

Education Book Reviews

Breault, Donna Adair & Breault, Rick, Editors (2005) *Experiencing Dewey: Insights for Today's Classroom*. Indianapolis: [Kappa Delta Pi](#).

I picked up this book intending to skim the introduction and forward, but planning to read and review the entire text later. I found myself on page 41 before I realized it. I had begun highlighting points that I agreed with, and others that I wanted to refer to in other projects. I also marked chapters that I wanted to reread critically. This is a text a person can read several times and gain new insights with subsequent readings. The chapters are not sequential so there is no danger of taking a chapter out of context.

Each of this book's forty-four chapters begins with a quote from one of Dewey's many works and continues with a contemporary author applying that quote to his or her work in the educational setting. For example, Chapter 3 begins a quote from *The school and society*; "There is very little place in the traditional schoolroom for the child to work" (p. 18). Donna Adair Breault discusses this quote from her perspective as a former second grade teacher focusing on *activities* that kept her busy preparing for the children, and kept the children busy completing them. She realized her lack of content knowledge prohibited the children from fully questioning and exploring. She admits to being the "entertainer" (p. 19), rather than the facilitator of learning. In addition, she describes a first-year teacher she observed in her later role as college professor. The novice teacher used an activity similar to one that Breault had used many years before, but with very different results.

Many of the quotes chosen are amazingly appropriate for education in the 21st century. For example, a quote from *Democracy and Education* says, "Why is it, in spite of the fact that teaching by pouring in, learning by passive absorption, are universally condemned, that they are still so entrenched in practice?" (p. 23). Dewey asked this some six decades ago, but it seems fitting to ask that question again today.

Although all the writers attempt to place their chosen quotes within the proper perspective, the editors encourage the reader to examine the original source documents for a richer understanding of the context from which the quote came. They fear a reader who is unfamiliar with Dewey, or with particular works, may develop a skewed view of his writings; therefore, they thoughtfully offer numerous references. They cite the *Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953* as well as individual sources the reader might access.

The editors arranged the chapters around five themes (Active learning, The educative experience, Critical thinking, Inquiry and education, and Democratic citizenship) for the sake of organization and have a variety of entries in each section. The entries are brief (most are 2-4 pages) and could easily serve as a discussion starter for a faculty meeting, study group, or a university graduate course. The reader may agree or disagree with a particular entry's author, but Breault and Breault claim that this is an effective way to experience Dewey, and the point of the text. In order to agree or disagree, one has to think about the ideas offered by the writer, in terms of one's own experience.

Far from being sacrilegious, the editors sought to create a sort of "daily devotional" (p.2) of John Dewey's quotes. The writers brought together by the editors included college professors, students, classroom teachers, and administrators. Some names will be unfamiliar while others are well known, but each reflects on, and writes about, the chosen quote in terms of his or her professional life.

Keep this book handy for those times when you need a common starting place for reflection in a graduate class or professional development seminar.

References

Dewey, J., Boydston, J.A. & Hickman, L. (1996) *The collected works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*. Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corp.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York: Macmillan.

Dewey, J. (1915). *The school and society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Reviewed by Mary Ransdell, Ed.D, an assistant professor of elementary education at the University of Memphis in Memphis, TN. She enjoys her work with preservice teachers, both before and during their professional semester, and with those preparing for national board certification. Her professional interests include reflection by preservice teachers and the use of cooperative learning.