

This Day in History... October 20, 1859

Birth of John Dewey

John Dewey was born on October 20, 1859, in Burlington, Vermont. A philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer, he proposed educational theories that shaped education in America in the 20th century.

Dewey attended the University of Vermont and Johns Hopkins University. He then taught high school for two years in Oil City, Pennsylvania and a year of elementary school in Charlotte, Vermont. After this latter experience, Dewey decided he didn't want to teach primary and secondary school. After earning his PhD from Johns Hopkins, Dewey joined the faculty of the University of Michigan from 1884 to 1894, teaching philosophy and psychology.

In 1894, Dewey transferred to the University of Chicago, where he remained for 10 years. It was there that he began to develop his philosophy of pragmatism. Also known as experimentalism, this philosophy centered on the idea that learning occurs when a person is actively involved with his environment. His educational ideas came from this belief. Dewey felt children learn best through a hands-on approach and studying subjects they are interested in. This led to the progressive movement in education.

Dewey put his ideas into practice in 1896 when he founded the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools. The school attempted to develop a unified system from kindergarten to college. Dewey was able to test out many of his educational theories there and this work informed his first major work *The School and Society* (1899).

Dewey eventually came into disagreement with the university's administration and resigned in 1904. From then until his retirement in 1930, he taught philosophy at Columbia. He was elected president of the American Psychological Association in 1899 and the American Philosophical

Dewey founded or helped found four institutes of higher learning.

Association in 1905.

Dewey continued to develop his theories and speak out on a variety of social issues, including education reform. Considered the founder of the Educational Progressive Movement, Dewey emphasized the "learn by doing" method. He felt that kids should experience, not just read and listen. Dewey called for constant experimentation. He opposed the traditional method of learning by memory under the authority of teachers. Dewey believed learning should be related to the interests of the students, and should include physical and moral improvement as well as intellectual. He regarded intelligence as the power to face conflict and challenge. His "childcentric" approach to teaching revolutionized early 19th century education.

Dewey helped found the New School in New York City in 1919. His ideas also inspired the founding of Bennington College (1932) and Goddard College (1938), where he was on the Board of Trustees. His theories also inspired the founding of the short-lived Black Mountain College (1933) in North Carolina. During his career, he published over 1,000 works including books, articles, and essays. His works include *Democracy and Education* (1916), *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920), *Experience and Nature* (1925), and *Art as Experience* (1934).

In 1919, Dewey was invited by Peking University to visit China. He arrived in Shanghai as students began protesting the Allies' decision to relinquish the German-held region of Shandong province to Japan. Dewey became involved in the situation and stayed in China for two years, lecturing and writing articles. He urged Americans to support that nation's transformation while encouraging the Chinese to achieve it through education and social reforms rather than revolution. Dewey considered schools and civil society to be fundamental to democracy. He was hailed by many as "Mr. Democracy" and the "Second Confucius."

Dewey died from pneumonia on June 1, 1952. Several schools were named after him as well as an education award. One historian said that "Dewey has been to our age what Aristotle was to the later Middle Ages, not a philosopher, but the philosopher."



Issued one day after Dewey's 109th birthday.



Dewey was a leading educational reformer of the early 20th century.



Dewey supported and was on the board of Jane Addams's Hull House.

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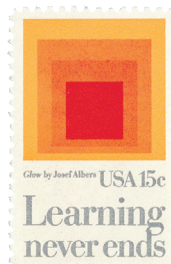
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