

As I read through Dewey's words, I was especially intrigued by his discussion in "The Child and the Curriculum" of how children learn, what society is expecting them to learn, and the contradictions between the two. I found this reading particularly important because it relates so well to my own situation. Dewey explains that children are often left with "meaningless" sets of unrelated materials that they are to absorb and then recite back on a test to prove to the teacher and society that they "learned" something. While learning facts may be vital to an overall understanding of a concept, too many times that basic remembering of facts is considered the final step in an entire unit of learning. If students are only given logically ordered information in books from which they are to read and remember, yet do nothing else with, the time spent and the information presented both become a "waste of time" to them.

In our alternative program, each child has his own reason for dropping out of a traditional school setting. While their personal reasons and situations vary, the students overwhelmingly share the view that what they learn in school doesn't have any relevance to their lives. These children don't want to learn facts and figures that they can't apply to anything they deem worthwhile. They want to know that what they study in a classroom will help them get jobs and a place to live and give them an opportunity at future happiness and security. Although our students' goals may seem very basic, their educational need is the same: make learning make sense.

After nine years I am still working on the perfect answer to "What does this have to do with anything?" My hope is that as our alternative education numbers continue to increase every semester, that I am able to help those students who want to give up on education to see the connection between "school learning" and a lifelong education. Dewey's ideas on how and what children should learn still hold for me a truth that "showing" is better than "telling". Giving students the tools to inquire and learn on their own in a school setting is vital to their understanding of how to grow and learn to be successful, productive adults.

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Assignment 1, Part 1