

# An Analysis of John Dewey's Notion of Occupations: Still Pedagogically Valuable?

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## **Abstract**

John Dewey lived and worked in an environment where the manual training movement was ever present. For Dewey, his own unique version of manual training is labeled "occupations." Nevertheless, over the years, what Dewey meant by occupations has been either misinterpreted or ignored for a plethora of reasons. This manual training climate that Dewey was a part of was dominant and Dewey could not and did not ignore it. He did, however, transform it. Later on, published sources used Dewey's notion of occupations and in many cases misinterpreted what he meant by occupations as a method. Finally, what Dewey actually says about occupations is found in his *Early Works* and *Middle Works*. This analysis of Dewey's concept of occupations, seeing its complexity, value, and thereby its distinction from ideas about vocational education, gives clarity to what Dewey believed about his concept but also shows its value for teaching and learning in schools today. Finally, a part of the confusion of Dewey's notion of occupations may be found in the various ways Dewey employed the term.

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At the end of the nineteenth century, the manual training (MT) movement was a major concern for educators, industrialists, and politicians, and this included John Dewey. For Dewey, his unique version of MT, or "occupations," was a method of learning by doing that was at the center of the curriculum and had equal weight with other studies. It was also a key component of a pedagogy that considered the psychology of the child,<sup>1</sup> liberal studies, and the social dimension of learning; however, it was not trade or vocational education.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, over the years what Dewey meant by occupations has been either misinterpreted or ignored for a plethora of reasons and, at times, seen as syn-

onymous with vocational education. Much of what has been written about Dewey's occupations and vocational education is confusing.<sup>3</sup> Although some may believe Dewey's concept of occupations has been extensively discussed, a review of the literature shows that very little has been written about Dewey and occupations as opposed to Dewey's notion of vocational education.<sup>4</sup>

This paper examines 1) the MT climate that Dewey was a part of, 2) selected publications that show the various ways Dewey's concept of occupations has been interpreted, and 3) what Dewey actually says about occupations in his *Early Works* and *Middle Works*.

This analysis of Dewey's concept of occupations, showing its complexity, value, and distinction from ideas about vocational education, will not only give clarity to what Dewey believed about concept but will also show its value for teaching and learning in schools today.

### ***The Ubiquitous Manual Training Movement***

MT<sup>5</sup> is not now and never has been a common, shared concept. Usually MT refers to vocational or industrial education, and it is seen as necessary for job preparation. However, its lack of adherence to a common definition has in no way deterred its ubiquitous presence. As early as 1897 in the New York City public schools, MT was seen "as a part of the system."<sup>6</sup> The MT movement had a number of versions, and it had supporters as well as detractors. Even in the early stages of development in the schools, some saw MT as no longer an experiment but one aspect of the reform movement. As early as 1891,<sup>7</sup> MT included better teacher training so that it could be taught more effectively in the schools. In 1884, the Industrial Education Association<sup>8</sup> (IEA) started in New York City, and it aimed to introduce industrial education into the curriculum. The IEA planned to introduce elementary school children to MT so they could become self-supporting. In addition, the IEA defined MT as industrial training as opposed to technical training.<sup>9</sup> The IEA wanted industrial training to exist for two years on the elementary level and two years in the special branches schools. The organization saw MT as a way to stimulate the child's constructive ability and creative force.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the IEA's, other versions of MT were offered. At Teachers College in 1896, the American Manual Training Association discussed having a variety of activities and offered its version of MT. It included: clay modeling, cardboard, scissors and needle work, paper folding, mat weaving, book covering, and bent wire work. The New York City Board of Education in 1887 offered a version of MT that was vocationally focused. Their Committee of Study and School Books wanted instruction on MT in the primary schools for boys to consist of construction "by the use of splints, wire, thread, paper, pasteboard, and clay." For boys from first to fifth grades, some "wood turning," metal work, and carpentry work would be offered.<sup>11</sup> For girls in grades four to eight, sewing would be taught and cooking in second and third grades.

At the New York State Teachers Convention in 1889,<sup>12</sup> there was a discussion of reform in the schools and specifically the need to balance the “present system.” At this convention Dr. Francis Patton, president of Princeton College, noted that schools needed to prepare students for earning a living. His idea of MT was a more applied and vocational view of MT. Also at the convention, another speaker<sup>13</sup> cautioned educators that unless the present school system rectified the existing imbalance by infusing MT, the growth, prosperity, and possibly the life of the republic could be in jeopardy. In 1908,<sup>14</sup> Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, wrote in the *New York Times*, outlining his view of MT. He wanted students to receive vocational training after completing six years of elementary education. The vocational training could take one of two forms: vocational high schools for children who would attend full time in lieu of the general secondary school, or continuative schools with evening instruction. He believed the schools must be true vocational high schools. President Butler also discussed the error of vocational training and liberal learning being antagonistic.<sup>15</sup> Finally, in 1908, the New York State Commissioner of Education, Dr. Andrew Draper, offered another version of MT,<sup>16</sup> a version completely committed to the world of work. Commissioner Draper lamented the fact that elementary schools did not train students for industrial employment but just for secondary schools. He wanted to create new types of schools: factory schools and trade schools. Their goal was to train better workmen “so they may earn more bread and butter.”

Nevertheless, no matter which version of MT educators supported, it also had its detractors. As an example, an “expert” examiner hired by the New York City schools in 1904<sup>17</sup> recommended abolishing music, physical culture, and MT. The evaluator believed that these studies did no good and worked to the detriment of children who have a limited time for schooling and were offered at the expense of the common branches. This “new education,” or MT, was in reality vocational education. It was done for practical reasons but did not really encompass what Dewey had in mind with his theory of occupations, nor did the various common notions of MT reflect what Dewey defined as vocational education. It is within this multitude of versions of MT that Dewey transformed it into his version of occupations, or learning by doing. I will now examine two sources that employ Dewey’s concept of occupations to demonstrate that what has been written about it is not necessarily what Dewey actually meant.

### ***Outside Sources and Their View of Dewey and Occupations***

Much of what has been written about Dewey concept of occupations and vocational education is unclear. A review of the literature<sup>18</sup> shows that very little has been written about Dewey and occupations as opposed to Dewey’s notion of vocational education. Until recently, scholars have generally found it difficult to examine Dewey’s views, not only because of the inaccessibility of some of his writings but also the magnitude of them. His *Collected Works*<sup>19</sup> include approximately twenty-nine books, five hundred and eighty-eight essays, or a total of 1079 entries. To gain

a better sense of Dewey's notion of occupations, and before analyzing Dewey's writing on it, I will examine two articles<sup>20</sup> written on Dewey's concept of occupations to emphasize either the incorrectness or incompleteness of what others believe Dewey meant by occupation.<sup>21</sup>

Richard Lakes,<sup>22</sup> in "John Dewey's Theory of Occupations: Vocational Education Envisioned," suggests that Dewey's theory of occupations provided a foundation for a group of early twentieth-century vocational educators.<sup>23</sup> Lakes explains that these educators were looking for more than just skills training, and they found it in Dewey's theory of occupations, particularly its social dimension. Furthermore, Lakes explains that Dewey believed that "vocational education was the best way to guarantee all citizens the right to full participation in industrial policy and decision making."<sup>24</sup> Although Lakes is correct in describing Dewey's belief regarding vocational education, and also correct that Dewey's view of occupations includes their social dimension, Lakes neglects to point out that Dewey's view of occupations and his position on vocational education have different aims and origins. Lakes has somehow blended Dewey's notion of occupations and his belief regarding vocational education into one.

Lakes correctly explains that in the Lab School at the University of Chicago, Dewey's concept of occupations was a method to educate children in history, science, social learning, and problem solving. What Lakes omits is a plethora of benefits that Dewey saw in occupations. As an example, Dewey states that occupations will not prepare the child for "any particular business"<sup>25</sup> and that "[o]ccupation as thus conceived must, therefore, be carefully distinguished from work which educates primarily for a trade. It differs because its end is in itself; in the growth that comes from the continual interplay of ideas and their embodiment in action, not in external utility."<sup>26</sup> Dewey wants occupations to be free of economic stress, and their aim to be the development of social power and insight.<sup>27</sup>

Lakes divides his article into three parts: 1) synthetic epistemology, which is an explanation of Dewey's belief in occupations as a method of learning, 2) a redefinition of manual training or occupations, moving away from just skills training that leaves out the intellectual and social and educational ends, and finally, 3) a theory of cultural recapitulation. Here Lakes explains that Dewey used occupations as a vehicle to learn the various disciplines.

In the first section, "A Synthetic Epistemology," Lakes correctly discusses Dewey's notion of epistemology by using the notion of synthetic as applied in logic as having truth or falsity determined by experience. Lakes explains that Dewey's epistemology or view of knowledge did away with the dualism of the knower and the known, and through the use of occupations, the method of learning by doing, the child would reconstruct his experiences.<sup>28</sup> However, Lakes does not mention that Dewey's view of epistemology as embodied in occupations includes manipulation. Dewey's epistemology includes not just the intellect but the body interacting with the environment.<sup>29</sup> Dewey explains how manipulation is an important part of knowledge verification and defines knowledge as an action, a physical action:

The child gets the largest part of his acquisitions through his bodily activities, until he learns to work systematically with the intellect. That is the purpose of this work in the school, to direct these activities, to systematize and organize them, so that they shall not be as haphazard and as wandering as so that they shall not be as haphazard and as wandering as they are outside of school. The problem of making these forms of practical activity work continuously and definitely together, leading from one factor of skill to another, from one intellectual difficulty to another, has been one of the most difficult, and at the same time one in which we have been most successful.<sup>30</sup>

Unfortunately, Lakes does not make a distinction between Dewey's concept of occupations and his social and political writings on vocational education. For Dewey, occupations is a method of teaching, whereas, with vocational education, he discusses the various social and political issues for workers living in a social democracy. These writings oppose a dual system of liberal education and vocational education and the exploitation of the worker. These issues are too important to be blended into Dewey's notion of occupations. Lakes's article does explain to a degree how Dewey conceives occupations but is problematic when it suggests that the concept of occupations can become for vocational educators a tool for vocational education. Ironically, Dewey saw all education as vocational and was not in favor of training for specific jobs—at least not until the student was near the end of the public school experience.<sup>31</sup>

In his conclusion, Lakes argues that Dewey “saw a need for a unification of vocation and culture” and mentions Dewey's desire for “industrial intelligence.”<sup>32</sup> Lakes's perspective reflects an important explanation of Dewey's notion of occupations, but it is at best incomplete when one examines what the concept of occupations included, as Dewey's view is misplaced when used as a foundation for vocational education. Reading Dewey's ideas on vocational education will show that Dewey was opposed to vocational education in its traditional sense.

James Palermo also wrote about Dewey's concept of occupations.<sup>33</sup> Palermo begins by referring to *Democracy and Education* and explaining that the “New Education” Dewey is talking about is a “student-centered”<sup>34</sup> pedagogy of doing. Palermo continues by stating that “A crucial element of this pedagogy involves a nostalgic return to the past in which children simulate the adult occupations of an agrarian household economy as the living model of democracy.”<sup>35</sup>

Key to Palermo's critique of Dewey's notion of occupations is the use of simulation. This becomes apparent when he states in his conclusion that:

In what sense is the Dewey simulation for today's children like the Warhol example, the hyper-real? Dewey's specific example of the children's re-enactment of the process of changing raw wool into fiber is illustrative. Dewey tells the reader how the children re-invented a simple frame for carding the wool and of another device to spin it. Like Warhol, the teacher who uses “occupations” resuscitates a message located within popular cul-

ture. For the teacher, that message is “Dewey’s philosophy is, ‘We learn by doing!’” The reinvention of the frame is an attempt to have children look again, to have them see the hidden processes of production. Like Warhol, the teacher revives an icon from the past (in this instance a machine) and a way of life which has disappeared. But what really is being simulated here? The answer is nothing. The frame is not a copy of something real. The labor relationships acted out do not exist in the real world: the occupations expressed are depoliticized and a-historical; the social relationships describe life as we would dream them; they are examples of wish fulfillment. This is an agrarian utopia, more fun and more humane than our own experience of the world. This simulation wants to represent to children how we would see ourselves—what Baudrillard has called a simulacrum. In fact, it is the simulacrum of our age—the hyper-real. The hyper-real represents the fetishism of a lost object, an absence which is simulated. The children’s re-invention of the frame works precisely that way. The democratic style of conjoint living that is simulated is the living image of an imaginary past. Such an experience is absent from, and a denial of, today’s real life. Dewey’s simulation, like Warhol’s painting, is complete onto itself. Without a referent in the world, the occupation technique signifies only itself. In other words, for today’s students Dewey’s pedagogy of occupations is caught within its own simulation loop.<sup>36</sup>

Palermo does not think that all of Dewey’s work is outdated but his method of occupations is: “My caveat is simply this: if one today would like to implement Dewey’s occupational simulation in the schools, the first task is to ask how these pedagogical techniques reflect the real world.” According to Palermo, the occupations simulate nothing. The occupations are ahistorical and depoliticized.

Yet according to Mayhew and Edwards,<sup>37</sup> Dewey wants an active attitude of work and play, not a simulation: “the substitution of an active attitude of work and play and of inquiry for the process of imposition, and passive absorption of ready made knowledge and preformed skills that largely dominated the traditional school. It implied a much larger degree of opportunity for initiative, discovery, and independent communication of intellectual freedom than was characteristic of the traditional school.”<sup>38</sup> Mayhew and Edwards explain that the one aim of the teachers in planning the year’s work “was to make the study of the social life the center of attention and to follow its development, . . . from its earliest beginnings through the barbaric stage to the opening of authentic history. Starting with the most primitive ways of living, it took up the beginnings and growth of industry though discovery and invention and their effect on social life.”<sup>39</sup>

Dewey’s belief in using “occupations” in the Lab School was not an activity for the child that was a “simulation” of life but was life. It was an experience for the child that was initiated based upon the child’s experiences. “According to Dewey’s theory, ‘educative experiences’ are interactive, historical and social processes founded on the principles of continuity and

interaction (which he later referred to as ‘transaction’). Continuity refers to the temporal concept that children will learn best when they are helped to connect their past and present experiences, both in and out of school, which can then be used to create new knowledge and to expand opportunities for future growth. When teachers reach back to what history has taught us, the content body of ‘inherited knowledge,’ they help children to link the lessons of the past with current individual and social concerns. Understanding the relationships between current and historical social issues may lead to children’s developing insights about society’s future.<sup>340</sup>

It would seem that in these two articles Lakes and Palermo are limited in their discussion of Dewey’s concept of occupations, and their myopia regarding what Dewey actually meant by occupations resulted in a misunderstanding of the concept. Because of this misunderstanding, it is now necessary to examine what Dewey actually said about occupations: the concept’s origin, evolution, and various elements.

### ***Dewey’s View of Occupations in the Early Works***<sup>41</sup>

#### ***Epistemic Origin***

Dewey has much to offer on the topic of occupations. It is found in both in the *Early Works* and *Middle Works*, with the majority of writings dealing with occupations found in the *Middle Works, 1899-1924*.<sup>42</sup> However, this is a period spanning forty-two years.<sup>43</sup>

In the *Early Works*, Dewey’s ideas regarding learning by doing and the initial seeds for the concept of occupations can be seen when he writes about the nature of knowledge and knowledge as action, the importance of interest in learning, and the child being born with the impulse to construct. Dewey states that the child comes to school to do, and the doing must be clustered around occupations that will ensure the proper kinds of experiences for the child. The initial epistemic origin of occupations, or “doing,” is for Dewey psychological and can be traced back to three articles.

#### ***Knowledge or Imagery through Movement***

The first one is written in 1895: “Plan of Organization of the University Primary School.”<sup>44</sup> Here Dewey sees knowledge as being within the grasp of action, not physical or psychic, but “imagery through movement” or doing. Dewey also ties interest to action, and impulse to curriculum. He makes an argument for activities that are genuine and that the child can relate to. Along with interest goes a sense of power and accomplishment. Dewey also criticizes manual training activities that the child cannot relate to and can turn into “amusement” with no real educational value. For Dewey, “genuine work” is not mere play or labor that is disagreeable to the child but action that is meaningful to the child.

Dewey wants the school experience to start with the child's impulses. "The starting point is always the impulse to self-expression; the educational process is to supply the material and provide (positively and negatively) the conditions so that the expression shall occur in its normal social direction, both as to content and form or mode. This gives the standard for determining the entire school operation and organization, both as to the whole and as to its details."<sup>45</sup> Dewey sees the value of occupations and the child's constructive powers and thus connects occupations to the various subjects to be taught.

This university plan for an experimental school contains the unity of the intellectual, the volitional, and the emotional. It is a constructive activity for the student starting with an image or idea, a coordination to execute the idea, and finally the interest to accomplish it. Dewey offers an example of three occupations to explain how occupations will be utilized: "The three typical activities of cooking, carpentry, and sewing (taken in a broad sense) are taken as affording adequate opportunity, on the psychological side, for constructive work, while socially they represent the fundamental activities of the race."<sup>46</sup>

### ***Nature of Knowledge***

In "The Significance of the Problem of Knowledge,"<sup>47</sup> Dewey discusses the nature of knowledge. He examines the two obvious views of knowing: sensation versus thought, explaining that neither is sufficient by itself. For Dewey, this is a flawed dualism<sup>48</sup> of thought and action. Dewey explains: "Sensation and thought themselves seem to stand out more rigidly opposed to each other in their own natures than ever. Why both are necessary, and how two such opposed factors co-operate in bringing about the unified result of knowledge, becomes more and more of a mystery. It is the continual running up against this situation which accounts for the flagging of interest and the desire to direct energy where it will have more outcome."<sup>49</sup> Dewey defines knowledge not "as a self-sufficing purveyor of reality, . . . but as a statement of action, that statement being necessary, moreover, to the successful ongoing of action."<sup>50</sup> Knowledge Is an Action not a Noun.

### ***Balance of Ideas and Expressive Activity***

In "The Kindergarten and Child-Study,"<sup>51</sup> Dewey wants to have teachers apply the latest research in psychology to balance ideas and expressive activity. Dewey reminds the kindergarten teachers that "it is psychology which controls the adaptation of all materials and occupations to the capacities and aims of the individual child."<sup>52</sup> Dewey recognizes that using MT in the curriculum is not new in schools, but in his notion of occupations there is a reconstruction of what presently exists. He believes the child comes to school to do, and what the school sees as "studies" are really just factors in the child's life. Moreover, the University school would cluster the "studies" around the occupations, and learning would evolve naturally.<sup>53</sup>

The preoccupation for learning from books in the schools is a concern for Dewey. He believes that book learning has become a fetish and has turned read-

ing and writing into mechanical and meaningless activities. Obviously, he is not opposed to books but instead wants the child to have experiences to increase his or her intellectual powers, and occupations again should be used: “There arises an urgent demand for the introduction of methods of manual and industrial discipline which shall give the child what he formerly obtained in his home and social life.”<sup>54</sup> However, Dewey is not advocating vocational training or trade schools and wants children protected “against some of the hard and over-utilitarian aspects of modern civilization.”<sup>55</sup> Dewey wants educators to focus not on test scores and rote learning but on what enriches the child’s everyday experiences. This would come about through a correlation of the subject matter and doing.<sup>56</sup>

## ***Dewey’s View of Occupations in the Middle Works***

### ***Experience Learning and Social Values***

The *Middle Works* contains the bulk of Dewey’s writings regarding occupations. Besides various articles, the concept of occupations is discussed in *School and Society*,<sup>57</sup> *How We Think*,<sup>58</sup> and *Democracy and Education*.<sup>59</sup> Dewey discusses the social value of occupations and the method’s place in the curriculum, and he sees it as superior to object lessons as a way of learning. He sees occupations transforming the child’s mind, giving the child scientific insight and making the mind an instrument of free and active participation. Another result of using occupations in the classroom is the development of the spirit of service and the skills of planning, observation, and reflection. Occupations must have equal weight in the curriculum and must be the center of the curriculum. Finally, the concept of occupations contains a moral dimension.

In chapter 1 of *School and Society*, Dewey discusses his laboratory school and the use of occupations. According to Dewey, the new education’s aim, MT, should be awareness. The educational experience must give play to the deep-lying motor instincts and demands of the child, enabling consciousness of her powers through a variety of uses and awareness of their social values.

To give play, to give expression to his motor instincts, and to do this in such a way that the child shall be brought to know the larger aims and processes of living, is the problem. The saw, hammer, and plane, the wood and clay, the needle and cloth, and the processes by which these are manipulated, are not ends in themselves; they are rather agencies through which the child may be initiated into the typical problems which require human effort, into the laws of human production and achievement, and into the methods by which man gains control of nature, and makes good in life his ideals. Out of this larger human significance must grow gradually the interest in the technical problems and processes of manual training. When the interest becomes of the purely technical sort, then of necessity manual training no longer occupies a central position; it belongs upon the level where all other forms of special technique are found.<sup>60</sup>

For Dewey, object lessons cannot take the place of experience, nor for that matter can the training of the senses. This is also true of verbal memory and reasoning powers. In the lab school, occupations gave the children the following: "In all this there was continual training of observation, of ingenuity, constructive imagination, of logical thought, and of the sense of reality acquired through first-hand contact with actualities. The educative forces of the domestic spinning and weaving, of the saw-mill, the grist-mill, the cooper shop, and the blacksmith forge, were continuously operative."<sup>61</sup>

Dewey criticizes the school's academic goals and the use of MT. He explains that academic goals are being used unwisely: regrettably, activities are simply done to occupy the child's mind and miss MT's true value, which is social. The former just has children learning facts. For Dewey, occupations transform the child's mind: "The occupation supplies the child with a genuine motive; it gives him first hand experience; it brings him into contact with realities. It does all this, but in addition it is liberalized throughout by translation into its historic and social values and scientific equivalencies. With the growth of the child's mind in power and knowledge it ceases to be a pleasant occupation merely, and becomes more and more a medium, an instrument, an organ of understanding—and is thereby transformed."<sup>62</sup>

### ***Occupations As Instrumental***

Furthermore, occupations give the child scientific insight, which, once gained, becomes an indispensable instrument of free and active participation in modern social life. Occupations cause the child's mind to become an instrument for free and active participation because the child is educated. With occupations, not only will the child have a better environment for learning but the ultimate goal of education will also become realized: an individual saturated "with the spirit of service." Moreover, "providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guarantee of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious."<sup>63</sup>

In discussing the psychology of occupations, Dewey notes that using occupations brings about a balance between the intellectual and the practical phases of experience. It involves continual observation of materials and continual planning and reflection in order that the practical or executive side may be successfully carried on.<sup>64</sup> Occupations offer an excellent occasion for sense-training and discipline of thought.

### ***Interest and Occupations***

Another dimension of occupations is interest, a theme also discussed in the *Early Works*. Dewey sees a strong connection between occupations and the interests of the child. The child's interests grow from instincts or habits the child possesses and that are in need of transformation, not satisfaction.<sup>65</sup> Interests through occupations will create a steady, continuous focus for the child where the organization of powers follow along specific lines.

### ***Occupations and the Curriculum***

In conjunction with seeing occupations as instruments for learning, Dewey gives them equal weight with the other parts of the curriculum. The elementary school curriculum according to Dewey has three aspects: 1) active pursuits, for example, occupations 2) subject matter that gives context to social life, and 3) skills such as math and reading.<sup>66</sup> He discusses occupations from a psychological perspective and the new emphasis given to motor factors and “the entire mental development that the latter cannot be intelligently discussed apart from the former.”<sup>67</sup> For Dewey, occupations must have a central place in the school. He even goes as far to state that occupations, “more than any other one study, more than reading or geography, story-telling or myth, evoke and direct what is most fundamental and vital in the child; that in which he is the heir of all the ages, and through which he recapitulates the progress of the race.”<sup>68</sup> Again he reiterates that occupations must allow for recognition of the child’s motor instincts and enable the child to become conscious of his powers and their uses and aware of their social values.<sup>69</sup>

As he talks and writes about his concept of occupations, Dewey continues to reconstruct the notion. In discussing the kindergarten setting, Dewey sees play and work as synonymous and the imagination being a big part of this.<sup>70</sup> Dewey does not want occupations to be just diversions for the student and is concerned that the “new education,” as MT is referred to, will become “a sort of vaudeville divertissement, with all sorts of spectacular accompaniments. The aim is to permit the intrinsic wonder and value which attach to all the realities which lie behind the school curriculum to come home to the child, and to take him up and carry him on in their own onward sweep.”<sup>71</sup>

### ***Occupations as Moral***

For Dewey, educators have to understand that the method of occupations is not just a better way to make learning more pleasing to the student, but is moral, since it offers a way for the child to participate in the realities of life.

We need to remind ourselves that the newer types of study, the various forms of social occupations, the cooking, the shop work, weaving, music, painting and clay modeling, are not merely devices for making old studies more pleasing, nor for disguising the inherent disagreeableness they have for boys and girls, that they are not simply effective methods for getting children to study more and learn their lessons easier and better than they used to, but that they stand for something which is fundamentally moral. They stand for the belief that the only final educative force in the world is participation in the realities of life, and that these realities are inherently moral in effect.<sup>72</sup>

### ***Occupations and Learning Style***

In 1901 Dewey delivered ten lectures reinforcing the significance of how the mind learns. The psychology of learning by action is elaborated by Dewey in “How the

Mind Learns.”<sup>73</sup> Dewey explains that the mind is not like a blank piece of paper or a waxed tablet. The child is active and is born with impulses, tendencies, or instincts.<sup>74</sup> Physical activity is one side of learning and sensation is the other. The teacher does not have to motivate the child but supply the proper environment to feed the appetites of the child. He explains, “We get our ideas through the use, very largely, of our hands, our eyes, and our ears. That is the natural mode of learning. When educational reformers said that is a part of doing, the statement was true in an important sense. That idea has been formulated in this way: No impression without expression and no reception of an idea without counterpart expression. Now in our educational system that is called constructive work. Manual training of various kinds really rests on this principle.”<sup>75</sup> Doing for Dewey is both impression and expression, and a balance is always needed.

The idea of seeing occupations as more than psychological is expanded on in *Cyclopedia of Education and Social Process*.<sup>76</sup> The social dimension of occupations is tied into the cultural epoch theory.

Elementary education has already included within itself (for a variety of reasons) such activities as gardening, cooking, sewing and weaving, constructive work in paper, leather, wood, metal, care of animals, excursions, singing, story telling, dramatizations, drawing, painting, designing, sand molding, clay modeling, plays and games, etc. These modes of activity are not psychological merely; they do not simply appeal to and express the more native and spontaneous impulses of children; they also present important social processes; they typify occupations that are indispensable to the continued existence of community life. Moreover, as processes they condition intelligent study of social products.<sup>77</sup>

In *How We Think*,<sup>78</sup> Dewey discusses the value of occupations to transform the curriculum and the value it has both psychologically and from a utilitarian perspective, its social value. “They have been for the most part simply additional school studies. It remains to utilize them systematically as foundation stones for the other studies by teaching them as representatives of these social activities which are fundamental to the knowledge and modes of skill embodied in these other studies.”<sup>79</sup>

In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey discusses the pedagogical value of occupations in the curriculum.<sup>80</sup> Specifically, in chapter 15, “Play and Work in the Curriculum,” Dewey mentions three reasons for MT becoming a part of the curriculum: 1) educational reform, 2) research in child psychology, and 3) direct experience in the classroom. He also explains that the problem facing educators with regard to MT is the temptation to use activities “in such ways that while manual skill and technical efficiency are gained and immediate satisfaction found in the work, together with preparation for later usefulness, these things shall be subordinated to education—that is, to intellectual results and the forming of a socialized disposition.”<sup>81</sup> Dewey continues to explain the real value of occupations in the curriculum, not for a particular job but for learning and for liberalizing the student:

For in schools, occupations are not carried on for pecuniary gain but for their own content. Freed from extraneous associations and from the pressure of wage-earning, they supply modes of experience which are intrinsically valuable; they are truly liberalizing in quality. Gardening, for example, need not be taught either for the sake of preparing future gardeners, or as an agreeable way of passing time. It affords an avenue of approach to knowledge of the place farming and horticulture have had in the history of the race and which they occupy in present social organization.<sup>82</sup>

## **Conclusion**

To assume that the concept of occupations, or learning by doing, is not pregnant with so many factors but just children being active in a classroom is regrettable and a simplistic view of what Dewey believed occupations had to offer teachers. Its roots in epistemology—looking at learning that considered the child’s constructive impulses, interests, and constructive powers and realizing that knowledge is not a statement about reality but a statement of action—is in itself a transformative notion.

Along with the epistemic view of occupations, Dewey adds the psychological and social dimension. Occupations bring to consciousness the need for service, and also educate the child to realize the powers she has, how those powers can be used, and the social value of those powers to control nature and solve the problems of living. Through occupations, the child’s mind is continuously transformed. Occupations are not just a pleasant way to learn something; through them, the mind becomes an organ for understanding, an instrument of free and active participation in the social life.

Some have mistakenly confused Dewey’s concept of occupations and his concept of vocational education. Neither concept supports training for a specific job and both have a social dimension. There is no doubt that Dewey was opposed to vocational education as trade education. Yet the concept of occupations has so much to offer educators if only it is clearly understood and applied. Dewey stated that the child comes to school to do and “gets the largest part of his acquisitions through his bodily activities until he learns to work systematically with the intellect. That is the purpose of this work in the school, to direct these activities, to systematize and organize them.”<sup>83</sup>

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## Notes

1. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 177.
2. In the literature, industrial education and vocational education are frequently used interchangeably.
3. Dewey's notion of vocational education has a different agenda than his view of occupations. For him vocational education was concerned with social, political, and moral education for democracy. It was not a method of teaching. Also, when Dewey wrote about vocational education, it was for a reconstruction of the educational system. He stated in a response to David Snedden that he wanted education to be vocational but in the way he defined it, which included no learning of trades before the age of 18 or 20. This is clearly not a concern regarding occupations.
4. In Levine, *Works about John Dewey 1886-1995*, The Electronic Edition Folio Bound VIEWS ver 3.1a. A query of "occupations" produces only two hits, whereas a query of "vocation," "vocational," "vocationalism," or "vocationism" produces 25 hits. The two papers on occupations are L-13. Lakes, "John Dewey's Theory of Occupations" and P-9. Palermo, "Dewey on the Pedagogy of Occupations."
5. The MT movement discussion is focused in New York for reasons of space and focus. What was happening in New York City is just a microcosm of what was occurring throughout the country during this time period.
6. DeKay, "Training of Eye and Hand."
7. *New York Times*, "Reform in the Schools."
8. IEA was the predecessor of Teachers College, which started ten years later. See *New York Times*, "Where Teachers Are Taught." Also, *New York Times*, "A Trade for Every Child."
9. The IEA does not support technical training, which is a type of education that is focused on limited skills for a particular type of job.
10. *New York Times*, "Manual Training."
11. *New York Times*, "Favoring Manual Training."
12. *New York Times*, "An Educational Problem."
13. Mr. John Ward Stinson, Superintendent of the Institute of Artist-Artisans.
14. Butler, "Training for Vocation and for Avocation."
15. He is also discussing a dualism of liberal learning and vocational training, which like all dualism, is false and contrary to Dewey's view of MT.
16. *New York Times*, "Dr. Draper on Work Schools."
17. *New York Times*, "Expert Calls School Courses Too Complex."
18. There is no mention of occupations in Martin, *The Education of John Dewey*. In Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey*, "occupations" is not found in the index and vocational education refers the reader to industrial education, which is discussed in three pages. Westbrook's *John Dewey and American Democracy* does not have "occupations" in

the index but does discuss vocational education and within those ten pages occupations is mentioned. Tanner, in *Dewey's Laboratory School*, devotes three pages to occupations, and neither vocational education nor industrial education are found in the index.

19. References to Dewey's *Collected Works* are to the Electronic Edition, 1996. This present edition is based on the critical edition, but differs from it in significant ways. Previously unpublished materials were transcribed and delivered in hard copy. Consequently, no machine-readable text was produced at the Center as a part of the editorial process.

20. In searching the Levine CD, only two articles on occupations were found: Lakes, "John Dewey's Theory of Occupations" and Palermo, "Dewey on the Pedagogy of Occupations."

21. Other references that reflect confusion regarding Dewey's notion of occupations and vocational education are not really focused on occupations: Cohen, "The Industrial Education Movement, 1906-17"; Null, "Schwab, Bagley, and Dewey"; Amioka, "Career Education: John Dewey Revisited"; and Mullen and Kohan, "Beyond Dualism, Splits, and Schisms."

22. Lakes, "John Dewey's Theory of Occupations," 42.

23. *Ibid.*, 41.

24. *Ibid.*, 42.

25. MW 1: 46.

26. MW 1: 92.

27. MW 1: 12.

28. Lakes, "John Dewey's Theory of Occupations," 43.

29. For Dewey, his theory of epistemology is his instrumentalism, a theory of inquiry. See Quinton, "John Dewey's Theory of Knowledge," 14.

30. MW 1: 62.

31. LW 17: 26.

32. Lakes, "John Dewey's Theory of Occupations," 45.

33. Palermo, "Dewey on the Pedagogy of Occupations."

34. Dewey, of course, was not a child-centered advocate. In "How Much Freedom in New Schools?" he states, "The relative failure to accomplish this result indicates the one-sidedness of the idea of the 'child-centered' school." LW 5: 321.

35. Palermo, "Dewey on the Pedagogy of Occupations."

36. *Ibid.*

37. Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*.

38. *Ibid.*, 6-7.

39. *Ibid.*, 46.

40. Weiss, Weiss, and DeFalco, "Progressive = Permissive?"

41. The EW covers 1882-1898, the MW 1899-1924, and the LW 1925-53. The LW are dominated by Dewey's political writings, speeches, and lectures and does not really have much to offer regarding the concept of occupations. See Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, 243.

42. There is one exception to this time sequence: "How the Mind Learns" was first published in White and Blue (Provo City, Utah), vol. 5, no. 2, 1 November, but is found in LW 17: 213.

43. Thirty-seven volumes from 1882-1953.

44. EW 5: 223. This is privately printed, not published, and is to be so treated. It will be understood to define the general spirit in which the work is undertaken, not to give a rigid scheme. [1895 (?). Not reprinted during author's lifetime.]

45. EW 5: 229.

46. EW 5: 231.

47. Dewey, "The Significance of the Problem of Knowledge," EW 5: 5. First published by the University of Chicago Press, 1897 in *University of Chicago Contributions to Philosophy*, vol. I, no. 3.
48. As are all dualisms for Dewey.
49. EW 5: 5.
50. EW 5: 20.
51. Dewey, "The Kindergarten and Child-Study," EW 5: 209. First published in *Addresses and Proceedings of the National Educational Association*, 1897. Dewey mentions the need for kindergarten teachers to restudy the "gifts and occupations from the standpoint of what is now known regarding the laws of development of motor activity in childhood." Also see "A Pedagogical Experiment," EW 5: 244, first published in *Kindergarten Magazine*, June 1896.
52. EW 5: 244.
53. Dewey, "A Pedagogical Experiment," EW 5: 244. First published in *Kindergarten Magazine*, 1896.
54. EW 5: 259.
55. EW 5: 267.
56. Dewey, "Plan for an Elementary School," EW 5: 448. First published in *Addresses and Proceedings of the National Educational Association*, 1898.
57. Dewey, *The School and Society*, MW 1: 236. First published by University of Chicago Press, 1899.
58. Dewey, *How We Think*, MW 6: 179. First published by D. C. Heath, Boston, 1910.
59. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, MW 9: 1.
60. Dewey, *The School and Society*, MW 1: 235.
61. *Ibid.*, 8.
62. *Ibid.*, 1-15.
63. *Ibid.*, 20.
64. *Ibid.*, 92.
65. *Ibid.*, 94.
66. Dewey, "The Place of Manual Training in the Elementary Course of Study," MW 1: 230. First published in *Manual Training Magazine*, 1901.
67. *Ibid.*, 232.
68. *Ibid.*, 235.
69. *Ibid.*, 236.
70. Dewey, "Appendix 3: Play and Imagination in Relation to Early Education," MW 1: 339. This summary report first published in *Kindergarten Magazine*, 1899.
71. Dewey, "Education Direct and Indirect," MW 3: 247. Address at the Francis W. Parker School, Chicago, January 1904.
72. *Ibid.*, 247.
73. Dewey, "How the Mind Learns," LW 17: 213. These ten lectures were delivered June 17-21, 1901. Although these lectures were delivered in 1901, the MW period, they are for some unknown reason placed in the LW.
74. Dewey does not distinguish between impulses, instincts, or tendencies and puts them all under the notion of appetites.
75. LW 17: 218.
76. MW 6: 395.
77. *Ibid.*, 401.
78. MW 6: 179.

79. Ibid., 401.

80. “This is typical Dewey when he talks about the curriculum and what is to be taught referring to ‘making a living’ is for the masses and only the rich get to have a ‘real’ or worthwhile education.” MW 9: 200.

81. Ibid., 204.

82. Ibid., 208.

83. Dewey, *The School and Society*, MW 1: 161-62.

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