

AN INTERVIEW WITH
DAVID GRANGER: A
DECADE OF EDITING
EDUCATION AND CULTURE

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David Granger is Professor of Education at SUNY Geneseo. He is the author of *John Dewey, Robert Pirsig, and the Art of Living: Revisioning Aesthetic Education*, Palgrave Macmillan (2006). From 2010-2020, he was the editor of *Education and Culture*, a journal of the John Dewey Society.

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The editors of Dewey Studies asked Jessica Heybach, the current editor of the John Dewey Society journal Education and Culture, to interview the previous editor, David Granger. David served Education and Culture from 2010 to 2020 and has some important insights about trends in Dewey scholarship. The interview begins with an introduction by Jessica Heybach.

Recently, I had the opportunity to interview the former editor of *Education and Culture*, David Granger, and to learn more about his experience heading up the journal. David's long tenure as the editor of E&C was from 2010-2020, where he oversaw twenty issues of the journal. He stewarded E&C through significant changes in the field associated with the proliferation of journal choices for authors and the explosion of open-access journals. David offers sage advice for current and future editors of academic journals in-general, and Dewey scholars in particular. The stylistic shifts in author voice from formal to informal, as well as the diversity of those engaging in Deweyan scholarship, is reflective of changing cultural and academic norms.

As the current editor of E&C, I already feel the weight of David's insights as presented throughout the interview. The breadth of topics taken up within Deweyan studies is staggering. Similar to David, my knowledge of Dewey's canon was immediately challenged upon taking the role of editor. As a field of study that sits at the intersection of philosophy and education, Deweyan studies demands a certain brand of interdisciplinary skill that can be a challenge for any one scholar to attain. Authors, as well as reviewers, straddle this artificial divide and finding the right balance is necessary to speak to the different audiences within Dewey studies.

David ends this interview with questions all editors struggle with, including "what is the 'right' amount of editing necessary for publications?" I might add that finding the appropriate reviewers for articles to ensure that topics are fully engaged is emerging as another perennial dilemma.

It is quite an accomplishment to shepherd any journal, let alone one riddled with disciplinary fault lines, through ten years of development. I thank David for his time, expertise, and commitment to *Education and Culture*.

JH: How would you characterize your experience as editor of Education and Culture?

DG: I found editing the journal a very rewarding experience. To be honest, I was a little concerned at first with the idea of serving in the position while living in rural upstate NY, but the journal submission system works very effectively, and I received a lot of support from the staff at Purdue University Press and former editor AG Rud.

Being connected with so many people interested in Dewey's life and work, both authors and manuscript reviewers, was deeply edifying, especially when the journal began to attract increasing numbers of scholars working outside schools or departments of education: folks in English, the natural sciences, political science, psychology and, of course, philosophy. The fact that Dewey contributed to scholarship in so many areas really made this unique experience possible. I certainly learned a great deal about Dewey during my 10 years as editor of *Education & Culture*. The experience also prompted me to reflect a lot on my own scholarship, both its strengths and deficiencies, but especially the latter.

JH: What were your favorite articles that you published? Why were they your favorites?

I enjoyed many of the articles published in *Education and Culture* and for a variety of reasons, so I'll just mention a particular issue of the journal. Volume 32, No.1, Spring 2016 included many engaging and well-written articles that really showcased the depth and breadth of Dewey's scholarship. It also contained several very compelling pieces

from the 2015 JDS symposium “The Legacy of Maxine Greene: Critical Engagements with Her Philosophy of Democratic Education.” The articles from the symposium were made that much more special by the inclusion of a previously unpublished manuscript by Maxine entitled “Liberalism and Beyond: Toward a Public Philosophy of Education,” made available to the journal through the good graces of Jim Giarelli and Maxine Greene’s estate. All of the topics addressed in that issue are both timely and urgent, perhaps even more now than at the time of publication. In my experience, this issue of *Education and Culture* is very much worth revisiting.

JH: What content or stylistic trends in academic writing did you notice over the course of your editorship?

DG: There are several things I could mention here, but I’ll just choose one that I didn’t foresee when I became editor of the journal. I found over time more authors writing in what one might call a conversational style, including frequent use of the first person and often with reference to the authors’ personal experiences. That made it especially important to look closely at the bases of authors’ arguments and the conclusions they were trying to draw from them. Sometimes a manuscript was very readable, making it easy to connect with the author, but the argument wasn’t sufficiently strong, or the conclusion overstated what the argument had (or could have) accomplished. What made the trend that much more interesting, and at times personally and professionally challenging, was that I would include myself among those authors preferring a more conversational writing style. (Of course, too, there’s the further complication that Dewey is known for writing in a rather impersonal and abstract way, such that his personal voice seems to many readers frustratingly absent.)

JH: What aspects of the publishing experience do you feel should be discussed more openly amongst academics and graduate students coming up in the discipline?

DG: I'll mention just a few things here. They might seem relatively minor on the surface, but they really stood out to me as editor of *Education & Culture*. The first is the critical importance of writing clarity. As we all know, academics tend to use big, technical words. At times those are appropriate, and perhaps even necessary. But many times this practice also seems forced and unnecessary. When experienced scholars develop the habit, I think it sets a bad example for graduate students and other beginner scholars.

As an editor naturally concerned with clarity, I would always rather read two relatively brief sentences written in a very clear and straightforward (even "choppy") way than one longer sentences with lots of technical verbiage and punctuation. In my experience, very few writers can manage the latter with (what I would consider) the necessary clarity. Finally, I would suggest to beginning writers that, if there is a word being used in a very specific way, keep using it, even if it gets repetitive. I know some authors think it detracts from their writing if their vocabulary seems repetitive, but it's very confusing to readers when important concepts or ideas are suddenly referenced using alternative vocabulary. It's easy for the reader to think the author is referring to something different when they are really only fishing for alternative vocabulary because they think it's stylistically preferred.

JH: What were some of the more interesting experiences you had and/or ethical challenges you faced as a journal editor?

DG: Whenever I rejected a manuscript it created an ethical challenge! Even if I was very confident about my decision, it was sometimes very tough. For much of my tenure as editor of *Education & Culture*, I

was also serving on the personnel committee in the School of Education at Geneseo. I was functioning as a gatekeeper of sorts in both capacities. As a result, I was always very aware of the potential consequences for authors of my decisions. Though I obviously depended a lot on manuscript ratings and written feedback from reviewers, I found it very important to read the reviews carefully and to make sure they were equitable and appropriate in tone. This, I would like to think, made the review process as educational as possible (a “teachable moment” of sorts) for the authors, especially with those who were new to the journal submission and publication process. Still, in the end the editor inevitably has to make some very difficult publication decisions.

JH: What lessons did you learn as editor that you would want to pass on to future editors?

DG: I learned very early on not to procrastinate! Reading new manuscripts as soon as they were submitted and, if warranted, sending them out for external review asap turned out to be very important in managing the workload effectively. In fact, I found that a timely but thoughtful publication decision really benefited all parties. I should say, too, that over the last few years of my tenure as editor I began to send pieces that I knew weren’t publishable out for review if the author showed considerable promise as a developing scholar. I would let the reviewer(s) know that I realized a particular manuscript wasn’t publishable, but that I was hoping to make the situation a positive learning experience for the author. Our *Education & Culture* reviewers were routinely willing to oblige. Thank you!

In addition, learning to manage reviewer requests so that I spread the workload around and found the right reviewer for each manuscript took some time. I tried not to take advantage of people’s good will in serving as reviewers, but some did go above and beyond

on several occasions. That was very much appreciated. Expanding and deepening the academic scope of the stable of reviewers helped with managing reviewer requests as well. In most cases, I was able to locate reviewers in no more than two or three attempts.

Finally, I found that learning to edit manuscripts the right amount and the right way was very important, especially as the journal received increasing numbers of manuscripts from non-native English speakers/writers. It's important to maintain the authentic voice of the author while also attending effectively to readability. There is no magic formula here, and I'm sure every editor handles the issue somewhat differently. Looking back, I feel fortunate that, after editing ten years of *Education & Culture* and over one hundred manuscripts accepted for publication, I never had an author complain that I was too heavy-handed with my editing or interfered with what they were trying to communicate. Of course, that doesn't mean no one ever felt that way! (If I remember correctly, many of Dewey's submissions to *The New Republic* were edited, sometimes almost rewritten, before publication for the benefit of the readership with nary a complaint from Dewey!)