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JOHN DEWEY

(1859-1952)

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John Dewey was the most significant American philosopher of the first half of the twentieth century. His career spanned three generations, and his voice could be heard in the midst of cultural controversies in the United States (and abroad) from the 1890s until his death, at the age of 93, in 1952. During this long career, Dewey developed a philosophy that called for the unity of theory and practice. He exemplified this unity in his own work as an intellectual and political activist. His thinking was grounded in the moral conviction that 'democracy is freedom', and he devoted his life to the construction of a persuasive philosophical argument for this conviction and to the pursuit of an activism that would secure its practical realization (Dewey, 1892, p. 8). Dewey's commitment to democracy and to the integration of theory and practice was most evident in his career as an educational reformer.

As he began his duties as a new member of the faculty of the University of Chicago in the fall of 1894, Dewey wrote to his wife Alice that 'I sometimes think I will drop teaching philosophy directly, and teach it via *pedagogy*' (Dewey, 1894). Although he never actually stopped teaching philosophy directly, Dewey's philosophical views probably reached more readers via books aimed at educators, such as *The school and society* (1899), *How we think* (1910), *Democracy and education* (1916) and *Experience and education* (1938), than through those directed principally to his fellow philosophers. *Democracy and education*, Dewey once said, was the closest thing he ever wrote to a summary of his 'entire philosophical position' (Dewey, 1916). It was no accident, he observed, that like himself many great philosophers had taken a keen interest in the problems of education because there was 'an intimate and vital relation between the need for philosophy and the necessity for education.' If philosophy was wisdom, a vision of 'the better kind of life to be led', then consciously guided education was the praxis of the philosopher. 'If philosophy is to be other than an idle and unverifiable speculation, it must be animated by the conviction that its theory of experience is a hypothesis that is realized only as experience is actually shaped in accord with it. And this realization demands that man's dispositions be made such as to desire and strive for that kind of experience.' The shaping of dispositions might take place in various institutions, but in modern societies the school was the most crucial, and as such it was an indispensable arena for the shaping of a philosophy into a 'living fact' (Dewey, 1912-13, p. 298, 306-7).

Dewey's efforts to shape his own philosophy into living fact in the schools were surrounded by controversy, and to this day he remains a touchstone in debates over the shortcomings of American education: a reputable villain for 'back-to-basics' conservatives and an inspiring forefather for 'child-centred' reformers. Both sides of these debates tend to misread Dewey's work, to overestimate his influence, and to underplay the democratic ideals that were at the heart of his pedagogy.

The making of an educator

John Dewey was born in Burlington, Vermont, in 1859, the son of a storekeeper. He graduated from the University of Vermont in 1879, and after a brief career as a school-teacher in Pennsylvania and Vermont, he enrolled as a graduate student in the department of philosophy at Johns Hopkins University, which had pioneered graduate education on the German model in the United States. There he came under the influence of George S. Morris, a neo-Hegelian idealist. After receiving his Ph.D. in 1884 with a dissertation on 'Kant's Psychology', Dewey followed Morris to the University of Michigan, and assumed leadership of the philosophy department there in 1889.

While at Michigan, Dewey met his future wife, Alice Chipman, who was his student. Alice had come to college after several years of teaching in Michigan schools. More than anyone else, Alice was responsible for the practical turn that Dewey's interests took in the late 1880s. Dewey accredited her with putting the 'guts and stuffing' into his work, and she had a significant influence in the shaping of his pedagogical ideas (Jane Dewey, 1951, p. 21). Following his marriage, Dewey began to take an active interest in public education, and he was a founding member and officer of the Michigan Schoolmasters' Club, which fostered co-operation between state high school and college teachers. When he was lured away from Michigan to the newly-founded University of Chicago by its President William Rainey Harper, he insisted that his appointment include the leadership of a new department of pedagogy. He successfully pressed for the creation of a 'laboratory school' where his ideas could be tested. It was during the decade he spent in Chicago, from 1894-1904, that Dewey worked out the fundamental principles of his philosophy of education and began to envision the sort of schools his principles required.

Pragmatism and pedagogy

Over the course of the 1890s Dewey steadily moved away from absolute idealism toward the pragmatism and naturalism of his mature philosophy. Building on a functional psychology that owed much to Darwinian evolutionary biology and to the thinking of his fellow pragmatist, William James, he began to develop a theory of knowledge that contested the dualisms of mind and world, thought and action, and which had marked Western philosophy since the seventeenth century. Thought, he argued, was not a congeries of sense impressions or an artifact of a thing called 'consciousness', nor a manifestation of an Absolute Mind, but rather a mediating, instrumental function that had evolved in order to serve the interests of human survival and welfare.

This theory of knowledge emphasized the 'necessity of testing thought by action if thought was to pass over into knowledge', and Dewey acknowledged that this proviso extended to the theory itself (Mayhew & Edwards, 1966, p. 464). His work in education was intended, in part, to explore the implications of his functional pedagogy and to test it by experiment.

Dewey was convinced that many of the problems with prevailing educational practices grew out of their foundations in a faulty dualistic epistemology. He attacked this dualistic epistemology in his writings on psychology and logic in the 1890s, and he set out to design a pedagogy that was grounded in his own functional pedagogy. Having spent a good deal of time observing the growth of his own children, Dewey was certain that there was no difference in the dynamics of the experiences of children and adults. Both were active beings who learned by confronting the problematic situations that arose in the course of their activities. For both children and adults, thinking was an instrument for solving the problems of experience, and knowledge was the accumulation of wisdom that such problem-solving

generated. Unfortunately, the theoretical insights of this functionalism had had little impact on pedagogy until that point, and therefore had been ignored in the schools.

Children, Dewey contended, did not arrive at school as blank slates upon which teachers might write the lessons of civilization. By the time the child entered the classroom, he was 'already intensely active, and the question of education is the question of taking hold of his activities, of giving them direction' (Dewey, 1899, p. 25). When children began their formal education they brought with them four basic 'native impulses' —the 'impulse to communicate, to construct, to inquire, and to express in finer form.' These were the 'natural resources, the uninvested capital, upon the exercise of which depends the active growth of the child' (Dewey, 1899, p. 30). Children also brought their own interests and activities from home, and it was the task of the teacher to make use of this 'raw material' by guiding their activities at school toward 'valuable results' (Mayhew & Edwards, 1966, p. 41).

This argument placed Dewey at odds with both the proponents of a traditional, 'curriculum-centred' education, and romantic reformers who advocated a 'child-centred' pedagogy. The traditionalists, led by William Torrey Harris, the United States Commissioner of Education, favoured disciplined, step-by-step instruction in the accumulated wisdom of civilization. It was the subject-matter that furnished the end and determined the methods of education. The child was expected simply 'to receive, to accept. His part is fulfilled when he is ductile and docile' (Dewey, 1902, p. 276). However, the advocates of child-centred education, like G. Stanley Hall, and prominent members of the National Herbart Society, argued that instruction in subject-matter should be subordinated to the natural, uninhibited growth of the child. For them the expression of the child's native impulses were 'the starting point, the centre, the end' (ibid.). These two schools of thought on education engaged in a fierce philosophical battle in the 1890s. Traditionalists defended the knowledge of centuries of intellectual struggle and viewed child-centred education as a chaotic, anarchistic surrender of adult authority. Romantics, however, celebrated spontaneity and change, and charged their opponents with suppressing the individuality of children by means of a boring, routinized, despotic pedagogy.

To Dewey, this debate pointed to another pernicious dualism, against which he set himself. The dispute could be resolved, he said, if both sides would 'get rid of the prejudicial notion that there is some gap in kind (as distinct from degree) between the child's experience and the various forms of subject-matter that make up the course of study. From the side of the child, it is a question of seeing how his experience already contains within itself elements — facts and truths — of just the same sort as those entering into the formulated study; and, what is of more importance, of how it contains within itself the attitudes, the motives, and the interests which have operated in developing and organizing the subject-matter to the plane which it now occupies. From the side of the studies, it is a question of interpreting them as outgrowths of forces operating in the child's life, and of discovering the steps that intervene between the child's present experience and their richer maturity' (ibid., p. 277-278).

Dewey's critique of the traditionalists for their failure to connect the curriculum to the interests and activities of the child is well-known. His attack on the advocates of child-centred education for their failure to connect the interests and activities of the child to the curriculum is, however, often overlooked. Some critics of Dewey's educational theory have confused his position with that of the romantics, but he clearly differentiated his pedagogy from theirs. The danger of romanticism, he said, was that it regarded 'the child's present powers and interests as something finally significant in themselves' (ibid., p. 280). However, it would be wrong, to cultivate the purposes and interests of children 'just as they stand'. Effective education required these purposes and interests to be used by the teacher in order to guide the child toward his understanding of the sciences, history, and arts. 'Interests in reality are but attitudes toward possible experiences; they are not achievements; their worth is in the

leverage they afford, not in the accomplishment they represent' (ibid.). The curriculum was based on the experiences of the human race, and therefore it was designed to encourage the immature experience of the child in their activities. 'The facts and truths that enter into the child's present experience, and those contained in the subject-matter of studies, are the initial and final terms of one reality', Dewey concluded. 'To oppose one to the other is to oppose the infancy and maturity of the same growing life; it is to set the moving tendency and the final result of the same process over against each other; it is to hold that the nature and the destiny of the child war with each other' (ibid., p. 278).

Deweyan pedagogy called upon teachers to perform the extremely difficult task of 'reinstating into experience' the subject-matter of the curriculum (ibid., p. 285). This subject-matter, like all human knowledge, was the product of man's efforts to solve the problems that confronted him in experience, but, as a formal body of knowledge, it had been abstracted from the problematic situations where it had originally developed. Traditionalists argued that this knowledge should simply be imposed on the child in a sequence of steps determined by the logic of this abstracted body of truth. However, when presented in this fashion, the material was of little interest to children. Moreover, it did not allow them to discover knowledge on their own by doing activities in which it was necessary for them to have certain types of knowledge. In this model, children were told how to do something rather that given the freedom to discover, first-hand, how to do it themselves. As a consequence, teachers had to appeal to interests unrelated to the subject-matter, such as the child's fear of pain and humiliation, in order to produce the appearance of learning. Rather than impose the subject-matter on children in this fashion (or simply leave them to their own devices as romantics advised), Dewey called upon teachers to 'psychologize' the curriculum by constructing an environment in which the activities of the child would include problematic situations. In order to solve these problems, children would have to call on their knowledge and skills of science, history and art. In effect, the curriculum told the teacher 'such and such are the capacities, the fulfilments, in truth and beauty and behaviour, open to these children. Now see to it that day by day the conditions are such that *their own activities* move inevitably in this direction, toward such culmination of themselves' (ibid., p. 291).

If teachers were to teach in this fashion, to direct a child's development by indirection, they would, Dewey acknowledged, have to be highly skilled professionals, thoroughly knowledgeable in the subject-matter they were teaching, trained in child psychology, and skilled in the techniques of providing the necessary stimulus so that the subject-matter would become part of a child's growing experience. As two teachers who worked with Dewey remarked, such a teacher had to be capable of seeing the world as both a child and an adult saw it. 'Like Alice, she must step with her children behind the looking-glass and in this imaginative lens 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' (Mayhew & Edwards, 1966, p. 312). Dewey admitted that most teachers did not possess the knowledge and skills necessary to teach in this fashion, but he contended that they could learn to do so.

Democracy and education

The way a child's character is shaped, the moral and political agenda of schooling, is sometimes termed the `hidden curriculum.' In Dewey's case, this aspect of his educational theory and practice was no less explicit, though a good deal more radical, than his other curricular aims. Dewey was not reluctant to assert that 'the formation of a certain character' was 'the only genuine basis of right living' nor to identify 'right living' with democratic practices (Dewey, 1897*b*).

Individuals, Dewey argued, achieved self-realization by utilizing their peculiar talents to contribute to the well-being of their community, and hence the critical task of education in a democratic society was to help children develop the character, the habits and virtues, that would enable them to achieve self-realization. On the whole, he believed, American schools were failing to provide an environment in which self-realization could be attained. Most schools employed highly 'individualistic' methods that called upon all the students in a classroom to read the same books simultaneously and recite the same lessons. In these conditions the social impulses of the child atrophied, and the teacher was unable to take advantage of the child's 'natural desire to give out, to do, and that means to serve' (Dewey, 1897*a*, p. 64). Social spirit was replaced with 'positively individualistic motives and standards' such as fear, emulation, rivalry, and judgements of superiority and inferiority, and, as a consequence, 'the weaker gradually lose their sense of capacity and accept a position of continuous and persistent inferiority', while 'the stronger grow to glory, not in their strength, but in the fact that they are stronger' (ibid., p. 64-65). Dewey argued that in order for a school to foster social spirit and develop democratic character in children, it had to be organized as a co-operative community. In order to educate for democracy the school had to become 'an institution in which the child is, for the time, to live — to be a member of a community life in which he feels that he participates, and to which he contributes' (Dewey, 1895, p. 224).

Creating the conditions for the development of democratic character in the classroom was not an easy task, especially since teachers could not impose such character on students but rather had to create a social environment in which children took it upon themselves to assume the responsibilities of a democratic moral life. Such a life, Dewey noted, 'is lived only as the individual appreciated for himself the ends for which he is working, and does his work in a personal spirit of interest and devotion to these ends' (Dewey, 1897*a*, p. 77). Dewey realized he was placing heavy demands on teachers, and for this reason, when describing their social role and significance in the late 1890s, he lapsed into the language of the social gospel, which he had otherwise abandoned, calling the teacher 'the usherer in of the true kingdom of God' (Dewey, 1897*b*, p. 95).

As this testament suggests, Dewey's educational theory was far less child-centred and more teacher-centred than is often supposed. His confidence that children would develop a democratic character in the schools he envisioned was rooted less in a faith in the 'spontaneous and crude capacities of the child' than in the ability of teachers to create an environment in the classroom in which they possessed the means to 'mediate' these capacities 'over into habits of social intelligence and responsiveness' (ibid., p. 94-95).

Dewey's faith in teachers also reflected his belief in the 1890s that 'education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform' (ibid., p. 93). There was a certain logic to this belief. Insofar as schools played an important part in the shaping of the character of a society's children, they could, if they were designed to do so, transform that society. The school provided a relatively controlled environment in which the conditions of self-development could effectively shape its course. Indeed, if teachers did their job well, there would hardly be a need of any other sort of reform. A democratic, co-operative commonwealth could emerge from the classroom.

The difficulty with this belief was that most schools were not designed to transform societies but rather to *reproduce* them. As Dewey acknowledged, 'the school system has always been a function of the prevailing type of organization of social life' (Dewey, 1896*b*, p. 285). His beliefs about schools and teachers, outlined in his pedagogic creed, were thus not as much beliefs about what was than about what might be. If schools were to be made agencies of social reform rather than agencies of social reproduction, they would have to be thoroughly reconstructed. This was Dewey's most ambitious aim as an educational reformer:

to transform American schools into instruments for the radical democratization of American society.

The Dewey school

'The school', Dewey declared in 1896, 'is the one form of social life which is abstracted and under control — which is directly experimental, and if philosophy is ever to be an experimental science, the construction of a school is its starting point' (Dewey, 1896*a*, p. 244). Dewey arrived at Chicago with a pretty good idea of the sort of 'laboratory school' he wanted to start. He told his wife in 1894 that:

> There is an image of a school growing up in my mind all the time; a school where some actual and literal constructive activity shall be the centre and source of the whole thing, and from which the work should be always growing out in two directions — one the social bearings of that constructive industry, the other the contact with nature which supplies it with its materials. I can see, theoretically, how the carpentry, etc., in building a model house shall be the centre of a social training on the one side and a scientific on the other, all held within the grasp of a positive concrete physical habit of eye and hand (Dewey, 1894).

Dewey proposed a school to university officials that would keep 'theoretical work in touch with the demands of practice' as the most essential component of a department of pedagogy — 'the nerve of the whole scheme' — and he received the support of Harper, who was himself an important activist in the campaign for educational reform in Chicago (Dewey, 1896*c*, p. 434). In January 1896, the Laboratory School of the University of Chicago opened its doors. The school began with sixteen children and two teachers, but by 1903 it was providing instruction to 140 students and was staffed by twenty-three teachers and ten graduate assistants. Most of the students were from professional families, many of them the children of Dewey's colleagues. The institution soon became known as the 'Dewey School', for the hypotheses that were tested in this laboratory were strictly those of Dewey's functional psychology and democratic ethics.

At the centre of the curriculum of the Dewey School was what Dewey termed the 'occupation', that is, 'a mode of activity on the part of the child which reproduces, or runs parallel to, some of work carried on in social life' (Dewey, 1899, p. 92). Divided into eleven age groups, the students pursued a variety of projects centred on particular historical or contemporary occupations. The youngest children in the school, who were 4 and 5 years old, engaged in activities familiar to them from their homes and neighbourhoods: cooking, sewing and carpentry. The 6-year-olds built a farm out of blocks, planted wheat and cotton, and processed and transported their crop to market. The 7-year-olds studied prehistoric life in caves of their own devising while their 8-year-old neighbours focused their attention on the work of the sea-faring Phoenicians, on Robinson Crusoe and adventurers, like Marco Polo, Magellan and Columbus. Local history and geography occupied the attention of the 9-year-olds, while those who were 10 years old studied colonial history, constructing a replica of a room in an early American house. The work of the older groups of children was less strictly focused on particular historical periods (though history remained an important part of their studies) and centred more on scientific experiments in anatomy, electro-magnetism, political economy, and photography. The 13-year-olds built a substantial clubhouse when they could not find another suitable place for their debate club to meet. Building the clubhouse was a group effort that enlisted children of all ages in a co-operative project that was, for many, the emblematic moment in the school's history.

The occupational activities pointed on the one hand toward the scientific study of the materials and processes involved in their practice and on the other toward their role in society and culture. Therefore, the thematic focus on occupations provided the occasion not only for

manual training and historical inquiry but also for work in mathematics, geology, physics, biology, chemistry, reading, art, music and languages. In the Laboratory School, Dewey reported, 'the child comes to school to *do*; to cook, to sew, to work with wood and tools in simple constructive acts; within and about these acts cluster the studies—writing, reading, arithmetic, etc' (Dewey, 1896*a*, p. 245). Skills such as reading were developed when children came to recognize their usefulness in solving the problems that confronted them in their occupational activities. 'If a child realizes the motive for acquiring skill', Dewey argued, 'he is helped in large measure to secure the skill. Books and the ability to read are, therefore, regarded strictly as tools' (Mayhew & Edwards, 1966, p. 26).

Katherine Camp Mayhew and Anna Camp Edwards, who taught in the Laboratory School, later provided a full account of this remarkable educational experiment. They cited evidence of the considerable success that Dewey and his colleagues achieved in translating his theories into practice. Their accounts were supported by the testimony of less-interested observers as well. For example, the 6-year-old students in the school, building on the experiences with home activities they had had in kindergarten, concentrated their work on 'occupations serving the home'. They built a model farm in the sandtable in their classroom and in the schoolyard they planted a crop of winter wheat. As was the case with most constructive activities in the school, the building of the model farm provided an occasion for learning some mathematics:

> When their sand-table farm had to be divided into several fields for wheat, corn, oats, and also for the house and the barn, the children used a one-foot ruler as a unit of measurement and came to understand what was meant by `fourths and halves'— the divisions made, though not accurate, were near enough to allow them to mark off their farm. As they became more familiar with the ruler and learned the half-foot, and the quarter-foot and inch, finer work was naturally expected of them and obtained. ... When building the farm-house, four posts were needed for the corners and six or seven slats, all of the same height. In measuring the latter, the children frequently forgot to keep the left-hand edge of the ruler on the left-hand side of the slat, so the measurements had to be repeated two or three times before they were correct. What they did to one side of the house, they also did to the other and naturally worked more rapidly and more accurately as the work was repeated (Mayhew & Edwards, 1966, p. 83-84).

In instances such as this, one can see how the child's interest in a particular activity of his/her own, such as building a model farm, served as the foundation for instruction in a body of subject-matter, the skills in measurement and the mathematics of fractions. Moreover, this method introduced children to the methods of experimental problem-solving in which mistakes were an important part of learning. Providing children with 'first-hand experience,' the problematic situations largely of their own making, was the key to Dewey's pedagogy. He believed that 'until the emphasis changes to the conditions which make it necessary for the child to take an active share in the personal building up of his own problems and to participate in methods of solving them (even at the expense of experimentation and error) the mind is not really freed' (Dewey, 1903, p. 237).

It is difficult to read through descriptions and accounts of the Laboratory School and understand how Dewey has come to be seen by some critics as a proponent of 'aimless' progressive education. He explicitly stated his curricular goals, and they were readily apparent in the classroom practice of the teachers with whom he worked. Dewey valued mankind's accumulated knowledge as much as the most hidebound traditionalist, and he intended that the children in his elementary school would be introduced to the riches of science, history and the arts. He also wanted them to learn to read, to write, to count, to think scientifically, and to express themselves in a refined manner. As far as subject-matter was concerned, Dewey's goals for education were rather conventional, only his methods were innovative and radical. His goals were conventional but they were also clearly expressed.

The Laboratory School was useful as a testing ground for Dewey's functional psychology and pragmatism, but it was even more important as an expression of his ethics and democratic theory. 'The social phase of education', he said, 'was put first' (Mayhew & Edwards, 1966, p. 467). The Dewey School was above all an experiment in education for democracy.

By all available accounts, Dewey was fairly successful in creating a democratic community in the Laboratory School. Children shared in the planning of their projects, and the execution of these projects was marked by a co-operative division of labour, in which leadership roles were frequently rotated. Moreover, the democratic community was fostered not only among the students in the school but also among the adults who worked there. Dewey was highly critical of the failure of schools to allow teachers to participate in the decisions affecting the conduct of public education. He was particularly disturbed by reformers who wrested control of the schools from corrupt politicians only to invest school superintendents with enormous, autocratic power. This criticism reflected Dewey's commitment to extending democracy beyond the polity and into the workplace. 'What does democracy mean', he asked, 'save that the individual is to have a share in determining the conditions and the aims of his own work; and that, upon the whole, through the free and mutual harmonizing of different individuals, the work of the world is better done than when planned, arranged, and directed by a few, no matter how wise or of how good intent that few?' (Dewey, 1903, p. 233). In the Laboratory School Dewey tried to implement this sort of workplace democracy. The work of teachers was organized much like that of the children. Teachers met weekly to discuss and plan their work and, though no doubt constrained in their criticism by Dewey's commanding presence, they played an active role in shaping the school curriculum.

Dewey did not have a clear strategy for making American schools at large into institutions working on behalf of radical democracy. Although he neither intended nor expected that the methods of the Laboratory School would be strictly reproduced elsewhere, he did hope that his school would serve as a source of inspiration for those seeking to transform public education as well as a training ground and research centre for reform-minded teachers and specialists. He tended in this to underestimate the degree to which the success of the Dewey School was attributable to its insulation from the conflicts, divisions and inequities besetting the larger society, an insulation difficult to replicate. It was, after all, a small school comprised of the children of middle-class professionals and staffed by well-trained, dedicated teachers with access to the intellectuals of one of the nation's great universities.

If Dewey did not have a plan for establishing the schools as powerful adversarial institutions in the heart of American culture, he did have a clear vision of what he thought the schools in a thoroughly democratic society should look like. He attempted, with some considerable success, to embody that vision in the Laboratory School. This school was clearly not designed for social reproduction. Although Dewey sought to connect the school to larger social life by putting occupations at the heart of his curriculum, he self-consciously purified these occupations of one of their most essential features as they were conducted in American society by removing them from the social relations of capitalist production and putting them in a co-operative context in which they would have been virtually unrecognizable to those who performed them in the larger society. In the school, he said, 'the typical occupations followed are freed from all economic stress. The aim is not the economic value of the products, but the development of social power and insight' (Dewey, 1899, p. 12). Freed from 'narrow utilities', occupations in the school were organized so that 'method, purpose, understanding shall exist in the consciousness of the one who does the work, that his activity shall have meaning to himself' (ibid., p. 16). The children's work was unalienated

labour in which the separation of hand and brain that was proceeding apace in the nation's factories and offices was not present. Dewey sometimes referred to the Laboratory School as an 'embryonic society', but it was far from an embryo of the society that lay outside its walls (ibid., p. 19). It did not promise the reproduction of industrial America but rather prefigured its radical reconstruction.

The life of Dewey's prefigurative community was very brief and, ironically, it was a struggle over workers' control of the Laboratory School that led to its demise. Dewey and his teachers, after all, did not own their workshop; the University of Chicago did. And in 1904 President Harper sided with disgruntled teachers and administrators from the school founded by Colonel Francis Parker (which had been merged with the Dewey School in 1903) who resented incorporation into the 'Mr. and Mrs. Dewey School' and feared that Alice Dewey in particular would see no need to retain their services. When Harper fired Alice, Dewey resigned and almost immediately accepted a position at Columbia University, where he remained for the rest of his extended career. The loss of the Laboratory School left it to others to interpret, apply and often distort Dewey's pedagogical ideas and deprived him of an extraordinary, concrete manifestation of his democratic ideals.

Progressive reform

Although he never again had his own school, Dewey remained an active critic of American education for the remainder of his career, and he also ventured abroad to lend his voice to reform efforts in Japan, Mexico, Turkey, the USSR and China. It was in these places where he had perhaps the greatest impact. Arriving in China in 1919 on the eve of the emergence of the May Fourth Movement, Dewey was lionized by many Chinese intellectuals who, as one historian has said, 'closely associated his thought with the very definition of modernity' (Keenan, 1977, p. 34).

Dewey's democratic convictions led to his involvement in disputes with a wide range of 'progressive' educators, including some who regarded themselves as faithful Deweyans. He attacked 'administrative progressives' who favoured vocational education programs that, in his opinion, were a form of class education that made the schools a more efficient agent for the reproduction of an undemocratic society. 'The kind of vocational education in which I am interested', he said, 'is not one which will adapt workers to the existing industrial regime; I am not sufficiently in love with the regime for that.' Rather Americans should strive for 'a kind of vocational education which will first alter the existing industrial system, and ultimately transform it' (Dewey, 1915, p. 412). Dewey also continued to distance himself from romantic, child-centred progressives, and in the 1920s he was moved, in an uncharacteristic moment of public bluntness, to label their method of simply allowing children to follow their untutored inclinations as 'really stupid' (Dewey, 1926, p. 59). Finally, he even took issue in the 1930s with the radical 'social reconstructionists', whose thinking was perhaps closest to his own, when they proposed programs of 'counter-indoctrination' to contest a curriculum designed to legitimate an oppressive social order. For radicals to engage in counter-propaganda, he argued, was to demonstrate a lack of confidence in the power of the convictions they held and the means by which they themselves had presumably arrived at these convictions. They had not been indoctrinated into the conclusions they had reached about the shortcomings of capitalist society but had reached these conclusions by means of 'an intelligent study of historical and existing forces and conditions' (Dewey, 1935, p. 415). Radical democrats had to credit their students with the capability to reach the same conclusions by the same means, not only because this was more democratic but also because these conclusions should be subjected to the continuous scrutiny that such education would provide. 'If the method of intelligence has worked in our own case', he asked, `how can we

assume that the method will not work with our students, and that it will not with them generate ardour and practical energy?' (ibid.).

Dewey's criticisms of other reformers were usually politely received, but changed few minds. Few followed the 'way out of educational confusion' that he proposed. For most educators, it posed too great a threat to traditional methods and subject-matter. At the same time, its social implications were too radical for advocates of scientific efficiency, and not radical enough for some proponents of social reconstruction. Furthermore, although it called for a revolutionary curriculum that would build on the impulses and interests of children, it was too respectful of tradition and subject-matter to satisfy romantics. Thus, as the historian Herbert Kliebard has said, 'his intellectual stature, his international reputation and his many honours notwithstanding, Dewey did not have enough of a true following in the world of educational practice to make his impact felt' (Kliebard, 1986, p. 179).

Had Dewey continued to believe that the teacher was 'the usherer in of the true kingdom of God', he might have been more distressed than he was that his pedagogical arguments so often fell on deaf ears. However, after the First World War, the schools were no longer the focus of his activism. This change reflected a less naive estimate of the place of the school in social reconstruction, a substantial displacement of the classroom from the centre of his reform vision. What had once been to his mind *the* critical means for the democratization of American life became one of a number of critical means, and one clearly secondary to more overtly political institutions for public education. Dewey began to more openly acknowledged that schools were inextricably tied to prevailing structures of power. Therefore they were used as agencies for reproduction of the class society of industrial capitalism. Thus it would be extremely difficult to transform schools into an agency of democratic reform. Efforts to design them into more democratic institutions repeatedly ran afoul since their were powerful forces that wished to preserve the existing social order. The defects of schools mirrored and sustained the defects of the larger society and these defects could not be remedied apart from a struggle for democracy throughout that larger society. Schools would take part in the democratic social change only 'as they ally themselves with this or that movement of existing social forces' (Dewey, 1934, p. 207). They could not be viewed, as Dewey had once been prone to see them, as the vehicle for an evasion of politics.

Dewey's legacy

Dewey's philosophy of education came under heavy posthumous attack in the 1950s from the opponents of progressive education, who blamed him for virtually everything that was wrong with the American public school system. Although his actual impact upon American schools was quite limited and conservative critics erred in confusing him with the progressives he had himself attacked, Dewey proved to be a convenient symbol of opprobrium for 'fundamentalists,' worried about the decline of intellectual standards in schools and the threat this posed to a nation involved in a Cold War with Communism. Following the launch of the Russian space satellite 'Sputnik', as two historians of the period have said, 'the already swelling outcry against the educational system became a deafening roar. Everyone joined in —the President, the Vice-President, admirals, generals, morticians, grocers, bootblacks, bootleggers, realtors, racketeers—all lamenting the fact that *we* didn't have a hunk of metal orbiting the earth and blaming this tragedy on the sinister Deweyites who had plotted to keep little Johnny from learning to read' (Miller & Nowak, 1977, p. 254). Since the 1950s, variations on this theme have become a regular, periodic feature of debate about the condition of American public education, and each new call for a return to the 'basics' has brought with it some predictable Dewey-bashing. This type of criticism (as in the case of recent best-

selling indictments by Allan Bloom and E.D. Hirsch) usually insists on misrepresenting Dewey as a Rousseauean romantic (Bloom, 1987, p. 195; Hirsch, 1987, p. 118-27).

Although many American teachers who have most probably read Dewey and have tried to teach as Dewey would have had them teach, critics have vastly overestimated his influence. His legacy is less one of established practice than of adversarial vision. Most schools are far from the 'supremely interesting places' and 'dangerous outposts of a humane civilization' he would have had them be (Dewey, 1922, p. 334). Yet for those who would like schools to reach Dewey's vision, his work remains a valuable resource.

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The entire corpus of John Dewey's work has been published in the recently completed, thirty-seven volume *Collected works of John Dewey* (Carbondale, IL, Southern Illinois University Press, 1967-1992), comprised of

three series: *The early works of John Dewey, 1882-1898*; *The middle works of John Dewey, 1899-1924*; and *The later works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*. Here I list Dewey's major writings on education from this edition in chronological order. Most of his books on education are also available in other editions, many in paperback.
My pedagogic creed. 1897, *Early works*, vol. 5, p. 84-95.
The school and society. 1899. *Middle works*, vol. 1, p. 1-109.
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See also: Reginald D. Archambault. (ed.) *John Dewey, lectures in the philosophy of education, 1899*. New York, NY, Random House, 1966; and *Two useful anthologies of Dewey's educational writings*: Joseph Ratner. (ed.) *Education today.* New York, NY, Putnam, 1940; and Reginald D. Archambault. (ed.) *John Dewey on education*. Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 1974. A helpful roadmap to the whole of Dewey's philosophy is: Jo Ann Boydston. (ed.) *Guide to the works of John Dewey.* Carbondale, IL, Southern Illinois University Press, 1970.

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For a guide to the extensive secondary literature on Dewey see:
Boydston, Jo Ann; Poulos, Kathleen. (eds.) *Checklist of writings about John Dewey*. 2nd ed. Carbondale, IL, Southern Illinois University Press, 1978.