
CREATIVENESS AS AN EDUCATIVE IDEAL IN DEWEY'S PHILOSOPHY

Eun-Joo Yang
Sunchon National University, South Korea

INTRODUCTION

Creativeness or creativity becomes more and more important at both the individual and societal level as the rapid growth of knowledge and technology accelerates.¹ Education systems in post-industrial societies grounded on the new global knowledge-based economy, face intense pressure for change so as to yield 'creative human capital' capable of producing new knowledge and technology. But such demands of educational change, while constituting current concerns of a global scope, are problematic in that creativeness is valued and pursued from an economic perspective, but not from educational reformist ideas reflecting the interest of a genuine and profound human need. This situation for educators evokes the need for a philosophically grounded educative ideal lest education will be changed primarily to serve industrial needs.

It is in Dewey's philosophy that one can find a needed ground for validating and explicating creativeness as an educative ideal from critical consciousness of the human condition. While Dewey's works do not directly address creativeness *per se* as explicit aim of education, they do embody an ideal of creative mind as a philosophically grounded reformist end-in-view. For Dewey, the characteristic activity on the human plane as differentiated from the physical or animal plane is to respond to things in their meanings pursuing "a creation of more meanings and more perceptions."² He also critically notes that a truly human life is limited under the modern industrial conditions, which have rendered human productive action in separation from consumption enforced labor, drudgery, a mere means.

The purpose of this study is to elucidate the significance and validity of creativeness as an educative ideal for educational reform in the light of Dewey's philosophic thoughts on nature and human experience. The major contents of this study will be framed under three categories; the source, characteristics, and developing method of creativeness. It will be shown that the meaning of creativeness as it is refined utilizing a Deweyan perspective implicates democratic, humane and educative values in contrast with elitist, utilitarian and technological ones. This attempt entails re-interpretation of Dewey's educational thoughts in a way as to replace 'reflectiveness' by 'creativeness' as a primary educative ideal, in line with current new scholarship in which Dewey is reconfigured.³ In conclusion, I shall argue that the ideal of a creative person rather than that of a reflective person is more holistic and pertinent for education today.

NATURALISTIC SOURCE OF CREATIVENESS

What is the source of creativeness? How do those novel ideas come to be when some geniuses create original art works or invent new theories, as are the cases where human creativeness manifests itself in a marked degree? With unquestioned admiration and prestige of creative products in art and science, creativeness is often ascribed only to highly eminent geniuses inspired by a sort of divine dispensation. Then the source of creativeness is rendered mystical or esoteric. But to resort to a non-natural source invokes an insidious approach of elitism and authoritarianism, which leads to threatening the ground of democratic ideas and practices in education. In contrast, Dewey proposes a naturalistic view on its source; naturalistic in that human creative activity is regarded as “a continuation, by means of intelligent selection and arrangement, of natural tendencies of natural events,” and thereby subject to scientific inquiry into the developing conditions without resorting to any extra-natural causative forces (*EN*, 291).

Dewey postulates “the creative mind, the mind that is genuinely productive in its operation,” as common to *every* individual.⁴ In contrast with the ordinary notions that associate creative mind with “persons regarded as rare and unique,” Dewey recognizes and posits the creativeness of every individual mind. As he states poetically, “Each individual that comes into the world is a new beginning; the universe itself is, as it were, taking a fresh start in him and trying to do something, even if on a small scale, that it has never done before” (*CC*, 127). According to Dewey, each one of us at birth as an individual brings into the world something fresh and novel, an original way of experiencing it, a different angle than anybody else, and thereby the universe itself comes to be making more or less a new start. He takes fresh spontaneous reaction of small children to be the evidence of creativeness in germ as native constitution of every human individual.

What does he mean by genuine individuality as the naturalistic source of the creative? There are two points to be illuminated further regarding the ways in which Dewey affirms both natural continuity and qualitative difference of human creativeness. First, Dewey regards qualitative individuality as a generic trait of every individual existence in nature including subhuman as well as human individuals, based on his metaphysical idea of natural continuity. For Dewey, of direct immediate existence there are “those irreducible, infinitely plural, undefinable and indescribable qualities which a thing must *have* in order to be” (*EN*, 74, italics in original). It is the vital reality of qualitative individuality in nature that gives “opportunity for the emergence of the genuinely new.”⁵ He states, “[g]enuine time... is all one with the existence of individuals as individuals, with the creative, with the occurrence of unpredictable novelties” (*TI*, 112). With intrinsic relation of temporal quality, individuality, creativeness,

and contingency, every individual existence in nature is creative in a broad sense of being pregnant with genuine qualitative change in time. And human creative activity as manifestation of genuine individuality on the level of conscious meanings and values is as natural as any other physical events, both of which occur without intervention of any super- or extra-natural force.

Secondly, by the idea of natural continuity, Dewey does not mean to suggest that physical and human individuality are identical. He affirms the differences of forms and qualities in nature in general and on the human level in particular in terms of the idea of individuality as a temporal development. For Dewey, individuality is “a power to develop,” rather than something given ready-made and once for all at the beginning. Individuality is not “to be unfolded from within” but to be “called out through interaction with other things” (TI, 109). While every individual is endowed with uniqueness of native constitution, the quality of its actual manifestation is a matter of an indefinite range of interactions. Under the modern industrial conditions in which everyday life experiences are overly limited by mechanical routine and passive reduplication, native creative potentialities become slowly choked up and thereby abdicate their unique individuality. Dewey notes critically, under the industrial conditions in which means are cut off from ends, human activity becomes predictable, machinelike and routinely recurring and thereby “an individual way of approaching the world” so soon gets dimmed.

Finally, Dewey’s metaphysical thought notes individuality of every existence as the naturalistic source of human characteristic creativeness. It contrasts with dualistic philosophies, which presuppose complete rupture between human experience and natural processes and resort to non-natural source for the former. According to Dewey’s metaphysical description, “in nature itself qualities and relations, individualities and uniformities, finalities and efficacies, contingencies and necessities are inextricably bound together” (EN, 314).⁶ But the former traits of the precarious, the individual, the contingent have long been denied the natural standing. Dewey explains it as not only due to the habit of “mortal man’s quest for certainty,” but also due to the problems in philosophic tradition that has attributed the ultimate reality solely to the immutable, the universal and the necessary. He criticizes such *a*-temporal philosophic foundations in that they function for legitimating totalitarian undemocratic practices and “denying the reality of time and the creativeness of the individual” (TI, 113).

In short, Dewey’s distinctive idea of the naturalistic source of creativeness functions in two ways. On the one hand, positively, it enables us to project creativeness of every human individual as a non-discriminating and democratic educative ideal with its validity grounded upon metaphysical understanding of natural events. On the other hand, critically, it challenges us to reflect upon the

social life conditions that either support or limit human existence. Thus, Dewey's thought requires us educators to see the existence of "real individual" as "the fountains of creative activity," and to examine critically the educational interacting conditions that either liberate or suppress creative power of every individual student (TI, 114). Furthermore, his metaphysical idea illuminates a fundamental necessity for us to overcome "the cultivated inability" to note the potential creative energies residing in the indeterminate, the contingent, and what is in process of change in nature.

HUMANE CHARACTERISTICS OF CREATIVENESS

What are the essential characteristics of creativeness? How do we judge some ideas or products as creative? In common understanding, the creative is related to making or bringing into existence something new. According to psychologists' technical definition, creativity is "the ability to produce work that is both novel and appropriate"; novel in the sense of involving a large step from preceding work, and appropriate in the sense of fulfilling a need, being sensible, and being useful.⁷ But it appears that this technical meaning also falls short of the defining measure that qualifies it to be intrinsically educative ideal. For there are varying degrees of novelty from subjective fancy to objective modification, from expansive application to revolutionary transformation. Individual imaginative power to vary responses and to make varied combination of diverse factors which terminate in transforming objective conditions, differs from "imagination as mere reverie" (EN, 170-171). Furthermore, in fact there are conflicting interests, for each of which some creation is appropriate and useful, say, from cultivating the bacteria of anthrax as a weapon to discovering a new anti-cancer material.

Critically noting that creative energies get perverted into "an over-specialized and frequently inhumane operation," Dewey proposes humane characterization of creativeness, which accounts for not just the bare fact of creation but its qualitative value for human characteristic needs.⁸ Dewey discusses the theme of creativeness most explicitly in one of his later works, *Construction and Criticism*. As the title indicates, it is the idea of intrinsic duality involving both constructive action and critical reflection, of both free initiatives and discriminating among values, of both active doing and passive undergoing that makes his characterization of creativeness distinctive.

On the one hand, in accordance with common notions, Dewey affirms that creativeness denotes 'constructive action' to be characterized by individual initiative, novel variation, independent reaction, etc. But he objects to such views that treat constructive action either objectively in terms of its outer products or subjectively as manifestation of a sort of native instincts. For Dewey, the essence of creativeness does not lie merely in the external fact that "no one's ever having thought of the same idea before," but in its being first-hand and

straightforward for a specific individual, regardless of how many other persons have already thought of it (CC, 128). Furthermore, Dewey rejects psychological notions that presuppose any original causative force such as creative instinct of the individual. In other words, the creative quality of constructive action is attributed neither to the objective material, nor to the individual subject, but to a course of continuous and dynamic interaction. Thus, Dewey qualifies the constructive action as personal but not as self-actional, in that genuinely creative conception comes only to a person who is bounded in an actual indeterminate situation involving continuous interaction of diverse correlated factors.

On the other hand, Dewey regards ‘the discriminating judgment’ of a critical mind as a necessary accompaniment of constructive action, instead of taking the critical to be opposed to the constructive. For him, the exercise of critical power means “taking thought as to what is better and worse in any field at any time, with some consciousness of *why* the better is better and *why* the worse is worse” (CC, 133; italics in original). Taking thought as to the better and the worse is to discriminate *de jure* goods from *de facto* goods that direct unwittingly our constructive action into specialized channels. It is to conduct critical reflection upon immediate goods and taken-for-granted values, which functions for continuous reconstruction of wider and more enduring meanings and values. Critical judgment is in great need, Dewey notes, because most of our liking is “a product of earlier conventional education” that has overlaid our own liking with a borrowed standard (CC, 137-139). In this respect, the ultimate functioning of critical mind is to liberate us from habituated meanings and traditional values, to throw off mental submission to what are termed authorities and thereby to get down to some more primitive reaction “proceeding from our own true nature.”

Finally, it is the idea of intrinsic duality involving both construction and criticism, of both free initiatives and discriminating among values that makes his characterization of creativeness not merely instrumental but intrinsically humane. For Dewey, while constructive capacity in itself may remain merely instrumental for certain specialized ends, critical power as functioning organically within a concrete constructive situation opens up a continuous path of liberating human action from pre-existing means and ends. He states, “Critical judgment is therefore not the enemy of creative production but its friend and ally” (CC, 134). Dewey explicates the organic place of constructive action and critical reflection in genuinely creative process as rooted in “the law of all natural activity” like the rhythm of output and intake of natural energies (CC, 139). Comparing them to “expiration and inspiration in our mental breath,” he claims, “[p]roduction that is not followed by criticism becomes a mere gush of impulse; criticism that is not a step to further creation deadens impulse and ends in sterility” (CC, 140).

In short, Deweyan characterization in terms of intrinsic duality helps us educators rethink the ultimate criteria of human creativeness. Genuine creativeness is not to be identified with any and every constructive action with novel variation. Instead, humane quality permeates creative activity to the extent that construction and criticism co-operate in a way as to liberate and unite the fabric of meanings and values in which we find our individual and social lives. It is the beginning for developing creativeness for students to come up with their own first-hand ideas and aims. But educators ought to see to it for each individual student that release of hitherto pent-in energies terminates in instituting a new object and thereby enhancing the constructive and critical spirit for continuous remaking of conscious experience.

EXPERIENTIAL METHOD OF CREATIVENESS

How can we develop or improve creativeness? The effective method of developing creativeness has become important concern for many people in education today. There have been attempts to devise creativity-building programs based on psychological theories that account for creative process in distinction from routine process.⁹ The underlying premise is that creativity is a sort of faculty (often regarded as cognitive faculty) to be developed or improved by means of training so-called creative thinking skills. In contrast with such notions, Dewey does not believe that a special program is called for. He takes the conditions for strengthening creativeness to have a place in all aspects of educational practice in that creative processes are emphatic manifestations of normally developing experience. In this respect, it can be inferred that for Dewey the actual means or method of developing creativeness resides in experience, which is to be derived from his idea of “the normal course of an experience to its fruition.”¹⁰

First of all, Dewey’s thought is distinctive in that he regards creativeness as “a normal accompaniment of all successfully coordinated action,” whether its primary purpose is esthetic, intellectual, political, or practical.¹¹ But one should not mistake what he refers to as “a normally developing experience” to be identical with any and every native activity. He claims that native activity *becomes* creative process in so far as it moves to its own fulfillment and liberates further activities with enriched meanings. Thus, for Dewey, an experience moving toward its own consummation with construction of new meanings is distinguished from many inchoate experiences that we have. In much of our ordinary everyday experiences as actually lived, we start and then stop “not because the experience has reached the end for the sake of which it was initiated but because of extraneous interruptions or of inner lethargy.”¹² In contrast with such disintegrated experiences, we have a complete experience or what he calls “*an* experience,” which is characterized by temporal development and dynamic integration of interacting energies. Then, individual variations in desiring, observing,

imagining, and thinking are unified and terminate in a new object and thereby a genuinely creative quality permeates the whole course. In this rigorous sense, Dewey suggests that creative potentiality of every individual develops gradually by passing through completely each course of fulfilling experience.

For further analytic understanding of the experiential method of developing creativeness, we may fruitfully resort to Dewey's own statement in one of his later essays, "Creative Democracy," which points to succinctly what constitute a normally developing experience. He states, experience is "(1) that free interaction of individual human beings with surrounding conditions, especially the human surroundings, (2) which develops and satisfies need and desire (3) by increasing knowledge of things as they are."¹³ This description involves three distinctive factors implicated in his conception of every normally developing experience as the fundamental method of creativeness: the tripartite unity of the practical, the emotional, and the intellectual, or of acting, feeling, and meaning.

In the first place, a normal experience involves active intercourse, that is, doing-undergoing series of the self with the environing conditions including both physical things and other human beings. For Dewey, free interaction denotes dynamic and continuous integration of interpenetrating energies, in contrast not only with mechanical routine activity but also with aimless dissipation of capricious impulse. In the second place, a normal experience involves emotional growth, which is conditioned by becoming implicated within a problematic situation that develops conscious need and desire. Dewey regards need and desire as the moving and directive force to "continually open the way into the unexplored and unattained future." Developing what we desire and the ways of desiring leads to genuinely creative remaking of the self. In the third place, a normal experience involves adding to the intellectual meaning of experience with the increased perception of the connections of the activities in which we are engaged. For Dewey, creative perception of new meaning is necessary means for transforming the objective world and for redirecting further experience.

In sum, according to Dewey, a normal experience is the method of developing creativeness. It is characterized by the unity of acting, desiring, and knowing in a dynamically moving situation. In having a consummatory experience, the person is "fully present, all there, in all of the actions," understanding what she is all about and caring for it wholeheartedly. For Dewey, it is in art, distinctively esthetic experience, that the ideal possibility of experience is realized most intensively and significantly. Affirming the continuity of art with ordinary experience, he defines "esthetic quality" as what makes every experience develop into an integral complete one, not as some special quality present solely in making or appreciating the works of art. In school curriculum art subjects such as the fine arts and music are to be considered to be of peculiar

value in developing creativeness. But furthermore, Dewey claims, “every subject at some phase of its development should possess, what is for the individual concerned with it, an aesthetic quality,” and therefore it is the only criterion for determining genuinely educative value.¹⁴ In other words, every ordinary experience to the extent that esthetic quality permeates it, *is* the very method of developing creativeness. Thus, Dewey’s thought requires us educators to engage in cooperative inquiry into the conditions under which each ordinary instructional situation develops into a consummatory experience while keeping alive an artistic attitude for every individual student.

CONCLUSION

There are many educative ideals and aims which have been suggested and urged in the history of educational thoughts; to name only a few, moral excellence with the knowledge of the good as originated in Plato, rational reason grasping the law of nature from Rousseau, etc. In line with the etymological meaning of philosophy as “love of wisdom,” Dewey regards its task as critical examination and re-construction of ideals, values, and beliefs, operating in human life-activities at a given time. In this study, I have shown that by utilizing a Deweyan perspective, creativeness is to be reconceptualized and projected as an educative ideal for educational reform today, in contrast with the ways in which creativity is pursued as a mere means for specialized ends from economic concerns.

As has been stated at the outset, Dewey’s works do not directly address creativeness as an educative ideal. In the traditional account of Dewey’s thoughts, it is reflectiveness or reflective thinking that has been treated as a central value. It is evident that Dewey values the reflective, the scientific, and the intelligent as the precious instrumentality for transforming human life conditions. But it has been often misinterpreted so as to suggest objectivist scientism when too much emphasis has been put upon Dewey’s realist strain at the expense of his liberal strain. With the conception of creativeness refined and enriched, I propose that creativeness be regarded as a primary ideal value that represents better what is suggested in his educational thought. This is to suggest a re-interpretation of his educational thoughts, particularly in line with current new scholarship in which Dewey’s theory of art and esthetic experience is taken to be central for understanding his philosophy.

To sum up what I have shown as Deweyan reconceptualization of creativeness, first, the source of creativeness resides in every individual existence in nature, and human creativeness is the natural manifestation of genuine individuality without any intervention of any non-natural causative force. Secondly, genuine creativeness is characterized by intrinsic duality of both constructive action and criticism, and it is to operate ultimately for liberating and uniting the meanings and values in which we find our lives. Thirdly,

creativity develops gradually by having each normally developing experience, in which what the person does, what she desires, and what she thinks comprise a dynamic unity moving toward its own fulfilling close. These three refined meanings grounded on Dewey's consistent philosophy will help us educators envisage creativity as a democratic, humane and educative ideal. And it will also help us overcome an elitist, utilitarian, and technological ideal, which has influenced persistently theories and practices in education even while it is rarely advocated in words.

NOTES

1. 'Creativity' is a more popularly used term than 'creativity' in educational discourses in general and in psychological discourses in particular. I take creativity to be more appropriate for the major points in this paper in that the meaning of creativity refers more emphatically to the state of being creative whereas creativity to the quality itself or the faculty. Dewey himself mostly uses 'the creative' or 'creativity' instead of creativity, which reflects his tendency to prefer adjectives and verbs to nouns so as to avoid the fallacy to mistake a trait of activity to be the causative substance.
 2. John Dewey, *Experience and Nature, The Later Works*, vol. 1 (Carbondale and Edwardsville: The Southern Illinois University Press, 1981[1929]), 278. This work will be cited as *EN* in the text for all subsequent references.
 3. As for an example of taking 'a reflective person' to be Deweyan ideal of the educated person, see Paul Nash, Andreas M. Kazamias, and Henry J. Perkinson, eds., *The Educated Man: Studies in the History of Educational Thought* (New York: Wiley, 1965). By current new scholarship, I refer to the current reinvigorated interests in Dewey's philosophy and educational thoughts for the last two decades. There are, as ever, diverse and often contradictory views and disputes on his thoughts in current Dewey scholarship. But as Shook argues, it is Dewey's perspective "as a critic of fundamental realist tenets" rather than the safe realist status that heightens his relevance to current issues. See John Shook, *Dewey's Empirical Theory of Knowledge and Reality* (Nashville: Vanderbilt Univ. Press, 2000), 11-14.
 4. John Dewey, *Construction and Criticism, The Later Works*, vol. 5 (Carbondale and Edwardsville: The Southern Illinois University Press, 1984[1930]), 127. This work will be cited as *CC* in the text for all subsequent references.
 5. John Dewey, "Time and Individuality," *The Later Works*, vol. 14 (Carbondale and Edwardsville: The Southern Illinois University Press, 1988[1940]), 101. This essay will be cited as *TI* in the text for all subsequent references.
-

6. Dewey presents his metaphysical description of nature as an attempt to reconstruct our beliefs about natural events in accordance with the conclusions of competent inquiries in natural sciences. He refers explicitly to the new perspective in the 20th century physical science turning from Newtonian mechanistic view (TI, 104-108).
 7. T. I. Lubart, "Creativity," in *Thinking and Problem Solving*, ed. R. J. Sternberg. (San Diego: Academic Press, 1994): 289-332.
 8. John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct, The Middle Works*, vol. 14, (Carbondale and Edwardsville: The Southern Illinois University Press, 1983[1922]), 101.
 9. Osborn's Brainstorming program and de Bono's CoRT program with six thinking hats are two old examples of creative thinking programs. A. Osborn, *Applied Imagination: Principles and Procedures of Creative Thinking* (New York: Scribner's, 1963). E. de Bono, *Lateral Thinking for Management* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1971).
 10. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education, The Middle Works*, vol. 9 (Carbondale and Edwardsville: The Southern Illinois University Press, 1980[1916]), 175.
 11. John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 99.
 12. John Dewey, *Art as Experience, The Later Works*, vol. 10 (Carbondale and Edwardsville: The Southern Illinois University Press, 1987[1934]), 42.
 13. John Dewey, "Creative Democracy-The Task Before Us," *The Later Works*, vol. 14 (Carbondale and Edwardsville: The Southern Illinois University Press, 1988[1940]), 229. Numbers added.
 14. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 258. Dewey deals with the educational significance of art more explicitly in Chapter 10 "Interest and Discipline" and Chapter 18 "Educational Values" in this text.
-