

To Inspire Inquiry

A Deweyan Response to Neoliberalism in Higher Education

The Situation

- Students are disinterested in their own education
- The only point of university is to find a job upon completion
- Meanwhile, the world falls into chaos and who knows if there will even be jobs in four years
- Which further alienates students from their courses
- Causing more disinterest and higher incompleteness rates

Neoliberalism

- Competition/economics based political theory where the market and its improvements are held as the goal
- Much criticism in recent years; few will identify as “neoliberal” even if they promote neoliberal values

“Instruction is redefined as workforce preparation more than as personally and socially enhancing education”(Slaughter & Rhoads 74)

- No Child Left Behind Act
- Standardized Testing
- Student Learning Outcomes/Program Learning Outcomes

“I contend that neoliberalism is but another form of authoritarian teaching, albeit a relatively sophisticated one” (d’Agnese 694)

“In the process, the fundamental social roles of higher education, including providing increased upward mobility for underserved populations, have been displaced by the economic role of serving corporations’ global competitiveness” (Slaughter & Rhoads 73).

“Changes in funding policy that require institutions to generate surplus income have led HE to become more open to forces for commodification, with the result that education has developed into a product and process specifically for its ‘exchange’ rather than for its intrinsic ‘use’ value” (Naidoo & Williams 212).

The Product:

Students who are not interested in their education



Students who view education as only necessary for finding employment, though not often related to that employment



Students who either fail to succeed academically in higher education or who drop out voluntarily due to burnout or losing purpose

A Pragmatic Method

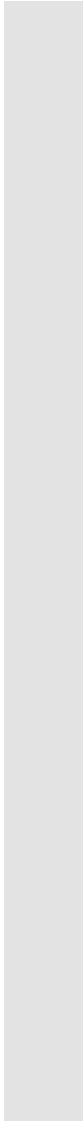
- Continuous growth
- Creative democracy
- Human capacity for imagination



Melioration

- Working with what exists towards progress
- Not instant revolution

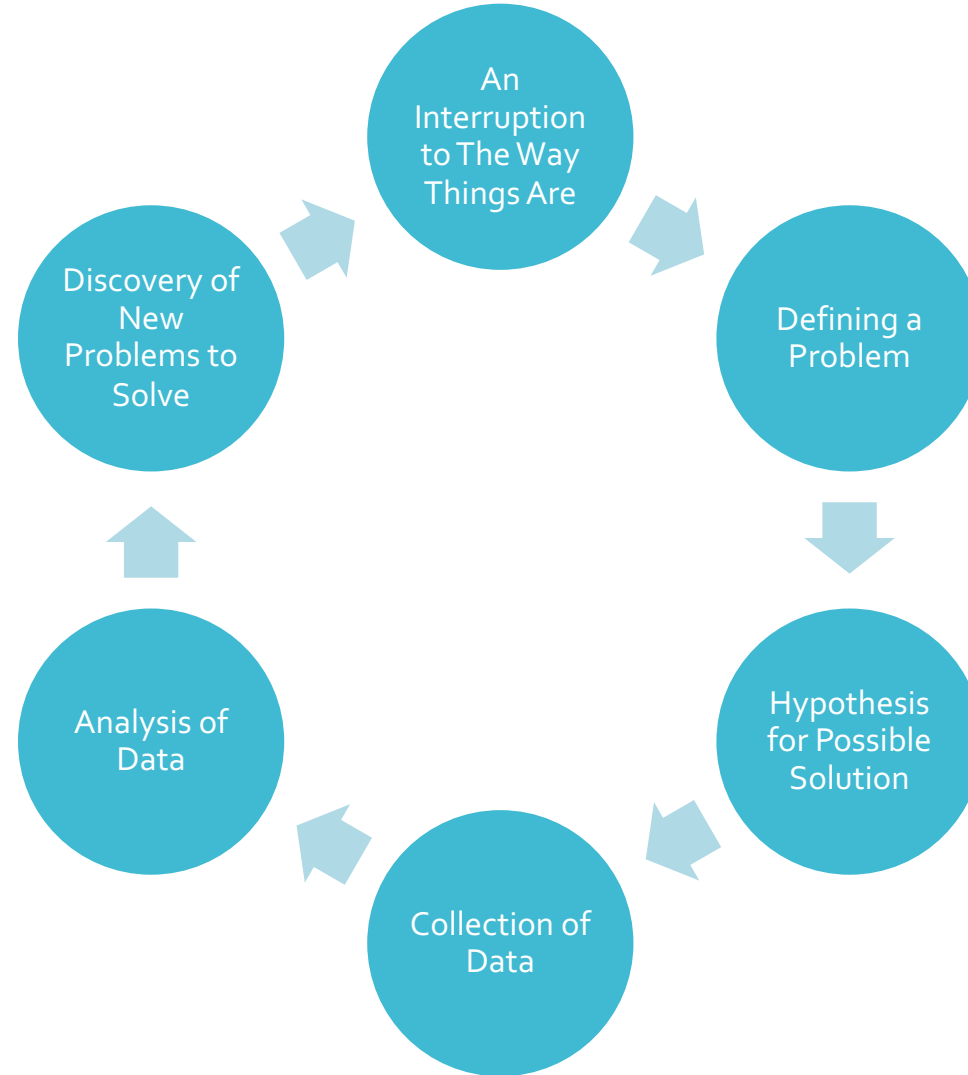
Integration

- Information does not exist in a vacuum
 - Not mere sensory experience; but a *transaction* between the one experiencing and the natural world around oneself
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HYPOTHESIS

I propose that the FYE seminar is the ideal place to introduce students to the method of inquiry and the means-ends continuum by way of reflection and an introduction to conflict as the beginning of growth. Utilizing John Dewey's theories in a well structured, integrative FYE program is not sufficient to flip the neoliberal system that holds sway over education; however, such an FYE gives students an opportunity to take the view of their own education as not just a means to a future paycheck, but as a lifelong endeavor for one's individual growth and the overall improved quality of democracy in one's community. Despite lacking the excitement of revolution, the amelioration of individual desire and effort from faculty, administrators, and students may cause the balance to shift from the competitive neoliberalism towards an increase in creative democracy in higher education and beyond.

The Pattern of Inquiry



The First Year Experience

- Adjusting to College Life
- Study Skills
- Critical Thinking
- University Resources
- Connections with Faculty

Carol Dweck's
*Mindset: The
New Psychology
of Success*

Fixed Mindset

- Intelligence is innate
- Challenges should be avoided

Growth Mindset

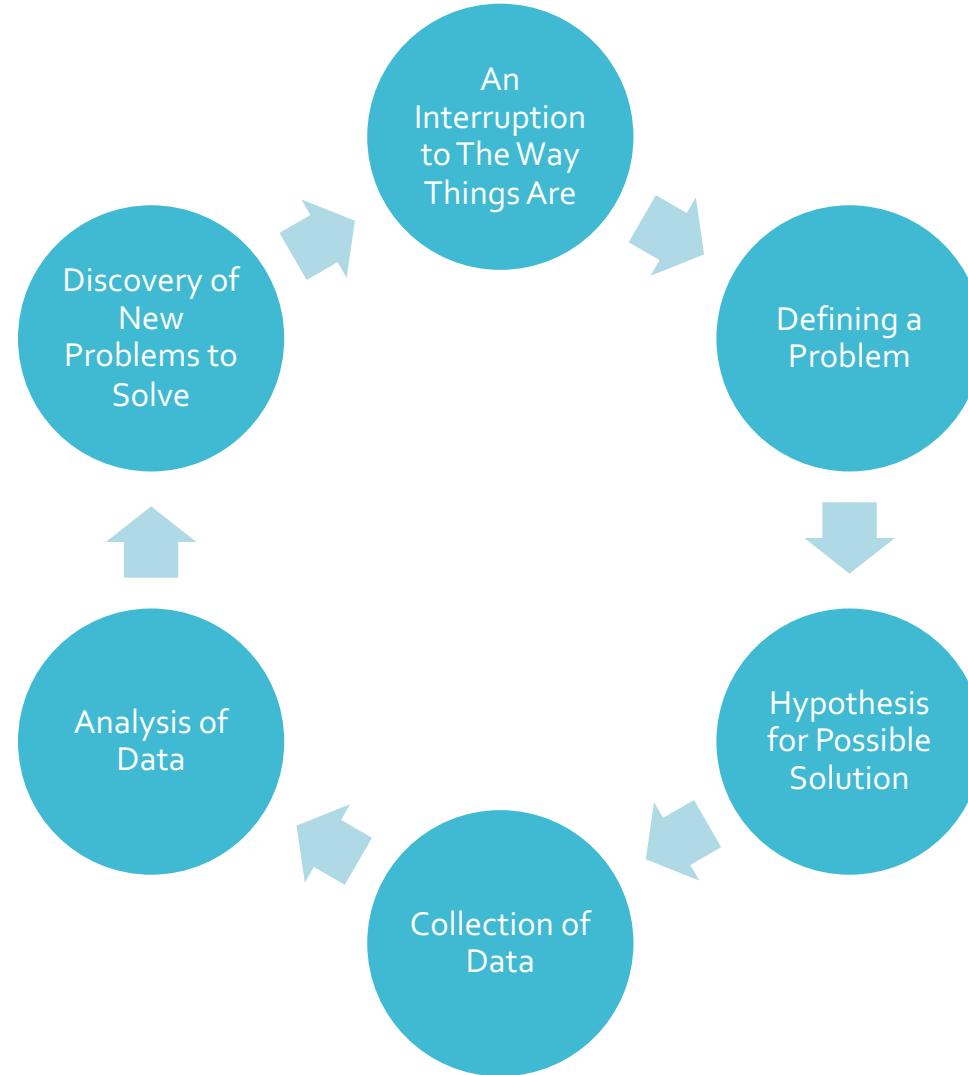
- Human Plasticity
- Planning and Possibilities
- Development of Habit

- Guides students to think deeper
- Requires complex answers
- Requires connections outside of the material used in class

Reflective Writing

“For Dewey, after doubt comes experimentation. As students embark on inquiry, they begin to ‘play’ with and test hypotheses; in our course, these hypotheses were self-formed, discovered collectively during class discourse, or presented by secondary text. Experimenting and testing result in further observation and data-gathering and a concomitant acquisition of knowledge, and this process was indeed evident in the third and fourth categories we identified, as students commented on what they were learning and how this affected their ability to observe and understand” (Ciccione 317)

The Pattern of Inquiry



Problems

- Students may still not see the point of inquiry and refuse to engage, which is potentially discouraging for professors and other classmates
- Organizing a cohesive program at a university with appropriate training for faculty on first-year student education is no easy task

Pragmatic Reasons to Keep Going



Democracy

- Conflict
- Humility
- Conversation

Eros

- Passion
- Loving the Good

Hope

- Means-Ends Continuum
- Must have an End to work on Means
- Dramatic Rehearsal

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