

“I AM AN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHER”

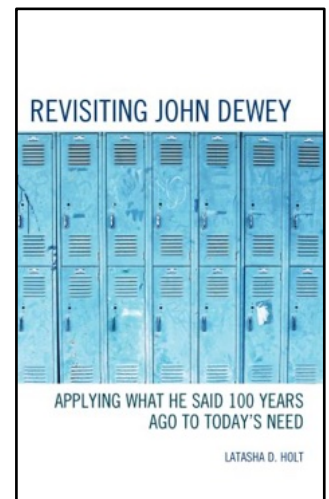
—An Interview Series with John Capps—



LATASHA HOLT is Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Curriculum & Instruction at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, where she also serves as the assessment coordinator for the College of Education & Human Development. She is the author of *Revisiting John Dewey: Applying What He Said 100 Years Ago to Today's Need* (Rowman & Littlefield 2023), as well as many articles on literacy instruction, standardized testing, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

What does American philosophy mean to you?

For me, American philosophy is a calling. Exploring fundamental questions about life, ethics, politics, education, and the impact on our society directly connects to the state of our democracy. To preserve our democracy, we must identify issues and make needed changes. Sharing American philosophy ideologies and addressing issues is something all citizens have a responsibility to do. The ability to think freely is something I never want to take for granted. Passing knowledge along to future generations is so important to who I am as a person and to American philosophy.



How did you become an American philosopher?

Simply being included in this category is such an honor. I recognize the great philosophers that paved the way for young professors like me to learn and grow into my own ideas and understandings that I get to pass on to others.

I have always been a deep thinker even as a young child. I am sure I gave my parents a challenge or two growing up. My father constantly encouraged me to learn everything I could. He talked often of the importance of learning to read and write. He showed me how to be bold and brave when advocating for doing what is right. Like many other Americans,

my parents have always worked hard. I believe I got some of my work ethic from them. Besides my parents, my children, colleagues, students, and volunteer opportunities motivate me daily to learn more from our past and continuously advocate for change to preserve our democracy.

Formally, I studied education and earned a degree in early childhood education and a master's degree focused on reading, special education, and teaching English language learners. These early educational opportunities, combined with my teaching experiences, prepared me to tackle my Ph.D. studies at Texas Tech University.

My doctoral program was built on the works of John Dewey. While studying Dewey, Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle, the need to address current real-world challenges was an important focus in my course work. It was in my Ph.D. studies where I polished my understandings and began to connect foundational philosophical knowledge to the everyday challenges I was experiencing as a mother, teacher, and citizen of America.

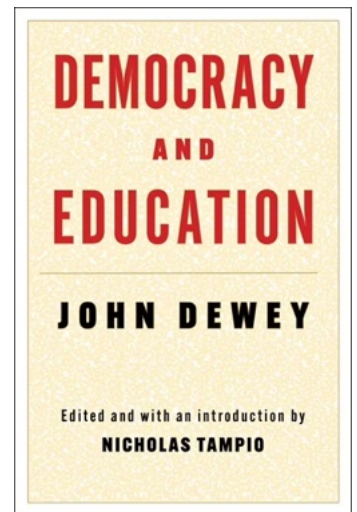
These things have helped shape me into the American philosopher I am today.

How would you describe your current research?

I am interested in so many topics! My research agenda is ever evolving with needs that I see in our world. Lately, I have been focused on AI (Artificial Intelligence) and its role in teaching and learning. AI is already embedded into our daily lives. Trying to better understand how teachers and students perceive this technology in practice has been fascinating to me. I have been fortunate to lead AI faculty learning communities through distance learning on my university campus. In this role, I connected with amazing professors from many different disciplines. Together, we have been studying perceptions regarding AI in today's classroom and sharing ideas on how AI can improve pedagogy in our specific disciplines.

In my book, *Revisiting John Dewey: Applying What He Said 100 Years Ago to Today's Need*, I share Dewey's connections between community and our educational system. Schools are often behind society with technology and this needs to change. How can teachers engage learners when having to compete with the world's latest technology? Teachers are often mandated to use outdated scripted curriculum, and they lack resources. How does this impact our society as a whole?

I also want to share my focus on improving teaching practices to ensure children learn to read and write. Being literate is foundational to our democracy. I continue to worry for our



country's future when classroom decisions impacting the development of reading and writing skills are being controlled by forces earning huge profits selling a product. This ethical issue expands into meeting the needs of all learners, including those with exceptionalities.

Maybe I can capture all these thoughts in my next book?

What do you do when you're not doing American philosophy?

When I am not focused on American philosophy, I spend most of my time being a mother to my three girls who make me proud every day. I also spend time volunteering with several groups including Make-a-Wish, National Organization for Rare Disorders (NORD), Danny's Dose: The Voice for Those with Special Needs, Hospice of Acadiana, and my local Library Foundation Board. Antiques, thrifting, and puzzles are also my favs.

What's your favorite work in American philosophy? What should we all be reading?

My favorite work in American philosophy is anything John Dewey. My John Dewey favorites include *Democracy and Education*, *How We Think*, *The Child and the Curriculum*, *The School and Society*, and *Schools of To-morrow*. Lately *Democratic Education* by Amy Gutmann has me intrigued.

What we should all be reading? We should all read current news, follow the latest activities of our legislative bodies, and explore current research (checking for new discoveries and questioning gaps in literature that should be explored...) and of course we need a little John Dewey here and there.

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