Chapter 3

Criteria of Experience
Chapter 3

Guide to Experience and Education

Criteria of Experience

In his Book John Dewey discusses following two important principles of ‘experience’:

1. **First principle: Continuity of experience (Experiential Continuum)**

A true educative experience **must live fruitfully & creatively in subsequent experience.**

**Democracy**

An educative experience requires democratic values. In new education, teachers & because our society & culture formally & informally believes that democracy is the best of all social institution, therefore strict discipline within classrooms must be opposed.

Also democratic form of life offers more humane social life and more individual freedom through mutual consultation that lead to a better quality of life & experiences. This criterion goes back to the experiential continuum because life experiences within democracy achieve global & unlimited scope for the sound society & world.

**Growth or growing**

The educative process can be identified with growth when that is understood in terms of the active participle ‘growing’. Growing physically, intellectually, and morally involves again the principle of continuity. Putting it in other words growth or education must proceed towards positive development and social direction. (even a burglar, a gangster, or a corrupt politician may grow in efficiency but ultimately circle becomes narrow, therefore growth must involve universal but not the limited application & direction.)

For example, a child learns to speak, then to read, and decides to become a teacher, lawyer, physician, stockbroker…etc, he or she becomes sensitive & responsive to certain conditions that make him sustaining & developing in his profession throughout his or her life (continuity of experience).

**Every experience is a moving force / Role of educator**

The principle of continuity applies in some way in every case and every experience is a moving force, but its value can be judged where it moves towards and into. For instance, if an experience arouses curiosity, sets up desire and purpose, and leads a person over dead places in future, there is some continuity here but the direction is wrong.

Here the role of educator must be to evaluate each experience of the young & see in what direction it is heading. The educator should use his greater insight to help organize &
Chapter 3

Guide to Experience and Education

direct the conditions of the immature (learner) toward more social & more continuum direction through active contact & communication.

Facilitator’s fundamental duties should be:

- To provide intimate help this is conducive to continued growth.
- To evaluate immature’s experience.
- To direct immature’s experiences to more positive, more continued social life.
- To provide immediate help using his insight so that immature can proceed to right direction.
- To understand the immature individuals—what is actually going on in their minds. (their emotions, feelings, culture)
- To understand environmental conditions & to shape those experiences of individuals that is worthwhile & conducive to growth.
- To know how to utilize the physical & social surroundings.

Experience & Society

Experience does not occur in a vacuum. Experience has inner (subjective) and outer (objective) aspects / worlds. We live in a world of persons & things which are in large measure result of the transfer of previous human activities. They (past) can not be ignored. Environment also creates experiences for people. No doubt, it influences. There is obvious difference between children reared in slum or city.

- It is possible (and is necessary according to Dr Dewey) to frame schemes of education based on inner (subjective) conditions of individuals (their emotions, interests, feelings, etc). The outer (environmental influences or past) conditions have their importance but they should remain subordinate to the inner ones so that there should be no external control and the freedom of individuals (creativity) could be insured.

- The inner conditions exist temporarily yet they work as primary force & make the external forces compelled & fix the whole process. For example, needs of baby for food, rest, & activity are primary & decisive inner forces. The baby must be provided with nourishment, comfortable sleep & so on. But there should be a program for these. Wise mother not only from her experience sets the program when to feed & when to sleep etc. but also additionally she gets help from the past experiences of experts to
organize & subordinate her personal, other external influences to satisfy her baby’s personal inner conditions.

2. Second Principle “Interaction”

- An experience may occur under the influence of person’s inner conditions or objective conditions as well.

- ‘Interaction’ is a kind of a balance & interplay these two conditions. The interplay of inner & external conditions of an experience is called ‘a situation’. This interplay or relationship of both conditions is obviously an ‘interaction’ of an individual. The problem of traditional education was that it over emphasized external conditions & ignored or paid little attention to the inner ones and imbalanced the ‘situation’ (either—or).

- In the above example baby’s needs of nourishment, sleep & play etc, firstly, the parent has responsibility for arranging for all those things needed; secondly, the responsibility is fulfilled by parents’ own past experience & by the advise of experts (physicians & others). This fulfillment of responsibilities does not limit the freedom of the child or the mother in any way. Even, it enriches her freedom to continue her experience in future, however, there are some restrictions which also enhance & support the freedom because of experiential continuum. For example baby is to be left in the crib when playing, or the baby is taken for feeding when is hungry, or restricting the baby when putting hand into open fire etc.

- The two principles of continuity & interaction are not separate from each other, and at the same time, they intercept & unite like longitudinal and lateral aspects of experience.

- An individual’s own ‘world’ remains one (same); however, it expands or contracts when one passes from one situation to another, thus one enters in a different part of the same world. Process goes on as long as life and learning continues. But when it does not occur, the experience (individual’s own world) becomes disorderly and splits. This split and divided world on reaching a certain point makes the individual disordered, and we call him or her insane.

- Thus a fully integrated personality, on the other hand, exists only when successive experiences are integrated with one another. It can be built up only as a world of related objects is constructed.
• For educator a situation is of immediate concern in which interaction takes place (an individual consciously achieves interplay or a balance between his inner and environmental conditions).

• The objective external conditions involve all the materials in which an individual interacts or the total ‘social’ set-up of situations. (i.e. what is done by educator, how is done, voice tone, materials etc). The problem with traditional education was not focusing external objective conditions but was the ignorance of individuals’ own (inner) powers & purposes.

• The principle of interaction makes it clear that failure of adaptation of material to the needs and capacities of individuals may cause an experience to be non-educative quite as much as failure of an individual to adapt himself to the material.

• The future aspect within traditional education is not quite right as it aims at fixed knowledge and skills that would be assumed as needed later; therefore, pupils are made ready-made for the futuristic needs. But through experience and conscious interaction a person gets prepared for later (futuristic) experiences with a deeper insight and effort.

• The concept that a person learns only a particular thing is perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies. Collateral learning i.e. attitudes, likes, dislikes are more important than learning only a spelling lesson or a lesson in geography, history etc. It also points to hidden curriculum that must be controlled properly, for it may, however, more or less develop collateral attitudes i.e. liking or disliking something or somebody. Moreover, the most important collateral attitude that can be learned is that of desire to go on learning.

• If the attitude of desire to go on learning is lost all learning is lost (undone), and if it is developed all learning can be sought.

• We always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and, only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future. This is the only preparation, which in the long run amounts to anything. (‘present’ is more important even than to ‘future’)

• Traditional schools sacrificed the present to a remote and more or less unknown future. Therefore, present experiences of the young are not focused.

• Present and future should not be seen as ‘either-or’ affair. Maturity reflects when persons find connection between the present and future, and those mature persons
should take responsibility for developing conditions for such present experience which has favorable effect upon the future. Education should be the process of growth and maturity forever.