Democratic Education

A Deweyan Reminder

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Abstract

Educational historians, philosophers, and sociologists have long warned that the increasing encroachment of business logic in public schools bodes ill for democracy as a way of life. Many have concluded that the business person's interest in affecting public education is to bring about a greater bottom line, which, of course, is profit, albeit secured in the name of democratic freedom and social progress. These scholars have noted that the corporate parasite is eating away the insides of our public schools and is reproducing its hereditary material (consumer materialism) within the bodies and souls of its captive hosts: our children. Through corporate advertisements on school walls, corporate-sponsored curriculum materials and programs, and corporate-sponsored fundraisers and contests (not to mention the enormous political influence corporations have in framing the very aim and purpose of public education), corporations use schools as conduits by which to establish consumption as the ultimate expression of participatory democracy and, thus, as the supreme good and standard of personal growth. Drawing upon the work of John Dewey, this paper articulates a conception of democracy and a democratic theory of education that privileges the social over the private, the public over the corporate, such that the *homo-economicus* ideal that our public schools train our children to aspire to on a daily basis is checked by a wider commitment to the good life, defined in more socially benevolent ways.

Introduction

Over the past decade, my children along with millions of other children attending our nation's public schools have been marketed to in schools more so than at any other time in the history of public schooling. On any given day, students across the

country ride to school on buses draped with Coca-Cola ads. They are shown two minutes of paid corporate advertisement on Channel One (two minutes per day $\times$ 180 school days = 360 minutes or 6 hours of watching corporate advertisement per year). Some win a personal pan pizza from Pizza Hut's Book-It program simply for reading a quantity of books. For those who do not qualify for the pizza award, they still have the opportunity to buy Pizza Hut pizza, Taco Bell burritos, or McDonald's hamburgers in their school cafeterias. Others have the additional opportunity to wash these food items down with 20 oz. Cokes or Mountain Dews bought out of hallway vending machines. Later on in the day, some students calculate the area of Nabisco's Oreo cookie, while others conduct tests to see if Prego spaghetti sauce is thicker than its competitors'. Still others, like my own kids, attend Reader's Digest/Q.S.P.- sponsored fundraisers set up to entice students to raise much-needed funds for their "cash-challenged" school. And at the end of the day, many students, textbooks covered with jackets advertising Clairol or Reebok clutched snugly under their arms, ride home on Pepsi-bannered buses.

Educational historians, philosophers, and sociologists have long warned that the increasing encroachment of business logic in public schools bodes ill for democracy as a way of life. Many have concluded that the business person's interest in affecting public education is to bring about a greater bottom line, which, of course, is profit, albeit secured in the name of democratic freedom and social progress. These scholars have noted that the corporate parasite is eating away the insides of our public schools and is reproducing its hereditary material (consumer materialism) within the bodies and souls of its captive hosts: our children.¹ Through corporate advertisements on school walls, corporate-sponsored curriculum materials and programs, and corporate-sponsored fundraisers and contests (not to mention the enormous political influence corporations have in framing the very aim and purpose of public education), corporations come to control the particular conditions within schools that feed shared habits and, therefore, command impulse, need, want, and desire.

How corporations have come to use schools as conduits by which to establish consumption as the ultimate expression of participatory democracy and, thus, as the supreme good and standard of personal growth is a complex, richly-textured tale well documented and better told by others.² Drawing upon the work of John Dewey, this paper articulates a conception of democracy and a democratic theory of education that privileges the social over the private, the public over the corporate, such that the *homo-economicus* ideal that our public schools train our children to aspire to on a daily basis is checked by a wider commitment to the good life, defined in more socially benevolent ways. Along the way, this paper underscores the necessity of a democratic education in light of the understanding that human beings are always in relations of power (effective capacity), the significance of which depends upon human perception and judgment of the actual and potential consequences on the growth of shared habit. Consequently, this paper stresses the necessity of seeing education as an inherently political undertaking,

insofar as education refers to the conscious deliberation about and struggle over valued ends, shared activities, and, thus, forms of power to be fostered or expunged from collective experience. Since education is concerned with the specific forms of community life that *should* be brought about, an adequate democratic theory of education demands a careful consideration for the consequences of these forms on individual growth, which in turn demands an increased sensitivity for expectations and claims of right intrinsic to these forms. In other words, education inextricably is involved in the struggle over power, over what the “good life” should mean, over what democracy should mean and how this meaning should be cultivated in the characters of those who will be entrusted with its realization and direction. Therefore, this paper emphasizes Dewey’s point that the ideal of democracy can be realized only to the degree that schools aim to cultivate socially and politically engaged citizens who are sympathetically and critically responsive to the demand of democratic justice as it is manifested through the particular activities in which they take part. Furthermore, it makes the pedagogical point that only by engaging individuals to take up the actual social, economic, and political problems that affect them in *every* phase of their lives can an education develop citizens sensitively, intelligently, and responsibly charged enough to struggle over the meaning of democratic community and to fight hegemonic relations that preclude individual freedom and social equality.

A Parent’s Problem

In light of the vast technological and social changes accompanying industrial capitalism, particularly as more and more people gained access to consumer goods and services that were once accessible only by the rich, capitalism spoke to the material needs of the masses and thus, as Joel Spring has pointed out, the development of human capital became “the most important goal of the educational system in the twentieth century.”³ As Merle Curti put it in the 1930s, “Educators accepted, in general, the businessman’s outlook and consciously or unconsciously molded the school system to accord with the canons of a profit-making system.”⁴ With the National Association of Manufacturers reports in 1905 and in 1912 breathing fear into the public that foreign competitors were advancing on U.S. markets and thus threatening the American way of life, the conditions were ripe for the business hero to apply his logic of volume, efficiency, and control and his practices of scientific management to education and save *the highest form of civilization ever achieved by humankind*.⁵ Consequently, the seizure of school boards and schools by businessmen allowed them to turn public schools into factories processing a standard way of looking at experience and a standard set of skills necessary to “succeed” in this experience. For the better part of a century now, schools have manufactured a public consciousness acquiescent to the needs and demands of a profit-seeking economic system and generations have been saturated with the belief that one “gets” an education in order to get a good job, which, in turn, will allow one to buy oneself, to purchase self-respect, personal and collective identity, security, and freedom. With

schools dying, and warping and weaving students into consumer materialists, all that was needed was a company store.

Over the past twenty years, businesses have marketed to students inside schools more than at any other time in the history of public schooling. From Kroger-sponsored “school-to-work” programs to Reader’s Digest-sponsored “be a good citizen” fundraisers, from Pizza Hut “read-a-book” incentive program to Exxon-sponsored “oil spill good for the . . . environmental science lessons,” from Coke in the lunch room to Pepsi on the scoreboards, school buses, and schoolhouse door, the Citicorp-IBM public school has become what Alex Molnar has called an “educational flea market open to anyone who has the money to set up a table.”⁶ As Deron Boyles effectively argues in *American Education and Corporations*, schools serve as sites for consumer materialism in at least two ways. First, overemphasizing basic-skills training to the detriment of cultivating capacities for critical intelligence aimed at securing democratic justice, schools reinforce the idea that one “gets” an “education” solely to generate economic capital, which allows for greater levels of consumption. Second, through business-school partnerships schools welcome the marketing of corporate goods, which are portrayed as essential to personal and social welfare. In consequence, schools reinforce the idea to students that the production and consumption of goods is the essence of individual happiness and civic obligation. Business not only has a young, highly impressionable, and captive market but one that, by virtue of schoolhouse training, is “ripe to be gulled,” one ready and willing to sell all sorts of corporate trinket items, secure in the belief that one is participating in generating much-needed funds for one’s cash-strapped school—community service for a common good.

Until my own children started attending public schools, I had considered the educational aim of cultivating human capital and business-school partnership practices merely as problems for democracy in theory. However, these theoretical problems became real problems to me last May when my first grader brought home an “educational” product called Summer Vacation. This self-titled “edutainment,” produced and marketed by Entertainment Publications Operating Company, included a workbook that could be purchased for \$11.99 and a CD, contained in glitzy packaging with a three-dimensional figure on the cover, that could be purchased separately for \$18.99. (Software plus workbook could be purchased for \$27.99.) On the back cover of the packaging, the company maintained that the purchase of this product would ensure that children not lose up to 25 percent of their reading or math skills during the summer, a possibility that studies (although only one was cited) reveal can happen. Summer Vacation, the company contends, is a “valuable investment in your child’s future.” An information sheet accompanying the product stated that the school and its students may receive special prizes just for participating. This *edutainment* product is grade-specific and came home with every child at the elementary school, a school that has a total enrollment of 695 children, 46.3 percent of whom qualify for the federal free/reduced price lunch program.

Within the prevailing discourse on business-school partnerships, there is nothing objectionable about this situation. A for-profit corporation is giving back

to the community by offering a product for purchase designed to enhance a specific public good (student achievement). Furthermore, such practices as listed above constitute a “win-win” solution for the pressing financial problems that our public schools face and provide real-world opportunities for students to develop the habits of mind necessary to be productive citizens of a twenty-first century global marketplace. Since it is primarily through the free market, proponents of business-school partnerships point out, that individuals concretely express their freedom to choose, then it is paramount that public schools empower students with the affections, skills, and intelligence necessary for students to develop themselves as they see fit within this twenty-first-century free market context. Obtaining input, guidance, and participation from those most successful in this context (business people) is central and vital to the schools’ mission.

Critics of business-school partnership, however, claim that such partnerships encourage students wrongly to equate consumerism with democracy, thus strengthening the ideological control that corporations have over the public mind. Proponents of business-school partnerships assert that market democracy is the outcome of people expressing and satisfying their needs and desires through economic means. Therefore, market democracy unquestionably remains the most flexible living option for people in the real world. Telling people how they should see democracy, the proponents say, is itself anti-democratic, contradictory to the very tenet of freedom of choice, and the luxury of academicians who must feed—and often do so quite comfortably—at the same trough as everyone else.

The proponents’ response is predictable and saddening. It is predictable because the institutionalization of consumer materialism has become so thorough that its ideals and standards have become intertwined with the very fiber of who we are as a people. Furthermore, the institutionalization of consumer materialism through public education precludes the development of critical habits of mind and civic virtues necessary for a public to take a look at itself. Any criticism of consumer materialism naturally is resented as an attack upon what is truest and most meaningful about us as individuals and as a public. What more, then, can be expected than reactionary dismissal? It is saddening because without the ability to take a look at itself, the public becomes easily hoodwinked. Easily hoodwinked, the public becomes susceptible to forms of insidious power arrangements that nurture individuals’ desires to serve the interest of the few and come to legitimize their own subjugation as reasonable and natural.

A Deweyan Perspective

As Dewey repeatedly notes, democracy requires not only courageous involvement but also the honest and open sharing of ideas such that each individual alerts, informs, and enriches the lives of others. To Dewey, the identification of power is a necessary, but not a sufficient, task in releasing individual capacities to expand and enrich the meaning of the common good. Illuminating the effects of power within shared activity serves as a beginning, not an end, for a public to form a definite

idea of itself. Perception of effects on shared habits is an occasion to exchange and judge differing ideas, to fill out and correct competing perspectives. It provides an opportunity for individuals to become conscious of those influencing associations of which they are unaware, such that possibilities of growth in interests, desires, capacities, and resources are suggested and shared. As Dewey maintains, “Democracy is itself an educational principle, an educational measure and policy,” insofar as education means fostering, cultivating, and sharpening individual capacities through communication.⁷ Through the constant give and take of ideas, mere association can tighten into a community in which the activity of each is referred with interest to the activities of others.

In the broadest sense, then, democracy rests upon the working faith that community life is infinitely more powerful in securing a just balance between individual freedom and social equality than is any other mode of associated living. Education serves as the most conscious and surest means by which this faith can be nourished in principle and birthed as a living power through individual character. As Dewey puts it, “Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife.”⁸

A Philosophical Warrant for a Democratic Theory of Education

Every theory of education rests upon philosophical assumptions that provide a foundational warrant for its normative prescriptions. A brief sketch of the philosophical warrant necessary for a democratic theory of education follows.

According to Dewey’s ontological account, human beings ineluctably share in concrete activities that yield concrete results. Simply put, shared activities provide human beings with the fundamental means of living and learning. They are the essential substances through which individuals acquire and refine their special affections, dexterities, and aptitudes. They are the media by which individuals more or less develop a sense of the shared goods directing their effective capacities and of the common standards, expectations, and claims of right by which to judge their efforts and sharpen their judgments. Fundamentally, shared habit is social power, the ability to act so as to affect the social environment, the growth and direction of which depends directly upon the human responsibility to define and measure the moral significance of its execution. That is, the determination of power (effective capacity) as enhancing or debilitating rests upon some person attempting to discover and judge the consequences of a particular line of conduct on the growth of his or her interests, skills, desires, habits, and ways of forming ends and on the shared arrangements, opportunities, and materials that nourish the active participation and growth of others. Shared habits, therefore, provide the individual with an intrinsic ideal for conduct that serves as both a good and standard. As the good or aim of conduct, the ideal refers to the individual’s conscious tendency to develop his or her particular capacities in harmony with the demands and needs of others as they develop their own powers. As the standard of judgment, the ideal refers to the degree to which the individual actually brings about this harmony in

consequence of acting upon his or her conception of good. Through their attempts to realize a common good, individuals come to identify new interests and capacities for further growth, as well as additional responsibilities intrinsic to these new potentials. Thus, shared activity serves as the means by which to realize two principles whose just relation makes up the democratic ideal: individual liberty and social equality.

Liberty is that secure release and fulfillment of personal potentialities which take place only in rich and manifold association with others: the power to be an individualized self making a distinctive contribution and enjoying in its own way the fruits of association. Equality denotes the unhampered share which each individual member of the community has in the consequences of associated action. It is equitable because it is measured only by need and capacity to utilize, not by extraneous factors which deprive one in order that another may take and have.⁹

Again, the growth of an individual's interests (personal liberty) takes place within and by virtue of a social environment. Those affected make claims upon the individual to act in such a way that is considerate of and fair to the full development of others (social equality). Justice, then, refers to the degree of harmony brought about in consequence of an individual's growth in relation to the special demands of others. To the extent that the phrase "the common good" refers to and is a measure of this harmony, then "the common good" also signifies a measure of justice at any one given time. As a measure of justice, the common good serves as a guide for considering broader social claims to fairness and thus for forming a more thorough idea of the social ends to be served. Dewey puts the matter this way:

The tenor of this discussion is that the conception of common good, of general well-being, is a criterion which demands the full development of individuals in their distinctive individuality, not a sacrifice of them to some alleged vague larger good under the plea that it is "social." Only when individuals have initiative, independence of judgment, flexibility, fullness of experience, can they act so as to enrich the lives of others and only in this way can a truly common welfare be built up. The other side of this statement, and of the moral criterion, is that individuals are free to develop, to contribute and to share, only as social conditions break down walls of privilege and of monopolistic possession. . . . The criterion is identical in its political aspect with the democratic ideal. For democracy signifies, on one side, that every individual is to share in the duties and rights belonging to control of social affairs, and, on the other side, that social arrangements are to eliminate those external arrangements of status, birth, wealth, sex, etc., which restrict the opportunity of each individual for full development of himself.¹⁰

Variation of social environment and practices, however, cultivates a variety of interests, valued ends, and habits of attention and judgment. Experience is shot through with competing judgments over the relative value of power. As Dewey sug-

gests, social conflict is a fundamental datum. In light of all evidence that the growth and direction of human experience is not determined by any metaphysical absolutes or necessities, ill will and selfishness are just as ontologically possible as goodwill and altruism. Stated differently, human beings are just as capable of manipulating each other's needs, desires, wants, and ways of judgment to serve and legitimize narrow, selfish ends as they are capable of directing each other to search and act for ends that appreciate in value and expand the lives of all. According to Dewey's philosophical account of human conduct, individuals always should act so as to stimulate the growth of their own capacities with due care for the particular claims, needs, well-being, and development of others. This is to suggest that the moral significance of any form of power, including business-school partnerships, should be judged according to the extent to which it expands and enriches the meaning of individual liberty in just relation to the meaning of social equality.

The quest for an enriched democratic justice requires free-flowing and broad communication about the consequences of shared activity. Mutual reference and exchange of ideas is vital for multiplying perceptions of possible resources, sharpening consciousness of shared ends, and stoking the desire to excel beyond existing conceptions of good. Constant vigilance over existing efforts to meet social demands helps detect conditions that in effect set up unequal relations of power and that stifle freedom of individual growth. Persistent questioning and shared, critical inquiry help bring debilitating forms of power that coerce acceptance of these conditions to the light of social discussion and deliberation. However, the work of democracy does not take place merely by virtue of collective acceptance and general appeal to its abstract principles. The work of democracy can be made concrete, secured, refined, and extended only through the day-in and day-out activities that human beings share. As Dewey suggests, "Only when we start from a community as a fact, grasp the fact in thought so as to clarify and enhance its constituent elements, can we reach an idea of democracy which is not utopian. The conceptions and shibboleths which are traditionally associated with the idea of democracy take on veridical and directive meaning only when they are construed as marks and traits of an association which realizes the defining characteristics of a community."¹¹

Democracy as a moral ideal, therefore, challenges each individual to be actively engaged with the particular problems that arise within his or her various associations and that limit free and full contact with each other. Only through active concern for the community of good in which one is a part can problems be immediately felt, understood, and appreciated with sympathy. Only through constant communication and critical reflection about shared ends and purposes, standards, and the special needs and capacities of all involved can existing efforts to satisfy social needs be measured, deficiencies be identified, and further work be suggested. Only when felt problems are communicated can a public form to discuss the value of existing power and, therefore, suggest and debate what forms of power are worth promoting or resisting. To deliberate about the forms of power to promote is to

struggle over what effective capacities should be cultivated. As Dewey suggests, to struggle over effective capacities is to struggle over what liberty should mean in the concrete and, by implication, what equality and justice should mean as well.

Liberty is not just an idea, an abstract principle. It is power, effective power to do specific things. There is no such thing as liberty in general; liberty, so to speak, at large. If one wants to know what the condition of liberty is at a given time, one has to examine what persons can do and what they cannot do. The moment one examines the question from the standpoint of effective action, it becomes evident that the demand for liberty is a demand for power, either for possession of powers of action not already possessed or for retention and expansion of powers already possessed. . . . Demand for increased power at one point means demands for change in the distribution of powers, that is, for less power somewhere else. You cannot discuss or measure the liberty of one individual or group of individuals without thereby raising the question of the effect upon the liberty of others. . . . Liberty is always a social question, not an individual one. For the liberties that any individual actually has depends upon the distribution of powers or liberties that exist, and this distribution is identical with actual social arrangements, legal and political—and, at the present time, economic, in a peculiarly important way.¹²

In the most basic sense, then, to be actively concerned for and engaged in the struggle for liberty is to take part in the discussion about what kind of community should be in the making and what sort of citizens are necessary to see it to fruition. Do we want a citizenry trained to be mere producers and consumers or should we aspire to more? Can a democracy exist when its citizens view themselves and their potential through the narrow lens of consumer materialism? Democracy demands, according to Dewey, nothing more or less than social and political engagement in the direction of shared experience. An education most fitting to democracy is one that consciously aims to cultivate “robust trustees of its own resources and ideals.”¹³ That is, a democratic education must develop citizens with the affections, skills, intelligence, and virtues (effective habits or powers) necessary to assume social and political responsibility for themselves and their various communities, not to be mere cogs in an economic machine. Therefore, democratic education implies a political education.

A Democratic Theory of Education

As Dewey points out, “The problem of education in its relation to direction of social change is all one with the problem of finding out what democracy means in its total range of concrete applications: economic, domestic, international, religious, cultural, and political.”¹⁴ Insofar as democracy entails finding out what freedom and equality mean in a just relation with each other, then the ongoing problem of democratic justice—the problem of equalizing power—gives a general direction to the aims and methods of democratic education. The problem of justice demands

that schools cultivate character animated by social interests and sympathy and guided by social intelligence.

A character animated by social interests and sympathy refers to an individual who consciously appreciates the inherent social nature of human existence. To appreciate is to feel and understand the quality of something, to sense its goods and standards. To appreciate the inherent social nature of existence entails the further recognition that human beings are creatures of acquired habit, the good of which should be a more refined and controlled interaction with the social environment. More specifically, it entails the conscious sense that human beings are living organisms whose life-sustaining activities are directly dependent upon the activities of others for formation, sustenance, and growth. To appreciate the social nature of humankind is to understand the fact that the growth of individuals can be secured only as they take in, digest, and replenish the social nutrients that sustain them. This is to recognize that growth can be realized only as individuals attend to the particular aims, purposes, and skills of others, as well as to their demands to realize the good in a way that is considerate and careful of their particular needs and development. In the most fundamental sense, to appreciate the inherent social nature of human existence is to understand the basic fact that individual liberty or freedom to grow always involves the matter of a just relation with others who make up the social environment and who share in the consequences of growth. It is to recognize that the meaning of the good always should be a social good, the expansion of which depends upon increasing the range and depth of sympathy one has for the needs, expectations, and demands of others. As Dewey suggests, "To put ourselves in the place of another, to see things from the standpoint of his aims and values, to humble our estimate of our own pretensions to the level they assume in the eyes of an impartial observer, is the surest way to appreciate what justice demands in concrete cases."¹⁵ A character motivated by social interests, furthermore, is one charged by an affection for social well-being and by a "hatred for all that hinders this well-being."¹⁶ Like all interests, a social interest signifies something active, in this case an active search for the concrete opportunities that expand and enrich mutual contact, as well as an active search for the arrangements that preclude, shut down, and distort free and open communication. By implication, then, a social interest suggests a special sensitivity for the persistent problems that plague shared activities and a special affection for the "underdog" who suffers most in consequence of these problems. In the most general sense, a character animated by social interests has not only an acute feel for the concrete problem of justice but a strong sense of responsibility for the conduct that causes and changes this problem. A sense of social welfare, as Dewey implies, induces a sense of responsibility, a sense of the necessity to know and reflect upon the conditions and consequences of conduct. "The tendency, moreover, of adopting social well-being as a standard is to make us intellectually sensitive and critical about the effects of laws, social arrangements, and education upon human happiness and development."¹⁷

Simply put, intelligence refers to the effective power or capacity to search for and obtain adequate knowledge of actual and potential conditions so as to conduct

oneself more effectively and efficiently. Dewey suggests that intelligence refers to the “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends.”¹⁸ More specifically, intelligence denotes a certain habit of mental attention that brings the how and why of conduct into immediate focus through the light of past experience. It is the inquiry into and identification of the “con-sequence” of ideas and facts for the purpose of judging the degree to which each grows out of and supports the occurrence of the others. Social intelligence, then, refers to the power of forming and judging the means and consequences of conduct on the growth of shared habits and conditions. Fundamentally, social intelligence signifies the social control of conduct mediated through individual character.

A character guided by social intelligence strives to be more perceptive, reflective, and judicious about the effects of conduct on the equal consideration and just development of all involved. This is to say, the problem of justice (again, the problem of equalizing power) fixes not only the end of social intelligence but its means as well. To approach the problem of justice by way of social intelligence requires certain attitudes or traits of character and modes of approach. Gaining adequate knowledge requires a skeptical attitude towards the surface or apparent meaning of facts. It requires an insistent desire for a range of facts and evidence and an openness of mind to consider fully the significance of facts as reported from as many different perspectives as possible. Thus, social intelligence entails a willingness to endure suspense and uncertainty of outcome until enough facts have been identified and mined for their concrete bearings. To act with social intelligence demands a tolerance or willingness to attend to and face the reported meanings of facts with sincerity, no matter how in congruent or conflicting these are with some particular interest. Furthermore, since the problem of democratic justice demands the consideration of facts according to the needs and claims of others, justice requires a character willing to seek out the perspectives of others as indispensable resources for guidance.

As Dewey suggests, only by aiming to cultivate individuals guided by intelligence and sympathy can a democratic society thrive. “Only as the coming generation learns in the schools to understand the social forces that are at work, the directions and the cross-directions in which they are moving, the consequences that they are reproducing, the consequences that they might produce if they were understood and managed with intelligence—only as the schools provide this understanding, have we any assurance that they are meeting the challenge which is put to them by democracy.”¹⁹ The pedagogical implication that follows is that critical, democratic habits of mind can form and mature only as they are fed constantly through practice. Thus, the only way to cultivate characters who will be actively engaged in the challenge of democracy is to engage them in the concrete challenges of justice. Therefore, a democratic education requires several important responsibilities of the schools in terms of the conditions, methods, and content of instruction.

School Context

First, the school must provide a context that ensures intellectual freedom and encourages shared inquiry, communication and deliberation. All those concerned with public education must be involved and vigilant in detecting relations of power that, intentionally or not, prevent, censor, or distort the freedom of inquiry, discussion, and expression. However, the identification of merely restrictive forms of power is not enough. Dewey's reminder that powerful groups have influenced shared institutions so as to condition others to accept, desire, and blindly act for ends antithetical to the growth of personal freedom should give a more critical edge to the watchdog responsibilities of the public.²⁰ The possibility that powerful ill-willed individuals can—and, in fact, do—use the public schools to gain hegemonic control over other people's perspectives should make all concerned about a public education more wary and discriminating of the vested interests that permeate schools. The increasing presence of marketing in public schools serves as an opportunity for critical engagement about the intent and purpose of corporate involvement in schools. What are the benefits, what are the effects, how so, and for whom?

Of course, the relative effect and value of power are matters of judgment and, therefore, matters to be contested and debated. This is to say that education necessarily is involved in the larger political discussion about what kind of community should be in the making. It is immersed in the collective deliberation and struggle over the effects of existing power on the growth of freedom, the types of associations or powers that should be fostered, and the habits of character necessary to develop these associations into conscious communities of good. A primary responsibility of all those committed to a democratic education (especially administrators, teachers, and parents) is to make sure that the school serves as the best example of democracy in the political engagement about the direction of experience. This responsibility entails making the school a citadel for the methods indispensable to a thriving cultural and political democracy. If schools are to produce active political citizens, the atmosphere of the school must be saturated with a spirit of public participation and civic courage. "It is idle to expect the schools to send out young men and women who will stand actively and aggressively for the cause of free intelligence in meeting social problems and attaining the goal of freedom unless the spirit of free intelligence pervades the organization, administration, studies, and methods of the school itself. . . . Eternal vigilance is the price of the conservation and extension of freedom, and the schools should be the ceaseless guardians and creators of this vigilance."²¹

Content and Methods of Instruction

As Dewey points out above, securing a context that is conducive to intellectual freedom is one element in the shaping of characters who are able to form ideas that are socially relevant. Therefore, the second responsibility of the schools is to provide an organized set of experiences that socially and politically engage students such that critical, intelligent sympathy develops as a necessary habit of practice. Dewey's 1922 criticism of public schools in terms of their instructional duties is worth quoting at

length because it offers a timeless suggestion for what the general content and methods of democratic schools should be.

Our schooling does not educate, if by education be meant a trained habit of discriminating inquiry and discriminating belief, the ability to look beneath a floating surface to detect the conditions that fix the contour of the surface, and the forces which create its waves and drifts. . . . This fact determines the fundamental criticism to be leveled against current schooling, against what passes as an educational system. It not only does little to make discriminating intelligence a safeguard against surrender to the invasion of bunk, especially in its most dangerous form—social and political bunk—but it does much to favor susceptibility to a welcoming reception of it. There appear to be two chief causes for this ineptitude. One is the persistence, in the body of what is taught, of traditional material which . . . affords no resource for discriminating insight, no protection against being duped in facing the emergencies of today. . . . The other way in which schooling fosters an indiscriminating gulping mental habit, eager to be duped, is positive. It consists in a systematic, almost deliberate, avoidance of the spirit of criticism in dealing with history, politics, and economics. There is an implicit belief that this avoidance is the only way by which to produce good citizens. The more indiscriminating the history and institutions of one's own nation are idealized, the greater is the likelihood, so it is assumed, that the school product will be a loyal patriot, a well-equipped good citizen. If the average boy and girl could be walled off from all ideas and information about social affairs save those acquired in school, they would enter upon the responsibilities of social membership in complete ignorance that there are any social problems, any political evils, any industrial defects. They would go forth with the supreme confidence that the way lies open to all, and that the sole cause of failure in business, family life or citizenship lies in some personal deficiency in character. . . . The effect is to send students out into actual life in a condition of acquired and artificial innocence. Such perceptions as they may have of the realities of social struggles and problems they have derived incidentally, by the way, and without the safeguards of intelligent acquaintance with facts and impartially conducted discussion. It is no wonder that they are ripe to be gulled, or that their attitude is one which merely perpetuates existing confusion, ignorance, prejudice, and credulity. Reaction from this impossible naïve idealization of institutions as they are produces indifference and cynicism.²²

To produce good citizens—that is, individuals who are sympathetic and responsible for the direction of experience—requires supplying the concrete opportunities that will elicit these traits as genuine, active responses. It follows that the subject matter of education can be nothing less than shared experience itself. Since shared experience fundamentally consists of shared habits and practices, in the most elemental sense the curricular and instructional responsibilities of the

school must be to widen and enrich the students' native interest in the social activities that compose their particular community of experience. This should be done by enlisting their energies in trying out and undergoing a myriad of practices that will enhance their natural sensitivity to and curiosity for what their community life is like.

The importance of shared practices for curriculum and instruction cannot be overstated. Shared practices develop in response to the particular problems and demands of the social environment. Thus, they are the particular means to realize specific consequences in experience. Again, as Dewey plainly states it, "Concrete habits do all the perceiving, recognizing, imagining, recalling, judging, conceiving, and reasoning that is done."²³ They are the special powers by which to form and regulate experience with efficiency and meaning. Furthermore, shared practices *are* the forms of human association. They serve as the mechanisms by which to realize further connections with other forms of human activity and to understand the intimate interactions between people that make community life possible and important. Directly engaging students in the concrete activities of community life provides the best stimulus to induce students to find out what the special demands and purposes of community life are. In turn, a developing sense of shared ends and demands gives social purpose to the need to acquire special methods for gathering facts and generating ideas and for developing special techniques and skills necessary to execute plans. A sense of shared ideals and demands gives reason for the need to attend to and judge consequences more carefully and to modify plans in light of their consequences. As Dewey suggests, "Things gain meaning when they are used as means to bring about consequences (or as means to prevent the occurrence of undesired consequences), or as standing for consequences for which we have to discover means. The relation of means-consequence is the centre and heart of all understanding."²⁴ On the most elementary level, therefore, the school should involve students in shared activities such that the means-consequence relation and the inherent human responsibility for this relation become the constant integrating themes of their educational experience. The different content areas of the traditional curriculum represent the various ways of approaching this relation and therefore represent the different ways of stating, analyzing, and understanding it. It follows that all subsequent efforts in terms of instructional content and method should bring the social significance of the means-consequence relation to greater degrees of consciousness. This is to say, the elementary development of attention through shared practices has instructional significance for engaging students to take up the problem of democratic justice.

As pointed out above, shared practices are the particular means to specific consequences in the social environment. When transferred into personal ability, shared practices are effective capacities, liberties, or, to put it in more relevant terms, powers to act. Since liberties always produce social effects, liberties always entail the social question of justice, the question of harmonious balance between the capacities of one and the capacities of all. Directly engaging students in the

means-consequence relation, which makes up the central nerve of shared practices, furnishes the most direct mechanism by which students can develop an intimate sensitivity to and personal responsibility for the problem of justice in its various concrete manifestations.

The problem for instruction is selecting and arranging the experiences necessary to lead students to define the good of a particular activity and to develop a sense of what expectations and demands should guide their consideration of consequences and means. By way of developing an idea of goods and standards, students come to sense for themselves the special problems and conflicts intrinsic to a particular shared activity. That is, a developing interest in realizing a particular shared good provides the prime condition for a heightened sensitivity and attention to the ideas, beliefs, and relations that block or hinder the full satisfaction of the good. As students are engaged in forming and measuring shared goods, they implicitly are forming and judging powers and consequences, liberty and equality—justice. The role of the teacher becomes that of suggesting and magnifying the social, economic, and political implications of felt problems such that questions of justice serve explicitly as stimuli to call out and sharpen social intelligence as a response.

In the most basic sense, the role of the teacher is to serve as a resource for suggestion and guidance. The instructional task, then, includes directing students in bringing felt problems to a more acute, articulated focus by suggesting and supplying additional materials, accounts, and claims to be researched. This function entails leading students into a careful study of the history of particular problems to see what specific events and assumptions of meaning inform their manifestations. Thus, the teacher should serve as a model for sound habits of investigation. This involves helping students search for and gather relevant facts and examine and test the relations between facts so as to induce a clearer understanding of the particular ideas of good and demands of right these facts embody or ignore. More specifically in terms of power, the teacher carries the responsibility of making explicit the point that underlying ideas of good and right represent specific relations of power, specific ideas of liberty or effective capacity, specific demands for increased capacity, constrained capacity, or redistributed capacity. The job of the teacher is to help students uncover and untangle the particular interests served by relations of power as these are embedded in historical facts and have come to bear upon presently felt problems. Therefore, the more critical and political aspect of teaching is directing students in identifying, deliberating about, and judging the effects of power on the development of shared habits, desires, needs, and ways of judgment. This task involves leading students in tracing and examining the particular means used to legitimize one way of acting, one form of power, over another. Of course, engaging students in these political tasks depends upon the creative ability to select experiences that will lead students to identify problems extensive enough in social scope so as to require them to seek out the perspectives of others, both historical and current. Therefore, another responsibility of teaching is to help students build a wider and more enriched forum of community experience.

By use of the extensive nature of the problem of justice itself, the teacher must lead students to see that only as they draw upon the lived experiences and stories of others can they gather a range of facts and judgments necessary to bring particular injustices into adequate focus. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the teacher to cultivate in students a strong sense that only as they seek out the perspectives of others can they come to hear and feel a variety of living testaments of past events, episodes, and effects of power. Mutual reference, in turn, should lend an emotional charge and significance to students' intellectual search, particularly as they struggle to identify and measure competing ideas of good and right. What students should come to see is that free and open discussion serves as a vital means by which they may become alert to subtle forms of exploitation that they had not yet taken into account. An intimate exchange of perspective should serve as the indispensable medium by which students come to confront the consequences of exploitation as these are manifested in impulses, desires, and ways of judgment. Through mutual conference students can come to help each other demystify hegemonic forms of power as natural and outside of human change. Moreover, drawing upon the stories of others should allow students to come to consciousness of past struggles of protest and resistance. In turn, these past struggles should provide rich suggestions as to how to form effective coalitions of resistance against current injustices and offer insights about how to nourish more intimate associations with others. Therefore, the teacher's duty in this regard is to underscore the significance of assembling a tribunal of others that will act as an authoritative resource by which students can come to test, correct, and sharpen their ideas of the good to be served and the responsibilities inherent in serving it.

The upshot of this discussion leads to a simple but indispensable educational principle. As Dewey states it, "The only way to prepare for social life is to engage in social life. To form habits of social usefulness and serviceableness apart from any direct social need and motive, and apart from any existing social situation, is, to the letter, teaching the child to swim by going through motions outside of the water. The most indispensable condition is left out, and the results correspondingly futile."²⁵

It was asserted at the beginning of this paper that public education serves as an instrument in the regulation of social and political sentiment required by a capitalist system. The idea of self-development fostered in schools is reduced to the goods, services, and images available for purchase. The moral life of citizenship in schools is one based upon the shared commitment to an economic system that promises ever higher standards of living and levels of consumption of common goods. Democracy, the idea that individuals morally should be free and equal in the pursuit of happiness as each sees fit as long as this pursuit somehow contributes to the well-being of others, then becomes bastardized to mean each individual's right and responsibility to pursue happiness defined solely in terms of material goods. This narrow conception of being in the world leads to the kind of society Max Weber anticipated in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*:

a society characterized by “mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance,” one consisting of “specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart.”²⁶ Dewey’s conception of democracy and education entails an understanding of self-development as wide, robust, and meaningful as the human ability to feel, appreciate, and imagine the infinite connections that we do and can share with each other. Only as a more enchanting spirit of democracy is breathed into our children through every aspect of their public school experience can we hope that they will develop the souls necessary to transcend the “iron cage” that Weber warned us about a century ago.

Notes

1. See Joel Spring, *The American School: 1642–1996*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 1997); Kenneth Saltman, *Collateral Damage: Corporatizing Public Schools—A Threat to Democracy* (Oxford, England: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000); Deron Boyles, *American Education and Corporations: The Free Market Goes to School* (New York: Garland Pub., 2000); Deron Boyles (ed.), *Schools or Markets? Commercialism, Privatization, and School-Business Partnerships* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005); Henry Giroux, *Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life: Critical Pedagogy in the Modern Age* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Henry Giroux, *Corporate Culture and the Attack on Higher Education and Public Schooling* (Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Foundation, 1999); Henry Giroux, *Stealing Innocence: Youth, Corporate Power, and the Politics of Culture* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000); Joe Kincheloe, Patrick Slattery, and Shirley Steinberg, *Contextualizing Teaching: Introduction to Education and Educational Foundations* (New York: Longman, 2000); and Alex Molnar, *Giving Kids the Business: The Commercialization of America’s Schools* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

2. See, for example, Raymond Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency: A Study of the Social Forces That Have Shaped the Administration of the Public Schools* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education: 1876–1957* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961/1964); Merle Curti, *The Social Ideas of American Educators* (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams & Co, 1935/1966); Joel Spring, *Education and the Rise of the Corporate State* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972); David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Paul Violas, *The Training of the Urban Working Class: A History of Twentieth Century American Education* (Skokie, IL: Rand McNally, 1978).

3. Joel Spring, *The American School*, p. 220.

4. Merle Curti, *The Social Ideas of American Educators*, p. 230.

5. Spring, *The American School*, pp. 233–234.

6. Alex Molnar, *Giving Kids the Business*, p. 38.

7. John Dewey, “Democracy and Education in the World of Today,” *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 13, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), p. 294.

8. John Dewey, “The Need of an Industrial Education in an Industrial Democracy,” *John Dewey, The Middle Works, 1899–1924*, vol. 10, edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), p. 139.

9. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Chicago: The Swallow Press Inc., 1927/1954), p. 150.

10. John Dewey and James Hayden Tufts, *Ethics* (1908/1932), *John Dewey, The Later*

Works, 1925–1953, vol. 7, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), pp. 348–349.

11. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, p. 149.
12. John Dewey, “Liberty and Social Control,” *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 11, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), pp. 360–362. In “The Social Significance of Academic Freedom,” Dewey writes: “Liberty is a social matter and not just a claim of the private individual. Freedom is a matter of the distribution of effective power; the struggle for liberty is important because of its consequences in effecting more just, equable, and human relations of men, women, and children to one another” (*The Later Works*, vol. 11, p. 377).
13. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916/1950), p. 12.
14. John Dewey, “Education and Social Change,” *The Later Works*, vol. 11, p. 416.
15. John Dewey, *Ethics, The Later Works*, vol. 7, p. 251.
16. John Dewey, *Psychology* (1887), *John Dewey, The Early Works, 1882–1898*, vol. 2, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), p. 293.
17. John Dewey, *Ethics, The Later Works*, vol. 7, p. 251.
18. John Dewey, *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process* (1910/1933), *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 8, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), p. 118. See also pp. 113–124.
19. John Dewey, “The Challenge of Democracy to Education,” *The Later Works*, vol. 11, p. 183.
20. See, for example, *The Public and Its Problems*, pp. 166–184; *Individualism, Old and New* (1929), *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 5, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), pp. 50–65; *Ethics, The Later Works*, vol. 7, pp. 358–366; and *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935), *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 11, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), pp. 23–40.
21. John Dewey, “Freedom,” *The Later Works*, vol. 11, pp. 254–255.
22. John Dewey, “Education as Politics,” *John Dewey, The Middle Works, 1899–1924*, vol. 13, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), pp. 331–333.
23. John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: The Modern Library, 1922/1930), p. 177.
24. John Dewey, *How We Think, The Later Works*, vol. 8, p. 233.
25. John Dewey, “Ethical Principles Underlying Education,” *John Dewey, The Early Works, 1882–1898*, vol. 5, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), p. 62.
26. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1904/1958), p. 182.

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