

John Dewey's Conundrum: Can Democratic Schools Empower?

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Developed at the end of the 1900s, largely in his short-lived Laboratory School at the University of Chicago, John Dewey's vision of democratic education has remained influential for over a century. Yet, as he grew older Dewey himself increasingly lost faith in the ability of schools, alone, to create a more democratic society. Drawing on data available from the Laboratory School, this paper expands upon Dewey's concerns. Ultimately, I argue that Dewey's educational approach failed to equip students to act effectively in the world as it was (and still is), and, further, that Dewey's model of democracy, while extremely useful, is nonetheless inadequate to serve the varied needs of a diverse and contentious society.

INTRODUCTION

John Dewey is probably the most famous educational philosopher America has produced, and his work continues to influence nearly every corner of the field of education. He is a towering and often misunderstood figure in the history of American education. As Herbert Kliebard (1995) pointed out, he doesn't quite belong to any particular movement or approach, "somehow hovering over the struggle," during and after his lifetime, "rather than . . . belonging to any particular side" (p. xvi). In fact, there is the sense in Kliebard and elsewhere that it was fundamentally the failure of most mainstream reformers of his day to "really" understand Dewey's model that doomed them to failure. Today, there is yet another resurgence of interest in Dewey and his educational vision; and those who aim to create more democratic schools often look to Dewey as a primary example. Yet, as he grew older Dewey himself increasingly lost faith in the ability of democratic schooling, alone, to equip citizens with the collective practices that would allow them to make their society a better place. This paper expands on Dewey's concerns, mapping out some of the tensions in his writings that, I argue, he was never ultimately able to overcome, tensions that have implications for current efforts to promote democratic education.

From 1896 to 1904, Dewey created and directed one of the most important educational experiments of this century—the Laboratory School at the

University of Chicago. This school is perceived by most scholars as one of the pinnacles of progressive education. In fact, Lauren Tanner's 1997 book on the School used the metaphor of "Brigadoon" to express her desire to bring the school forward, unchanged, in time, and her conviction that it would rival the most advanced schools today. Dewey created the School to give him a place to work with actual students in developing his vision of education; and although his time there was cut short by a disagreement with the president of the University of Chicago, the years he spent with the School appear to represent the only time in his life when he had significant experience with the day-to-day activities of an actual school. Because it was a laboratory, it was never meant to represent some static model of an ideal school. Dewey argued, however, that it is from our experiences that we develop our theories about the world; and it was largely through his efforts in the Laboratory School that he refined his theoretical vision of democratic education. Thus, while we can never know what changes Dewey might have made had he remained at the University of Chicago, it nonetheless makes sense to look closely at what Dewey and his teachers learned to do as a result of their experience in the Laboratory School. Thus, this paper draws extensively from published material about the School.¹

I begin by exploring the ways Dewey and the teachers conceptualized and actually engaged in efforts to release the "powers" of individuals in the Laboratory School.² I then examine how Dewey and the teachers attempted to direct these individual powers to collective and socially productive ends. In both cases, I argue that the School did not completely succeed in achieving its most cherished goals, ultimately preparing students for a society that did not (and still does not) exist, perhaps because Dewey felt he was participating in an already ongoing process of social change. After examining Dewey's democratic model in more detail, I look to the work of Maxine Greene (1982, 1988, 1997) for insights that might strengthen any attempt to apply this model to education. Even with Greene's assistance, however, I argue that Dewey's model of democratic schooling ultimately reflects the ways of being of particular classes and cultures of his time and that we must move fundamentally beyond the vision he developed in his lifetime if we are to be true to the spirit of his pragmatic project.³

DEVELOPING POWERS OF INQUIRY IN INDIVIDUALS

Below, I sketch out Dewey's understanding of the nature of knowledge and processes of individual learning, showing how Deweyan pedagogy in the Laboratory School was designed to foster individuals who actively engaged with obstacles, changing themselves and their environment in the process. I leave Dewey's efforts to orient students to shared social ends for the next section. While the learning discussed in this section derives from inter-

action with others in a social and “natural” environment, it aims at the release of individual abilities that are not necessarily focused on common projects or situated in collaborative action. Dewey noted, in fact, that “the school was overweighted, especially in the earlier years, on the ‘individualistic side’ in consequence of the fact that in order to get data upon which we could act, it was necessary to give too much liberty of action rather than to impose too much restriction” (cited in Mayhew and Edwards, 1936, pp. 467–468), even though, as I note in the next section, social service was the School’s ultimate goal.

Dewey was convinced that understanding something involves seeing how it is connected with other things and events. We can’t simply tell students about these connections, however. Knowledge, Dewey (1916) argued, cannot be transferred directly “as an idea from one person to another” (p. 159). It is only by having an actual experience, “trying to do something and having the thing perceptibly do something to one in return” (p. 153) that we can begin to understand something (Dewey, 1972). Authentic learning thus happens in the midst of purposeful activity, in which knowledge enters “as a factor into an activity pursued for its own sake” (Dewey, 1916, p. 208).

Learning through interactive experience of this kind does not produce merely conscious understandings of connections, however. Instead, most learning involves the formation of what Dewey called a “habit,” which he defined as “an ability to use natural conditions as means to ends. It is an *active* control of the environment” (Dewey, 1916, p. 46, italics mine). Being able to drive or play the piano would be “habits” in this sense, representing practical skills that give one some control over aspects of one’s environment. In fact, Dewey (1988c) argued that habits are largely what “constitute the self” as our “conscious estimates of what is worth while and what is not are due to standards of which we are not conscious at all” (Dewey, 1916, p. 18). A habit, in this sense, is not passive, then; instead it is “an *inclination*. . . . It actively seeks for occasions to pass into full operation” (p. 48). Habits that are not provided with outlets for use in daily activity eventually degrade or disintegrate, and the impulses they were meant to direct may eventually sublimate into other forms of (often unproductive) activity (see Dewey, 1916, p. 349, and Dewey, 1988c, p. 110). Dewey continually emphasized, then, that the habits promoted in schools must enhance students’ ability to respond to the world *the way it is*, providing them with increased control over the course of their lives and the power to contribute as effective citizens.⁴

Part of the reason habits give individuals control over the environment is that they treat “new occurrences as if they were identical with old ones,” even though “situations do not literally repeat themselves.” This means, however, that a habit only “suffices . . . when the different or novel element is negligible for present purposes” (Dewey, 1916, p. 226). When the novel

element in a situation is too important to ignore, reflection, reason, and abstraction—thinking—come into play as one struggles to bring a problematic situation back into harmony, a process that involves changing not only the environment but also one's habits—one's self (Dewey, 1988c, p. 150). If we never encountered obstacles to our habitual activity, difficulties that our habits could not overcome, we would never be required to (would never learn to) think.

It should be no surprise, then, that Dewey's educational practice revolves around *the provision of obstacles*, problems, for children to conceptualize and then solve, disposing them to seek out obstacles in their environment that they might otherwise have ignored. All obstacles are not equally good for educational purposes, however. Effective schooling, Dewey argued, must begin with the interests of a child, using them as resources to develop problems for the child to grapple with, something that requires constant and careful planning on the part of teachers.

Dewey often represented his theory of education as one founded in "science." As many have pointed out, however, what he meant by science was much broader than this term commonly refers to. In fact, Dewey's (1916) general vision of the scientific attitude has much in common with what Hans-Georg Gadamer (1987) and others have called the "hermeneutic circle," in which people draw on their own prior experience in order to make sense of a new situation (see also Garrison, 1996). An *everyday* inquirer, in this sense, draws on her past experiences and knowledge in order to make sense of a problematic present situation. She first deliberates about the possible actions she can take, imagining the consequences that could arise from each possible action before she arrives at a hypothesis (see Dewey, 1988c, chap. 17). Ultimately, however, she must act into the relative unknown, suffering the results of her actions and learning things about the world that will inform yet future actions. To foster this mode of inquiry, Dewey and his teachers worked to ensure a continuity between the activities the students engaged in, structuring tasks so that "control gained by the child in one situation might be carried on to the next, thus insuring continuity of experience, a habit of initiative, and increasing skill in the use of the experimental method" (Mayhew and Edwards, 1936, p. 20).

As a student with what he called an "aim in view" works on her project, her aims invariably change and develop as she learns more about her situation. She must constantly alter her goals to fit her current circumstances and to take account of what she learns through activity. Thus Dewey argued that "the act of striving to realize it [an aim] tests its worth" (Dewey, 1916, p. 104), promoting change not just in means but in the aims themselves. In this way, Dewey hoped not only that this inquiring approach to life would increase society's ability to achieve goals it had already set, but that it would also help society discover new and more democratic aims. A

crucial aspect of the kind of individual change and growth Dewey envisioned, then, was not just in improved *means* but in improved *desires* as well.⁵

Because of arguments I make in the sections that follow, it is important to look for a moment at Dewey's vision of "scientific" knowledge and activity that goes beyond this everyday process of inquiry. The specialized knowledge of practicing scientists, he argued, is different from everyday, "practical" modes of knowledge because it operates in an essentially imaginary world of systematic abstraction. Scientific knowledge is not "better" knowledge than that organized in a practical manner, however; it is only better given the particular purposes to which scientists intend to put it. And the danger inherent in the scientific representation of knowledge is that the very thing that makes it so useful for science "renders its results, taken by themselves, remote from ordinary experience" (Dewey, 1916, p. 189). Because science "aims to free an experience from all which is purely personal and strictly immediate . . . whatever is unique in the situation, since dependent upon the particularities of the individual and the coincidence of circumstance, is not available for others" (p. 226). In other words, the very structure of scientific knowledge *hides* "its connections with the material of everyday life" (p. 220) and practice. Thus, science as it is usually taught in school can easily become a "strange world" that has little or no relation to students' lives.

Because of its abstract nature, applying scientific knowledge to any specific context is not straightforward. And the case of scientific knowledge is only a special example of a problem that arises whenever knowledge from one context is applied to a different one. As I noted above, *every* effort to understand a concrete situation that goes beyond the capacities of one's habits requires one to imagine the kinds of connections that might be possible, the kinds of consequences that might come from action. Every situation is unique, and it is only through imagination, or by ignoring the differences between situations, that we can apply knowledge from one situation to another (Dewey, 1916, pp. 65, 226). Dewey saw the scientific activity of scientists, then, as involving the abstraction of general, symbolic patterns from particular experiences, creating knowledge that must be constantly appropriated creatively back into particular contexts if it is to be practically useful.

Imagination of this kind, it is crucial to note, was not a "mass" phenomenon for Dewey. He believed that each imagining individual was unique, with at least the potential for her own unique way of seeing the world. "Each individual," Dewey (1916) argued, "constitutes his own class" (p. 190). In *Human Nature and Conduct*,⁶ for example, he described a number of sources of distinctiveness in individuals. First, on the most basic level, people are distinctive from birth simply because of their individual physiologies

(Dewey, 1988c, p. 61). Second, every effort to transmit the customs of a society to the next generation cannot help but result in diffusion and changes in these customs; for example, because different people with different habits educate each new member of society, each child is taught something at least slightly different than any other (p. 69). Finally, as an individual moves through the world, she faces conflicts that arise from a myriad of different sources, including encounters with obstacles, efforts to communicate with people who are different from her, and conflicts between different habits. "Conflict of habits," for example, "releases impulsive activities which in their manifestation require a modification of habit, of custom and convention" (p. 62) in unpredictable ways.⁷ Individuality, and the development of distinction throughout one's lifetime, then, is a piecemeal, slow process. While "wholesale revolt" against one's own habits or the habits of one's community is simply impossible, complete stasis and homogeneity is impossible as well.

Despite Dewey's belief in individuality, however, he rejected entirely the idea of the transcendental "Enlightenment" individual who exists outside associations with other people and the environment. Individuality, for him, meant "a *distinctive* way of behaving in conjunction and *connection* with other distinctive ways of action, not a self-enclosed way of acting independent of everything else" (Dewey, 1927, p. 188; Westbrook, 1991, p. 364). The very idea of a "residual" individual outside of all associations was simply absurd to Dewey. In fact, Dewey (1927) argued that an individual is different in every different association he is a part of, and that "he can be contrasted with *himself* as he behaves in other connections" (pp. 189). Thus, because Dewey (1916) saw individuals as made up of multiple "selves," he understood another goal of schooling to be the promotion of balance and integration across an individual's multiple associations (pp. 307–310).

While Dewey argued that individual diversity is a given because of the different experiences each individual has, however, he worried that this uniqueness could *not matter* without both an *education* that trains individuals to draw on their unique backgrounds as they respond to novel events, and an *environment* that continually encourages and nurtures such individual contributions. "An individual may lose his individuality," he warned, "for individuals become imprisoned in routine and fall to the level of mechanisms" (Dewey, 1988c, p. 112). "For the most part," he noted, "adults have given training rather than education." And such "an impatient, premature mechanization of impulsive activity after the fixed pattern of adult habits of thought and affection has been desired" (Dewey, 1988c, p. 70) destroys the "plasticity" upon which intelligent adaptation to one's environment depends. In opposition to this approach, he argued that the development of active distinctiveness in individuals, properly directed, instead of the enforcement of rigidity, would increase the potential for "social service" to the larger

community. In fact, he felt that "the intellectual variations of the individual in observation, imagination, judgment, and invention are simply the agencies of social progress, just as conformity to habit is the agency of social conservation" (Dewey, 1916, p. 297). An education that encouraged individuality among children, therefore, simply served the self-interest of society.

From what little we know from the students of the Laboratory School (Mayhew and Edwards, 1936), the skills the children gained in grappling creatively and systematically in this way with a range of obstacles in their own lives appears to have served them to some extent in their lives outside the school. One student reported, for example, that as a group they did "not vacillate and flounder under unstable emotions; they go ahead and work out the problem" (p. 406) in the face of emergencies. But Dewey was not simply trying to prepare students for the world, especially the work world, *as it was*. He argued that in society the "division of labor . . . is reduced to a mechanical routine unless workers," like the children in the Laboratory School, can "see the technical, intellectual, and social relationships involved in what they do, and engage in their work because of the motivation furnished by such perceptions" (Dewey, 1916, p. 85). He hoped that by teaching his students to perceive the relationships between their individual activities and the processes and structures of the larger society, he could help to free them from it, helping them participate in changing this reality, especially in their working lives.

This already begins to bring us to the larger social goals Dewey's pedagogy aimed at, because of his efforts to promote connections between the activities within the school and the world beyond it. His central mechanism for this drew on what he called "occupations," which provided the central "themes" for the school. For example, the teachers might engage the students in a discussion of farming and its connection to their own lives. The children might then visit a farm and be encouraged to create their own farm at the school. Planning the farm would require mathematics through measuring, it would require learning about how flour was made, it encouraged investigations into the chemistry of the products they produced, the kinds of climates and geographies in which their plants and others grew, the ways products were transported to market, and so on. Because the children engaged in activities that reflected the daily activities going on outside of the school in their homes, in the community, in business, industry, and so forth, the children continually worked towards goals relevant to the entire society, tracing consequences and connections from their local acts into distant operations of society. The students did not just grow wheat, but learned as well about the transportation system that brought it to market, the retail system that distributed it to individual families, and the cooking processes that turned it into bread. Students thus learned to relate their individual (and collective) activities to distant goals.

But as Dewey well knew (and wrote about many times over the years), drawing, for example, on his experiences with Jane Addams at Hull House as well as his initial introduction to Chicago, which coincided with the violent and largely unsuccessful Pullman strike, the relatively free and flexible structure of daily activity within the Laboratory School was largely *unrepresentative* of daily activity beyond the school, especially in the work environment. Therefore, the lessons learned in the School were only partially applicable to his students' actual lives (Westbrook, 1991, chap. 3, 4). Dewey (1991) argued "that there should be a natural connection of the everyday life of the child with the business environment around him, and that it is the affair of the school to clarify and liberalize this connection" (p. 76), but "clarifying" the connection for children could not, by itself, "liberalize" the environment of work in the world beyond the school. As I note below, Dewey appeared to believe his efforts in the Laboratory School were only a part of a larger process of change already taking place in the larger society. Without this accompanying change, the children's ability to *perceive* connections between their own activities and the larger structure of society would have found few contexts in which these perceptions might be transformed into concrete *action*, especially in the economic aspects of their lives.

THE LABORATORY SCHOOL AND HABITS OF COMMUNITY

Until now, I have focused on Dewey's analysis of how the diverse powers of individuals might be released through interaction with their environment. However, as Dewey was careful to explain, "the social phase of education [in the Laboratory School] was put first" (cited in Mayhew and Edwards, 1936, p. 467). Dewey's general plan was to make his school (and ultimately schools in general) a miniature example of the kind of society he wished to promote—a society engaged in a continual process of democratic joint inquiry, a "planning" society that collaboratively adjusted itself and its shared goals to a constantly changing environment, aiming always to deepen the possibilities for actualizing individual capacities in the midst of collective efforts.

A range of different approaches were used in the Laboratory School to ensure that nearly all activities encouraged cooperative activity and "joint inquiry." For example, Mayhew and Edwards (1936) reported that the four year olds "preferred to play alone, but with skillful management the climbing, jumping, running, and rolling were guided into group games where the children learned to accommodate themselves to others and to express themselves in the presence of others" (p. 63). Therefore, "each child came to see that orderly self-direction in his activity was essential to group effort. . . . The 'good' way of doing things developed in each situation, and the best

order of proceeding with the activity was formulated by teachers and children as a result of group thought" (p. 71).

In each case, teachers drew obstacles for groups of students to overcome from the students' own interests, fostering situations that required joint efforts of the collective to succeed. Each student was given many opportunities "to get from and exchange with others his store of experience, his range of information" (Mayhew and Edwards, 1936, p. 79). The students' efforts to build a clubhouse together were perhaps the most paradigmatic moment of this effort in the Laboratory Schools. As Mayhew and Edwards told it, the older children initially attempted to build the clubhouse alone, but

as the work went on Group X realized that what they had undertaken was beyond their own powers to accomplish, and little by little the whole school was drawn into cooperative effort to finish the building. . . . Because of its purpose, to provide a home for their own clubs and interests, it drew together many groups and ages and performed a distinctly ethical and social service. It ironed out many evidences of an unsocial and cliquish spirit which had begun to appear in the club movement." (pp. 232–233)

The clubhouse brought the entire school together to engage in a project requiring the creative effort of each individual, while creating a continual series of problems to overcome that required the students to work together in a process of joint inquiry to solve them. Social problems of group difference appear often to have been solved in the Laboratory School in this fashion, by engaging the students in common projects that required these differences and conflicts to be overcome if they were to succeed.⁸

Norms were slowly developed in the school, and the teachers reported that "there was a sense of security born from years of working in and with the group, a trust in the efficacy of cooperative action for the reconstruction of experience" (Mayhew and Edwards, 1936, p. 204). Everyone in the school shared these norms, and the teachers were ready to step in when there were problems, even going to the extent of temporarily removing students from the larger community when they could not cooperate effectively (p. 214). It is important to emphasize the extent to which these activities were initiated and guided by the often subtle efforts of the teachers, something Dewey felt later "progressive" educators had often missed.⁹ Protected by the teachers, children learned that in this micro-community they could trust others to act in a collaborative manner on the common projects they engaged in.

This stress on cooperative activity did not mean that Dewey or the teachers had some unachievable utopian vision, however. Students were led to

see that some people made better leaders at different times, that different children had different skills and aptitudes for different activities (Mayhew and Edwards, 1936, pp. 103, 157), and competition was not entirely outlawed (p. 150). In fact, through their group projects, the children discovered “new powers of both individuals and groups, new ways of cooperation and association” (p. 98), exploring a range of different approaches to social organization and learning how these different modes served different needs. The building of the clubhouse, for example, engaged the students in the creation and development over time of a range of different organizational strategies in order to ensure that they could effectively complete their project and organize its use after it was completed. Always, however, more hierarchical and more habitual forms of organization appear to have remained ultimately responsive to the process of collaborative democratic inquiry, as the teachers stressed the importance of attending to the contributions of each participant and the effects that emanated from the actions of individuals and the group into the environment. As Mayhew and Edwards (1936) noted, “conversation was the means of developing and directing experiences and enterprises in all the classrooms. . . . Each day’s recitation was a debate, a discussion of the pros and cons of the next step in the group’s activity” (p. 339). The process of democratic joint inquiry directed all other activity in the school.

It is perhaps in the Laboratory School’s approach to teaching history, focused as it was on economic issues, that the way students learned “moral motives and relations” in the school is shown most clearly. As Robert Westbrook (1991) pointed out, “the subject to which [Dewey] devoted the most attention [in his educational writings] was not the sciences, but *history*, because he believed that history was ‘the most effective conscious tool’ for moral instruction” (p. 171). Dewey’s was a very particular take on historical pedagogy, however, drawn largely by analogy from his understanding of science. He felt that the study of history “must be an indirect sociology—a study of society which lays bear its process of becoming and its modes of organization” (Dewey, 1988c, vol. 1, p. 192). The chaff of history, the specific details that might confuse and distract children from the key processes by which people adapted creatively to their environment, was generally eliminated. For Dewey, this meant that political history should be subordinated to economic history because “economic history is more human, more democratic, and hence more liberalizing than political history. It deals not with the rise and fall of principalities and powers, but with the growth of the effective liberties, through command of nature, of the common man for whom powers and principalities exist” (Dewey, 1916, pp. 215–216). History taught in this way served a clear *moral* goal, as history became “the record of how man learned to think” (Mayhew and Edwards, 1936, p. 314) in the manner Dewey felt everyone should. Dewey thus freely acknowl-

edged that "'Historical' material was subordinated to [the] maintenance of the community or cooperative group in which each child was to participate" (cited in Mayhew and Edwards, 1936, p. 473).

As was the general pattern in the School, history was taught to children through the careful provision of obstacles in often very generalized imagined situations that children explored through play, drama, and the material reconstruction of aspects of the conditions of earlier times (Runyon, 1906). The youngest children began not with an exploration of the past, but with an "occupational" exploration of the present. Slightly older children imagined that they were "primitive" peoples, naked and with no material possessions. With their imagined bare hands they had to overcome obstacles in their environment using the material resources made available to them. Later, the children imagined they were "Phoenicians," forced by the spare conditions of their local surroundings to develop trading relations with other peoples. As they explored this "history" the children invented new tools in response to challenges created by the conditions they faced, creating stone axes, bows and arrows, units of measure, new kinds of ships, and systems of symbols to expedite trading.

As the children grew older, the material of history became less general and "local conditions and the definite activities of particular bodies of people became prominent" (Dewey, 1900, p. 203). Specific political institutions and issues were left for these later years. Yet these new stages appear to have built relatively seamlessly on the earlier ones, in that the more specific history generally provided more detailed information that the children could draw upon in their reenactments. In the later stages, as in the earlier ones, children used the actual events of history as "culminating touches to a series of conditions and struggles which the child had previously realized in more specific form" through imaginative recreation (Dewey, 1900, p. 201; Runyon, 1906, p. 54).¹⁰

"Intelligence" of a Deweyan sort generally reigned supreme in these imaginary contexts. When an imagined migrating tribe entered another tribe's territory during a migration, for example, "the two tribes consolidated and arranged to unite their forces, since less men would be needed to watch the sheep" (Mayhew and Edwards, 1936, p. 106). The children worried that this would be difficult, and that if the tribes tried to separate they couldn't figure out whose sheep were whose, working through this problem by means of an "examination of the character of shepherd life and the conditions and situations likely to cause difficulty" (p. 107).¹¹ The children took themselves as young scientific thinkers into the past, and dealt with problems in a logical, cooperative way, often even when they faced hostile foreign tribes. Other tribes, they often assumed, would operate under the same cultural "intelligence" they possessed, because, of course, the other tribes, if not entirely imaginary, were their classmates.

It is important not to overstate the extent to which the pedagogy of the Laboratory School followed the vision given in some of Dewey's writings on the subject. Yet, while there are indications in Mayhew and Edwards' (1936) book and elsewhere that the study of history in the Laboratory School touched on less progressive and more culturally specific aspects of history, these appear not to be a central force in published descriptions of the activities the children engaged in or in the pedagogy of history Dewey promoted in his pedagogical writings. By framing the content and context of historical events in this way, however, Dewey and the teachers ran the risk that students would not understand the contingency, complexity, and unpredictability of social change. The emphasis placed on intelligent responses to natural and economic conditions as the clearly identifiable engines of historical and social change could obscure the extent to which different cultures can operate under fundamentally different worldviews, constructing their environments through very different filters than our own (Mills, 1964, p. 378). Thus the Laboratory School's focus on intelligent responses to material conditions may have made the students less responsive to the complex cultural forces that operate in the "real" world. For example, Mayhew and Edwards (1936) reported that the students "were much amused at the fact that, after it [feudalism] had been discarded in the old country because it did not work, people could be so stupid as to establish it in this country" (p. 169); they were surprised, at this point, when people did not respond "intelligently" (to their conditions).

Children in the Laboratory School, therefore, learned in a cooperative environment that was deeply separated from the social realities of the "mean city" of turn-of-the-century Chicago at the same time as they learned a history designed to explain the development of their own cooperative world (and not of the complex society outside). They operated in a sheltered world, an environment structured carefully to reward collaborative activity, a community where, over a long period of time, students built a set of common norms of action and trust. They did not have to cooperate with people who were fundamentally different from them, who occupied differential positions of power, who represented fundamentally different interests and cultures. Both the social and the natural environment created by the teachers presented obstacles that lent themselves to scientific inquiry and Deweyan intelligence. This relative isolation (and apparent "innocence" [Thompson, 1998]) was surely exacerbated by the fact that most students came from professional and academic, almost certainly white, families (Westbrook, 1991). It is not at all surprising, then, that Mayhew and Edwards (1936), who maintained contact with a number of the Laboratory School children, reported that "society brings both shock and conflict to a young person thus trained. . . . His attempts to use intelligent action for

social purposes are thwarted and balked by the competitive antisocial spirit and dominant selfishness in society as it is" (Mayhew and Edwards, 1936, p. 439; Westbrook, 1991, p. 111).¹²

At the end of *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1916) noted two fundamental criteria for democratic schools. First, the school must itself be a vibrant community in which "playgrounds, shops, workrooms, laboratories not only direct the active tendencies of youth, but they involve intercourse, communication, and cooperation" (p. 358). The school should be a miniature example of the kind of democratic community Dewey envisioned for the larger society. Second, "the learning in school should be continuous with that out of school. There should be a free interplay between the two." He noted the danger of a school where the "social life would no more represent or typify that of the world beyond the school walls than that of a monastery" (p. 358). Yet, as Robert Floden, Margaret Buchmann, and John R. Schwille (1987) have argued, Dewey was also fundamentally committed to the need for schools to be places where students broke with the commonsense beliefs inherent in everyday activity beyond the school. Dewey saw schools as places where students should learn how to *change* their society. Dewey's point, then, was not that what happens in the school must be the *same* as what happens in the outside world, but instead that what students learn in schools must be useful in the activities they will engage in when they leave the school. To the extent to which the social habits learned by the children in the Laboratory School had limited application in the world they actually entered, however, their "effective liberty" was not enhanced, and the School failed to achieve Dewey's most fundamental aims for education.

YOU CAN'T CHANGE LARGER SOCIETY THROUGH SCHOOLS ALONE

As Westbrook and others have pointed out, in the years after he left the Laboratory School, Dewey increasingly lost his faith "that schools can be the *main* agency" (Westbrook, 1991, p. 508) in changing society, although his vision of what such a democratic education should look like did not significantly shift over this period. In fact, despite some of his early rhetoric it is likely that Dewey never thought that schools could change society single-handedly. For example, in a lecture originally given to the parents of the Laboratory School children, he argued that his approach to schooling was important because it could be *connected* with what he perceived then as "the general march of events" in which it had the potential to "appear as part and parcel of the whole social evolution, and, in its more general features, at least, as inevitable" (Dewey, 1991). I think as he began to realize that society was not evolving in the manner he wished, his focus on schools

appeared increasingly problematic, given that it ignored “the fact that school education is but one educational agency out of many, and at the best is in some respects a minor educational force” (Dewey, 1981–1990, vol. 11, p. 414) in society. Even as he wrote *Democracy and Education* (Dewey, 1916), a decade after he left the Laboratory School, he had begun to understand that “the democratic reconstruction of American society he envisioned would not take place simply by a revolution in the classroom” (Westbrook, 1991, p. 192).

In fact, Dewey was fundamentally a “meliorist.” He believed in progress as something that “is cumulative, a step forward here, a bit of improvement there. It takes place day by day, and results from the ways in which individual persons deal with particular situations. . . . It is made piecemeal, not all at once” (Westbrook, 1991, p. 245). Dewey (1988b) felt, as he noted in one of his later works, that “democracy can be served only by the slow day by day adoption and contagious diffusion in every phase of our common life of methods that are identical with the ends to be reached” (p. 187). The problem was that even in this gradualist, “diffusion” oriented approach, success required that there be environments in which new dispositions, new modes of interaction with others could actually *appear* in individuals’ daily practices. Otherwise, the impulses tied up by habits developed in the school would be sublimated into other areas, other activities.

In the years after Dewey left the Laboratory School and the University of Chicago, he slowly began to seek a larger “educational” role in the media, as well as a more extensive “political” role in a range of different associations, attempting to influence the educative forces that operated ubiquitously in the daily lives of Americans. In his later works, for example, he often discussed the educative power of the media, noting the impediments it can place in the way of progress when it consists of propaganda and mere entertainment. Of course, this was no new issue for Dewey—as Westbrook (1991) pointed out, his comments on the media in *The Public and Its Problems*, in 1927, were reminiscent of an earlier abortive effort to create an “educative” newspaper, *Thought News*, in the 1890s (p. 311). The central obstacle Dewey saw in the way of a more just society, however, was the structure of the economy and not the media or politics. While he noted that “there is no basis whatever . . . for the belief that a complete economic change will produce of itself the mental, moral, and cultural changes that are necessary for its enduring success” (Dewey, 1981–1990, vol. 11, p. 414), he argued that *without* such change, the possibilities for other aspects of social advancement were largely blocked.

In the last decades of his career, still struggling to find a way for schools to participate in social change, he presented a number of different and conflicting possibilities for schools in a largely intransigent society. In a more upbeat essay, for example, reminiscent of his comments to the parents of the Laboratory School, he argued that since social change is mul-

tiple and contradictory, schools should ally themselves with “the newer scientific, technological, and cultural forces that are producing change in the old order; [educators] may estimate the direction in which they are moving and their outcome if they are given freer play, and see what can be done to make schools their ally” (Dewey, 1981–1990, vol. 11, p. 410). If all of society was not changing in the right direction, he thought, perhaps there were nonetheless currents of change that could be teased out and enhanced.

Even this relatively strategic vision of schools’ potential contribution to change was, I think he knew, still extremely problematic. And elsewhere he wrote what can be seen as a damning critique of any school-based approach to social change. “Educators here and there are awake to the need of discovering vocational and occupational abilities and to the need of adjusting the school system to build upon what is discovered,” he wrote, but

the whole existing industrial system tends to nullify in large measure the effects of these efforts even when they are made. The problem of the adjustment of individual capacities and their development to actual occupations is not a one-sided or unilateral one. It is bilateral and reciprocal. It is a matter . . . of the structure of the industrial system. . . . [W]hat assurance is there in the existing system that there will be opportunity to use their gifts and the education they have obtained? As far as the mass is concerned, we are now putting the social cart before the social horse. (Dewey, 1981–1990, vol. 13, pp. 318–319)

In this moment of despair for the power of schools, he pointed out what was, I think, implicit in his educational work from the beginning.

Dewey increasingly saw other problems, as well, with using schools as sites for democratic change. Westbrook noted, for example, that as Dewey grew older he “more openly acknowledged that schools were inextricably tied to prevailing structures of power and therefore extremely difficult to transform into agencies of democratic reform” (Westbrook, 1991, p. 509). Dewey (1916) pointed out, in addition, that democratic action was only possible where individuals had the minimum resources that would enable them to engage in it (p. 98). I tend to bracket these additional problems here, however. I discuss schools as if they were places where such democratic reforms could be put into effect in an effort to understand the limits of such Deweyan reforms, regardless of whether we know how to initiate them on a large scale. The fact that schools cannot, alone, change society does not release us from the responsibility for imagining how schools might develop “effective” democratic citizens, even if this can only happen on a small scale in individual schools.

Dewey and others like him increasingly realized that “because political life and fundamental cultural values are intertwined, they must change

together” (Kloppenber, 1986, p. 414). As Ryan (1995) noted, in Dewey’s last major political book, *Freedom and Culture*, “the prospect Dewey offers is daunting. We are encouraged to seek a multi-causal, culturally and historically sensitive recipe for a liberal-democratic society built on a socialized economy, but we are told it will be exceedingly difficult” (p. 327). If we agree with the conclusions Dewey seems to have reached at the end of his life, then as educators there appears to be little reason to think we can empower students to engage in democratic social action. Below, however, I argue that Dewey’s thought contained the seeds of a different path for schools than the one he followed in the Laboratory School that at least begins to answer some of the limitations of his vision. But in order to develop more empowering approaches to pedagogy that remain true to Dewey’s vision of what society should aspire to it is important first to explore in more detail what Dewey meant by a “democratic” community.

DEWEY’S VISION OF COMMUNITY AND DEMOCRACY

From early in his philosophical career Dewey was a thorough pragmatist, at least theoretically open to the possibility that even the most cherished of his values might need to change in response to what he learned through events and actions in the world. He was careful to note, for example, that there is no abstract “ideal” democracy that can be established outside of the demands of actual contexts.¹³ Yet, at the same time, there is an underlying tension between this pragmatism and his core faith in a particular vision of democracy. Fundamentally, Dewey was committed to the enhancement of the active, *effective*, distinctiveness of individuals in the context of communally shared projects, something that did not significantly change from the time of the Laboratory School. Thus, despite his rejection of abstract visions of democracy, the outlines of a model of democracy can nonetheless be discerned in his work.

James Campbell (1995) noted that Dewey presented three different basic characteristics that together create “community”: “*interaction or association, shared action, and shared values*” (pp. 174–175). As Campbell knew, however, there are important differences between this general vision of community and Dewey’s hopes for a *democratic* community.

First of all, Dewey (1916) was quite clear that *association* is fundamental to *any* human community—even the worst communities. As I have already noted, for Dewey the very idea of a residual individual outside of all associations was absurd. In ideal communities, however, these associations turn into consciously *shared action*. Democratic communities are ones where I refer my action to that of others and where others’ actions give direction to mine (p. 87). In joint action, the good towards which a group aims, and the

obstacles that prevent the achievement of this good, give direction to the actions of the participants in a group (p. 33).

Dewey (1916) accepted the importance of the functional differentiation of different groups serving different needs, and he also promoted a kind of cultural diversity. The aim of schools, and the ethical goal of human society, was not to dissolve differences between groups, but to “coordinate” within the disposition of each individual the diverse influences of the various social environments into which he enters” (p. 22), allowing individuals to develop an integrated sense of self despite the many different roles they play in the different groups they participate in. As J. Christopher Eisle (1983) has argued, Dewey clearly promoted a kind of cultural diversity, rejecting any “melting-pot” approach (p. 153). There are limits to his acceptance of diversity, however, because, as Spencer J. Maxcy (1984) has pointed out, Dewey did not approve of groups that seek to isolate themselves, that refuse to interact with other groups and the environment. He celebrated differences between groups, but only as long as lines of communication remained open between them. Differentiation, both of individuals given their multiple roles in society and of groups, served an important function in society only if they remained responsive to a larger organic unity (Dewey, 1916, p. 86). Thus, Dewey vehemently opposed isolation and any limits on free exchange among groups, arguing that better societies are the ones with more “numerous and varied interests,” and “full and free interplay” between groups. An organic unity of an individual’s multiple selves and of a society’s multiple associations was crucial to his vision of democracy.

While Dewey (1988b) often focused on the achievement of good consequences through joint inquiry as central to the success of this kind of conscious community, his most fundamental aim was the promotion of democracy itself (vol. 13, p. 154). Although he faced moments of desperation, when, for example, he tried to turn what he saw as the United States’ inevitable entry into World War I into a positive event that might ultimately promote a more international democracy, Dewey generally rejected efforts to achieve good consequences through non-democratic action.¹⁴ “*The fundamental principle of democracy,*” he argued, “*is that the ends of freedom and individuality for all can be attained only by means that accord with those ends*” (cited in Campbell, 1988, p. 135). If a community acts non-democratically, it will foster non-democratic habits of action, and thus eliminate the possibility of achieving the very goal for which it ultimately strives.

The third element Campbell presented as central to Dewey’s conception of community is more difficult to grapple with. Certainly Dewey (1916) noted that *shared values*, shared habits of action and thought, are an inescapable part of human society. He said, for example, that “to have the same ideas about things which others have, to be like-minded with them, and thus to be really members of a social group, is therefore to attach the same

meanings to things and to acts which others attach. Otherwise there is no common understanding and no community life” (p. 30). In some of his discussions of community, there was much that is reminiscent of more current “communitarian” scholars like Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) who have argued in different ways for the deepening of what I will call shared “background” practices, essentially communal habits of action, as a tool for strengthening community. Dewey repeatedly warned, for example, that one of the most crucial problems of our current society is that our shared habits are often left over from previous times and have become obsolete, obstructing more productive responses to a changing environment. One of the central aims of joint inquiry in community, for Dewey, was always the mutual adjustment of shared habits and the environment into harmony, and such adjustment was a continual byproduct of the joint activities students and teachers engaged in in the Laboratory School.

But Dewey’s vision of a democratic community was nonetheless fundamentally one in which distinctive individual action is the “engine” of positive social change. And as the individuals that make up a community become increasingly unique, the collective will have fewer routine habits. Distinct individuals will increasingly appropriate common habits in unique ways at the same time as they develop new and idiosyncratic habits through practical engagement with their environment. As their distinctiveness increases, the shared “background” of society must attenuate as these individuals make increasingly idiosyncratic contributions to joint activity. Of course, a society with *no* shared habits could not operate—common habits exist, Dewey argued, in order to free us from conscious attention to routine and well established issues in our environment, allowing us to focus on those issues that most need our attention. Even so, however, as a community approaches Dewey’s more “ideal” democratic model, the “bonds” that hold a community together will increasingly arise from the “foregrounded” joint activities.

Charles Taylor (1987) made a similar distinction between foreground issues and background habits that I think will help illuminate the comparison I am trying to describe here. Taylor distinguished between “intersubjective meaning” and “common meanings” in communities. *Intersubjective meaning*, he said, represents the transparently shared background practices of a community, while *common meanings* represent “the common reference points of all debate, communication, and all public life in society” (p. 60): They are what we talk *about*. Taylor argued that “common meanings are the basis of community. Inter-subjective meaning gives a people a common language to talk about social reality and a common understanding of certain norms, but only with common meanings does this common reference world contain significant common actions, celebrations, and feelings” (p. 60). Dewey’s vision of democracy, I argue, tends to shift the “meaning” base of

society from its unconsciously shared intersubjective background to a common and conscious foreground.

It is in Dewey's later works that I think he worked out in more philosophical terms the nature of the kind of community he promoted in the Laboratory School. In *The Public and Its Problems*, for example, Dewey (1927) argued that it was through shared "symbols," seen by all, that communities establish common aims and desires (p. 152). Although his discussion of symbols was vague in *Public*, in other works Dewey made a distinction between *scientific* symbols, which contain abstract generalizable knowledge that fits into a system, and more *artistic* symbols, which allow a conscious community to come into being.¹⁵ "The same word 'symbol,'" he wrote, "is used to designate expressions of abstract thought, as in mathematics, and also such things as a flag, crucifix, that embody deep social value and the meaning of historic faith and theological creed" (Dewey, 1934, p. 29). Artistic symbols, in contrast to scientific ones, *contain* an experience (p. 83) and stir emotions, acting as access points to a common and deeply felt history (Dewey, 1981, vol. 1, p. 289). While scientific symbols are tools for the achievement of ends, artistic symbols represent those ends themselves.¹⁶ "The presence of common or general factors in experience," Dewey (1934) said, "is an *effect* of art" (p. 286). Artistic symbols were Dewey's version of Taylor's "common" meanings.

As Dewey (1934) explained in *Art as Experience*, artistic objects intensify and deepen experience. Unlike science, art focuses on the contingent, the particular—it attempts to grasp the fundamental aspects of unrepeatable persons and events. In a manner similar to the "imagination" required to conduct inquiry or apply abstract science to a situation, to respond to a work of art we must put energy out into the experiencing (p. 53), we must contribute our own unique background knowledge to the act of interpretation. Therefore, "a new poem is created by every one who reads poetically" (p. 108). Art is the most perfect form of communication—but as in education, this communication does not simply allow one to "transfer" meanings from one person to another; instead, "*communication is the process of creating participation*, of making common what had been isolated and singular" (p. 244, italics mine).¹⁷ Artists do not communicate "messages" (p. 104) but instead create "experiences" that are seen differently by all who participate in them. As a community becomes increasingly democratic, then, the ground of community increasingly shifts from shared *background* habits to *foregrounded* and multiply interpreted "common" aesthetic meanings, even though the background shared habits always remain the bulk of any community's shared resources.

The common "symbols" that allow such conscious communities to come into being contain the hopes and desires, multiply interpreted, of a community; but these hopes and fears exist only because they indicate that

there are *barriers* to a community's self-becoming—otherwise there would be no need to consciously grapple with them. Dewey believed “communication which insures participation in a common understanding is one which secures similar emotional and intellectual dispositions—like ways of responding to expectations and requirements” (Dewey, 1916, p. 4), in part because the projects individuals work together on often represent efforts to bring their community's shared background habits into harmony with the constantly changing conditions of their environment. But if complete harmony were ever actually achieved, their conscious community would collapse. In fact, the example of the Laboratory School indicates that conscious communities of different sizes are constantly forming and dissolving as obstacles are discovered and overcome. The creation of the clubhouse, for example, was not only a culmination but also a demand for a new obstacle if the community created through its building was to be maintained. However, the existence of the clubhouse itself and its limited ability to serve all the needs that were put on it created yet another obstacle, as Dewey predicted, promoting new efforts at joint inquiry. Democratic communities, as Dewey understood them, are constantly reaching from the “actual” towards the “ideal” (Rockefeller, 1991, p. 539), and the ideals represented by the symbols that bring them into existence are never (*should* never be) entirely achieved.

In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1916) presented two key questions for interrogating democratic societies. First, “how numerous and varied are the interests which are consciously shared?” Second, “how full and free is the interplay with other forms of association?” (p. 83). The first encompassed the value of promoting individual uniqueness through engagement in shared efforts, since as conscious contacts and interests between individuals increase, individuals are increasingly called upon to respond distinctively to change in their environment. The second reflected his commitment to an entirely open and organically unified society. The most ideal democracies, then, are the ones that promote the most *effective* distinctiveness among their members through their participation in the largest number of projects of joint inquiry, and that, at the same time, have the fewest barriers of communication between different groups.

AVOIDING CONFLICT

Despite the power and subtlety of the model of democracy I have just sketched, a key limitation of the way Dewey and his teachers concretized this practice in the Laboratory School, and of the ways it tended to operate in his larger theoretical and political projects, was in their tendency to downplay the necessity of social conflict. I tend to agree with C. Wright Mills (1964) when he argued that Dewey's “model of action and reflection

serves to minimize the cleavage and power divisions *within society*, or put differently, it serves as a pervasive mode of posing the problem which locates all problems between *man and nature*, instead of between *men and men*,"¹⁸ in which "nature" includes the collective social/material environment produced by human history. While Dewey sometimes noted that social conflict could be productive, he generally argued that such conflict was not, ultimately, necessary. If people would only struggle together against *shared* obstacles, as the students had in their efforts to build a clubhouse, the illogical, obsolete habits that distort our relations with our environment and with others would also be reconstructed in the process without requiring conflict *between* people. In a celebration of the American frontier, for example, Dewey noted that "when men make their gains by fighting in common a wilderness, they have not the motive for mutual distrust which comes when they get ahead only by fighting one another." In his own time, however, he worried that "instead of sharing in a common fight against nature we are already starting to fight against one another, class against class, haves against have nots" (Dewey, 1976–1983, vol. 10, p. 207). It is just such an inclusive spirit that arises as a transparent byproduct of collaborative engagement with shared obstacles that Dewey sought in his writings and that he and the teachers promoted in the Laboratory School.

This requires, as Mills argued, however, a belief in "a relatively homogeneous community which does not harbor any chasms of structure and power not thoroughly ameliorative by discussion" (West, 1989), a complaint echoed by many other Dewey interpreters (for example, Ryan, 1995; Westbrook, 1991; Parringer, 1990; Gonzalez, 1982). As Ryan (1995) noted, "Dewey's philosophy was almost in principle antipathetic to the adversarial system in politics. . . . It was the role of brute power in political life that Dewey could never quite reconcile himself to" (pp. 245, 295) (see also, West, 1989, p. 102). Dewey downplayed the necessity of social conflict wherever possible, emphasizing, instead, the possibilities inherent in cooperation and the dangers entailed in the use of force or violence.¹⁹

Some have argued that we should look to Marx in an effort to respond to Dewey's discomfort with social conflict, noting, as Emily Robertson (1993) does, for example, the potential that could be released by combining "Marx's notions of the need for struggle with Dewey's rejection of violence and manipulation" (p. 372). I look, instead, to Greene (1982, 1988, 1997), who drew from Dewey (but also from others, like Hannah Arendt), in her effort to develop an approach to collective action that can grapple with such conflict but that nonetheless remains true to Dewey's general vision of collaborative democracy.

Greene (1982, 1988, 1997), often looked to Dewey's philosophy of art, and in fact her work could be read, in part, as an effort to integrate implications from Dewey's later aesthetically oriented work into his earlier

pedagogical writings.²⁰ Greene argued that schools should focus more attention on aesthetic engagement, helping students attend to the concrete and the particular in their own lives. It is through the unveiling practice of aesthetic engagement, she said, that we discover obstacles and burdens that we had not noticed before, as well as possibilities that encourage us to act against these burdens, learning to confront the banal stereotypes that suppress the complex realities of our lives.

Like Dewey, Greene (1988) was convinced that “freedom shows itself or comes into being,” not when isolated individuals engage with obstacles, but

when individuals . . . have a project they can mutually pursue. When people lack attachments, when there is no possibility of coming together in a plurality or a community, when they have not tapped their imaginations, they may think of *breaking* free, but they will be unlikely to think of breaking through the structures of their world and creating something new. . . . There must be an opening of a space between them, what Hannah Arendt called an “in-between” (1958, p. 182), deeper and more significant than merely practical and worldly interests. (p. 17)

In contrast with Dewey’s generally “naturalistic” approach, however, Greene (1988) argued that *all* barriers to our self- and communal becoming must “be perceived as obstacles, *most often obstacles erected by other human beings* . . . if freedom is to be achieved” (p. 9, italics mine). She celebrated “those who try to convert obstacles into favoring agencies, as women have done in setting up Women’s Studies courses, as African Americans have done with their great novels and theater pieces, as certain young people have discovered causes and companionship by campaigning against violence and war” (Greene, 1997, p. 66). In the end, democratic action cannot avoid conflict over the symbols meant to act as the organizing centers of our communities.

Unlike Dewey, who sometimes seemed to dream that a conscious community created through joint engagement in shared obstacles would make conflict between individuals obsolete, Greene (1988) envisioned communities created through resistance to the forces of routinization themselves, accepting that while this resistance will often antagonize others, it opens the possibility for creating more vibrant common projects. In addition, although she rarely stated this explicitly, unlike Dewey’s Laboratory School Greene’s vision of education would not seem to easily allow for schools that would isolate themselves away from the harsh realities of the social world. If students are to learn to act in the world, her approach implies, then they must *do so*, interacting with the society beyond school boundaries through both collaborative and yet often conflictual projects of social change. And because individuals are made up of multiple associations, we may be forced to take these antagonisms into our very bodies.

Greene's (1988) vision also has implications for a pedagogy of history that contrasts with Dewey's. Dewey (1934) noted that "every culture has its own collective individuality . . . [which] leaves its indelible imprint upon the art that is produced" (p. 330), and this individuality can either be retrieved through the myriad unique appropriations of individuals and collectives, or through scientific efforts to arrive at a generalization about this art. It is the latter that Dewey appears to have attempted in the Laboratory School, and it is the former that Greene focused on. Her own writings, exploring the subtle complexities of artistic works and narratives, provide a model of an aesthetic as opposed to a scientific, sociological approach to the past.²¹ Instead of culling the complex chaff of real situations, Greene encourages us to engage with the contingent narratives that come to us from the past, emphasizing their complex, contradictory, and unpredictable nature. Instead of helping students make choices in streamlined, carefully framed, imaginary situations with "intelligent" solutions, a vision of history drawn from Greene's writings emphasizes the often insoluble situations in which individuals are often forced to act. As she noted, "my problem with Dewey . . . was that he lacked a tragic sense of life, that awareness of paradox and absurdity that spoke to me so directly in existential literature" (Greene, 1997, p. 22).²² Greene's approach to history brings the cultural objects of the past, the symbols, the hopes and dreams of those long dead, into the present to be renewed and appropriated, where they can actualize new conscious, democratic communities.²³

For the purposes of this paper, then, Greene's (1997) work makes three fundamental contributions to Dewey's vision. First, Greene showed how a model like Dewey's might grapple more directly with inequality, oppression, and interpersonal/intergroup conflict. Second, although it remains largely implicit in her writings, her work tends to move us beyond the model of the Laboratory School in which students were largely isolated away from these realities in a nurturing cocoon. Finally, Greene brings a more complex vision of the ways that history could be used to prepare students to grapple with the complexities, absurdities, and tragedies of social action and change.

Her final goal for society, however, was very similar to Dewey's. Like Dewey she sought to break down the barriers between individuals and groups, aiming to engage people in shared projects and opposing withdrawal from spaces of dialogue. Practices of political engagement, she argued, "cannot include those who reject dialogue" (Greene, 1982, p. 8). In addition, while Greene remained open to the possibility that her most fundamental commitments might change in response to what she learned through dialogue with unpredictable, incommensurable others, I would argue that, like Dewey, Greene ultimately valorized those discursive practices that aimed to actualize unique individuals in the midst of collaborative

activity as the “highest” form of community—evidenced, for example, in her constant focus on the aesthetic. Although Greene’s commitment to such a vision of community was much less detailed than what I would argue constituted Dewey’s hierarchy of community practices, and although she rejected the idea that there should be any single dominant discursive practice in a particular context, her commitment would tend to indicate a valuing of practices that are more likely to actualize unique individuals in the context of collective activities as fundamentally more democratic than those that are less focused on this as a goal.

Below, however, I argue that even these remaining commitments may be extremely problematic for any effort that would empower all students equally as democratic citizens in schools. The pragmatic demands of effective and truly equal democratic action may require that we leave even these Deweyan principles behind.

BEYOND DEWEYAN DEMOCRACY?

The pedagogy explored in Dewey’s writings and in the Laboratory School represented a carefully orchestrated effort to develop a specific kind of democratic “person” with a defined, though evolving, set of communal dispositions. As I noted above, despite important differences Greene’s writings seem compatible with this project. Inherent in any such an effort, however, is the danger of a kind of domination, of the kind of forced “subjectification” that Michel Foucault (1977), among others, has described so well. It has become increasingly difficult in our “postmodern” age to believe in free-floating, cross-cultural practices. Critical race theorists, like Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw et al., 1995), for example, have worked to show how claims to neutrality often work to obscure the ways in which particular theories, practices, and laws serve the purposes of dominant groups. In fact, I would argue that individual theorists cannot help but draw on their own social positioning and personal history of experiences in the world in their attempts to discover strategies for social change and to define what might *count* as a *better* future for society. Cornel West (1989) is only the most convincing of a number of scholars who have argued that Dewey’s philosophy, in particular, remained deeply invested in the middle class professionalism that infused his own life.²⁴

Dewey didn’t actually claim neutrality. Everything in his vision, even the very practice of inquiry on which it was based, remained open (paradoxically) to empirical testing and the possibility of revision (Eldridge, 1998, p. 97). Yet, within this context of perpetual doubt, despite the development of particular aspects, Dewey’s fundamental commitment to a particular form of democracy remained relatively unchanged over more than a half-century of writing.²⁵ While he would have admitted the possibility that his

commitment to a particular form of dialogic democracy—to a world without insoluble conflicts, to the primary importance of actualizing unique individuals through participation in communal projects, to a society with a shared, overlapping, and ultimately organically integrated “public space” in Greene’s (1982) terms—might have significantly changed in response to new experiences, they did not. We have inherited from Dewey, then, not only his larger vision of pragmatic “intelligent” inquiry, but also a particular model of democracy.

A recent book by Paul Lichterman (1996), however, provides empirical evidence that the kind of dialogic practice I described in my discussion of Dewey’s model for democratic discourse is neither neutral nor universal. Drawing on an empirical analysis of different local activist groups in America, Lichterman argued that groups with practices that look much like the one I have argued represents Dewey’s vision of democracy often draw from and reflect middle-class, professional ways of being in the world, and are more accessible to those with the “cultural capital” of educated professionals (p. 24). For example, Lichterman examined local chapters of an environmental group, the Greens. He found that for them, as for Dewey, “a good ‘community’ was one that could allow individual identities and political wills to resonate loudly within collective accomplishments” (p. 24). At their meetings, the Greens encouraged each participant to construct often elaborate personal narratives, ensuring that each individual’s perspective was contributed to the group effort. Often, however, these groups ended up excluding those who either did not share culturally specific *skills* of narrative self-construction that would equip them to participate effectively, or who placed less value on “individual” actualization. The collective practices of the Greens were often different from those of other, often less privileged groups. Hillviewers Against Toxics (HAT), a largely African American group from a more low-income area, for example, tended to focus less on process and on the actualization of unique voices, and more on the achievement of concrete goals, often treating their groups more like collective units than as collections of unique individuals (Lichterman, 1996, pp. 116, 121). Their practices of collective action represented fundamentally different ways “of practicing a sense of moral obligation” (p. 178).²⁶

While the range of collective practices engaged in by the Greens appears more limited than the flexible approach Dewey and the teachers promoted in the Laboratory School, it is illuminating, I think, to note that the Greens often had great difficulty actually acting together on concrete common efforts. Their focus on individuality sometimes splintered them apart, preventing them from achieving any coherent shared project. Unlike the children in the Laboratory School, they did not have “teachers” in the background working to hold them together and focus them on a common project. In contrast, the generally more hierarchically oriented strategies employed by

HAT, while they had their own limitations, often produced more stable and focused projects of social action than the Greens were able to achieve.

Drawing from Lichterman's analysis, I argue, allows us to go beyond West's more general accusation that Dewey's model is fundamentally derived from the commitments of a particular class, to an exploration of specific implications that this limitation might have for Dewey's vision of democratic schools. To the extent to which Dewey's practice of democratic dialogue, like that of the Greens, is one that middle-class students are more equipped to engage in—partly because of its emphasis on enhancing the distinctiveness of participants in collective action—this hierarchy may end up leaving these students in ultimate control of communal actions.²⁷ Of course, Dewey's aim in his educational model was to initiate all students equally into this democratic practice. But as James Gee (1990) and others have pointed out, even if we wished them to be, individuals are not infinitely flexible. Children gain a "primary discourse" when they are very young, as they learn who to "be" in their family and culture. While people can learn myriad "secondary discourses," students whose primary discourses are most similar to that taught in schools will have less trouble achieving fluency, and will experience fewer conflicts between the new discourse and their primary discourse (chap. 6). And even if schools could, somehow, teach students to overcome their primary discourses, such an effort seems more than problematic. To the extent to which the kinds of practices Dewey recommended are inseparably intertwined with the cultures of particular dominant groups in our society, such an approach threatens to return us to the ideas of cultural "deficiency" that many have struggled so long in education to overcome. To the extent to which any model of democracy appears to require students to repudiate crucial aspects of their own (and others') communities, families, and even personal histories, it is difficult to see how it could be considered "democratic."²⁸

What I have argued represents Dewey's hierarchy of practices, his valorization of the actualization of unique individuals within collective action as the highest goal of democracy, disregards what Lichterman's (1996) examples (and Dewey's own writings) show—that different practices serve different purposes. As one moves towards the increasingly precarious political strategies of the Greens, one increasingly gives up the strength resident in a kind of background solidarity. One cannot know beforehand what practice will be most appropriate for any particular situation. While one should strive to not act in a manner that would make democratic action impossible in the future, what this means in any particular context cannot be established ahead of time.

"How," Lichterman (1996) asked, "would activists act together if, even within the same movement, they practice democratic citizenship in different ways?" (p. 225). He proposed what he called a "translation ethic" in

which people, like Lichterman himself, could act as “sociological participant observers” in their attempt to understand “what ‘participation’ or ‘self interest’ mean in different political cultures. With this understanding,” Lichterman argued, “they could help explain to some activists what they were doing and why” (p. 228). Such activity, Lichterman imagined, might allow different groups with different discourse commitments to stitch together a myriad of different collaborative projects in particular contexts, helping each learn the limits of their particular ways of being and the possibilities inherent in that of others.

What such “translation” would look like, however, is extremely unclear. Many have argued, for example, that truly understanding other people requires that individuals transpose themselves into the actual points of view of those others. As Georgia Warnke (1993) and James Garrison (1996) have argued, however, drawing from Gadamer, Dewey, Jürgen Habermas, and others, individuals can only understand other people from where inquirers start in their own histories, experiences, and environments. Iris Young (1997) argued, therefore, that the idea that we could truly understand the possibilities and limitations of the practices of others is itself potentially oppressive. She discussed the example of the state of Oregon, which, in an effort to construct a rationing plan for health care, asked able-bodied people whether they would value medical treatment less if they were disabled. Perhaps not surprisingly, able-bodied people felt they would value their lives less if they were disabled, a conclusion that outraged the disabled community. Thus, the idea that one can actually understand the point of view of others is extremely dangerous from a political standpoint. As Dewey noted, we cannot simply transfer information between individuals; the best we can do is problematically participate in common meanings that we interpret differently—and we can never entirely understand the interpretations of others, even though we may learn from them.

Another problem with Lichterman’s (1996) “translation” approach, something also resident in Dewey’s vision, is that it would seem to require all groups to treat their own traditions as extremely contingent, leading to a continual weakening of group solidarity. In addition, groups who have fought to maintain a sense of cultural identity in the midst of efforts to destroy this, and who have struggled over time to secure an always threatened and never adequate structure of rights, may for good reason be much less open to such a fluid vision. While in the abstract there may seem to be broad potential inherent in such an experimental approach to social change, this vision may appear extremely unrealistic and ill-advised to those groups most experienced in the workings of power, to groups for whom change more often has entailed loss instead of gain.²⁹

Finally, yet another fundamental limitation of Dewey’s model of democracy lies in his vision of a multicultural society. As I noted, Dewey argued that

more democratic societies are those that have the fewest barriers between groups. The problem with this aspect of his thought is that we do not live in a world where all hold equal power, where everyone's voice will be "listened" to equally. Without such equality, the enforcement of exchange across multiple groups can threaten to become a form of domination in which one group's "voice" suppresses the cultural constructions of others. Promoting completely free movement and association between groups avoids the fact that those with less power in our society—women, people of color, working class people, and so forth—have much less ability to travel between groups, and often have much more difficulty making themselves heard when they are in mixed company, even if they happen to be expert in the discursive practices that are dominant in any particular context. Nancy Fraser (1992) has pointed out, for example, the dangers inherent in the promotion of a single, unified public realm "freely" open to all (p. 123). Different groups require safe spaces in which to develop what James C. Scott (1990) has called their "hidden transcripts," their own common projects that can reject, appropriate, and oppose the power of dominant groups and institutions, emerging strategically into larger spaces which will never be entirely safe for them. They require moments in which they can, in fact, refuse to engage in dialogue.

Accepting the challenge of "difference" means we must, as Dewey was loath to do, and as I worry Greene may not have done extensively enough, acknowledge the affects of power and oppression on individuals' ability to participate in even the smallest of communities. In the end, the creation of a single, common, public space may be fundamentally oppressive to these groups. And the necessity of maintaining boundaries makes it even more difficult to imagine how a Deweyan vision of a communicative society, or even the kind of "translation" envisioned by Lichterman (1996), might be promoted. To the extent to which members of marginalized groups hide the activities that take place in their safe spaces from others, the ability of these others to communicate with them and understand them by attempting to take into account their particular environment and experiences will be diminished.

Thus, Dewey's (1916) two key criteria of more democratic communities—the promotion of individual distinctiveness through participation in shared efforts and the elimination of boundaries between groups—both appear to contain the seeds of significant oppression for those groups that are already marginalized in our society. Even his vision of an "experimental" approach to social change can be extremely problematic for some contexts and some situations.

CONCLUSION: LIVING WITH PARADOX

Schools are caught in a difficult conundrum. On the one hand, in a democratic society it is surely crucial that we discover ways to promote an

expansive vision of democratic empowerment among our students, initiating them into practices that will enable them to effectively engage with oppression and improve our society for everyone. Yet, one could read this paper as indicating that such a project ultimately rules out the development of any shared, authoritative, and dependable practices for all students within schools, or even in a particular school. "Democracy" in this vision can increasingly appear to verge upon chaos—and chaos certainly does not represent any kind of productive democratic option.

At the same time, I am speaking here not of society in general, but of schools, institutions that are placed at particular locations within actual communities and that are depended upon to serve a range of different functions in our society. They seek to provide students with *both* the concrete useful skills that will allow them to succeed in society as it is *and* the collective practices that will allow them to act effectively to alter the options currently open to them. Children need safe spaces in which to learn and grow, and to the extent to which schools fail to provide these, they fail in their most central purposes. I would tend to agree with Sara Lawrence Lightfoot (1983) that "good" schools create clear boundaries between the school and the larger community, and that they ultimately must develop predictable and relatively shared traditions of "ideology, authority, and order [that] combine to produce a coherent institution that supports human interaction and growth" (p. 350). Certainly the teachers of the Dewey school had no qualms about exerting their considerable authority to gently direct students down the paths they felt would be the most productive for them, despite their openness to student creativity and interests.

In the end, I think Greene's (1997) comment that Dewey never really understood tragedy is crucial. I would be suspicious of those who, often following Dewey's lead, argue that this and other paradoxes in schools might somehow be overcome, that diversity and coherent unity can ever be brought together without some loss to one side or another.³⁰ I am not talking about some static unity/diversity binary; instead, I envision a complex and multi-layered set of shifting contradictions and continua between myriad different definitions of these two terms among others. To some extent I follow West's (1989) idea of "prophetic pragmatism," here as applied to education, that "denies Sysyphean pessimism and utopian perfectionism," acknowledging that "all human struggles—even successful ones—against specific forms of evil produce new, though possibly lesser, forms of evil" (p. 229). As Magdalene Lampert (1985) and Nicholas Burbules (1997) have both argued, there may be something fundamentally tragic and contradictory about efforts to teach.

Despite his own general commitment to a particular vision of democracy, Dewey (1976) argued that it was dangerous to provide strict definitions of "democracy." He worried that "in transferring the issue from concrete sit-

uations to definitions and conceptual deductions, the effect . . . is to supply the apparatus for intellectual justification of the established order” (vol. 1, p. 188). While it should be clear from what has transpired above that I accept the wisdom of this statement, I have also become increasingly convinced that a problem cannot really be taken seriously unless there is at least the possibility for a concrete response. Thus, I end this paper with a kind of thought experiment—an effort to begin to imagine what *one* “extra-Deweyan” effort to balance out these myriad challenges might look like. And while I am sure that, as a middle-class, white male myself, my own vision contains within it the same kind of hidden oppressions that Dewey’s did, like him I cannot avoid starting where I am, testing and critiquing my ideas in dialogue with others. My goal is not to provide a decontextualized solution for any particular context, but instead simply to demonstrate that it is possible to at least imagine a defensible vision of democratic education that contrasts with Dewey’s.³¹

I imagine, then, a school that would encompass a wide range of different discursive spaces that are not equally open to all. A myriad of different teachers might teach in and advise these different spaces, ensuring safety and “rigor” within diversity. Students in such a school would become used to passing through permeable barriers between different spaces, taking on many different and often contradictory selves during a single day—some of which they would be better equipped to engage in than others. Instead of having a single dialogic practice that rules the community, such a school would explore the possibilities of a range of different collective practices.

Such a school would be engaged in constant negotiation, while at the same time seeking to understand what might constitute “fair” negotiation in a particular place at a particular time. Teachers and administrators would struggle to maintain a coherent sense of community, but would be willing to tolerate (and perhaps would even promote) much more contention and conflict than schools today tend to allow. Those in the school would get used to working with other people without the illusion that all participants somehow “understood” each other, or even saw their goals in the same way. Failure would be as productive as success—although a school could not survive if it were based mostly on failure. Ultimately, the effort to understand what it means to be a “collective” would be an integral aspect of what would be learned there. The community would be constantly engaged in an effort both to reconstruct itself in response to new challenges and to understand the dangers inherent in engaging in such efforts.

While such a school would maintain boundaries of some kind with the community, it would also provide myriad opportunities for community members to enter in many different roles and for students to emerge into the community from relative safety. The tensions and interrelations between the school and its community would be a constant focus of all involved. “Community”

would be a contested term, as participants challenge the borders of inequality and difference that increasingly characterize our segregated society.

Different students would be rooted in different ways in the school's myriad spaces and in the larger community, resisting a commitmentless, postmodern relativism. The need to make decisions in an uncertain world would be constantly and publicly modeled by the adults in the school, providing an opportunity for all to grapple with the challenges of judgment. Instead of dismissing others because they are not "democratic" enough, as the Greens tended to do, or being amused at the kinds of practices particular groups engage in at any point in their history, as the Laboratory School students did at one point, students might be more inclined to ask both *what* kind of practice others are engaging in and *why* they deem it appropriate at a particular time in a particular place while also exploring the issues of power, inequality, and history that affect what practices are operative in a given context. Carefully designed collective projects both within and without the school would help students understand the different resources different practices bring to particular problems, drawing from the cultural and other resources students, teachers, and others brought with them to school.

Again, I present this thought experiment not as a solution, but as an extremely problematic example of how one might grapple with some of the issues I have raised. Ultimately, I have sought in this paper to create not solutions but problems. To the extent to which rich problems are crucial components of democratic spaces, the development of such problems can be seen itself as potentially democratic. And Dewey is an especially important theorist to treat as a source of such problems. To the extent to which scholars imply (and some do) that Dewey's writings contain within them the solutions to all (or nearly all) of the problems of schools, they subtly eliminate the need to listen to other oppositional voices. Thus, a respectful exploration of the many limitations of Dewey's vision is paradoxically a very Deweyan activity. It ultimately supports the need for many different and often contradictory voices and perspectives to engage together to grapple with these problems. In the end, despite Dewey's brilliance, it is important not to forget that his theories were created at a particular time by a specific person situated at a particular intersection of class, race, gender, and so forth. With West (1989) and others, I am convinced that Dewey drew from his own experience a philosophy that made sense of that experience and that matched with his own way of being in the world. It is only from this perspective, I argue, that his work can be useful (and sometimes not useful or even oppressive) to those of us who come after him.

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Notes

1 Susan Laird made a similar point in “Women and Gender in John Dewey’s Philosophy of Education,” *Educational Theory* 38, no. 1 (1988): 111–129. I think we can have a fair amount of confidence that Dewey generally agreed with the accounts published by his colleagues about his school during his lifetime because he was deeply involved in the publication of nearly all of the relevant documents. He edited the *Elementary School Record* and at least one volume of the *Elementary School Teacher* in which many of the earliest accounts were published, and was deeply involved in the creation of the book about the Dewey School written by former teachers Katherine Camp Mayhew and Anna Camp Edwards (1936), *The Dewey School: The Laboratory School of the University of Chicago, 1896–1903*. He wrote of the Mayhew and Edwards book that “the account of the Laboratory School contained in the pages that follow is so adequate as to render it unnecessary to add anything to what is said” (p. xv). Laura L. Runyon’s (1906) thesis, “The Teaching of Elementary History in the Dewey School,” draws from her essays published under Dewey’s editorship of the *Elementary School Teacher*. It is fitting to draw from the teachers’ work since, as Laird and others have noted, the teachers were clearly partners in the development of Dewey’s philosophy. I have chosen not to draw from Dewey’s other empirical volume, *Schools of To-Morrow*, because, as Douglas J. Simpson and Michael J. B. Jackson (1997) note in *Educational Reform: A Deweyan Perspective*, the book “was written mainly by Dewey’s daughter, Evelyn, and fits into Dewey’s works as largely a descriptive rather than an evaluative piece on school practices. . . . [It does] not always represent his best thinking, as a careful reading of his other pedagogical writing demonstrates” (p. 284). I have not drawn from other teacher reports, many published weekly in the *University Record*, because I am most interested in those writings carefully prepared for presentation of the school’s “general” approach to the wider public. Dee Miller Russel’s (1996) dissertation, “The Passion that Precedes Knowledge: The Role of Imagination in John Dewey’s Theory of Experience and in the Activities of the University of Chicago Elementary School,” is the best example of recent work, to my knowledge, which does draw from these and other sources, and I have drawn much of my information about them from his careful work. My interest, however, is more in how Dewey and the teachers conceptualized what they did in more general terms after they developed at least provisional theories about what they were doing, than in their efforts leading up to this conceptualization.

2 I refer, here, not to individuals as isolated pre-social beings, but to people as organisms learning and acting through interactions with their social and natural environment.

3 I treat Dewey’s theory of collaborative joint inquiry in this paper as an essentially local phenomenon. I think Dewey never managed to solve the challenges entailed in promoting such a model of democracy in broad social contexts. I am convinced that Dewey’s philosophy remained a theory of relatively small planning *communities* in essentially face-to-face contexts; see Aaron Schutz (1999), “John Dewey and the ‘Paradox of Size’: Some Limitations of Teaching for Local Democracy.” But because schools and classrooms are generally local communities, Dewey’s democratic pedagogy remains crucial for those who are struggling to create more empowering and egalitarian schools.

4 Thus he distinguishes between, for example, merely “formal” and “effective” liberty. See *Liberalism and Social Action*, in Dewey (1981–1990, vol. 11, p. 27).

5 See Alan Ryan (1995), *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*. Dewey thus argued that there was no fundamental distinction between “facts” and “values.” The habits that we use to engage with the world are always already “saturated with story and transmitted meaning” (Dewey, 1981, vol. 1, p. 305), and so we always begin with the “goods that are diffused in human experience” (Dewey, cited in James Guinlock, *John Dewey’s Philosophy of Value* [1988] p. 165). His scientific method was, he thought, the only way these might be improved, the only way the goods we happen to inherit can be transformed into tested, reasoned goods.

See especially the last chapter of Dewey's (1981) *Experience and Nature*. He notes, further, that "fidelity to the nature to which we belong, as parts however weak, demands that we cherish our desires and ideals till we have converted them into intelligence" (p. 314).

6 Also see "Individuality in Education," in Dewey (1976–1983, vol. 15). As I show in the next section, however, he believed that the most authentic and effective mode of individuality comes when children work together on a "community project."

7 I have not discussed Dewey's theory of "impulses," which essentially represent instinctual forces that take on meaning only when sublimated into habits (see Dewey, 1988c, p. 68).

8 The extent to which Dewey and the teachers were willing to go to ensure that activities in the school promoted cooperation and interdependence is indicated by the fact that, for example, students were not pressed to learn to read at a young age in part because "reading conduces much to the habit of *solitary* self-entertainment which ends to often in daydreaming" (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p. 142, italics mine). Books were to be used in the service of joint activities.

9 See especially Dewey (1988a, vol. 13, chap. 7).

10 Runyon (1906) noted that "the study of colonial history . . . furnished only the 'carrying medium' for the deeper and more universal study of the adaptation of a civilized people to the primitive conditions of a new environment, the study of character, the training of judgment" (p. 54).

11 In this case, they apparently decided to part from each other because of purely logistical reasons.

12 Importantly, however, Audrey Thompson (1998) pointed out that the kind of "innocence" apparently evidenced by students in the Laboratory School is a "specifically White, social ideal" (p. 530) much less available to African American students, for example, for whom "there has been no sure place of refuge" (p. 532). As I note below, the relevance and impact of engaging with the kind of practices Dewey described will differ for different groups. I have not yet explored this issue to the depth it deserves, however.

13 See, especially, the last chapter of *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, in Dewey (1976, vol. 2, pp. 77–201).

14 See Westbrook (1991), chap. 7, and also Westbrook's comments about Dewey's actions with respect to the Polish in chap. 6. Dewey also argued in *Freedom and Culture* (1988b, vol. 13, pp. 63–188) that force is sometimes justified to ensure democracy survives.

15 Despite the constant focus on generalizable scientific inquiry in Dewey's writings, then, he notes in *Experience and Nature* (1981, p. 269) that "art," and not science "is the complete culmination of nature." In fact, "'science' is properly a handmaiden that conducts events to this happy issue" in art.

16 It is possible, however, for the same symbol to serve both purposes.

17 Even everyday communication does not directly communicate "messages"; instead, as he notes in *Experience and Nature*, in Dewey (1981), it allows individuals to act together, referring their actions to the actions of others. Failure is an issue of failed "action" not of failed "transmission." See especially chap. 5.

18 Cornel West (1989) calls this a "creative misreading" (p. 126). However, in the context of Dewey's approach to education in the Laboratory School, I think Mills is largely correct.

19 Robertson, (1993, p. 371), cites a few moments where Dewey appears to leave open the possibility of social conflict. See also "The Teacher and the Public" (1981–1990, vol. 11), where Dewey argued that teachers should "ally themselves with their friends against their common foe, the privileged class, and in the alliance develop the character, skill and intelligence that are necessary to make a social order a fact" (p. 161). Also see Dewey (1981–1990, vol. 6, pp. 169, 175). Despite these and other exceptions, Dewey's general opposition to social conflict remained a central theme for him.

20 Dewey himself acknowledged that the Laboratory School “can justly be said to have failed more often at this point [aesthetic education] than at any other” (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p. 362).

21 See the middle chapters of *The Dialectic of Freedom* (Greene, 1988) as a good example of this approach.

22 For a relevant work on the kind of tragedy I think is missing in Dewey, see Martha C. Nussbaum (1988), *The Fragility of Goodness*. See also West (1989), *The American Evasion of Philosophy*.

23 The writings of Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin are also relevant here. See Lisa Disch (1995), *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy*, and Richard Wolin (1994), *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption*.

24 Especially those writing from the Marxist tradition tend to make this accusation. See, for example, Gonzalez (1982); and, for a more “critical theory” approach, Parringer (1990).

25 While some changes can be discerned in his work, over time, I would argue that they did not really alter the core beliefs on which his democratic vision was based.

26 He referred only to the Greens in this statement, but I think it applies to all.

27 In fact, West (1989) argued that Dewey envisioned “the emerging and reformist and professional elements of the middle class as the preferable historical agent” of social change (p. 76).

28 Delpit (1995) complicated Gee’s (1990) argument, but it is still relevant for my purposes.

29 Some of C. A. Bowers’ (1987) comments seem relevant here. See also Tate (1997).

30 See Gay (1997) for a recent example of such an effort.

31 In fact, in a recent evaluation of an alternative school, Ian M. Harris and I recommended a model much like Dewey’s, convinced that it was the most relevant response in this particular circumstance. See Schutz and Harris (in press).

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