

**John Dewey and James Mursell:  
Progressive Educators for Contemporary Music Education**

By

Steven N. Kelly  
College of Music  
Florida State University

**Abstract**

*The purpose of this paper was to compare and contrast basic information regarding philosophies, educational approaches, and societal debates involving John Dewey and James Mursell. The paper includes a comparison of societal situations and educational issues during the time of Dewey and Mursell to current educational debate, including similarities and differences between the Progressive Era and contemporary American society. The paper concludes with recommendations for today's music educators.*

*Keywords:* John Dewey, James Mursell, Progressive era, educational debate

Historically, virtually every interest group has debated education in the United States. Politicians, parents, business leaders, and school administrators are among those that seemingly are always citing a need for education reform. However, perhaps at no other time during the 21st century has the debate been so vibrant and intense regarding what to teach, how to teach, and who to teach. Both the quality of instruction and the individuals providing educational experiences have frequently been faulted for being poorly qualified and incapable of effectively communicating skills and information necessary to prepare students for contemporary global society (Cruz, 2009; Labaree, 2008). Furthermore, the “how to teach” and “what to teach,” the very process and content within an educational course of action, has been questioned. From teaching basic reading and writing, to complex technical and professional skills, to instruction concerning social problems, schools are often caught between the need to teach freedom of thought and calls to conform to traditions and public views.

There is little consensus regarding the place or function of schools in American society. Many individuals believe schools should place more emphasis on basic “core” skills (e.g., reading, writing, mathematics), believing courses such as music are a “frill” intended for curricular enhancement rather than contributing to educational growth. For example, the Governor of Florida recently called for an increase of educational focus on science, technology, math, and engineering, believing these areas would help students gain jobs, thus reducing the state’s high unemployment rate and subsequently influence the Florida economy. Subsequently, liberal studies courses would receive less funding in an attempt to reduce overall educational spending (Herald-Tribune, 2011). This example demonstrates how schools often wrestle with issues of tradition versus progress. The

quality and value of education is a daily feverous debate at all levels of government, frequently permeating the very fabric of family life in the United States. Questioning education often leads to calls for schools to teach skills and information deemed necessary by public opinion to meet immediate existing situations and needs, while ignoring knowledge and experiences necessary in preparing students for future responsibilities. Yet, such debates over education, even to present extent, are not new. Many current issues have been issues in past debates. Calls for current reform frequently reflect almost identical calls from America's past. The issues surrounding the role and function of education, and those involved in the schooling of individuals, remain amazingly similar to those of Americans' past.

### **Educational Evolution: Progressivism**

From its initial beginnings, educators in American society utilized a formal structured approach emphasizing rote teaching and memorization (Keene, 1982; Labuta & Smith, 1997). Drill and repetition were common teaching approaches, while mere recitation of facts demonstrated achievement. Education focused more on the subject matter and less on relating information to student interest or abilities. Music educators applied such a formalistic approach within music education. Students learned the musical "classics" with little opportunity for individual expression. Teaching centered on the group rather than individual development. The large performing ensemble concept, initiated by Lowell Mason in 1838, was the norm. However, unlike Mason, many educators thought musical ability to be for the few individuals who had been blessed genetically with "Divine" skill. Subsequently, views of the purpose of music education became that of training a select number of individuals to become professional musicians.

Influences leading to changes in both society and education can be attributed to philosophical thinking from the post-Civil War period, which is commonly known as the Progressive Era. This time period, from roughly the end of the Civil War in 1865 to the beginning of the Cold War in approximately 1946, was a period of tremendous social, economic, demographic, political, and technological change (Labuta & Smith, 1997; Mark, 1996). The United States was evolving from a rural to an urban society, from an agricultural to industrial economy, and from a regional to world political and military power. The American population was experiencing a great transition as millions of immigrants from Europe and Asia integrated into society, resulting in tremendous cultural change. Social, cultural, and educational inequalities that had long existed surfaced with unprecedented attention (Labuta & Smith, 1997; Volk, 1998). Circumstances challenged society to adopt this change and Americans struggled to cope with the need for new information and skills necessary of a world leader.

Education had to assume much of the responsibility for helping American society cope with such dramatic transitions and the frequent reconstruction of social and moral concepts. Prior to Progressivism, educational inequalities fueled social class differences as students within the same school received much different experiences; common thought was that only certain students could learn more advance materials (Volk, 1998). However, Progressivism sought common school experiences for all students, believing that every student could succeed.

To achieve common experiences, Progressivism looked toward science. A general belief that scientific organizations could manage society marked the Progressive Era. The public viewed schools as a means for perpetuating prosperity and as sources to resolve

social problems (Labuta & Smith, 1997; Mark, 1996). The Progressive Era was characterized by the belief that schools had the power to change individuals and promote social well being, prosperity, and progress (Labuta & Smith, 1997). Proponents of Progressivism believed humans were behavioral and capable of altering their environment. Humans had the ability to solve their own problems through their own intelligence, and through the development of individual intelligence, freedom occurred because humans could think for themselves rather than waiting for instruction (Miller, 1966). Accordingly, individuals did not think alike and differences were due to varying unique interactions with environments. Within this thought, schools best served students by adapting to children's natural stages of life. Reflecting a nature versus nurture process, everyone had the capacity to learn, but learned differently based on maturity and environmental interactions.

The concept of Progressivism was often viewed as a revolt against formalism in education while seeking to alter society toward more equality within its numerous components (Miller, 1966). For example, Progressivism rejected an educational emphasis on rote teaching, drill, and memorization in favor of a more interactive approach focusing on problem skills and creative thinking. Rather than repeating answers through repetition, students experienced transfer of information among topics. Process was important and experience was reality. The outcome of any repetition was the discovery of many pertinent generalizations. Progressivists rejected the status quo due to the idea that information and society was in constant change. Education was not limited to a structured classroom, but rather a living process that never ceased. Education was an action and every action leads to a better action; thus, humans were always learning.

As enriching and exciting that the Progressive Era seems to have been, the period was controversial. Generally, Progressivism was strong on scientific method, but weak in concrete and comprehensive methods. It was so focused on process that the education product was at times perceived as missing. Progressivism centered on the individual and the development of self-expression and individualism. Consequently, Progressivist approaches hindered working within a group. Finally, Progressivism's belief in the importance of the present was the basis for its strength and popularity. Conversely, its weakness and frequent criticism stemmed from an emphasis on the future being equally important to the present (Miller, 1966).

Changes in American culture toward Progressive education stemmed from a flow of Pestalozzian concepts centering on personalizing education based on an individual's abilities and interests (Ballantine, 2001; Labuta & Smith, 1997). This thinking was followed by the combined efforts of Johann Friedrich Herbart, who stated education's primary goal was the development of moral standards, and by Herbert Spencer, who promoted scientific inquiry as a basis for understanding how humans developed, how children learn, and developing better methods of instruction (Keene, 1982).

While the Era itself had many individuals calling for change, two individuals stand out not only for their work during the Progressive Era, but also for the continuing relevance and influence on contemporary music education. Perhaps no individual was more influential on how students learn, what should be taught, and how best to teach than John Dewey (1859 -1952). Dewey challenged traditional cultural stereotypes, narrow thinking, and teaching approaches, which he considered as limitations to learning and education's influence on an individual's quality of life. Dewey's views may reflect a

reciprocal relationship of education and society where the two parts interact and reflect each other rather than existing as isolated independent components. However, while Dewey was altering educational perspectives, James Mursell (1893 - 1963) may have been the most influential music educator to connect Dewey's concepts to music education. Mursell viewed music education as an opportunity to improve an individual's life. Consequently, similar to Dewey, Mursell considered music education as essential to every individual beyond the music classroom. Music was more than mere play, rather an educational venture requiring a total sensory engagement that perhaps no other school experience could offer. Mursell sought to connect school music experiences to students' outside-of-school musical activities. Mursell viewed humans as musical beings capable of participating in music activities for their entire lives. Thus combined, Dewey and Mursell altered the scope and focus of music education and remain influential and controversial in contemporary music classrooms.

Many similar social and educational issues debated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century continue today. Discussions on how best to teach, what skills students should learn, and what a music curriculum should provide, were debated during the Progressive Era and are still deliberated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Like Progressivism, contemporary music educators can look to Dewey and Mursell for guidance toward developing experiences that enhance music growth for all students. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to present basic information relating to John Dewey and James Mursell. This information will include overviews of their philosophies, educational approaches, and the frequent debates surrounding their teaching approaches. Furthermore, the paper will offer comparisons of societal situations during the time of Dewey and Mursell to current educational debate. It

is important to consider the similarities and differences within educational thought presented during the Progressive Era and that of contemporary American society. Through such examination, readers will be able to make their own conclusions reflective of their unique situations and their students' needs.

### **John Dewey**

John Dewey was born in Burlington, Vermont and later earned a doctorate from John Hopkins University. Known primarily as a philosopher and psychologist, his early influences were the Helgelian idealism of George Morris, and the psychological approaches of G. Stanley Hall and William James (Birge, 1966; Keene, 1982). Many of his influences and intellectual growth coincided with the development of Progressivism and scholars often perceive him as a primary leader of what is referred to as American pragmatism. Ironically, 1859, the year Dewey was born, was the year of publication for Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Pragmatists placed great faith in scientific processes, and Darwin's theory led pragmatism to reject the notion of a god or a higher being. Dewey adopted such beliefs and faith in scientific knowledge and those beliefs created great controversy in his life (Dewey, 1922; TIME, 1952). Scholars have also called Dewey an instrumentalist, experimentalist, empiricist, functionalist, and a naturalist - all labels reflecting his position that scientific knowledge was the most reliable perspective and basis for improving human good.

Dewey had a strong faith in human behavior and believed that when given the opportunity, individuals would make the best value judgments to guide ideas, actions, and intelligent conduct (Dewey, 1922). Among the many influences on his thought was George Herbert Mead. Mead's theory of self and the development of self through social

interactions strongly affected Dewey's concept of education. Dewey advocated numerous social reforms regarding education, employment, and equal rights for many groups. To achieve his goals, Dewey looked to schools as a principle venue to change society. He viewed schools as the primary source for training individuals in moral inquiry and a civil society (Dewey, 1900).

Dewey merged many of his educational thoughts into a focus on social activism. In 1894, he accepted the position of department head of philosophy, psychology, and pedagogy at the University of Chicago, where he developed his famous Laboratory School. It was in this setting that Dewey put many of his pragmatic thoughts and concepts to work. For instance, he believed education had placed too much focus on individualism. Though Dewey believed in individual development, he believed such achievement should not come at the expense of the group and the individual's contribution to the group. Consequently, Dewey thought schools should teach cooperation, and he attempted to accomplish this goal by replacing individual desks with group tables (Spring, 2006). Furthermore, teachers at the Laboratory School taught classes from a "child-centered" perspective where the interest of the children determined the instructional direction. The thought of the child's interests being the primary source of learning was very controversial among educational leaders at that time. However, a misconception of Dewey was that child-centered education allowed the student to dictate the educational process. Instead, Dewey argued that schools should not place excessive reliance on children, as this focus could be detrimental to the learning process (Dewey, 1902). Subsequently, he advocated balancing teaching experiences based on students' interests with educational goals. Within the child-centered balance, teachers served as

facilitators seeking to establish habits by relating and connecting information and skills to individual meaning. Flexibility, known as plasticity, was essential, as information and experiences fluctuated based on contextual situations and student development.

Dewey made his greatest influence during the Progressive Era. A characteristic of this period was the rejection of many commonly accepted education concepts that focused on instructional techniques centering on drill and repetition and the demonstration of academic achievement as mere recitation of facts. Prior to Progressivism, teachers were viewed as authoritative taskmasters who were the center of instruction. Dewey advocated that teachers should become partners in the learning process by guiding experiences as student skills matured (Dewey, 1902). Progressive educational thought rejected societal status quo and believed humans were capable of thinking independently if given the opportunity through a stimulating environment (Labuta & Smith, 1997).

Largely through Dewey's work, schools during the Progressive Era became less theoretical and more humanistic, less selective and more inclusive. Dewey's concept of education was a democratic perspective (Dewey, 1916; Woodford, 2005). Dewey had a profound belief in democracy and, while this label may appear to indicate equality, Dewey's concept acknowledged that individuals were not created equally (Dewey, 1916). It was through active participation and interaction with individual environments, or socialized intelligence, that each person was free to develop his or her own skills based on their own interests. No single person or group had a monopoly on truth or knowledge. Education should be a process of fostering freedom of mind, not accepting the status quo (Dewey, 1902).

Dewey viewed schools as social institutions through which social reform would occur. The function of schools was not simply to learn predetermined skills and information, but rather to provide opportunities for students to realize individual potential and discover the ability to use skills for the greater good (Dewey, 1900). One controversial aspect of Dewey's thinking was that all knowledge has social origins. Numerous religious groups, believing that God was the source of knowledge, rejected many of Dewey's approaches. However, Dewey believed that morality and social justice were relative to the social institutions that produced them and were in a constant state of change due to social conditions. Thus, students within the school environment would be encouraged to experience and interact with the curriculum in individually unique ways as every child was considered capable of learning (Dewey, 1900). However, individuals learn best when educators present information in a manner relating to the students' interests and abilities. To achieve this goal, teaching would require a better understanding of the nature of children; the entire concept of education from what is taught, to who teaches, to who has access to information would need altering.

Dewey stated that individuals were unique and that a one-size-fits-all approach to education would not enable students to grow to their fullest capacities. According to Dewey, the best pedagogical techniques involved hands-on experiences where students did not sit and listen to lectures or watch others. Information should be relevant to real-world experiences and would consequently be more meaningful. Learning was a life-long process accomplished by human action. Within the learning process, teachers acted as moral and intellectual leaders (Dewey, 1902). The learning process involved students not being taught what, but rather how, to think. The final product was important, but not at

the cost of the process. By learning the process of a concept, individuals were capable of adjusting to new information and situations (Dewey, 1900). For example, Dewey liked to teach students to knit, not by telling them how, but having them go through and experience the actual process. If students made mistakes, they learned from those mistakes and grew in both knowledge and skill. Students made sense of their world as a result of interacting with their world. Subsequently, learning within the Dewey concept became a process of reconstructing new experiences from prior experiences, even if these experiences were inadequate (Dewey, 1902). Thus, according to Dewey, from birth to death, humans were capable of always learning in many ways, within any environment, and at all times.

Dewey was not a musician, but valued music because of its direct, hands-on experiences. Dewey thought people should not only enjoy music, but that music was good for people because it added culture and refinement to the world (Handlin, 1959). He regarded the arts as a measure of culture and as instrumental in developing the social conscious of individuals (Miller, 1966). Thus, he perceived music education to be an important part of the progressive social reform movement. Dewey viewed music not as a training venue for future professional musicians, but rather as a key variable in improving the quality of life for individuals and society as a whole. Similar to his broader focus on life-long learning, Dewey believed music was a human action, a doing or action experience. Reflective of his other education views, he was critical of instructional techniques that focused on rote teaching and memorization of notes and rhythms. Dewey believed all individuals had the capacity to learn and participate in music activities throughout their entire lives. In this manner, music was a major contributor to an

individual's quality of life. To achieve this goal, the ultimate musical skill individuals should develop was an appreciation of music. Individuals could achieve appreciation through a variety of manners including traditional performance experiences, listening to music, reading about music, discussing music, or in any other mode involving musical topics. Therefore, through appreciation, all individuals could participate in a manner unique to each person. Performance by itself, though important, was a mere product unless the process of appreciation was developed. Appreciation would enable individuals to take pleasure in music beyond the music classroom and into their daily lives and thus develop a fuller life (Miller, 1966).

Instruction in music was a valued part of Dewey's Laboratory School (Labuta & Smith, 1997; Shiraishi, 1995). The school regarded music activities as a means of communication and expression, thus these goals became the chief aims of the instruction. Musical activities centered around five categories: ear training, rhythm, sight-reading/notation, singing songs, and song composition. The most common activity was singing. However, what truly set music education in the Laboratory School apart from traditional school music was the emphasis on developing individual creativity through song composition. American music educators had paid little attention to creative activities prior to 1920, while the Laboratory School viewed composition as a means for musical expression which would transfer to developing expression in all areas of life (Shiraishi, 1995).

Considering what musical skills educators should teach, according to Dewey's educational approach, music skills and activities should mirror student interests and abilities. Music could not be a separated entity from cultural and world affairs. Music

must interact with the various components of society. Recognizing the variety of human cultural diversity, Dewey called for an expanded music curriculum to meet the varied interests of students (Miller, 1966). Many of these new experiences revealed Dewey's support of rhythmic activities as part of a total educational experience. Dewey believed rhythmic activities provided the body with a natural means of expression. Furthermore, rhythmic training brought unity to the physical, intellectual, and emotional components of life (Shiraishi, 1995).

Contemporaries frequently viewed Dewey's educational ideas as controversial and perceived them as anti-intellectual, radical, and catering too much to the whims of children. He advocated for change in social and educational attitudes, called for expanded views on how humans best learn, and sought changes in curricular organization. Dewey believed that teachers should change by basing instruction on a better understanding of human growth through science and less on repression and fear. However, the lasting effects of Dewey's ideas remain unclear. In a 1952 TIME magazine interview, Dewey lamented that many of his fundamental ideas had been lost due to the persistence of "fundamental authoritarianism" remaining in society (TIME, 1952). Despite his strong value of democracy, he saw little cooperative learning in American schools. His blunt and bulky delivery style annoyed people. Even his colleagues at the University of Chicago were critical, as seen in a quote from Chancellor Robert Hutchins who stated: "Mr. Dewey says you must give up philosophy and religion or you cannot truly believe in science. He requires us to not merely to have faith in science, but to have faith in nothing else" (TIME, 1949). Despite such criticisms, Dewey remained true to his philosophical

beliefs up until his death in 1952. So strong was his impact that his approaches are still debated in contemporary education in the 21st century.

### **James Mursell**

James Mursell was born in Derby, England and received his early education in England and Australia. After coming to the United States in 1915, he later received a doctorate in philosophy at Harvard University. In 1935, Mursell joined the education faculty at Teachers College, Columbia University, where he eventually became head of the department of music and music education. Mursell was a prolific author, writing extensively within the fields of music, psychology, and education. Among his early influences were the writings of Montessori and Piaget (Stimutis, 1968). Though some have criticized his writings as inconsistent, some have also viewed his writings as reflective of a swiftly changing society (Metz, 1971).

Like Dewey, Mursell was a pragmatist as well as a disciple of Progressivism and the child-centered movement. Unlike Dewey, Mursell was both a musician and music teacher. This difference may have been the only significant distinction between the two. Mursell believed humans were the highest form of creation and therefore had the capacity to change behaviors. Individuals could think for themselves, could learn, and learning would shape their behavior (Mursell, 1920, 1922). Mursell was concerned with growth and the means to stimulate growth. For Mursell, education was guided growth requiring the differentiation and integration of information into a meaningful context. Experience was reality. Reflective of scientific influence, Mursell believed human growth was continuous and occurred along natural developmental lines. Thus, similar to Dewey,

humans had a natural capacity to learn that developed through environmental interactions (Mursell, 1938, 1948).

Mursell believed that much of music education was out of touch with the true aims of education (Mursell, 1943). Indeed, Mursell believed that education was a system of human values through which individuals could gain better perspectives of themselves (Mursell, 1934). Tools for learning were part of the education process and should be valued for their use toward a goal, not learned as an ultimate end to themselves (Harvey, 1974). According to Mursell, the purpose of music education was to enable humans to realize their musical potential, or stated another way, to help all individuals evolve into musical people (Mursell, 1948). This view reflects Dewey's concept of democratic education where everyone had the capacity to learn and participate in musical experiences. Within this goal was the selection of music experiences that reflect concern for developing human value through a life-long appreciation of and appreciation in music as well as a constant shaping of societal beliefs and ideals. Thus, music and music education contributed cultural and human value as a social art toward improving society (Mursell, 1943, 1948, 1958).

Unlike Dewey, who valued compositional projects that utilized rhythmic components, Mursell considered aural education to be the core of any musical experience through which musical responsiveness occurred (Mursell, 1937). The degree of responsiveness to music was a direct reflection of the amount of musical growth within an individual. To Mursell, everyone could sing, and because of this universality, "democratic" musical development was a function of growth (Mursell, 1938, 1948). He believed every human had the natural capacity to develop musically and to participate in

music. Accordingly, responsiveness to music is universal, not a special or limited endowment; musical growth (learning) can occur in everyone. For Mursell, all humans had musical skills to differing degrees of ability; consequently, ability was not an all-or-nothing capacity (Mursell, 1948).

Mursell sought to expand music's influence beyond Progressivism's focus on present conditions. He considered all humans to be musical beings capable of experiencing music in unique manners. Reflecting the Progressive Era's focus, music education was viewed as a means for improving an individual's quality of life through the development of emotional and aesthetic considerations (Miller, 1966). Every aspect of teaching should have the primary goal of developing musicality. The concept and perception of musicality was a reflection of an individual's responsiveness to music that would increase as individuals experienced growth in musical skills. For example, teaching reading of notation should lead to a more adequate response to music because the individual now has more knowledge. Furthermore, educators presented students with opportunities to discover music for themselves in manners uniquely individual (Mursell, 1943, 1948, 1958). Reflective of Dewey, the students' interests were a prime consideration in determining the type of activity by which the developed musicality. Consequently, the only real goal for learning was growth.

Like Dewey, Mursell believed classroom activities should relate to and reflect real-world experiences so students could transfer skills to music activities outside of school. Accordingly, participation in music throughout an individual's life would be promoted by in-school experiences. For Mursell, education was a sequential, continuous process of structuring environments and creating social situations where individuals

would engage in personally meaningful activities (Harvey, 1974). A quality educational experience integrated bodily movement with mental and emotional appeal. Teachers were viewed as democratic leaders guiding students to explore and discover their own meaningful ways to participate in music. To accomplish this goal, music had to become meaningful beyond the classroom and every musical concept (e.g., symbol) should be taught within a musical situation leading toward a similar situation beyond the classroom (Mursell, 1943, 1948, 1958).

Whereas the basis of Mursell's educational approach is founded with the Gestalt philosophy, his teaching techniques also reflected the then newly developing spiral approach to learning of Jerome Bruner where information is gradually re-introduced as students grow and develop. Learning and transfer of symbols is essential. This approach, often referred to as "synthesis-analysis-synthesis," would place previously acquired skills in new contexts thus adding new expanded meaning. This transformation and reorganizational approach required the teacher to be a facilitator, not the center of activity (Mursell, 1948). Teaching is never routine, but flexible based on the situation and musical context. Reflective of Dewey, teaching focused on process not product, the well-planned sequential presentation of information based on the student's ability and readiness, and the teacher providing as many varied experiences as possible to broaden students' perspective and enable transfers. Consequently all experiences should be thoroughly planned, the instructor should always have clear goals and instruction should always be flexible and adapted to each student's developmental needs (Mursell, 1958).

Mursell was soundly against what he called the mechanistic approach to teaching. Music education's primary emphasis must focus on the emotional and expressive nature

of music rather than the technical components. The mechanistic approach required isolating musical elements, which minimized the development of musicality and led to a disconnect of musical elements from the music “itself.” To Mursell, music growth was hindered, if not completely halted, by an ignorance of music elements within a musical context. Musical perception, imagery, thinking, and feeling become secondary to “external manifestations” that are part of the mechanistic approach (Mursell, 1948). Reflecting Dewey’s position, Mursell believed mechanistic teaching focused on product more than process where memorization, as opposed to habits of musicality and the overall development of musical growth, became the primary emphasis.

Like Dewey, Mursell was often criticized for his positions and teaching approaches. He was questioned for his inconsistencies on selecting materials and thought to be more concerned with minimal musical achievement over the breadth of musical experiences. He was perceived as being unsure regarding the relevancy of his materials to younger age groups and matching materials to students’ ability levels. Furthermore, Mursell was questioned regarding his belief in the value of music being either more for music’s intrinsic aspects or for its social and personal benefits (Metz, 1971). In any event, many of Mursell’s writings in the later part of his career appear to be inconsistent with his earlier thoughts, thus hindering contemporary perception of his contributions. Yet, like Dewey, James Mursell and his ideas are still discussed in many contemporary music education programs.

### **Connection to Contemporary Music Education**

From a social perspective, music education cannot be understood unless it is examined with regard to the social processes and contexts in which it occurs. This

connection is especially true when considering how Dewey, Mursell, and the Progressive Era relate to contemporary music education. By understanding the past, music educators may learn how to better approach the present and prepare for the future. Frequently, issues and experiences present-day music educators encounter are similar to those of the Progressive Era. Demographic changes, calls for educational reform, a growing reliance on testing to demonstrate achievement, changing social values, a distrust of political leaders, and a society in transition all have commonalities between the early 1900s and the early 21st century.

During the Progressive Era, schools in the United States changed dramatically, evolving from single classroom settings to kindergarten, junior high schools, and high schools (Labuta & Smith, 1997; Miller, 1966). Within these new settings, music curricula expanded to include a wide diversity of musical offerings from performance ensembles to music appreciation. Because of curricular diversity, every student could participate in some type of musical experience. The belief that music participation could enhance an individual's quality of life was greater than it had ever been. Consequently, it was not unusual for entire school populations to be enrolled in a music class (Birge, 1966; Keene, 1982). Everyone was seen as having some degree of musical ability and benefitting from musical participation. This strong value of music contributed to the Music Supervisors' National Conference slogan "Music for Every Child" which was developed during the Progressive Era (Miller, 1966).

Much of the popular role music played in education came to a quick halt in the late 1950's when Russia launched Sputnik into space (Mark, 1996). This event shocked Americans, creating immense fear that resulted in the federal government becoming

directly involved in educational issues (Mark, 1996). Many schools revised curricula to include a stronger focus on mathematics and science, since these areas were considered crucial to improving technological advancements (Labuta & Smith, 1997). Consequently, this curricular revision could be viewed as the first back-to-basics movement in American education. Classes such as music were suddenly considered anti-intellectual or irrelevant to national security and disappeared from course offerings. Whereas Progressivism was in many ways a reaction to Victorian authoritarianism, societal reaction to Sputnik was a lack of trust in the American education system from its teachers to administrators, to policy makers at all levels. Similar to critics of Progressivism, critics following Sputnik called for more directive and absolute teaching approaches (Ballantine, 2001).

Consequently, educational thought in the post-Sputnik era rejected many progressive ideals promoted by Dewey and Mursell. The growth of standardized testing shifted the instructional focus shifted from process to product, from student-centered to more teacher-controlled. Education achievement was gauged more by outcomes than individual interests. School structures began to be modeled after competitive business concepts where favor lies with those who are more successful than others. Consequently, competition among schools and students was encouraged, replacing the promotion of unity and democratic ideals. Success was more about immediacy and less about preparation for future environments. There was less regard toward developing skills for improving individual quality of life and more emphasis on surviving and producing for the good of society. Increasingly, society turned away from schools as leaders in progress and more to widespread dependence on individuals recognized as “experts” in all areas of life from child rearing to personal problems (Labuta & Smith, 1997). Society lived in fear

and perhaps for the first time, it did not turn to education to help solve concerns. A national distaste for intellect appeared.

Music education has not been immune from education debates and reform in the post-Sputnik era. Debates are necessary if music education is to grow and become more relevant to American society. Acceptance of the status quo, which both Dewey and Mursell assailed against, leads to complacency resulting in a cessation of musical growth and relevancy. Yet for all the fears and rejections of education, components of Dewey and Mursell survived and still fuel many educational approaches, including those within music education. Many leaders in society became concerned about the emphasis placed on instruction perceived as too academically isolated or intellectually advancing at the exclusion of total educational experience (Mark, 1996). National meetings such as Tanglewood in 1967 and Visions 2020: The Housewright Symposium on the Future of Music Education in 1999 called for a more humanistic component to education (Mark, 1996; Madsen, 2000). Reflecting many of Dewey and Mursell's approaches, these conferences challenged music education to diversify, be more student-centered, and to connect school music experiences to "real life" music experiences outside of schools. A more constructivist approach was promoted where students could develop unique meaningful musical experiences. Critical thinking encouraged independent music thinking and a rejection of a status quo that was so often promoted in the increasing forms of media from television and cell phones to the Internet and iPods.

The value of aesthetic education for teaching and learning music was promoted as a manner through which individuals could become aware of, and better understand, music's emotional qualities, as well as stimulating debates regarding characteristics of

various qualities of musical standards. Qualities such as tone, genres, contexts, and form stirred ideas of self-expression, authenticity, and an individual's capacity to make unique musical decisions.

Throughout the twentieth century, philosophers and educators such as Theodor Adorno, Harry Broudy, Bennett Reimer, and David Elliott (1995) advanced philosophical views demonstrating music's unique influences on human lives and its contribution to human understanding beyond the music classroom. From the mid-half of the 20th century, aesthetic music education was promoted as a unique approach to a total education experience (Leonard & House, 1959; Reimer, 1970; Schwadron, 1967). This view of the value of aesthetic education directly reflected Mursell's primary goals for music education: (1) humans are musical beings capable of making musical decisions that reflect their musical interests, and (2) music education should enable humans to participate in musical activities throughout their lives.

Yet, despite a greater understanding and awareness, music education may still be viewed as its worst enemy. Perhaps music educators too often assume that music's contributions are too evident. An assumption that students, parents, administrators, business leaders, and politicians clearly understand the contributions that school music experiences provide can lead to complacency. This attitude exemplifies a degree of apathy regarding music's role in American society contributing to a perceived lack of relevancy between music experienced in school and music experienced outside of schools. A 2003 Gallup poll suggested Americans are participating in musical behaviors; they are just not necessarily participating in music behaviors that relate to school music experiences (Gallup Organization, 2003). This reaction was presented in the Visions

2020 conference, where discussion and data were presented focusing on perceptions that people value music deeply as an aesthetic and entertainment force in their lives. They just do not value school music because it offers few musical options and choices, and is different from the music personally consumed by society (Jellison, 2000; Madsen, 2000). If such attitudes indeed exist, those in the music education profession must question the value and role of music in the schools and the product resulting from these experiences. Such attitudes may result in a return to the post-Sputnik regards for music in American schools.

Too often school music programs reflect a product-driven approach rejected by Dewey and feared by Mursell as mechanistic. American society frequently views music education as product-driven where the performance is the end result. Valuing music for the sake of music gets lost. This approach focuses on performances for the sake of performance at the expense of the individual processes and musical growth. Opportunities for individual expressivity are limited and the development of appreciation can be hindered. Rather, Mursell and Dewey would have society view performance not as the end result, but part of the continuing process of discovering musical value throughout life. Learning through music becomes the goal.

The acceptance of a product-driven approach within music education is understandable due to American society's need for immediate outcomes and accountability. Consequently, this focus receives quick public adoration and support, and easy acceptance of the status quo. This approach reflects the Victorian pedagogical techniques of rote instruction, drill and repetition rejected by Dewey, and a mechanistic approach to teaching where Mursell denounced the role of teacher/conductor as an

authoritarian directing the cause. Yet, while this approach is frequently viewed successful, statistics show declining student participation in school music programs (Minear, 1999). Some have criticized public school music education as being out of touch with the music behaviors of its students (Madsen, 2000). Opportunities for individuals to discover their unique relationship with music are often limited at best. Individualism suffers due to the traditional group ensemble experience. An unbalanced emphasis on the product becomes the focus.

To reverse this trend, contemporary music education must be willing to change its role to better reflect both pluralistic perspectives and contemporary societal values, including the changing role music plays in American society (Jorgensen, 2003). A more pluralistic and flexible approach is reflective of the ideals presented by Dewey and Mursell. Individual development needs more attention. Like Progressive Era philosophy, today's teachers must recognize that each student brings a diverse background of social, musical, and academic experiences into every class. Effective music teachers understand and recognize their role as facilitators in an active dynamic classroom full of social interactions, each a learning experience in itself. Ideals of Dewey and Mursell that included the promotion of individual interests, democratic values and responsibility, transferability of skills from classroom/rehearsal hall to out-of-school-experiences, an emphasis on individual musical growth, and the role of teacher as a guide would alter the perception that music is a frill for the select few. Remembering music's growth during the Progressive Era, the diversity of music classes, and the contributions of music in all aspects of society could be the basis for demonstrating music's relevancy to America's increasingly complex society. Thus, music education once again can become a

compelling and relevant focus in contemporary society. Knowledge and skills learned through music education become useful beyond the classroom, and though they function in varying manners among different cultural groups, music would be viewed as a life-long skill for everyone, not just the “talented” few.

By establishing a relevancy between the ideals and work of John Dewey and James Mursell during the Progressive Era, the content of this paper should encourage readers to reflect and make their own connections based on their unique individual situations. The ideals set forth by John Dewey and James Mursell during the 1900s are still very relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Many of American society’s concerns during the Progressive Era remain concerns today. It seems as though there has never been a time in American history that all members of society were content with its educational system. While malcontent may never disappear, it may be helpful for music educators to remember that Dewey and Mursell encouraged educators to make choices based on the student growth and not societal trends or fads. Dewey and Mursell encouraged teachers to promote life-long learning, not focus on immediate outcomes. They saw process as a requirement to understanding constantly changing information. Easy solutions often promoted through repetition and drill did not develop critical and creative thinking. Thus, in a contemporary society where information constantly changes and new developments occur and are transmitted immediately, a recognition and understanding of the ideals promoted by Dewey and Mursell can still form the basis of how students learn and how teachers teach. By accepting the belief that all individuals should have opportunities to experience music in unique ways and promote music education’s contributions to society, music education can regain a vibrant purposeful place in schools and society.

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**Steven Kelly** (skelly@admin.fsu.edu) is Professor of Music Education at Florida State University where he teaches undergraduate and graduate music education courses, coordinates the music education internship program, conducts the University Concert Band, and serves as Director of the FSU Summer Music Camps. He is the author of the book *Teaching Music in American Society: A Social and Cultural Understanding of Music Education* and has presented papers, presentations, and clinics at international and national venues including the International Society for Music Education World Conference, the International Society for Research in Music Behavior, and the National Association for Music Education Biennial Inservice Conference. Additionally, Dr. Kelly serves as Editor of the *Florida Music Director* and is on numerous editorial boards including the *Journal of Research in Music Education* and the *Journal of Band Research*.