

# EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF JOHN DEWEY FOR CONTEMPORARY KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

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## Abstract

*The educative process is a continuous process of growth, having as its aim at every stage an added capacity of growth. John Dewey, who was one of the most powerful influences on educational thought in the 20th Century, believed that the school should prepare the child for active participation in the life of the community, that education must break down, rather than reinforce, the gap between the experience of schooling and the needs of a truly participatory democracy. This paper however proposes to elucidate on the contemporary aspect of practical application of educational components to make the Teaching- Learning Process Effective For Holistic Knowledgeable And Socially Efficient society. This attempt is based on the multiple sources of writings available in the name of this great western educational thinker.*

## Introduction

Dewey's contribution to the development of education in the 20th century was incalculable and uncomparable, as far as his counterparts were concerned of that time. His greatest contribution was to liberate the education of children from the dead hand of tradition and from what he himself had called the 'static cold-storage ideal of knowledge'. He forged a theory and practice of education which was relevant to contemporary industrial and social progress without becoming the slave of either. Dewey's philosophy was about dealing with problems which arise out of real situations. It aimed at control. It stressed that solutions to problems were tentative and to be judged by their usefulness. Its method was the method of science. It highlighted at the control of the environment and improvement of the environment by creative and reflective thought. The educational manifestation of scientific method was the project method, which was highly appreciated by all other educationists. Dewey's pragmatist philosophy was based on the priority of experience over theory. We learn to think and reason by thinking and reasoning, by tackling real problems which arise in our experience. When we think, we become conscious of a problem or obstacle to our development; we analyse the situation; we identify possible solutions; we compare the implications of the different solutions and select the best course of action and eventually then we implement this in practice. Dewey put the pupil at the centre of education as a wilful, purposive and active agent in the learning process. The child was the starting point, the centre, and the end.

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His development, his growth, was the ideal. Holistic personality,

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character, is more than subject matter. Not knowledge or information, but self-realisation, was the goal. Dewey was convinced that the ordinary contacts of day to day community life, be they social, economic, cultural or political, provided real and significant learning situations. For Dewey politics was not just a matter of national importance removed from the concern of the ordinary citizen but a matter of vital and immediate interest to the community. He was in the favour of the laboratory school to provide learners with the opportunity to create their own experience; to experiment, to enquire, to create. He wanted a classroom where children could move about, form groups, plan and execute activities, in short, learn for themselves under the direction and guidance of the teacher. A society of free individuals in which all, through their own work, contribute to the liberation and enrichment of the lives of others, is the only environment in which any individual can really grow normally to his full stature.

### **Rationale of the Study**

The justification for the study and application of educational works of John Dewey in contemporary times for the contemporary knowledge society are not difficult to decipher. The current teaching - learning process is dominated by teacher centred approach amidst theoretical boundaries, where the learner is left unattended.

In order to address this dilemma, Dewey's given educational structure, strikes a balance between delivering knowledge while also taking into account the interests and experiences of the student. Dewey not only re-imagined the way that the learning process should take place, but also the role that the teacher should play within that process. Dewey continually supported that education and learning were social and interactive processes, and thus the school itself is a social institution through which social reform could and should take place. In addition, he believed that students thrive in an environment where they were allowed to experience and interact with the curriculum, and all students should have the opportunity to take part in their own learning. The ideas of democracy and social reform are continually highlighted in Dewey's writings on education. Dewey's educational philosophy makes a strong case for the importance of education not only as a place to gain content knowledge, but also as a place to learn how to live. The works of John Dewey provide the most prolific examples of how the purpose of education should not revolve around the acquisition of a pre-determined set of skills, but rather the realization of one's full potential and the ability to use those skills for the greater good.

Thus, this study is highly rationalized in present educational times, where the true aims of education are being overlooked in order to achieve only monetary gains.

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## **Objectives of the Study**

The ultimate purpose of this study was to reflect on the prevailing system of education vis-à-vis the educational parameters as defined by John Dewey for the successful implementation and achievement of holistic knowledge society. Specific objectives of this study were as under:

- To study the core idea and meaning of education in John Dewey's educational philosophy
- To study the aims and methods of education in Dewey's philosophy
- To study the nature of school and the teacher advocated in Dewey's philosophy
- To study the impact of John Dewey's educational philosophy on the contemporary theory and practice of education

## **Need and Importance**

This study demarcates the lacunas in the prevailing educational system of our present times. The educational philosophy as given by John Dewey clearly stands out as impeccable foundation of teaching- learning process, influencing all educational stakeholders till date. For many of us still today, education's purpose is only to train students for work by providing the student with a limited set of skills and information to do a particular job. As Dewey notes, this limited vocational view is also applied to teacher training schools who attempt to quickly produce proficient and practical teachers with a limited set of instructional and discipline skills needed to meet the needs of the employer and demands of the workforce. The school and the classroom teacher, as a workforce and provider of a social service, have a unique responsibility to produce psychological and social goods that will lead to both present and future social progress. Thus, the present study is an attempt to deal, handle, manage and control the flaws hindering the smooth and efficient functioning of educational institutions and thinking process of the various educationists by providing them with the right direction, to move forward towards achieving a equitable and progressive system of education in contemporary times, in the light of beacon of John Dewey's educational philosophy.

## **Design of the Study**

The design of this study was mainly historical based on intensive library studies. The present study was primarily of a philosophical nature.

## **Sources Used**

Relevant information and facts were gathered from the educational writings and works of John Dewey. Books on this remarkable thinker by some other authors were also consulted to draw out pertinent conclusions.

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## **Technique of Data Analysis**

The literary works of John Dewey were analyzed extensively and intensively using techniques of thorough readings and correlating parallel by internet resources.

## **MAJOR FINDINGS**

The study undertaken explored that Dewey's educational philosophy is one of the most scientific, logical, rational, objective and democratic philosophy for imparting holistic education to various learners. Regarding the various aspects of education in Dewey's view, this study found the following observations:

### **Meaning of Education**

John Dewey regarded education as a continuous process of growth, having as its aim at every stage an added capacity of growth. Education is not a preparation for some idealized future. It is simply growth: the continuing reconstruction of our experience. It is not determined by any outside or independent aim or end. Dewey put the pupil at the centre of education as a willful, purposive and active agent in the learning process. He notes that "education is a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness; and that the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction". He notes that "to prepare him for the future life means to give him command of himself; it means so to train him that he will have the full and ready use of all his capacities" (My pedagogic creed, Dewey, 1897). In addition to helping students realize their full potential, Dewey goes on to acknowledge that education and schooling are instrumental in creating social change and reform.. John Dewey is probably most famous for his role in what is called progressive education. Progressive education is essentially a view of education that emphasizes the need to learn by doing. Dewey believed that human beings learn through a 'hands on' approach. This places Dewey in the educational philosophy of pragmatism.

### **Aims of Education**

Dewey always associated life with education saying that education is not only as inseparable part of life but the whole life itself. In order to make our lives happy, rich and better all humanity should strive towards achieving maximum education till the end of their lives. Education promotes holistic growth of an individual, which is a continuous and lifelong process. It also makes mankind socially efficient and enables all individuals to adapt, adjust, and make sacrifices and compromises in all sorts of situations and with each other. Education also imparts vocational diligence to sustain our lives.

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## **Discipline**

Dewey advocated free, positive and voluntary discipline among the students. In his opinion he always wanted to practice self control or self restraint, rather than superficial forceful discipline being thrust on them. Because non voluntary discipline very easily turns out in a negative discipline, which further retards the holistic personality development of child. There should also exist no fear of punishments of any kind like physical, monetary etc to impose discipline among students. Students should be trained to practice self discipline, which will eventually act like a catalyst in overcoming their psychological and behavioural problems.

## **Curriculum**

The child's relation to the curriculum is not the subordination of the child to the existing established knowledge, nor is it the abandonment of established existing knowledge for an anarchic child centered approach. The curriculum should reflect this attitude of the child and be seen more as an integral whole rather than as a logical structure containing conveniently differentiated parts. He argues that in order for education to be most effective, content must be presented in a way that allows the student to relate the information to prior experiences, thus deepening the connection with this new knowledge. He notes that "the child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a single process. Just as two points define a straight line, so the present standpoint of the child and the facts and truths of studies define instruction"

## **Role of a School**

The school is primarily a social institution. Education being a social process, the school is simply that form of community life in which all those agencies are concentrated that will be most effective in bringing the child to share in the inherited resources of the race, and to use his own powers for social ends. Education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living. Pragmatists believe that reality must be experienced. From Dewey's educational point of view, this means that students must interact with their environment in order to adapt and learn. Dewey felt that the same idea was true for teachers and that teachers and students must learn together. His view of the classroom was deeply rooted in democratic ideals, which promoted equal voice among all participants in the learning experience.

## **Role of a Teacher**

In Dewey's pedagogy the teacher has two main functions. The teacher must guide the young through the complexities of life and give them opportunities to learn in the natural way, that is, by solving relevant problems. The teacher must also enable the young to cope adequately with contemporary conditions and to cope with the new tasks which an unpredictable future will bring. The teacher is not in the school to impose certain ideas or

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form certain habits in the child, but is there as a member of the community to select the influences which shall affect the child and to assist him in properly responding to these influences. The teacher's business should simply be to determine, on the basis of larger experience and riper wisdom, how the discipline of life shall come to the child. As Dewey notes, "The business of the teacher is to produce a higher standard of intelligence in the community, and the object of the public school system is to make as large as possible the number of those who possess this intelligence. Skill, ability to act wisely and effectively in a great variety of occupations and situations, is a sign and a criterion of the degree of civilization that a society has reached. It is the business of teachers to help in producing the many kinds of skill needed in contemporary life. If teachers are up to their work, they also aid in production of character

### **Methods of Teaching**

The control and direction of inquiry is central in Dewey's theory of education. Knowledge begins in doing, it is active. It is in the course of putting ideas to the test of experience that growth occurs. Dewey requires that pupils be given wide opportunities for purposive inquiry. This is as seen in the project method. The pupil learns only by thinking about problems and trying to solve them for himself:

If he cannot devise his own solution (not of course in isolation but in correspondence with the teacher and the other pupils) and find his own way out he will not learn, not even if he can recite some correct answer with one hundred per cent accuracy. Problem-Based Learning (PBL), for example, a method used widely in education today, incorporates Dewey's ideas pertaining to learning through active inquiry.

### **Evaluation/ Conclusion**

John Dewey, lauded as the 'Modern Father of Experiential Education,' was a forward educational philosopher whose ideas still influence education today. His approach of learning by doing is practiced in classrooms around the world and has changed the way educator's present knowledge and students learn. John Dewey is nothing less than a rock star of modern education. His ideas and approaches to schooling were revolutionary ideas during his lifetime and remain fundamentally important to modern schooling today. In this video, we will take a brief look at the background of John Dewey as well as a more in depth look at his educational philosophies and ideals. When we're done, you should be able to describe Dewey, but more importantly, you should be able to identify his philosophy in action.

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