

The Dewey School

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The Dewey School

THE LABORATORY SCHOOL OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

1896-1903

By

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and

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Introduction by

JOHN DEWEY

D. APPLETON-CENTURY COMPANY
INCORPORATED

NEW YORK

LONDON

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

P R E F A C E

The increasing number of progressive schools throughout the world shows the wide and fast growing interest on the part of parents and educators in an educational experience for their children which they do not find in schools of the more traditional types. This interest renders an account of an early organized experiment in progressive education suitable and timely.

This school was a coöperative venture of parents, teachers, and educators, and was carried on at the University of Chicago during the years from 1896 to 1903. Under the direction of John Dewey, then head of the University's unified departments of Philosophy, Psychology, and Pedagogy, the undertaking grew out of a genuine desire to work out with children an educational experience more creative than that provided by even the best of the current systems.

The school was a laboratory for the departments of Psychology and Pedagogy where Mr. Dewey's educational theories and their sociological implications were worked out in accord with the then new psychological principles and in association with colleagues and students, the teachers in the school, and the parents of the children. It was never a "practice" school.

The book has been called *The Dewey School* not because Mr. Dewey as its head ever exercised any of the dominance too often evident in a "One man's school." Rather was the title chosen out of gratitude to the great person who made the school possible by his objective and impersonal attitude of faith in the growing ability of every individual, whether child or teacher. Mr. Dewey was never dominating. His respect for the opinions of even the youngest and least experienced of his staff bore fruit in the creative character of the work done. Only a person who has worked in such an atmosphere can understand what inspiration to creative work such freedom gives. After all, teaching is a creative social art. Mr. Dewey's philosophy

expressed through his personality stimulated others and released their powers so that all who understood his point of view worked freely and coöperatively under his guidance.

The subtitle of the book, *The Laboratory School of the University of Chicago*, indicates its relation to the University, always a source of direct and indirect help and backing. Without this direction from experts, the teachers, functioning creatively in their daily experience, would have traveled many more blind alleys than they did. Had this experiment been allowed to come to fruition, it would have presented the first example of a unified enterprise in education at all age levels.

The slowly evolving curriculum of the Dewey School in both subject-matter and method was the result of the combined experimental efforts of trained specialists. These chapters should reveal that it was scientifically developed. Great emphasis was given to the use of directed experimental method in all areas of study. The main hypothesis was that life itself, especially those occupations and associations which serve man's chief needs, should furnish the ground experience for the education of children. The classrooms in this laboratory school were the proving grounds where teachers—specialists in their subjects—would discover, by trying, the particular experiences that would enrich the child's present life, making it a growing process and an ever more real and satisfactory preparation for the future. The hypothesis was that freedom to express in action is a necessary condition of growth, but that guidance of such expression is an equally necessary condition, especially of childhood's freedom. Learning, a main issue to the teacher, was seen as a side issue to the child, a by-product of his activity. The test of learning was the increasing ability of the child to meet new situations through habits of considered action which were even more social in character. It was found that satisfaction and emotional stability accompany such growth. The development of the curriculum was in relation to the immediate interests of growing children and thereby revealed the chief interests of the different psychological levels of this span in their life development. A type of education in which there is steady maintenance of coöperative processes and constant use of the

scientific principle of objective testing of ideas through action and evaluating the results of such action for future planning, has significant implications for the world ferment of the day.

The authors were both teachers in the school. Katherine Camp Mayhew, as vice-principal, was in charge of the developing curriculum; she was also head of the science department. Anna Camp Edwards was a teacher of history in the early experimental period and later as a special tutor followed through the work of all other departments at older age levels, an experience which has aided her in interpreting the value of Mr. Dewey's philosophy of education in the present crisis.

The scope of this study was decided upon and its plan worked out by the authors in close consultation with Mr. Dewey, who has guided the entire development of the book. Throughout these consultations Mrs. Edwards acted as secretary and custodian of the records from which the selections used were made. In order that the manuscript should have literary unity, it became apparent that the composition and writing must be done by one of the authors. Mrs. Edwards has served in this capacity for all the chapters except the seventeenth. She is responsible for the amalgamation and editing of all the records and contributions from the various accredited sources. Mrs. Mayhew taught science and mathematics in the school for seven years. This and her wide later experience are the backgrounds of the seventeenth chapter and for her many invaluable contributions to all the other chapters of the book, especially her account of how the school developed the approach to history as the story of man's progress through invention, exploration, and discovery.

The original manuscript of this book was too large for publication. All the chapters were reduced in size, and two chapters omitted from the body of the book. These two chapters, however, have been included in the form of an appendix. The first, *The Evolution of Mr. Dewey's Principles of Education*, was written by Mrs. Anna Camp Edwards; the second, *The Theory of the Chicago Experiment*, by Mr. Dewey himself.

From 1896 to 1899 extensive accounts of the experimental school were published in the *University Record*. During 1900

the reports of the school appeared in a series of nine monographs entitled the *Elementary School Record*. These were later bound in one volume which soon was out of print. The records of 1901 and 1902 consisted of typed reports and summaries carefully collected and edited by Laura L. Runyon. These were never printed. The sources upon which the writers have drawn include the publications and documents mentioned above, the current and later writings of Mr. and Mrs. Dewey, and those of alumni and friends of the school. The school was deeply indebted to Mrs. Alice C. Dewey for her exceptional insight in solving many of its problems. She also collected and preserved a large part of the source materials. Mrs. Dewey's death in 1927 made impossible her plan to write the history of the school in collaboration with Mrs. Mayhew. Following her death, the authors undertook the work at Mr. Dewey's request and gratefully acknowledge their debt to Mrs. Dewey.

In the following pages much material has been taken from hitherto unpublished accounts of the school. The writers have also used extracts from published articles by the following: Georgia F. Bacon, Althea Harmer Bardeen, Lillian Cushman Brown, Hattie Hover Harding, Charles F. Harding, Katherine Andrews Healy, Nellie Johnson O'Conner, May Root Kern, Laura L. Runyon, and Katherine C. Mayhew. Special mention should be made of the never failing support of Mr. and Mrs. George H. Mead and their constant faith in the educational worth of the school. The first account of the undertaking, *The School and Society*, a series of three lectures on the school by Mr. Dewey, was edited by Mr. and Mrs. Mead, assisted by Katherine Camp Mayhew and Althea Harmer Bardeen.

Appreciation is expressed to Miss Bacon, Mrs. Brown, Miss Runyon, Sara French Miller, D. P. MacMillan, and Mary Tough for counsel in the early planning of the manuscript; to Elsie Clapp for her suggestions in relation to the needs of teachers; to Harry O. Gillette for access to letters and information collected by a graduate student for an unfinished thesis and to the few records of the last year of the school, preserved in the present School of Education of the University of Chicago; to George W. Locke, Anna Bryan, Grace Fulmer, E. C. Moore, Frank H.

Manny, W. A. Baldwin, and Helen Thompson Wooley; also to many pupils of the school, parents, former teachers, graduate students, and visitors at the school for their loyal support. Appreciation is also expressed to Marion Le Brun Pigman for her aid in the first revisions of the manuscript; to Elizabeth F. Camp, John L. Childs, Richard H. Edwards, Galen M. Fisher, Price H. Gwynn, Jr., Mr. and Mrs. Paul R. Hanna, Mrs. Harriet Hover Harding, Mrs. Katherine Andrews Healy, and Mrs. William Kent for valuable suggestions on the manuscript. The authors are indebted to several friends and alumni of the school for making it possible to include a number of the illustrations, thus giving much added interest and value to the story of the experiment.

Gratitude is due above all to Mr. Dewey for his written contributions, his permission to quote his writings freely, and for the generous donation of his time and thought, and to Evelyn Dewey (Mrs. Granville Smith, Jr.) for the final editing of the manuscript.

INTRODUCTION

The account of the Laboratory School contained in the pages that follow is so adequate as to render it unnecessary for me to add anything to what is said about its origin, aims, and methods. It is, however, a grateful task to express my appreciation of the intelligent care with which the theory and practice of the school have been reported. Because of their long connection with the school, the authors have a first-hand knowledge, while their responsible share in the work of the school has enabled them to make an authoritative statement of its underlying ideas, its development, and the details of its operation. The entire history of the school was marked by an unusual degree of coöperation among parents, teachers, and pupils. It is particularly gratifying to have this living evidence that the coöperative spirit still continues.

My gratification is far from being merely personal. The volume has historic interest and value, since it is a record of one of the earlier efforts in this country in the direction of experimental and progressive schools. But this historic interest is not all. This educational movement is still going on and is far from having reached its goal; its unsolved problems are still many. The book has, I think, a good deal to contribute now and here. It is timely as well as historical in interest. There is one point in particular which may be singled out for its present bearing. The problem of the relation between individual freedom and collective well-being is today urgent and acute, perhaps more so than at any time in the past. The problem of achieving both of these values without the sacrifice of either one is likely to be the dominant problem of civilization for many years to come. The schools have their part to play in working out the solution, and their own chief task is to create a form of community life and organization in which both of these values are conserved. The school whose work is reported in this volume was animated

by a desire to discover in administration, selection of subject-matter, methods of learning, teaching, and discipline, how a school could become a coöperative community while developing in individuals their own capacities and satisfying their own needs. I am sure the present value of the volume is not exhausted in its account of this phase of the school's life. But the present importance of the issue emboldens me to believe that it is especially timely at the present juncture.

JOHN DEWEY

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PART I

**HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND
ORGANIZATION**

CHAPTER I

GENERAL HISTORY

THE following pages tell the story of one of the earliest experiments in what later came to be known as *progressive education*. This experiment was an integral part of the University of Chicago during the years 1896 to 1904, and was an undertaking which aimed to work out, through the University, a school system which should be an organic whole from the kindergarten to the university. Conducted under the management and supervision of the University's Department of Philosophy, Psychology, and Education, it bore the same relation to the work of that department that a laboratory bears to biology, physics, or chemistry. Like any such laboratory it had two main purposes: (1) to exhibit, test, verify, and criticize theoretical statements and principles; and (2) to add to the sum of facts and principles in its special line. In consequence, it was often called the *Laboratory School*. The name is significant. John Dewey, when called to be the head of the department in 1894, had arrived at certain philosophical and psychological ideas which he desired to test in practical application. This desire was not merely personal, but flowed from the very nature of the ideas themselves. For it was part of the philosophical and psychological theory he entertained that ideas, even as ideas, are incomplete and tentative until they are employed in application to objects in action and are thus developed, corrected, and tested. The need of a laboratory was indicated. Moreover, the inclusive scope of the ideas in question demanded something more than a laboratory of experimentation in its restricted technical sense. The materials with which they dealt were the continuing development of human beings in knowledge, understanding, and character. A school was the answer to the need.

During the years at Chicago, Mr. Dewey's thought along these lines was greatly stimulated and enriched. One of the important influences affecting the distinct advance in the psychological formulations of this period was the coöperative thinking and pooled results of a close-knit group of colleagues, all concentrating under one leadership. James R. Angell was then working out his ideas of functional psychology. George H. Mead, who earlier had been a colleague of Mr. Dewey's at the University of Michigan, was developing the psychology of the act on the basis of wide biological knowledge, and James H. Tufts collaborated with Mr. Dewey in a course for the parents of the school. These men and others in related departments of the University made up a united and enthusiastic group of investigators and teachers.

Mr. Dewey's thinking was further supplemented by the work of the various study clubs of which he was a member and the groups of graduate and undergraduate students under his direction. He early joined the Illinois Society for Child Study, which included among its members many able educators. In the transactions of this society, which were being watched and commented upon by leaders in psychological thinking, Mr. Dewey took an active part. A number of his earliest statements were published by this organization and by the newly organized National Herbart Society.

As a result of all this original and coöperative effort, there were gradually built up the psychological and sociological principles, which, together with their many implications, form the basis of Mr. Dewey's theory of education. Statements of these appeared from time to time in various periodicals and in other forms.¹

¹ This selected list of statements published at the time contains the essential elements in Mr. Dewey's philosophy of education: (1) "The Results of Child-Study Applied to Education," *Transactions of the Illinois Society for Child Study*, January, 1895; (2) "Interest as Related to Will," in National Herbart Society, *Second Supplement to the Herbart Yearbook for 1895*; (3) "The Reflex-Arc Concept in Psychology," *Psychological Review*, July, 1896; (4) "Pedagogy as a University Discipline," *University (of Chicago) Record*, September, 1896; (5) "Ethical Principles Underlying Education," in National Herbart Society, *Third Yearbook* (Chicago, 1897);