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A REVITALIZED EDUCATIONAL CONCEPTION OF GROWTH IN THE 21ST
CENTURY FOR CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION PRAXIS IN NEBRASKA

by

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A DISSERTATION

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Under the Supervision of Professor Edmund T. Hamann

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A REVITALIZED EDUCATIONAL CONCEPTION OF GROWTH IN THE 21ST
CENTURY FOR CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION PRAXIS IN NEBRASKA

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University of Nebraska, 2017

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My dissertation argues for a revitalized conception of growth in the 21st century and contemporary education. Through reconstruction, re-conceptualizing, and re-emphasis of growth, this revitalization attends to acute challenges in schooling and can impact praxis in education today. This pragmatic and philosophical work places a revitalized conception of growth as the purpose of education and, to the extent that education is life, continual growth as a process for living.

John Dewey provided his conception of growth during the 19th and 20th centuries as he valued the natural capacities a human being possesses for experiencing life. Dewey's conception called for continual reconstruction, as the context of the world we live in today matters and provides for the reconciling of growth in the 21st century. I argue that Dewey's expansive conception of growth matters in contemporary education, but differs from today's prevailing conceptions (e.g., Carol Dweck's work), and must be revitalized.

The current dominant conceptions of growth in education are limited with a focus primarily on English Language Arts and mathematics achievement of students. In this context, there are three conceptions: student growth, professional growth, and a growth

mindset. These are narrow conceptions that underserve the possibilities of children and adults in contemporary education.

A revitalized conception of growth embraces and weaves the personal – or the consideration of one’s identity and what is occurring with oneself – with the social in the context of an educative experience that sees children and adults as unique and vibrant human beings. As the purpose of education and in the context of the 21st century, a revitalized conception of growth provides a way of rethinking and re-imagining how students and adults experience school as a part of society. Reconciling a conception of growth for today means the continual re-construction of oneself through educative experiences in the context and involvement of others and in which education in schooling and education in life are interwoven. Growth occurs in our time, which is wherever we are, and is always changing. Therefore growth and what it means to grow evolves with the time we are in and is never final.

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Although they are no longer serving at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, both had a profound impact on me through their philosophical and scholarly approaches.

Suppose all of the syllabi and curricula textbooks in the schools disappeared. Suppose all of the standardized tests – city-wide, state-wide, and national – were lost. In other words, suppose that the most common material impeding innovation in the schools simply did not exist. Then suppose that you decided to turn this “catastrophe” into an opportunity to increase the relevance of schools. What would you do?

– Postman and Weingartner
Teaching As a Subversive Activity
(New York: Delacorte Press, 1969)

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A Revitalized Conception of Growth in the 21st Century
for Contemporary Education Praxis in Nebraska

CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

During the early part of the 21st century, the term and concept of *growth* is casually referenced in the context of education. Expressions of professional growth, student growth, and growth mindset are recurrent within districts, schools, and classrooms. In the late 19th and into the 20th century, a conception of growth was also part of the philosophy of education promoted by John Dewey.¹ Although what Dewey intended and current invocations of growth are not reconciled in schooling today (to the detriment of educational practices), this new century provides the opportunity to reconsider and reconstruct a conception of growth for contemporary education.

In this dissertation, I argue that John Dewey's conception of growth matters in contemporary educational environment, differs from today's current, limited conceptions, and can be revitalized to impact praxis in education today. Dewey was a reflective and pragmatic person and provided texts such as *The School and Society* (1900), *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902), *Moral Principles in Education* (1909), *Schools of To-Morrow* (1915), *Democracy and Education* (1916), *Art as Experience* (1934), and *Experience and Education* (1938), which each illuminate his conceptions of growth and will be analyzed and utilized in support of this dissertation.

With Dewey, growth was something rich and complex. His philosophy inclusive of a conception of growth permeated his work and he continued to expound upon his

thinking regarding growth and education over much of his life, which spanned from 1859 to 1952. During his life, the United States' society experienced great changes – such as wars (i.e. the Civil War, Indian Wars, Spanish-American War, World War I, and World War II), the end of slavery, Reconstruction, women's suffrage, the Second Industrial Revolution, the Great Depression, and technological changes (first light bulb, the Model T Ford, flight), that caused continual challenges for education reform.

In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey wrote:

In directing the activities of the young, society determines its own future in determining that of the young. Since the young at a given time will at some later date compose the society of that period, the latter's nature will largely turn upon the direction children's activities were given at an earlier period. This cumulative movement of action toward a later result is what is meant by growth. (Dewey, 1916/1944, p. 41)

Dewey later would describe how the “educative process can be identified with growth when it is understood in terms of the active participle, *growing*” (1938/1997, p. 36).² For Dewey, growth was an action and process which was inclusive of a person's intellectual, moral, and physical development (p. 36). A child was not meant to sit passively and absorb information from an adult in a school. He was to be active, as every child has the capacity, ability, and power (1916/1944, p. 41)³ to develop in multiple ways.

In *Living as Learning: John Dewey in the 21st Century* (2014), professor of philosophy of education Jim Garrison explains that growth occurs in feeling, action, and happiness, and not just thought, but that schools ignore emotional intelligence, physical ability, sociability, creative talent, a sense of adventure, and moral character (p. 93). A

Deweyan conception of growth requires attentiveness to experiencing education in a manner that is inclusive of the whole person and not limited to a passage of knowledge from adult to child.

As a philosophical work, I am generating new knowledge as I argue that the reconstruction, re-conceptualizing, and re-emphasis of growth attends to acute challenges of contemporary education. Although the term growth has been referenced for over 100 years in the educational setting, its conceptions, from Dewey to its use today, are not the same. Dewey believed that education, as growth, was a connection of the child and the community for which he lived. Dewey described this community thinking in *The School and Society* (1900/1990), believing that there needed to be connections among the school, home, business, country (gardens and parks), and university in order to unite these parts of a system to life (pp. 72-76). What he described was the growing child's need to understand the society in which one lives as well as the current community the school is within to assure that connections are made as to not isolate the school.

However, society changes and, even with the types of changes in American society that occurred during Dewey's life, he may not have anticipated contemporary societal and technological changes of the 21st century. In what doubles as a succinct rationale for this dissertation, contemporary philosopher Nel Noddings, in *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*, pointed to Dewey's work in having continuity in educational experiences in order for students to grow and states:

Dewey's recommendations are still vital, but today they need to be analyzed more closely and extended. The structure of social relations has changed dramatically since Dewey wrote. Many children suffer instability

in both family and community life. Most parents work outside of the home, neighborhoods are less personal, schools are larger, and recreation is passive -- connected to personal experience only by chance and presented with little consideration of what Dewey called “growth.”
(Noddings, 2005, p. 64)

Schools of today continue to be impacted by changes in society and communities (e.g. rural, suburban, urban) as Noddings described, just as they were in Dewey’s time. This contemporary context is not only vital in reconsidering and reconstructing a conception of growth for today, but also for how this conception is lived through education.

In *John Dewey and the Mutual Influence of Democracy and Education* (2009), David Fott, a professor of political science, noted that growth has been one of Dewey’s most misunderstood terms because it had no absolute content for him. There was not a defined and final educative goal, such as going to college or getting a job. The process of education ceased once a student graduated and went to work. However, for Dewey, growth is both a means and ends. For example, in *Reconstruction in Education* (1920), Dewey said that “acquisition of skill, possession of knowledge, attainment of culture are not ends: they are marks of growth and means to its continuing” (p. 185). Growth is a continual process that has a purpose for more growth and in which graduating, going to college, and getting a job would be a part of growing and not the end.

A revitalized educational conception of growth values the individual as well as the community and this runs counter to the predominant Western paradigm of our time, Neoliberalism. Since the 1970’s and 80’s, Neoliberalism has placed an emphasis on free markets, privatization, consumer choice, the individualistic vs. the collective, and

competition as a vehicle for perceived individual freedom. This is highlighted in *How School Choice Turns Education Into a Commodity* (Blakely, 2017) and *Neoliberalism: The Idea that Swallowed the World* (Metcalf, 2017). Neoliberalism places a price tag on what it means to be human within a market, instead of valuing being human with the natural powers each person has for continual growth, and contributes to the constraining of how growth is conceptualized.

A revitalized conception of growth matters today as it proposes to connect the whole person with the whole society through educative experiences. This would mean that the individual, as a complete and whole person, is valued and active within the context of community (in which the school is a part of and not separate). Growth would be the means and ends of a continual educative process.

For this dissertation, philosophy suggests a more holistic resurrection of what “growth” means than how it is actualized in current times. Formal education should be for growth in ways it is not yet. Given this new re-creation and educative purpose of growth, I will illuminate “what might be” for contemporary education in the 21st century.

Although the term “growth” is commonly referenced in contemporary schooling, current uses are rarely tethered to what Dewey meant and are impoverished by that lack of context. The varied uses of “growth” are located in sundry policies and practices and are inconsistent in the meaning and application of growth. For example, in the Council of Chief State School Officers’ (CCSSO) *Implementer’s guide to growth models* (2008), growth is not explicitly defined even though it is that framework’s ostensible central theme. It is referenced within the context of a need to create and implement a growth

model in education for school accountability and the text provides examples of the types of models developed thus far. In this CCSSO document, growth is a comparison of a student's test performance in one grade to the same student's test performance at the next grade (such as from 5th grade to 6th grade) or a group of students' test performances from one grade to another.

The term growth, in general, has various definitions. The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides several, such as:

- The process of increasing in physical size:
 - 'the upward growth of plants' or 'the growth of the city affects local climate'
- The process of developing physically, mentally, or spiritually:
 - 'keeping a journal can be a vital step in our personal growth'
- The process of increasing in amount, value, or importance:
 - 'the rates of population growth are lowest in the north'

Consistent with these definitions are the three complementary (and I will argue later, in chapter 3, narrow and inadequate) conceptions of growth commonly used in education today. The following is a brief introduction to those three:

1. Achievement or Academic Growth. This conception of growth is epitomized by the current accountability models in education that stem from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and have continued through the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Academic growth is measured and measurable through comparisons, over time, of a student's test scores in core content areas. These tested content areas include reading, math, and science, that, even collectively, compose a small part of all opportunities a student has in schooling related to learning and activity. In this context,

using another CCSSO example, namely *A Practitioner's Guide to Growth Models* (Castellano and Ho, 2013) which was commissioned by the Technical Issues in Large-Scale Assessment (TILSA) and Accountability Systems and Reporting (ASR), state collaboratives on assessment and student standards, and the CCSSO, growth is defined as “describing the academic performance of a student or group (a collection of students) over two or more points in time” (p. 13). This, in turn, allows growth models which are collections of definitions, calculations, or rules that summarize student performance over two or more time points to be used in the context of education as a way to interpret students, their classrooms, their educators, or their schools (p. 16) in a narrow and limited manner. Left out are both ‘non-academic’ content areas (e.g., art, sports, theatre) and the portions of ‘academic’ subjects that aren’t measured or measurable (such as engagement, relevance, affinity, and preference). This conception of growth does not reflect student strengths, talents, interests, or passions, or personal skills (such as critical thinking, problem solving, communicating, creativity, etc.).

2. Professional Growth. From legislation at the state and federal levels, along with school board policies, professional growth initially referenced opportunities educators had to continue to learn about their profession and improve practices. Today, however, it is connected to the accountability model as part of teacher evaluation (i.e. what are a teacher’s instructional practices?, how does the teacher plan and prepare?, etc.). Growth gets

reduced to performance without acknowledgment of what else might shape or constrain performance. Professional practitioners themselves don't get to define what counts as their growth. Indeed, they sometimes are not even the ones directly measured. Student test scores in reading and math are supposed proof of professional growth as a part of accountability. For example, Chicago Public Schools uses the computer adaptive test, Measurement of Academic Progress, in reading and math with student test scores resulting in 15% of the teacher's overall evaluation.⁴

3. The Growth Mindset. This concept, which is third on my list because it is the newest and comes largely from the work of Carol Dweck (2006), is based and defined in the belief that a person's basic qualities are characteristics that can be cultivated through personal efforts. Although people differ, the growth mindset asserts that everyone can change and grow through application and experience as long as they have the right attitude (p. 7). It is understood as an individual psychological orientation rather than a co-created, social phenomena and sometimes gets associated with other currently popular individual disposition foci, like 'grit' (Duckworth, 2016). Yet proof of its existence often gets reduced back to the conditions described in growth concepts one and two – i.e., measures of reading and mathematics test scores.

I critique each of these three common uses of growth in schooling today in another part of this dissertation. Through a brief examination of federal, state, and district education policies, as well as supporting materials (such as Dweck's *Growth*

Mindset), I clarify that common invocations of growth in schools today are narrower and less encompassing than what Dewey proposed and what is needed for contemporary education. Although there are multiple uses of growth in education today, such as the three aforementioned applications, this does not contradict my assertion that current concepts are thin and lacking.

In order to move further with a more robust and revitalized concept of growth, it is the contextual understanding that helps bring clarity to its application. In schooling in the 21st Century, a more precise understanding is needed. Garrison et al. (2014) share that every human being has unique as well as generic social and biological needs, desires, and purposes (p. 75). A reconstructed conception of growth is inclusive of these needs, desires, and purposes through the educative experience of contemporary education. It re-embeds teachers, students, and other educational stakeholders as co-determiners of what counts as their growth and rejects the premise that all relevant growth be summarized with comparative achievement metrics of academic knowledge acquisition.

This dissertation in promotion of a reconsidered and reconstructed conception of growth engages Dewey's philosophies and conceptions, current manifestations, and what might be in future practice for education in the 21st century. As a philosophical work, there are two underlying influences shaping the dissertation: practical wisdom and having a purpose. These are addressed in the following sections to provide context to this philosophical dissertation.

1.1 Practical Wisdom

Every person, being a proponent, neutral, or a critic of something, brings her own experiences, which affects her thinking. Understanding that I have experiences, past and present, in formal education is important in this dissertation. In my role in education as a school district's director of learning and before that as a practicing educator, I bring a synthesis of thinking as I consider and argue how Dewey's conception of growth matters today. My current position, as delineated in school district board policy, is described in the following way:

The Director of Learning shall provide leadership for staff, administer all programs and services pertaining to curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the district, as well as the achievement of students. The Director of Learning shall direct activities contributing to the quality instruction for students through the development and improvement of the instructional staff, instructional materials, and curriculum.⁵

As this description suggests, I am positioned (and required by policy) to have insight and understanding of the common interpretations of growth in education today, as student achievement and improvement of the instructional staff are identified responsibilities.

However, I am also expected to understand how the goals for students and professionals' growth might be measured as the word 'assessment' is also a part of my formal job description. I also engage in the philosophy of education and therefore contemplate what a reconstructed Deweyan conception of growth might look like. Philosophy derives from the Greek word *philosophia*, which means the "love of

wisdom,” and an educational philosophy calls for studying how human beings think, experience, and should be in the world.

While my job description does not use the verbs ‘think’ or ‘reason,’ I cannot meet my responsibilities without thinking and reasoning. Thus the philosophy of education inserts itself quite explicitly into my praxis. As a practicing educator with responsibilities for student and adult learning, I seek *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, as well for connecting theory and practice. In a sense, I straddle these two worlds of philosophy and practice in which language is shared (such as “growth”), but the applications and uses are not. To that end, this is a dissertation which is reflective of the weaving of the philosophical and practical.

An understanding of Dewey’s conception of growth and experience is enhanced by not only his many writings and lectures, but also through the perspectives of others directly addressing him, those connecting to his work within their own work and contemporaries’ reflections and praxis with Dewey (such as Garrison, Hickman, Ikeda, and Noddings). In his book, *Reading Pragmatism* (1999), the late pragmatist and former professor of political science and teacher education, Cleo H. Cherryholmes views pragmatism as an art term. He says,

Peirce’s maxim implicitly poses a question: After imagining practical consequences, which consequences should we value and desire? I read Dewey’s (1934/1980) argument in *Art as Experience* as answering that question. He tells us, in effect, that we should pursue aesthetically desirable consequences; pursue outcomes that are satisfying, fulfilling, harmonious, and beautiful; and explore what makes them so. (p. 28)

The artistic manner described by Cherryholmes is reflective of Dewey's conception of growth and of educative experiences for growth. As Jim Garrison stated in regards to growth being the goal, "Deweyan philosophy is a living philosophy. Deweyan pragmatism is a philosophy of life and social amelioration...For Dewey, the meaning of life is to make more meaning" (2014, p. 46). Dewey's conception of growth is about a continual process of developing and improving, in the context of the here and now, in which education is growth and growth is about living.

With growth being referenced more and more in educational settings today, there is need to inquire about the conceivable practical consequences of a reconciled conception of growth and to answer the questions about how experiences and policies might be designed for this purpose (growth). By fusing the horizons of self, John Dewey's pragmatic approach to the conceptions of growth and educative experience, other modern works (such as Carol S. Dweck's *Mindset*), and education in the 21st Century, the reweaving of the human web of beliefs and tastes (Cherryholmes, 1999, p. 126) can occur with the artistic belief that consequences should be aesthetically desirable.

Understanding that I do have practical wisdom to recognize the best possibilities, the highest value, or end-in-view (Garrison, 2010, p. 51) within my personal experiences in education, my experiences provide a perspective from which I draw upon in connection to Dewey's texts, as "it is the formation of a comprehensive horizon in which the limited horizons of text and interpreter are fused into a common view of subject matter – the matter of meaning – with which both are concerned" (Gadamer and Linge, 1976/2004, p. xix). As such, I interpret through the lens of my human experience to propose an expansive, revitalized concept of growth for contemporary education. As a

practicing educator proving my mettle, I am influenced by my experiences. Therefore, in this dissertation I bring a synthesis of thinking and practical wisdom in considering what might be for educative growth. Additionally, I provide recommendations that are grounded in the fusing of current self, Deweyan philosophy and conceptions, and the re-creation of educative growth. In doing such, not only do I engage in philosophy and practice for growth in contemporary education, but also clarify a purpose for education.

1.2 Having a Purpose

Philosophers, amongst many others, have pondered for years what it means to be an educated and growing human being. Or, as Noddings put it, “people have been debating questions concerning the aims of education since the days of Plato and, in our times” (2003, p. 76). Whether educational beliefs are religious, secular, cultural, and the like, the intention has been to bring meaning to human existence within the context of one’s own lived experience and education. All humans have their own personal realities, and it is my belief that part of the human experience is the opportunity to grow in each of these unique realities within the various stages a person has in the cycle of life.

In education, adults have the responsibility and privilege of interacting with children each day. As John Dewey, and his co-author and daughter, Evelyn Dewey stated in *Schools of To-morrow*, “the very meaning of childhood is that it is a time of growth” (1915, p. 6). This time in a person’s life is about embracing the immature with the capacity or power to grow. Childhood is also about the dependence upon adults in the process of growth and the adults need to protect the child throughout this time of life.

There has been recognition of the importance of childhood and education from adults. One example is the United Nations General Assembly document, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.⁶ Within this document on human rights, the U.N. wanted to protect children's rights and guarantee their well-being. The document contains such wording as "In all actions concerning children...the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration,"⁷ as well as includes that education should develop a "child's personality, talents...to their fullest potential."⁸

The rights' document also references the health, physical, mental, spiritual, and social development of children. Indeed, within the United Nations' document containing 54 Articles and created towards the end of the 20th Century, there is a recognized need to enable children to continually grow. No matter which part of a state, country, or continent a person lives, there is a recognized need for the kind of growth that is not limited to that of a child's height or improved reading test scores. Rather, growth is holistic and inclusive of human personalities, talents, abilities, health, etc. and is to be done through educational experiences. I would argue that this perspective is Deweyan, but also that current American educational practice embraces only discrete portions of it.

Garrison, talking about educational wisdom in *Living as Learning* (2014), pointed out that Dewey argued a person cannot grow without the opportunities the community provides (p. 95). Beliefs, such as those in the United Nations' document, demand consideration of a clearly articulated conception of growth within education and the educative experiences that should be provided to students. Questions arise such as, how might growth in education be articulated for the 21st Century? Or how might this philosophy of growth impact policies and practices in education today? The reconciling

of growth in education provides a clear purpose that requires the horizons of educational experiences, policies, and practices to fuse.

Nel Noddings, in the introduction to *Happiness and Education* (2003), poses the question, “Why do we so often defeat our own purposes by choosing means that are in clear contradiction to our aims?” (p. 2). She then proceeds to promote aims-talk for education, or the continual dialogue and reflection on aims that is essential to the thoughtful practice of education, as “great educators have devoted much thought to the issue of aims, but today we hear little such debate. It is as though our society has simply decided that the purpose of schooling is economic...Surely there is more to education than this” (p. 4). Noddings, like Dewey, recognized the importance of having a clear purpose for education. Without a clear purpose, we lack clear aims. Purpose and aim are referenced together here, but are not interchangeable. To differentiate, the *purpose* is the reason why we do what we do, while an *aim* is what is trying to be achieved (therefore an aim would be in support of the purpose, a reason for having the aim). If we lack clear aims, then we do not know if our means are contradictory, such as going to school for the purpose of continually growing as a person rather than solely to graduate or go to college or get a job.

We are driven, focused, and engaged by having a purpose. As individuals, and through our institutional affiliations (such as a school or education), we seek clarity through purpose and find the means in unifying actions with purpose. A model recently promoted, and one that I will use the language of, is Simon Sinek’s Golden Circle, or a “why - how - what” model (Sinek, 2009). The *why* is described as the purpose, or the reason we do what we do, and is the inner part of the Golden Circle. Actions that are in

support of the why are called the *how*, and the evidence of the why is the *what*, which is the outer part of the circle.

Sinek explains that we typically work from the outside – in as we tend to move from *what* we do, which is simple and the easiest to access, and *how* we do it, without the *why* which ultimately will drive us. However, when we work from the inside – out of the Golden Circle, we drive decision-making and behavior as a common cause or belief is focused upon. When applying this theory to the current state of education, we find a focus on the *what* that includes things such as “career and college readiness” or Common Core Standards for every single child to master. The Golden Circle’s *why* is what tends to be missing in education. Throughout the dissertation, references to purpose, actions, and evidence or proof will be synonymous with, and reciprocal to, the *why*, *how*, and *what* of the Golden Circle.

John Dewey addressed the concept of “why” when he described an affirmative view towards a progressive movement in education due to the manner in which a human is treated in the traditional, or industrial model, of education. However, he pointed out that this is not far enough and he was concerned that the favorable is only about what something causes instead of the actual reason for why something should be preferred (1938/1997, p. 34). His intention is for a depth of clarity and understanding of educators’ purpose (our why) and for supporting that purpose (the things we actually do, the *how* and *what* we do, that is directly related to the *why*) as well.

Dewey was continually promoting educational experiences for the purpose of continual growth. However, while widely known and celebrated, his work did not become the purpose for education during his time or now, as former professor emeritus

William A. Proefriedt has pointed out in *High Expectations* (2008). With *A Nation at Risk* (1983) being much more of an influence on contemporary practice, education in the United States today tends to focus on priorities such as the Common Core Standards (or state standards) for every single student to master or sending every child to college (i.e. “College and Career Ready”). An education for “getting to college” has become a means to an end, but for what purpose? It is the deeper “why” that is missing from education overall.

There are various calls for educational reform that have included moves towards creativity, collaboration, problem solving, or “21st Century Skills” as a focus. These can be argued for or against, but that is not the purpose of this dissertation. Rather, I argue that educators and policy-makers must reflect more deeply in regards to core beliefs about children and education with Dewey’s conception of growth as the purpose.

Examining the intent behind previous social and political movements in education provides insight into the ability of a society to desire, not necessarily provide, the best for each child in the educational setting and in life. However, intent and purpose differ in not only meaning, but also practical application.

According to Dewey (1938/1997), “...a purpose is an end-view. That is, it involves foresight of the consequences which will result from acting upon impulse. Foresight of consequences involves the operation of intelligence...” (p. 67) and this formation of purpose is complex, requiring observation, knowledge, and judgment (p. 68-69). The education *why* is “not a final end; it is an occasion and a demand for the formation of a plan and a method of activity” (p. 71) in direct support of the educational purpose.

In *Living as Learning* (2014), philosopher Daisaku Ikeda, in a conversation regarding how all children are unique, states, “one of Dewey’s unshakeable articles of faith was...working for the sake of children...we must always embrace in our hearts the key question, ‘For what purpose?’” (p. 71). It is through this lens, one inclusive of a reconstruction of the conception of growth as the purpose or why for education, that I proceed.

1.3 Growth Matters – Chapter Summaries

As human beings, we have the capacity for growth (physical, moral, social, emotional, etc.) and deserve to have experiences in support of this growth within a school environment. Dewey stated that the purpose of school education was,

to insure the continuance of education by organizing the powers that insure growth...to learn from life itself and to make the conditions of life such that all will learn in the process of living is the finest product of school. (Dewey, 1916/1944, p. 51)⁹

What Dewey was describing is something more than getting taller, improving test scores, participating in a class activity, or being a competitive individual within a free market.

An accurate understanding of John Dewey’s conception of growth must include the conditions and expressions necessary for it to occur. This includes immaturity, a term Dewey intentionally used to describe a power a person has for continual growth and which further explanation will be provided in Chapter 2, along with dependence, plasticity, and habits. Additionally, an accurate understanding of Dewey’s educative experience as the “how” of growth is necessary and must include the criteria or principles

and considerations of continuity, interaction, occupation, social control, and freedom. Dewey's conception of growth and educative experiences are further presented, explained, and expounded in Chapter 2.

To engage in the possibilities of a resurrected Deweyan conception of growth guiding school praxis, one must understand the limitations of the current use of growth. In Chapter 3, I will critique the three common uses of growth in schooling today: Achievement or Academic Growth, Professional Growth, and the Growth Mindset. I will clarify that common invocations of growth in schools today are vague conceptions and less precise and encompassing than what Dewey proposed as growth.

When Dewey stated that "what the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children" (1900/1990, p. 7) he was referring not only to what a democratic society needs to flourish, but also the connections between school and society as a whole. When referring to this, Noddings noted that, "the best and wisest parents would want for each of their children an education that matched his or her needs, capacities, and interests" (2005, p.44). As with Dewey and Noddings, I will bring a synthesis of thinking and procedural knowledge in considering what educative growth might be in Chapter 4, along with recommendations in Chapter 5 that are grounded in the fusing of current self, Deweyan philosophy and conceptions, and educative growth that is respectful of what the best and wisest parents would want for their children.

Dewey's philosophy or parts of his educational philosophy have been used to promote, or be negative towards, various educational reforms. But there has not been a fundamental focus on a Deweyan conception of growth as *the* purpose of education in the 21st Century. By revisiting Dewey's conception of growth in education, recognizing the

current limited conception of growth, and considering praxis in the 21st Century, this dissertation places a reconstructed conception of growth as the purpose for and philosophy of contemporary education.

CHAPTER 2: JOHN DEWEY'S CONCEPTION OF GROWTH

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the long-lived John Dewey developed his philosophy regarding growth. Although Dewey wrote about various conceptions in relation to living, society, and education, his conception of growth, along with experience, was central throughout his work. Embracing each person's natural capacity, his ability or power for growth (1916/1944, p. 41), and thoughtfully providing experiences which promote further growth were intentional for Dewey for a progressive education in a democratic society.

In education and in life, "each individual is a unique, one-time-only event" (Garrison, 2010, p. 52) and Dewey valued not only the individual, but also the individual as a part of a larger social group. Larry Hickman, in *Living as Learning* (2014), believes Dewey's notion of growth is the promotion of the natural capacities or powers within each individual human being within his or her life (p. 45).

In *Democracy and Education* (1916/1944), Dewey defined growth as a "cumulative movement of action toward a latter result" (p. 41) and would later clarify this when he explained, "in a certain sense every experience should do something to prepare a person for later experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality. That is the very meaning of growth – continuity and reconstruction of experience" (1938/1997, p. 47). He was clear throughout his writing and lectures that a mere definition of growth is still short of what is needed to understand and pursue such a concept in an educative way

and that everything depends upon how it is conceived (1916/1944, p. 49). To be complete defining requires action in addition to delineation.

Although it may seem sensible and simple to some to address a conception of growth by minimizing it to establishing standards or focusing on achievement scores in reading and math as goals or ends, for Dewey, it was not to be conceived as such. In *John Dewey: Rethinking Our Time* (1998), professor of philosophy Raymond Boisvert states that growth is the continual flowering and actualizing of possibilities and is a substantive, concrete process (p. 59). For example, a student that understands how to apply and blend various colors of painting oils onto a canvas today may begin to express feelings through the placement and blending of colors at another time. This may lead to the student utilizing other mediums to express feelings or tell a story. Freezing it to measure distorts it.

Each point of growth is meant to provide support of further growth. This process of continuation is supported in *What Good is Growth? Reconsidering Dewey on the Ends of Education* (2011) by political science professor R.W. Hildreth when noting that a Deweyan philosophy of education has intentional results of growth where such “ends become a part of a process, one stage in a continuum” (p. 34) of growth. This means and end of continual growth makes clearly identifying the types of experiences students might have and intentionally pursuing growth each day in an educational environment a complex and challenging endeavor.

This philosophical approach, used by Dewey throughout his writing and lectures, provides us with a more clearly articulated and deeper understanding of growth through

educative experiences. For Dewey, growth is the *why* of education. For clarity of this purpose, he shares the essential conditions and expression necessary for growth:

- Immaturity as a Power
- Dependence
- Plasticity and Habits

These conditions and expressions provide us an entry into better understanding Dewey's conception of growth. These also provide clarity for reconsidering and reconstructing growth for contemporary education. The next three sections address these separately to identify what each brings to growth. However, all are necessary for growth.

2.1 Growth: Immaturity as a Power

Dewey brought an approach to his beliefs and actions in which he always found value in the human potential intrinsically by their very nature of being. With that in mind, he embraced immaturity in his conception of growth, but not without purpose. He understood that, in a narrow view of growth, we fixate on a negative connotation of immaturity and states,

Our tendency to take immaturity as mere lack, and growth as something which fills the gap between the immature and the mature is due to regarding childhood *comparatively*, instead of intrinsically. We treat it simply as a privation because we are measuring by adulthood as a fixed standard. This fixes attention upon what the child has not. (Dewey, 1916/1944, p. 42)

In Dewey's conception of growth in education, being in the present is valued and immaturity is recognized as a positive force. Immaturity is part of the power humans have to grow. Growth is not something done to them; it is something they do (p. 42). A child has interests, strengths, curiosities, etc. that are natural to being human. At any moment, these are to be valued as the immature can grow from this point in time. Additionally, the immature are able to grow when expectations are aligned to the child and to that of an adult.

As an example, if a 5-year old child is playing with cars, as the book Kisisi (2016) so poignantly illustrates, he is interacting with objects that may be familiar to him. He is not worried about a driver's test he will have to pass at age 16 or driving to work on a crowded freeway at age 30. As adults, we would not view his play as not being ready for driving, rather we would view it as a child learning about the objects in-hand and using his imagination. This use of imagination and play at age five is a positive force.

Comparing what a child is doing now in play to a later adult standard does not make sense for Dewey's conception of growth. Immaturity is a natural power to be valued and an asset to being human. It is a positive force for growth and it demonstrates that we all have the ability to develop (1916/1944). No matter our age, we remain immature across our lifespan. This immaturity is a good thing as regardless of our stage in life, in the words of Paulo Freire (1998), we are all unfinished.

2.1.1 Growth: Dependence

One of the two traits of immaturity that Dewey identifies to promote growth is dependence. As he described it, "Growth not only is about the individual, but also about

the relationship with others. From a social standpoint, dependence also denotes a power rather than a weakness; it involves interdependence” (1916/1944, p. 44). From a baby relying on the physical and emotional assistance of a nurturing parent to a grandparent learning to use an iPad with the assistance of his grandchild to help understand what it can do for him, there can be a positive dependence which provides growth of the immature.

Dependence, in Dewey’s conception of growth, reflects the need for others and Dewey would argue that needing others is a combination that should endure across the lifespan. In a narrow view of growth, one where the belief is a person will “grow” with or without others, growth is limited physically, intellectually, socially, and emotionally. If a parent does not feed a child, the child will starve. If the child interacts with no one, the child will not be social. The point is that dependence is a natural, positive trait that is necessary for this conception of growth.

This does not mean that dependence is always positive. Too much can hinder an individual, for example a parent or teacher making decisions that a child could make, such as telling the child to make the sky blue in his painting. Or the adult might do what otherwise could be done by the child, such as routinely feeding her pet. However, we do not live in isolation in education for it is social and provides an environment in which dependence of an individual with another individual or group of people can be enacted upon for growth (“How do you see the sky?” or “Can I share in the care of a pet?”).

Dependence, when viewed in Dewey’s conception, is accompanied by increase in ability. Through [inter] dependence, more becomes possible. Growth is for all humans, not just the child. It is not merely about people who are struggling with something, rather

it is about continual growth wherever one is at in the present. Take for example a teenage girl learning to drive a car. There are certain things she may already know (where a key goes, how to start the car, etc.) and some skills she might not (how to brake, how to judge distances while turning, etc.). Having never driven before, she is unable to just get into a car and drive safely on the streets. This current lack of driving ability is not a negative, it is where she is at in a point in time. She is dependent upon someone else to guide her into growing as a driver. But the parent that helps coach her also learns something from the teaching of driving, and, eventually, the sense that the daughter can safely get herself to school, be sent to the grocery store to buy a missing ingredient, etc. For this driving situation to flourish, the young vulnerable driver is in need of someone that she is willing to listen and learn from and with whom she has a sense of trust. There is an awareness of expertise and a social relationship, much like the theory of ‘funds of knowledge’ (Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti, 2005).

Applying it to the possible PK-12 education, the condition of dependence in education requires an understanding of the needs of children, the needs of the individual and the group, the ability to view immaturity as a positive and natural power for growth, and the ability of the adult to interact and facilitate based upon those understandings and needs to further promote growth. For example, a small child may have an interest in butterflies and wants to learn more about them by reading. However, the books that have butterfly information are at a level that the child can’t read. The teacher understands this and knows that there are two other children that are also interested in learning about the butterflies. He puts the three together and lets the students talk about the pictures in the book and their experiences with butterflies, then has one of the children that can read

share the book information aloud. In this situation, the children's interests to learn about butterflies were met by the teacher's understanding of each child's strengths. The teacher was supportive at times, backed away at times, and positively viewed students' varying immaturity with a focus on their desire to learn more about butterflies.

2.1.2 Growth: Plasticity and Habits

The immature, with the power for growth, have the ability to learn from an experience and then utilize something from that experience in order to deal with a later situation. In Dewey's words, "this means power to modify actions on the basis of the results of prior experiences, the power to develop dispositions...the acquisition of habits" (1916/1944, p. 44). This is another essential trait Dewey identifies to promote growth. The trait of plasticity of the immature which is necessary for growth as the continual adjusting, adapting, considering, and learning from experience affects future experiences. Learning not only occurs because of plasticity, as each personal experience requires something learned to be utilized at another time, but also through the acquisition of a habit, such as the habit of learning; "he learns to learn" (p. 45). This gives credence to "life-long learning," which should not be dismissed even though it has become a cliché in education today. The habit of learning continues on with the individual as he experiences life.

From this ongoing learning and from experiencing something then retaining and applying it in another situation (plasticity), the human capacity to gain habits, or develop dispositions to formulate habits, occurs. According to Dewey, "A habit means an ability to use natural conditions as a means to an end and the ability of such changes to effect

subsequent changes in the environment” (p. 46) and over time these habits will “transform the environment” (p. 48). These habits, in relation to growth (and plasticity), are not to be confused with routines or what Dewey calls “unthinking” habits. One may think of a small child eager to learn about the world around her, then she goes to school and loses that desire because the habits that are being formed are unthinking, about a fixed standard, or merely an efficient skill. Ultimately, these habits formed within continual growth must enable the individual to “stand up and count for something in the actual conflicts of life” (Dewey, 1909/1975, p. 50).

This form of habit also addresses the emotional and intellectual and our “basic sensitivities and ways of meeting and responding to all the conditions which we meet in living” (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 35). Habits that are inclusive of the way in which an individual approaches each experience, adaptable and can change (are not “routine”), able to affect the experience had by the individual, and applicable in the future, are habits that allow for continued growth.

As an example, let us go back to the teenage girl learning to drive. She may be dependent upon an instructor or parent to learn and grow as a driver. Her first experience might be going slowly through a large, empty parking lot to learn about accelerating, stopping, and turning. She learns the feel of the pedals under her foot, recognizes the challenges of parking next to a pole, and notes that she needs a lot more practice. Her plasticity is highlighted, as the next time out her acceleration, stopping, and turning may be smoother; her sense of surroundings and observations may be heightened. Her patience and confidence may be increasing as she adjusts, adapts, learns, etc. from one practice session to the next session.

Dewey believed that life is growing and growing is life, which means education has no end beyond itself and the educational process is continually reorganizing, reconstructing, and transforming (1916/1944, pp. 49-50). Providing a deeper context for growth, which includes its conditions and expressions, enables one to have an understanding that growth is not just something we physically do (height, weight, etc.), but that we also grow intellectually, emotionally, and socially as human beings. We have the natural capacity to grow. It is our being and who we are becoming. In the educative sense, being human is inclusive of immaturity, dependence, plasticity and habits to utilize the natural power of growing.

2.2 How to Grow: Dewey's Conception of Educative Experience

Returning to Simon Sinek's Golden Circle model, for Dewey the *why* of education is growth. However, this leaves us with the *how* of the circle. How does one grow in education? Although Dewey had a clear focus on growth in *Democracy and Education*, with reference to experience, he later articulated a focus on a philosophy of experience as expressed in *Experience and Education* (1938/1997) that further illuminated how he conceptualized growth. In education, Dewey believed that the philosophy of experience should be approached from an educative viewpoint and form its principles by a comprehensive, constructive survey of actual needs, problems, and possibilities (p. 6). A philosophy of educative experience cannot simply be the opposite of a traditional practice, such as being against the concept of reading and math accountability measurement therefore believing that there should be no reading and math measurements.

Dewey does not necessarily define experience (experience is _____.). Instead he actually expounded upon a philosophy of experience as it is connected to education and schooling. He pointed out that experiences are continuously occurring. However the kind of experience Dewey was referring to is one that he considers “*an*” experience and explains it in this manner:

A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives a solution; a game is played through; a situation, whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation, writing a book, or taking part in a political campaign, is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation. Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-efficacy. It is *an* experience. (Dewey, 1934, pp. 36-37)

Taking this further in relation to education, Dewey (1938/1997) stated that, “experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are mis-educative. Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting growth of further experiences” (p. 25). And here we see the key tie-in to growth. Because growth is both a means and an end, any experience that discourages subsequent growth should be avoided or overcome.

Dewey goes on to note that we need to be considerate of the quality of each experience as “every experience lives on in further experiences” (p. 27). For Dewey, the conception of experience is distinctive and essential to education. It is deeply intertwined with growth, but ultimately subordinate to it in a Dewey taxonomy of education.

As he previously had done with growth, Dewey modeled delving deeper into understanding a philosophy of experience in various writings and lectures during his lifetime. Dewey identified experience as vital for the purpose of education. He states,

The more definitely and sincerely it is held that education is a development within, by, and for experience, the more important it is that there shall be clear conceptions of what experience is. Unless experience is so conceived that the result is a plan for deciding upon subject-matter, upon methods of instruction and discipline, and upon material equipment and social organization of the school, it is wholly in the air. It is reduced to a form of words which may be emotionally stirring but for which any other set of words might equally well be substituted unless they indicate operations to be indicated and executed. (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 28)

In Dewey's view, the concrete actions and pedagogy of education must derive from a conception of experience that promotes more growth.

An experience is inclusive of a person within an environment (the physical, social, objective conditions such as equipment, tone of voice, etc.) in which he/she is located. Yes, we all have experiences, but not all are *an* experience as Dewey was addressing within his work. Dewey provides the criteria or principles he believes are necessary for an experience in education as well as some areas to carefully navigate:

- Principle of Continuity
- Principle of Interaction (and Situations)
- Social Control and Freedom (Form a Purpose)

As with growth, these criteria and principles provide us an entry into better understanding of what Dewey refers to as an educative experience, or an experience which promotes growth. These too provide clarity for reconsidering and reconstructing growth for contemporary education. The following three sections address these criteria or principles separately to identify what each brings to an experience, but all of these are necessary for the purpose of having an educative experience.

2.2.1 Educative Experience: Principle of Continuity

The principle of continuity is needed in order to assist in discerning those experiences which are worthy and those that are mis-educative. This principle is the connection of past, present, and future experiences and requires a connection to why something is or is not preferred. Such as “why we prefer democratic and humane arrangements to those which are autocratic and harsh” (1938/1997, p. 34). Continuity is also a principle that requires involvement of habit. A habit that is the “formation of attitudes, attitudes that are emotional and intellectual; it covers our basic sensitivities and ways of meeting and responding to all conditions which we meet in living” (p. 35). This echoes a point I made in the earlier direct review of growth and, as such, highlights how intertwined Dewey’s thinking was about growth and experience.

However, since Dewey aims to discriminate between a worthy and non-worthy experience, having a purpose that includes habits is not enough in his view. To discriminate between these experiences, “growth, or growing as developing, not only physically but intellectually and morally, is one exemplification of the principle of continuity” (p. 36) with the quality of the present experience influencing the manner in

which this principle is applied (p. 37). The aim is not to have an experience that stops or limits the growth of a child, or the immature; it is to promote growth. Therefore, the continuity principle requires one to ask if an experience creates the conditions for continuing growth.

2.2.2 Educative Experience: Interactions & Situations - Internal & Objective Conditions

These experiences are not simplistic and each involves internal and objective conditions. The internal conditions are about the individual having the experience. The individual brings his past experiences, along with his current level of immaturity, habits, and dispositions, into the experience. The individual also brings interests to the experience. Dewey stated that there are human interests such as “conversation, or communication; in inquiry, or finding things out; in making things, or construction, and in artistic expression” (1900/1990, p. 47) that depend on active growth. Certainly, there are things in life that do not interest an individual, and such lack of interest is also part of the internal conditions.

The objective conditions are the elements of an experience that the individual is stepping into. Dewey (1938/1997) maintains that this includes the physical environment – “whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience that is had” as well as the impact of previous experiences and the current context (p. 44). Objective conditions also include others within the given environment, adults and children, who are also bringing their internal conditions to the experience. These objective and internal conditions, when coming together within the

experience, form what Dewey refers to as an interaction. This is the second principle utilized to discern how worthwhile an experience is, and when combined form a “situation” (p. 42).

In an experience the two principles that have been described – continuity and interaction – work together. The individual’s interaction, forming a situation, provides an opportunity for continued growth of the individual (continuity) thus creating a worthy educative experience. As an example, consider again the teenage girl (driver) learning how to drive a car. The individual has an adult with her, a specific type of car, a place and purpose to drive the car (which, depending upon previous experiences, may still be a parking lot or has moved on to a neighborhood street or highway), rules to follow, symbols to look for, other drivers to consider, etc. These factors create an interaction and specific situation.

The driver may drive on a side road today, a move away from the empty parking lot, getting a feel for the car in this context. This is something she may not have experienced before, something in which she has been looking forward to and interested in learning about, and it will allow for continual growth as she will be able to take this experience and expand upon it in future experiences, just as she had previously done with driving in the empty parking lot.

She not only learns to apply “driving” in new contexts, but she also may be learning about interacting with other drivers (and passengers), abiding by rules of the road, etc. while forming habits and adding to the quality of the situation. This has meaning to the driver in the here and now, as well as to future endeavors. The experience provides continual growth based upon the interactions involved.

2.2.3 Educative Experience: Social Control and Freedom (Form a Purpose)

To provide more context for experience (still within the principles of continuity and interactions), Dewey believed we must take into account social control and individual freedom and purpose while still maintaining growth and quality. He addressed the reason why when agreeing to a “belief that democratic social arrangements promote a better quality of human experience” and “regard for individual freedom and for the decency and kindness of human relations come back in the end to the conviction that these things are tributary to a higher quality of experience” (1938/1997, p. 34). Being overly controlling or exercising no control at all does not always serve the needs of the learner. It is not the will or desire of any one person which establishes order, but the moving spirit of the whole group. The control is social, but individuals are part of a community, not outside of it (p. 54).

As an example of social control, again using the learning to drive experience, there are rules to abide by when one is driving. These rules enable the individual and the community to drive safely. Since these rules still enable the individual to drive in various contexts (neighborhood road speed or highway speed), it is an acceptable social control that does not overly infringe upon the individual’s freedom to drive while also looking out for the best interest (safety and well-being) of the community.

The point is that experiences which do have social control and individual freedom can still be maintained. This is not to be misinterpreted that every rule meets such criteria. There are rules that are held over others for the purpose (although not necessarily explicitly stated) of power and control that are different than a social control where individual freedom is valued. For example, the social control that is needed in

school for “drop everything and read” (i.e., D.E.A.R. time) to work requires a specified time in the day and for children to all have a book to read during the specific time. There may be freedom of choice in what a child is reading, but an adult decides when and where this is to occur.

As far as freedom is concerned, Dewey (1938/1997) states that, “the only freedom that is of enduring importance is freedom of intelligence, that is to say, freedom of observation and of judgment exercised on behalf of purposes that are intrinsically worthwhile” (p. 61). Dewey notes that confusing the external movement or physical side of an activity with the internal side is often a mistake. For example, restricting the external or physical movement in an educational setting (staying seated in rows) also restricts the internal movement.

From freedom, according to Dewey, an individual is able to form a purpose and carry the purpose out. The formation of purpose involves (1) observation of surrounding conditions; (2) knowledge of what has happened in similar situations in the past; and (3) judgment which puts together what is observed and what is recalled to see what they signify (p. 69). This purpose to action that Dewey describes is much like the concept of agency. The Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University, in *The Influence of Teaching, Beyond Standardized Test Scores: Engagement, Mindsets, and Agency* (2015), describes agency as “the capacity and propensity to take purposeful initiative...to seek meaning and act with purpose to achieve the conditions they desire in their own and others’ lives” (p. 1). Ultimately, an educative experience inclusive of social control and freedom requires a person to exhibit her agency.

Again, in the context of learning to drive, the teenager (driver) must be aware of the road she is traveling, the car, the road conditions, the traffic level, etc., and be able to reflect upon past driving experiences (which could also be as a passenger in a car or as the actual driver). A driver must simultaneously form a judgment of what might be expected in this current situation of driving and engage in a purposeful driving experience.

Still, within this driving experience, the driver could have the impulse or desire to speed. The driving instructor (or teacher or parent) providing guidance and support within this situation must be “intelligently aware of the capacities, needs, and past experiences of those under instruction and allow for suggestions made” (1916/1944, p. 71). In addition to the driver intelligently understanding and demonstrating self-control, he or she must understand that driving a reasonable rather than excessive velocity is important in this situation.

In this context, the driver is using multiple levels of knowledge and skills which, through continual reasoning, analysis of the situation, problem solving, and the like, empower him or her to take the actions necessary to apply driving in this new experience. This example also acknowledges that the capacity to drive fast can feel exhilarating. Part of agency includes agreement to curtail freedom (the prospect of going as fast as possible) with the idea that what one *can* do is not necessarily what one should do.

Providing a deeper context for experiences, which includes continuity and interaction within a democratic and humane context valuing individual freedom and purpose and social control, allows for greater understanding of experience. To enable and cultivate growth, the intellectual and intrinsically motivated human being is valued

within experiences that are aimed at being educative. In an educative sense, individuals engage in worthy experiences that draw upon their natural powers and abilities for growth and are based upon the principles of continuity and interaction. The experience which is educative is an experience that includes the criteria and principles promoted by Dewey and provides continued growth of those within it. This is what separates the educative experience for growth from the non-educative experience.

2.4 Conclusion

Dewey's conception of growth, inclusive of the power of immaturity, dependence, plasticity, and habits, provides a purpose for education. Dewey (1938/1997) believed that "growth is education and education is growth" (p. 36). He believed the process of education "has no end beyond itself," it is its own end. It is a process of "continual reorganizing, reconstructing, and transforming" (1916/1944, p. 50). Growth is Dewey's *why*, or purpose, for education and schooling.

Dewey's conception of educative experience is how growth is continually promoted and cultivated. Continuity, situations and interactions, and context create the conditions of educative experiences for growth. Dewey's conception of growth, as educational means and ends, calls for continual reconstruction, meaning the context of education and of society today matters. In contrast, the current dominant conception of growth in education, with the ends of improved achievement scores focused in language arts and math, offers no such reconstruction.

Dewey's conception of growth embraces the capacities (as powers), interests, and needs of human beings and thoughtful educative experiences. However, Dewey's

conception of growth and the educative experiences for growth are not the same as what is being applied in education today. The current conceptions of growth are unreconciled and are derived from a different purpose of education in which student growth, professional growth, and a growth mindset are narrow and limited, as we will turn to next.

CHAPTER 3:

THE UNRECONCILED CONCEPTION OF GROWTH IN EDUCATION TODAY

Educational policy makers, such as the Committee of Ten in 1892 and state and local governments, have played a role in creating the current context of education throughout the United States in general, and Nebraska in particular. The Committee of Ten was commissioned by the National Education Association and was chaired by Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard University. The committee had several tasks, which included identifying school courses of study for six to eighteen year olds, the amount of time that should be devoted to subjects and schooling, and what should count towards college entrance requirements. Although public schooling was already occurring in the 1800's, it was the 1893 report from the Committee of Ten that helped shape the concept of grade levels and specific content in the high school, such as algebra, English, geometry, and the systemization of this form of education as further discussed by former Professor of Educational Policy Studies Herbert Kliebard (1995) and Proefriedt (2008).

A review of school or district graduation requirements today, reflective of state rules and regulations, demonstrates the impact of this committee as three or four years of math and English are a part of a student's course work. As an example, School District 145 in Nebraska requires 4 years of English and 3 years of math (as well as 3 years of science and social studies). These account for 130 credits of the 220 needed to graduate and reflects the Nebraska Department of Education Rule 10 regulations and procedures.

Some of the recent federal and state laws, such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), require equality for students within these grades and courses

through standards and measured achievement. State and local agencies, namely the department of education, school districts, and boards of education, then are responsible for establishing policies that reflect the law, while teachers, schools, and districts retain some discretion regarding what happens.

Within this larger context of education and grade levels, which I will refer to as a traditional education, the use of the term “growth” has become commonplace in the past few decades. What was once occasional use, such as professional journal publications on teacher growth, has now become a common terminology for referencing students, professional development, and student and educator mindsets.

In contemporary education, hearing an educator speak about having a growth mindset or wanting to have students grow is a frequent occurrence. Doing a web search for the conception of growth in the context of education, or an even more specific search on an educational site, such as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), provides literally millions of hits in connection to the three aforementioned manifestations.

Each of these current conceptions of growth have day-to-day implications for children and adults in contemporary education and each has narrow and limited meaning. These current conceptions are more aligned with the definition which described “the process of increasing” something as growth. The following sections detail these three dominant invocations of growth.

3.1 Achievement or Academic Growth

The inception of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 called for the measure of educational achievement if a state or district were to receive a special grant.¹⁰ The intent was to provide students in need with equal opportunity to achieve in school with a focus in the areas of reading and math. From this, Title 1 funds were available to districts and schools for their students with low socio-economic status to improve their achievement. (See Sandra J. Stein's 2004 book, *The Culture of Education Policy*, for a more in-depth analysis of ESEA of 1965 and the subsequent updates of the law with the exception of the most recent ESSA.)

However, in the 2002 version of the law, known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (and with many states and districts receiving federal funding) the language changed to supporting the “growth” of children. NCLB required elementary and secondary schools to measure progress on academic assessments in the areas of reading or language arts, mathematics, and science. Through this new law of accountability, a reductionist achievement or academic growth conception took shape. The latest reauthorization of ESEA, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, built upon the previous version and further emphasized measures of student academic proficiency and growth, specifically in the area of English Language Arts (ELA) or reading and mathematics.

At the same time, there has been a relative decline in the curriculum emphasizing social studies. Even as the National Council of Social Studies has called for an upgrade to state standards and the strengthening of practices in schools as described in the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework, this decline is due in part because it is

more difficult to measure the type of achievement or academic growth in social studies described in the recent accountability laws as well as not being included in the law itself.

The Glossary of Education Reform by Great Schools Partnerships defines achievement growth as the:

Academic progress made over a period of time, as measured from the beginning to the end of the defined period. Achievement growth can be tracked and determined for individual students, schools, states, or countries, and a wide variety of variables and methodologies may be used to determine whether “growth” is being achieved.

In general, achievement growth is tracked and calculated to determine how effectively or how quickly students, schools, states, or countries are improving, and “achievement” is most commonly measured using standardized-test scores—although other metrics, such as graduation rates, may be included in certain methods or reports. Achievement growth is also commonly reported in a comparative format—i.e., how different states or countries, for example, are improving achievement in comparison to one another, or how certain groups of students, such as minorities or English-language learners, may be improving comparatively. (Great Schools Partnership, 2013, np)¹¹

This form of growth required changes at the state and local levels of education. For example, to align with the updated legislation, school board policies needed to be updated. School district statements similar to “The District utilizes national, state and local student assessments as needed to determine the academic growth of [the] student”¹²

were established or updated across the United States. Some states (notably Nebraska – see Chris W. Gallagher’s *Reclaiming Assessment* [2007]) resisted this narrowing for several years before capitulating.

In the context of growth within an accountability regime, determining academic or achievement growth is done through measures within a defined growth model. In 2008, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) created the *Implementer’s Guide to Growth Models* as a “how to” for measuring this growth. In this document, the CCSSO states that growth models:

refer to models of education accountability that measure progress by tracking the achievement scores of the same student from one year to the next with the intent of determining whether or not, on average, the student made progress. For example, growth in learning can be measured by comparing the performance of a fourth grader this year with the performance of the same student last year in the third grade. Achievement growth over time at the school level is then the aggregate of growth for individual students. By comparing data for the same students over time, progress can be defined as the degree to which students’ estimated improvement compares to a statewide or local target. Growth models account for the cumulative process of learning by modeling achievement growth over time. (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008, p. 4)

Children’s achievement and academic growth in the current state of education is reflective of an emphasis of core academic content and testing. These required measurements, as identified by state and local education agencies to meet legislative

requirements, focus primarily on standards of English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics, with a smaller focus on science.

In the state of Nebraska, state accountability testing known as NeSA is required for all students in grades 3-8 and 11 for ELA and mathematics. Science is also tested in grades 5, 8, and 11. The initial NeSA testing in reading started in 2009 with mathematics following in 2010. Some Nebraska teachers assisted in the process of developing test questions which reflected state standards, although more had participated in the previous 'state' education system, which required districts to create assessments that measured students progress on state standards (Gallagher, 2007).

Per NCLB, these NeSA tests have been used for federal accountability to show adequate yearly progress (AYP) in which a certain percentage of students were to meet proficiency scores that were set by the United States Department of Education each year. With updates over time to the federal law, a purported growth measure was added. This consisted of comparing a student's test scores from one year to the next, comparing a group of students from one year to the next, and comparing the same grade level (almost entirely different students) from one year to the next (Phillips, 2017).

This new testing has come into being concurrent with a new mantra of career and college readiness. State standards must expect students to meet a career and college ready level, so state tests must reflect this as well. Epitomizing this in 2016-17, the state of Nebraska adopted the ACT college entrance exam as the state test for 11th grade students. The impact of this test is unknown at this time but the logic for the change was to address 'college readiness standards' and to reduce (by one) the number of tests high school juniors would take (as noted in the *Update: Standards, Assessment, and*

Accountability [SAA-19] received via personal communication from the Nebraska Department of Education on April 17, 2017).

Additionally, a test that has become popular around the United States and within Nebraska is the Measure of Academic Progress developed by Northwest Evaluation Association (i.e., NWEA MAP). This is another testing system, with a focus in the areas of reading and math. The *Northwest Evaluation Association: Measurement of Academic Progress, Glossary of Terms* (2012) also refers to growth as “the change in a student’s score and improvement over time” (p. 2).

The conception of growth, in relation to children and in the current state of education, has become defined by measurement from standardized tests compared over time. In all that a child does as a part of his schooling, the conception of growth is primarily about the English Language Arts (reading) and mathematics.

The 2007 book *Annual Growth for All Students, Catch-Up Growth for Those Who are Behind* by educators Lynn Fielding, Nancy Kerr, and Paul Rosier, is about Kennewick Schools in Washington State and how students here increased their test scores. The authors of this text exemplify this limited concept of reading and math as growth. After a lead into the executive summary of, “This is a ‘how to’ book – how to get 90-95% of your students to your state’s reading and math standards” (p. XIII), they state:

America is in the midst of a long educational reform. The aim of the reform is to assure that our top 60% of students continue to make annual growth while the remaining 40% of students, who have not achieved

minimum state standards, make annual growth plus necessary catch-up growth. Teaching all children to read and do math proficiently has always been the promise of public education. (Fielding, Kerr, and Rosier, 2007, p. XIII)

Acknowledging the tasks of teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic have deep Jeffersonian roots, Fielding et al. ignore the other longstanding charges for schools to support democracy, to “awaken children to cultural values” and to build habits of reflection, self-regulation, and aesthetic appreciation (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954).

Instead, how a student does from one measured point-in-time on a reading or math assessment to another specified point-in-time on a reading or math assessment is what it means for her to grow in education today. Put another way, student growth has been reduced to an increase in scoring on tests measured over time. A student who does not have an increase in test scores, or has a decrease, is not a student that is growing in education today.

Could schools create tests in other areas (i.e. social studies, art, etc.) and do the same increase equals growth approach? Yes. However that would only be a one-dimensional expansion in what counts as growth (still test scores, still academic content areas, still nothing about habits, dispositions or curiosities). The conception would remain the same where an increase in a score is not only called growth, but also is the entirety of what it means for a human being to grow in the context of education.

3.2 Professional Growth

This conception is about the students in traditional schools. The term and conception of growth in today's schools also has implications for the adults in education. Beyond student growth, we move to professional growth. Although education research has been written for decades, professional growth for educators has been guided by a similar, limited conception. Proof of supposed professional growth is based on student achievement growth that is grounded in accountability legislation. The current inclusion of this kind of professional growth is a requirement at the federal, state, and local agency levels.

Starting at the federal level, the addition of the terminology "professional growth" is a recent event. The original ESEA document only makes one reference and that is to the development and strengthening of training staff and curricular capability of such training.¹³ With NCLB, the promoting of professional growth is added without reference to what growth means for an educator. In the current form of ESEA, i.e., ESSA, the promotion of a stilted non-Deweyan version of professional growth remains. However, it is included as a measurement through evaluation that features student achievement growth. As described earlier (see p. 8), Chicago Public Schools' teachers have 15% of their evaluation based upon their students' test scores on NWEA MAP.

At the state level, Nebraska legislation requires evidence of professional growth.¹⁴ During each six-year period of employment, this may include six semester hours of college credit or other activities approved by the local school board. This may include work on educational committees, attending educational conferences, and professional publications. While these requirements reduce professional growth to activity

irrespective of whether the activity actually leads to intended learning), they at least relate to what the teacher does rather than a supposed outcome (student test scores) of what a teacher does.

Many school districts have board policies that make a similar statement regarding professional growth for employees. An example from public record documents comes from Lincoln Public Schools in Nebraska:¹⁵

- Policy 4930 states that professional development facilitates the personal and professional growth of all employees. The program provides opportunities for professional growth focused on increasing Student Success. The purpose of professional development is to support the career growth of all individuals in the district to improve their performance in their present job assignment, to increase job satisfaction, and to affect continuous academic improvement for all students.
- Policy 4950 states the professional growth requirements and refers to professional work or activities which contribute to professional growth.
- Both policies are supported by regulation 4950.1, which creates a point system for professional growth activities and outlines which activities are currently acceptable by the school system.

Although under Policy 4950 educators are able to take college courses, attend conferences, and participate in other educational activities to meet expectations of the professional growth policies and practices, the policies do not define what growth actually is for a professional. Additionally because Lincoln Public Schools accepts federal funds, with the passing of ESSA, a new element has been added to measuring

educators (and schools). As noted by Great Schools Partnership,¹⁶ student achievement growth intersects with efforts to improve public schools in a variety of ways, typically by using achievement growth as a factor when making important decisions about schools or educators. For example, teacher compensation or job security may be based in part on achievement-growth measures, or schools may be subject to penalties or negative publicity if they fail to achieve expected levels of growth.

Much like a student's growth is currently conceived as an increase in test scores over time, an educator's growth is measured by participation in certain educational activities over time. However, within educational accountability today, the caveat is that professional growth activities in which an educator participates should also "translate to improved student learning."¹⁷ More specifically, it should reflect student achievement growth that is predominantly focused on ELA or reading and mathematics and measured largely through standardized testing.

Returning to *Annual Growth for All Students, Catch-Up Growth for Those Who Are Behind* (2007), Fielding et al. note that professionals:

Are committed to continual professional growth through staff development, teaming with colleagues, and studying educational research journals. They use precise data about students to guide instructional decisions and adjust lesson plans to target the learning levels of each child. Excellent instruction is essential for annual growth. Spring third-grade reading scores are a result of all that comes before. (Fielding, Kerr, and Rosier, 2007, p. 59)

Although Fielding et al. describe teachers as professionals who are working collaboratively and participating in studying and learning (about reading instruction), the educational focus of growth is limited to increasing the reading scores of children. Moreover, that narrow focus ignores how little what teachers do explains test scores. As educational psychologist David Berliner and education researcher Gene Glass note in *50 Myths and Lies That Threaten America's Public Schools* (2014), less than 30% of students measured achievement comes from school practices (p. 51).

3.3 Growth Mindset

With the focus of both student and professional growth being connected to achievement testing, a third conception of growth has slowly become a part of education today; a concept that initially is more beguiling.

The third manifestation of growth in education today is that of the growth mindset. This framing of growth usually is attributed to Carol S. Dweck from her book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (2006). Dweck's growth mindset is a belief that a person's basic qualities are characteristics that can be cultivated through effort (p. 7). The growth mindset, according to Dweck, allows for people to value what they're doing regardless of the outcome. They are able to tackle problems, start new courses, and work on important issues (p. 48). What some may not know is that Dweck had previously co-authored a study in 1988 with Ellen L. Leggett entitled "A Social-Cognitive Approach to Motivation and Personality" in which they describe the following two entities:

Some children favor what we have termed an incremental theory of intelligence: They believe that intelligence is a malleable, increasable, controllable quality. Others lean more toward an entity theory of intelligence: They believe that intelligence is a fixed or uncontrollable trait. Our research consistently indicates that children who believe intelligence is increasable pursue the learning goal of increasing their competence, whereas those who believe intelligence is a fixed entity are more likely to pursue the performance goal of securing positive judgments of that entity or preventing negative judgments of it. (Dweck and Leggett, 1988, pp. 262-263)

The change in terminology from the original *incremental theory* from the 1988 research article, to today's *growth mindset*, has occurred around the same time and in connection with changes in contemporary schooling. Specifically, Dweck's reorientation comes with a rise in 'growth as achievement' and 'growth as a professional' being included in educational legislation and policies. Where as incremental, or increases, would better describe the current objective of academic measures and those measures being tied to how well a teacher is performing, the narrowed use and conception of growth is utilized.

The idea of putting forth effort, staying positive, and persevering makes sense to educators. So Dweck's work is, not surprisingly, resonant. With that, the "have a growth mindset" movement has made its way into education and schools in the context of achievement and academic growth. This mindset became "the right thing to have, the right way to think. It was as though educators were faced with a choice: Are you an

enlightened person who fosters students' well-being? Or are you an unenlightened person, with a fixed mindset, who undermines them?" (Dweck, 2015, p. 24).

However, using the term "growth mindset" was not leading to the actions Dweck intended. Dweck clarified this in a commentary in *Education Week* stating, "the growth mindset was intended to help close the achievement gaps, not hide them. It is about telling the truth about a student's current achievement and then, together, doing something about it, helping him or her become smarter," and that, "effort is a means to an end to the goal of learning and improving" (2015, p. 20). So Dweck herself has advocated her ideas to schooling, but not necessarily in the ways they have actually been taken up.

As her 1988 study with Leggett emphasized, students, or, more aptly, children can have different attitudes about learning. But presumably, these attitudes are both autobiographic and holistic; they are about self in relation to the world. They are not mainly about reading or writing or math or even, strictly, academic identity. When they are viewed only as they pertain to this test-scoreable triumvirate, we risk profoundly distorting what it is that informs or demonstrates students' learning dispositions. Unfortunately, the achievement gaps come from required testing in the areas of reading and math, so a growth mindset in education today is aimed at increasing these test scores for students.

Dweck has provided some ways to encourage and communicate a growth mindset to students (2015, p. 24) with the examples connected to mathematics:

- When you learn a new kind of problem, it grows your math brain!

- If you catch yourself saying, “I’m not a math person,” just add the word “yet” to the end of the sentence.
- That feeling of math being hard is the feeling of your brain growing.
- The point isn’t to get it all right away. The point is to grow your understanding step by step. What can you try next?

Whether the terminology used is incremental theory or growth mindset, the educational purpose has been set for contemporary education in relation to student achievement. In her own more recent words, Dweck makes it clear that increasing achievement is the goal and she provides examples from mathematics for a familiar “how to” for educators today in the classroom. Her work could critique the closing achievement gaps emphasis of federal accountability, through No Child Left Behind and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and through state legislation that has mandated ‘something’ be done using student achievement with growth measured through multiple point-in-time assessments. Dweck’s theorizing could embrace larger Deweyan concepts and could challenge the reduction of growth to test scores in a few key subjects. But she herself has not embraced this possibility; instead, she has endeavored to see how the ‘growth mindset’ can pertain within the existing paradigm.

3.4 Conclusion

The current dominant conceptions of growth in education involve students and adults (professionals) and their mindsets as revealed by performance on tests. These conceptions primarily place a focus on the English Language Arts and mathematics achievement of students. They are measured through multiple content assessments over

time. Whether measuring student achievement growth, outlining professional growth, or providing feedback and support to help students believe they can improve through a certain growth mindset, each conception of growth ultimately comes back to a narrow conception of learning as reflected mostly on assessments in reading and mathematics.

John Dewey expressed that all human beings have capacities, and this can have a negative or positive connotation. It could be negative, if human capacity is viewed as being receptive, such as having the capacity to hold something as if a measuring device. It can also be positive, with capacity viewed as an ability and a power to do something. These unique powers each person has, in addition to aptitudes in reading or math or even science, is my starting point for stating that the current conceptions of growth are too narrow.

Nel Noddings articulates the point that:

[T]he capacities that have traditionally been most highly valued in schools are linguistic and logical mathematical. These are the capacities recognized and drawn upon in the liberal arts curriculum. If these two lie at the heart of liberal education, then students who are best endowed with these capacities and most interested in developing them will succeed and, predictably, students with other capacities will feel inferior, rejected, out of place, bored, and perhaps hostile. Forcing all students through a curriculum designed for the capacities of a few cannot be done in the service of equality... at any rate, it is clear that an education that values and builds upon only a small part of human capacity cannot be the best education for all. (Noddings, 2005, p. 31)

Like Noddings points out, there is a narrow focus on English Language Arts and mathematics in schools today. This is not to say reading and math are unimportant. These two areas are important for being a literate person. However, there is more to a human being than reading and math. For the immature with the power to grow, this narrow focus limits the opportunity for students in schools today, not just in courses that a student might take, but in the opportunity to pursue one's interests, strengths, and talents or to be creative or think critically.

This disconnect that Noddings refers to is not uncommon. Even Dweck provides an example of this:

John Holt, the great educator, says that these are the games all human beings play when others are sitting in Judgment of them. "The worst student we had, the worst I have ever encountered, was in his life outside the classroom as mature, intelligent, and interesting a person as anyone at the school. What went wrong?... Somewhere along the line, his intelligence became disconnected from his schooling. (Dweck, 2006, pp. 58-59)

Although Dweck's purpose is to justify how growth mindset is of value, she is making a hazardous assumption. She infers that if the student's mindset for school, which is in large part schooling for reading and math (or life in the classroom), was in the form of growth, then the student would be connected to school and demonstrate his same "mature, intelligent, and interesting" self inside of school as he does outside of it. Reading and mathematics remain singularly paramount. When the focus is on such a narrow view of the capacities of students and educators, then growth is also narrowed.

This disconnect described by Holt (in Dweck's text) is the whole child from the school, his interests, talents, passions, and skills and not just his intelligence.

Again, this is not to say that the language arts and mathematics, or core content for that matter, are not important. These are important pieces in being and becoming a literate participant in society. However, placing *the* focus on these two, along with accountability measurement outlining how students and educators grow, limits the possibilities that living and being goes beyond reading, math, and assessment scores.

In connection to the *why*, *how*, and *what* model of the Golden Circle (referenced in section 1.2), contemporary education is focusing on a conception of growth that is the *what* of achievement test scores and evaluation scores and that are purportedly supported by the *how's* of various professional activities. The *why* is not clear and one is left to infer that the purpose of school is for measurable reading and mathematics achievement.

John Dewey understood the disconnect created by a narrow, and imposed, viewpoint of schooling. He explained,

[T]he traditional scheme is, in a sense, one of imposition from above and from outside. It imposes adult standards, subject-matter, and methods upon those who are only growing slowly towards maturity. The gap is so great that the required subject-matter, the methods of learning and of behaving are foreign to the existing capacities of the young. They are beyond the reach of the experience the young learners already possess. Consequently, they must be imposed; even though good teachers will use devices of art to cover up the imposition so as to relieve it of obviously brutal features. (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 19)

The narrow and imposed viewpoint within schools today is reflected by the level to which reading and mathematics have defined the conception of growth in education today. Through this lens, the gap between imposed adult standards, subject-matter focused primarily on the language arts and math, the methods that Dewey laments, and the nature of children that he celebrates still exist. Contemporary growth is defined by student assessments over time, professional activities that are to help educators improve those student assessment scores or achievement over time, and the utilization of an incremental mindset in which one believes he has the ability to increase his reading and math scores.

This current narrowed version of education in which the disciplines of English Language Arts and mathematics are held as the measuring stick of growth, feeds into existing Neoliberalism, as these limited achievement test scores allow for clear winners and losers in market competition. Schools that do not meet the required scoring cut are labeled as losers. In turn, the call for school choice and privatization of schools continues to gain momentum. Education as competition in a free market, as seen through the lens of the Neoliberal, will raise achievement for students in a new setting and translates into some schools making it while others will not and therefore be forced to close down. A reduction in funding, public perception, and opportunities within neighborhoods and communities cause an even greater focus on test score achievement and perpetuates a restricted conception of growth as a unique human being.

Although there is more to being human than English Language Arts and mathematics achievement – for example, one’s identity and understanding “who I am” and “who am I as a part of something greater than myself,” such possibilities are neither

promoted nor celebrated or valued in today's schools. The current conception of growth with its narrow focus underserves the possibilities of children and adults in contemporary education and is not reflective of Dewey's conception of growth and educative experience. So it is time to re-imagine school praxis with a reconsidered and reconstructed conception of growth as Dewey once promoted.

CHAPTER 4:
RE-IMAGINING RICHER SCHOOL PRAXIS THROUGH DEWEYAN
GROWTH

John Dewey provided a conception of growth through education that included a positive view of human capacities (power for the immature to grow), human relationships (dependence), and the formation of habits. Chapter 2 already focused on the Deweyan philosophy of growth in education and the elements necessary to support it. Chapter 3 presented the three forms of growth currently promoted in contemporary education that are more narrow in conception even as they dominate application. Both chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate that how growth is conceived matters.

Although contemporary educators invoke Dewey via famous quotes and reference growth in generalized terms, Dewey is not commonly read and his work is not much understood nor evident in the context of public education today. This chapter brings a Deweyan conception of growth to provide a re-imagined school praxis for a Deweyan vision of the growth of the child (as student), the growth of the adult (as professional), and the mindset of growth.

As reflected in Chapter 3, the educational *why*, or purpose of schooling, is often not clear. Instead, only the *how* and *what* of improved student achievement through narrow teaching and then student testing and evaluation of staff, are the current practices of today. Along these lines, Nel Noddings provokes,

It is as though our society has simply decided that the purpose of schooling is economic, to improve the financial condition of the

individuals and to advance the prosperity of the nation. And students should do well on standardized tests, get into good colleges, obtain well paying jobs, and buy lots of things. Surely there is more to education than this. (Noddings, 2003. p. 4)

Neoliberalism contributes to this free market approach as the growth of the economy, in which some people win and many others lose, is considered more important than a revitalized and broader conception of growth of a person. Yes, Nel, surely there is more to education than that.

This is not to say that a person going to college or getting a job that allows an individual to support herself is problematic, and Noddings does not imply that those things are not of any significance. What is an issue is that a human being is more than an economic status or Neoliberalism “profit-and-loss calculators” (Metcalf, 2017). A modern conception of Deweyan growth directs us to consider, and re-imagine, what more there can be to education. Through the Deweyan lens of growth, along with educative experience for growth, a richer praxis can be re-imagined, understanding praxis as action that is morally-committed as well as oriented and informed by traditions in the field (Kemmis and Smith, 2008). To better understand praxis, Stephen Kemmis and Tracey Smith in *Enabling Praxis: Challenges for Education* (2008) provide six themes of its nature (pp. 264-271):

1. Praxis is doing - doing the right thing and the action itself.
2. Praxis is action that is consciously moral and just - towards the good of humankind.

3. Praxis embodies agency, subjectivity, being, identity and reflexivity - an individual who acts and is informed by learning from experience.
4. Praxis embodies connectedness, relatedness, order, and arrangements.
5. Praxis is particular, concrete, and material - it always occurs under real and existing conditions.
6. Praxis embodies our history, our biography, and is always a process of becoming - shapes what can be, what we become, and what we can be.

Although not one of their six points, they also add that enabling praxis in and through education requires people to live educationally by being philosophical about what they are doing, not by applying rules (p. 280).

The purpose of this approach is to consider what could be while utilizing a Deweyan conception of growth and a positive view of being human. However, one must also keep in mind Dewey's advice about movement towards something new, such as progressive education for the sake of being progressive or anti-traditional. He warned that there is danger in a new movement that, "in rejecting the aims and methods of that which it would supplant, [the new] may develop its principles negatively rather than positively and constructively. Then it takes its "[clue] in practice from that which is rejected instead of from the constructive development of its own philosophy" (1938/1997, p. 20), better articulating what it isn't than what it is.

The current conceptions of growth in education, as described in Chapter 3, do bring the child, adult, and mindset together, albeit in an inadequate way in which reading and mathematics are perceived to be the keepers to what it means to be educated today. Returning to Dewey, I consider what might be for these three: (1) A Deweyan

conception of growth as education, (2) calls for re-conceptualizing and re-emphasizing student growth and professional growth, and (3) what, if any, place there is for Dweck's mindset, to attend to the needs of current schooling.

4.1 Growth of the Child (Student)

The growth of the child in contemporary schools has been limited to academic or achievement conceptions in which the increase of a student's test scores, over time, is growth. In this arrangement, education is preparation for testing, primarily in reading and math, which then 'confirms' growth (or its lack) and eventually leads to graduation from high school, attending college, and having a job. John Dewey was clear about the hazards of too modestly understanding growth this way:

“Preparation” is a treacherous idea. In a certain sense every experience should do something to prepare a person for later experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality. That is the very meaning of growth, continuity, reconstruction of experience. But it is a mistake to suppose that the mere acquisition of a certain amount of arithmetic, geography, history, etc., which is taught and studied because it may be useful at some time in the future, has this effect, and it is a mistake to suppose that acquisition of skills and reading and figuring will automatically constitute preparation for their right and effective use under conditions very unlike those in which they were acquired. (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 47)

Much like Noddings, Dewey expressed that there has to be more to education than preparation for the economy. Just because there is acquisition of a skill does not equate it

to being ready to use such skills in varying contexts, be that a job or attending college.

The score a student receives on the ACT to demonstrate skills in reading, math, and science does not necessarily ensure the student is prepared for or ready for a college life. Simply stated, skills acquisition does not equal preparedness for deeper experiences.

Dewey goes on to say,

A person, young or old, gets out of his present experience all that there is in it for him at the time in which he has it. 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. (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 49)

As Dewey understood long ago, there will always be novel environments in which a person will find himself. These situations can be strikingly different than what contemporary schools provide. Readiness for other ‘nows’ that cannot be fully predicted necessitates the skills and dispositions to negotiate the novel.

Growth, re-conceptualized, is not about this limited preparation or the development of self. Boisvert notes that it must be understood that Dewey’s concept of growth is intended to signify genuine contingency and contextuality (1998, 60). Within the Deweyan conception, growth is in the here-and-now as well as in the future, there is a constant reconstruction of growth in the individual. This growth involves individual identity or “who I am” along with relations to others or “who I am as a part of something greater than myself.” All of which occur in the context of the experiences that one is engaged and participating in. While it’s possible to imagine ‘who am I?’ and ‘how do I

fit in?’ questions related to reading (e.g. in an advanced high school language arts class), that would need to be the goal and the consequential ‘counted’ outcome, rather than an incidental outcome for it to be Deweyan. And assessments would need to account for the fact that ‘good’ answers would necessarily vary from each other because of the inescapable autobiographicality of these considerations.

Boisvert goes on to say that, “For Dewey, education is always an activity of the present. It is the practice of extracting meaning from actually existing conditions. Earlier educative experiences cannot be compared to some instrument, once used and now discarded. They are, rather, important ingredients in growth that have been absorbed as we continue life’s journey” (1998, 105). This conception of growth moves beyond the linguistic and mathematical focus of education today and requires an interdependent context in which adults truly see the child.

As education theorist and retired University of Illinois at Chicago professor William Ayers pointed to in *To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher* (1993), “what we need are multiple ways of seeing a child’s ever-changing strengths...the focusing questions for effective teachers must be these: Who is this person before me? What are his interests and areas of wonder? How does she express herself and what is her awareness of herself as a learner? What effort and potential does she bring? These are the kinds of questions we need to figure out how to attend to” (p. 29). These questions bring the whole child into view for the educator as “seeing” goes beyond the literal of the student that is visually in front of the adult or a student’s score on a test. It is taking in the child, who they are and who they are becoming, in all that it is to be human. These questions present teachers with a task of discovery – Who is this student? – and an expectation that

instruction will be influenced by how that is answered. Districts' and states' delineation of standards also then require complementing to account for *this* child as opposed to *every* child.

This type of seeing is not about judging a student, but rather understanding the student as a person with the power for growth. Where we see immaturity, we see this unique power. Seeing is reciprocal. When a student is seen, the student knows she matters. Educators Elliot Washor and Charles Mojkowski in *Leaving to Learn: How Out-of-School Learning Increases Student Engagement and Reduces Dropout Rates* (2013) note that “mattering is how students see themselves as significant” and that kids need to know who they are, who they are becoming, and what they are living does matter in school and the community (p. 12). (Washor, along with Dennis Littky, were the founders of Rhode Island’s celebrated MET Schools.)

As an example, let us return to the situation of the teenager learning to drive. While reading the driver’s manual to learn about the various rules of the road or reading the car manual to learn about taking care of a vehicle does provide her some background information related to driving. However, it is the teenager behind the steering wheel of the moving vehicle on the road and the inter-dependence of the teenager and adult who provides guidance and feedback that is the act of driving. It is from the experience of driving that the teenager can grow as an individual driver and as a member of society (as there are many other drivers sharing the road). A key premise of this preparation is that the new driver can negotiate the unexpected (e.g., new places, new conditions) and not just the specific settings in which she has practiced.

Additionally, based upon context, a teenager's ability to drive (lawfully) on the road can be adjusted. For example, a 14 year old can have a permit to drive to and from school. At the same time, not everyone wants to drive, has access to driving, etc. so driving is not intended to be the metaphor for growth, it is an example of an educative experience for growth. One could just as easily describe a person wanting to learn to swim. He can read about swimming, but ultimately it is being in the pool that the action of swimming occurs. We should remember that in both the driving and swimming examples, there are real hazards to not learning/learning poorly. So the growth that comes through mastery of either task is tangible and substantive.

With a reconstructed conception of growth, the immaturity of each individual is embraced, as this provides the human power for growth. With this in mind, "children must be given age-appropriate choices not only for optimal individual development, but as part of their education for citizenship" (Noddings, 2003, p. 211). Growth is always in the context of self and others. We do not require everyone to learn how to drive or learn how to swim. This choice or decision involves "participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his activities in the learning process" that is an "active co-operation of the pupil in construction of the purposes" (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 67). This becomes the context for the immature to grow and the need to move beyond the narrow, adult-centered approach of the past and present.

Adult standards have continued to be placed upon children and become the dominant rationale for even elementary education. For some future job or going to college, children are told they need to be reading to a certain level or standard and doing math to a certain level or standard. Take kindergarten as an example. Having a half-day

of kindergarten with play and learning about letters and numbers was typical in the 1970's, 1980's, and 1990's (which captures my own direct experience), as well as many decades before that. However, in the 2000's, full-day kindergarten became the norm and, instead of play, being introduced to concepts in reading (and math) became primary purposes for kindergarten. Again, this is not to say that reading and writing and math are unimportant. Kids do need access to certain literacies and skills if they are to function fully and well in our society (Ayers, 1993), but growth can and should entail so much more than that.

Due to the understanding that certain literacies are important, along with current federal requirements, in my state (Nebraska) there are college and career ready state standards for English Language Arts and mathematics. This has led many states to utilize the Common Core Standards and the state of Nebraska to update its own standards which have been approved as college and career ready standards.

This is not an either-or, where schooling should have reading and math or not have it. A literate society needs these forms of communicating, however, with a reconstructed conception of growth, these become a part of a bigger project for developing habits of learning and action. With growth as the purpose, reading and math remain important and are included within educative experiences that matter to students. This requires that students be taken off the proverbial clock in which specific standard indicators are set consecutively by age groupings.

With a re-conceptualized and reconstructed conception of growth, we move away from narrow and limiting adult standards placed upon 5, 10, and 15 year-olds and move to an actual lived-mode, the here-and-now, for valuing who these students are today and

thoughtfully providing experiences for growth and who they will become. This conception of growth, a reconstructed Deweyan growth, requires a student (of any age) to be seen as the individual he is, with the power of immaturity to grow and a dependence on adults to support and guide him.

4.2 Growth of the Professional

In contemporary education, the growth of the professional, with professional being the adult working in relation to children and adults in education, is of equal importance to the growth of the child. When there is “growth as education and education as growth” (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 67), the adult, like the child, is growing. Through a re-conceptualized and re-constructed growth, professional growth is no longer focused on providing activities to staff in order to increase student achievement scores over time and the evaluation of staff on such measures. Instead, the possibilities for the education professional moves from the limited (ways in which the educator increases student achievement) to the expanded (ways in which the educator can use and develop her capacities or powers to grow).

Growth in this way has two areas of continual movement for educators: (1) as an active participant within a child’s (or colleague’s) growth, as the immature with the power for growth requires this dependence, and (2) as an active participant in one’s own growth that is also in relation to others. In both of these contexts, phronesis allows educators to recognize what is authentically good for their students and themselves (Garrison, 2010). In *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching*, Jim Garrison concludes:

The expansiveness of a teacher's selfhood may be "measured" not by teacher evaluation instruments but by the interests he takes in his students. Being interested in students, caring for them intelligently, requires understanding their needs, desires, interests, dreams, and aspirations. Caring teaching must be sympathetic, imaginative, creative, inquiring, and critical. These are the most important virtues of practical wisdom, or phronesis. (Garrison, 2010, p. 41)

Likewise, professional growth builds upon what William Ayers pointed to with "seeing" the student,

Teaching is an interactive practice that begins and ends with seeing the student. This is more complicated than it seems, for it is something that is ongoing and never completely finished. The student grows and changes, the teacher learns, the situation shifts, and seeing becomes an evolving challenge. As layers of mystification and obfuscation are peeled away, as the student becomes more fully present to the teacher, experiences and ways of thinking and knowing that are initially obscure become the ground on which real teaching can be constructed. (Ayers, 1993, p. 25)

A teacher that is able to see each student before him is a teacher that is able to build upon the unique strengths, talents, and interests of each student and consider the experiences for student growth. This interaction of seeing the student and creating new experiences requires the teacher, the professional, to continually grow as well. One illumination of what Ayers is saying is what Postman and Weingartner (1969) describe as a curriculum of children's inquiries. This curriculum would evolve from children's questions and

curiosity, much like Emilia Riggio and Montessori. To be responsive to each child requires the teacher to see each child in support of each child making meaning.

By seeing and valuing the student within this conception of growth, an educator can actively participate in the reciprocal relationship of immaturity and dependence. For example, if the teenager does not desire to drive a car (or learn to drive a car), the adult understands this is not an educative experience relevant to that teenager. However, if the teenager is apprehensive about driving, maybe having fears about controlling a vehicle or is concerned with judging distances while driving, this is also understood by the adult. As such, the adult works through these fears and concerns with the teenager so the experience of driving can occur.

The teenager's purpose to drive or not to drive is her own, so to avoid forcing an activity of the young into the adult's purpose instead of a student's, the adult first needs "to be intelligently aware of the capacities, needs, and past experiences of those under instruction, and, secondly, to allow the suggestion made to develop into a plan and project by means of further suggestions contributed and organized into a whole" (1938/1997, p. 71-72). This planning, Dewey suggests, is a co-operative enterprise in which the educator's suggestion is not a mold for a cast-iron result rather it is a starting point to be developed into a plan through contributions from the experience of all engaged in the learning process. The development occurs through give-and-take; the educator takes, but is not afraid to also give (1938/1997).

There is not a script for working through the unique qualities and needs of each individual or for the educative experiences necessary for further growth. Therefore, it takes professional educator's on-going development and understanding the of whole

student (e.g., social, moral, physical, etc.), as well as the academic, to provide the educational continuity and interactions necessary for educative experiences to occur.

In a sense, this continually constructing or making meaning is professional growth and “demands a contextual responsiveness, valuing the relational complexities unique to learners and learning, seeking out the ensuing interactions as productive elements furthering learning” (Hostetler, Latta, and Sarroub, 2007, p. 241) and growth of the student and the educator, as “normal child and normal adult alike...are engaged in growing” (1938/1997, p. 50). This reciprocity, this back-and-forth between the teacher creating the environment for student growth while also growing as a professional, is described well by Garrison,

In creating the conditions necessary for a child to learn and grow, teachers are bestowing value (i.e., a good) on the child. In creating value teachers find self-expression, learning, and personal growth. By learning to recognize and respond appropriately to the needs, desires, and interests of each unique child in their class, teachers may have their own needs, desires, and interests fulfilled as well. (Garrison, 2010, p. 40)

It follows then that a veteran teacher, one who has gained more experience by working with more children for more time, should be more developed (should have grown more) than a more novice colleague. Such a teacher should be more adept and thus ‘worth’ more, as long as their praxis environment allows wisdom (instead of, for example, following a district-required script).

In past and current practices, professional growth has been tied to limited activities and evaluation. A re-conceptualized professional growth approach recognizes an educator's growth as ongoing and supported through educative experiences.

Under this logic, consider a teacher who may be seeking to grow in how she communicates as a teacher-leader with colleagues. Through her research (which can be empirical and include mechanisms like participation in 'critical friends groups' [Lord, 1994]) and reflection, she finds she must understand herself as a member of the group, know how to listen to others as well, and consider the various roles of the members in her group. She seeks opportunities to learn more about dialogue and discussion and how to include group members' voices. She continually interacts with others and practices what she is learning about herself and her skills in communication as each experience provides her the opportunity for growth or the ability to apply something from one group experience to the next group experience.

Taking it to experiences with students, a teacher may want students to demonstrate their learning through performances in which knowledge and skills can be observed in action. Therefore, he participates in and learns about project-based learning, for another example. The experiences this teacher creates for students, based upon his own professional learning experiences, are interdisciplinary and integrate knowing and doing throughout the process. He continually interacts with the unique students in this learning environment, adjusting and adapting along the way as he uses his professional judgment with the goal of having students actively demonstrate their understanding and learning.

Professional growth experiences, such as these, value who a teacher is, as well as who she can become, as a person and professional educator. These experiences for growth are not separate from the school or from students (unlike many traditional in-service activities or teacher workshops held outside of the school) as what is experienced is a part of being a professional. These teachers grow as communicators with colleagues and learn about listening to give others voice, skills they can also often apply with the students they work with each day. A visitor in the classrooms would be able to observe the ways in which the teacher and students interact and communicate. This continual growth process is in contexts which are inside and outside of the school and are relational with students, other adults, or both. From a professional development design standpoint, this kind of growth can be enabled – giving teachers time to work in small groupings, for example – but much of its content is generated by the teachers themselves from their lived experiences. External ‘sage on the stage’ (Eisner, 1998) professional developers have at most, minor roles with all of this.

4.3 Growth as a Mindset

From Chapter 2 we know that the manifestation of the growth mindset in education today is the connection between the narrow and limited view of academic or achievement growth and Carol Dweck’s incremental theory. First, there is recognition that her application of growth mindset is through the lens of how schools are today. In her 1988 study with Leggett, they noted:

Achievement situations are particularly suitable for developing and testing motivational models. Researchers can readily establish convincing and

compelling situations that afford a high degree of control and precision. For example, achievement situations allow for standardization of tasks and feedback across individuals. (Dweck and Leggett, 1988, p. 264).

Connecting the dots of the theory with achievement, with one mindset being “fixed” and the other being “growth,” worked in this situation. In *Mindset* (2006), Dweck defined the growth mindset as “the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts” and, although people differ, “everyone can change and grow through application and experience” (p. 7). So far, I was on board when she referenced achievement as a type of relevant situation, but Dweck later supported this approach (effort and achievement) with a follow-up article in 2015 that articulated that increased achievement was *the* goal and a student’s effort played an important role in increasing achievement (p. 20). This reduced stance allowed the goal of growth to be entirely externally defined, excluding the student and increasingly the teacher from anymore agency that to engage or not engage with someone else’s agenda.

Dweck was connecting her research to the limited conception of growth in education today. With a reconstructed growth for contemporary education, which includes immaturity as the power for growing, utilizing dependence upon others for growth, and having plasticity to learn from experiences, a growth mindset has a different meaning. The 1988 version of Dweck and Leggett may have some more modest pertinence. Their research required them to also apply their theory to social domains. They noted that the research established the existence of helpless and mastery-oriented patterns in social interactions (p. 265). They associated a child hoping for

someone's positive judgment and validation for his likeability with helplessness.

Meanwhile, a child hoping to develop new relationships and expanding social horizons and experiences was associated as being *mastery-oriented*. (p. 265). Mastery and helpless are charged terms, but they are not intrinsically incompatible with Dewey.

When applied to personal attributes of self (intelligence, morality, physical skills, and physical attractiveness) some children saw these as malleable and some saw these as fixed. From this, the incremental theory identifies *self* as a "system of malleable qualities that is evolving over time through the individual's efforts" (p. 266). These attributes go beyond the academic or achievement as growth. Although Dweck, in *Mindset*, did provide some explanation that more than intelligence through academics or achievement is cultivated with a growth mindset, in this newer work the application was directed towards the narrowed conception of growth in education. It is conceivable that, with a reconstructed concept of growth, a growth mindset would promote recognizing the malleable qualities beyond the academic.

As Dweck (2006) defined, a fixed mindset is a belief that an individual's qualities are already "carved in stone" (p. 6). Dweck's growth mindset would be in support of this contemporary conception of growth, as it is about having the capacity to continually be and become, to continually learn from experience, and believing in this continual process of cultivating the qualities that make a person unique.

One key point using the re-conception of growth in relation to a growth mindset is that of understanding and avoiding fixed conceptions of being human. Deweyan growth embraces the immature as embedding the power for growth. Therefore, where a child is today, intellectually, morally, emotionally, and the like, is based upon who she is as a

unique person. This growth does not place an adult standard on the child that would imply a fixed standard for someone to reach, with the child by definition lacking until she reaches that point.

Another part of growth, or growing, is the power to modify actions on the basis of the results of prior experiences. This is the power to develop dispositions in which habits are acquired (Dewey, 1916/1944). Habits too can be for growth or be fixed. A habit for growth, as Dewey defines it, “is a form of executive skill, of efficiency in doing...an ability to use natural conditions as means to ends. It is an active control of the environment through control of the organs of action” (p. 46). A student that is inquisitive may form the habit of questioning to seek answers in order to ultimately solve problems that arise in her day-to-day activities.

On the other hand, a habit is fixed when either it is routine (such as turning the radio on every time you are in the car), or it possesses you instead of you possessing it (such as smoking cigarettes or following orders). These are habits that are “so severed from reason that they are opposed to the conclusions of conscious deliberation and decisions” (p. 49). A student that listens to an adult and believes knowledge is passed from the adult to the student creates a habit of being a recipient of knowledge and not a seeker of learning. Contemporary concerns raised by former Stanford dean, Julie Lythcott-Haims, suggest this hazard is frequently becoming manifest. She observed incoming students unable to take care of themselves due to parents being over-involved in their children’s lives. Thus creating a fixed habit of relying on adults to be the student’s advocate instead of being a self-advocate.

Again, Dweck's growth mindset, in this context and as demonstrated through her previous research with Leggett, would support this continual development of habits. For example, a child may form the disposition of solving problems that arise in various situations. This is demonstrated in the mastery-oriented (adaptive) children who, when confronted with difficult problems, did not begin to offer attributions for their failure. Indeed, they did not appear to think they were failing. Rather than viewing unsolved problems as failures that reflected on their ability, they appeared to view the unsolved problems as challenges...they engaged in extensive solution-oriented self-instruction and self-monitoring" and over 25% of these children increased the level of strategy used as they taught themselves new, more sophisticated hypothesis-testing strategies. (Dweck and Leggett, 1988, p. 258)

Another key point using this re-conception in relation to a growth mindset is that of understanding effort towards growth. Dweck describes the helpless child in her research. These children fell into the fixed mindset category and had a tendency to "avoid challenge and show impairment in the face of difficulty." With children considered to be in the growth mindset category, this avoidance and impairment was never an issue even if something was unexpectedly difficult. It should be noted that, "one would expect withdrawal from a task that became useless or boring, even if it continued to promise favorable ability judgments" (p. 262). Therefore a child that approaches an experience through the lens of the growth mindset does not guarantee the child will continue with the experience when the curriculum is shaped *for* the child instead of *with* the child.

These efforts toward growth imply two things. First, with a re-conceptualized growth, there needs to be an understanding of dependence and helplessness. The immature, with the power to grow, require dependence or the support of an adult in the child's growth. As an example, a baby that is crying may need to be fed or may need his diapers changed. In this case, the baby is helpless and dependence (the need for others) supports his growth. However, if every time the baby cries the adult is right there, even if he is not hungry or needing changing, the helplessness is supported rather than the growth. Sometimes a baby needs to cry and soothe himself as a part of growing.

The same is true of a child having difficulty with solving a problem. Sometimes an adult is needed to show, guide, and support the child and, at other times, the child needs to be left alone to solve the problem herself. If helplessness were all there were to dependence, no development would ever take place (Dewey, 1916/1944). Helplessness is a positive when connected with dependence for growing.

Secondly, with this re-conceptualization, growth is connected with the interest and needs of children. The fact children often withdraw from useless or boring tasks, even though they may be doing well at the task at hand, reflects this conception of growth. Dewey understood there are both challenges and efforts to support growth,

Growth depends upon the presence of difficulty to be overcome by the exercise of intelligence. Once more, it is part of the educator's responsibility to see equally to two things: First, that the problem rows out of the conditions of the experience being had in the present, and that it is within the range of the capacity of students; and, secondly, that it is such that it arouses in the learner an active quest for information and for

production of new ideas the new facts and new ideas does obtain to become the ground for further experiences and what new problems are presented. The process is a continuous spiral. The inescapable linkage of the present with the past... (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 79)

One would not expect to teach a 5 year-old to learn how to fly an aircraft, as the child's capacity for this is not within range at the present time even though it might arouse a quest for information. However, one would expect to teach the 5 year-old (if she is interested) how to swim as both responsibilities Dewey points to could be met. Moreover, a 5 year-old's interest in flying could be a catalyst to take on engaging learning (like thinking about how birds fly) that could help a youngster advance his understanding, or grow.

Growth involves interdependence specifically, the dependence upon the adult to support growth and the independence of the child. Allison Zmuda, in *Learning Personalized* (2015), regards this independent effort towards growth in the following way:

We want students to be willing to get messy, agonize over details, and persist until they accomplish their goal. What articulates two opposing mindsets that affect how people respond to struggle and challenge, which in turn affects their feelings toward learning. Students with a growth mindset, in contrast, believe they can always improve regardless of whether success come easily or proves to be more elusive.

A growth mindset can be nurtured, but it requires explicit conversations and cues. The stories that learners conjure up about

themselves do matter, and the quality of their thinking affects the quality of the experience. When a student struggles in spite of exerting a significant amount of effort or when a student flounders and asks for help the goal is to intervene through prompts or questions rather than swoop in and save them. (Zmuda, 2015, p. 49)

Understanding that growth is both a means and end in any educational endeavor does provide a place for Dweck's research, that conceived the growth mindset (mastery-oriented, developmental or learning goals, and incremental theory), to connect with a reconstructed conception of growth. This mindset is based upon children's beliefs that they have adaptive and malleable qualities that are evolving over time. The children also applied perseverance, or effort (as well as ingenuity to new situations), in the research studies and that these too affect growth positively. These qualities went beyond the academic (and the content areas of language arts and math) and included self-concept and social domains towards a more holistic, although not complete, view of the child. As such, growth for contemporary education can be supported by Dweck's growth mindset, but at this stage, that possibility does not seem to be one that she is actively advancing.

4.4 Conclusion

Through the re-conceptualizing and re-constructing of growth, new meanings and possibilities exist for student growth, professional growth, and a mindset in support of growth. This conception provides a clear *why*, or purpose, through which actions and intentions can be connected. When one is asked, "for what purpose?" is this action (be it

for a student or adult) the answer of “for growth” could have new meaning in contemporary education.

To be “for growth” in this renewed vision, would mean to be for the power of immaturity in which growth is even possible. It is for dependence upon others in guidance and support of continual growth. It is for plasticity to continually learn from one experience and apply what is learned in later experiences. To be for growth, to have it occurring, means providing educative experiences as a part of schooling that is within or beyond the actual school.

We grow through continuity of experiences as well as interactions and situations that involve self and others. Some experiences are miseducative in the sense that we learn, but do not grow (Hildreth, 2011, p. 34). The revived and revised version of growth that I am proposing here is personal and it is social. To have an educative experience means consideration of one’s identity and of what is occurring within oneself, considerations (such as seeing) and interactions with others, and the environment or context of the experience.

Growth for students and adults is, as Dewey (1916/1944) expressed, a “characteristic of life” and as such “education is all one with growing; it has no end beyond itself...the value of school education is the extent in which it creates a desire for continued growth and supplies means for making the desire effective fact” (p. 53). To bring this thinking to fruition requires an understanding that growth is more of what Dewey conceived and less of what the current conception is in today’s schools.

John Dewey’s conception of growth has never been fully pursued or been given the opportunity to be the purpose of education. Although he encouraged educators to try

things in their own unique contexts, much as he did at his lab school in Chicago, the traditional focus on content area achievement always prevailed.

A reconsidered and reconstructed conception of growth in education today, as the purpose of education and in the context of the 21st century, provides a way of rethinking and re-imagining how students and adults experience school as a part of society.

In this new perspective, children and adults are not limited to the linguistic and mathematical as a way of growing. Additionally, the content of educational experience is not that of the agricultural United States of the late 1800's or the Industrial Revolution of the early 20th century. A person's identity (strengths, talents, interests and who I am), relationships between and among each other, and agency in which skills (e.g. creativity, critical thinking, communication, etc.) and academics unite in schools for students to seek meaning and act with a purpose. They are valued by education and provide a context for this conception of growth.

CHAPTER 5:

RECONCILING A CONCEPTION OF GROWTH FOR TODAY

Dewey noted that our tragic error is that we are so anxious for the results of growth that we neglect the process of growing (Dewey and Dewey, 1915, p. 7).

Reconciling a conception of growth today with Dewey's idea calls for an appropriate metaphor which reflects this 21st century growth. Thinking of the organic growth which occurs with trees and plants growing is vital for the organisms. That also should be true for the context of today's educational environment.

In his book, *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything* (2009), former professor of arts education and current author and educational advisor Sir Ken Robinson also uses plants as a metaphor for growth:

We have to move beyond linear, mechanistic metaphors to more organic metaphors of human growth and development.

A living organism, like a plant, is complex and dynamic. Each of its internal processes affects and depends on the others and sustaining the vitality of the whole organism. This is also true of the habitats in which we live. Most living things can only flourish in certain types of environment, and the relationship between them are often highly specialized. Healthy, successful plants take the nutrients they need from their environment. At the same time, though, their presence helps to sustain the environment in which they depend.

Farmers' livelihoods depend on raising crops. But farmers do not make plants grow. They don't attach roots, glue on the petals, or color the fruit. The plant grows itself. Farmers and gardeners provide the conditions for growth. Good farmers know what those conditions are, and bad ones don't. Understanding the dynamic elements of human growth is as essential to sustaining human cultures into the future as the need to understand the ecosystem of the natural world on which we ultimately depend. (Robinson, 2009, pp. 257-258)

Growth, in this metaphor, is akin to what Dewey believed when he described having the power to grow. As the farmer described by Robinson does not make the plants grow, Dewey states that "we do not have to draw out or reduce positive activities from a child as some doctrines would have it. Where there is life, there is eager and impassioned activities. Growth is not something done to them; it is something they do" (1916/1944, p. 42). So how do we help children do this? How do we allow and nurture this growth?

In the organic sense, the child's growth in education has been more like that of a piece of fruit with the goal to get the single apple to grow (through schooling consisting of core subjects, such as reading and math) and once ripe, it is finished (the end of school and off to adulthood). Even though the term kindergarten refers to naturally growing, the practice today is that kindergartners are "behind" if they are not reading by the end of the year. Once again it is increases in reading that is proof of a kindergartner growing.

However, a 21st century growth would view the entire fruit tree as the individual child. The tree grows slowly and continually over time and bears its unique fruit each

year. Some of the fruit will be utilized (picked and eaten immediately, kept and used for cooking, taken to the market for sale, etc.) and some might not be used at all. These are the strengths, talents, passions, and gifts the tree bears. Therefore, the tree is valued each year and there is an understanding that it will continue to grow and bear and in its own development also become of increasing value or utility to others. In this view, the tree gets bigger and bigger and there is no end to the growing and creating of fruit to be utilized. The tree is growing until it is not, and when it is not, it is no more. Thus is revitalized 21st century human growth.

Growth is within each individual, the power to continually move from the immature with the power to grow towards being more mature, from the current to the next. From a continually growing child to a continually growing adult, a 21st century conception of growth values this unique process. Growth should occur until there is no more. And no one knows when each human will be no more. Therefore, the value of the individual is today for you can't value what isn't tomorrow. Yet, at the same time, schools and adults provide experiences that will foster continued growth assuming the individual will be here tomorrow. So it is a balance of valuing today and continuing growth tomorrow in an environment that provides the conditions necessary for this conception of growth in contemporary education.

As described in previous chapters, the relationship between the child and adult should be reciprocal. The adult, the educator, must have an understanding of the particular needs, talents, passions, strengths – the dynamic elements – of the child. The child interacts with the adult and dependence is necessary as the adult must provide the support and conditions for further growth. This requires an understanding of the context

of experiences that are intended to be educative. The environment can be within the school or outside of the school. A child can be having educative experiences in an apprenticeship, such as learning how to plumb, or an activity, such as basketball, just as easily as in a classroom. All these contexts play a role in growth.

As Robinson goes points out, all environments hold the opportunity for growth:

Not much grows in Death Valley, hence the name. The reason is that it doesn't rain very much there -- about two inches a year on average.

However, in the winter of 2004-05, something remarkable happened.

More than 7 inches of rain fell in Death Valley, something that had not happened for generations. Then in the spring of 2005, something even more remarkable happened. Spring flowers covered the entire floor of Death Valley. Photographers, Botanists, and just plain tourists traveled across America to see this remarkable site, something they might never see again in their lifetimes. Death Valley was alive with fresh, vibrant growth. At the end of the spring, the flowers died away and slipped again beneath the hot desert sand, waiting for the next rains, whenever they would have come.

What this proved, of course, was that Death Valley wasn't dead at all. It was asleep. It was simply waiting for the conditions of growth.

When the conditions came, life returned to the heart of Death Valley.

Human beings and human communities are the same. We need the right conditions for growth, in our schools, communities, and in our individual lives. If the conditions are right, people grow in synergy with the people

around them and the environment they create. If the conditions are poor, people protect themselves and their anxieties from neighbors and the world. Some of the elements of our own growth are inside us. They include the need to develop our unique natural aptitudes and personal passions. Finding and nurturing them is the surest way to ensure our growth and fulfillment as individuals. (Robinson, 2009, pp. 258-259)

For many, education and schooling is their Death Valley, with the child sometimes waiting years for the conditions for growth. She can't provide it all by herself, as growth is dependent on others. She might be the seed, but she isn't the fair. At some point, she may have an adult who recognizes that her uniqueness and shapes her environment for growth, but this often then stops after this ideal condition ends. Even though we may not always be able to visually see the latent qualities, they are there. The capacities, the powers to grow, are within and are in need of the conditions to support this growth. When the purpose of education is focused on a narrow conception of increased reading and math achievement as growth, then schooling is a parched Death Valley in which human identity, human agency, and the individual strengths, talents, interests, and passions of children lay dormant. If that dormancy endures for the duration of a child's schooling, then the likelihood of eventual flourishing is smaller.

However, just as education can create its own Death Valley desert, in education today we also have the capacity to be the good farmer and provide the conditions for 21st century human growth. There is more educational research in support of viewing schooling through a broader and more innovative lens to address the needs of students today. A few highlights from educational research that support revitalized 21st Century

growth, along with pointing to the problem with the current and narrow conception of growth include:

A. Gallup's *State of America's Schools: The Path to Winning Again in Education* (2014):

- Gallup has gained unparalleled expertise on the “human” elements – including a focus on strengths development and engagement in the classroom – that drive success. These elements are often overlooked...but there is growing recognition that unless U.S. schools can better align learning strategies and objectives with fundamental aspects of human nature, they will always struggle to help students achieve their full potential (p. 6).
- The need to create learning environments that support students’ strengths and engagement is likely increasing in importance with the growing focus on teaching students 21st century skills such as problem-solving, creativity, communication, and global awareness. Such abilities are more difficult to quantify for testing than lower-order skills like basic content comprehension (p. 39).

B. The Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University's *The Influence of Teaching – Beyond Standardized Test Scores: Engagement, Mindset, and Agency* (2015):

- The development of agency may be as important an outcome of schooling as the skills we measure with standardized testing (p. 1).

- Awareness that success in life requires agency is not new. However, we have tended as a society to treat its development as mostly a family and community responsibility, not a focus for policymakers, curriculum developers, or teacher preparation programs (p. 15).

C. Harvard Graduate School of Education's *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century* (2011):

- The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, whose members include such companies as Microsoft, Apple, Cisco and Pearson, has been critical of what it sees as obsolete and outmoded approaches to education, and is calling for more focus on the development of such "21st century skills" as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, and communication (p. 4).
- It is time to widen our lens and to build a more finely articulated pathways system – one that is richly diversified to align with the needs and interests of today's young people (p. 11).

D. The Annenberg Institute of School Reform – Voices in Urban Education's *Readiness for College: The Role of Noncognitive Factors and Context* (2013):

- When students feel a sense of belonging in an academic community, believe that effort will increase ability and competence, believe that success is possible and within their control, and see work as interesting or relevant to their lives, students are much more likely to persist in academic tasks despite setbacks and to exhibit the kinds of academic behaviors that lead to school success (p. 50).

Although each of the studies and/or projects contain language from a continued narrow conception of education (e.g., readiness for college, pathways to prosperity, achievement gap), these empirical studies also point toward the desire for education to be more than just reading and math or content knowledge. The descriptions regarding agency, identity, strengths, interests, skills such as problem solving and critical thinking, and engagement reflect the need for this 21st century conception of growth.

The implications of a re-conceptualized and re-constructed growth are a focus on continual growth through experiences that are educative in the best environment possible. Like Death Valley, not all environments are conducive, day-to-day, for providing the conditions for growth. However, it is the adult who continually strives to know each child, see each child, and understand each child in order to create the interactions and situations who can support growth as the purpose of education.

To move towards a re-conceptualized and re-constructed growth, I have engaged in a life of the academic. Much of my work has been an intersection of academia and praxis, where the two worlds I straddle share common language, but not necessarily application and use. At times, there is superficial overlap, such as the term “growth.” However, there is a need for a more substantive overlap to bring philosophy and practice together. Isolating praxis from academia and academia from praxis only limits the possibilities of actively exploring what might be in contemporary education.

As I have connected experienced-informed personal beliefs about growth – the growth of the whole person as an individual and with others as a part of society – with that of John Dewey, I have also continually considered ways a reconstructed broader sense of growth has application in what I do. I understand what current practice is

because I live it each day and as a doctoral student I understand how philosophy and academia provide avenues for thoughtful discourse. However, for these two worlds to come together, a pragmatic approach is necessary. One example is the articulation of school district purposes, or the *why*, of children's growth in which increasing language arts and mathematics scores is not the only focal point. As I helped write for my school district,

- All kids have innate strengths, talents, interests, and passions that should be developed and pursued through experiences that are personal (Who am I?), relational (Who am I as a part of something greater than myself?), and lead to actively engaging in her or his calling in life.
- Based upon a PreK-12 education with us, all kids should be and become thinkers (creative and critical), problem solvers, communicators, collaborators, active citizens, and have confidence to lead successful lives.¹⁸

These two purposes are intended to articulate the importance of the whole child (e.g. social, emotional, intellectual, etc.) and valuing who each is today and who each is becoming. These provide a broader lens for district educators to consider growth, specifically how students grow and the educative experiences (inside and outside of the school) that promote growth. These are consciously different from the narrow and limited conception of growth in schools today and moves towards a further reconstruction and re-conceptualization of growth in contemporary education.

To illustrate, a high school student may be interested in how wind energy might be utilized locally. This in turn leads a teacher, as the student's advisor, to listen to his inquiries. The student may be wondering why there aren't more windmills locally. Or how a wind farm produces energy. The student's interests and questions are the driver, while the teacher's role is to listen and provide support in considering the type of experiences the boy might engage in for growth. The teacher may connect the student with a local wind company, or encourage the student to communicate directly with the company. Parts of school days or weeks might be set-aside for the student to interview and shadow a wind energy professional.

The teacher as coach might observe that the skills of communication, confidence, and critical thinking, along with the academic skills of inquiry and research, are most connected to the boy's experience. These become the areas of growth the teacher further asks the student about (such as, how does your communication with the energy company differ from school or at home? Or how might you work to convince the city council that wind energy is something the city should consider?). The next step taken is based upon the next question asked by the student or the answer(s) the he provides in thinking through the teacher's questions.

In this example there is no mention of taking a test or trying to connect subject areas to the wind energy experience. The learning comes from the experience had and reflecting upon it as an interested and unique individual as well as reflecting with the adults involved. The "test" then becomes how the student is growing from this experience when applied to a new experience.

This connection of philosophy and practice also affects how opportunities, such as grants, are viewed. As one example of beginning to reframe the conception of growth in contemporary education is the opportunity to seek grants or funding for innovative practices in which articulation of the reconstructed conception of growth can occur. Due to Nebraska Legislative Bill 519, the Nebraska Department of Education requested proposals for the Nebraska Innovation Grant. Those grants, as stated in the 2016 *Nebraska's Innovation Grant Program: Pre-Application Guide and Request For Proposals (RFP)*, are intended to:

support the development, expansion and investment in innovative best practices to improve:

- Education outcomes for early childhood, elementary, middle school or high school students;
- Transitions between any successive stages of education; or
- Transitions between education and the work force. (p. 4)

Furthermore, the RFP defines innovation as,

A process, product, strategy or intervention, featuring new practices or methods that are advanced, original or creative, which will improve significantly upon the outcomes reached with status quo options and ultimately reach widespread effective usage. (p. 4)

With a reconstructed conception of growth, a grant such as this could take on a different meaning today and is one example of a chance to begin to make changes to how growth is conceived and perceived. An application process such as this provides

opportunity to articulate a different conception of growth via the four priority considerations that have been presented by the state of Nebraska (p. 4):

- Serves “High Needs” Students
- Focuses on Nebraska’s Accountability for a Quality Education System, Today and Tomorrow (AQuESTT) Tenets
- Serves Students in “Needs Improvement” Schools
- Leverages Technology to Support Instructional Practice and Professional Development

One particular consideration, the AQuESTT Tenets, does appear to have the possibility of moving beyond the Nebraska State Accountability Test (NeSA) in reading, math, and science, in that assessment is only one of the six tenets. This allows some interpretive space in considering other things that count as success and valuing things that not necessarily everyone needs (Hamann, 2008).

Although ultimately the manner in which this grant is judged is still through a narrow, test-score defined lens of accountability (i.e., how will this innovative approach increase achievement?), each of these considerations, as well as the concept of innovation, could have an alternative and thoughtful response in terms of 21st century growth. On one hand, the use of the district’s purpose is a move in the direction of growth for contemporary education and provides dependence and plasticity. Developing student strengths, talents, interests, and passions, in addition to identity (Who am I?), relationships (Who am I in relation to something greater than myself?), and expressing agency in seeking meaning and taking purposeful initiative, are not common purposes in education today and thus would provide an “innovative” approach.

Innovative practices could align to and promote continual growth for students. For example, a practice such as project-based learning becomes more intentional when growth is the purpose and it would fit the state's RFP. The performances that students are to enact are experiences in which forms of learning are applied. So a student may have to defend her beliefs about an issue using evidence through inquiry, research, and reflection and communicating it to an authentic audience. Within this same example, a teacher's professional growth might include learning about project-based learning and developing an integrated unit that is inclusive of the personal, social, and academic growth of students. Each day he applies a part of the project and he is observant of the students, the environment, and the interactions within this experience. He adjusts and applies his learning to the next part of the lesson. And within this situation, having a post-Deweyan (or more than Dweckian) growth mindset would allow each of the individuals (students and teachers) to understand that they are valued today for who they are while still growing, that their end is not a fixed one, but one that is open to more growing.

On the other hand, much like Chapter 3, there is a need to clarify the limits of the current manifestation of growth and the "meager and narrow field of school activities" (Dewey, 1909, p. 31) that contributes to it. An expansive understanding of the state's RFP is possible, but that doesn't appear that it's what is expected.

Additionally, the experiences for growth, for students and adults (professionals), must attend to the fact that growth occurs through these experiences. Reflecting upon the types of performances, projects, and defenses of portfolios that could be encouraged, as well as locations inside and outside of the school, is necessary to ensure continuity of

educative experiences and providing those involved with meaningful interactions and situations.

At the imagined or intended instructional level of implementation, this type of grant requires an evaluation of the student's project and must, as described in 2016 RFP, "generate evidence of effectiveness (in which the student has input), culminating in the identification, development, validation and potential scale-up of an innovative best practice or method" (p. 14). This type of grant could provide further dialogue, and generation of evidence, for a re-conceptualized and re-constructed idea of growth in contemporary education in Nebraska.

To reconcile growth in education today with Dewey, ideas must be brought together. Ideas that evolve from metaphors that help bring understanding of growth's organic nature such as that of the living and growing tree, to creating experiences that go beyond isolating academic content and include the social, emotional, and physical, as well as individual and collective identity. Attending to student and teacher agency provides for a fusing of horizons and a deeper understanding of a reconstructed growth. Pragmatism is required in a time when narrowed and limiting views of growth continue to pervade education. Nebraska provides an educational environment where praxis and academia can come together in re-constructing growth, growth that is for the whole person (whether child or adult), for education today.

Educational policy (which ultimately can drive practices) must shift from the narrow conception of growth to the reconstructed and re-conceptualized growth for today. Taking a page from Boisvert (1998) on Dewey's approach to education, he notes that for Dewey

Education...was not for him a mere matter of getting information to the mind. Children could not learn optimally unless they were active, using their hands and engaging in varied sorts of experimentations. Teachers could not teach effectively if they thought of themselves as information machines passing on data from one mind to the next. They too had to be physically active, moving around to stimulate the students as human beings, not just disembodied minds...Human, embodied experiencing is not a matter of receiving data into a mental computer. It involves a fully human response to the environment within which we are enmeshed.

(Boisvert, 1998, p. 10)

To be fully human is to have fully human growth consisting of the humanness of identity, agency, strengths, interests, relationships, and so on and the educative experiences intended for continual growth. For this growth, there must also be educational policies that move away from the simplistic accountability measures of “getting information to the mind” of students and of professionals being evaluated and judged by test scores. This growth would require policies and funding (through local budgets and grants) that asks education professionals to identify 21st century growth measures that are formed around knowing and doing, academics and skills, cognitive and noncognitive, and identity and agency, for students and teachers to be taking action within the context of the here and now.

5.1 Advancing Growth as the *Why*

In his book, *Reading Pragmatism*, Cleo H. Cherryholmes views pragmatism as an art term. He says,

Peirce's maxim implicitly poses a question: After imagining practical consequences, which consequences should we value and desire? I read Dewey's (1934/1980) argument in *Art as Experience* as answering that question. He tells us, in effect, that we should pursue aesthetically desirable consequences; pursue outcomes that are satisfying, fulfilling, harmonious, and beautiful; and explore what makes them so.

(Cherryholmes, 1999, p. 28)

In a re-constructed conception of growth, pragmatism leads to a constellation of ideas of contemporary schooling.

Since Plato, the aim of the education of the human eros has been to enable students to distinguish between something they might desire and the truly desirable. It is the single most important aspect of all education. We become what we love. That is how we grow (Garrison, 2010, p. 28). What we love is described by Sir Ken Robinson when explaining what people who work creatively usually have in common:

They love the media they work with. Musicians love the sounds they make, natural writers love words, dancers love movement, mathematicians love numbers, entrepreneurs love making deals, great teachers love teaching. This is why people who fundamentally love what they do don't think of it as work in the ordinary sense of the word. They do it

because they want to and because when they do, they are in their element. (Robinson, 2009, p. 73)

This does not mean that we love absolutely everything we do. In some cases, we do things we don't love (e.g., chores) in service of things we do (e.g., our homes).

Growth is about the continual re-construction of oneself through educative experiences in the context and involvement of others. In becoming what we love, we are being what we love through these experiences, for growth cannot occur without them. Experiences must explicitly involve the internal conditions (individual) and the objective conditions (context and others) in order to create a situation that is conducive to growth. Too many students leave schooling unsure of their real talents and not knowing what direction to take next; they feel that what they are good at is not valued by schools (Robinson, 2009, p. 225), a point that has been made by many (e.g., Erickson, 1987; Littky, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Washor and Mojkowski, 2013).

In his introduction of his work *What Good is Growth?*, R.W. Hildreth explains, Dewey famously argues that the end of education is growth. First, Dewey understands education as the reconstruction of experience. As such, there is an intimate and inextricable relation between a person's life experiences on one side and educational methods, content, and ends on the other. We learn by gaining a better sense of the meaning of present experiences and by increasing our ability to direct future experiences (MW 9: 83). Second, we grow when learning opens up opportunities for future growth and thereby enables us to continue our education (MW9: 107). In this sense, there are no ends outside of the processes of education; it is its own end

(MW 9: 54). Third, as a result, Dewey consistently rejects any move to impose ultimate or external ends for education. (Hildreth, 2011, 28)

John Dewey's practicing of his conception of growth occurred during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Although he provides the conditions necessary for growth, he was doing so in a different era, one of the family, agriculture, the Industrial Revolution, and of educational reform, which was reflective of the systemization occurring in society at the time. Today, there are working families (both parents work), single-parent households, kids that are in before and after school programs (which limits time with family members), and many areas of families living in poverty.

Schools today, be that public, private, or charter, are not able to make significant changes as alternatives to the traditional system as these schools would be out of compliance with the narrow definitions of student success and with the regulations and protocols for how those outcomes must be achieved. Furthermore, even charter schools are mostly, at best, better versions of the same public schools for which they were meant to be models (Washor and Mojkowski, 2013, p. 134) and fare no better than traditional public schools (Berliner and Glass, 2014).

Growing and recognizing the power of the immature to continue to grow should be the beginning and the end of education. To embrace a 5 year-old or 35 year-old as such, as a person with strengths, talents, and interests that will continually develop and evolve over time, is to consider and act upon the educative experiences for this growth. Currently, without a re-conception of growth, that 5-year old is expected to enter kindergarten already knowing letters and sounds and numbers, as well as to be considered

“proficient” only if he is reading by the end of kindergarten. In this, the beginning and end is for increasing proficiency of language arts and math, not for growth.

Currently, for the 35 year-old teacher, there is some space for the natural love of teaching, yet often times the joy is taken away through a “testing” environment with a focus on achievement scores and scripted programs or district timelines for curriculum (teach *this* on *this* day). The beginning and the end for the educator is to teach a specific way in order to obtain specific achievement scores for the children in the classroom. When alternatively, there should be educator growth through praxis and praxis as growth. Where there is space for teachers to love teaching (Lord, 1994) and to feel the joy of igniting the passions of kids.

For the re-conception of growth, there must be a stoppage to the dis-connect between education in schooling and education in life. The use of the teenager learning to drive is intended to reflect this connection, even though it is one simple example. If a teenager decides to learn how to drive, there are options inside and outside of the school for this experience. The point being, this (i.e., learning to drive) can be an educative experience regardless of location.

Growing through educative experiences happens regardless of where it occurs as well. Being thoughtful about how educative experiences might be provided allows for the natural connection between school and society (which is inclusive of the home, the neighborhood, etc.). This also demonstrates the appreciation of one’s prior experiences (within school or society) affecting one’s current experience.

Nel Noddings puts it this way,

It is not a matter of absorbing something already laid out, tried and true. It is a matter of trying things out with the valued help of experts, of evaluating, revising, comparing, sharing, communicating, constructing, choosing. Strictly speaking, there is no end product -- no ideally educated person -- but a diverse host of persons showing signs of increasing in growth. There will be commonalities, of course, but these will have been achieved in the process and not necessarily through exactly similar experiences. Even when common values are achieved by one group, they cannot be simply transmitted to another. The new group can be guided, we can share what we have learned. But as soon as we impose our values on a new generation we risk losing those values that are most needed in a dynamic Society -- those that encourage reflective criticism, revision, creation, and renewal. (Noddings, 2005, p. 165)

A conception of growth, a Deweyan model re-conceptualized and re-constructed for contemporary education, provides an opportunity to flesh out the promises of growth in education. Although Dewey could not have anticipated such dramatic changes or lack of changes in society and schools as described above, he certainly would have insisted it was again time to re-construct our schools (Garrison, 2010).

Boisvert (1998) says that it is the task for philosophers to think our own time. Once we abandon this quest for radical rupture, we can, as Dewey did, formulate a comprehensive scheme to think about in our own time as we re-conceptualize and re-construct growth. Having 21st century growth as the purpose of education, one inclusive of identity, agency, strengths, interests, relationships, or the whole person, allows for

educative experiences to be thoughtfully considered and created, which are reflective of our time, the here and the now of the ever-changing world we live.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ For examples, see John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Touchstone, 1938/1997) and John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1916/1944).
- ² Dewey used the terminology of ‘active participle’ although the contemporary version might use ‘gerund’ for growing (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 36).
- ³ Dewey explains the term capacity is to be conceived positively as it embraces how the immature have the power to grow (Dewey, 1916/1944, p. 41).
- ⁴ The teacher evaluation information is from the Chicago Teachers Union *Rights at work* » *Teacher evaluation*. (2012). Retrieved on June 6, 2016 from <http://www.ctunet/rights-at-work/teacher-evaluation/pera-faq#q20>
- ⁵ The description of the position of Director of Learning comes from the public record of School District 145 – Waverly, School Board Policy for Administration, 2260. Located at http://www.district145.org/pages/uploaded_files/BP2260%20Director%20of%20Learning.pdf
- ⁶ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (adopted 1989, entry into force 1990).
- ⁷ United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Article 3, 3.
- ⁸ United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Article 29, 1(a).
- ⁹ Dewey uses the term *insure*, however the intent better echoes the contemporary use of the word *ensure* (Dewey, 1916/1944, p. 51).
- ¹⁰ The ESEA information comes from Public Law 89-10-April 11, 1965, a grant is from Title II – Financial Assistance to Local Educational Agencies for the Education of Children of Low-Income Families.
- ¹¹ Achievement growth (2013, August 29). The glossary of education reform. Retrieved from <http://edglossary.org/achievement-growth/>
- ¹² The specific policy cited is from the public record of Lincoln Public Schools, School Board Policy 4775 (3-24-2015). Located <http://docshare2.lps.org/docshare/dsweb/Get/Document-770059/4000%20-%20Human%20Resources.pdf>
- ¹³ From Public Law 89-10-April 11, 1965 in Title IV – Educational Research and Training

¹⁴ Nebraska Statute 79-830 located at <http://nebraskalegislature.gov/laws/statutes.php?statute=79-830>

¹⁵ Public record documents from Lincoln Public Schools public record documents are located at <http://docshare2.lps.org/docshare/dsweb/Get/Document-770059/4000%20-%20Human%20Resources.pdf>

¹⁶ Achievement growth (2013, August 29). The glossary of education reform. Retrieved from <http://edglossary.org/achievement-growth/>

¹⁷ National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, *Linking teacher evaluation to professional development: Focusing on improving teaching and learning* (2012), 16. The use of this national document is meant to highlight the current narrow conception of professional growth in which ‘good teaching’ is related to ‘improved test scores’ and from which this concept is promoted.

¹⁸ This statement reflects the District 145 - Waverly Student Essential Outcomes, or 21st Century Skills, which were adopted by the District 145 Board of Education and located at <http://www.district145.org/vnews/display.v/SEC/District%7CCurriculum%3E%3EEssential%20Outcomes>