**Workshop Seven:**

***Experience and Education***

**Out of the Cave : Education, Ancient and Modern**

**Pomona College — Spring 2021**

I: An Experience of Education [45 minutes]

For our first exercise today, I will group you into a dyad in a Zoom Breakout Room. Each participant will take one 15-minute turn as the *experiencer* and as the *observer*. Having fun is optional.

Please start by reviewing the instructions and getting settled. Decide who will take on the role of *experiencer* first. (5 min)

In this exercise, each *experiencer* will recall and explore their memory of a pleasurable educational experience. As the ***experiencer***: follow your impulses toward sensory experience. Try to focus on your embodied sensations.

In the role of ***observer***, follow the *experiencer*. Pay attention. Listen. Be engaged. **Keep close track of the time.**

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The *observer* begins the exercise by inviting the *experiencer* to take a moment to center themselves into their body. Invite the *experiencer* to sit comfortably and take a deep breath in through the nose and out through the mouth.

Suggest: “As you breathe out, close your eyes. Notice how your body feels right now. Start at the top of the head, and gently scan down through the body, noticing what feels comfortable and what feels uncomfortable. Remember, you’re not trying to change anything, just notice how the body feels as you scan down evenly and notice each and every part of the body, all the way down to the toes.”

Next, the *observer* reminds the *experiencer* about the exercise prompt:

“Recall an experience in your life that was both pleasurable and educational. There is no right or wrong answer. Trust your intuition. Feel into an experience that shaped who you are, even if you can’t say exactly how or why. Take a few moments to hone-in on this experience (or “time”) in your life that was both pleasurable and educational. Feel free to close your eyes – or keep them closed – it may even help to place your hands firmly over your eyes, as you turn inward and experience your memories.

As you find a memory that strikes you as both pleasant and educational, describe it briefly. Please don’t go into detail and don’t try to explain why you’ve selected this memory. Just tell me briefly what you’ve chosen.”

Next, *observer*, ask: “How do you know this experience was pleasant? What do you sense in your body as you recall this experience?”

As the *experiencer* describes how the memory feels in their bodies, invite them to pay attention to their sensations. Ask (some of the following, but don’t rush through them!):

“Does that sensation have a color? Is it moving? Does it have a temperature? Is there an image associated with your sensation? As we take some time to track your sensation, what happens next?”

Allow approximately 5 minutes, maybe a little more, for the *experiencer* to track their sensations.

Then, ask them to return to the narrative of their memory. Ask: “As you recall that experience now, how do you imagine the pleasure it gave you contributed to its educational impact on you?”

Discuss this question for a few minutes.

Now, please switch roles and repeat.

II. After this forty-five minute exercise, we will reconvene to the main room to discuss these experiences and take a break. [30 minutes]

III. For the next part of today’s workshop, you will be organized in a Zoom Breakout Room with a group of four to five students. If you have any questions or concerns, please send a message via Zoom asking for help. I’ll join you as soon as possible. Please begin today by appointing a timekeeper and a scribe. [85 minutes]

A. “The history of educational theory is marked by opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without” (p. 17).

1. (15 mins.)

Discuss the idea of education conceived as “development from within.” What does this mean?

Can you give some concrete examples of instances of such education from your own experience?

Discuss the idea of education conceived as “formation from without.” What does this mean?

Can you give some concrete examples of instances of such education from your own experience?

2. (10 mins.)

Dewey’s philosophy of education intends to avoid the either/or of these two possibilities and to conceive of education neither as development from within nor as formation from without, but rather as some third possibility. What might this third possibility be?

Can you give some concrete examples of instances of this third kind of education from your own experience?

Draw three diagrams, each of which schematically represents the *shape* of education according to the three possibilities you have discussed.

B. “Amid all uncertainties,” Dewey takes one certainty as given: “the organic connection between education and personal experience” (p. 25). Developing a philosophy of education upon this premise then “depends upon having a correct idea of experience” (p. 20).

* (5 mins.) Based on your reading of this book so far, what would you say *is* the “correct idea of experience” according to Dewey?
* (10 mins.) In order to understand Dewey’s conception of experience, you have to understand the two central concepts he presents as the crucial *criteria of experience*: continuity and interaction. But in order to understand these two concepts you have to first understand what he calls “the fact of habit, when *habit* is interpreted biologically” (p. 35 — Dewey’s emphasis).

A habit is an organized pattern of responding to the environment. “Habits” can range from the simplest reflex, which is an instinctual pattern of response (pulling your hand back when you touch something hot), to a simple learned habit (putting on a seat belt when you get into a car), to a complex, constantly adjusting pattern of response (dancing), to simple mental habits, to complex intellectual conceptions or chains of reasoning.

Read the paragraph below (from page 35), and based on what you have read, discuss and try to make sense of Dewey’s concept of habit. Come up with your own examples.

*At bottom, this principle rests upon the fact of habit, when habit is interpreted biologically. The basic characteristic of habit is that every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences. For it is a somewhat different person who enters into them. The principle of habit so understood obviously goes deeper than the ordinary conception of a habit as a more or less fixed way of doing things, although it includes the latter as one of its special cases. It covers the formation of attitudes, attitudes that are emotional and intellectual; it covers our basic sensitivities and ways of meeting and responding to all the conditions which we meet in living. From this point of view, the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after.*

* (10 mins.) Now explain what Dewey means by the principle of continuity in experience.

How can this principle be a criterion for determining which experiences are educative and which are not?

Next, explain what Dewey means by the principle of interaction in experience. How does the concept of “environment” fit into this principle?

How can this principle be a criterion for determining which experiences are educative and which are not?

* (5 mins.) “The two principles of continuity and interaction are not separate from each other. They intercept and unite. They are, so to speak, the longitudinal and lateral aspects of experience” (p. 44). Please explain. Give an example.

C. Not all experiences are educational

* (5 mins.) Contrary to the views of many who espouse a philosophy of experiential education, Dewey insists that not all experiences are educational. “[S]ome experiences are mis-educative” (p. 25). What makes an experience mis-educative? Give an example (not Dewey’s example, but your own).
* (5 mins.) Many people say that education should *prepare* you for the future. Dewey says that “‘preparation’ is a treacherous idea” (p. 47). Why is it a treacherous idea? From Dewey’s point of view, in what ways should education be preparation and in what ways not?
* (5 mins.) In this same discussion (on p. 47), Dewey uses the phrase “reconstruction of experience.” This a phrase he uses repeatedly in much of his writings. What does it mean? Give an example of a “reconstructed experience.”

D. “There is no discipline in the world so severe as the discipline of experience subjected to the tests of intelligent development and direction” (p. 90).

* You may or may not find it surprising that the philosopher responsible for the progressive movement in education and the most ardent advocate of *experiential education* ends his book with an appeal to discipline. What does Dewey mean by “the discipline of experience” in this sentence? Give an example.
* Why do you think he ends his book with an emphasis on discipline? Give at least two reasons.