

Dewey Personal Reflection

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Growth and experience is a vital aspect to education. John Dewey realized this and was able to develop a short concise version of how he thought school systems should be teaching students. Progressive teaching was a new way to look at how we all learn, and how our experiences shape the learning environment. I was able to relate with his way of thinking. I have experienced both traditional and progressive styles of teaching and it has made me the individual I am today.

I grew up in Canon City, and attended a traditional K-12 style of early education. It was a typical setting where we had restrictions, but were able to use some of the progressive educational experiences that Dewey talks about. It was after I graduated high school when I really started to grow as an adult and a learner.

I joined the Air Force when I was 18. While in basic military training, military tradition, history, and culture was jammed down our throat in a very militaristic traditional style of teaching. Every day we had about two hours of classroom instruction. We had to originally wait outside of the classroom, in formation, for permission to enter the building. Once inside, we quickly filed in one by one, and stood behind our seat at attention. Once we were given the order to sit down, we were able to sit but still we had to sit at attention. Once everyone was sitting down “at attention” and the instructor was ready to begin we were given the order to sit at ease.

During instruction we had a strict set of rules. For example, we were not able to put our elbow on the desk and rest our head on our hand. This was called a “kick stand for our head”, and most students would fall asleep after only a couple of minutes in this position. If we wanted to use the restroom, we would have to ask

and often we were denied. I witnessed students urinate on themselves because they were too afraid to ask for permission to utilize the latrine.

In the military we also used a ton of hands on training. Most of our ground combat skills and assessments were all hands on. This was an improved learning environment, but was still very structured.

Now looking back, I think to myself how difficult that type of learning environment was. The instructors' main goal was to teach the material at hand, but during the process they also taught us discipline and respect. John Dewey stated "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 way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understand and dealing effectively with situations which follow." (Dewey, 1997, p. 44) This statement allows me to reflect back on what I learned and how it allowed me to develop into the instructor I am now.

During my tour in England I was chosen to be an instructor of the Battle Field Air Course. This course was designed to get base personnel who were deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan combat ready. Our students were military members whose main specialty was not in security. I was one of the few chosen to be an instructor, because of the missions I was involved with during my deployments, as well as my continued motivation and dedication for my job and this country. During this time is when I found my passion for teaching. I was able use more of a progressive style of teaching. I really didn't know it at the time, but I am now able to look back and

realize my teaching style and technique. I wanted my students to feel comfortable, and absorb the information and skills they were learning. This information was important and could one day save their life.

During my undergrad studies I had the opportunity to take a couple of philosophy courses. These courses were extremely beneficial for me because the professor created a great learning environment and this led to an overall growing experience. John Dewey stated that, "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 they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth." (Dewey, 1997, p. 40) This was a great way for me to grow and learn about myself. The AET program has also created this environment and allows for a progressive approach to learning/teaching.

During our discussions about environment, I was able to notice how some of the smallest parts of a physical environment can create a positive learning experience. The position of the chairs can allow for students to hide and be uninvolved. A u-shape pattern allows for more openness and more involvement from the students. Again, during my undergrad, I had a class that had the seating arrangement in a u-shape. The instructor was a very large proponent of the Socratic Method of teaching. Most of the class instruction was questions from him to us. When a student would give feedback to a question, the instructor would often ask another student how they felt about the first student's response. This style of teaching allowed for a very active process of teaching, and forced the students to

engage in critical thought. His courses were consistently full and had amazing class participation.

During week three of this course we discussed participation and motivation. I feel that John Dewey's approach to a more progressive school system leads not only to a better learning environment, but also better participation and motivation from students. These students don't feel as bound by specific rules, and they are able to retain the information easier. I have personally experienced this. While in the military I was not motivated to participate in any of the classroom portions of instruction. This led to poor retention of the presented material. The instructors need to create a good learning experience and environment for the student, this will make the student want to be there. "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 purpose of those taught." (Dewey, 1997, p. 45)

John Dewey taught us through a progressive teaching style we are able better reach out to our students. Our students deserve this, and as instructors it is our duty allow them to positively grow through the introduction of education. Near the end of the reading John Dewey states, "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 capacity of students; and, secondly, that it is such that it arouses the learner an active quest for information and production of new ideas." (Dewey, 1997, p. 79) As I grow as an

instructor, I am going to challenge myself to remember that education needs to be fluid. Fundamental principles change, as society changes. Everyday is an opportunity to recognize my past, current, and future experiences, and allow them to help me grow into a larger piece of society.

Works Cited

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