Zach Troyer

Treasure Hunt 1

Dewey, J. (1902). *The child and the curriculum.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

The entire text of this book can be viewed [here](https://books.google.com/books?id=lJEjAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA3#v=twopage&q&f=true).

1. Dewey began by revealing what he saw to be the greatest conflict in education – that of “the child *vs.* the curriculum; of the individual nature *vs.* social culture” (p. 8).
2. He continued by discussing the nature of a child’s life and mind in comparison to an adult’s logical manner of viewing the world. These differences set up a conflict between the experiences of the child and the subject-matter.
   1. The “unity, the single wholeheartedness of the child's life” (p.11) vs. “the specializations and divisions of the curriculum” (p. 11).
3. Dewey then illustrated how this conflict might look from opposing sides of the conflict of child vs. curriculum. He did this by presenting the arguments, almost as caricatures, of one whose primary focus is on the subject-matter contrasted with another whose primary focus is on the child (pp. 11-14).
4. He then proposed a resolution:
   1. “Abandon the notion of subject-matter as something fixed and ready-made in itself, outside the child's experience; cease thinking of the child's experience as also something hard and fast; see it as something fluent, embryonic, vital; and we realize that the child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a single process” (p. 16), namely, the process of instruction.
5. Instruction can best be accomplished by making the subject-matter truly relevant to the life of a child. This is done by “psychologizing” the subject-matter.
   1. “When the subject-matter has been psychologized, that is, viewed as an out-growth of [a child’s] present tendencies and activities, it is easy to locate in the present some obstacle, intellectual, practical, or ethical, [in the life of the child] which can be handled more adequately if the truth in question be mastered. . . . An end which is the child's own carries him on to possess the means of its accomplishment” (pp. 32-33).
6. Finally, he exhorted educators to develop a deep understanding of both the subject-matter and the child so that the classroom can become a space of true interest and discovery.
   1. “Now, the value of the formulated wealth of knowledge that makes up the course of study is that it may enable the educator to *determine the environment of the child*, and thus by indirection to direct. Its primary value, its primary indication, is for the teacher, not for the child. It says to the teacher: Such and such are the capacities, the fulfilments, in truth and beauty and behavior, open to these children. Now see to it that day by day the conditions are such that their own activities move inevitably in this direction, toward such culmination of themselves. 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” (pp. 39-40).

One possible application (from my experience):

* One of my goals is to guide my students as they develop as musicians.
* I could do this by discussing proper breathing and singing techniques, the mechanics of phonation, body alignment and posture, etc.
* The above strategy is taking my subject-matter – singing – and as Dewey explained, subdividing “each topic into studies; each study into lessons; each lesson into specific facts and formulae” (p. 12).
* This approach has little connection to a student’s conception of what singing is and how it is done, and abstracts singing into something foreign from its true nature. As Dewey wrote, “when material is directly supplied in the form of a lesson to be learned as a lesson, the connecting links of need and aim are conspicuous for their absence” (p. 33).
* However . . .
* Many of my students listen to pop music.
* My students often compare themselves to the musicians they hear “on the radio.”
* This comparison can lead to their discouragement, because often they judge themselves to be “not good at singing.”
* This discouragement can be viewed as the “obstacle” Dewey discussed.
* From this place I can then affirm them as individuals and as learners on a journey, and together we can embrace the uniqueness of the adolescent voice and explore ways to further develop as musicians.
* It is from this place that the subject-matter has, “an appropriate place within the expanding consciousness of the child” (p. 35), and can grow, “out of his own past doings, thinkings, and sufferings, and grows into application in further achievements and receptivities” (p. 35).

Additional resources:

Null, J. W. (2003). John Dewey’s The Child and the Curriculum 100 years later: Lessons for today? *American Educational History Journal, 30*, 59-68.

Simpson, D. J., & Jackson, M. J. B. (2003). John Dewey’s view of the curriculum in The Child and the Curriculum. *Education and Culture, 19*(2), 23-27.