

## Educational Theorist

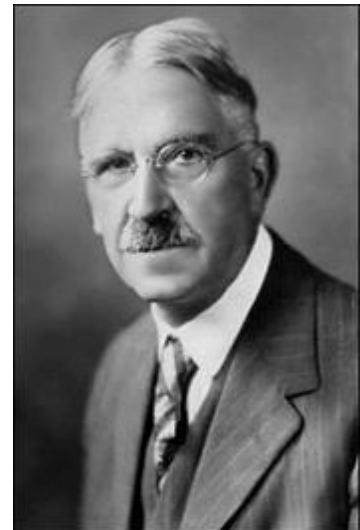
John Dewey

(1859-1952)

The educational theorist assigned to me is the world renowned and highly controversial philosopher and psychologist John Dewey.

Considered one of the most progressive and influential minds of the 20th century, Dewey was considered a man well ahead of his time within the theoretical field of educational thought. Unlike many of his conventional-minded peers, during and after his lifetime,

Dewey's pragmatist approach toward the acquisition of knowledge stressed the importance of experience over theory. For many pedagogic traditionalists, this educational philosophy spat in the face of the rigid and authoritarian instructional methodologies of the day. Despite this fact, Dewey was convinced that his "interactive" approach yielded greater results based on simple rational logic (Flanagan, 1994).



John Dewey was a strong proponent of "active" learning. His philosophical belief regarding the pedagogic approach toward learning leaned heavily around the need for students to be physically and mentally engaged, within the "natural" environment associated within their respective field of study. He contested that students who passively engage in their lessons, via traditional teacher-centered methodologies such as reading literature and listening to lectures, do not reap the benefit of true understanding and knowledge of that particular subject. According to Dewey and his fellow pragmatists, knowledge is the product of human inquiry. He asserted that unless the inquiry can be substantiated through some form of personal experimentation, the acquisition of knowledge is not truly effective (McDermid, 2006).

The pragmatist epistemology posits that the act of perception and observation via active participation provides a means with which we can alter and manipulate the reality around us. According to this theoretical viewpoint, knowledge is gained by pushing and prodding at our physical reality, which in turn validates our own perceptions and instills us with empirical belief in lieu of idle doubt. From this philosophical perspective of knowledge, Dewey openly rejected

the term "epistemology", for its connotation is traditionally defined as the "theory of knowledge". Dewey would rather the "theory of inquiry" and or "experimental logic" be a more fitting representation of his own educational approach (Field, 2005).

Based on my limited understanding, Dewey's pragmatist position infers that experimental inquiries are provisional and contingent based upon each individual's personal perception. This is in direct contrast to the conventionally static and non-reflective aspects associated with traditional methods of teaching and learning. As a master's student, I believe I understand Dewey's position clearly. At this stage in my educational development, I am learning the importance that comes with collecting and analyzing data with objectivity and truth, while building upon my own personal knowledge base. Simply put, the knowledge that I gain is not bound by subjective lectures and or dated materials, rather the knowledge I gain is based on rational logic, investigative inquiry, and personal experience.

As Dr. Peter has mentioned several times before, "There are no right or wrong answers." I gather this insight has something to do with either conferring with or disputing against our collected and analyzed findings.

## **References**

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