

DEWEYAN INQUIRY

From Education Theory to Practice

JAMES SCOTT JOHNSTON

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Preface

I have written this book in hope that it is of some benefit to teacher educators, as well as practicing teachers and teacher candidates. Many, many good outlines of Dewey's educational theory exist, and I must answer to the question: Why, yet another one? This book will be of service to those who wish to see a condensed treatment of Dewey's theory and its uses in various curricular contexts. Much of the Dewey literature provides this, but not with inquiry as the central focus. Inquiry is often embedded in other concerns (reflective practice, pedagogy, the social aims of education, and the democratic classroom) and not developed with singular emphasis.

I have included some examples of how inquiry operates in relation to the various subject matters discussed. My examples are neither comprehensive nor exhaustive, and so, at the end of the book I list references that provide many better examples and strategies. My aim here is to get the reader thinking about how a teacher might use inquiry in the classroom or discuss inquiry in teacher education classes. There is voluminous literature on this subject, and I can only gesture towards it. I have included, in the footnotes, what I think are some of the best examples of this. Also in the footnotes is criticism of Dewey's approaches to inquiry in the context of the curriculum.

A final note: this book is not a substitute for Dewey's works: it is designed to stimulate teachers and teacher candidates to think of how best to use inquiry in the classroom. I recommend that, if this is used as a stand-alone text, then it be supplemented with some of Dewey's own writings—particularly as found in *Democracy and Education* or *Experience and Education*. For those wishing to concentrate on particular subject matters, I recommend reading the introduction, chapter 1, on general inquiry, and their chapter of interest.

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Finally, this book is dedicated to Richard Rorty (1931–2007). I met Dick several times at various conferences, beginning in the late 1990's, and we spoke on the phone and conversed through email on several occasions. Dick is quite rightly responsible for the resurgence of interest in Dewey scholarship, largely through the publication of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, and his collected papers. I had the good fortune to tell him so on one occasion. His views on Dewey are to say the least, contentious. However, all agree that through his influence, Dewey is once again a force to be reckoned with in American philosophy, education, and social science.

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