

INTEREST AND EFFORT IN EDUCATION

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9781760570064

Interest and effort in education by John Dewey

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**INTEREST AND
EFFORT IN
EDUCATION**

Riverside Educational Monographs

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IN EDUCATION

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HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

BOSTON, NEW YORK AND CHICAGO

The Riverside Press Cambridge

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

It is a pleasant privilege to present the following monograph to the profession and the public, for there is no discussion which is more fundamental to the interpretation and reform of current teaching than this statement of the functions of interest and effort in education. Its active acceptance by teachers would bring about a complete transformation of classroom methods. Its appreciation by the patrons of the schools would greatly modify current criticism of the various programs of educational reform. The worth of this presentation is well summarized in the statement that, if teachers and parents could know intimately only one treatise on educational procedure, it is greatly to be doubted that any other could be found which would, within small compass, so effectively direct them to the points of view, the attitudes of mind, and the methods of work which are essential to good teaching.

By good teaching we here mean that provision

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of school experience wherein the child is wholeheartedly active in acquiring the ideas and skill needed to deal with the problems of his expanding life. That our present instruction falls far short of this standard must be obvious to all who are not blinded by their professional adherence to narrow scholastic measures of efficiency, or by their loyal appreciation of the great contributions already made by schools in spite of their defects. Somehow our teaching has not attracted children to the school and its work. Too many children leave school as soon as the law allows. Too many pupils, still within the compulsory attendance age, are retarded one, two, or more grades. Too many of the able and willing of mind are only half-engrossed with their school tasks. And of those who emerge from the schools, duly certified, too many are skillful merely in an outer show of information and manners which gives no surety that the major part of their inner impulses are capable of rational and easy self-direction. For a long time we have tolerated these conditions in the belief that economic pressure drives the poor out of school, and that the stu-

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pidity or perversity of children accounts for their retardation and their half-heartedness. But recent investigations have made us skeptical of these easy defenses. The pressure of poverty does not seem to be so great an influence on the elimination of pupils as that attitude of child and parent which doubts the worth of further schooling. And we find that many children, whom we have considered backward or perverse, are merely bored by the unappealing tasks and formalities of school life. The major difficulty with our schools is that they have not adequately enlisted the interests and energies of children in school work. Good teaching, the teaching of the future, will make school life vital to youth. In so doing it will not lose sight of the demands and needs of an adult society; it will serve them better in that it will have a fuller coöperation of the children.

A single illustration will suffice to show how completely we may fall short of realizing public purposes in education if we fail to center our attention on the fundamental function and nature of the learning process.

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At the present hour we are very deeply concerned with the universal education of youth. To this end we have established a compulsory school attendance age, forbidden child labor, and provided administrative machinery for executing these legal guarantees of the rights of children. Yet, a guarantee of school attendance will never of itself fulfill the purposes of state education. The parent and the attendance officer, reinforced by the police power of the state, can guarantee only one thing,—the physical presence of the child at school. It is left to the teacher to insure his *mental attendance* by a sound appeal to his active interests. A child's character, knowledge, and skill are not reconstructed by sitting in a room where events happen. Events must *happen to him*, in a way to bring a full and interested response. It is altogether possible for the child to be present physically, yet absent mentally. He may be indifferent to school life, or his mind may be focused on something remote from the classroom. In either case he is not attending; he does not react to what occurs. The teacher has not created an experience for him; she has