

Cheat Sheet: Dewey's "Child and the Curriculum"

Facts are torn away from their original place in experience and rearranged with reference to some general principle. Classification is not a matter of child experience.

The studies as classified are the product, in a word, of the sciences of the ages, not of the experience of the child.

From these elements of conflict grow up two different educational sects:

- 1- Focuses its attention on the importance of the subject matter of the curriculum. Ignore and minimize the child's individual peculiarities, whims, and experiences. The child is simply the immature being who is to be matured. It is his to receive, accept. Discipline is their watchword. Guidance and control are critical.
- 2- The child is the starting point, the center, the end. His development, his growth, is the ideal. It alone furnishes the standard. Not knowledge or information, but self-realization is the goal. Interest is their watchword. Freedom and initiative are critical.

What is the problem? To get rid of the notion that there is some gap between the child's experience and the various forms of subject matter that make up the course of study.

The child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a single process.

It is the continuous reconstruction, moving from the child's current experience out into that represented by the organized bodies of truth that we call studies.

What we need is something that will enable us to interpret the child's present puttings-forth and fallings away in light of some larger growth process in which they have their place.

Guidance (of the child) is not external imposition. *It is freeing the life-process for its own most adequate fulfillment.* (his emphasis)

Development does not just mean getting something out of the mind. It is a development of experience into an experience of something that is really wanted.

Dewey goes into a parallel between the two sides of the conflict above, comparing it to a map and a journey (he ends up referring to # 1 as logical, #2 as psychological).

The map is not a substitute for personal experience. The map doesn't take the place of an actual journey. The map prevents useless wandering, and points out the paths which lead most quickly and most certainly to a desired result. Observation is assisted- we know what to look for and where to look.

The material needs to be *psychologized* (his emphasis)

The problem for the teacher is that of inducing a vital and personal experience. It is different than the problem of the scientist, who is looking to add to a body of knowledge. Hence, what concerns the teacher is the ways in which that subject may become a part of the experience; what there is in the child's present that is usable with reference to it; how such elements are to be used. Thus to see it is to psychologize it.

It is the failure to keep in mind the double aspect of subject- matter which causes the curriculum and child to be set against each other as described in our early pages.

3 typical evils result when we don't psychologize the curriculum, when the gap between the child and the curriculum is present:

- 1- The lack of any organic connection with what the child has already seen and felt and loved makes the material purely formal and symbolic. A symbol is dead and barren. It would mean something if one only had the key.
- 2- Lack of motivation. There is no craving, no need, no demand.
- 3- Even the most scientific matter, arranged in most logical fashion loses its quality when presented in an external, ready-made fashion. The really thought provoking character is obscured. It is presented only as stuff for 'memory'. The logic of the child is hampered and mortified.

His solution: Connection must be established between mind and material. If the subject matter of the lessons be such as to have an appropriate place within the expanding consciousness of the child, if it grows out of his own past doings, thinkings, and sufferings, and grows into application in further achievements and receptivities, then no divide or trick of method has to be resorted to enlist "interest".

Kids may decide that to learn the lesson is more interesting than to take a scolding, receive degradingly low marks, or fail to be promoted. The subject matter does not appeal; it cannot appeal; it lacks origin and bearing in a growing experience.

The legitimate way out (of the gap between child and curriculum) is to transform the material' to psychologize it- that is to take it and develop it within the range and scope of the child's life. But it is easier and simpler to leave it as it is, and then by trick of method arouse interest; to cover it with sugarcoating; to conceal its barrenness and to get the child to swallow and digest the unpalatable morsel while he is enjoying something quite different.

Let the child's nature fulfill its own destiny, revealed to you in whatever of science and art and industry the world now holds as its own.