1. The near century that Dewey lived (1859-1952) saw profound changes in almost every aspect of human life. Can you think of another comparable period of history?

2. Contrast Dewey’s theory of learning with those of other thinkers. How did Piaget, Skinner, and Dewey use Darwin’s ideas similarly, and how did they differ in their further elaborations of them?

3. Dewey’s five-step analysis of learning (his “method of intelligence”) has much in common with the “scientific method” that is taught in elementary science classes. However, his insistence on the first emotional response is different. What do you think of it? Connect it to today’s emphasis on “brain based” learning that encompasses emotional responses to learning situations.

4. In our Scaffolding Self-Regulated Learning in Primary Classrooms film, our consultants suggest that Vygotsky’s theories avoid the traditional dichotomy between “teacher directed” and “child directed” learning. Dewey also argued vehemently against such dichotomies. He thought that children need to be engaged in their own learning, but that they were not informed enough to be the instigators and planners of it. In reality, learning can never be completely teacher- or child-centered, but curriculum debates definitely continue to favor one side or the other. How does the current “standards movement” fit into this debate?

5. In this brief film, there was not time to fully describe the “Absolutists” and “Realists” whose ideas Dewey rejected. What are other terms for these groups and who are some of the philosophers associated with each group? Could you offer a better description of these camps than the video did?

6. Dewey’s ideas about truth as a process are hard to conceptualize and illustrate. Can you think of commonly accepted “truths” that have been changed in recent years?

7. Are you comfortable with Dewey’s notion that truth is determined by its consequences rather than handed down from on high? What would be the truth conception’s consequences for moral behavior?

8. Dewey and Rosenblatt’s definition of democracy is far from those learned in government classes. Is the idea of democracy as an attitude rather than a system appealing? How could it be promoted?

9. Dewey’s stance that art should not be an activity separate from everyday life is another stretch for most of us to absorb. He spoke against regulating art to separate spaces, such as museums and concert halls, thinking that the arts should be incorporated into daily life. How does this mesh with his insistence that opportunity be given to all for the fulfillment of their gifts? Can you conceive of a society where that could occur?
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