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Introduction

John Dewey was one of the twentieth century’s most influential philosophers and educators. During his career, he taught and researched at several prestigious universities, including Johns Hopkins, Columbia, the University of Michigan, and the University of Chicago. While at these universities, he wrote much of his work regarding education. Although the breadth of Dewey’s ideas and writings was far-reaching, central to his education philosophy was using experiences as learning tools, which he outlined in *Democracy and Education*, one of his books. To Dewey, learning was more than memorization or the use of formulas. Instead, it meant understanding the *why* and *how*, emphasizing student input concerning what students needed to learn to be proficient in their chosen careers.

Many educational institutions, including SIU, have been impacted by Dewey’s work and incorporated his philosophy of experiential learning into their pedagogy. In the 1960s, SIU established its Center for Dewey Studies, which compiled much of his work, including *The Collected Works of John Dewey*, a thirty-seven-volume collection of Dewey’s work. While the Center remained an excellent resource for the collections of Dewey, the full extent of Dewey’s influence on SIU has been largely overlooked. Dewey’s influence on the SIU system is apparent in one largely unnoticed area – the SIU School of Medicine (SIU-SM). SIU-SM borrows much of its pedagogy from Deweyan ideas. There is a dearth of information regarding these connections. This study aims to explore the history of Dewey’s impact on the curriculum of SIU-SM and highlight Dewey’s influence on SIU outside of the Center for Dewey Studies.

Deweyan Philosophy: Widespread Impact and Influence

John Dewey outlined his philosophical ideas regarding education in his book *Democracy and Education*, which articulated philosophical theories he believed would aid students’ learning. One focus of his theory centered on the concept of experience as learning. Praxis of this theory involved hands-on learning. There is no shortage of studies about Dewey’s ideas, including his experiential learning theory. Much of the academic literature that discusses American educational curriculum building, or pedagogy in general, mentions Dewey and his philosophies.

Many studies on Deweyan influence revolve around his concept of experiences as learning. Essentially, the theory emphasizes the importance of students’ use of hands-on projects and applicable kinesthetic learning methods. Additionally, numerous studies related to curriculum building draw from philosophy in *Democracy in Education*. For example, Alice and David Kolb’s study, “Learning Styles and Learning Spaces: Enhancing Experiential Learning in Higher Education,” takes the ideas of Dewey, but

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more specifically his notion of experiences as learning, and applies them to a modern version of education. What is important to note about this study is that the authors use these ideas in higher education instead of solely in K-12 schools. Most of the piece revolves around the authors’ discussion of their Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). This theory has six propositions, all of which can be summarized in the first proposition:

Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes. To improve learning in higher education, the primary focus should be on engaging students in a process that best enhances their learning – a process that includes feedback on the effectiveness of their learning efforts. As Dewey notes, “[E]ducation must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience: … the process and goal of education are one and the same thing.”

In the first principle, they construct the foundation on which the theory is based. The process of learning is the most important part; focusing more on the means to the end is perhaps more beneficial than focusing on the end itself.

Another broad idea regarding institutions and methodology for formulating curriculum is found in Allan Ornstein’s article “Philosophy as a Basis for Curriculum Decisions.” Although Ornstein discusses several philosophies in this article, he demonstrates that Dewey’s progressivism is the most important. The author wants the reader to understand Dewey’s perspective on using philosophy as the starting point for curriculum building. It is foundational to building an institution where students learn and comprehend. The goal is for the student to learn by asking questions instead of simply accepting what the instructor says.

Dewey’s ideas were as influential in the United States as in other countries such as China, Russia, Spain, and Japan, among other countries. In Zhixin Su’s study, “A Critical Evaluation of John Dewey’s Influence on Chinese Education,” she provides insight into Dewey’s contributions to Chinese education. This

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9 Ibid., 193–212.
11 Ibid., 102-9.
piece aids in understanding Dewey on a global scale, as Dewey spent more time in China than in any other foreign country. Su offers several perspectives on Dewey’s successes and failures within China. While Dewey did influence Chinese education, he failed to shape Chinese politics through education. This is important to understand because of the contrast to American education and its rejection of democratic approaches to education. Dewey’s ideas were accepted in Chinese academia but not in Chinese politics. By contrast, democracy was accepted in American politics but not philosophically accepted in the realm of education. Jin Shenghong and Jua-wei Dan offer a similar perspective in their study “The Contemporary Development of Philosophy of Education in Mainland China and Taiwan.”  But their focus is primarily broader than that of Su’s. They discuss Confucianism and other Eastern philosophies before the 20th century. At this time, they note that education philosophy emerged as a fundamental discipline as ancient Eastern philosophies, like Daoism and Confucianism, merged with Western thought and Marxist ideals. They argue that a Western model of education was needed.

Dewey spent most of his time lecturing on education in China. The relationship between Dewey’s philosophies and China is partially due to the 1842 Opium War. At this time, many Chinese individuals wanted to learn and embrace some form of Western education in hopes of then being able to reform China’s declining feudal dynasty. China sought to identify Western educators to breathe new light into Chinese education. Dewey was the most evident choice for a Western, liberal philosopher of education who could bring reforms to Chinese education. Many of his former Chinese students studied abroad at Columbia University in the United States. These Chinese bureaucrats called upon him to come to China and lecture about educational practices. Dewey’s Democracy and Education was immensely popular in China. As Zhixin Su explains, there remains literature insinuating Dewey’s success in Chinese education and literature that insists on his failures. Ultimately, Dewey’s influence in China lies somewhere between success and failure. While he successfully influenced several Chinese educational intuitions, Dewey’s ideas did little in a political sense. Democracy and Education could not survive in China politically. Nevertheless, Dewey’s ideas strictly concerning education, apart from the importance of democratic freedom to education, did impact China. Jin Shenghong and Jau-wei Dan note in their paper, “As Dewey stayed a whole year in China and his Chinese students, such as Hu Shi and

15 Ibid., 579.
17 Ibid., 304.
18 Ibid., 305.
Tao Xingzhi, successfully introduced his ideas into China, it is hard to deny that his thoughts played an important role in the development of the Chinese education system and educational theories.” Interestingly, considering China’s political history, Chinese education systems embraced Deweyan pragmatism and the ideas of a democratic form of education.

Any literature regarding local influence by Dewey comes indirectly. The book Southern Illinois University at 150 Years: Growth, Accomplishments, and Challenges by Jackson, Montemangno, Buhman, and Sneed looks into many parts of SIU’s history and dedicates a chapter of discussion to the medical school. Within this chapter, the authors detail SIU-SM’s history and unique approach to curriculum, which, essentially, is that SIU-SM uses experiential learning theory.

Dewey’s Idea of Experience as Learning

Dewey’s philosophical framework regarding education consisted of a vast number of theories. However, the idea of experiential learning stood out, as one can conclude that this was the concept that Dewey may have wanted individuals to understand the most. He believed that experiences were central to understanding. By experiences, he meant that learning happened when the learner practiced rather than just listened to instructions. For example, Dewey would probably favor lab-based science classes that allowed students to be immersed in their learning by conducting experiments. Rather than just read books about how seeds germinate and grow, Dewey would have likely recommended planting a seed and observing its growth. This allowed students to connect with what they learned instead of just reciting concepts. In Democracy and Education, Dewey lays out his ideas about learning through experiences:

Two conclusions important to education to follow. (1) Experience is primarily an active-passive affair, not primarily cognitive. But (2) the measure of the value of an experience lies in the perception of relationships or continuities to which it leads up. It includes cognition in the degree in which it is cumulative or amounts to something, or has meaning. In

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21 Jackson, et al., Southern Illinois University, 190-191.
schools, those under instruction are too customarily looked upon as acquiring knowledge as theoretical spectators, minds which appropriate knowledge by direct energy of intellect. ... An ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance.\(^\text{22}\)

Dewey believed that the foundation of learning involved allowing students to engage in hands-on experiences, followed by teachings or lectures based on that experience. He also thought there was no point in only trying to teach students what they should learn when they may have no practical reason. It is better to give them a *why and, in most cases, an experience, a kinesthetic version of learning.* The environment in which students learn was also vital to Dewey. In “John Dewey and Progressive Education,” Erin Hopkins notes, “Dewey explained that an experience between an individual and their environment results in learning as the individual tries to make meaning upon the experiential learning.”\(^\text{23}\) Another way of understanding this is that a student (or group of students) conducts an experiment or tests a hypothesis before the instructor provides them with any theory. Then, after the experiment, students could reflect on their experience and ask questions about what they still need to learn. With this model, educators become more like facilitators in students’ learning process.\(^\text{24}\) To Dewey, this was the most complete form of democratic learning, allowing for proper understanding and comprehension without hierarchies of knowledge.

**Dewey and Southern Illinois University**

Dewey never taught nor researched at SIU nor visited the university. So, why, then, give any attention to a possible correlation between Dewey and SIU? There are several reasons for this. As mentioned previously, SIU is home to the Center for Dewey Studies. In 1961, George Axtelle founded the Co-operative Research on Dewey Publications (or the “Dewey Project”), which would later become the Center for Dewey Studies.\(^\text{25}\) Axtelle was a prominent Dewey scholar. He, university press director Vernon Sternberg, and university president Delyte W. Morris brought the project together. Although the Dewey Center was not necessarily on Delyte Morris’s to-do list, it was vital to Axtelle,

\(^{25}\) Boydston, “The Dewey Center,” 19.
and Morris fully supported it. Shortly after the Center’s founding, Axtell stepped away, and Jo Ann Boydston became director of the project. As discussed, most of the Center’s work focused on bringing Dewey’s works together in several collections. The Collected Works of John Dewey was the Center’s first major accomplishment, completing thirty-seven volumes. The center also, under director Larry Hickman, published over 22,000 pieces of Dewey’s correspondence. In January of 2017, Dewey Center closed due to funding cuts. However, the center was re-opened in 2022.

**Dewey’s Influence on the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine**

In the late 1960s, SIU became the ideal spot for a new medical school in Illinois. In 1968, the “Campbell Report” was released and endorsed the idea of SIU being the home of a new state medical school. The medical school officially opened in 1970. From the genesis of SIU-SM, the founding dean, Richard Moy, vocalized his unique approach to curriculum building. Moy wanted the teaching methods of SIU-SM to be different from those at the University of Chicago. Moy expressed criticism of the University of Chicago and characterized its faculty’s teaching methods as full of “… esoteric facts that were interesting but not too useful on the front lines of medicine.” Moy envisioned that the approach to medicine at SIU would be different. Moy’s goal was to create a student-focused medical school that allowed students to learn through non-traditional teaching methods, including hands-on approaches and a focus on clinical. Moy sought to shift from teaching theory before praxis to start with clinical and allow the students to understand through experiences. This deviated from standard pedagogy at the time, as most universities treated their medical schools as extensions of the undergraduate curriculum, which focused on literature over practice but within the framework of medical courses. A typical medical program operated as such: In years one and two, the student was void of patient care, and the focus was on building a foundation of knowledge through lectures and textbooks. In years three and four, the student was introduced to patient care through rotations in various specialties. This approach was in stark contrast to the traditional model of medical education, which emphasized theory and didactic instruction before clinical experience. Moy's medical curriculum was designed to provide students with a hands-on, patient-centered education that emphasized clinical skills and patient care from the very beginning of their medical training.
exposure and focused only on learning the science behind medicine and disease. Most universities structured these classes as undergraduate classes – lecture-based and consisting of exams and a final. In year three, students participated in clerkships in their specialized fields. Then, in the fourth year, students leaned into their specializations, where they finally understood how to use their experiences from year three.\textsuperscript{34}

SIU-SM did not adhere to traditional teaching approaches—they ultimately rejected them. Moy and SIU-SM developed seven principles on which to base their medical school’s curriculum:

1. The focus of development and implementation of the curriculum will be on what students should learn as opposed to what teachers shall present. All decisions regarding what and how to teach will be made on the basis of clear statements of learning objectives.
2. Self-pacing will be applied whenever possible.
3. Students will be allowed and encouraged to work independently, within reasonable time constraints, toward program goals. Whenever possible, alternative routes for learning will be made available to the students.
4. All learning activities should approximate experiences anticipated for the practicing physician. The learning of basic knowledge and skills should, therefore, be carried out in a clinical context throughout the program.
5. Students will be required to meet predetermined acceptable levels of performance with provisions for remediating deficiencies when needed.
6. Time will be provided for students to pursue special interests.
7. Evaluation of the program will include recurrent feedback from students through structured discussions and written responses.\textsuperscript{35}

Their approach, especially principal four, resembles the experiential learning theory developed by Dewey. A close reading of SIU’s education policies reveals that Richard Moy implemented Deweyan theory into SIU-SM’s pedagogy design. The true genius of Richard Moy was not that he formulated the teaching philosophy of experiential learning but that he implemented it at SIU-SM.

There are some connections between SIU and Dewey’s philosophies. As we have observed in the vast literature on Dewey’s ideas, experiential

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
learning theory is a Deweyan concept. Richard Moy wanted to focus on clinical learning and experiences rather than notes and concepts, emphasizing praxis over theory. This approach closely resembles Dewey’s philosophy in *Democracy and Education*.\(^{36}\)

The article “The SIU Medical Curriculum: Systemwide Objectives-Based Instruction,” by Silber, Williams, Amitrano Paiva, Taylor, and Robinson, studies SIU-SM and how its curriculum works.\(^{37}\) The study breaks down the curriculum of SIU-SM piece by piece. The analysis reveals the seven learning principles by which SIU-SM was founded. Again, the fourth principle states, “All learning activities should approximate experiences anticipated for the practicing physician. The learning of basic knowledge and skills should, therefore, be carried out in a clinical context throughout the program.” This learning objective closely resembles Deweyan philosophy. What is missing from the study is any explicit mention of Dewey. The relationship between learning and experiences in principle four has the same intention as those Dewey recommended in *Democracy and Education*. The authors’ concern is in the material of a new medical school curriculum, not in the influence behind it.

As mentioned earlier, Richard Moy studied medicine at the University of Chicago. Interestingly, Dewey taught and conducted research at the University of Chicago from 1894-1904. He served as the head of the Department of Philosophy. He wrote and published several books about education and philosophy during his tenure there.\(^{38}\) Perhaps Moy was influenced by Dewey’s ideas. Although Moy’s medical education was, according to him, dissatisfactory, it is more than plausible that he studied alternate teaching methods while at medical school. Considering Dewey’s direct connection to the University of Chicago, one can infer Deweyan thought at least indirectly influenced Moy. It is plausible that Moy was close to the ideas of Dewey while at the University of Chicago, and as someone who later became the dean of a medical school, he likely had an interest in education philosophy. It was common practice for incoming deans of colleges to know education philosophy and history.\(^{39}\) In particular, he seemed interested in alternate ideas for education since he opted to build SIU-SM around principals different from his own medical school experience. It is possible that Moy even studied Dewey’s methods for teaching during medical school to gain an alternate

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37 Silber, et al., 473-479.
perspective. Although these are just speculations, they are not hard to infer, given the closeness between the seven SIU-SM principles and Dewey’s theories.

Arguably, the structure and curriculum of SIU-SM are based on Dewey’s idea of experiences as learning. Yet, Dewey’s name does not appear anywhere within the context of the SIU-SM curriculum literature. ⁴⁰ This is especially interesting considering the presence of SIU’s Center for Dewey Studies. Other education philosophers’ ideas went into SIU-SM’s pedagogy formulation. Still, there appears to be a link between Dewey and the pedagogy used to create SIU-SM’s groundbreaking approach to medical school education. This is evident when examining the seven principles of the SIU-SM curriculum. Principle four could have easily been taken from Democracy and Education as it explicitly mentions using experiences as a basis for teaching methods. The SIU-SM curriculum wanted students to be in clinical, real-world contexts throughout their academic experience. This is, in essence, precisely what Dewey talked about. Although Dewey mainly focused on elementary and high school education, these theories are not necessarily bound to any grade level. Richard Moy and SIU-SM implemented them within their medical school in 1970.

Conclusion

While Dewey’s ideas permeate many institutions, SIU stands apart from others because of the seemingly unnoticed influence. SIU is home to the Center for Dewey Studies, yet relatively no literature details the lesser-known indirect impact of Dewey on the university. While elements of his ideas are likely present in many of the university’s departments, SIU-SM is the one in which it is the most explicit. Within the history of SIU-SM are guidelines for how the school operates, much of which resembles Dewey’s ideas. In particular, the direct approach to using experiences as learning, which is among the most important of Dewey’s theories introduced in Democracy and Education, is apparent in SIU-SM’s pedagogy. Richard Moy used these ideas to build SIU-SM’s curriculum during its founding in 1970. The groundbreaking new approach to medical school stood out at the time, as no other school designed its curriculum the way SIU-SM did. ⁴¹ Many of the ideas utilized by SIU-SM were Deweyan, yet despite the university’s longstanding Dewey Center, this connection has largely gone unnoticed. While several Deweyans within the SIU system understand this connection, such as philosophy professor Dr. Ken Stikkers, it is not commonly discussed. This paper aimed to explore the wide-ranging influence of John Dewey and, mainly, present an unnoticed history

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40 Dr. Kenneth Stikkers (SIU-C philosophy professor), in discussion with the author, March 2023.
41 Jackson, et al., Southern Illinois University, 199.
– that John Dewey influenced SIU far more than previously understood. The Center for Dewey Studies is an underutilized resource, and the university should celebrate Dewey’s influence, especially within the history of SIU-SM.