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Education: imagination, communication, and participatory growth

Introduction

Education is absolutely central to Dewey's thought, both as a human enterprise and a philosophical subject matter. Whether philosophers recognized it or not, he believed education was 'the supreme human interest in which . . . other problems, cosmological, moral, logical, come to a head' (LW5:156). Moreover, it was the area which represented his best attempts to 'sum up' and 'most fully expound' his philosophical position.¹ As pedagogue, Dewey wrote educational materials: lesson plans, schedules, syllabi, lectures, etc. As philosopher, he articulated a profound new vision of how learning occurs, how teaching should reflect and respond to learning, and how the school should be organized to optimize this process of growth.

Dewey's comment that his writings on education 'summed up' his *entire* philosophical position expresses his conviction that any adequate educational philosophy must look deeply not only at the processes of learning but at the experiential contexts which make learning – and democracy – possible. For Dewey, this meant that philosophy of education had to be informed by relevant theories, especially those in psychology, morality,

politics, and inquiry. Dewey attempts this in *Democracy and Education* by, 'connect[ing] the growth of democracy with the development of the experimental method in the sciences, evolutionary ideas in the biological sciences, and the industrial reorganization, and [the book] is concerned to point out the changes in subject matter and method of education indicated by these developments' (MW9:3).

What is education and who is it for? Dewey answers this most concisely in 'My Pedagogic Creed' (1897) by listing and explaining five main areas of his educational philosophy: (1) the purpose and nature of education; (2) the function of schools; (3) how subject matters should be conceived and arranged; (4) what methods of instruction are appropriate; and (5) the role education plays in social progress. In brief, education's purpose is to prepare us to survive and, hopefully, flourish in a future that is by nature uncertain. This is best provided by enabling each child to take full command of her own powers, rather than merely fashioning her to fulfill society's current needs.

It is important to understand, at the outset, that Dewey sees education as a *primarily* social process, not an individual achievement. This is because individuals are, in large part, constituted by social experience. Education, of course, is concerned with both individual psychology and social structures, but these must be understood as organically related, interdependent factors. No child's interests, words, or deeds exist in a vacuum; it is through the reception and response they receive in society that they gain meaning. The school must provide a socially interactive atmosphere for education to succeed. At the same time, social factors do not have a self-sufficient meaning either. Their meaning depends on the perspective of the child being educated. For this reason, education must heed the child's instincts, habits, and powers as important clues as to the meaning social factors (agents, circumstances) have for that child. Education which

overemphasizes either factor – the child or the social forces – becomes either haphazard or coercive.

Schools are primarily social institutions that must be considered valuable for their own sake. While schools equip children with information and training useful for the future, the school and its teachers are part of the child's present community; they shape the context of his experiences. These informational and existential facts must, in the school, function together to deepen and extend those values and capacities most pertinent to a given environment. Schools can do this, in part, by representing community life to the child through activities simplified for the child's understanding but nevertheless continuous with his experience. By seeing how school subjects and activities have a larger significance, the child gains insight into why their participation in learning portends their own social significance.

Dewey's philosophy of education arrived during a period of considerable pedagogical debate. In the 1890s a heated battle between educational 'traditionalists' and 'romantics' was ongoing, and Dewey satisfied neither group.² *Traditionalists* (also called 'old education' by Dewey) pressed for a 'curriculum-centered' education under the leadership of William Torrey Harris, who saw children as blank slates on whom teachers must write the lessons of civilization. Subject matter ('content') was of supreme importance, best taught with step-by-step discipline. The child's role was to remain docile and receptive to the wisdom being poured into her. *Romantics* (also referred to as 'new education', and 'progressive education' by Dewey), urged a 'child-centered' approach. Advocates such as G. Stanley Hall argued that the child's natural impulses were the proper starting points of education. Children are active and creative beings, and education must ensure that their unfettered growth take precedence over all else – including content instruction which, while necessary, was of subordinate importance.

Neither group much respected the methods and values of the other. Traditionalists saw themselves as authoritative conveyors of centuries-old wisdom, whereas their opponents had foolishly relinquished this authority for the immature desires of children; as a consequence, the romantics had developed a pedagogy of chaos, anarchy, and ineffectiveness. Romantics, for their part, saw their pedagogy as loyal to children's spontaneity and joy; traditionalists, in their view, were suppressing children's unique spirits with a pedagogy both mechanistic and depersonalizing.

Dewey criticizes both educational philosophies. Traditionalists subordinate children to the curriculum because they mistakenly see education as 'formation from without'. Their overemphasis on curriculum creates their mistaken ideal of a learner who is docile, receptive, and obedient. When traditionalists compare *actual* children with their ideal, children seem impulsive, self-centered, narrow, confused, and uncertain; their boredom or inattention to the curriculum is construed as a *moral* failing. Consequently, traditionalists' solution to the problem of connecting the curriculum with the living interests and activities of the child becomes 'discipline', and so numerous punishments and rewards (extrinsic to learning) are institutionalized as part of pedagogy.

Dewey also criticizes romantic (or 'child-centered') educators. This approach (with which Dewey is frequently confused) overestimates the degree to which education is 'development from within', and afflicts its pedagogy with excessive reliance on the child's present interests and purposes. While agreeing that these interests and purposes are crucial ingredients for educational practice, Dewey insists that it is up to teachers to actively direct them toward fruitful expression in history, science, art, and so on. Child-centered schools, Dewey warns, must be careful not to craft their identity on the mere rejection of traditional methods, as this makes them more liable to new

dogmatism. Every new method proposed for education must examine, radically and self-critically, both underlying principles and present conditions. Only by doing this can educational content (curricula and disciplinary boundaries) and agents (students, teachers, and administrators) be assured of practical connection with present experience.

In contrast to these two schools, Dewey proposes that regular change is the one fact educators can predict with certainty – and the one, stable guide on which a new pedagogy can be constructed for children.

The open mind is the mark of those who have . . . learned the eagerness to go on learning and the ability to make this desire a reality. The one precious thing that can be acquired in school or anywhere else is just this constant desire and ability . . . There will be almost a revolution in school education when study and learning are treated not as acquisition of what others know but as development of capital to be invested in eager alertness in observing and judging the conditions under which one lives. Yet until this happens, we shall be ill-prepared to deal with a world whose outstanding trait is change.

(LW17:463)

Traditional schooling's reliance on rote memorization and restrictive discipline renders the mind passive, closed, and backward looking.³ An open mind is not passively open (like a door), but *actively* open (like being 'open' to new ideas or experiences). The condition of being critically and actively open is the heart of Dewey's pedagogy. We will return to this shortly.

When Dewey arrived in Chicago in 1894 to chair the Philosophy department, he had mostly taught college. He increasingly believed that a truly participatory democracy could only emerge from a population adequately schooled for such activities; public education therefore had to be adapted. Dewey

planned to accomplish these aims by teaching and researching pedagogy alongside his philosophical and administrative duties, and he convinced the trustees and President of the university to create a separate academic department of pedagogy for him to direct. The opportunity proved an exceptional one, both professionally and personally.

The practical manifestation of Dewey's proposals and the position afforded him by the university was the Laboratory School of the University of Chicago. With the assistance of President Harper, Dewey and his wife Alice founded the school (which opened in January 1896). It provided a real site for Dewey to test his theories about learning and the formation of democratic communities. As part of a larger campaign for educational reform in Chicago, Dewey's Laboratory School became nearly synonymous with progressive education. Dewey, however, was cautious not to over-identify his educational philosophy with 'progressive education'. While this label was reasonably descriptive of many parents' solution to the problems of traditional education (over-regimentation, excessive discipline, etc.) it glossed over Dewey's unique strategies for non-traditional learning.⁴

Dewey's philosophy of education

Dewey's seminal critique of the reflex arc concept in psychology (see chapter 1), argued that psychologists had been misdescribing human experience as a series of fits and starts, rather than as a continuous circuit of activity.⁵ As a special case of human psychological interaction, learning also does not occur in fits and starts; learning is a progressive and cumulative process in which the dissatisfaction of doubt alternates with the satisfaction that attends problem solving. Children, no matter how young, are never passive recipients of sensation; they are actively engaged agents in life's ongoing dramas. Educators who grasp this fact

must surrender the picture of children as blank slates awaiting inscriptions and grasp that 'the question of education is the question of taking hold of [children's] activities, of giving them direction' (MW1:25).

However not everyone saw Dewey's view of education as benign. Traditionalist critics like Mortimer Adler blasted Deweyan education for failing to *impose* values on students – thus leaving civilization value-less and vulnerable to fascist forces.⁶ But Dewey could not accept Adler's premise that values are *only* acquired from external sources. Any child begins school, Dewey argues, with four basic impulses, 'to communicate, to construct, to inquire, and to express in finer form', and the educator who properly appreciates the psychological nature of these impulses will see them as 'the natural resources, the uninvested capital, upon the exercise of which depends the active growth of the child' (MW1:30). None of these resources are devoid of values, but for educators to make use of these resources they had to take a *personal* approach – knowing the children as individuals, understanding how *their* interests and habits derive from *their* homes and neighborhoods.

Teaching active learners is no simple matter. Teachers must both know their subject matter *and* also be able to integrate it into their students' individual and cultural experiences. Unlike traditionalist teachers, who can use punishment or humiliation to motivate children through fear, and unlike romantics who can look to the child's whims to shape the lesson, Deweyan teachers have to reconceive the whole learning environment. They have to match the present interests and activities of these pupils with preexisting curricular goals (for instance, of history or chemistry) by identifying specific problematic situations capable of integrating the two. This problem-centered approach demands a lot from teachers; it requires not only they be trained in the subject matters, but also in child psychology and a variety of pedagogical techniques for creating experiences which weave

child, problem, and curriculum together. About teaching at the Laboratory School, two colleagues wrote:

Like Alice, [the teacher] must step with her children behind the looking glass and in this imaginative land she must see all things with their eyes and limited by their experience; but, in time of need, she must be able to recover her trained vision and from the realistic point of view of an adult supply the guide posts of knowledge and the skills of method.⁷

This was a tall order, and while some might argue that Dewey achieved it in Chicago, it is more debatable that it provided a model that has endured elsewhere in the country. Some, like Alan Ryan, doubt that it *can* be accomplished, given its requirements: small and well-equipped classes, curricula resistant to external metrics ('accountability' as it is called today), and extraordinarily versatile teachers able to teach various subjects while still having time to regularly revise methods (Ryan 1995, 147). While this is an important criticism, it is based on empirical claims about present possibilities, which cannot be debated here.

For many, education's purpose is simple: training for work. Dewey rejects this aim as too narrow – and also too classist. Central to education, Dewey believes, are 'occupations' not 'vocations'. 'Vocational' (or 'pre-professional') training aggravates social class differences; some in society are provided with a limited set of skills and information to do particular jobs, while others receive a more generous and humanizing 'liberal education'. Such educational 'tracking' might work for utopian fantasies (as described, for example, in Plato's *Republic* or Huxley's *Brave New World*) but it contravened Dewey's hope for a more democratic America.

Instead, education should train for 'occupations': 'a mode of activity on the part of the child which reproduces, or runs parallel to, some form of work carried on in social life' (MW1:92).

In Dewey's school these activities included carpentry, cooking, sewing, and textile work. Children, some as young as four years old, were divided into age groups to pursue various projects: cultivate and process farm crops like cotton and wheat, study local history and geography, construct a replica of a colonial American home, conduct experiments in anatomy or political economy. (A project done in the same spirit today might still involve cooking, though it might also involve the creation and editing of a movie.)

The point of taking the occupational approach was this: engaging the child's interest lays down a motivational foundation for more abstract curricular lessons to be introduced later. For example, a child who has started cooking a meal has an emotional investment in the activity as a whole. If an obstacle is presented that can be overcome by consulting a book, it becomes immediately obvious why reading is important. The conventional problem of 'getting children to read' is overcome, gradually and naturally, at an early age.

Occupational projects also introduced children to the experimental method of inquiry. Faced with 'problematic situations' of their own making, children realize that overcoming obstacles requires observation and hypothesis-formation. Trial and failure of hypotheses leads naturally to developing analytical methods (to determine what went wrong) and inquiry into how proposed solutions should be revised. Such firsthand involvement with inquiry is central to education because it truly frees the mind of the child by impressing on him the need to 'take an active share in the personal building up of his own problems and to participate in methods of solving them' (MW3:237).

Finally, unlike vocational training, occupation-education is not tied to narrow objectives. Each successive project in which children engage illustrates more diverse interrelationships and more general lessons. While a specific gardening project initially requires one to furrow the soil, questions introduced

later (e.g., about optimizing plant health) raise more general questions of biology, chemistry, and meteorology. Cooking the garden's products would necessitate specific lessons about food preparation; but again, that process is utilized as a fulcrum for discussing more general topics (such as how kitchen work could be divided among many people – 'fairness').

In brief, then, occupation-centered methods propose that education proceed, as Raymond Boisvert puts it, in widening concentric circles (Boisvert 1998, 103). Dewey outlines this approach in 'The University Elementary School' (MW1:318): (1) *Start with interests*. Courses of study that start from students' interests, activities, and contexts are better able to engage students in learning. Subject-matter and methods must call the whole child into activity at each subsequent educational level. (2) *Employ cumulative sequences*. Subject-matters should progress naturally, year to year. Each new year should begin with a review, not a repetition, of the preceding year's problems and materials. A review presents previous materials as prospective of what is to come. (3) *Introduce specialization gradually*. To engage students at the level of experience, studies should not seem remote or disconnected from ordinary life. For this reason, specialized topics and concepts should be introduced *within* problematic contexts as useful tools applicable to that context. (4) *Introduce abstract concepts and symbols when appropriate*.⁸ Later stages of study introduce students to more abstract thinking, formal methods, and increased facility with symbols (words, numbers, formulas). Textbooks are more extensively used than at previous stages. Unlike traditional schools that often frustrate students by prematurely forcing their involvement with abstract tools, Deweyan schools help students anticipate the use of abstract methods through gradual and practical exposure.

The social atmosphere of the school is as important as any lesson taught there. Schools must create a culture of communication and cooperative activity. Unfortunately, in Dewey's

view, schools are largely institutions that lack 'a social atmosphere and motive for learning' because they assume there is an 'antithesis between purely individualistic methods of learning and social action' (MW9:310). By creating an atmosphere based on this false opposition (between individual and community), schools are controlling education in a way that is destructive to learning. Imagine a classroom of students who must all read the same books, recite the same lessons; each day, tasks and results are the same. In such regimented environments there 'is no opportunity for each child to work out something specifically his own, which he may contribute to the common stock, while he, in turn, participates in the productions of others . . . The social spirit is not cultivated – in fact . . . it gradually atrophies for lack of use' (EW.5:64). Something tragic is done to the personality in such an environment since, as discussed in the chapters on morality and politics, the self is naturally social and flourishes through interaction and cooperation with others. By creating environments at odds with social needs, schools contribute to the creation of children who tend toward solipsism and the anxious expectation that others are more likely to be competitors than partners in social inquiry.

Control is, of course, necessary to education; but there are other approaches to control besides the external imposition of power typical of traditional schools. When a spirit of cooperation and participation pervade an activity – such as in a family or on a baseball team – there is order, not because one person or authority is imposing it, but because of the 'moving spirit of the whole group'. Dewey adds, 'The control is social, but individuals are parts of a community, not outside of it' (LW13:33).

In Deweyan education, teachers exercise control not by fighting or overwhelming students' natural tendencies, but by creating social and physical circumstances designed to elicit and encourage students' natural desires and capabilities to learn. Student interest is 'controlled' not by external threats or rewards

but because they find themselves engaging with others in solving the problems that various lessons present.

The changes Dewey enacted in his own school and proposed for education generally required more than a change in educators' habits; physical structures, too, required adjustment. One need only compare how much more inquisitive children are *out* of school than in school to appreciate how insensitive traditional schools have been to how the physical environment stimulates (or dampens) curiosity. 'The physical equipment and arrangements of the average schoolroom', Dewey writes, 'are hostile to the existence of real situations of experience . . . Almost everything testifies to the great premium put upon listening, reading, and the reproduction of what is told and read' (MW9:162). In conjunction with teachers and school administrators, architects and engineers can help reimagine what a physical school could be. At a minimum, new pedagogical flexibilities can be enabled by moveable desks, kitchens, and even laboratories. 'There must be more actual material, more stuff, more appliances, and more opportunities for doing things, before the gap [between children's in-school and out-of-school experience] can be overcome' (MW9:162).

In contemporary society, it is still commonplace to assume categorical distinctions between education and the rest of life ('school' *versus* 'real life', 'ivory tower' *versus* 'practical world'). Sometimes, the comparison is to the school's detriment; one is 'too cool for school' because school is primarily a place of rote and routine demands. At other times, it is 'real life' which suffers in comparison, since 'real life' connotes an arena of brutal competition and merciless consequences.

Such attitudes, while caricatures of school and 'real life', stem from well-established incongruencies between what happens in and out of schooling. School and society are distinct and, in many ways, opposing worlds. Education's fundamental task, Dewey believes, is to heal the school-society divide because 'the

school cannot be a preparation for social life excepting as it reproduces, within itself, typical conditions of social life' (MW4:272).

Readers may wonder why it is so important for Dewey to connect school and society. His motivation is not just pedagogical but ethical. Because ethical responsibilities are themselves manifested in a social world, individuals can only become capable of assuming those responsibilities *if* their educational training bears some semblance to social life.

There cannot be two sets of ethical principles, one for life in the school, and the other for life outside of the school. As conduct is one, so also the principles of conduct are one. The tendency to discuss the morals of the school as if the school were an institution by itself is highly unfortunate. The moral responsibility of the school, and of those who conduct it, is to society. The school is fundamentally an institution erected by society to do a certain specific work, – to exercise a certain specific function in maintaining the life and advancing the welfare of society.

(MW4:269)

While Dewey writes here about children, his point may be set in relief by considering higher education. Over the years, many in the West have accepted the division between 'practical education' and 'education for its own sake'. As pre-professional course offerings and degrees have mushroomed, humanities educators have adjusted by appending so-called 'liberal arts' courses to the pre-professional program. Under the assumption that these courses will make them 'well-rounded', pre-professional students take just an uncoordinated sampling of humanities classes. This reveals, in effect, that universities are psychologically unable to renounce explicitly their age-old mission of 'educating the whole person'. In actual practice, however, this mission *has* been relinquished. The education of a *whole person* –

that is, educating students about facts and values transcendent of narrow vocational objectives – has been relegated to vitamin-like supplements of humanities and science courses for pre-professional degree seekers.

Such trends in education may seem innocuous, mere responses to *society's* preference for buying and selling. But society needs and wants more than economic activity. The formation of an educated and ethical person requires a diverse curriculum, which does not predispose one to construe 'welfare' in exclusively pecuniary terms. For welfare also includes artistic innovation and moral resourcefulness; it requires intelligence, the ability of new generations to reason intrepidly about their future. On Dewey's view, the proper measure of a school's 'service to society' would be this: the active representation, in microcosm, of the plurality of values (economic, aesthetic, moral) that its students will find themselves engaged with for the rest of their lives.

Dewey's mandate that education become relevant to the needs and conditions of society addresses the excesses of traditionalists and romantics. Both of those approaches are undermined by their assumption that there is such a thing as 'education in itself'. Dewey is arguing that 'education in itself' is impossible as long as the school is kept connected with the society it inhabits. In contrast to other theoretical approaches to education, Dewey assumes no 'ideal learners'. There are, in the actual world, only learners who bring some particular 'reference to social life or membership' to their education (MW4:271–22).

In a culture where school and society saw one another as part of the same enterprise, debates over what 'the moral mission' of schools should be would dissolve. This is because, Dewey writes,

Apart from participation in social life, the school has no moral end nor aim. As long as we confine ourselves to the school as

an isolated institution, we have no directing principles, because we have no object . . . Only as we interpret school activities with reference to the larger circle of social activities to which they relate do we find any standard for judging their moral significance.

(MW4:271)

Some, such as Alan Ryan, have criticized Dewey's emphasis on the socializing and future-oriented function of the school as oppressive to some students: those who are individualistic nonjoiners or those who approach education with conservative attitudes about traditional values would find little accommodation of their perspectives in Deweyan schools.⁹ Dewey might reply that his educational philosophy ensures room for these students, too, because the school's mission was *not* to socialize individuals toward a certain particular social type, but to enable each student to have the fullest possible experience of their own autonomy, which will of course be meaningful only within a larger social context.¹⁰ I suspect, however, that there is a more difficult problem here for Dewey than my reply can presently address.

Education for democracy

The school's aim, then, is complex. It is not simply vocational training, intrinsic flourishing, or even civics; in actual life, the child inhabits all these roles – he is a voter, family member, community activist, friend, worker, and recreational player. Accordingly, the school must educate the child to accomplish and grow in all these endeavors. Schools failing to do this prevent the child from living a social life as 'an integral unified being' and condemn her to 'suffer loss and create friction' (MW4:269).

Schools' training of leadership deserves special emphasis. Students must be trained with the self-reliance needed for intelligent leadership along with a constructive sense of their membership in the society they are inheriting. In this regard, the school is the most important institution in a democracy. In a 'democratically constituted society', social life predominantly consists of interests that are not wholly foreign to one another, but are 'mutually interpenetrating' (MW9:92). Progress, in such a society, is measured by how effectively citizens can adjust to changing conditions and problems. For example, as science develops new ways of prolonging life, citizens would discuss and debate the challenges to values implied by the research. What is gained and what is lost, and from which perspectives? How can the benefits and detriments, appreciated from various points of view, be translated into the best course of action? The challenge for education in a democratically constituted society is to train children to avoid framing social problems from only *one* particular perspective – from the point of view of business, or science, or religion, for example. This is a burdensome but necessary requirement. 'A democratic community', Dewey writes, 'is more interested than other communities have cause to be in deliberate and systematic education' (MW9:92–3).

It is safe to say that education's most valuable contribution to democracy is the creation of what Dewey calls a 'total' attitude.¹¹ The need for such an attitude stems from the conflicts that arise between individuals and groups. For example, when the interests of medicine conflict with those of a religion (in end-of-life care, say) or when developers' property interests conflict with the aesthetic interests of homeowners, there is, Dewey writes, 'a stimulus to discover some more comprehensive point of view from which the divergencies may be brought together, and consistency or continuity of experience recovered' (MW9:336). While there may be many very different perspectives with which one can interpret experience, we should not

conclude that this entails permanent disagreement among pluralistic groups. For, Dewey reminds us, even among the most disparate groups 'in certain fundamental respects the same predicaments of life recur' (MW9:337). There is almost always common ground between diverse groups, and this fact offers continuing hope that challenges can be confronted as a unified public, no matter what other differences might remain outstanding. Progress toward such an ideal demands more than just strategic politics; it demands an education which is both practical and philosophical:

[E]ducation offers a vantage ground from which to penetrate to the human, as distinct from the technical, significance of philosophic discussions . . . The educational point of view enables one to envisage the philosophic problems where they arise and thrive, where they are at home, and where acceptance or rejection makes a difference in practice.

(MW9:337-8)

Education of a 'total attitude' enables people, at their best, to build communities. It also makes possible the creation of 'communal perspectives', which can transcend parochial boundaries to address new conflicts. When aiming for these goals, education utilizes activities that are conjoint, consciously shared, and communicative. Participants in the process learn strategies for open communication and free inquiry; they strive to be 'objective' in a manner consistent with sympathetically seeing 'an other's perspective' rather than striving for a perfectly neutral point of view.

Any pluralistic society which seeks to be democratic must figure out how to prevent those with parochial, even anti-democratic, views from fomenting factionalization or even violence. By what criteria is a group 'too parochial'? This is a political question as well as an educational one, and Dewey takes

it up in *Democracy and Education*. There he uses the example of a gang (or clique) to discuss his basis for criticizing parochialists. In even the most hermetic of groups, we must first recognize that they: (1) hold some interests in common among themselves, and (2) have some interaction and cooperation with other groups. These two traits, found throughout human societies, allow us to ask about such groups: 'How *numerous and varied* are the interests which are consciously shared? How *full and free is the interplay* with other forms of association?' (MW9:89, emphasis mine). Measured against these criteria, a group need not be *criminal to possess traits that, while not inherently immoral, are likely to engender conflicts and internecine strife*. Dewey writes,

The isolation and exclusiveness of a gang or clique brings its antisocial spirit into relief. But this same spirit is found wherever one group has interests 'of its own' which shut it out from full interaction with other groups, so that its prevailing purpose is the protection of what it has got, instead of reorganization and progress through wider relationships . . . The essential point is that isolation makes for rigidity and formal institutionalizing of life, for static and selfish ideals within the group . . . On such a basis it is wholly logical to fear intercourse with others, for such contact might dissolve custom. It would certainly occasion reconstruction.

(MW9:91, 92)

In our day as in Dewey's, the ability to exclude others remains an important source of group identity. As a result, factionalization increasingly dominates Western cultural formations – in how people live, sell, shop, politick, educate, and communicate, to name just a few. By permitting the creation of ever more parochial groups we eliminate risks but also experience little growth. Conflicts become more intractable as forms of life become anti-educational.

The rise of techniques creating factionalization stand in marked opposition to the democratic ideal as Dewey conceives it. On Dewey's view, 'democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself' (LW2:328). Democratic life, then, rests upon the qualitative character of a society's constituent social groups. If we recall Dewey's two criteria for assessing the democratic character of groups (mentioned above), we find (1) that social groups embody the democratic ideal when they push beyond their narrower 'interests' to seek out 'more numerous and more varied points of shared common interest' with other groups. They recognize that navigating social conflicts requires 'the recognition of mutual interests' rather than the aggrandizement of differences.

We also find (2) that the democratic ideal is fostered when 'freer interaction between social groups' is sought. The challenges presented by more diverse social interaction tends to produce in groups a 'change in social habit' and an improved ability to readjust to new situations (all quotes from MW9:92). In other words, groups faced with inter-group dialogue become more democratic once they stop hunkering down ('rallying their base' as contemporary political strategists call it) and engage instead with those less like themselves. The result is that their character *as a group* becomes broader and more adaptable.

While it is obvious that many groups do not *in fact* do this, Dewey's point is a hypothetical one based on the idea that we *want* to get along. Unless groups can discover new mutual interests or ways of interacting with other groups, there is little chance of escaping anti-democratic antagonisms and struggles for factional power.

Conclusion

In the end, education determines whether democracy flourishes or falters. Education determines the kind of habits we develop

for investigating beliefs and situations, and how we communicate along the way. While any culture seeks to pass on its values and beliefs to the next generation, Dewey argues that it is critical that we distinguish between education that encourages interaction and creative hypothesizing from those which celebrate parochialism and dogmatism.

Among Americans, Dewey found a general cultural tendency to fix belief with methods that rest upon sheer authority. Such anti-empirical habits of mind were not isolated to isolationist communities, but were the result of popular pedagogical methods and communicative practices outside the school. The unfortunate result was that many citizens could not understand or evaluate complicated political and scientific explanations. One cause of this, bad schooling, has been discussed in this chapter. But Dewey points to another cause, worth considering in the twenty-first century. He writes,

There is a considerable class of influential persons, enlightened and liberal in technical, scientific and religious matters, who are only too ready to make use of appeal to authority, prejudice, emotion and ignorance to serve their purposes in political and economic affairs. Having done whatever they can do to debauch the habit of the public mind in these respects, they then sit back in amazed sorrow when this same habit of mind displays itself violently with regard, say, to the use of established methods of historic and literary interpretations of the scriptures or with regard to the animal origin of man.

(MW15:50)

As a contemporary example, one might think for a moment of the American broadcasting elite who, despite their excellent educations, barrage viewers with the kind of bad logic and hyperbolic rhetoric that leads to good ratings but also to diminished public understanding. Alternatively, one might consider

the ferocity with which advertisers colonize space in schools and textbooks – under the cover of ‘efficiency’ and the ‘free market’. These influential persons, powerful modelers of disingenuous inquiry, are deeply complicit in debauching the public’s ability to reason. As they blur the distinction between argument and persuasion, they contribute to public skepticism about the legitimate claims of scientists, philosophers, educators, and advocates of sound public policy. The blame for public ignorance, then, must be spread beyond society’s usual charlatans to educated individuals. By caving in to careerism and self-gain, they fail to exercise the moral and intellectual discipline needed to model responsible inquiry, and so compromise the potential for democracy.

The lesson Dewey wanted educators to take from such phenomena is: if genuine democracy resides in ‘the idea of community life itself’ but actual conditions show that community life is being undermined by deceptive or authoritarian methods of fixing belief, then another way must be found to educate citizens. Since democracy is more than just a technique of governing but is ‘primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience’, then education becomes vital to democracy *only once it provides individuals with the intellectual habits not only for rejecting authoritarianism, but for critically evaluating everyday persuasion and trickery.*

This brings us to the second and final way education enables democracy to flourish, through the instruction of communication. Communication makes cooperative inquiry possible. Inquiry provides citizens with an alternative to knee-jerk reactions; it allows us to examine events logically and investigate alternatives with imagination and art. Inquiry and communication allow experimentation with meanings, which may be able to mitigate social isolation and factionalization. Against such problems we find in education ‘the only possible solution: the perfecting of the means and ways of communication of

meanings so that genuinely shared interest in the consequences of interdependent activities may inform desire and effort and thereby direct action’ (LW2:332). The more impoverished our communication, the less able we are to navigate around incongruent values toward common ground and acts of cooperation. Ideally, education trains students to be imaginative and experimental, and to see inquiry as a fallible process which may, in the future, revise the meaning of present judgments. By definition this process is exclusionary of dogmatism, and Dewey certainly did intend this value to be inculcated.