

Prof. Rex Li's Writings

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Challenging John Dewey

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Summary/ Abstract: This short outline points to 7 domains in which John Dewey's ideas have been challenged or superseded.

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Challenging Dewey

In writing the concluding chapter of my book *Rediscovery John Dewey*, I took stock of Dewey's ideas and pointed to his enduring impact and life after death. It is important to show respect to an intellectual giant but we should also assess his ideas from a distance. In this respect, so many research findings and ideas have developed in so many fields that contemporary researchers have gone beyond John Dewey.

(1) Human Nature

Dewey's human nature is a good treatise. The latest challenge is that human nature is an outmoded cultural presupposition (Ashworth, 2000).

(2) Consciousness

The problem of consciousness and subject – object interaction is no longer philosophical speculation. It is now brought to scientific treatment. (see, for example, Revonsuo (2010), Kreitle (2012), Dehaene (2014))

(3) Education Theory

For the broad shape and vision of education, Dewey's view still holds (EU: learning to be). But global values of equity, diversity may not be the same as Dewey's ethics (justice, freedom) and citizenship (participatory democracy)

(4) Curriculum Studies

With the professionalization of education and teaching, curriculum studies in general and subject-based specialism in particular, grew in competing paradigms (Kliebard) to a discipline beyond what Dewey could recognize.

(5) Pedagogy

I'm not sure Dewey has a vision, but Herbart, and the latest critical pedagogy and flipped classroom are dissimilar with Dewey: different zeitgeist and problem set (Dewey: presentation of material; Critical Pedagogy: underlying hegemony and ideology; New Pedagogy: to learn fast; Curriculum Redesign: metalearning; flipped classroom; students' autonomous learning, etc.) (Giroux, Bergmann & Sams, 2012, Pahomov, 2014, Fadel, 2015)

(6) Science of Education

In 1930s, Dewey just urged for the development of a science of education, with learning, curriculum development, etc. He hasn't contributed much. As early as 1918, Charles Judd, a contemporary of Dewey, had published *An Introduction to the Scientific Study of Education*, studying education with experimentation. In the past century, we see the scientific study of education, school reform, sociology of education, management, quantitative and qualitative research, action research, etc.

(7) Learning

It is a whole new field of psychology since 1920s, developing into behaviorism, cognitive, developmental and latest neuro-science. Dewey quit since 1930.

By taking stock of the above, Dewey is a starting point of many ideas but they belong to early 20th century. On the other hand, the proliferation of knowledge in education thrusts us to think, such as the following questions:

- (1) What Ross school boasted as effective system of reflective teachers, innovative curriculum, student-centered interaction, does it go much ahead of Dewey? The 3 adjectives (reflective, innovative, student-centered) are Deweyan. Let's learn deeper.
- (2) Dewey has a vision in democracy and education for 20th Century; how about 21th Century?
- (3) In the global 21st century, how are we going to tackle cultural diversity, equity, democracy in a global scale?

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