The Value of Experience in Education: John Dewey

Carlos Aedo, May 2002

Although **Experience and Education**[1] is an analysis of "traditional" and "progressive" education, it is also a clear and concise statement of Dewey's basic criteria of experience. He uses continuity and interaction to describe the latitudinal and longitudinal aspects of experience (EE, 42).

Continuity describes the aspects of experience as they relate to the individual. An appropriate experience modifies the person who has the experience, and the quality of subsequent experiences. Continuity is desirable when it fosters growth, arouses curiosity, and carries a person to a new and stronger place in the future. Interaction describes the aspects of experience as they relate to the environment. An experience has an active component which changes the context in which experiences are had: society and the physical world and its conditions. An experience should have appropriate interaction between objective and internal conditions. When the individual components and environmental components of an experience are working together, they form a situation —a complete and whole experience which changes both the user and the context of use[2].

Even though I had heard about John Dewey, I knew nothing concrete about his philosophy. I wanted to understand a little bit more about him and why he has been so important in American philosophy of education. In this sense, I chose one of his most readable works to begin with, i.e. Experience and Education. The following pages are the

---

[1] Dewey, John. **Experience and Education: The 60th Anniversary Edition**. Kappa Delta Pi: West Lafayette IN, 1998. This book will be cited as EE in the text for al subsequent references.

[2] For an analysis of different theories of experience, see: Forlizzi, Jodi. **Towards a Framework of Interaction and Experience as it Relates to Product Design**. Available [Online]: http://goodgestreet.com/experience/theory.html

result of my efforts to comprehend some of the basic concepts that Dewey uses to analyze education and experience.

In the first part —Dewey and the Concept of Experience— I present what Dewey understands by experience. In **Experience and Education** he analyzes the concept and reflects on the quality of experiences that are taking place in traditional and progressive schools. However, keeping in mind that **Experience and Education** seems to be a summary of his though, I had to explore some of his earlier works —**Democracy and Education**— to get the big picture of his theory of experience.

Dewey's theory of experience is based on two concepts: interaction and continuity. In the second part —Continuity and Interaction: The Value of Experience— I reflect on these two concepts trying to understand why Dewey thinks that they are the key criteria to asses the value of any experience. I present each concept in a very summarized way and then I show that both concepts must be taken together to see the big picture.

The third part of this essay —John Dewey and the Concept of Experiential Education—is focus on the concept of experiential education. I think it is important to see how Dewey's ideas are part of the movement of experiential education, especially when he is seen as one of the founders of this new approach to education. In this sense, I see some connections with Paulo Freire's main ideas about the aim of education. Teachers, then, seem to be crucial in this particular approach to education, and I reflect on their role and challenges. Finally, I reflect on the concepts of discipline and self-control and how they are related to democracy and the role of teachers.

1. *DEWEY AND THE CONCEPT OF EXPERIENCE*

The philosophy of experiential education, according to Carver[3], can be traced to Plato and has at its core principles what were developed by John Dewey. This is not to suggest that experiential education programs are always informed by John Dewey's thinking, but rather that at the core of any strong example of experiential education lies the embodiment of what Dewey expressed. Experiential education ties to integrate the life experience of students into the curriculum. Examples of experiential education can be found in a variety of settings, including the following types of programs: wilderness-based adventure, community development, advocacy, art and music, service-learning, study abroad, work internship, and youth development.

However, the belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. For Dewey, experience and education cannot be equated to each other (EE, 14).

Students in traditional schools[4] do have experiences. The trouble is not the absence of experiences, Dewey argues, but their defective and wrong character —wrong and defective forms the standpoint of connection with further experience. This traditional scheme is, in essence, one of imposition from above and from outside. It

---

[3] Carver, Rebecca. **Continuity and Interaction in the Context of Practice**. Paper presented at the AERA International Meeting. Seattle WA, April 2001.

[4] In traditional schools, Dewey says (EE, 2), 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 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, he says, the general pattern of school organization constitutes the school a kind of institution sharply marked off from other social institutions. In short, 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 (EE, 3).

imposes adult standards, Dewey says, subject-matter, and methods upon those who are only growing slowly toward maturity (EE, 4).

Accordingly, Dewey points out 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 schools (EE, 21). The fundamental philosophy of these new schools —called "progressive schools" by Dewey— is found in the idea that there is an intimate and necessary relation between the process of actual experience and education (EE, 7). A system of education based upon the necessary connection of education with experience must take the environment and other conditions into account.

Experience does not go on simply inside a person, Dewey adds (EE, 33-34). It does go on there, because it influences the formation of attitudes of desire and purpose. However, 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.

In **Democracy and Education**[5], Dewey clarifies this distinction between the active and the passive side of experience. On the active side, experience is trying —a meaning which is made explicit in the connected term experiment. On the passive, it is undergoing. When we experience something, Dewey states, we act upon it, we do something with it; then we suffer or undergo the consequences (DE, 139). We do something to the thing and then it does something to us in return. The connection of these two phases of experience measures the fruitfulness or value of the experience. Mere activity, Dewey says again, does not constitute experience. Arguing against

[5] Dewey, John. **Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education**. The Free Press: New York NY, 1916. This book will be cited as DE in the text for al subsequent references.

traditional schools, Dewey says that experience is truly experience only when objective conditions are subordinated to what goes on within the individuals having the experience (EE, 37).

Consequently, to learn from experience is to make a backward and forward connection between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in consequence (DE, 140). All principles by themselves are abstract. They become concrete only in the consequences which result from their application, Dewey says (EE, 6)[6]. Dewey brilliantly summarizes all this:

> *An ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance. An experience, a very humble experience, is capable of generating and carrying any amount of theory (or intellectual content), but a theory apart from an experience cannot be definitely grasped even as theory. It tends to become a mere verbal formula, a set of catchwords used to render thinking, or genuine theorizing, unnecessary and impossible* (DE, 144).

Having reflected on the concept of experience, a next step is needed. Dewey thinks, as it has been said, that not all experiences are equally educative. What are, then, the criteria, to assess a relevant and an educative experience? He says that the measure of the value of an experience lies in the perception of relationships or continuities to which it leads up (DE, 140). In **Experience and Education** he deepens into these two concepts, i.e. interaction and continuity.

[6] Adult learning, for instance, is mainly based on this principle. A study conducted by the North Carolina State University in 1994 showed that extension educational programs should include foremost, experiential or "doing" opportunities. The learning process is enhanced by providing opportunities for the learners to also see and discuss the information. Richardson, John G. **Learning Best Through Experience**. Available [Online]: http://www.joe.org/joe/1994august/a6.html

2. *CONTINUITY AND INTERACTION: THE VALUE OF EXPERIENCE*

For Dewey, the origin of thinking is some perplexity, confusion or doubt[7]. There is something specific which occasions and evokes it, i.e. a difficulty. Given a difficulty, the next step in the process is suggestion of some way out —the consideration of some solution for the problem[8]. In this sense, Dewey points out that the sources of such suggestion are two: past experience and prior knowledge. If the person has had some acquaintance with similar situations, if he or she has dealt with material of the same sort before, suggestions more or less apt and helpful are likely to arise. However, unless there has been experience in some degree analogous, which may now be represented in imagination, confusion remains mere confusion.

In Dewey's work, a key idea is that interaction and continuity are two core characteristics of effective teaching and learning through experiences. The interaction characteristic highlights the importance of the dialogue and communication underlying learning; the continuity characteristic emphasizes that the individual learner must be viewed as the key design element. In other words, instruction must be designed so that individual learner can effectively build on what he or she knows, and have to resources and assistance to learn. These two characteristics will be discussed in detail.

---

[7] Dewey, John. **How We Think**. Dover Publications: Mineola NY, 1997. P.13. This book will be cited as HWT in the text for all subsequent references.

[8] Dewey says that there are five steps in the process of thinking: (1) a felt difficulty; (2) its location and definition; (3) suggestion of possible solutions; (4) development by reasoning of the bearings of the suggestions; and (5) further observation and experiment leading to its acceptance or rejection; that is, the conclusion of belief or disbelief (HWT, 72).

2.1 Interaction

During the last two decades we have become far more conscious of our social and ecological interdependence. We have begun to see things less in a cause-effect or linear mode and more in a systems-mode. As it was stated above, one of Dewey's premises is that student experience results from the interaction between the student and the environment. This is Dewey's principle of interaction. Factors that affect student experience include those that are internal to the student, and those that are "objective" parts of the environment. The students' perceptions of, and reactions to, the objective factors are influenced by their attitudes, beliefs, habits, prior knowledge, and emotions. In this regard, Dewey says that we may group the conditioning influences of the school environment under three heads (HWT, 46): (1) the mental attitudes and habits of the persons with whom the student is in contact; (2) the subjects studied; and (3) current educational aims and ideals. For him, everything the teacher does, as well as the manner in which he or she does it, incites the students to respond in some way or other.

For Dewey, interaction assigns equal rights to both factors in experience — objective and internal conditions (EE, 39). Any normal experience is an interplay of these two sets of conditions. Interaction is going on between individual and objects and other persons. The concepts of situation and of interaction are inseparable from each other. An experience, Dewey goes on (EE, 41), *"is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between the individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment."* Each individual's experience is, in this way, complex spatially, the result of an exchange between and organism and its environment.

Learning, Fishman and McCarthy[9] say, is imbedded in the emotional moments when individual and environment clash. That is, learning in its broadest, no-school sense, is a reconciliation of tension between the self and its surroundings. It happens when *"desire is frustrated, attention is aroused, and we investigate our surroundings with purpose, learning new ways to achieve our sought-after ends."*

2.2 Continuity

The other premise of Dewey's theory is called the principle of continuity. It states 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 (EE, 27).

Experiences are complex temporally, penetrating one another, earlier ones leaving deposits or residues which influence later ones. Dewey explains that people develop habits of emotional response, perception, appreciation, sensitivity, and attitude. These habits, developed from past experiences, affect future experiences[10].

Every experience has continuity: it is permeable, taking something from the past and leaving tracks which shape the future. In this sense, Fishman and McCarthy say, *"continuity is educationally effective when a sequence of experiences, despite occasional*

---

[9] Fishman, Stephen M. and Lucille McCarthy. **John Dewey and the Challenge of Classroom Practice.** Teachers College Press: New York NY, 1998. P.16.

[10] McAninch, reflecting on preservice teacher candidates, says that most of them *"tend to design projects as islands unto themselves, with little emphasis on how the subject matter might connect to future studies. For example,* she goes on*, a project on 'China', followed by a project on 'Australia', will contain few concepts and understandings connecting the two subjects. If there are concepts that relate one study to the next or subsume both topics, they are all too often implicit, rather than explicit. Thus, while the customs or language particular to each country may be examined as part of project work, children are not helped to think in terms of overarching concepts such as 'culture.' The consequence is a weakening of the educational value of the project."* McAninch, Amy C. **Continuity and Purpose in the Design of Meaningful Project Work.** Available [Online]: http://ecrp.uiuc.ed/v2n1/mcaninch.html

'cul de sacs' and detours, is so driven by deeply held purposes that it coheres, develops, and finds fulfillment." (p.32)

For Dewey, any experience is miseducative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. In **Democracy and Education** he points out that *"the measure of the value of an experience lies in the perception of relationships or continuities to which it leads up. It includes cognition in the degree in which it is cumulative or amounts to something, or has meaning* (DE, 140). For him, the principle of continuity, also called the experiential continuum, is involved in every attempt to discriminate between experiences that are worthwhile educationally and those that are not (EE, 24)[11]. Because of this, Dewey warns against "useless observations" (HWT, 191). He says that what makes scientific observations in schools often intellectually ineffective is that hey are carried on independently of a sense of a problem that they serve to define or help to solve.

2.3 Interaction and Continuity Taken Together

Taken together, the principle of interaction and the principle of continuity determine, for Dewey, the quality of and educational experience. He describes them, as it was said earlier, as latitudinal and longitudinal aspects that intercept any situation. Carves argues that understanding the quality of a person's experience using this theory requires consideration of how the experience contributes to the development of that

[11] When Dewey examines the natural resources in training though (HWT, 39), he clearly says that suggestions —the result of a problematic situation— must be arranged with reference to one another and with reference to the facts on which they depend for proof. Continuity, then, not only is a requirement for the experiences but also for the consequences of them.

person's habits (principle of continuity) and the immediate nature of that person's connections with his or her environment (principle of interaction).

Continuity and interaction in their active union with each other, Dewey says (EE, 42), provide the measure of the educative significance and value of an experience. 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 (EE, 46). On the other hand, 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 (EE, 47).

Dewey uses the expression "collateral learning" (EE, 49) to describe the learning that takes place in addition to what results from explicit teaching. If students get bored in school, for instance, they might learn (via collateral learning) that being in school is unpleasant and lessons are boring. Dewey recognized the importance of considering the effects of collateral learning when assessing the quality of an experience. Hence, the costs and benefits of an experience are intrinsically connected with its long-term consequences and include the effects of collateral as well as directed lessons:

> *"collateral learning in the way of formation of enduring attitudes, of likes and dislikes, may be and often is much more important that 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 desired to go on learning."* (EE, 49)

Dewey wants instructors, not to present already established truths via lecture, but to teach indirectly, to structure classes so that they and their pupils identify genuine problems, use the curriculum to investigate and discover solutions to these problems, and, as a result, establishing connections with course subject matter. To borrow Deweyan

terminology, he wants instructors to help students build their own “continuities and interactions” with the curriculum.

His strategy is to emphasize continuities between school and non-school life as a way of adding emotional intensity and relevance to formal instruction, promoting methods of discovery as opposed to mere training. This is the use of knowledge as opposed to mere acquisition of it. When continuities between student and subject matter are established, students —as in informal instruction— have a stake in the educational situation. They are able to remember what they master of the curriculum because they use and care about it.

3. *JOHN DEWEY AND THE CONCEPT OF EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION*

3.1 What is Experiential Education?

Experiential education is essentially an educational philosophy first developed in the late nineteenth century and has since been articulated in a variety of fields including cooperative education, internships, outdoor education, organizational development and training, and service- learning[12].

The essence of experiential education, according to the National Society for Experiential Education[13], was captured by Dewey. As it has been discussed, he mainly suggests that experience happens; it is unavoidable. The problem for teachers and students is how to make meaning out of the experience. In its purest forms, experiential education is inductive, beginning with "raw" experience that is processed through an intentional learning format and transformed into working, useable knowledge[14].

It is important to note that Dewey articulated his theory of experience as a critique of traditional education. Traditional, classroom-based education, he argued, developed in response to the demands of urban industrial capitalism. It is based on the dualisms of mind and body, mind and world, and on deductive logic that works from the general to the particular[15]. It assumes the ignorance of the learner and the wisdom and authority of

---

[12] The Girl Scout Program is an example of this. See: Hettinger, Beth. **John Dewey's Principles Embodied in Girl Scout Program.** Available [Online]: http://members.iglou.com/hettigr/KERA/JohnDewey.htm.

[13] Available [Online]: http://www.nsee.org/found.htm

[14] Dewey says that there is a double movement in all reflection: a movement from the given partial and confused data to a suggested comprehensive (or inclusive) entire situation; and back from this suggested whole —which as suggested is a *meaning*, and idea— to the particular facts, so as to connect these with one another and with additional facts to which the suggestion has directed attention. The first of these movements is inductive; the second deductive. A complete act of thought involves both —it involves, that is a fruitful interaction of observed (or recollected) particular considerations and of inclusive and far-reaching (general) meanings (HWT, 79-80).

[15] Fishman and McCarthy develop the idea of three nested dualisms underlying Dewey's student-curriculum integration. They refer to: continuity and interaction (pp.30-310; construction and criticism (pp. 32-35); and interest and effort (pp.35-41).

the teacher and is premised on belief in bodies of knowledge or disciplines that the student should acquire.

While Dewey was careful to acknowledge the utility, power, and cultural primacy of this approach, he argued that traditional education was inherently undemocratic, since it is hierarchically structured, divorces subjective from objective ways of knowing, and separates experience from learning. Thus, there is a "small-d" democratic assumption embedded in experiential education; its logic is intended to be holistic and integrative, based on the process of making meaning out of experience.

Paulo Freire has made use of Dewey's basic insights in more recent years, in the context of adult education and social justice. Writing in the 1960s and 1970s, Freire recognized that education was a way for oppressed people to claim power, and in his famous **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**[16] called for "problem-posing" education, in which *"people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality but as a reality in process, in transformation* (p.83)*."* Dewey and Freire suggest that a goal of experiential education is that we learn how to transform experience into knowledge, that we use this knowledge for our individual and collective development.

Experiential education differs from much of traditional education in maintaining that knowledge is individually and communally constructed by people as they reflect on the world around them. In short, experiential education replaces the dualisms of experience and knowledge, mind and body with an emphasis on a unifying process of communication, what Freire more recently called dialogue —the encounter between

[16] Freire, Paulo. **Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition.** The Continuum International Publishing Group: New York NY, 2001.

persons, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. Dialogue, following Freire, might be described as an ongoing conversation about how our experience of the world can be most accurately and usefully interpreted (p.89). One value of community is that it provides a place in which this dialogue can take place. It is this process of dialogue, most commonly referred to as "reflection," which unifies experience and knowledge, mind and body, individual and community. This cycle of experience and reflection grounds all forms of experiential education.

3.2 Teachers and Experiential Education according to Dewey

Experiential Education can be understood more concretely by asking what constitutes an experience. Noting that not all experiences are genuinely or equally educative, Dewey argues that educative experiences could be judged by whether or not: the individual grew, or would grow, intellectually and morally; the larger community benefited from the learning over the long haul; the situation resulted in conditions leading to further growth, such as arousing curiosity and strengthening initiative, desire, and purpose.

The responsibility of the educator, Dewey also pointed out, is to create the conditions for experiences that would result in this kind of growth, a responsibility that required: knowledge of the students; understanding of the types of experience that could help them learn; the ability to anticipate and respond to the particular situations that developed as an experience unfolded.

The unifying process that is central to Experiential Education can make it difficult to categorize the various types: internships, field experiences, service-learning,

cooperative education, outdoor education. Broadly speaking, the competing motives of skill development, vocational preparation, service, content knowledge, and values or spiritual development are not, in fact, competing. Tension among them is a part of what creates the cognitive dissonance that motivates learning.

Nevertheless, Dewey argued that we must think of experience broadly enough 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. At the "macro" level, in other words, experiential education generates a logic that drives student/teacher relationships, priorities, timelines, resource allocation, and decision making processes.

3.3 Experiential and Democratic Education

3.3.1 *The Democratic Ideal*

For Dewey, faith in experience is inseparable from faith in democracy. While all types of authoritarianism, intellectual or social or political, imply a vertical or hierarchical scheme in which a few command and the rest obey, democracy is a horizontal arrangement in which freely reflecting individuals can work together as equals to propose and realize individual and social aims.

Dewey regards democracy in human affairs as an ideal arrangement which has been only partially realized. The requirement that human beings work together to solve vexing problems implies that as individuals they have acquired capacities for thinking freely and imaginatively and critically, for framing and evaluating purposes, and for acting decisively and cooperatively. In a word, democracy requires education. What is

learned besides content in both formal schooling and informal learning are habits of openness, reflection, and dialogue. In this sense, Gordon L. Ziniewicz[17] points out that education means education in the classical sense of "paideia", of nurture and growth of persons as individuals and as citizens. This requires stimulation of intellectual and social capacities through the give and take of communication of ideas. The educational community, like the broader political or social community, calls for deepening and widening of meaning-horizons through shared communication of ideas. As even the partial victory of democracy over authoritarianism depends upon liberating thought so as to create individuals who "think for themselves," so democracy requires a liberal and liberating system of universal education. Universal education cannot exist without free and unprejudiced access to information and ideas. Elitism or intellectual authoritarianism, on the other hand, exists only to the extent that the majority of minds are kept in the dark, while a privileged few are enlightened.

3.3.2 Self-Control and Discipline

In his educational writings, Dewey criticizes the nature of discipline in schools. External enforcement of rules, excessive concern for order, and even teacher directed study are forms of discipline that Dewey finds contradictory to an education designed to prepare students for active participation in a democratic society. The top-down, compulsory, and punitive nature of classroom discipline affects students negatively, creating an aversion to study.

---

[17] Ziniewicz, Gordon L. **Experience, Education and Democracy.** Available [Online): http://www.fred.net/tzaka/preface.html

It is important to keep in mind that the key to understanding Dewey on democracy is that he sees it not just as a form of government. It is surely that, but it is simultaneously a way of life, an ethical ideal, and a personal commitment. Specifically, it is a way of life in which individuals are presumed to be self directing and able to pursue their own goals and projects. No society which maintains order through constant supervision and/or coercion can be rightly called democratic. Further, individual benefit and the common good are mutually enhancing in a democracy.

Dewey also reminds us that citizenship in a democratic state is not just a condition; it is an office. We, therefore, not only have rights, but also responsibilities. These latter appear to be in conflict with the pursuit of our individual interests only if we misapprehend the true nature of our interests. An article of faith for Dewey is that we are each best served by a democracy that is so constituted as to maximize the common good[18]. The key to this compatibility between public and private goods is their democratic reciprocity: social membership entails certain responsibilities; in return, the society has the responsibility to take those actions and pursue those policies that remove obstacles to the realization of any individuals' full membership and participation. This is the nature of "rights." That there is this public responsibility commits the individuals who constitute the public to its pursuit.

For Dewey, the ideal aim of education is creation of power of self-control (DE, 75). Progressive education, to accomplish its goals, must be based on intelligently directed development of the possibilities inherent in ordinary experience (EE, 113-116). Those who think progressive education is not successful or valuable are doing it wrong.

---

[18] See: Covaleskie, John F. **Dewey, Discipline, and Democracy.** Available [Online]: http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-Yearbook/94_docs/COVALESK.HTM

Progressive education can only succeed when certain conditions apply: Primarily, this involves use of sound standards and methods to achieving its goals, which are based on providing the best educational experience possible to create confident, self-controlled, and capable citizens. Experience, in this sense, is the means as well as the goal. Dewey was aware of that many of the free schools of his days failed to offer students the guidance they needed to develop self-control as well as the knowledge they needed to shape their destinies.

What is, then, self-control? Dewey says, first of all, that the mere removal of external control is no guarantee for the production of self-control (EE, 75). He points out that they 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"* (EE, 69). Freedom of mind means mental power capable of independent exercise emancipated fro the leading strings of others, *"not mere unhindered external operation"* (HWT, 64). Genuine freedom, then, is intellectual. It resists in the trained power of thought, in ability to "turn things over", to look at matters deliberately, to judge whether the amount and kind of evidence requisite for decision is at hand, and if not, to tell where and how to seek such evidence (HWT, 67).

Freedom, then, is tied to self-control (EE, 77). The control that really matters is derived from "high-quality" educational experiences, i.e. experiences where continuity and interaction are seriously taken into account. In this sense, Dewey compares again progressive and traditional education:

> *There is no point in the philosophy of progressive education which is sounder that 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 co-operation of the pupil in the construction of the purposes involved in his studying. (EE, 77-78).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Dewey discovered that traditional schools were anti-democratic. He found that the first anti-democratic feature was related to subject matter. In traditional schools, students are not taken into account when a subject matter is decided to be taught. Students, in this sense, are seen as mere passive agents. They do have experiences, as Dewey suggested, but they are irrelevant. John Dewey advocates for a different way of teaching and learning, one where students are active in their learning and where experiences make sense to them and are useful.

Another anti-democratic feature of traditional schools is the way teachers exercise authority. Dewey discovered that the way teachers related to students did not prepare students for active participation in a democratic society. Students experienced that authority meant excessive concern for order, top-down decisions and enforcement of rules. That, according to Dewey, is not democracy.

What Dewey proposes is a different model of education, one that is democratic and participatory. Experiences, in this sense, are fundamental to understand what Dewey thinks democratic education should be. Since democratic is not just a form of government but a way of life, experiences should be able to prepare students to be self directing and pursue their goals and projects. Even though he was criticized by the development of progressive schools, they were Dewey's answer to the desire of encouraging democratic values among students.

In one word, teachers are fundamental. They need to be able to design meaningful and democratic experiences for students. Designing these new experiences implies to take into account the two characteristics that Dewey mentioned, i.e. continuity

and interaction. Teachers are required to discover how the subject matter is related to past, present and future experiences, having in mind the democratic ideal. On the other hand, teachers are also called for establishing means to make students connect with their environment and history. Education without interactions isolates students and does not produce students willing to be part of democratic societies.

5. REFERENCES

- Carver, Rebecca. **Continuity and Interaction in the Context of Practice.** Seattle WA, 2001.
- Covaleskie, John F. **Dewey, Discipline, and Democracy.** Available [Online]: http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-Yearbook/94_docs/COVALESK.HTM
- Dewey, John. **Democracy and Education**. The Free Press: New York NY, 1916.
- Dewey, John. **Experience and Education: The 60th Anniversary Edition**. Kappa Delta Pi: West Lafayette IN, 1998.
- Dewey, John. **How We Think.** Dover Publications: Mineola NY, 1997.
- Fishman, Stephen M. and Lucille McCarthy. **John Dewey and the Challenge of Classroom Practice.** Teachers College Press: New York NY, 1998.
- Forlizzi, Jodi. **Towards a Framework of Interaction and Experience as it Relates to Product Design**. Available [Online]: http://goodgestreet.com/experience/theory.html
- Freire, Paulo. **Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition.** The Continuum International Publishing Group: New York NY, 2001.
- Hettinger, Beth. **John Dewey's Principles Embodied in Girl Scout Program**. Available [Online]: http://members.iglou.com/hettigr/KERA/JohnDewey.htm
- McAninch, Amy C. **Continuity and Purpose in the Design of Meaningful Project Work.** Available [Online]: http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v2n1/mcaninch.html
- National Society for Experiential Education. **Foundations of Experiential Education.** Available [Online] http://www.nsee.org/found.htm
- Ziniewicz, Gordon L. **Experience, Education, and Democracy.** Available [Online]: http://www.fred.net/tzaka/preface.html