Introduction

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The year 2016 marks the centenary of the publication of John Dewey's *Democracy and Education*. This magisterial work stands alongside Plato's *Republic* and Rousseau's *Emile* as canonical works in philosophy of education. It has been continuously in print since its initial publication, and is cited more frequently each year than all of the other classic works in educational studies – those by Edward Thorndike, G. Stanley Hall, and Lewis Termin among others – combined.

The text has had worldwide influence and is regarded as a classic in philosophy of education. The sheer numbers of international publications and events planned for 2016 to celebrate this magisterial work indicate its profound relevance, within the field of philosophy of education and beyond.

What is it about this book that so many people are drawn to?

Democracy and Education was written as a textbook in philosophy of education; it is still frequently assigned in many education courses – in whole or part – as course reading. At first, some may find the book a daunting read. Most pre-service teachers have not heard of Dewey. However, it is often the case, as teacher educators report, that as soon as university students read a few passages of *Democracy and Education*, they start to discuss how the ideas apply to the classrooms they have experienced, either as students during their own schooling, or as teachers.

Dewey's book covers a wide range of themes and issues relating to education, including teaching, learning, educational environments, subject matter, values, and the nature of work and play. Dewey discusses various aspects of these issues and how they relate to underlying philosophical positions on the mind, knowledge, and morality. As the title indicates, the text offers a way of looking at the relationship between democracy and education. Dewey writes in the preface that he will not only discuss "the constructive aims and methods of public education," but also provide "a critical estimate of the theories of knowing and moral development which [. . .] still operate, in societies nominally democratic, to hamper the adequate realization of the democratic ideal."

For educators, the book offers insight into the importance of their work. It makes clear that educating is not an isolated task, something that has influence on just the one person being "educated" in one particular moment. Rather, the work of the educator is embedded in the web of relationships – political, social,

moral, etc. – that make up our groups, communities, and societies, and can, in turn, influence those relationships.

One reason philosophers of education admire this book is the contribution it makes to establishing philosophy of education as indispensable to the education of teachers. As is seen in many of his other texts, Dewey regarded teaching as a profession that entails thinking and reflection (on this point he was in agreement with thinkers of other traditions, such as J. F. Herbart and R. S. Peters).

Democracy and Education illuminates how philosophy is intimately intertwined with education and this is seen in how the book sets out to define what education is, and culminates with a definition of philosophy as "a general theory of education." Sidney Hook wrote in his introduction to *Democracy and Education* that it is "the one book that no student concerned with philosophy of education today should leave unread."

This handbook is designed to help experts and non-experts to navigate the text. The authors of each chapter in our handbook are experts in the fields of philosophy and education and are writing on a part of Dewey's work that has particularly resonated with them, and that they have returned to time and time again throughout their careers.

The handbook is divided into two parts. Part I features short companion chapters corresponding to each of Dewey's chapters in *Democracy and Education*. These serve to guide readers through the complex arguments developed in the book. Part II features general articles placing the book into historical, philosophical, and practical contexts.

PART I

Companion Chapters

Introduction to Part I

Leonard J. Waks

Democracy and Education is a complex work. Readers may require a roadmap, but *Democracy and Education* has no "Introduction" where such a map might be found.[1]

Part I of this Handbook fills this void by providing a detailed guide – offering a companion chapter for each chapter of the text. In this Introduction I provide a brief outline of the work as a whole, paying particular attention to key concepts introduced in the early chapters. The book has four main parts: (I) the theory of education as growth, (II) the theory of democracy in education, (III) untenable conceptual dualisms as obstacles to democracy in education, and (IV) implications of democracy in education for the reconstruction of philosophy.

A Theory of Education as Growth: Chapters 1–6

The first four chapters present a theory of education as a necessary undertaking in any kind of society. Dewey presents the central problem of this section in the first chapter: how to understand the respective contributions of everyday informal incidental learning and formal school learning, and establish a proper balance between them.

Action Is End-Directed

Dewey starts by noting that *doing* – human action – is directed to ends. Flicking a switch is directed to bringing light into the room, which is why we more generally describe it in terms of its end – "turning on the light." Same for baking a cake, growing tomatoes, writing a book, training a dog, or bearing a child. We act in and on an environment to achieve ends – our wants and needs.

Action Takes Place in a Social Context

Each action is surrounded by thousands of others, with other people acting in pursuit of *their* ends. For example, behind my turning on a light lie

[1] Dewey does offer a brief and incomplete map through the work at the beginning of chapter 24. But those approaching the work for the first time can hardly be expected to find it there, or to find it of much use so late in their struggle with the work.

systems of electrical energy, home design and construction, etc., served by engineers, designers, architects, builders, managers, salespeople, miners, and oil drillers, legislators, etc. Behind an author writing a book we find networks of publishers, lawyers, editors, book designers, marketing professionals, critics, book clubs, audiences of learned professionals or fan club members, each acting to achieve *their* assigned ends. Every human action presupposes a social world.

Actions Are Norm-Governed

The behaviors of all of these actors, moreover, are governed by social norms. These are of several sorts. For example, (1) In playing a game, actions are literally *defined* by the rules of the game. In baseball, for example, "stealing second base" is not sneaking into the park late at night and walking off with a leather sack; stealing second base, and second base itself, are defined by the rules of the game; (2) in everyday life, actions are all hemmed about by norms related to *ways of doing things*. "Setting the table," for example, is defined by rules about where each item is placed. If a child places dishes, silverware, and napkins in a different arrangement, mother may say "that's not setting the table, dear," referring to a norm governing *ways of doing things*.

Occupations

Dewey often refers to important life activities governed by ways of doing things as *occupations.* He does not mean "paid jobs," but rather activities that occupy us as we keep life moving along; baking cakes, tending gardens, writing books, training dogs, or bearing children are all as much occupations as teaching children, arguing legal cases, or performing medical operations.

For an infant to "grow up" and take her place in society, she must learn to take part in many "occupations" herself. *For Dewey, education in its broadest sense simply is the process of bringing a child along from infancy to full participation in occupations of adult social life.* That is why, as Dewey puts it, education is "*the means of the social continuity of life*" (MW 9: 6, emphasis mine).

The best way of educating, he argues, is by engaging young people directly in activities that are similar or related to adult occupations – whether in everyday life or in school – throughout childhood and youth. Dewey's discussion of the role of occupations in school learning in *The School and Society,* which he builds upon in *Democracy and Education*, is worth quoting at length. He defines "occupation" in its educational sense as any "mode of activity on the part of the child which *reproduces, or runs parallel to*, some form of work carried on in social life." He adds,

> The instincts which find their conscious outlet and expression in occupation are bound to be of an exceedingly fundamental and permanent type. The activities of life are of necessity directed to bringing the materials and forces of

> nature under the control of our purposes; of *making them tributary to ends of life* [. . .] [The child] continually sees his elders engaged in such pursuits. He daily has to do with things which are the results of just such occupations. He comes in contact with facts that have no meaning, except in reference to them. Take these things (i.e., the end results of occupations) out of the present social life and see how little would remain-and this not only on the material side, but as regards intellectual, aesthetic, and moral activities, for these are largely and necessarily bound up with occupations. (MW 1: 96; emphasis mine)

Learning and Experience

Young people enter action situations with already developed habits, which shape their perceptions, define action possibilities, and activate ends. Consider a simple example: a young girl enters a kindergarten room, and sees children engaged in an occupation – for example, building a "castle" with blocks. This activates her social and constructive instincts, and in joining in with the others, she adopts their "end-in-view."

As she or young people in general act in pursuit of their ends in social contexts, they *learn* from *experience*. This means that they *do*, and they *undergo* consequences of doing. Whether their actions succeed or fail, experience reconditions their habits. They "grow," they get better prepared for, and better at, doing things.

Learning from Communicative Exchange

In acting with others young people learn how to relate to and get along with other people. As Dewey puts this central point:

> All communication (and hence all genuine social life) is educative. To be a recipient of a communication is to have an enlarged and changed experience. One shares in what another has thought and felt and in so far, meagerly or amply, has his own attitude modified. Nor is the one who communicates left unaffected. (MW 9: 9)

Communication requires formulating what one wishes to say so that others can understand. That means "getting outside of it, seeing it as another would see it, considering what points of contact it has with the life of another so that it may be got into such form that he can appreciate its meaning." And in taking the place of the other, and appreciating as the other does, the communicator's own experience is expanded and he or she grows as a person.

Learning Social Norms

Education means bringing young people along into adult occupations, and the way to do so is to position them within occupations from childhood. In this way they become surrounded by, and incorporate within themselves, the norms of social life.

Humans are social animals. Like dogs, young children instinctively seek human company; they want to participate in human life and seek actively to join in and emulate. And "children are gifted with an equipment of the first order for social intercourse" (MW 9: 49).

What the child *does* and what he *can* do, therefore, "depends upon the expectations, demands, approvals, and condemnations of others" (MW 9: 17). So as children join in and participate, their behaviors invite the application of norms. As they really do *hunger* to join in – they feel deflated if excluded, they absorb these norms as their own. They become saturated with them; their behaviors are only meaningful – even to themselves – in light of them. It is in this deep sense that humans are social. As Dewey states:

> Society is a society of individuals and the individual is always a social individual. He has no existence by himself. He lives in, for, and by society, just as society has no existence excepting in and through the individuals who constitute it. (EW 5: 55)

When children participate in common activities, however, their "original impulses are modified." They are not just acting in agreement with others, but "in so acting, the same ideas and emotions are aroused in (them) that animate the others" (MW 9: 18). They become members of the group, sharing ideas and feelings with others. In this way children become "possessed by the emotional attitude of the group," and become "alert to recognize the special ends at which it aims and the means employed to secure success" (MW 9: 19).

Directing Learning Activities – The Role of Adults

Action is directed by its ends, not (directly) by adults, as Dewey tells us in chapter 3. When children fully *engage* in activities – that is, take the ends as their own and put themselves heart and soul into them and feel success or failure acutely – they are all the more alert to consequences and ready to adjust habits and dispositions to attain the ends or, when they meet obstacles or fail, to learn how to do *better*.

Adults – parents and teachers – can bring children along by "setting up conditions which stimulate certain visible and tangible ways of acting," and including children in activities in these settings so that they "feel its success as his success, its failure as his failure" (MW 9: 19). Perhaps most important, they establish the *normative environment* of "expectations, demands, approvals, and condemnations." This environment in turn imposes an "unconscious influence" that is "so subtle and pervasive that it affects every fiber of character and mind." The "texture" of children's action tendencies are thus formed "independently of schooling" (MW 9: 22).

Deliberate teaching can then "free the capacities thus formed for fuller" exercise (MW 9: 22). It achieves this in a number of ways. Teaching at its best *starts with* establishing settings for engaged action – settings that "furnish objects which make (child) activity more productive of meaning" – where, as

Dewey explains at the start of chapter 1, learners pursue ends on their own or through communication and cooperation with others. At certain points in the learning process, as Dewey explains in chapter 14, learners will need more logically organized subject matter knowledge to make sense of their experience. At those points teachers, who in Dewey's vision are genuine experts not only in pedagogy but also in their subject matter areas, can blend in such knowledge. The aim, as learning progresses, is for learners to attain adult levels of knowledge as they come to take on adult roles in society. As Dewey puts this important point in chapter 14:

> [There are] three fairly typical stages in the growth of subject matter in the experience of the learner. (i) In its first estate, knowledge exists as the content of intelligent ability—power to do. This kind of subject matter, or known material, is expressed in familiarity or acquaintance with things. (ii) Then this material gradually is surcharged and deepened through communicated knowledge or information. (iii) Finally, it is enlarged and worked over into rationally or logically organized material—that of the one who, relatively speaking, is expert in the subject. (MW 9: 192)

Education as Growth

As the young become engaged in the activities and occupations of social life, they grow into full membership. When they come of age and their elders retire or pass away, they simply take over; social life continues through generations of change in membership.

As Dewey explains in chapter 4, the new members in turn continue to experience life in new ways, to act and to undergo, to meet with success and achievement but also with disappointment and failure. Fortunately, they retain some measure of plasticity – "the ability to learn from experience, to modify actions on the basis of the results of prior actions" (MW 9: 50). Some modifications include new technical developments that transform social occupations – as the Internet has transformed all occupations in a matter of two decades. The "net conclusion" is that "life is development, and that developing, growing, is life" (MW 9: 55). Dewey applies this conclusion to education in language, which has become justly famous:

> Translated into its educational equivalents, that means (i) that the educational process has no end beyond itself; it is its own end; and that (ii) the educational process is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming. [. . .] There is nothing to which growth is relative save more growth, there is nothing to which education is subordinate save more education. (MW 9: 57)

Education as Preparation

When we first run into the idea that *education is bringing a child along to full participation in occupations of adult social life*, we are apt to think of it as

implying that education is *preparation* for something in the child's *future*. Dewey's objections should already be quite predictable. This approach takes both individuals and groups as static when both are in fact constantly changing and growing. We simply don't know, in the necessary detail, what future occupations will be like or what knowledge and skill they will demand. If we keep engaging ever-changing young people in ever-changing occupations *throughout* the years devoted to education, they will already be acting capably *in* the future (when considered in relation to their early school years) when they get there. By focusing, however, on some imaginary future during their early years – and the most unlikely future possible is the present as it recedes into the past – we simply ignore the possibilities for learning in each *successive present* as their lives unfold. Chapters 5 and 6 bring up other ideas that Dewey sees as roadblocks in the way of appreciating the idea of education as *growth*.

The Theory of Democracy in Education: Chapters 7–18

The Definition of Democracy

In this part of the book Dewey presents his unique account of democracy in chapter 7, and then considers how democracy requires a reconstruction of the received pattern of education.

What constitutes a democratic society? For Dewey "society" is a reification, that is, an abstraction transformed into a thing and then endowed with mysterious powers. He breaks this abstraction apart by calling our attention to familiar facts. People act in social contexts, and associate together in groups of many types: family, neighborhood, ethnic, racial, religious, political, cultural, occupational groups . . . and many others. Each person belongs to many intersecting groups. What we think of as "society" is just the rich and connected network of these groups.

At this point Dewey makes what is probably the best known (and possibly the least well understood) move in the entire work. He has already asked how we are to evaluate – and thus gain a standpoint to make improvements in – any form of social life: that is, any such network of groups. His answer is that "the measure of the worth of any social institution is its effect in enlarging and improving experience" – that is, its impact on enlarging human powers and sensitivities (MW 9: 10).

To accomplish this enlarging and improving entails a broadening and deepening of communication. If people's voices cannot be heard and responded to, their difficulties cannot come to light – and then we lack the necessary information for shaping and testing improvements. Now in all groups "we find some interests held in common, and we find a certain amount of interaction and cooperative intercourse with other groups." This, says Dewey, points us to the right *standard* for optimizing social exchange in a way that illuminates needs and potential areas for improvement: "How numerous and varied are the

interests which are consciously shared? How full and free is the interplay with other forms of association?" (MW 9: 90).

First, we have to consider communication patterns *within each* existing group. So for example, in our families, do we really get to know each other deeply? Are there topics that are off limits? Do the parents discuss family finances, or sexual behavior, or religious faith freely with their children in appropriate ways? Do they listen deeply and take the ideas of their children into account? While some groups may promote broad and deep communicative exchanges among members, others limit themselves to a narrow range of prescribed concerns. The greater range of concerns they share, the more they are likely to uncover sufferings and longings and consider ways of addressing them and improving the lives of the members and the group.

But we also have to consider how these groups interact with one another. Diverse individuals may all work in the same, for example, university department or medical practice. In this limited way, their respective groups come into contact. If their communications remain "strictly business" they will learn little about each other. But if those groups share many interests, they will bring in a greater diversity of opinion and experience. If they take part together in public interest and social action projects, they will have occasion to discuss and learn from, for example, their respective cultural or religious faith traditions.

The distinct groups, moreover, may also have formal intersections: for example, a religious group may participate in interfaith dialogues. The more fully and freely they enter into such exchanges, the more they learn about and from one another, and thus build reservoirs of trust and respect that allow them to grow from each other while constraining conflict and violent opposition.

Dewey, finally, identifies "democracy" as that form of social life that meets this stated standard of communicative exchange. He says:

> The two elements in our criterion both point to democracy. The first (broad range of intra-group interests) signifies not only more numerous and more varied points of shared common interest, but *greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests as a factor in social control*. (MW 9: 93)

In democratic living, that is, the norms that shape and control behavior are continuously modified so as to recognize and respond to the expressed needs and contributions of all members.

> The second (free and full inter-group exchange) means not only freer interaction between social groups (once isolated so far as intention could keep up a separation) but *change in social habit*—its continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse. (MW9: 93)

In democratic living the habits and norms affecting inter-group relations are also modified in response to issues that emerge as groups come into contact. So while at first, for example, Protestants may distance themselves from and despise Catholics, they may eventually not merely learn to live together