

Learning is activated within situations of dialogical interchange, open questions, and environments rich enough to provoke proactive efforts to make sense. Making sense demands entries into various provinces of meaning—the sciences, the social sciences, the arts, mathematics, linguistics, et al., each one requiring a distinctive mode of attending to what is conceived to be “reality”. Each one, moreover, requires a certain balance of subjectivity and objectivity. To interpret a poem involves a subjective engagement to a larger degree than a measuring of molecules (although both are affected by a degree of indeterminacy, by memory, and stored understandings). A study of an institutional structure (a school, e.g.) may be given a more or less distanced or objective description. A study of students and teachers within the school depends upon a degree of “*verstehen*”, some ability to look through others’ eyes, an amount of identification, even empathy. Perceptual capacity must be nurtured in every case; it may be that learning begins in perception. That means for some that it begins in a primordial landscape on which meanings are gradually sedimented as the young move into diverse ways of seeing, feeling, saying. Communication increases as they move and act among others, as they explore with others, exchange insights, move gradually into the provinces of meaning mentioned above. They can find new perspectives as they move into such provinces; they may find themselves looking through new lenses, from different angles, as they master the tricks of the trade needed to enter each province and to move among such sources of meaning.

I put great stress on imagination as I work to move students to learn how to learn. Imagination is the capacity to reach beyond where we are, to open towards possibility. It is the consciousness of possibility—perhaps the shared consciousness—that moves people, to reach towards what should be, what might be, if an acceptable choice or action were to be found. Dewey, commenting on the mean, the “repellent” nature of brute facts, said that imagination was needed if intellectual possibility were to be pursued. This is one of many reasons why significant encounters with the arts can stimulate learning as a perpetually new beginning, as an action, a becoming, a moving beyond.