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2008

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### Recommended Citation

Stone, Lynda (2008) "Speculation on a Missing Link: Dewey's Democracy and Schools," *Journal of Educational Controversy*. Vol. 3 : No. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://cedar.wvu.edu/jec/vol3/iss1/3>

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## ARTICLE

**Speculation on a Missing Link: Dewey's Democracy and Schools**

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**Introduction**

In a special issue focusing on the relationship of democracy and schooling, an essay on the influence of John Dewey seems necessary. This is because in American and international educational psyches, Dewey's name is associated in a progressive tradition with this relationship. In effect, a historical and contemporaneous trope, a symbolically discursive unity, has been established of *Dewey and democracy and schools*. The controversy of this essay concerns what it might mean if a missing link were identified in Dewey's writings, in which he rarely, almost never, made the tropic connection himself. That is, when he wrote about democracy, he did not write about schools. Questions arise: Is there evidence of a missing link in writings about Dewey and how might it be manifest? Is there evidence in Dewey's own writings, and what might be reasons for what is missing? How might it matter today if there is a missing link between democracy and schools?

Several preliminary points are important before considering a possible missing link. One is to emphasize that this undertaking is a speculation in which philosophical, biographical and bibliographical, and educational ideas and information are brought together to form a provisional position: In no way is this speculation a definitive argument. A second is that its purpose is precisely to provoke. Whatever the outcome, discussion that brings the central trope to the fore—and in a new way—might well renew its significance for schooling today. The third is to underscore the difficulty of taking on the trope especially because of the iconic status of its central figure. As will be seen, even those critical of Dewey fully acknowledge his theoretical if not actual influence in education and for schools.

An additional point and premise for what follows is that critics and supporters alike do recognize the importance of democracy for Dewey. This standard account is posited by Richard Bernstein: “[Democracy] was not simply one topic among others that . . . [Dewey] explored. It stood at the center of his being and his intellectual endeavors. His words and deeds always emanated from his concern with the process and precarious fate of democracy” (Bernstein, 1986, p. 260).<sup>[1]</sup> Besides writing about democracy, Dewey lived a democratic life, for example, through contributions to journalism in the popular press and to public service in professional associations. Organizations in which he demonstrated national leadership range from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to the American Federation of Teachers. Further exemplars of significant international public stands in politics are his joining with Woodrow Wilson to endorse entrance into World War I in the late teens and his defenses of Bertrand Russell and Leon Trotsky for their controversial views in the late thirties.

The trope of Dewey +democracy +schools is attended to in the following sections of the paper: First, *Schools Today* reveals the current state of democracy, presupposing its importance but emphasizing its absence. Second, *Criticizing Dewey* utilizes writings from educational theorists to indicate Dewey's lacks of schooling practicality as well as broader social understanding needed for realization of his democratic vision. It supports a missing link as critics offer implicit but not direct connections of democracy and schools from his writings. Third, *Supporting Dewey*, offers a second set of writings and again substantiates the missing link. Herein theorists make specific positive connections for various educational purposes. Fourth, a central section, *Writings on Democracy*, presents two kinds of

evidence from Dewey to further substantiate the speculation. One is a breakdown of biographical and bibliographic data taken from a careful reading of thirty published pieces on democracy across his career. The other is textual illustration from selections that are tied to connections made by educational theorists from the two preceding sections. Fifth, Speculation augments previous evidence with suggestions from other significant scholars of a set of reasons for the missing link, here especially about schools. Sixth, Penultimate Commentary returns one last time to the concept of democracy and recalls that to flourish, schools must exhibit and foster it. The conclusion of the paper summarizes its thesis about a missing link and asserts that today direct tropic connection of democracy and schools is vital.<sup>[2]</sup>

Before turning to the state of schools and democracy today, a word about reading Dewey is helpful. Given his 150<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2009 and over fifty years since his death, various interpretations of Dewey's writings have emerged as philosophy and the times themselves have changed. The authors cited within this paper hold different interpretive viewpoints but all concur about the importance of Dewey for schools today. The historicist stance posits that Dewey would have welcomed new insights about his work pertinent for new times (Dewey, [1920] 1988). Icons surely should withstand scrutiny and critique in order to remain useful. The theoretical use of this stance is returned to near the end of the essay.

## Schools Today

Even a quick look at the tropic connection of democracy and schools, and indeed of actual presence today, reveals a somber picture. It is one in which seemingly less and less democracy exists now than in the past. For example, consider how much time is spent on achievement testing about which teachers and their students have little or no say. Consider conventional school governance, hierarchically if not autocratically ordered, in the hands of ham-strung administrators with little representation for those not in charge. Consider the diminished role of student government and indeed the virtual absence of youth autonomy and choice over daily lives in schools. Consider the all-too-familiar recognition that some few are members of and attend school board meetings, and most parents and community members do not participate. If schools are places where democracy ought to matter, as training grounds for and exemplars of larger and more comprehensive democratic societies, one wonders how such societies flourish at all.

One reputable source on perceptions of schools is the annual *Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*, now forty years old. Chief focus on last year's poll (Rose and Gallup, 2007) was No Child Left Behind and related issues, followed by school governance and matters of curriculum and personnel. Three results are particularly salient. One is an overwhelming public belief that beyond academic achievement, schools should also be responsible for "behavioral, social, and emotional needs of students" (p. 41). A second is that the biggest problems are issues of school organization and personnel and deficiencies of children, with the former twice as important as the latter. A third is that reform of schools is best when utilizing existing locally-based governance forms. Of significant note is that the concept *democracy* is not mentioned anywhere in the poll report, although there might be implications of its value in emphasis on community, school-board control, and if alternative to public schools, the preference for charter schools. In general from the poll and elsewhere, across the political spectrum there is indication of difficulties schools have in preparing youth for lives ahead. What is interesting is that purposes of schooling typically tie directly to personal and private needs and expectations. School mission statements may be one place where lip service to democracy is given but few schools appear to countenance its direct, practical relevance for the young. One wonders, again, how democratically-inclined people and societies develop.

Requiring a bit more attention, a significant dimension of the issue of schools today concerns attitudes toward youth and their “behavioral, emotional, and social needs.” In an essay related to their book, *The Postmodern Adventure*, Steven Best and Douglas Kellner point to strong differences of opinion. They are worth quoting at length:

From the Right, Allan Bloom . . . [in *The Closing of the American Mind*] infamously excoriated youth as illiterate and inarticulate adolescents blithely enjoying the achievements of modern science and the Enlightenment while in the throes of a Dionysian frenzy, drugged by music videos, rock and roll, and illegal substances. . . .

[Such] pejorative characterizations of youth fail to understand that whatever undesirable features this generation possesses were in large part shaped by their present and past, and . . . [that] the younger generation is an unwitting victim . . . [of] global restructuring of capitalism and the decline of democracy. (Best & Kellner, 2001, p. 4 [website pagination])

While their purpose is to describe youth culture relative to societal conditions, Best and Kellner mention democracy only twice in the paper, once just above and the other in the final sentence in which “education . . . must . . . promote empowering learning and devise strategies to create a more democratic and egalitarian multicultural society” (p. 16). Significantly, nowhere in their analysis do they attend directly to schools, prescient of the missing link of this essay.

Before leaving current-day schools, a brief comment is in order about the presence of democracy in the curriculum. Children in the U.S.A. do read stories about heroes, and in the best classrooms they do exercise some individual freedom and collective responsibility. But, by the time children are adolescents, often democracy becomes an abstraction studied about in an irrelevant social studies lesson.

## Criticizing Dewey

Critics abound who decry undemocratic societal conditions for many adults and youth. Some of this criticism has been directed at Dewey, both philosophically and educationally. Philosophically, a debate for another day, his work has been described as being too speculative, too narrowly instrumentalist, too indecisive on epistemology and truth, even virtually illogical. In educational scholarship, the focus of this section, criticism has been both practical and theoretical. The former is composed of two major ideas, inaccessibility of Dewey’s ideas for practitioners and lack of concrete suggestions for implementation. In each of these, it is important to underscore that Dewey is praised for his democratic vision, when accessed and understood. The first critique, inaccessibility, has two sources: a writing style more 19<sup>th</sup>- than 20<sup>th</sup>- century, and as well, an uncommon use of common terms (see Stone, 1999). Not only has misunderstanding resulted, but also misuse of his ideas.

Most important for this article is lack of practicality. An example is central to a recently published book titled *Dewey’s Dream: Universities and Democracies in an Age of Education Reform*, written by Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, and John Puckett. Here is their principal thesis:

Dewey . . . [exhibited a] habitual aversion to the highly intensive, genuinely ‘scientific’ study of the societal problems that he passionately wanted to solve, as well as . . . [a] lifelong resistance to doing the hard, sustained, *practical* thinking and work necessary to solve those problems in any realistic way. (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2007, p. 12; emphasis in original)

Their position comes in part from an earlier essay by Ellen Condliffe Lagemann whose words are even

stronger, although mitigated. She writes,

However appealing John Dewey's thought may be, there is no denying that it lacks a sense of realpolitik. . . . [Despite ideas that] have stirred the imagination of many people . . . when one reads Dewey's writings wanting to know *how* the kind of democracy, education, or politics he described might be developed, one comes up lacking. (Lagemann, 1996, p. 171, emphasis in original)

While acknowledging that a philosopher need not necessarily be a practical reformer, her own historical project is to explore the relationship of Dewey to his student, the more practical educational reformer, Ella Flagg Young. In turning to Young and her own advocacy of teachers, Lagemann theorizes a change in Dewey:

[After] 1904, he seems to have turned away from consideration of 'democracy *in* education' to concern himself instead with broader issues of 'democracy *and* education.' . . . Although he continued to be deeply interested in education throughout his life and remained active in many educational organizations, after leaving Chicago direct participation in educational experimentation was no longer . . . important. (p. 180, again emphasis in original)

What is significant in the Lagemann essay is its attention to and acceptance of the concepts of democracy and education, rather than democracy and schools. In their own way also, Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett imply a similar missing link. They make four moves in a manifesto for "[transforming] American society and other developed societies into participatory democracies" through a conception and organization of university-assisted community schools (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, p. xiii). One is to situate Dewey's vision in his philosophy of democracy. Two is to assess his practical projects at Michigan and Chicago, including the Laboratory School. Three is to turn to Dewey's community education efforts with Jane Addams at Chicago's Hull House settlement. Four is then to augment Dewey's work with that of Elsie Clapp. Dewey's protégé, between 1929 and 1936, she organized two rural experimental community schools, providing practical details that Dewey had not offered. Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett find in the subsequent community schools movement a solution to their "Dewey problem," that serves as a "strategy for realizing his general theories in real-world practice" (p. xiii).

In educational writings, stronger theoretical blaming of Dewey has largely been the purview of a group of revisionist educational historians and philosophers writing from the mid-seventies (see Feinberg and Rosemont, 1975). In an illustrative essay, Clarence Karier and David Hogan analyze the curriculum Dewey advocated for the Laboratory School. Specifically, their focus is on Dewey's middle-class beliefs and values and on what this background leaves out:

[Dewey's curriculum] excluded economic conflict . . . that might contribute to a class consciousness, which, in turn, might increase class conflict. . . . [His content] bore a striking resemblance to the sanitized, benign social reality which came to dominate much of the American middle class school curricula by mid-twentieth century . . . [ironically divorcing the school from society] . . . [in its own time]. (Karier & Hogan, [1979] 1992, pp. 115-116)

The revisionists' movement grew out of but came to be differentiated from earlier traditions of educational progressives and social reconstructionists. Today, a focus on the relationship of broad historical trends, comprehensive societal structures, and deep social problems has evolved into various critical stances toward history of education. Along with that of Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett, Karier and Hogan's specific position on Dewey's democracy is returned to below.

## Supporting Dewey

Given traditional approval of and utilization of Dewey for American progressive education at all levels, strong support has been more prevalent than strong criticism (although supporters can be critical, too, of course). In this section, three examples demonstrate such support; again they recognize the tropic unity of Dewey, democracy and schools and make their own implicit connections.

In *Experimenting with the World*, Harriet Cuffaro tells of her turn to Dewey to develop a philosophy of education for early childhood education and educators. She writes,

Present within any philosophy of education are certain basic elements: a view of the learner and teacher, and the choices that have been made about knowledge. . . . What we choose to think about . . . [determines] the quality of life in a classroom and the possibilities it will hold for children and adults. (Cuffaro, 1995, p. 11)

She focuses primarily on two concepts, the social individual and experience, and incorporates mention of others that include potential, habit, community, quality, inquiry, continuity and interaction. Not surprisingly, Cuffaro underpins her own vision of classroom life with Dewey's concept of a democratic society (see p. 103). Of this she asserts,

Dewey's concept . . . both the community of the classroom and the Great Community that is to be society, is built on communication, participation, and association. His vision of democracy welcomes plurality and diversity and rejects barriers that divide and exclude. Accepting the spirit of Dewey's vision, we are challenged to attend to whatever diminishes the growth of a democratic society. (p. 103)

In this first example, Cuffaro accepts Dewey's spirit of democracy and seemingly assumes the role of the school in posing specific practices for classrooms.

A second text example comes from Douglas Simpson, Michael Jackson and Judy Aycock (2005) titled *John Dewey and the Art of Teaching*. Therein for the education profession, they consider over a dozen different images of the teacher as developed in and interpreted from Dewey's writings. Different from Cuffaro's stance, their pattern is largely to equate the teacher and the school in fostering democracy. As Cuffaro writes primarily from Dewey's *Experience and Education* from the late thirties, they primarily but not exclusively cite a series of essays from the same time period. One from 1934 actually refers to schools but infers democracy:

Unless the schools of the world can unite in effort to rebuild the spirit of common understanding, of mutual sympathy and goodwill among all peoples and races, to exorcise the demon of prejudice, isolation and hatred, they themselves are likely to be submerged by the general return to barbarism, the sure outcome of present tendencies if unchecked by the forces which education alone can evoke and fortify. (Dewey, [1934] 1989, pp. 203-204)

From a piece in an earlier period, Dewey asks a more direct question: "What has the American public school done toward subordinating a local, provincial, sectarian and partisan spirit of many to aims and interests which are common to all the men and women of a country?" (Dewey, [1916c, 1940] 1985, p. 203). Their conclusion of Dewey reads thus: "[As] far as he is concerned . . . schools have a delicate and challenging role to play in being counter-culture during times that antidemocratic tendencies are more pronounced. If they are silent, they may be viewed as a cause of undemocratic lifestyles, policies, and practices" (Simpson, Jackson, & Aycock, 2005, p. 100). In a third essay that they find significant, Dewey does not mention schools, and he indeed mentions education only twice. Near the conclusion of

the piece, Dewey asserts, “Since the process of experience is capable of being educative, faith in democracy is all one with faith in experience and education” (Dewey, [1939] 1991, p. 229). Overall, the interplay by these authors utilizes separate statements about schools and about democracy for teachers and their professional purposes; their link is implicit, as it is from the others.

A third example of support for Dewey is by Stephen Fishman and Lucille McCarthy out of reflection on their university teaching experiences. In *John Dewey and the Challenge of Classroom Practice* (1998), they take up the “student-curriculum relationship” from the perspectives of “[teachers] doing the kind of observing, questioning, and judging for which Dewey argues” (Fishman and McCarthy, 1998, p. 5). Their “work . . . [explicates] Deweyan theory by applying it to particular practice, . . . discussion of his educational philosophy never getting far from concrete school situations” (p. 3). They conceive of democracy once again through implicit connection and inference:

[Intelligence for Dewey] involves patience, tolerance for doubt, and sincerity. It is open and collegial, and to flourish, it requires diverse points of view, with everyone having equal access to cultural resources and spheres of public discourse. Alternatively put, scientific or intelligent thinking . . . can only prosper in democratic contexts. (p. 59)

Fishman and McCarthy emphasize the central idea of Deweyan community, as do Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett and Cuffaro. Their own emphasis is on difference in the organic, fully interactive ideal of community that Dewey espouses. In a summary for a college-based pedagogy, their debt is this: “Dewey’s approach to classroom politics and student transformation reveals both his commitment to democratic society and his recognition of the changing nature of our world” (p. 64). For today, “he does not want students leaving our classes clinging to rehearsed lines. That just will not do in a world as fluid and uncertain as ours” (p. 64). In sum, for both those who support and criticize Dewey, it is clear that his vision of democracy is valued. For various schooling purposes they utilize his writings, often making their own connections across the trope of Dewey +democracy +schools without acknowledging a missing link.

## Writings on Democracy

Echoing the introduction above, the standard view on the centrality of democracy for Dewey is found in Robert Westbrook’s outstanding intellectual biography, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (1991), indeed a major resource for Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett. Locating Dewey’s position as relative to its own time and itself changing, Westbrook “[puts] the development of his democratic theory within the context of the stresses and strains of his own experience and of American culture generally in the last century” (Westbrook, p. xi). For Dewey, these are comprised of “situations as mundane . . . [and as earth-shaking] as his concern about the security of his job . . . in the 1890s . . . [and later of world wars and revolutions]” (p. xi).

Sufficient for this speculation, emblematic but not definitive, in this section, one strategy to explore the missing link is to consider Dewey’s writings with the words democracy and democratic in the title. He penned, presented, and published approximately thirty pieces; only one actually links democracy and schools, an essay from 1917 referred to below. In an introduction to a recent publication of the classic textbook, *Democracy and Education* (Dewey, 1916a), Sidney Hook provides three meanings of the concept in Dewey’s writings: “Sometimes *democracy* is used in the narrow political sense; sometimes in the broad sense as ‘openness to experience’; and sometimes as synonymous with education itself” (Hook, [1980] 1985, p. x, emphasis in original). What is clear, Hook continues, is that philosophical and conceptual distinction is important in Dewey’s uses. All experiences are not education; all education is not democratic.

Introduced at the outset of this essay, significant evidence for the speculation is found in biographical and bibliographical information available in Dewey's *The Collected Works*, with publications dating from the eighteen-eighties to the nineteen fifties. These data substantiate a missing link, for indeed if there is one philosophically, these may be the only types of evidence available. First, almost twice the number of publications about democracy with the word or a form of it in the titles are found in *The Later Works 1925-1953* than in those earlier. Here are identifying breakdowns: Book chapters, including three in single-author works that include *The Public and Its Problems* (1927) and *Freedom and Culture* (1939); journal pieces in which three of five are in publications for educators; pamphlets that Dewey wrote for members of political organizations; two of the latter are the League for Independent Political Action and the Society for Ethical Culture, respectively published in 1932 and 1938; several conference and dinner presentations, also in the late thirties; and one unpublished piece dated 1946. In total, over half (11 of 19) of pieces titled with democracy or democratic are published between 1936 and 1939, with the next greatest concentration (three) written in the mid-forties.

Eleven publications with democracy in the titles appear across *The Early Works 1882-1898* and *The Middle Works 1899-1924*. Two early pieces are written when Dewey is at the University of Michigan, one a first signature essay, and the other a talk before a student religious group. Of nine pieces in *The Middle Works 1899-1924*, the concepts of democracy and education are co-joined in eight. In total, one appears in 1903, and one each in 1911, 1913, 1916, and 1917, in which three actually repeat the title of "democracy and education," and with the 1916 textbook, help comprise the publication total. Two of these are a chapter in the investigative look at progressive *Schools of Tomorrow* in 1915 that Dewey edited with his daughter Alice, and a piece in the more than 100 entries that he contributed to *A Cyclopaedia of Education*, published between 1911 and 1914, the first encyclopedia in the field. In this period only one essay is directed at a philosophical audience, based on a talk at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1919. It is significant that all pieces on democracy and education except for this one are written primarily for educators or with them in mind.

Three pieces from across his writings serve as illustration of Dewey's comprehensive conception of democracy and of specific thematic connections. All too briefly, Hook's meaning of democracy as a form of government is central to Dewey's earliest essay, "The Ethics of Democracy"—utilized centrally by Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett. Largely a book review, the focus is substantiation of democracy as not only contra-historical aristocracy, but even as aggregation of persons. Two links for Dewey are to democratic society as an organism within which individual personality is isomorphic and for whom it is ethical. Here is Dewey: "Democracy is a form of government only because it is a form of moral and spiritual association. . . . [In this organism there] is not a loss of selfhood or personality. . . . The individual is not sacrificed; he is brought to reality in the state" (Dewey, [1888] 1969, pp. 240, 241). As well, political meaning is the theme in a chapter from *The Public and Its Problems* titled, "The Democratic State." In typical fashion therein, Dewey traces a number of historical social movements out of which the modern state emerges: These include economic and scientific steps as they are related to main tenets of liberal theory. He concludes that "government as the genuine instrumentality of an inclusive and fraternally associated public . . . is still largely inchoate and unorganized" (Dewey, [1927] 1988, p. 303). A third piece from 1939, utilized by Simpson, Jackson, and Aycock, "Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us," is a statement of the second of Hook's meanings as a general form of experience. Herein Dewey acknowledges the "fortunate combination of men and circumstances" as traced in the piece just described (Dewey, [1939] 1991, p. 225). Again in a wartime context, he asserts, "Democracy is a way of personal life controlled not merely by faith in human nature in general but by faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgment and action if proper conditions are furnished" (p. 227). Reminiscent of his earliest statement, for Dewey "democracy is a moral ideal . . . a moral fact . . . [as] a commonplace of living" (pp. 228-229). What is significant across these pieces are, in fact, two missing links, to education and to schools. Neither is mentioned in these philosophic explorations.



A turn to a sampling of writings about education and significantly for educators further illustrates and refines the speculation. In the significant chapter, “The Democratic Conception in Education” in *Democracy and Education*, Dewey begins with human association, society—as above—and qualifies it with two criteria. In clear, textbook fashion, he concludes, “Education . . . implies a particular social ideal . . . The two points . . . by which to measure the worth of a form of social life are the extent to which the interests of a group are shared by all its members, and the fullness and freedom with which it interacts with other groups” (Dewey, [1916b] 1985, p. 105). Of note, three indicators of how Dewey approaches schools receive brief mention in this important text. First are the school topics of subject matter, methods, and administration (p. 171). Second is provision of school facilities (p. 104). Third is school as community and the continuous relationship of learning in and out of school (p. 368). Additional pieces from the same middle-works era connect democracy to other educational themes. A first theme is teacher loyalty in World War One in the only selection, named above, with both *democracy* and *schools* in the title (Dewey, [1917] 1985, beginning p. 158). Here Dewey defends due process for teachers fired for disloyalty. Related in a broad way is a later piece, “The Basic Values and Loyalties of Democracy,” written too for teachers, from 1941. “Prussianism” at home in the first becomes “forms of potential totalitarianism” in the second (see Dewey, 1941, 1991, beginning p. 275). A second theme is Dewey’s long-term interest in human occupation and specifically in industrial education. “The Need of an Industrial Education in an Industrial Democracy,” again from 1916, is the central source for Karier and Hogan’s critique. This selection begins with the political meaning of democracy and extends it. Here is Dewey at length on the subject:

A social democracy signifies, most obviously, a state of social life where there is a wide and varied distribution of opportunities; where there is a social mobility or scope for change of position and station; where there is free circulation of experiences and ideas, making for a wide recognition of common interests . . . and where utility of social and political organization . . . [enlists warm] and constant support. (Dewey, [1916d] 1985, p. 138)

From this conception, Dewey turns to purpose, subject matter, and methods (indeed laboratory methods) that complement “free and universal public education” and “a system of universal industry” (pp. 142, 143).

One more theme elaborates Dewey’s interest in economic opportunity. Central to *Liberalism and Social Action* from 1935, representative elements appear in occasional pieces, and in the forties, are joined by a theme of retaining democratic faith now during World War Two. In the journal of the education progressives, *Social Frontier*, Dewey asks “whether or not the economic structure of society bears, under present conditions, an inherent relation to the realization of the democratic idea” (Dewey, [1938a] 1991, p. 306). His answer is to posit a socialized economy. Once again he refers to facts and conditions of democracy rather than an abstract concept (p. 306.). In the five years of publication of *Social Frontier* in his regular feature, he did mention schools occasionally but without elaboration. Finally another link for Dewey is to science. By 1944, there is again merely brief attention to schools and their shortcomings in science and technology (see Dewey, [1944] 1991, beginning p. 251).

To close this section on Dewey’s writings on democracy, it must be acknowledged that a thoroughgoing analysis of school writings would complement and fill out the foregoing exploration. While some attention to schools is included in the next section, one example must suffice. This is from Dewey’s last book on education, *Experience and Education*, in which democracy is mentioned only twice. He writes, “[A philosophy of experience] is, to paraphrase the saying of Lincoln about democracy, one of education, of, by, and for experience” (Dewey, [1938b] 1991, p. 14). And, in comparison with fascism, he writes, “Can we find any reason that does not ultimately come down to the belief that democratic social arrangements promote a better quality of human experience, one which is more widely accessible and enjoyed, than do non-democratic and anti-democratic forms of

social life?" (p. 18) What this text incorporates are several of Dewey's major concerns for educators that appear across his writings: educative experience, reconstruction of traditional and progressive schools, concepts of personal and societal interaction and continuity, educational aims of social control and freedom, and method of intelligence. Per this speculation, there is no substantial link between schools and democracy in this key work.

## Speculation

Speculation in this section draws together evidence from what has preceded, augmented by brief mention of other pertinent scholarly contributions. First, a principal point from critics and supporters above who turned to Dewey for practical educational projects is two-sided: one, that his democratic vision inspired them and others; and two, that links could be made implicitly for their projects, programs, and pedagogies with what he wrote about democracy. They did not identify a missing link, even as they worked around one. In their writings, they do acknowledge various of Dewey's shortcomings principally, but not exclusively, with specifics of implementation.

A second group has had something specific to say about Dewey's limitations regarding schools themselves; their writings suggest possible reasons for the missing link. All too briefly, here are three illustrations from recognized Dewey scholars: Writing on his contributions to the history of the American school curriculum, Herbert Kliebard acknowledges the complexity and comprehensiveness that school reform necessitated and that made change so difficult. Dewey, he writes, may "have been out of step . . . with dominant American values . . . [in which the purpose of schools is to build an efficient and] stable social order" (Kliebard, [1985] 2004, p. 75). As Westbrook interprets from Kliebard, Dewey's views never had the needed following (Westbrook, 1991, p. 508). Philip Jackson (1991) adds insight as he considers the specific purpose of the Laboratory School, referenced particularly by Karier and Hogan previously. His point is that Dewey

did not intend it as a model for implementation. From Dewey's own writings and the report of the school by teachers Katherine Camp Mayhew and Anna Camp Edwards, it was to be a scientific laboratory. As Jackson contends, laboratories are "refined environments" in which reflection and risk-taking occur. It was foremost an experimental school (Jackson, 1991, pp. xxvii-xxix; Mayhew & Edwards, [1936] 1965). Finally, Westbrook has his own thesis, that Dewey changed his mind about the democratic role of schools. The long-term effect of his move to Columbia was to alter his professional focus, with a broader view of politics also contributing. Distinguishing himself from progressive colleagues, he no longer saw schools as the major vehicle to change the social order. In 1937, Dewey posits, quoted by Westbrook, "school education is but one educational agency out of many, and at the best is in some respects a minor educational force" (Westbrook, 1991, p. 508). If implementers gloss over the missing link through implicit connection, these theoreticians determine that a link is at best part of an early vision.

To summarize at this point, evidence in the preceding section from Dewey's writings on democracy as well as commentary above leads to several tentative conclusions. A major point is that Dewey's scholarship focuses on democracy out of particular motivations—confluences of historical context, philosophical commitments, as well as personal and professional opportunities. In compartmentalizing his writings, it must be clear that motivations are no more nor less similar than for other philosophers. First, Dewey writes about democracy in times when war threatens its existence and especially when it has salience in determining his specific and actually changing position toward war (see Stone, 2003). He also writes about democracy when its function is necessary for a nation's survival in what might be named a different kind of war, an economic one. Writings around the two wars and especially in *The Later Works*, from the late-thirties and mid-forties, point to these two motivations. Earlier writings on

democracy and education seem built around his textbook's publication and reflect almost exclusively invitations to speak to and write for groups of educators. These appear to be professional opportunities more so than sustained focus, especially as school is barely mentioned in these pieces. In this period, Dewey adds to his publication record at the same time he works through his mature philosophy. Three of his important books, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, *Human Nature and Conduct*, and *Experience and Nature*, were published in twenties.

## **Penultimate Commentary**

Underlying speculation of a controversial missing link in Dewey's writings has been the larger issue of whether democracy matters for schools then and now. As the section of *Schools Today* indicates above, even with exceptions, and surely there are some, democracy is largely absent in schools today and thus is not present in students' formal educational lives. Further, it is not as if democracy is never mentioned, although mention may be seldom. This section offers a final comment on democracy prior to conclusion. The point is that missing somehow today is the enactment of the idea that individuals and societies must have early planned practice in schools in order to appreciate and take advantage of participatory opportunity later. Youth democracy fosters adult democracy. In this speculation, one final reason for the missing link connects the present with the past. Perhaps democracy by any other name functions both in Dewey's writings and in schools, and this is sufficient.

Answer to the latter query requires reading Dewey in a particular way, named in the introduction as historicist. This stance builds on his assertion that new times require new philosophy, but it is even stronger than this. Present context and present conception always strongly influence context, conception and, indeed, philosophical understanding of the past. In two sections above, the speculation has been that when critical and supportive educational theorists sought direct links from Dewey of democracy for their schooling and other educational projects, they made implicit connection because a direct link was missing. Among markers for democracy, apparently, are experience, community, and inquiry. But the historicist issue is whether these implicit links are sufficiently meaningful today.

In this regard, a reminder of Hook's three meanings of democracy is valuable. These meanings, saliently those political and educational, are evident across Dewey's writings on democracy. First, political writings do appear across his career, these primarily intended for a philosophical audience. Appearing in several decades, his interests herein are on war and economy. Second, specific educational writings on democracy, most significantly, are published primarily for educators in the teen decades. In the thirties out of his alliance and then dis-alliance with the education progressives, his writings as well as his professional politics reveal a difference of opinion regarding the role of schools. An extended query for another day asks, interestingly, what a compartmentalization of writings on education means for Dewey's view of teachers. All along, by the way, Dewey's specifics on schools concern institutional organization and curriculum, especially later of science. Finally the general experiential meaning of democracy is not as apparent, more implicit and foundational, in the writings surveyed.

In this penultimate commentary, one more issue requires summary. Historically, it is very clear that Dewey's vision for democracy and education has not come to fruition. Neither has implicit democratic, school-based reform—in spite of well-intentioned and conceptualized proposals based in Dewey's vision. Various reasons have been offered for this lack of fulfillment from Dewey: inaccessibility and misunderstanding of language, no provision for practical implementation, and now, as discussed in the previous section, inadequate connections to schools.

## Conclusion

This essay has been a speculation on a missing link in Dewey's writings between the concepts of democracy and schools. Three forms of evidence have been utilized, philosophical and educational application of Dewey's writings for present schooling and other educational projects; biographical and bibliographical information, and illustration from Dewey's writings particularly on democracy; and substantive quotation from and commentary about Dewey concerning the central trope. The trope, significant for today, it has been posed, is Dewey +democracy +schools.

A conclusion, however suggestive—and meant precisely to provoke controversy and conversation—is this: At least as a set of writings about democracy indicates, Dewey is interested in both democracy and schools, but he does not, indeed almost never, link them, directly or conceptually. Further, working with several meanings of democracy, his interest takes two prominent forms: One is to focus on political democracy in times of national crisis; the other is to focus on democracy and education more broadly than with schools. In his writings, furthermore, the latter connection was largely for education audiences. Beyond the scope of this article and requiring more specific attention in his texts, Dewey does see the need for the interaction of schools and society, but, paradoxically, he does not posit democracy for the young as the direct medium for connection. Early writings describe broad psychological and sociological processes for children's development (see, e.g., Dewey, [1899, 1915] 1991; Mayhew and Edwards, [1936] 1965).

Three points remain. First, from a historicist stance, it is important that Dewey not be blamed for the state of democracy in schools today. His era, as extended as it was, is not this era. Moreover, there is no necessary connection of the present and the past and between philosophy and practice in education. Second, Dewey's vision remains theoretically strong both in the U.S.A. and elsewhere. In many modern nations, a tropic unity does exist: *Dewey and democracy and schools* are joined together in national particulars (Popkewitz, 2005). Third, a tropic unity that is important for educational theorists might well continue to matter for school practitioners. Underlying this speculation has been insight about the absence of and need for democracy in schools today. To close: Tropes can affect practice as they refigure vision; present conceptions for current times, turn symbol into practice. Consider in a speculative moment, how useful it might be to quote Dewey directly and pervasively on the significant, surely vital link, of democracy and schools in this contemporary world.<sup>[3]</sup>

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## Notes

[1] In a recent public forum, Bernstein expressed 'incredulity' when I asked about the missing connection. Given the nature of his reply, I believe I was misunderstood. Dewey was interested in schools particularly in the early years of his career.

However, such interest does not negate this speculation; it is the trope and the link that I am exploring.

[2] Thanks to anonymous reviewers whose comments helped me clarify purpose and process for a greatly revised introduction.

[3] Thanks to Lorraine Kasprisin for her editorship and encouragement, and to James Marshall, Kathleen Brown, and graduate students at UNC Chapel Hill for discussion of this essay. Its speculation is solely my responsibility.