Instructional Ventures: A Pragmatist Research Agenda for Studying Education in the Making

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Abstract
Beyond promoting a mode of ethnographic inquiry that is conceptually informed and rigorously attentive to the actualities of human lived experience, this article encourages a more sustained, comparative analysis of the ways that administrators and instructors deal with education as a collectively developed venture. After (a) establishing an analytic frame for a more comprehensive approach to education as a socially engaged process, this article focuses on (b) the administration of educational programs and (c) providing instruction as activity “in the making,” using an ethnographic study of two Protestant Christian seminaries as an empirical, illustrative case. While providing an agenda for examining the ways that people generate and sustain instructional ventures in any educational context, the material presented here also represents an important focal point for theoretically, conceptually, and methodologically integrating research that attends to the ways that instructional (administrative and teaching) activities are accomplished in practice.

Keywords
education, instruction, ethnography, symbolic interaction

Although the sociology of education has shown remarkable progress since the 1950s in the area of empirical research, it has lagged in the development of theories about schooling. As a result, the field in general—despite its empirical accomplishments—would benefit from greater breadth, integration, and focus. A stronger theoretical foundation would guide the selection of future research studies and would insure greater progress in our understanding of schooling.

Hallinan (2006, p. 3)

The present statement does not promote any particular educational policy or stance but rather examines education as a social process. Rather than contribute another analytically isolated instance of empirical research to the large corpus of research on education, the emphasis is on developing an analytic framework for integrating existing qualitative studies of education and for building a more generic, encompassing theory of engaging in instructional ventures (see Best, 2006; Emerson, 1987; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lofland, 1970, 1995; Snow, Morrill, & Anderson, 2003; Zerubavel, 1980). After (a) outlining a symbolic interaction approach (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934), we (b) consider several realms of education that appear to transcend all human communities. We then more directly focuses on the ways that people commonly (c) develop and sustain educational forums as administrators or managers and (d) engage roles as instructors or teachers.

Clearly, student participation and activities are essential to the entire educational process. However, because so much is involved in people “engaging roles as students,” it is necessary to deal with these activities in a separate, companion paper (McLuhan & Prus, in press). Nevertheless, the present statement is developed mindfully of the interrelatedness of administrator, instructor, and student activities within the educational process.

While virtually all interactionist research deals with human knowing and acting (also socialization, interaction, relationships, adjustments, and collective events—see Prus, 1997, for a processually and contextually framed review of the interactionist literature), only a small number of interactionists have focused on the educational process in more formal contexts. Still, some interactionists have directly contributed to the study of the educational process. Among the most noteworthy of these studies are Becker, Hughes, Geer, and Strauss (1961); Becker, Geer, Reisman, and Weiss (1968); Hargreaves, Hestor, and Melor (1975); Albas and Albas (1984, 1988, 1994); Evans (1987, 1988, 1994); Evans

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and Falk (1986); and Haas and Shaffir (1987). Also instructive are the works of Bernstein (1972), Martin (1975), Fine (1985), Dingwall (1987), Adler and Adler (1991, 1994), Dietz (1994), Emerson (1994), Campbell (2003), and Karp, Holmstrom, and Gray (2004). In addition to these studies and the interactionist literature more generally,1 we draw on McLuhan’s (2014) interactionist ethnographic research in two Protestant Christian seminaries (PCSs) as an empirical case with which to highlight and illustrate the research agenda for studying education in the making.

Although there are limits to what can be achieved in a statement of this sort, this article provides an overarching framework for conceptualizing the educational process. It also emphasizes the point that education, first and foremost, is to be understood as a humanly engaged process. As such, education is to be understood within the context of ongoing group life, both as situated sets of interchanges between administrators, teachers, and students and as a broader and more enduring, historically enabled community process.

This means that people’s involvements in education are considered in much the same way that one would examine people’s involvements in any other realm of activity. Although we will be concentrating on people’s involvements in “formal educational” programs, readers should appreciate that “what is considered education” in this and that setting does not and would not exist apart from those people’s involvements in other realms of community life. As a result, the more generic emphasis adopted here can accommodate the broader fields of lived experience that people routinely blend into educational programs.

**Symbolic Interactionism**

Whereas most of the contemporary research on education has a structuralist, often individualistic emphasis, the present statement considers education as a dynamic, enacted, collectively engaged process. It focuses on human knowing and acting as “something in the making.” Still, as all theory and all research rests on certain assumptions, it is important to establish the parameters of the present project. Although some readers will be well acquainted with the assumptions undergirding interactionist scholarship, others are not. And, it is largely because of comparative disregard of baseline premises that so much “qualitative” research on education has failed to achieve a conceptual and methodological coherence as well as higher standards of quality. Furthermore, because of the particular emphasis on education as a socially engaged, historically enabled process, it is essential that premises of this sort be kept clearly in mind throughout the discussion.

This statement builds on the symbolic interactionist tradition (see Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934; Strauss, 1993). Representing a sociological extension of the American pragmatist philosophic tradition associated with Charles Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead,2 the 11 premises or assumptions outlined here establish the conceptual parameters for the present consideration of education as a humanly engaged process:

1. **Human group life is intersubjective.** Human group life is accomplished and made meaningful through community-based, linguistic interchange.

2. **Human group life is knowingly problematic.** It is through symbol-based references that people begin to distinguish (i.e., delineate, designate, and define) realms of “the known” and “the unknown.”

3. **Human group life is object-oriented.** Denoting any phenomenon or thing that can be referenced (i.e., observed, referred to, indicated, acted toward, or otherwise knowingly experienced), objects constitute the contextual and operational essence of the humanly known environment.

4. **Human group life is (multi)perspectival.** As groups of people engage the world on an ongoing basis, they develop viewpoints, conceptual frameworks, or notions of reality that may differ from those of other groups.

5. **Human group life is reflective.** By taking the perspective of the other into account with respect to one’s own being that people become “objects unto themselves” (and act accordingly).

6. **Human group life is sensory/embodied and (knowingly) materialized.** Among the realms of humanly knowing “what is” and “what is not,” people develop an awareness of the material or physical things that others in the community recognize. This includes attending to some sensory/body/physiological essences of human beings (self and other), acknowledging human capacities for stimulation and activity, and recognizing some realms of practical (enacted, embodied) human limitations and fragilities.

7. **Human group life is activity-based.** Human behavior (action and interaction) is envisioned as a meaningful, deliberative, and formulative process of doing things with respect to objects.

8. **Human group life is negotiable.** Because human activity frequently involves direct interactions with others, people may anticipate and strive to influence others as well as acknowledge and resist the influences of others.

9. **Human group life is relational.** People do things within group contexts; people act mindfully of, and in conjunction with, their definitions of self and other (i.e., self–other identities).

10. **Human group life is processual.** Human lived experiences (and activities) are viewed in emergent, ongoing, or temporally developed terms.

11. **Human group life takes place in instances.** Group life is best known through the consideration and study of the developmental flows of the particular occasions in which people engage things.3
Although rudimentary in certain respects, these premises have profound methodological implications for students of the human condition. Addressing the human nature of our subject matter, these premises require that social scientists invoke methodological practices that acknowledge (a) the ways in which people make sense of the world in the course of symbolic (linguistic) interchange, (b) the problematic or ambiguous nature of human knowing (and experience), and (c) the object-oriented worlds in which humans operate. These premises also focus attention on (d) people’s capacities for developing and adopting multiple viewpoints on objects and (e) people’s abilities to take others and themselves into account in engaging objects.

In addition to acknowledging (f) people’s sensory-related capacities and experiences, methodological emphases are placed on attending to (g) the meaningful, formulative, and enabling features of human activity; (h) people’s capacities for influencing, acknowledging, and resisting one another; and (i) the ways that people take their associates into account in developing their lines of action. Furthermore, beyond attending to (j) the ways that people experience and enter into all manners of community life in developmental terms, particular stress is placed on (k) examining the specific instances in which people do things.

**Education as a Sociohistorical Process**

It may be conventional for people to envision education as that which is presently taught in schools, universities, and other formal training programs. Also, an emphasis on education as that which takes place “within the immediate present” can also be accurate and useful for many purposes.

Still, as Dewey (1966) and Mead (1932, 1934) insisted, scholars should attend to human knowing and acting in broader, historically informed terms. Indeed, those who disregard the developmental flows of the educational process and concentrate more exclusively on the present are apt to miss the complexity and rationality of what is actually being taught as well as the ways in which a much broader, historically derived assortment of concerns have shaped and otherwise have contributed to currently existing notions of education.

Quite directly, there can be no present without the past. Not only are people’s current practices fundamentally enabled by the things that earlier generations of people accomplished, but they also can only make sense within the context of the earlier developments that have taken place in particular communities. Likewise, whereas people can only engage education in “the here and now” of the present, people also develop virtually all instances of education to enable activities in the future.

Interestingly, although Emile Durkheim may be best known as a structuralist (following *Suicide* and *The Rules of the Sociological Method*), his materials on education have a notably different, much more consistently pragmatist emphasis. Thus, in *Moral Education* and *The Evolution of Educational Thought*, Durkheim not only explicitly rejects the simplistic rationalism implied in French (Cartesian) structuralism but he also insists on approaching the study of education as a situationally accomplished and historically achieved developmental process.

Sharing much of the pragmatist emphasis of the present statement, Durkheim’s works on education alert scholars not only to the necessity of envisioning education in developmental terms but also to the importance of viewing “what is taught” at any given point in time as a part of an evolutionary process that extends well beyond the specific matters (e.g., the curriculum, content, technologies) featured in classroom or other instructional settings. Thus, even more forcefully than Dewey and Mead, Durkheim also draws attention to the ways that specific matters, emphases, practices, and activities that constitute “education” have emerged within and become interfused with broader long-standing and more recent features (e.g., religion, politics, nationalism, localized developments) of the community life.

This emphasis on social process does not preclude people from learning things “on their own.” However, symbolic interactionists recognize that all intentional or conscious individualized modes of learning are predicated on people first acquiring language (especially concepts) and other group-related technologies (as in procedures, devices, materials) for making sense of their situations and acting toward things with meaningful intent. It is on the basis of these earlier, linguistically enabled community productions, that people (in the process of engaging the objects of the socially known world) may generate other instances, variants, and realms of knowing.

Moreover, although people often think of education and learning with respect to formal schooling or training programs, this viewpoint is unduly limited. As a matter of providing instruction about, and ways of thinking about, and engaging the world in deliberative manners, learning not only pervades people’s active lifetimes but also is central to all human notions of “experience.” Similarly, because the things encountered in classroom settings are interpreted and contextualized with respect to other aspects of people’s lives, the learning that goes on in the classroom cannot be separated or understood apart from people’s participation in other spheres of community life. As a process that is extensively embedded in ongoing community life, learning is virtually coextensive with an active human consciousness or people’s ongoing attentiveness of “what is” and “what is not.”

Because education is contingent on two or more people achieving a linguistic base or developing some sharedness of symbols, the human group must proceed or be recognized as an entity that exists prior to “the individual” as a meaningful entity (see Aristotle, 1984; Blumer, 1969; Ermarth, 1978, pp. 101, 276-280; and Mead, 1934). Relatedly, for instruction to take place, education requires that people assume roles as initiators, agents, designators, or instructors and audiences, targets, recipients, or students.
This does not deny people’s abilities to experience doubt, think about things, develop insights, and otherwise learn “on their own” through encounters with, ongoing reflection about, and reexaminations of things. However, it is only when people acquire language (and the concepts entailed therein) through association with others that they, as individuals, can think about things in meaningful terms. Education presumes that some content is being communicated and that this material is conveyed with some purpose or objective in mind. Thus, these instances of communication constitute meaningful essences and imply particular purposes whereby initiators or agents intend to communicate something to the target others.

While there is no guarantee that recipients will attend to, acknowledge, or comprehend messages as the speakers had intended, those initiating the communications typically anticipate that recipients could come to know these things and subsequently could incorporate these messages into the things they do (i.e., they have capacities to learn specific things as well as act toward these things mindfully of these communications).

Quite directly, without some baseline intersubjectivity, without people actively assuming roles as agents and targets, without content or existing “realms of knowing,” without a meaningful purpose, and without some anticipation that the other could act mindfully of the communication (as in understanding, memory, intention, and invoking particular realms of activity), there would be no education.

Clearly, there is no presumption that any instance of the education process will have the effect intended by the instructor (agent or initiator). Indeed, no matter what the agent may do, the educational process is ultimately contingent on recipients attending to instructor messages, interpreting communication in ways that are consistent with instructor intentions, and acting in ways that correspond with instructor objectives.

Also, while people often envision education primarily as a mental or brain-situated phenomenon, it is much more accurate to envision education as a more encompassing, activity-based process. This latter approach acknowledges (a) people’s physiological capacities for, and involvements in, teaching and learning processes as well as people’s more general capacities for knowing, acting, and interacting; (b) that education is not a cognitive process per se but more fundamentally represents a symbolic or linguistically enabled social essence; and (c) that teaching and learning require that both sets of participants engage the instructional process mindful of the other. Thus, education is achieved through, manifested in, accessed within, adjusted to, and motivated by, people’s participation in mutually meaningful realms of activity. These ideas are very much rooted in Aristotle’s writings on education (Chambless, 1987; Spangler, 1998). More recently, however, somewhat parallel notions have been reformulated by Emile Durkheim (1961, 1977), John Dewey (1966, 1967, 1970; Biesta & Burbules, 2003), and G. H. Mead (see Biesta, 1998, 1999).

**Education as a Multidimensional Process**

While a pervasive feature of the human community, education is not one thing, nor does it involve one realm of content. Although people may be seen to engage in a learning process throughout their lives, they may approach the matter of “learning things” with great variations of focus, emphasis, and continuity.

For example, while people may assume more distinctive roles as instructors and students in some cases, people also may engage the educational process as agents and recipients on a more or less continuous and interchangeable basis. Although there is no assumption of equality or adequacy, the very same sets of people may assume positions as both instructors (initiators, agents) and audiences (recipients, targets) with respect to each other (i.e., both parties may instruct as well as learn from the other).

Similarly, certain kinds of teaching and learning may be commonly or formally defined as “education,” but this should not obscure a broader appreciation of education as an ongoing, multifaceted, and multiengaged process. From this viewpoint, all of those who share a language with others may assume roles as initiators and recipients in the broader educational process, and the content of any communication endeavor may pertain to anything that people (as initiators) intend to convey to targets, with respect to any field of activity.

The participants (i.e., indicators and recipients) in any instance of the educational process need not explicitly define themselves as instructors and/or students, nor need they define their communications as having particular instructive contents or intentions. Indeed, we may expect great variations in the extent to which people making and receiving indications envision themselves as participating in an educational process of any sort.

However, by adopting an approach to education that more broadly acknowledges people’s intentions to communicate something to others by invoking shared terms of reference, scholars avoid more arbitrary distinctions and benefit analytically by having access to a fuller range of instances and comparison points. Furthermore, by approaching education in somewhat broader terms (than formal schooling practices, for instance), we may begin to develop a more unified conceptual framework for examining human group life in the making. Still, not all educational objectives are of one emphasis.

Attending to education as a social process within the broader community, several educational objectives or motifs may be delineated: (a) ensuring generalized life skills; (b) developing personal morality and character; (c) encouraging task-related competencies; (d) promoting social order; (e) dealing with health, illness, and mortality; (f) recognizing ambiguity and unpredictability; (g) attending to entertainment motifs; and (h) pursuing an understanding of the known and the unknown.
All of these agendas seem apt to receive some attention in every human community. Still, people’s emphases and forms of involvements in each of these areas are likely to vary extensively both across and within particular communities. The particular ways that people engage these matters in some groups may seem especially rudimentary when compared with people’s practices in other settings. However, insofar as a community has a language and some capacity to survive, all of these elements are likely to be invoked, albeit in greater or lesser degrees.

On the surface, the matters of providing standardized or routinized instruction and (especially) pursuing scholarship seem least likely to be developed across societies. Still, some group-directed instruction seems likely in almost all societies (if only in sharing language and coordinating routines), and some value also is likely to be attached to those who appear to know “what is” as well as those who know “how something works,” ” or “how something can be done,” or can explain “why something is.” Greater emphasis may be placed on people developing and pursuing knowledge (and curiosity) in some settings over others, but some attentiveness to others knowing, acting, coordinating, and learning seem fundamental to group life even when the people involved have not explicitly formulated concepts of these sorts.

Still, each and any set of associates within any given community may have quite different ideas of what is important, what people should know, and how others should be “instructed.” For example, while parents may expose infants to educational or religious motifs at the same time they are encouraging these children to develop basic life skills, other siblings in the family may be intent on instructing the newcomers to become playmates. Likewise, whether they engage targets more individually or within broader group contexts, those providing instances of instruction to others also seem likely to pursue their objectives in uneven fashions even as they move from one instance of instruction with the same targets to the next.

Clearly, education is not one thing. But, even when specific themes or agendas are pursued on a broader, community basis, particular educational emphases may be punctuated by comparative disregard, disruption, confusion, fragmentation, and loss over time (see Durkheim, 1977). Because of the variable emphases that members of both broader communities and the more specific groups within may put on the several realms of education just discussed, the greatest analytic gains are achieved by approaching education in a more distinctive processually focused manner.

**Attending to the Educational Process**

Whereas much instruction and learning takes place in more casual or routine communication, the more immediate focus is on the ways that people participate in the matters of teaching and learning on a more explicit, formalized, or routinized basis. Although denoting a matter of degree rather than an entirely different process, the emphasis is on the ways in which people enter into and experience educational motifs in more systematic and sustained manners. In what follows, we consider several realms of activity that would allow researchers and analysts to examine the educational process more directly in enacted terms.

We accomplish this task by informing and illustrating the following research agenda with examples from McLuhan’s (2014) 14-month ethnographic study of two PCSs, Mainline Seminary and Evangelical Seminary. In addition to offering graduate programs and degrees in theology and religious education, PCSs are educational institutions that prepare people for professional Christian ministry in the Protestant tradition for a variety of Christian churches, organizations, missions, and related contexts. PCSs primarily prepare people for ministry through master of divinity (MDiv) degree programs—the standard professional degree for Christian ministers—which combine course work with a supervised ministry placement.

Mainline Seminary was a denominationally based school, being one of a few across Canada that specifically prepared people for ordained congregational ministry in the Mainline denomination church. Evangelical Seminary was denominationally affiliated, but its MDiv program was not denominationally specific or restricted, designed to prepare people for evangelically inspired Christian ministry in a variety of denominational and nondenominational contexts.

Data sources included 80 open-ended, in-depth interviews with 64 MDiv instructors, students, and staff members; participant observation in 23 full-term ministry courses, weekly worship and community meals, informal student gatherings, and a variety of seminary events; and organizational documents related to the professional ministry program, including websites, promotional materials, course outlines and assignment instructions, student handbooks, and program manuals.

We used the full breadth of these data, in addition to the interactionist research and literature referenced earlier, in developing our theoretical constructs and conceptual categories. Rather than a study of seminary education per se or a review of the literature on “education,” this material is intended to foster more focused instances of ethnographic research on education “in the making” and provide a base for the comparative analysis of ethnographic materials that more specifically attend to education as an actively engaged process.

Whereas the matter of people experiencing student roles will be addressed in a separate, companion paper (McLuhan & Prus, in press), the following statement focuses on the ways that people (a) administer or manage the particular theaters of operation in which various educational endeavors may be pursued and (b) engage instructional activities. These two realms of activity are much more interconnected than these divisions suggest. The division invoked here reflects the complexities of the educational process and the matter of presenting materials in more manageable packages.
Administering Educational Programs

Whereas our emphasis is on more explicit and sustained realms of instructional endeavor, it is essential to recognize that educational ventures not only encompass a great many settings but also involve a great many participants in the community. As such, it is important to be attentive to both the multiple theaters of operation or fields of interchange in which people more explicitly invoke aspects of the instructional process and the ways in which this assortment of participants attempt to shape, manage, or administer aspects of the educational process in the lifeworlds in which these people operate.

Furthermore, although people may assume specifically designated roles as instructors and students in certain settings, people need not be identified as “instructors” and “students” to embark on educational ventures of sustained and consequential types (e.g., consider “on the job training,” “the playing of games,” and more sustained realms of parent–child tutelage). Similarly, the educational process also need not be confined to those assuming roles as instructors and students in particular settings. Other people may assume a variety of supporting, supplementary, and diversionary roles in instructional settings and interconnected arenas (see, for example, Karp et al., 2004).

Regardless of whether the contents of particular educational programs revolve around religious, occupational, or recreational matters, for instance, or whether they assume a liberal arts (and sciences) dimension, it is important to be attentive to the ways that instructional ventures are brought into being, managed, maintained, modified, and extended. Conversely, as educational programs require concerted enterprise merely to be sustained, analysts should also attend to when particular educational ventures dissipate, fall into disregard, or be terminated in other ways.

While some instances of instruction may be pursued with little outside resistance, people involved in more extensive educational ventures may encounter considerable resistance from others in the broader community. Whereas those implementing very limited and/or highly isolated instructional programs may be left more entirely on their own, even these people may encounter suggestions, criticisms, distractions, and other obstacles in their attempts to maintain a particular educational emphasis. When more people (administrators, instructors, students, and their associates) are involved, one is likely to witness a greater variety of resistances as well as more attempts at redirecting the matters under consideration.

As the particular people involved in educational ventures develop more extensive routines, these educators also seem likely to become more insistent on entrenching and maintaining, if not also extending, the parameters of their present fields of instruction. These efforts may serve to consolidate or objectify particular educational ventures, but these more concerted emphases also may become points of resistance on the part of others in the broader community.

Focusing on the theaters of operation in which people may pursue and administratively shape educational endeavors, we consider in what follows (a) the various people who may become involved in these ventures, (b) the matter of initiating and sustaining particular programs of instruction, and (c) the resistances that those operating educational ventures may encounter in these endeavors.

Acknowledging the participants. Because the matters of instructing and learning are so pervasive in routine human interchange, a great many instances of education involve two people who, in various ways, assume standpoints as instructors and students as they share information with one another. In other cases, a much wider assortment of people may become involved in attempts to shape, regulate, or control aspects of the educational process.

Although only some of these people may be designated as “administrators” or supervisors of educational programs, it should be recognized that an assortment of other people may enter into the administrative or management process in both more general and highly specific manners. Whereas some people may attempt to direct the educational process from afar by setting broad parameters of policy, insisting on particular moral or religious emphases, or promoting agendas that are contingent on the funding that they administer, others may attempt to shape people’s behaviors in more immediate, here and now, instructional settings. For example, at Mainline Seminary there was a division of administrative responsibilities and agendas both inside and outside the college. Inside Mainline, the faculty’s primary responsibility was the instruction and formation of the seminary students, while the principal of Mainline, in addition to teaching and supervising students, was involved in generating support for an extensive renovation planned for the college. As Mainline was a denomination-founded and -sponsored school, it was also subject, at times, to the requirements, requests, and agendas of the denomination and its local church bodies.

Whereas some managerial endeavors will be focused on ways of facilitating existing educational practices, other interventions may be more directly restrictive, oppositionary, censorial, or punitive in nature, as all involved parties pursue their own notions of “good intentions” and political expediences. For example, most Mainline ministry students had to be certified by their local church bodies to complete the MDiv program. The certification process could become political, with some local church bodies insisting that Mainline admit and train students whom Mainline thought to be of questionable suitability for the program.

The specific people involved in developing and sustaining particular programs of study may vary extensively, but this commonly includes those assuming roles as (a) organizers, coordinators, or administrators; (b) teachers; (c) students; and (d) parents, associates, and referential others.

Still, because education is a community process of sorts, others becoming involved frequently include (e) the moral
voices of the community (politicians, religious leaders, secular critics), (f) sponsors (also monitors, regulators), (g) competitors, and (h) analysts and researchers. For instance, both Mainline and Evangelical were in contact with and influenced by the Association of Theological Schools, allies and critics from affiliated secular research universities, local ministers and churches, financial donors, and competing seminaries.

Analysts should also recognize that while some people may assume multiple roles in particular instances (as in instances of parents administering homeschooling), people who adopt other roles (e.g., such as politicians, religious leaders, sponsors, or critics) may also embark on activities designed to direct (instruct, monitor, and regulate) instructional ventures or particular aspects of those educational programs.

Consequently, it is important that researchers and analysts be mindful of the various ways that the people involved in particular educational ventures engage one another in these broader, often overlapping realms of activity. Relatedly, scholars may consider the ways in which people become involved in particular educational ventures and when (and how) they sustain and intensify as well as diminish, terminate, and reengage these ventures.

Initiating and sustaining programs. All instances of purposive instruction represent “collective events,” in which (one or more) people are dependent on others to accomplish some particular set of objectives. However, those who intend to establish more sustained and extended educational ventures are apt to find themselves involved in matters that take them into an array of political theaters.

Thus, whereas those attempting to organize educational programs may maintain (a) an overarching focus on certain educational objectives, this emphasis may fade into the background as these coordinators (b) engage other (often supplementary) organizational agendas; (c) pursue instructional settings, funding, and other resources; and (d) negotiate agendas and organizational procedures with an assortment of others in the community.

Hence, while those attempting to promote particular educational ventures may begin with visions of desired objectives and notions of how these goals might be accomplished, they may find that other people are not as ready to acknowledge and support their visions of viable educational ventures as they had hoped. Not only may promoters find that their quest for cooperation is problematic from the outset but they also may find that those whose support is particularly vital for the development of these endeavors may have notably different ideas of desired end states and/or the ways these are to be pursued.

For example, Evangelical Seminary’s board of governors decided to replace the president of the college to change the vision, direction, and image of the school and its ministry formation program. This change was in part a response to the concerns of the local Evangelical church community who thought the program and its graduates had become too liberal in their orientation to Christian ministry. The Board attributed declining enrollment and graduate employment in ministry positions to this liberal focus. As one administrator explained,

[T]here was a certain period in the life of the college where virtually no graduate from the M.Div. was actively serving in ministry. What’s going on here? Nobody? That’s not good. That doesn’t speak well of the college, but we’re well past those years. (Administrator, Evangelical Seminary)

One of the focal points of the new administration’s agenda was increasing student enrollment in the ministry formation program. However, some professors expressed concern that rather than solely relying on the promotion and appeal of the reconfigured evangelical focus of the program, Evangelical Seminary was admitting students of inadequate academic ability to meet its enrollment and financial objectives:

To be honest, we’ll take any warm body, as will any theological college you can find because we are all desperate for money. In fact, I think the problem is we allow too many people in, people who we know are not going to make it in ministry, but if you want to pay us your money, then knock yourself out. We do have academic standards, but I think we fudge on them sometimes just because it’s a little more tuition. The financial constraints are an absolute reality. (Professor, Evangelical Seminary)

As realms of collective enterprise, educational ventures take organizers into the problematic and negotiated world of the other. In pursuing cooperation from what often becomes an extended array of others (e.g., politicians, religious leaders, prospective employers, parents, and students) who may enter into the process at multiple points and bring their own sets of agendas, associates, and other resources into play, the initial proponents of particular educational ventures may find that the programs that eventually are developed through these collective interchanges may be far removed from the objectives, outcomes, and other images with which these proponents were working at the outset.

In another example from Evangelical Seminary, the founding of a PhD program at the college resulted in Evangelical having to distance itself from the relationship it had with the secular university with which it was affiliated. The university refused to sponsor and grant degrees for Evangelical’s PhD program. The result was an unaccredited program in which PhD students found themselves to be ineligible for traditional forms of government student funding.

As in other sectors of community life, people’s attempts to define educational matters as significant concerns, persuade others of the importance of pursuing these objectives, and develop and sustain particular educational programs are best understood as collectively developed processes (Blumer, 1971). It is instructive to attend to the following processes...
when considering the administration of educational programs: (a) articulating visions of educational objectives, (b) drawing attention to educational concerns, (c) pursuing cooperation from consequential others, (d) generating educational policy (attending to emphases, content, and procedures), (e) pursuing resources (funding, locations, instructors, materials, technologies), and (f) incorporating particular modes of technology into the instructional process.

Relatively, although those involved in the administration of educational ventures may vary extensively in the degree to which they engage (and juggle) these activities at any given point, these processes represent consequential focal points for comprehending the administrative endeavor as well as pivotal departure points for more sustained ethnographic inquiry on the actualities of administrative practices in educational settings.

Whereas the preceding themes are presented in a particular order, readers may appreciate that once people have some preliminary images of educational objectives, they and their associates may engage and reengage all of these subprocesses (including the rearticulation of visions) in a variety of sequences in the developmental flows of actual cases.

Organizers may find that certain aspects of program development proceed smoothly (and sometimes much better than expected), but researchers and analysts should be mindful of the potential for resistance at all points in the process. This includes those educational programs in which the direction and status of the program seems entirely certain. It is to these aspects of the administrative process that we now turn.

**Facing program-related challenges.** Beyond the actual targets of instruction, those embarking on particular educational programs may face three major sources of challenge: outsider opposition, competition, and insider resistance. The most obvious sources of resistance to educational ventures are those associated with outsider opposition, particularly of more hostile sorts (as in condemnations, censorship, and purges).

For example, ministers who were critical of, sometimes directly opposed to, the practices of Mainline Seminary would sometimes interfere with its ministry formation program. These outside resisters would go as far as instructing prospective students to subvert and avoid some of Mainline’s core viewpoints and pedagogical practices, instead advising prospective students to perform the perfunctory student role:

At the end of October, start of November I’m asking [my mentor, the pastor] questions about [Mainline Seminary] . . . He tells me about his experience at [Mainline], which was not positive. His advice to me is, “You can do it. Go to [Mainline],” this is what he actually says to me, “Go to [Mainline], put your head down, don’t try to change [Mainline], don’t try to stir the pot, don’t try to zap them out of their ritualistic, traditionalist mentality. Just put your head down, write your papers . . . put your head down, power through it” . . . I don’t know if you’ve noticed in classes different profs just nuancing, “You are a learned clergy. You’re smart. You write good sermons. You write out those prayers. And the rest of them, those idiot Pentecostals, and those idiot Baptists, all these charismatic denominations.” That’s the sense I get from [Mainline Seminary]. And the robes, and all the pomp. Personally, I don’t buy it. I will not be like that as a pastor. [Q: How did this advice influence your approach at Mainline?] . . . I would just sit in the back of the class with a laptop and not say much. Because to say something like, “I think that we do communion wrong,” or something like that, to say something like that would get a lot of feathers ruffled. (Ministry student, Mainline Seminary, 24 years old)

The presence of competitors in the broader educational arena also draws attention to the more precarious nature of particular ventures. Because Evangelical Seminary’s ministry formation program was nondenominational in its enrollment requirements and instructional focus, it appealed to a wide population of potential applicants and competed with a number of other nondenominational seminaries in attracting students. In contrast, Mainline Seminary primarily trained people to become ordained Mainline denomination ministers. Mainline had in effect a monopoly on the production of Mainline ministers. While this situation was advantageous in some respects, it also left Mainline tied to the fate of the Mainline denomination and thus vulnerable. Still, some of the most consequential challenges that those coordinating educational programs face tend to come from within.

In addition to any disregard, denigration, or more direct opposition that organizers may encounter from groups and individuals of more external sorts, those promoting particular educational ventures also face the task of maintaining coherence within their more immediate sets of associates. Whereas the primary targets (students) of these educational ventures may generate certain problems for those operating educational programs through their preferences, applications, distractions, and other realms of modes of involvement, other insider resistance may come from those involved in administering and implementing particular programs. Thus, despite their more central roles in sustaining these programs, the people involved in particular educational ventures may find themselves at odds with respect to the objectives, notions of wisdom, procedures, and priorities of their own programs. An example from Evangelical was the tension some faculty had with president of the seminary over a variety of issues: the president’s unilateral and punitive administrative approach, the publish or perish emphasis for faculty focused on teaching in the ministry formation program, the emphasis of the academic (PhD) program over the ministry (MDiv) program, and the hiring and promotion processes, which were perceived to be unfair.

In some cases, program co-coordinators may attempt to reduce potential realms of resistance by developing common understandings among themselves (and those they define as major participants) at the outset as well as by reaffirming shared emphases on an ongoing basis. Nevertheless, the coordinators of virtually all sustained programs are apt to
encounter an assortment of external and internal resistances on a sporadic, if not a more consistent, basis.

Those organizing and promoting particular educational ventures may not only face the task of achieving consensus on the direction of their ventures at the outset, but even as particular programs are implemented, coordinators also may find themselves at odds (both among themselves and their personnel) amid subsequent shifts in existing programs and agendas, insider and outsider activities, and their own interests and experiences. Similarly, those “running educational ventures” on their own also may experience considerable ambivalence (i.e., may be of two or more minds) regarding all manners of administrative and instructional matters.

In addition to their own internal struggles, administrators are often reminded of their vulnerability to outsiders of various sorts and, as a result, endeavor to find ways of achieving autonomy of operations (with respect to outsider intervention). Educators, then, may spend considerable time and effort developing policies and procedures designed to shield themselves from the intrusions of an array of outsiders (including hostile, bothersome, and competitive sources as well as seemingly well-intentioned, supportive others).

Although many program administrators anticipate resistances of various kinds, their tactical adjustments often are confounded by their inability to predict just when and how they will encounter subsequent instances of resistance. The coordinators may not be able to anticipate the sources of their next set of challenges, the matters around which issues or resistances may emerge, the forms these may assume, the tactics these sources may invoke, the range of resources they may bring into any confrontations, or the ways in which these events may affect on their programs in more general and more specific terms. Even when administrators appear to effectively deal with particular challenges, the adjustments they make may not only take them some distance from their primary activities and educational agendas but these adjustments also may become points of later difficulties.

Mindful of administrative concerns and dilemmas along these lines, it is expected that those coordinating educational programs may find themselves (a) experiencing resistance from insiders (students, coordinators, instructors) as well as (b) encountering direction, resistance, and obstacles from an assortment of outsiders (competitors, politicians and policy makers, funding sources, religious leaders, parents, and others).

From a research perspective, this means that any inquiries concerning the policies, practices, and adjustments of those involved in administering educational programs are best understood when researchers more extensively attend to the ways that these other people enter into “the management process” in more direct, interactive terms as well as the ways that the administrators anticipate, define, and adjust their activities mindfully of these others.

There is no guarantee that any administrative adjustments will be successful, but some of the more common tactics program coordinators may deploy in dealing with resistance include (a) developing justifications for particular programs, (b) pursuing consensus on the program, (c) seeking supporters/allies, (d) attempting to neutralize oppositionary viewpoints and practices, (e) striving for autonomy, and (f) making compromises and concessions. Still, it will be necessary to see how administrators actually deal with the array of others that they encounter amid an attentiveness to their own objectives and activities. If we are to learn about administrative roles, it will be necessary to not only “study administrators at work” in sustained ethnographic detail but also develop more extended analyses of their activities by developing comparisons across a series of detailed ethnographic studies.

Clearly, researchers and analysts can expect great variation in the ways and extent to which particular educational ventures may be characterized by administrative as opposed to more distinctively instructional emphases. Indeed, in highly politicized, bureaucratic, and legalistic environments, these administrative features at times may dominate programs to such an extent that teaching as well as scholarly emphases may be rendered largely incidental.

Having drawn attention to the processes and problems of administrative activity and the necessity of examining the administration of the educational programs as “something in the making,” the focus now shifts to the ways that people embark on and sustain instructional activities.

Providing Instruction

Recognizing that those who intend to provide instruction for others rather inevitably are drawn into administrative matters of sorts, the more immediate emphasis is on the activities entailed in (a) setting the parameters of instruction, (b) dealing with students, and (c) striving for autonomy. Whereas “the coordinator” features of the instructor role are more evident in the matter of setting the parameters of instruction, “the teaching component” of the instructor role is more prominent in dealing with students.

Setting the parameters. Although those more exclusively involved in administering instructional programs commonly encounter some of the issues we discuss below, these topics have particular relevance for establishing the actual contexts in which instruction is implemented. Many of these activities may be engaged and reengaged as those involved in pursuing educational programs at one or other levels attempt to deal with the instances at hand.

Even though program directors and frontline instructors may have differing objectives, concerns, and emphases, there still are the matters of (a) determining who will be taught (and by whom); (b) deciding on the objectives, contents, and emphases of instruction; (c) considering the methods of instruction; (d) finding settings or forums for instruction; (e) attending to materials and technologies; (f)
setting standards or levels of expectation; (g) judging competence or assessing performance; (h) dealing with weaknesses and failures; and (i) certifying performance.

For example, both Mainline and Evangelical Seminary faced the pedagogical problem of designing and implementing programs that would develop students’ academic competence and ministerial character. The academic component was relatively nonproblematic for Mainline and Evangelical to effect and evaluate, for it is a process with which most schools are familiar and experienced, religious or secular. The difficulty for each school was the formation of student character and the assessment of character development, or lack thereof. Specifically, faculty cited a variety of challenges to character formation: the preponderance of part-time students, the lack of extracurricular time spent with students, the publish or perish pressures of the faculty position, the absence of reliable and quantifiable character measures, and the multicultural constitution of the student population. Still, acknowledging these challenges, both schools instituted practices for character development and assessment, even though the results were often nebulous.

**Dealing with students.** Those interested in instruction often focus on instructor backgrounds and presentational styles. However, the actual instructors typically become involved in a much more encompassing set of activities. Beyond any concerns with accessing and accommodating some specific sets of people as students, instructors also face the tasks of defining particular subject matters for instruction, pursuing quality, maintaining instructional focus, and dealing with an assortment of student associates. Instructors also commonly encounter a variety of emergent operational dilemmas. Beyond instances of disruption, resistance, and troublesome relationships, these may range from the matter of dealing with students who have exceptional abilities to coping with those who have evident physical and/or cognitive limitations. For example, a professor at Mainline noted how the “academic stars” in the ministry formation program were often limited in their development because of professors’ concerted focus on assisting students who were having difficulties with the material. The idea was that the many should benefit (or pass) rather than the few.

I think the difference between a theological seminary and an undergraduate college is that you’re not just teaching a discipline. You’re teaching a discipline, plus you’re teaching students . . . For me, teaching is improving every student to a certain level, so getting the best out of everyone if they’re willing to put the work into it, but trying to make everyone better, as opposed to here’s the standard and I’ll just grade you on the standard, and I don’t really care about you. The people who are struggling get as much attention as those who are doing well, probably a bit more. If there’s a group that suffers, it’s probably the very good who could become excellent. (Professor, Mainline Seminary)

Furthermore, because of the various people who may make demands on their time, efforts, and priorities, individual instructors often find it difficult to maintain the autonomy associated with a more desired sense of direction in their instructional endeavors. This was the case for instructors who felt that the pressure to publish limited their teaching preparation and performance:

I think that our metrics of promotion are too myopic . . . Promotion is based on research, teaching, institutional service, church service . . . But what really matters is book publications, articles. The other ones are required, but there is no reward for them, only punishment [if not completed]. What is rewarded are publications. So on the surface, one might say, “Oh, they are holistic! They look at everything.” But the function of what is going on is different. [Q: Does the pressure to research and publish affect your teaching?] It definitely does. My teaching suffers. All my teaching suffers . . . I give my teaching the least time that I need to. They get the bare minimum because it’s not what’s rewarded. Ultimately, I’m not going to be promoted and receive merit increases based on what happens in the classroom. Now, I try to be conscientious. But the fact is . . . What do I do over the summer? I don’t spend the time prepping classes. I spend it researching and writing . . . I try and go to events that are centered on students, but it’s just not rewarded. And I live in the real world; I have to spend my time on things that are rewarded. I could spend my time on teaching here, but that’s not rewarded in terms of promotion and merit increases. Now, maybe that’s reflective of my own poor moral character, but it’s just pragmatics in some respects: you work in certain contexts, you have to adapt to certain contexts. So time with students gets affected, class prep gets affected. (Professor, Evangelical Seminary)

Mindful of instructor concerns, activities, and dilemmas, researchers and analysts should find the following matters of particular consequence:

**Encountering (Obtaining/Meeting) Students**

**Setting an Agenda for Instruction**

**Engaging the Instructional Role**

**Knowing one’s subject matter**

**Building on “What is Known”**

**Promoting inductive and deductive reasoning**

**Encouraging scholarship**

**Pursuing Quality**

**Defining and maintaining objectives**

**Categorizing students**

**Gauging student abilities and potential**

**Encouraging performance**

**Encountering resistance**

**Making compromises**

**Assessing student performance**

**Providing feedback to students**

**Dealing with disappointed students**

**Encountering opposition (students/others)**

**Persisting with one’s sense of standards**
Getting penalized for emphasis on quality

Sustaining Instructional Focus
Getting prepared
Encountering/engaging students
Presenting materials
Making adjustments
Facing distractions/disregard/rejection
Maintaining student (and self) enthusiasm

Attending to Students More Generally
Encountering trouble/maintaining order
Dealing with students’ associates
Encountering Other Dilemmas

Despite the importance of attending to the things that people do in pursuing their roles as instructors, the educational process is not a unilateral process. Indeed, without examining the ways in which people engage roles as students, one cannot understand the instructional process.

Relatedly, because education normally is intended to prepare students for broader realms of endeavor, instructors seem unable to avoid “pitching to the generalized other” (Mead, 1934) in preparing and presenting materials to students—even in one-to-one settings. As all standpoints, wisdoms, and procedures (including the use of physical technologies) that constitute focal points of instruction must necessarily be conveyed (or taught) in intersubjective terms (i.e., establish some sharedness of meaning between the teacher and the learner), all instructors are dependent on those with whom they are working.

Where fuller senses of intersubjectivity are not achieved, communication is more notably limited, as are the prospects for education more generally. Still, it is not just the emphasis on intersubjectivity in itself that accounts for more viable education. There also are the matters of establishing a more substantial content base and students meaningfully attending to and otherwise actively engaging the materials under consideration.

Individualized instruction or tutelage may provide opportunities for achieving more enhanced levels of intersubjectivity between teachers and students, but this still presumes a receptivity on the part of students to attend to the instructor as well as a willingness on the part of the instructor to seek out points of reference on which to build. Relatedly, because students bring different stocks of knowledge, experiences, and relevancies into the instructional setting, it is most unlikely that all of the students in any group will approach and experience the studies in a homogeneous manner. The student role is much more multifaceted and activity-based than it may appear on the surface. As suggested in the companion paper on students (McLuhan and Prus, in press), learning is much more than a minute holistic or cognitive process. It is a much more completely humanly (and socially) engaged process.

Striving for autonomy. Insofar as they attend to particular objectives, methods, notions of quality, and varying arrays of outside interests and obligations, instructors seem likely to be concerned about shaping various features of the educational environment in which they operate. Relatedly, anything that is seen to interfere with instructors’ abilities to pursue their objectives in preferred manners may become the focal point of concern, resistance, and disaffection.

Although this would include students who disrupt others or otherwise disregard the instruction process, virtually anyone in instructors’ broader theaters of operation may be seen to jeopardize instructors’ anticipated flows of activity. For example, not surprisingly, some of the seminary instructors were unsure of how to deal with an ethnographer in their midst. After an introductory period of 2 weeks of class participation, most instructors’ concerns were assuaged. A minority, however, denied researcher access to their classes and seminars, citing potential distraction as their primary concern. Because people generally define things that interfere with their abilities to pursue desired objectives as troublesome, those interested in the teaching role would find this a particularly valuable realm of inquiry.

Still, it should be recognized that teaching may be only one of several objectives people may wish to pursue (also consider research and administration as well as people’s other interests, obligations, and capacities). For this reason, it is important that those conducting research in this area be mindful of and open to much wider realms of emphases and activities than those implied more directly in “the teaching role.”

Conclusion

Focusing on “education in the making,” this article has directed attention to the necessity of examining education as a humanly engaged, collectively achieved process. This might seem an obvious, almost commonsensical, standpoint. It also is one that has long-standing intellectual roots (minimally back to the classical Greek scholarship of Plato and Aristotle). However, this viewpoint generally has been ignored by those studying education as social scientists and educators.

The lack of correspondence between contemporary theory and research with the actualities of people engaging the educational process partially may be attributed to the structuralist, quantitative legacy of René Descartes (1596-1650) and people’s more general quests for simplistic (as in factors/variables) solutions and “quick fixes” to the problems of education.

While acknowledging the value of structuralist thought and quantitative methodology as technologies that people could use in studying and dealing with matters in the physical sciences (including human physiology), those assuming pragmatist approaches to education (including Aristotle, Dewey, Durkheim, and Mead) insist that the study of human
knowing and acting needs to be approached in very different terms. Rather than viewing human knowing as “mirroring what is there,” those adopting pragmatist standpoints envision people as engaging the world in meaningful, active sense-making terms. All knowing presumes a linguistically enabled set of group processes but takes place in the instances in which people, as purposive, anticipating, adjusting agents, do things.

Another source of confusion pertaining to educational theory also reflects the idealism associated with people such as Michele de Montaigne (1533-1592) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), who, among others of their era, not only criticized more structured forms of education (as inherently alienating to people) but also claimed that people would learn effectively if left largely to their own natural devices. Like Durkheim (1961), the interactionists would question those who assume that people do not require extended instruction or believe that knowledge can be poured into people’s consciousness (i.e., invoking the metaphor of pitchers and containers—fostered by Montaigne, among others).

Still, some of the failure of contemporary scholars to approach and study education as a complex set of activities and interchanges also may be linked to the lack of conceptual clarity in the pragmatism of Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey and their inabilities to articulate a viable methodology for studying human group life in the making. Thus, whereas these 20th-century pragmatists made great conceptual inroads in dealing with the structuralisms and idealisms of Descartes, Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel that had dominated Western social thought over the past three centuries, the pragmatist philosophers failed to provide a methodology that would enable more sustained examinations of the very processes of which they spoke.

The essential or enabling methodological transition took place in sociology at the University of Chicago, where Herbert Blumer synthesized the pragmatism of George Herbert Mead and John Dewey with the ethnographic emphasis of Charles Horton Cooley and Robert Park (see Blumer, 1969). Still, attending to the more pluralist analytic features of pragmatist thought, Blumer also stressed the importance of approaching the study of human group life in comparative, processual terms—as generic processes. It is this Blumerian pragmatist emphasis on the study of human knowing and acting that undergirds the present consideration of “education in the making.”

Building centrally on Chicago-style symbolic interaction and ethnographic methodology, this article has approached education as a humanly enacted, collectively achieved process that is to be studied in the instances. By doing so, this article has indicated a great many points of inquiry into the ways that the educational process is actually engaged by those assuming roles as administrators and instructors.

In addition to identifying a number of realms of activity central to the study of instructional ventures, the present statement also provides a coherent theoretical and methodological framework for engaging education as a subject matter. By approaching education as a field of activity in more distinctive interactionist terms, those studying the educational process may not only tap into a more extensive interactionist literature that deals with the study of human knowing and acting but also use their more focused examinations of the educational process to contribute to the broader study of human lived experience in more generic, enduring, and consequential terms.

Denoting an interim point of continuity in a long-standing pragmatist venture, it is hoped that this research agenda for studying instructional ventures as realms of activity may provide researchers and analysts with a set of conceptual coordinates and methodological resources for probing, examining, testing, assessing, informing, extending, and refining or recasting notions of the educational process (see Best, 2006; Emerson, 1987; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lofland, 1970, 1995; Snow et al., 2003; Zerubavel, 1980).

Still, the challenges facing those who intend to study “education in the making” remain formidable. In addition to striving for quality (as in depth, detail, openness, pluralism) in their ethnographic endeavors and developing a more extended familiarity with a body of literature that would facilitate comparative analysis and conceptual development, researchers also will have to manage inferences that they are too close to their data to be “scientific” and deal with funding agencies and others who want quick fix, simplistic solutions to what they define as consequential educational problems at this and that point.

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Notes

1. Interestingly, too, whereas John Dewey often is envisioned as (a) a consequential contributor to the pragmatist philosophy on which symbolic interactionism builds as well as (b) a major source of educational theory in America, (c) the interactionists have made little direct use of his work on education. Also, (d) those working more directly in the field of education seem largely unaware of interactionist approaches (theory, methods, concepts) to the study of education as a socially engaged activity. Furthermore, although there has been a considerable proliferation of qualitative and ethnographic studies in the field...
of education over the past few decades, most of this material lacks the conceptual and methodological coherence of interactionist scholarship and, likewise, seems only minimally atten-
tive to the enabling foundations of pragmatist philosophy more generally (see Metz, 2000).

2. Symbolic interactionism was developed through a synthesis of American pragmatist philosophy and ethnographic research by scholars at the University of Chicago. Although the connections are considerably more indirect and multifaceted (reflecting a variety of fields of scholarship over the millennia), American pragmatist philosophy, in turn, is rooted in Greek social thought particularly as articulated by Aristotle.

For an educationally focused consideration of the Greek roots of pragmatist thought, see J. J. Chambliss’s (1987) Educational Theory as Theory of Conduct: From Aristotle to Dewey. William Frankena (1965) provides a thoughtful comparative consideration of the viewpoints of Aristotle, Kant, and Dewey. Readers also are referred to Sr. Mary Michael Spangler’s (1998) highly instructive text, Aristotle on Teaching.

Of the American pragmatists, John Dewey is especially well known for the attention he has given to education as a realm of activity. Still, in addition to Dewey’s own works on education (especially see Dewey, 1966, 1967, 1970), readers may find Gert Biesta and Nicholas Burbules’s (2003) Pragmatism and Education Research especially helpful in isolating the more central pragmatist emphases in Dewey’s work.

Although G. H. Mead is seldom viewed as a philosopher of education, Gert Biesta’s (1998, 1999) thoughtful examination of Mead’s conceptualization of intersubjectivity and the educational process also merits careful consideration on the part of scholars and others interested in education as a collectively achieved realm of activity.

3. It is because of the recognition that knowledge is best developed from extended, comparative examinations of human group life as these take place in actual instances that the interactionists place such great stress on (a) ethnographic inquiry, (b) the capacity of instances to resist (and thereby inform) our earlier notions of things, and (c) the importance of developing concepts that represent instances in more authentic, comparative analytic terms. Unfortunately, this emphasis on developing and reformulating theory derived from an examination of things in actual instances is almost completely ignored in most “textbook” theory commentaries on symbolic interaction.

4. All names are pseudonyms.

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