

**Kristóf NYÍRI**

***A Hundred Years On***  
***Dewey's Democracy and Education Revisited***

Has progressive education failed? In his preface to Dewey's "My Pedagogic Creed" of 1897 the school superintendent of Brookline, Mass. used the formula "the schoolmaster, always conservative". Dewey was certainly not a conservative. But William James, in his *Talks to Teachers* from about the same time very clearly took the side of the conservative view of education. One senses a dilemma here. Dewey's epistemology – for instance when it came to the cognitive role of visual images – was perhaps more sound than that of James. But the educational program Dewey built on the basis of this epistemology turned out to be in many ways self-destructive. My talk will offer an overview of the essential ideas of Dewey's 1897 pamphlet, as well as those set forth in his *The School and Society* (1899), *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902), *How We Think* (1910), and in his main work on pedagogy and social progress, *Democracy and Education* (1916). I shall go on to review, on this basis, Thorndike's *The Principles of Teaching* (1906), Paul Goodman's *Compulsory Mis-Education* (1964) and Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society* (1971), before trying to come to terms with Neil Postman's *The Disappearance of Childhood* (1982), Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), Seymour Papert's *The Connected Family: Bridging the Digital Generation Gap* (1996), Don Tapscott's *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation* (1998), Paul Tough's *How Children Succeed* (2012) and E. D. Hirsch, Jr.'s *Why Knowledge Matters* (2017). I conclude by referring on the one hand to that great admirer of James, Ludwig Wittgenstein, who famously pronounced: "When you say NO to a child, you should be like a wall, not like a door", and on the other to another Austrian, Robert Musil, to whose protagonist in *The Man Without Qualities* the following wisdom appeared as an "extraordinary new thought": "a man's possibilities, plans, and feelings must first be hedged in by prejudices, traditions, obstacles, and barriers of all sorts, like a lunatic in his straitjacket, and only then can whatever he is capable of doing have perhaps some value, substance, and staying power". Has progressive education failed? Perhaps not entirely. But it is by now, as I will suggest in my talk, in need of a measure of conservatism.

**Kristóf NYÍRI**, born 1944, is member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He has held professorships at various universities in Hungary and abroad. He was Leibniz Professor of the University of Leipzig for the winter term 2006/07. His main fields of research are the history of philosophy in the 19th and 20th centuries, the impact of communication technologies on the organization of ideas and on society, the philosophy of images, and the philosophy of time. Some main publications: *Tradition and Individuality*, 1992; "Electronic Networking and the Unity of Knowledge", in Kenna and Ross (eds.), *Networking in the Humanities*, 1995; "The Picture Theory of Reason", in Brogaard and Smith (eds.), *Rationality and Irrationality*, 2001; *Vernetztes Wissen: Philosophie im Zeitalter des Internets*, 2004; "Time and Communication", in F. Stadler and M. Stöltzner (eds.), *Time and History*, 2006; "Film, Metaphor, and the Reality of Time", *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 2009; *Zeit und Bild*, 2012; *Meaning and Motoricity: Essays on Image and Time*, 2014. Further information: [www.hunfi.hu/nyiri](http://www.hunfi.hu/nyiri), <https://bme.academia.edu/KristofNyiri>, <https://www.facebook.com/kristof.nyiri>. E-mail: [nyirik@gmail.com](mailto:nyirik@gmail.com).

