

John Dewey

1859 – 1952



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John Dewey

Summary of Theories

Considered by many to be one of the most influential philosophers of modern education, John Dewey proposed student-centered classrooms, activity based learning, cross-curricular lessons, and the importance of understanding multiple intelligences and multicultural appreciation decades before they became buzz words in every classroom and teachers' lounge across America.

The following are just some of Dewey's key principles:

STUDENTS

- Should learn to be problem solvers
- Learn by being "participants" as opposed to "spectators"
- Need to be interested and engaged in order to learn

ROLE OF THE SCHOOLS

- Purpose is to enrich the lives of students
- Environment should be like that of "real world"
- Curriculum should have "real life" relevancy by being both useful (vocational) and liberal (leisurely)
- Subjects should be intertwined – as they are in "real life" – rather than taught in isolation
- Needs to acknowledge individual differences
- Needs to address differences in each students' prior knowledge
- Should use students' natural energy rather than fight it

LEARNING

- Occurs best through "doing", not drills – activity based learning
- Lectures are not considered "authentic learning"
- Knowledge is obtained by reflecting on consequences of activities
- Build upon prior knowledge
- New material should relate to – and build upon – old material

from *Democracy and Education*, John Dewey. 1916

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Never has John Dewey's philosophies found a better niche than in today's blossoming field of education technology. Since technology is not only a subject in and of itself, but also a tool that has endless uses, it easily follows Dewey's beliefs on a number of levels. Here is a brief rundown:

Dewey: education should be like "real life"; curriculum should have "real life" relevancy (vocational and leisure)

Ed Tech: Obviously, we live in an increasingly technological world. From cell phones to laptops, in-car navigation systems to digital medias – that basic operating principles of technology are becoming more and more necessary in order to function in our society. By incorporating basic computer technology skills into the curriculum, schools are not only preparing students for higher education and jobs, they are better preparing students for "real life" functionality. In addition, students can also use their skills in leisurely activities, like writing, photography, gaming, film making, or graphic design.

Dewey: subjects should be taught "intertwined" rather than in isolation

Ed Tech: By nature, teaching technology incorporates several subjects. Obviously, word processing programs incorporate writing skills. And the possibilities are endless as to what students can write about, it can incorporate anything from science to physical education. Spreadsheet programs incorporate math skills. Students further public speaking skills with presentation programs. And when students explore the endless creative possibilities of formatting in any program, they are actually incorporating art skills. With the Internet, technology becomes easily accessible for any subject imaginable.

Dewey: Students learn by being participants; learning occurs best through activities as opposed to lectures

Ed Tech: This Dewey philosophy could be the best match with technology, because the only way to really learn technology is by "doing."

Dewey: Students should learn to be problem solvers

Ed Tech: One great aspect of computers is the on-going need to troubleshoot. Students who learn to manage the small problems that arise, gain the confidence and the knowledge to tackle larger and larger problems. The more students use computers, the better problem solvers they will become.

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Links

The John Dewey Society - <http://JohnDeweySociety.Org>

Center for Dewey Studies - <http://www.siu.edu/~deweyctr/>

John Dewey Project on Progressive Education - <http://www.uvm.edu/~dewey/>

John Dewey and Informal Education - <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-dewey.htm>

John Dewey (The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy) –
<http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/d/dewey.htm>

John Dewey - <http://www.philosophypages.com/ph/dewe.htm>

Wikipedia: John Dewey - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Dewey

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