
BOOK REVIEWS INTRODUCTION

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As the new book review editor, I would like to greet you and offer you a quote to consider – consider from whom it was spoken, in what context, and during what time period:

Profound differences in theory are never gratuitous or invented. They grow out of conflicting elements in a genuine problem—a problem which is genuine just because the elements, taken as they stand, are conflicting. Any significant problem involves conditions that for the moment contradict each other. Solution comes only by getting away from the meaning of terms that is already fixed upon and coming to see the conditions from another point of view, and hence in a fresh light.

What are your thoughts? Did you guess Jean Piaget, or Lev Vygotsky? Who else might have challenged us to consider the significance of difference, of diversity? Gregory Bateson? Would you be surprised to learn this statement was made over one hundred years ago, that the author of this statement is actually John Dewey?¹ My intention in sharing this quote with you in this manner is to provoke your thinking, to engage in the contemporary language that we often find in complexity theory and education research.

In reading Craig Cunningham's (2014) recent publication, *Systems Theory for Pragmatic Schooling: Toward Principles of Democratic Education*, I was inspired to consider why the work of John Dewey has had such a profound effect on education, and why his ideas still resonate today. I believe it is, and as Cunningham suggests, that Dewey's notion of democracy is founded on principles likened to systems theory. And because of this, Dewey's suggestions for what it means to educate remain alive, emergent, adaptive. What is necessary in the system of schooling is diversity, for it is in difference that learning occurs.

The book reviews in this issue of *Complicity* are a concert of perspectives on Cunningham's (2014) book, using his words as the melody while others harmonize about schooling for a diverse democracy. The goal here in providing several reviews of the same book is to offer diverse points of view, to show difference. In doing so, we demonstrate how a "difference which makes a difference is an idea" (pp. 271-272), different ideas that offer sometimes contradictory yet complementary perspectives. By providing a conversation around a 'problem,'—in reference to Dewey's (1902) statement above—namely, the continued struggle in education to find 'solutions' that will improve teaching and learning in schools, we hope fresh light will be shed on what it means to educate. Cunningham (2014) argues that often solutions around education and schooling are reductionistic. In contrast, "shifting one's attitude from 'reducing' complexity to 'embracing' what is always already present in relations and

¹ The quote comes from Dewey (1902), *The Child and the Curriculum*, pp. 3-4

interactions may lead to thinking complexly” (Doll & Trueit, 2010/2012, p. 172). The authors of these reviews embrace the complexity of schooling, engage in central ideas around Cunningham’s (2014) views on Dewey and systems theory, and diverge in how the book makes different impressions on them as individuals. Overall, their perspectives present ways to consider how we can foster diversity in schooling as opposed to conforming diverse individuals towards fixed standards.

References

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