

Experience as a Teacher: On John Dewey's *Experience and Education*

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Abstract: When we speak of education today, we always view it as a spoon-feeding system. Teachers must give instruction to their students for them to learn and develop. Without a teacher, a child cannot perform well without them being supervised through the commands of a teacher. Most of the time, we perceive schools as an institution where a child will be developed through their teacher's instructions as they are labelled as the agents of the knowledge. With this kind of pedagogy, most of the students today became dependent with their teacher's knowledge as it only revolves to what they have learned inside their schoolroom. One must recognize that a child should learn and develop himself more through his own special ways, by believing in his instinct and impulse. They should discover things beyond what is being told by their teachers inside a traditional schoolroom.

In this work, I will further elaborate and expose the Deweyan approach on education through his work and illustrate how it may help to develop child's way of learning. This research aims to prove that *experiential* education may help every child's development and it is more effective than the traditional way of education.

Keywords: Child Development, Experiential, Traditional, Progressive

Education is one of the fundamental rights of being a human. Every man has the right to be educated through educational institutions such as academies, day care centers (for children aged 3 to 6 years old), and universities or even through the help of their parents, which can help in shaping and nurturing one's development through teaching them in different ways, as long as one can finally learn and develop his/her self through

the acquired knowledge given through educational institutions. In shaping one's character, development and knowledge of a child, we cannot deny the fact that these kinds of institutions are one of the biggest factors that we always consider. Through educational institutions, children have the access to skills

that will further prepare them for the future.¹ Also, "schooling has direct effects on children's educational achievement, their acquisition of literacy, numeracy and scientific knowledge."² Students usually learn objectives for a day, such as basic or introductory lectures about certain subjects in school. In this manner, teachers only discuss lessons that are merely book-based and after several days, child tends to forget what he/she learned for a day and does not recognize what he/she acquired from the teacher. As teachers play the biggest role of every child's development through the provided knowledge that has been given based on the stated right and wrong scheme that a kid should first recognize, a child may easily forget it as most of the imparted knowledge may not be significant to them as some may have experienced it, some may not.

At this point, there are several innovative institutions that offer different methods in developing a child. There are different institutions that will suit for different needs and wants based on the standards of the parents on where they want to enrol their child. But despite its varieties, most of them opt to follow the traditional one to maintain the authority of the teacher. As most of the educational institutions rely to the traditional, institutions today became one of the hindrances in every child's development. It

limit their students on what they should only be knowledgeable about. Most of the instructors up to date discuss textbook-based lessons curated by the so-called curriculum, as they believe that best education can be grasped through the knowledge of the books. In this case, child's development became limited.

Traditional schoolroom, according to Dewey, should also have interactions, incorporating real-life experiences, and make its students more engaged in learning. Despite the fact that traditional education offers a wide range of examples in accordance to experience, yet "traditional schoolroom was not a place in which pupils had experiences."³ According to Dewey, every human experience can influence one's capacity to learn; education is a mere social process, growth, and not a preparation for life; education is life itself.⁴

With that being said, I would like to focus on the following questions: (1) What are the arising issues that a traditional schoolroom is currently facing? (2) How do experiences contribute to one's development? Lastly, (3) Is there a possibility to incorporate experiential education in today's institutions instead of using the traditional way? These questions will be answered through John Dewey's

¹ "The Right to Education." *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*. n.d. <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/right-to-education/> (accessed March 15, 2017).

² Sylva, Kathy. "School Influences on Children's Development." *Association for Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 1994: 135.

³ Dewey, John. *Experience and Education*. New York: Kappa Delta Pi, 1938: 26.

⁴ Spanella, Theresa. "John Dewey on Education: Theory & Philosophy." *Study.com*. n.d. <http://study.com/academy/lesson/john-dewey-on-education-theory-philosophy-quiz.html> (accessed March 15, 2017).

Philosophy of Education, specifically, *Experience and Education*.⁵

THE TRADITIONAL SCHOOLROOM AND ITS ISSUES

Traditional schoolroom is problematic for some as there are several issues concerning it. With this, I would like to state some of the rampant issues that were also stated by other articles and based on my observations.

Manalang stated, "Education presents not only a tremendous quantitative problem, but its qualitative problems are probably even more difficult to resolve... There are too many demands on schools,"⁶ which makes it difficult for the students to expand their learning outside their schoolroom. Uniformed process of education became the usual and efficient (for some) type of education scheme to implement in a schoolroom up to date. Structure of the schools is one of the biggest reasons why it became problematic. The structure includes the curriculum of the schools, wherein there should be fixed flows of activities and lesson plans that will sustain one's education as long as these teachers deliver the said lessons for a day. Like for instance, if the curriculum states that in day three, the educator must explain such definitions of a certain topic and the student are required to answer an examination after the discussion. In the said structure, it also includes activities to test the capacities of a student,

such as objective exams for them to see if the student understood the said lessons that were delivered in a short span of time. With the said dilemma, students are restricted to what should they learn, which may lead to student's loss of interests for this kind of matter.

It was also stated by de Mesa and de Guzman, that traditional schoolrooms are still evident, most especially in the Philippines. It was stated that most high schools are still into the traditional education as these institutions still rely on lecture-based education system. As stated by de Mesa and de Guzman:

In many high schools, lectures continue to be the main method of instruction, and the overhead projector is often the most advanced technology used. Students remark that school is a dull, non-engaging environment that is much less interesting than the outside world.⁷

Due to this problem, it was stated by some students that this type of education is not student-friendly. Lecture-based education is too static for the learners as they are only to swallow all the lectures given by their teachers and it is non-engaging. Teachers discuss facts and students should grasp it accordingly. For the students, to hear repetitive facts are indeed dull and boring. Through school, what they

⁵ Dewey, John. *Experience and Education*. New York: Kappa Delta Pi, 1938.

⁶ Manalang, Priscilla S. "Issues in Philippine Education." *Philippine Sociological Review* (Philippine Sociological Review), 1977: 65.

⁷ Mesa, Amelia P. de, and Allan B. de Guzman. "Portrait of Filipino teachers' classroom practices: traditional or constructivist?" *Springer Science+Business Media*, 2006: 235.

need to know are merely fixed information which can be also seen in books.

Based on the observation made in this study, it was stated by de Mesa and de Guzman that in spite of the student-teacher engagements, student activities inside the schoolroom are still rotational and repetitive. Their everyday school life only consists of book-related activities, grasping static information, and taking exams after a topic or so. As stated by de Mesa and de Guzman:

Most of the time, the teacher is engaged in either frontal teaching, monitoring students' seatwork, or conducting quizzes of teaching and learning activity rarely engaged in by the students inside the classroom. Apparently, students working in smaller groups usually are doing the same things side by side, and these things tend to be determined by the teacher. Evidently, students' least engagement in classroom activities is a routine—listening to teachers, writing answer to questions, and taking tests and quizzes.⁸

Hence, de Mesa and de Guzman assumed that “generally, it appears that a large percentage of students are passively content with classroom life.”⁹ In a traditional schoolroom, as stated earlier, what a student usually does is repetitive and dull. In spite of which, most students

based on de Mesa and de Guzman's statements are fond and passively accepting this kind of education.

It was also stated that teachers are still cling to using traditional education in their respective schoolrooms. In spite of having a schoolroom with diverse students, some teachers still rely on the traditional. Most teachers believe that traditional method can cater every student's needs, whether it is a definition of a term or not. As stated:

The scenario of having a diverse classroom with diverse students is not new in Philippine education and it is always a problem on how to address the different learning preferences and styles of the students.¹⁰

But still, In spite of diversity inside the classroom, teachers still opt to do the easiest pedagogy to execute: traditional pedagogy. Aranda and Zamora stated:

It is observed in the Philippine classroom that most of the teachers are engaged in traditional instruction, in which one lesson is designed to meet the needs of all learners, and these teachers think they are using differentiation but actually not. Filipino subject like other academic subjects suffered much because students' diversity was not addressed.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Aranda, Ma. Rita R., and Joel L. Zamora.

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Academic Performance of Students in Filipino Language." *National University*, 2014: 35.

Learning preferences and styles were not given attention, thus, learning becomes difficult and boring.¹¹

In this case, some teachers do not pay attention in the other learning preferences to provide the needs of every student. For some, students see this as dull and boring as they cannot easily grasp the lessons. Some students cannot easily adapt the learning environment inside a traditional classroom.

Due to the aforementioned statements made, most students today lose their interests in learning. Some factors are: 1. Doing things for the sake of the requirements of the school, and the need to comply with it if they are eager and serious about their grades; 2. Viewing this kind of education as boring as they are only bombarded with information that teachers think that can only suffice to their learning; 3. Students are constrained to do something whether they are interested or not; 4. Students lose their interest in studying as they feel that they cannot grasp it anymore and feel uninterested with what they are studying. With this, some of them are not usually prepared for the modern workplace as they are only told on what to do, not how to do it. Schools also does not teach students to collaborate as it punishes them for the wrong lesson for future success. Their focus is set in the wrong direction, as they are dictated by their former educators; and lastly, the school, including the educators, did not consider the other factors in creating an experience. At some point, they are trapped in a room full of terms that are required to

memorize yet does know its essence. Students are deprived from their own interests since in a traditional schoolroom, all we need to do is to follow what is asked. Students attend their classes only to listen what is only told, instead of exploring things around them.

ON JOHN DEWEY'S *EXPERIENCE AND EDUCATION*

Let us now analyse and solve the aforementioned issues using John Dewey's theory on education using his work, *Experience and Education*. Let us first differentiate the two ideas that Dewey focused on and stated: Traditional and Progressive. According to Dewey, Traditional Education usually delivers ready-made and finished information, which will be transmitted to the new generations of kids. As traditional education has their pattern of organization, where they rely for its aims, methods of instructions, and discipline, through the help of the bodies of information, there are agents that will guide the students. These information, transmitted by the so-called agents are static, hence, finished products of the knowledge that has been also transmitted to them by the past generation. With this, students became passive to what they should do or even learn based from their sources. According to Dewey:

Books, especially textbooks, are the chief representatives of the lore and wisdom of the past, while teachers are the organs through which pupils are brought into effective connection with the material. Teachers are the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

agents through which knowledge and skills are communicated and rules of conduct enforced.¹²

Learning, hence, became the “acquisition of what is already incorporated in books and in the heads of the elders,”¹³ as they are for the discipline, aims and method of instruction, the elders or the mature (as how Dewey called it), are the ones who are capable of transmitting it to the new generation, hence, the pupils. In this case, “the chief business of the school is to transmit them to the new generation,”¹⁴ as it forms a cycle for traditional education. Knowledge imposed is based on their acquired knowledge from the past educators and passed it onto the next generation of pupils and most students will benefit from the said discussion/s made by their teachers. Learning in this kind of method may be limited as students only rely on their resources (such as books and especially, their teachers) and most chose to be passive instead of being active for them to learn more. As Dewey have stated:

The older education imposed the knowledge, methods, and the rules of conduct of the mature person upon the young, it doesn't follow, except upon the basis of the extreme Either-Or philosophy, that the knowledge and skill of the mature person has no directive value for the experience of the immature.¹⁵

On the other hand, Dewey stated that “there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education.”¹⁶ In this case, the progressive or the new education is a product of discontent with traditional education as it appears to be a too static for the students. As the opposite of the former, the progressive education believes that experiences have significant effects to one's everyday learning as it offers a new kind of education, which focuses on the individuality of oneself. Furthermore, social environment is a living factor for the students for them to learn and experience more than what is imposed. As everyone is exposed to the environment, one has the freedom to experiment to what they usually perceive through the environment itself. With this kind of matter, students are the ones who are in control of doing and learn things out of their own curiosity about a certain matter. They experiment, experience and do things from their own convenience and self-interest. It hones the interest of a student to a certain thing that will have him/her develop based on his/her learning through the environment. According to Dewey:

Basing education upon personal experience may mean more multiplied and more intimate contacts between the mature and the immature than ever existed in the traditional school, and consequently

¹² Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 18.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

more, rather than less, guidance by others.¹⁷

Dewey also admits that the new “progressive” education also has its defects like the traditional. At some point, progressive education can be also dogmatic. It appears as too radical as it emphasizes on the freedom of the students. In his work, he also clarified the ideal experience and when can we consider it educative. Because of which, there are certain criteria that is proposed by Dewey himself in order to distinguish whether the said experiences are educative or not. These are the principle of continuity and the principle of interaction, which are inseparable from each other. Principle of Continuity or Experiential Continuum, according to Dewey, is a kind of experience that we cannot rid of, while on the other hand, the Principle of Interaction explains that it is a situational influence on one’s experience and also, implies how significant our past experiences are with the present situations that we are currently facing. With this, Dewey stated that as long as we are into democracy, we can easily adapt the progressive one. But, as reiterated by Dewey, “we should support progressive education that applies the principle of continuity as a criterion, allows interaction and teach students in a manner consistent with their becoming positively interactive, democratic, and dynamic learners.”¹⁸

With educative experience, Dewey explained that it is still in need of a social control. This kind of education does not mean that a student must be solely independent and he/she must do all things on his/her own, Dewey argues that an educator must also be part of the social group, as the educator is the mature one and all he/she needs to do is to guide his/her students in order for the immature or the students to be trained as matures in the future and realize what appropriate experiences that are worth learning and the ideal usage of freedom in accordance to his/her education. The educator's role in this group is to facilitate, and each of them must emphasize student's growth and develop them through their experiences.

ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT

At this point, based on the previously stated issues, I would like to illustrate the effects of incorporating educative experience in a schoolroom, which in this case would emphasize what Ime Morales have encountered with her son. In an article by Morales,¹⁹ a mother of an eight-year-old explained how she came up with a decision to enter her son to a non-traditional school, in spite of her good experiences in a traditional school during her school days. She weighs down some factors in order for her to decide the best for her son. One of the factors considered by Morales is time. Since today’s generation is known for technology, Morales

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁸ Eldeeb, Rasha. "Review and Critique of the book "Education and Experience" by John Dewey." *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 2013: 45.

¹⁹ Morales, Imee. "Why I chose a non-trad school for my child." *Rappler*. 2013. Rappler.com: <https://www.rappler.com/life-and-style/27060-i-chose-non-trad-school-for-my-child> (accessed August 1, 2017).

worries about the possible effects of technology as they will be so-called slaves of the technology. She wants her son to be developed through creative thoughts and ideas without being confined to media and entertainment. As early as two and half years old, her son is exposed to nature, and activities such as baking, childhood chores and others, rather than iPads that a usual kid today has. With this kind of teaching for her child, Morales saw the effectiveness of this method of learning to her son as he became confident and exposed to the reality rather than being exposed to the convenience of the technology. In this kind of schoolroom, he experienced things physically with the help of his facilitators and things around him. He learned how to do such things that more than an 8-year-old kid barely does in this age. Hence, he learned things more than what is expected in school, which makes Morales feel that she made a right choice. With this kind of approach that were stated by Morales, we can say that with this kind of education, with the help of experiences, helps to develop a child and retain more things because of what he experienced, rather than what he only listened through a teacher. With this testimonial given by Morales, it gives an impression of how experiences can greatly affect a child's development.

CONCLUSION

Experiences are one of the factors that any educational institutions must consider in order to have a better and effective schoolroom, other than the traditional. In this case, it does not mean that a traditional education is ineffective, but rather, education per se must also present experiences as part of it. In spite of the problems raised, there are ways that we can reconsider traditional education. As suggested by Dewey, reformation of education can be reconsidered to cater the needs of every student by simply equipping experiences in a traditional schoolroom as experiences affect one's daily lives that can give daily lessons which will retain for more than what is expected. It does not matter whether it is considered as a new education or not, but rather, experiences must be included to have a fruitful education for kids, and further nurture a child. As it appears to be helpful, one must still be mindful about the criteria of experiences as there are experiences that may mislead a child towards learning. What education needs today is a balanced kind of education and applying the philosophy of experience.

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