

Introduction
John Dewey's Legacy for Education

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It is not an exaggeration to say that John Dewey is one of the most important thinkers when it comes to the theory, practice, and study of education. As Jim Garrison once put it, Dewey may be the most important Anglophone philosopher of education (Garrison 1998). Much, if not all, of Dewey's philosophy touches on education; Dewey himself posited that, "philosophy may even be defined as the general theory of education" (*Democracy and Education*, MW 9: 338). But Dewey was not only a philosopher of education; he was also an innovator in educational practice and the scientific study of education. He learned to practice the psychology of education from his teacher, G. Stanley Hall, and he deserves significant credit for the development of education research as a scientific field through his founding of the first Laboratory School at the University of Chicago. Here he developed many influential educational theories and pedagogical practices as well as methods for education research as an autonomous scientific discipline. Few if any have contributed as importantly to the philosophy, science, and art of education as Dewey, and his impact is still rightly felt in the study of education today.

The importance of Dewey for education has always received significant recognition in that field. Unlike philosophy, where Dewey experienced a brief eclipse of interest before the current trend of growing enthusiasm for his work, Dewey's reputation never wavered in educational circles. Indeed, in Barbara Levine's definitive *Works about Dewey 1886-2016*, a comprehensive bibliography numbering 1,488 pages, the word "education" appears on 1,376 pages (93%), while Google Scholar tracks over 1.3 million articles containing both the words "Dewey" and "education," over 34 thousand of those published since 2020. A volume such as the present one

might seem otiose, then, since the legacy of Dewey for education was never in doubt. What more can be said about John Dewey and education?

It remains important to explore Dewey's educational ideas and their contemporary legacy, however, for at least three reasons. First, because changing times necessity a reinterpretation and reassessment of Dewey's ideas for our current moment; over a century separates us from many of Dewey's most important works on education. Second, while Dewey has exercised a strong influence over the theory of education, the understanding and implementation of his ideas have never been thoroughgoing; many lessons that we can benefit from we have yet to fully learn. Third, the discussion of Dewey and education has remained too centered on the scene in North America and Western Europe, and much remains to be explored in terms of the influence and promise of Dewey for global educational movements and practices.

The present moment in the United States is one where still have a lot to learn from Dewey's work on education. There are significant threats to democracy in our current cultural and political milieu. Dewey taught us that education is absolutely central to democracy and vice versa. The enemies of democracy have learned this lesson as well, which is why education has been under siege for decades by those with an anti-democratic agenda, who would seek to limit the power and autonomy of the public. We are currently living through a resurgence of a kind of McCarthyism, as educators and educational institutions at all levels are under attack; our institutions are doing no better to defend education against these attacks than they did during the original McCarthyism. Teaching the histories and legacies of racism, sexism, and other such facts about our country are important roles for education that are becoming increasingly difficult in both public schools and institutions of higher education. Books are banned for merely admitting the existence of people who are not straight and cisgender. The fostering of diversity, equity, and inclusion was until

recently considered so benign as to even be banal but is now the target of reactionary political attacks. Professors have been suspended and valedictorians prevented from giving their commencement addresses because they have simply expressed opinions about geopolitics that are disagreeable to some, but fully within their rights to hold and express. Presidents of prestigious universities are dragged in front of Congress and either capitulate to the witch-hunters or lose their jobs. We can look to Dewey for both hope and for tools for fighting these anti-democratic movements, which threaten both our hard-won progress towards democracy as well as the quality of education itself. As Dewey teaches us, the school should be a “special social environment which shall especially look after nurturing the capacities of the immature” so that they can learn to participate in the “associated activity” of our social life (MW 9: 26-27). If we wish to educate competent citizens of a democracy, that means that schools, colleges, and universities must be safe environments in which students can, for example, form their own political opinions, freely express and discuss ideas, protest and demonstrate, etc.

More prosaic but longer-running trends have slowly been degrading the integrity of higher education in particular, and the very institutions of higher education are partly to blame due to lack of forethought and absence of a coherent vision of the public value of education. A well-educated citizenry is a public good we all benefit from in a democracy, and it is something the United States used to be willing to invest in. In recent decades, state institutions have continuously disinvested in higher education, while costs have risen, burdening students with debt and institutions with financial crises and recurrent waves of austerity measures. Reactionary, anti-democratic motives for defunding education cannot explain this movement in full. In the face of declining funding and increased reliance on tuition, in order to compete for student enrollments and justify higher tuition rates, colleges and universities have adopted both a radical individualism and a vulgar

vocationalism, where the goal or “selling point” of higher education is entirely the provision of credentials and marketable skills to individual students, so that they will more easily find better, higher-paying jobs. This kind of education is *not* a public good, but a private good, a benefit for the student who pays for it, removing much of the justification for public funding. Indeed, as was widely reported in the 2019-2020 campaign for the Democratic party nomination, Pete Buttigieg repeatedly attacked his opponents’ free college plans on just this point; if a college degree is a job credential, and college graduates earn more than non-graduates, free tuition is a regressive policy that redistributes money to those who (will eventually) earn more. On the vision of higher education extolled by many administrators and faculty, he has a point. What both Pete, his opponents, and the institutions themselves lacked was an alternative vision of education as a public good, which Dewey provides; education contributes not only to the flourishing of individuals but also to habits of social cooperation essential for democratic life. Universities have a much larger role to play in our communities, and they require a robust, diverse, and cooperative learning community whose members are pursuing more than their own self-interest.

It is not only the parochial scene of American politics and education that can benefit from continued explorations of Dewey’s legacy. Dewey himself was a cosmopolitan thinker who traveled the world, often observing and commenting on the educational experiments he found. His work has had a correspondingly global impact, which is explored in the first major section of the current volume, on “International Connections.” Notably, there is enormous energy and excitement about Dewey’s work on education in China, as the first three chapters in this section explore. Dewey represents an important opening for intellectual and cultural exchange between the U.S. and China. This is particularly important today, as the U.S. experiences a serious wave of xenophobia towards China (another aspect of the new McCarthyism gripping the country). While

Jim Garrison explores the thematic relations between Dewey's "naturalistic humanism" and the philosophical-religious traditions of China, the essays by Tu & Zhang and by Zhang & Liu explore the reception and interpretation of Dewey's ideas in China, providing important contexts for understanding the influence of Dewey in China and potential dialogue between Chinese and Western thinkers influenced by Dewey.

The other three chapters in this section explore other international contexts for the influence of Dewey's work. Khan and Syed explore the influence of Dewey in India and the relation between Dewey's educational thought and that of Ghandi. They argue powerfully that the education system in India could benefit from closer engagement with the ideas of Dewey and Gandhi and better follow-through in their implementation of those ideas. Filiz Oskay explores the influence of Dewey on the educational system in Turkey. She explores a variety of scholarly views about Dewey's influence there and argues that Dewey exercised a significant and specific influence through his visits to Turkey in 1924 and 1943. The chapter by Cameron and Boyles looks at the Reggio Emilia Educational Project in Italy, in comparison with Dewey's Laboratory School. Dewey influenced the Reggio Emilia schools through his influence on Loris Malaguzzi, who created the vision for the Reggio Emilia Project. Their chapter elucidates the importance of a place-based pedagogy through tracing these connections.

The next section of the book, "Philosophical Explorations," looks at the ways in which Dewey's philosophy of education interacts with other philosophers and philosophical ideas. Beisecker and Ervin trace important influences on Dewey's philosophy of education (Hegel and Harris), while Marcello Ruta and Ning Sun each compare Dewey to more recent philosophers (Brandom and McDowell) on whom he has had at least some influence. Setareh Ezzatabadi by

contrast focuses on the central philosophical concepts of *inquiry* and *autonomy*, and explores how they play out in Dewey's philosophy of education.

The last two sections of the book pair essays exploring specific contexts of education to which Dewey contributed. Section three explores "Dewey and Vocational Education." Scott Taylor explores Dewey's account of "occupations" and the role they play in Dewey's psychology and philosophy of education. Taylor argues that this concept figures centrally in Dewey's attempt to break down mind-body dualism but that his account remains in some ways too abstract. Connie Goddard, on the other hand, looks at Dewey's relationship with the Chicago Manual Training School in relation to the historical trajectory of manual training and industrial education in the U.S., complicating the received view on Dewey and vocational education.

The final section explores Dewey's legacy over the recent movement known as "Philosophy for Children" (P4C). As both chapters in this section show, Dewey had a significant influence on the founders of the P4C movement. Gregory and Lavery focus their attention on the ways in which P4C might educate for "deliberative critical citizenship," arguing that P4C should move further in a direction that Dewey's philosophy of education requires, namely, towards citizenship education focused on social justice. Patricia Díaz Herrera, on the other hand, looks at the concept of "habit" in Matthew Lipman's work on P4C and how it draws explicitly from Dewey's work. In the process, Herrera responds to those who see a major tension between Lipman and Dewey, arguing that this is merely a difference of emphasis. In the end, Herrera argues, Lipman's P4C is fully compatible with Dewey's educational project.

The essays in this volume all began, in one way or another, as contributions to the conference on *John Dewey and His Legacy for Education*, the inaugural conference of the Center for Dewey Studies at Southern Illinois University under my leadership, and the first of many such

events to come. It was a great pleasure to welcome over one hundred attendees and participants to Carbondale, and I am grateful to everyone who participated in that event, whether or not they were invited to or chose to contribute to this volume. The range of presentations, of which this volume is just a sample, demonstrates both the need and value for continuing to explore Dewey's legacy for education. My thanks in particular to the program committee: Matt Ferkany, Johnathan Flowers, Kyle Greenwalt, Megan K. Halpern, Bethany Henning, Danielle Lake, Grant Miller, Stefan Neubert, Ning Sun, Becky L. Noël Smith, Zachary Piso, Barbara Stengel, Kenneth Stickers, Mark Tschaepe, Chris Voparil, David I. Waddington, and Leonard Waks. My gratitude as well to the keynote speakers at the conference: Jim Garrison, Larry Hickman, Zhengmei Peng, Sarah Stitzlein, Ning Sun, and Shiwan Tu. I would also like to thank Rebecca Dycus for logistical support without which the conference would have been impossible to pull off; our student workers: Carlos Garrido, Josh Grese, Stephen Houchins, and Andrii Leonov; and Mr. Jun Zhou and the Maitreya International Community for their support. Last but not least, my gratitude to Stephen Houchins for his assistance in editing and formatting this volume for publication.

References

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