

Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

We appreciated the lead review accorded our book, *History of the School Curriculum* (Macmillan, 1990), in the Winter 1991 issue of *History of Education Quarterly*.

However, your editors failed to catch an appalling violation of scholarship on the part of your reviewer, David Labaree, who revealed in his review that he had derived much of his ammunition from the lead essay review of our book which had appeared over a year earlier in the *Educational Researcher* (December, 1990). Now, this may have been a shortcut for your reviewer, but it is the first time that we have seen a book review drawn from a book review—anathema to a scholarly journal such as *History of Education Quarterly*. By the sixth grade, every child is taught that one does not write a book report using material from a published review of that book.

Another “first” for your reviewer is his unique application of a form of “quantitative research” methodology to a historical work by counting the number of pages devoted to a particular topic or personage—in this case, John Dewey. Unfortunately, your reviewer once again took a shortcut by counting the number of references to Dewey in the Index. We do not apologize for drawing from John Dewey, or Lester Ward, or any other historical figure. But your readers are entitled to understand the perverse way in which your reviewer construed his “quantitative research” findings. Your reviewer proceeded to count every end-of-chapter footnote reference and bibliographic entry as a page devoted to a discussion of Dewey’s views. The result was an unprecedented hyperinflation of statistics.

In developing our book, we were aware that serious scholars have been critical of the growing trend on the part of publishers to seek economy by listing all references as endnotes. This makes for a very cumbersome and frustrating arrangement for the scholar who must turn to the very end of the book to search for the source of each citation. In so doing, the reader must first locate the particular chapter number at the end of the book and then locate the footnote number. Our Macmillan editor was most generous in acceding to our wish in having the footnotes appear at the end of each chapter, along with an alphabetized list of references. In connection with the latter, an author’s work might appear in the reference listings for several chapters (as in the case of John Dewey), instead of as a single listing at the end of the book. In taking his shortcut, your reviewer failed to recognize that the page references in the Index were differentiated by the symbol n to identify an endnote or reference

citation at the end of each chapter. Hence he should have realized that all of those pages were *not* devoted to a discussion of John Dewey's work, as stated in the review, but were mere footnote citations and bibliographic listings. This is in keeping with the standard practice in scholarly books.

It puzzles us as to how your reviewer could have reached this stage in his career without knowing (1) that a scholarly review is not drawn from a previously published review of the same work, and (2) the difference between the discussion of a cited work and the listing of an endnote and a bibliographic reference. Had your reviewer actually looked at the pages, he would have seen the difference.

Daniel Tanner and Laurel N. Tanner

To the Editor:

I must say I was surprised by the nature of the response by Daniel Tanner and Laurel Tanner to my review essay on their *History of the School Curriculum*. The review is sharply critical of the book. In it I argue that the book is a failure on at least three different levels: 1) it is poorly written; 2) it is not really a history of the school curriculum at all but a history of John Dewey's influence on this curriculum; and 3) it advances the claim that this influence was substantial and pervasive, which it was not. The bulk of the essay is devoted to a discussion of why the liberal version of progressivism had so little effect on the structure and content of what is taught in American schools. Given the sweeping nature of this critique, which extended over 4,000 words, it is puzzling to find that they choose to challenge only two sentences out of the entire essay. In one I quote from a previously published review of the book, and in the other I cite the number of page-references to Dewey noted in the index. Let me say a word about each of these concerns.

First, they assert that I "derived much of [my] ammunition from the lead essay review of [their] book which had appeared over a year earlier in the *Educational Researcher*." In fact, I quote a single sentence from this review—simply to demonstrate that I am not the only person who thinks that the writing in the book is, as the other reviewer puts it, "usually uninspired and occasionally dreadful." Nothing else in my essay is drawn from the earlier review—hardly "an appalling violation of scholarship," as the Tanners claim. Much as they might want to deny it, independent reviewers can come to similarly negative conclusions about their book.

Second, they accuse me of taking a scholarly "shortcut" by using the index to count the number of pages where they refer to Dewey. As a result, they say, I artificially increased my tally of the number of actual textual references by mistakenly including pages from the endnotes where