

# Prof. Rex Li's Writings

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**Summary/ Abstract:** Prof. Li reviewed the development of the 20<sup>th</sup> century psychology and education and pointed to ideas and the work at G.T. College that may go beyond Dewey's *Pedagogic Creed*.

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## Going Beyond Dewey's *Pedagogic Creed*

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Dear friends and colleagues,

In my talk to Pre-G1 parents entitled "*The Educational Thought of John Dewey and the G.T. Education Manifesto*" in December 2016, I made a somewhat bold and contentious claim: I intend to go beyond Dewey's *Pedagogic Creed* (1897).

### Dewey's *Pedagogic Creed* and *G.T. Education Manifesto*

I didn't realize that until I prepared my talk a few days earlier and read Dewey's *Pedagogic Creed* again. In fact it was my bible: I read it 30 years ago and then many times since. In 1996 when I started G.T., my major ideas were mostly based on this bible. Fact is, Dewey's *Pedagogic Creed* has dominated 20<sup>th</sup> Century educational thought: it is **THE Paradigm**.

In 2006, I wrote *G.T. Education Manifesto*. It is my declaration on education on behalf of G.T. My manifesto takes the style of Dewey's *Pedagogic Creed*. If it is an unconscious imitation in form, it is not so much in content. Dewey has 5 articles and I have 16 items.

### Editing Dewey's Works

Another 10 years passed and I'm about to retire from G.T. I became Visiting Professor of Dewey Centre, Fudan University, where I served as the chief editor of *Dewey's Selected Works*. Because of my editing duties, I read much more about Dewey and became well-versed with his psychology and education. I was able to put Dewey in perspective and on his developmental path. I realize his insights in psychology and education and appreciate the richness and sophistication of his latter works.

I have a chance to re-read Dewey's *Pedagogic Creed* and my *G.T. Education Manifesto*. I found I have a richer conception of education than the way Dewey sees it. This is possible because of the

growth of knowledge in psychology and education of the past century. I now have a broader framework, but in fact I build on Dewey.

### **How Did I Go Beyond Dewey's Pedagogic Creed**

I must clarify that I go beyond Dewey only on his *Pedagogic Creed*. I am not referring to his other monumental works, such as *Democracy and Education*, which is a treatise of philosophy of education, or *Experience and Education*, which is his final version of education based on his pragmatic theory of experience developed in 1920s. On the other hand, his widely quoted works, *How We Think* (1910,1933) and *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922) overlap with my interest and scope in my *Theory of Conceptual Intelligence* (1996) and my post-modern view on human nature (2015). Below I focus only on Dewey's *Pedagogic Creed*.

In Dewey's *Pedagogic Creed*, he mentioned that education is for living and that the school is a social institution. He is against rote memorization and the idea of education as preparing for the child's future life. These ideas were revolutionary a hundred years ago because at that time, children were considered little adults and education was seen as preparing them for their future jobs. It was the heyday of democracy and the beginning of modern mass education. Teaching was generally didactic, teacher-centred and authoritarian. Curriculum was outdated: Latin, Greek, Classics, Literature, Gospel with a little Science, Math and Geography. Dewey reconceptualized the whole idea of education and wrote his *Pedagogic Creed*.

### **Development of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Psychology and Education**

Since then Dewey's view has been accepted as the paradigm, or even dogma, by the education community, in the USA and worldwide. However, his ideas are a creed, i.e. it is an assertion, a claim, without proof, evidence or support. Its arguments are merely attacks of the old view. But he didn't go deep into child development, learning psychology, knowledge formation, individual differences, creativity, school culture, nature and environment, self-realization, growth and attitudes. For example, learning psychology discovered many laws of learning in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Cognitive psychology proposed many frameworks to conceptualize human cognition and learning

in the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Child development became an independent field of study in psychology, educational psychology also became a sub-discipline. Today we recognize individual difference and I take it as a starting point in education. School culture attracted wide attention since 1980s due to the so-called “failing of schools”. Education reform became a key word in 1990s. The list can go on and on. It is understandable that Dewey did not anticipate all this growth of knowledge and ideas of the last century. When I started my education journey in 1970s, I studied Dewey as well as many of the above issues. By 1990s, I tried to touch all these issues schematically in the *G.T. Education Manifesto*. It is my initial treatment and I hope to produce a full-blown version in the future, only if I can prioritize my work.

### **Stand on Dewey’s Shoulder**

If in any way I go beyond Dewey, it is simply because I keep putting in my effort and that I stand on the shoulder of the giant before me. My wish is to be a forerunner awaiting for a global Dewey of 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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