a discrepancy between means that are employed and consequences that ensue; sometimes this discrepancy is so serious that its result is what we call mistake and error. This discrepancy exists because the means used, the organs and habits of biological behavior and the organs and conceptions employed in deliberate inquiry, must be present and actual, while consequences to be attained are future." (45-46)

References

- Alexander, Thomas M. *John Dewey's Theory of Art. Experience and Nature: The Horizon's of Feeling.* Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1987.
- Boisvert, Raymond D. *Dewey's Metaphysics.* New York: Fordham University Press, 1988.
- Callan, Eamonn. "Dewey's Conception of Education as Growth." *Educational Theory* 32, no. 1 (1982): 19-27.
- Dewey, John. *How We Think.* New York: Prometheus, 1991a.
- Democracy and Education.* New York: Macmillan, [1916] 1968.
- Human Nature and Conduct.* New York: Modern Library, 1922.
- Experience and Nature.* 2d ed. LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1929.
- How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process.* In *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953*, Vol. 8: 1933, edited by Jo Ann Boydston, 105-352. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1986.
- Art as Experience.* New York: Perigree Books, 1934.
- "Modern Philosophy." In *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953*, Vol. 16: 1949-1952, edited by Jo Ann Boydston, 407-419. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989.
- Experience and Education.* New York: Macmillan, [1938] 1959.
- Logic: The Theory of Inquiry.* In *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953*, Vol. 12: 1938, edited by Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991b.
- Goodman, Nelson. *Ways of Worldmaking.* Indianapolis, Ind: Hackett, 1978.
- Phenix, Philip H. "John Dewey's War on Dualism—It's Bearing on Today's Educational Problems." In *Dewey on Education: Appraisals*, edited by Reginald D. Archambault. New York: Random House, 1966.
- Phillips, D. C. *Holistic Thought in Social Science.* Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1976.
- Popp, Jerome A. *Naturalizing Philosophy of Education: John Dewey in the Postanalytic Period.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998.
- Rorty, Richard. "Dewey's Metaphysics." In *New Studies in the Philosophy of John Dewey*, edited by Steven M. Cahn, 45-74. Hanover, N.H.: The University Presses of New England, 1977.
- Scheffler, Israel. *The Language of Education.* Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1960.
- "Educational Liberalism and Dewey's Philosophy." In *Reason and Teaching*, 149-159. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973a.
- "Toward an Analytic Philosophy of Education." In *Reason and Teaching*, 9-17. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973b.
- "Philosophy and the Curriculum." In *Reason and Teaching*, 31-41. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973c.
- Four Pragmatists: A Critical Introduction to Peirce, James, Mead and Dewey.* New York: Humanities Press, 1974.
- Of Human Potential: An Essay in the Philosophy of Education.* Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.
- In Praise of the Cognitive Emotions: And Other Essays in the Philosophy of Education.* New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Symbolic Worlds: Art, Science, Language, Ritual.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Thayer, H. S. *Meaning and Action: A Critical History of Pragmatism.* Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968.
- White, Morton. *Social Thought in America: The Revolt Against Formalism.* Boston: Beacon, 1957.

Alan G. Phillips, Jr. teaches at Indiana State University and can be contacted at <agphilli33@aol.com>.



McGill

Jon Bradley
Faculty of Education/McGill University
3700 McTavish Street
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
H3A 1Y2