

The John Dewey Society
and
The Journal of School & Society
announce:
A Call for Public Scholarship

Issue #3: What is the future of vocational education?

The John Dewey Society, founded in 1935, created *The Journal of School & Society* in order to meet one of its central aims: to support a vibrant public education system by fostering intelligent inquiry into problems pertaining to the place and function of education in social change, particularly among teachers, parents, and community activists.

We invite all those interested in engaged public scholarship to contribute to this exciting new venue!

Vocational education—once thought dead by many—is, by some accounts, back on the rise.

On the one hand, we know that many traditional vocational courses have been, generally speaking, gutted from the mainstream school curriculum. For example, shop and home economic courses, once mainstays of many school curricula, have virtually disappeared. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, while 13.1% of all credits taken are in the broad area of Career and

Technical Education, shop courses account for just 0.2% of all credits taken, while home economic courses account for just 1.3%. Many schools have eliminated these courses from their curriculum, now spending more time on the study of core academic subjects such as social studies, English language arts, science, and mathematics.

Not surprisingly, the National Center for Educational Statistics reports that course taking patterns in vocational educational were largely steady until the year 2000, at which point the national conversation, under the heavy influence of No Child Left Behind, inaugurated a steep decline. As we head into the 2016 President Election, there exists the possibility that educational policy in the United States will again be revisited. The place of vocational education seems likely to be part of this conversation.

While school curricula have largely jettisoned the older vocationally-oriented courses, it is also clear that there has been a backlash against the insistent focus on core academic subjects and college readiness. Politicians and teachers alike have acknowledged that collegiate education is not necessarily the best or most likely path for a portion of US students. In addition, policy changes that have resulted in both school choice policies and charter schools have forced schools to work to brand themselves for a consumer-oriented society. Some schools have sought to take advantage of the explosive growth in fields such as the culinary arts and the health sciences to help give their school a distinctive identity.

We know that John Dewey relied heavily on his notion of “occupations” for the organization of the school curriculum at his famous Laboratory School at the University of Chicago. Yet Dewey’s notion of an “occupation” was surely different than the notion of “vocation” used by many of his contemporaries. Clearly, the integration of hand, head and heart was central to Dewey’s notion of

a powerful education, one that prepared students to go on learning for the rest of their careers and lives. Just as clearly, Dewey had no interest in creating a system that focused on vocational education for the many and an intellectual education for the few. Such a system, Dewey recognized, was both unjust and anti-democratic.

The questions, then, are many.

On the educational level, we can ask: What does a good k-12 vocational educational look like? What purposes should it serve? What knowledge, skills and character traits are learned in vocational courses? Who should take vocational courses? Might vocational courses result in some students receiving a “second class” education?

On the social level, we can ask questions as well: What role does the global economy play in our vision for national schooling systems? What role should businesses play in determining what our children learn in school? How do we ensure that the gifts that each child brings to the world are honored, developed, and put to good use? How can we work to ensure that each adult is able to earn a just, living wage?

Ultimately, as we well know, a vocation is more than a job. It is, in the famous words of the theologian Frederick Buechner, “the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.”

What are the children of today called to do? How can the schools of today help them discover such a calling?

How to Contribute to the Issue

The Society's vision for this journal is that it will be one *by and for practitioners*. Each issue has thematic focus around which we seek to build dialogue. We seek to involve a wide range of folks working in public k-12 education, ones that include teachers, administrators, researchers, parents, and concerned community members. The writing that will be included in each issue includes opinion pieces, experiential accounts, and theoretical explorations of the theme as it relates to progressive education in general, as well as the writings of John Dewey in particular.

While some of the articles included in each issue will be invited pieces that seek to expand the range of publics with which the John Dewey Society interacts, we also seek to include pieces by the scholarly community under a blinded peer reviewed heading. To that end, we invite submissions from the scholarly community.

We are looking for pieces from 3,000 to 5,000 words that address some aspect of the theme of the future of vocational education, broadly defined. Submissions should be emailed to Kyle Greenwalt, Editor of *The Journal of School & Society* and Associate Professor of Teacher Education at Michigan State University. Kyle's email is greenwlt@msu.edu.

Submissions should be received by February 15, 2016.