

Bartłomiej Zdzisław Krasny
ORCID: 0000-0003-4140-0003
Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow

Development in Light of the Basic Categories of Thought of John Dewey

ABSTRACT

Development is undoubtedly one of the most important concepts among considerations on education and upbringing. Every educator must, at a certain stage of his or her activity, confront this highly contestable idea. John Dewey, whose views are the subject of analysis in this article, was certainly not one who would have avoided this. The aim of this paper is to reconstruct the development of the American educator's theory and to reflect critically on it on the basis of his works and other selected works discussing the pedagogical and philosophical thought of the pragmatic scholar. The main ideas associated with Dewey, such as instrumental value, the notion of habit, or democracy, are discussed in subsequent parts of the article. The issues herein are reflected on from the perspective of their pedagogical implications. The analysis of the subject shows the possible developmental directions open to individuals in Dewey's thought, which is the development of society. It seems inevitable that further research on the pedagogy of the American philosopher is needed in order to better understand and interpret his ideas or to resolve the ambiguities that exist in his writings.

KEYWORDS

John Dewey,
instrumentalism,
development,
pragmatism,
instrumentalistic
education, habit

SPI Vol. 23, 2020/1
ISSN 2450-5358
e-ISSN 2450-5366
DOI: 10.12775/SPI.2020.1.008
Submitted: 26.03.2020
Accepted: 4.05.2020

Introduction

John Dewey's thought is still relevant and inspiring today. As one of the greatest American thinkers (if not the greatest), he left an indelible mark on philosophy and pedagogy. However, his main achievement was to contribute to changing an ordinary person's way of thinking. "The strength of Dewey's philosophy doubtless lies in the fact that he always has his eye on empirical reality, or concrete situations... Dewey brings philosophy down to earth and tries to show its relevance to concrete problems, moral, social and educational" (Copleston, 2009, p. 333).

Pragmatism gives a layman the opportunity to simplify philosophy and relate it to his or her own life. People who had nothing to do with this science before were offered a chance to decide on it at one time, because "pragmatism was an expression of the typically American aversion to purely speculative philosophy, considered useless and barren" (Guttek, 2003, p. 83). Thanks to this system, philosophy became much more attractive to most people.

Pragmatism is regarded as a relativistic philosophy, and so is Dewey's version of it. There are no traces of values defined as timeless or absolute in Dewey's work. He rejected the possibility of absolute values, because they are not a direct object of human action—and it is action that his philosophical thought is concerned with. Dewey's conceptualization of development, an invaluable resource for researchers, opens the door to any number of interpretations. If we wanted to peruse his theory for something that could be interpreted as an absolute or timeless value, then undoubtedly we should turn to his considerations on the importance of development.

Development is not the most extensively described idea by Dewey, although it is unquestionably one of the most important, if not the most important ideas in his thought. Despite this, clarifying the meaning of the concept is not an easy task. According to Leszek Koczanowicz, when researching Dewey, one

is exposed to two dangers: firstly, when one decides to follow a certain slogan, such as "self," one risks losing sight of a whole range of interesting ideas that, although related to the main topic of the study, may appear in completely unexpected places; secondly, inconsistencies, resulting both from the vast material one is dealing with, must be always taken

into account, as do many theoretical turns in the path of this thinker. (Koczanowicz, 1994, p. 87)

This view is somewhat corroborated by the fact that when Józef Pieter was listing Dewey's most important publications in his book *A Selection of Pedagogical Essays*, he mentioned as many as thirty-five of them.

For the above reasons, this paper focuses mainly on Dewey's most important pedagogical works and on some critical analysis of his philosophy. I strive to glean from these sources what best corresponds to the subject of these considerations, i.e., the pedagogical implications of the concept of pragmatist development.

Instrumentalism

The American philosopher's theory of values is described as instrumentalism because it is based almost exclusively on the relationship between the goal and the means to achieve it. The phrase "almost exclusively" is intentional, because contrary to popular belief, Dewey also leaves room for non-instrumental values in his writings.

The first group of values are things that are significant in and of themselves, i.e., absolute values. Dewey writes, "insofar as any study has a unique or irreplaceable function in experience, insofar as it marks a characteristic enrichment of life, its worth is intrinsic or incomparable" (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 256); he further states that as long as a study speaks directly to us, there is no need to ask whether it is useful any other view is absurd (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 258). Therefore, it is not possible to set criteria for the selection of absolute values other than the subject's personal interest in a topic.

The second type of values, i.e., instrumental values, are evaluated according to an external criterion, which in pragmatism is effectiveness (Miś, 2002, p. 47). To value something primarily means to prize it, which refers to value in itself, while a secondary meaning is to appraise something, or instrumentalize value (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 254). Therefore, instrumentalism should not be defined by value theory, but by valuation theory.

The nature of instrumental value consists in defining an end and the means to that end. In Dewey's instrumentalism, there is only

a category of concrete ends of our activities adapted to concrete situations. “The problem that Dewey wants to solve is ... the answer to the question of what value is in a particular life situation” (Gałkowski, 2003, p. 91).

Within the process of instrumental valuation, we can determine the effectiveness of a value in two ways. Firstly, the values that are not subordinated to assessment as a means to something beyond themselves, i.e., absolute values, are a prerequisite for the shift from valuing a thing as an end in itself to estimating its value relative to its particular aims, because for students

it is as true of arithmetic as it is of poetry that in some place and at some time it ought to be a good to be appreciated on its own account If it is not, never having been realized or appreciated for itself, one will miss something of its capacity as a resource of other ends. (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 256)

It follows that instrumental valuation is contingent on including within it the values that are significant by their very essence, because otherwise we will not be able to sufficiently assess a value that was not assessed earlier. How can a person know that a thing is in some sense better than another, since he or she never used it? Accordingly, it is not true that “Dewey’s main thesis in value theory is that nothing can be a value in itself, but only because of something else as a means to it, i.e., that there are no values other than instrumental values” (Buczyńska-Garewicz, 1970, p. 284), as Hanna Buczyńska-Garewicz claims in her study on pragmatism. For a person who is starving, food is a good in itself, Dewey says, and you don’t need to make them aware of the benefits of eating. However, when a person has no sudden need, but instead has to make a choice between two values that are relevant to them, e.g., between listening to music and watching a film, instrumental valuation operates by judging the possible consequences of each value.

The second way of determining the instrumental value is not based on comparison, but on it being directly derived from action. According to Dewey, this involves the use of the experimental method, which results in an instrumental value that is applicable in similar situations. In both cases, we find the means to a specific goal, which “is not permanent or general, but is the product of immediate circumstances and their needs” (Buczyńska-Garewicz 1970, p. 284).

The starting point of this method is experience. Dewey's reflection on a new philosophy of education started from his new concept of experience, which was to become the most valuable way of learning. He wrote that

the fundamental unity of the newer philosophy is found in the idea that there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education. If this is true, then a positive and constructive development of its own basic idea depends upon having a correct idea of experience. (Dewey, 1938/2014, p. 34)

According to Dewey, there are two types of experience. The first of them is essentially non-cognitive, that is, the mind is not consciously employed to discovering reality. "Dewey starts [thus] by completely ignoring the notion of 'experience' as a conscious, cognitive, immediate appearance of something in the individual mind" (Gutowski, 2002, p. 159). Here, the researcher is referring to primary experience, which a human being acquires through their very existence, regardless of their will. A child who has not yet developed awareness learns about the world through this kind of experience. In short, primary experience is a passive and unconscious way of exploring the world, without foresight or intent.

With the appearance of consciousness in the human mind, it becomes possible to use the second type of experience, called reflective or experimental—or an experimental method, which is the most effective method of cognition in Dewey's approach (Dewey, 1910/1988, pp. 98–109, 187–194). This method is an intellectually active way of gaining experience: the result of the will of the subject. The American educator distinguished five stages of the method: 1) the appearance of a certain problem in the life of the subject, 2) a preliminary analysis and interpretation of that situation, 3) a review of solutions to this problem that could prove effective, 4) construction of a hypothesis that enables the solution of the problem, and 5) putting these findings into practice and attempting to verify them (Dewey, 1916/1963, pp. 162–163).

Dewey, as you can see, creates a specific relationship between the theory of cognition and the theory of valuation, and even merges both theories into one. As Buczyńska-Garewicz writes, "pragmatism transforms the reality of facts and events into *the universe of values*" (Buczyńska-Garewicz, 1970, p. 241). In this perspective, to know

means to discern a fact, thing, or idea, and then to recognize its usefulness. In addition, since the fundamental condition for deeming something to be an instrumental value is its effectiveness, this value appears only in the sphere of human activities. “The sense of instrumental logic is to prove that cognition is a kind of practical action” (Buczyńska-Garewicz, 1970, p. 284).

Instrumentalistic education

Since Dewey’s instrumentalism posits that cognition precedes valuation, the school plays an important role. In a special way, Dewey focused on the curriculum, because the values—according to his theory—depend on what kind of knowledge one acquires. He thought that the primary task is to establish legitimate aims, since they determine what actions will be performed. Therefore, he constructed criteria that should be taken into account when establishing aims.

The first criterion is that the ends must grow out of specific conditions that bear upon the subject: the end must be rooted in past human experience. Otherwise, such ends “limit intelligence, given ready-made, they must be imposed by some authority external to intelligence, leaving to the latter nothing but a mechanical choice of means” (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 114). According to Dewey, an aim which is imposed from without deprives a person of the opportunity to reflect on it.

Instrumentalistic education should, therefore, be based on the students’ previous experiences (primary or reflective). It is important in the educational process to diagnose not only the individual capacities of the child, but also the resources of their social environment, because it is most likely what he or she is keenly and particularly interested in. Dewey assumes that it is senseless to teach completely new material which is divorced from the child’s personal circumstances, i.e., without taking into account their skills or home life. The educator states that there should be an intrinsic continuity between the material being taught and the child’s individual experience, both in order to develop their previous experiences and to create new ones based on them (Dewey, 1938/2014, p. 66). “An educational aim must be founded upon the intrinsic activities and needs (including original

instincts and acquired habits) of the given individual to be educated” (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 118).

Another criterion is the flexibility of the aim, which means that it can be altered by certain circumstances that stymie attempts to achieve it. Therefore, an aim should be set up in such a way that it is attainable for the person who established it (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 114). The adaptability must be subordinated to the student; in other words, the goal should emerge directly out of the child’s interests and be bound to him or her in such a way that it can be modified to meet the changing circumstances. A child’s pursuit of an aim that cannot be altered causes harm to him/her as specific conditions and contexts to which such an aim may not be properly adapted are disregarded. “The vice of externally imposed ends has deep roots. Teachers receive them from superior authorities; these authorities accept them from what is current in the community. Teachers receive them from higher authorities; authorities accept from what is popular in the community. The teachers impose them upon children” (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 119).

According to the last criterion, a valid aim must free human activity. What’s more, this action, the doing with the thing, not the thing itself, is the actual end in view. “Strictly speaking, not the target but hitting the target is the end” (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 115). A truly educational objective must trigger action. This means that it must be attainable, because setting a goal that you cannot achieve is absurd. This criterion is related to the previous two. Firstly, if the aim is to be carried out, it should be based on the means available for reaching it; secondly, for it be attainable, it must be subject to certain modifications.

The essential feature of the aim in Dewey’s understanding is its dependence on the means which allow it to be executed (Buczyńska-Garewicz, 1970, p. 300). Each of these criteria shares one feature: they all account for the means available to the individual. Hence, Dewey was skeptical about ends that are set up contrary to the resources that a person possesses. Undoubtedly, having a goal is desirable because “it signifies that an activity has become intelligent. Specifically, it means foresight of the alternative consequences attendant upon acting in a given situation in different ways, and the use of what is anticipated to direct observation and experiment” (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 121).

However, setting up a goal to reach is not always synonymous with intelligent activity. Activities become intelligent only when the available means become part of establishing the aim. One can imagine a lofty goal, e.g. rehabilitating a recidivist into a citizen who complies with the law and social norms, but establishing this aim will mean nothing until we can answer the question of whether such a person has the means to achieve it.

The school is the institution which can implement an instrumentalistic education curriculum in a direct, purposeful, and organized way. Dewey put geography and history at the heart of his curriculum because these two subjects represent areas of human activity that are closest to man: nature and society. Teaching the subject matter of both of these subjects is not only meant for pupils to learn specific information, but above all to use it in practical, ordinary human activity by investing it with instrumental value.

Geography first of all animates the interdependencies between man and nature. “The differences of civilization in cold and tropical regions, the special inventions—industrial and political—of peoples in the temperate regions, cannot be understood without appeal to the Earth as a member of the solar system” (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 228). In this approach, human activity is strongly linked with natural factors. On the other hand, history deals with the study of the genesis of modernity. “Knowledge of the past is the key to understanding the present,” said Dewey (1916/1963, p. 229) and reasoned that “whatever history may be for the scientific historian, for the educator it must be an indirect sociology—a study of society which lays bare its process of becoming and its modes of organization” (Dewey, 1967, p. 83).

Both subjects are so closely interrelated that they can be taught simultaneously using the experimental method. At the Chicago Laboratory School, organized according to Dewey’s intent, weaving classes were held to show children social development from the perspective of the textile industry. Flax, wool, and cotton were distributed to children so that they first became acquainted with the materials and then began to process them. Thanks to this, the students later discovered the peculiar relationships between behavior and clothing and the type of fabric. History was thus centered around natural textile raw materials and was supposed to help students understand the

natural and social context of human progress (Dewey, 1967, p. 84). Thus, it can be seen that the Dewey education system also emphasizes the importance of handwork in school. Classes based on manual didactic methods are to be justified in the fact that cognition as valuation is realized in practical activity. In addition, as Dewey noted, “the world in which most of us live is a world in which everyone has a calling and occupation, something to do” (Dewey, 1967, p. 87).

The main intention of using the experimental method in schools is not to transfer knowledge to students, because knowledge changes over time. What was regarded as true in one epoch could be regarded as a harmful superstition in the next. Dewey focused on reflective experience not because it is the best way to impart knowledge, but because it is, in his opinion, the best way to acquire it. According to this approach, the method of education is much more important than the content of education, i.e., the real aim in education is the learning activity (the method). Pupils in such a school would have to acquire knowledge themselves, as was the case with the weaving classes mentioned above.

The school’s task, in Dewey’s thought, is to equip students with a method of making one’s way in the world—to teach active doing. However, what was supposed to be a strength in the pragmatist education also turns out to be its weakness. Namely, the philosopher does not include “rest” in his considerations. This is a consequence of making action the central category in his anthropology (Koczanowicz, 1994, p. 92). Continuous activity becomes the only way for the individual and the surrounding world to be and to become. Children at the Dewey school, writes Pieter, constantly think, manipulate, and gather “social experience”; they do not have fun, do not play, do not laze around” (Pieter, 1967, LXXVI). One could consider this point a serious mistake of Dewey’s philosophy, because “activism, by denying people the right to enjoy the moment, deprives activity itself of meaning—because we act in order to get something out of it, not to act for action’s sake endlessly” (Bocheński, 1994, p. 15).

The aim of continuous action would be to find a way for better, more efficient action, and to constantly adapt to the changing world and transform it for one’s needs. Therefore, if an action can be considered effective in certain situations, there is nothing to prevent it from becoming a habit.

Habits

Using the experimental method to derive value from studies gives us the opportunity to convert that value into a habit. As Frederick Copleston has noted, “Dewey insists that activity, consciously directed to an end which is thought worthwhile by the agent, presupposes habits as acquired dispositions to respond in certain ways to certain classes of stimuli” (2009, p. 323).

In Dewey’s view, a habit is “an active control of the environment through control of the organs of action the control of the body at the expense of control of the environment.” (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 54). Copleston adds that according to Dewey, “the whole moral life ... must be represented as a development of the interaction of the human organism with its environment” (2009, p. 324). School training therefore consists in furnishing students with the ability to acquire the habits of shaping both the natural environment (geography) and social environment (history), which is guaranteed by the experimental method. As a consequence, a habit derived from reflective experience is an instrumental value—it becomes effective conduct.

It should be clarified that Dewey understood as habit only an act that was deliberately and rationally adopted. So defined, a habit does not encompass routines, i.e., thoughtlessly repeated activities, often unconscious, and all kinds of addictions (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 57). Dewey found a correct habit to be rational.

In the case of the natural environment, habits are effectively adapted to one’s needs. Dewey claimed that it is the active aspect of a habit that distinguishes primitive tribes—which only passively acclimate to their environment—from civilized societies, which actively transform their natural environment to meet their own needs. What establishes a particular habit is the extent to which it allows people to adapt the environment to their own needs. The situation is similar in the matter of changing people’s habits, which can no longer be justified by their effectiveness.

It is clear that for Dewey the active side of human behavior was much more important, which is closely connected with reflective experience. Habits of action are formed when we recognize that the old habit formula has exhausted itself and that it no longer fulfills

its previous functions. When a situation in which a familiar habit cannot be used arises in our life, it confronts us with uncertainty and triggers a spontaneous impulse, resulting in an improvised response to the stimulus/problem. This is where the experimental method should come to the foreground, the purpose of which is to modify an old habit or create a new one. This method not only allows us to gain a habit of action; it should be a habit of action itself.

Dewey states that “the acquiring of habits is due to an original plasticity of our natures” (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 57). Habits exist, are modified, disappear, or change due to the fact that we are flexible beings. Łukasz Nysler, reconstructing Dewey’s views, writes that

human nature is flexible, indefinite, incomplete, and open and requires complementing, specifying, developing, and forming in the interaction processes with one’s physical, organic—and above all—with one’s social and cultural environment. (Nysler, 2007, pp. 60–61)

In light of this concept, the students become equipped with an experimental method during education, understood not only as a tool for acquiring knowledge, but also as a tool for self-formation. The pragmatist will describe the self in a similar vein. “The self should therefore be considered as a certain process that manifests itself in action, and not as the essence or nature of man” (Koczanowicz, 1994, p. 104). In this concept, the human being should be viewed as a constantly self-actualizing being whose fixity is only an instrument to move into a new form of the self. Without habits, a person cannot become who he or she is; human nature is therefore explored in terms of constant, but qualitative change, which is development, i.e., the continuous acquisition or modification of the habits of active functioning in the world.

“The moral problem,” writes Dewey, “in children and adults alike, as regards impulse and instinct, is to utilize them for the formation of new habits or the modification of an old habit” (Dewey, 1922, p. 104), because “impulses are modified through social interactions” (Koczanowicz, 1994, p. 104). Moreover, according to the American educator, growth is the only genuinely moral goal (Dewey, 1920, p. 173), so morality is tantamount only to the acquisition of intelligent habits, because their essence is human development: they are an

expression of development (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 54). We can't talk about Dewey's theory of education without the category of habits.

As you can see, according to Dewey, acquiring habits is development, while development can be equated with upbringing (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 59). Thus, it follows that upbringing "is becoming only an increasingly effective process of adapting to prevailing conditions, satisfying one's own needs, and acquiring the ability to solve problems that arise in human life" (Gałkowski, 2003, pp. 216–217). This process resembles incessant experimentation, as a result of which a human being acquires mental habits. "Education is not infrequently defined as consisting in the acquisition of those habits that effect an adjustment of an individual and his environment" (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 54). "We thus reach a technical definition of education: it is that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 86). This reconstruction is done by acquiring and modifying habits.

The experimental method, as demonstrated, has a very wide application. It shapes human experience, provides the opportunity to obtain knowledge, and determines the sphere of values or morality. The American educator contends that "it will doubtless take a long time to secure the perception that [the experimental method] holds equally as to the forming and testing of ideas in social and moral matters" (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 358). The most important thing, however, is that reflective experience directly participates in human growth as we acquire habits of action through this method.

Development—maturity—immaturity

The leading thesis of Dewey's theory of development is that "in reality there is nothing to which growth is relative save more growth" (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 59); therefore, there is nothing to which education is relative save further development of the student. This simple statement, however, requires significant supplementation.

Human growth only occurs if one is immature in some respect. According to Dewey, the disposition of an immature person can be defined by two main features: dependence and plasticity. "From a social standpoint, dependence denotes a power rather than

a weakness; it involves interdependence” (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 52). Dependence understood in this way leads to the awareness of the need to live in a community, and as a consequence, sensitivity to social life. The second trait of immaturity—plasticity—means “the ability to modify activities based on the results of previous experiments” (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 52), thanks to which a person can adapt their activities to concrete situations.

To say that development is an end in itself is a rejection of all aims external to education. First of all, the aim is to reach maturity. To be mature means to be formed, ready to function fully (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 50); achieving this state would not require further development. Maturity, or stagnation, is the opposite of development. By setting maturity as a goal of upbringing, defining its criteria becomes troublesome. When can a person be considered mature? The answer to this question is highly complicated and self-contradictory. Legal criteria could be applied here, but Dewey did not take them into account in his writings. Quoting the Polish dictionary, it can be assumed that a mature person is a “mentally and emotionally formed” individual (PWN, n.d.). This definition forces the reader to answer the question of when a person becomes “mentally and emotionally formed.” Obviously, one answer cannot be given, and even more so a correct one, because the human mind and emotions are barely measurable indicators—poorly-known ones as well, despite the constant advancement of scientific research. Dewey tried to avoid these insurmountable problems by constructing his own theory of development, which, as noted by Stanisław Gałkowski, contains a certain contradiction, because according to it a small child would have to be considered the most developed.

If, as Dewey claimed, development is acquiring skills and habits, the people who acquire them definitely impede their way to achieving competitive capabilities, as “a five-year-old child can become a physicist or a weightlifter while a thirty-year-old math genius no longer has such possibilities” (Gałkowski, 2003, p. 103). If we adopted this viewpoint, an adult would take the best step by remaining “in *blessed childhood* so as not to reduce their development opportunities” (Gałkowski, 2003, p. 103) and therefore would have kept the chance to realize their potential, because—as Dewey argued—“taken

absolutely, instead of comparatively, immaturity designates a positive force or ability—the power to grow” (Dewey 1916/1963, p. 50).

The solution to this problematic issue could be to refer to habits. Habits, as previously explained, are indicators of human development. Acquiring them gauges the realization of the potentialities that are dormant in a person. Nevertheless, habits are not passive, thanks to which we adapt to situations, but they are rather an active part of our doings in the world: “A habit does not wait ... for a stimulus to turn up so that it may get busy; it actively seeks for occasions to pass into full operation” (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 56). Thus, the conclusion is that Dewey’s flexible human nature is not intrinsic to humankind, but it is primarily a task we are given and it lies in our interest how we will use it. This conclusion means that plastic human nature cannot be just a set of potentialities, because having them is nothing unless one strives to realize them. The measure of the value of adult development is precisely the pursuit of realizing one’s abilities, while children only have abilities and are not always aware of them. For this reason, it is adults who are responsible for the development of children, because they can perceive the capabilities of young people and guide them properly or supply the means for putting them into practice.

As long as a person fails to take active steps towards realizing their potential, i.e., acquiring intelligent habits in his or her abilities, immaturity cannot be understood in an absolute sense. Consequently, “a normal child and a normal adult alike, in other words, are engaged in growing. The difference between them is not the difference between growth and no growth, but between the modes of growth appropriate to different conditions” (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 58).

Social conditions of development

Dewey was convinced that until we define the shape of the society which young people are to join, it is impossible to define the meaning of education (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 106). He described his pedagogical system as a democratic notion of education. For him, democracy was not only a mode of governing, but also of organizing social relationships, which provides the best conditions for development

because it fosters characteristic social relationships based on common interest and cooperation (Dewey, 1916/1963, pp. 92, 96).

The first feature is not choosing one goal that the group members would be interested in. Rather, it is a common interest of the group to have many common interests. “There must be a large variety of shared undertakings and experiences. Otherwise, the influences which educate some into masters educate others into slaves” (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 50). The variety of shared goals allows the individual to constantly learn about novel ideas; these novel ideas, in turn, stimulate thinking, and thus give the opportunity to acquire more intelligent habits (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 94). Cooperation, however, is intended to ensure the flow of interaction between individuals and communities, because, as Dewey argued, “the essential point is that isolation makes for rigidity and formal institutionalizing of life, for static and selfish ideals within the group” (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 95). Interaction, like a multitude of common interests, familiarizes people with new experiences.

The American educator wrote that “a society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic” (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 109). The first part of the quotation is important, in which Dewey suggests that the introduction of democracy is not enough, but some form of economic egalitarianism is also needed. Elsewhere, the philosopher writes that

school facilities must be secured of such amplitude and efficiency as will in fact and not simply in name discount the effects of economic inequalities, and secure to all the wards of the nation equality of equipment for their future careers. (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 108)

This indicates a sort of social-democratic socioeconomic system.

As you can see, immaturity alone is not enough for a person to be capable of development. This requires another condition, i.e., a properly organized society and a democratic society based on the principles of common interests and cooperation. Another condition for development is compliance with the experimental method. However, its use in didactics reveals some inconsistency in Dewey’s thought. In order to free pedagogy from the clutches of Herbartianism and

to oppose a one-sided teaching method, he introduced another one-dimensional method: only thanks to reflective experience can a person develop. The turn against traditional education was therefore partly illusory.

For Dewey, democracy is the best form of organization for society because, in his opinion, it guarantees the greatest variety of outlooks and standpoints among other known political systems. In a word, the more such variety, the more experiences and potential aims to choose from, and the greater the range of rational habits that can be acquired. The multitude of different standpoints also presupposes the existence of human individuality. However, he perceived individuality instrumentally, because

a progressive society counts individual variations as precious since it finds in them the means of its own growth. Hence a democratic society must, in consistency with its ideal, allow for intellectual freedom and the play of diverse gifts and interests in its educational measures. (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 324)

In another place in the book, he writes that “the intellectual variations of the individual in observation, imagination, judgment, and invention are simply the agencies of social progress” (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 315). At this point, it must be stated that according to the pragmatist’s writings, the development of individuals is only a means for the development of society—social development is the highest goal. In conclusion, Dewey believed that growth is the only genuinely moral goal (Dewey, 1920, p. 173), while the only moral goal of individuals is to contribute to the development of the community.

Conclusion: deliberations on progressivism

When scrutinizing the concept of Dewey’s development, it is impossible to overlook its affinities with the theory of progressivism, to which the American philosopher has been assigned. Progressivism became the leading idea of twentieth-century educators who, inspired by the revolutionary spirit, wanted to instigate an educational turn by opposing traditional education based mainly on the thoughts of Johann Friedrich Herbart and Prussian schools. The tremendous interest in such an approach to education can be

interpreted as a result of falling under the sway of intellectual currents at that time, which aimed to depart from traditional forms of organization of social relationships. In the case of pedagogy, it was a departure from Herbartianism.

Etymologically, progressivism simply means development, progress, or evolution (Latin: *progressus*). Gerald Gutek defines progressivism as “the philosophy whose representatives take the view that the improvement of human existence and the reform of society are not only possible, but also desirable” (Gutek, 2003, p. 296). The problem with such a reading of this theory is that, in principle, all other theories also postulate the improvement of human existence. Moreover, every known pedagogical system is based on the supposition that the development of a student is the most desirable objective, regardless of whether it is development by absorbing the content of teaching (Herbart) or by completely rejecting cultural influences (Rousseau). In addition, for many, “progress is not a theory; it is a fact” (Postman, 2001, p. 32). Furthermore, defining progressivists based on their proclamation of the need for social reform is misleading and vague, because there are many other theories whose platforms call for social reform.

Dewey himself was somewhat reluctant towards progressivism because he felt the transition to new forms of teaching and upbringing was too radical. In *Experience and Education*, he relates the Kierkegaardian “either/or” to the pedagogical reality of the first half of the twentieth century (Dewey, 1938/2014, p. 9). This was to show, as with the Danish philosopher, the contrast between the then dominant approaches to pedagogy: traditional and progressive. Dewey was not in favor of treating progressive education as a radical departure from previous didactic methods, because by doing so some of his contemporaries had built a caricatured version of the new approach in pedagogy. He comments that among educators there are some who do not see a middle ground between external coercion and total freedom, and choose either one or the other (Dewey, 1967, p. 63).

When opposing the authoritative nature of old education to children’s total freedom, these educators implied that the students are able to supply knowledge and methods of obtaining knowledge on their own accord. Dewey, however, admonished these reformers by stating that nothing is borne out of nothing and that real

development broadens the individual's experience and forces them to participate in the experience of others. At the same time, he argued, it is impossible to achieve it without some intermediary who facilitates the cultivation of abilities and interests considered valuable (Dewey 1967, pp. 63–64).

The point of departure for Dewey was the hypothesis that a child is not able to select and provide stimuli to the development of their own interests and, on this premise, he negated the total freedom of the student in education, which served as a reference point for some progressivists.

Dewey's central thesis of progressivism leads to the conclusion that individual development must lead to social development; the progress of individuals is a means for the progress of the community. Dewey's theory of development is quite consistent, but there are elements that raise some doubts, e.g., the contentious issue that students' development is best accomplished through practical and collectively organized classes, or that child and adult alike always think and always think the same way (Pieter, 1967, LXXVII). Views of Dewey as a revolutionary in education are also debatable. It is true that he shifted the center of gravity of education from teaching content to teaching methods, but his system, as the Herbart system, supported only one teaching method. In addition, pragmatism, like any relativistic idea, is capable of "self-refutation"—the rejection of pragmatism can be deemed effective.

One can argue about whether John Dewey took the right path by working out his original notion of development based on reflective experience, but it must be admitted that providing a framework and impetus for the development of the students is undoubtedly a commendable initiative, if only because regression or stagnation is an alternative to development, which does not seem like a worthwhile prospect.

References

- Bocheński, J.M. (1994). *Sto zabobonów. Krótki filozoficzny słownik zabobonów* [One hundred superstitions: A short philosophical dictionary of superstitions]. Krakow: Philed.

- Buczyńska-Garewicz, H. (1970). *Wartość i fakt. Rozważania o pragmatyzmie* [*Value and fact: Reflections on pragmatism*]. Warsaw: PWN.
- Copleston, F. (2009). *History of philosophy: Bentham to Russell* (Vol. 8, B. Chwedeńczuk, Trans.). Warsaw: Pax Publishing Institute.
- Dewey, J. (1920). *Reconstruction in philosophy*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Dewey, J. (1922). *Human nature and conduct: An introduction to social psychology*. New York: Holt and Company.
- Dewey, J. (1963). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education* (Z. Bastgen, Trans.) Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza (Original work published 1916).
- Dewey, J. (1967). *Wybór pism pedagogicznych* [*A selection of essays on education*]. J. Pieter, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.
- Dewey, J. (1988). *How we think* (Z. Bastgenówna, Trans.). Warsaw: PWN (Original work published 1910).
- Dewey, J. (2014). *Experience and education* (E. Czujko-Moszyk, Trans.). Warsaw: Warszawska Firma Wydawnicza (Original work published 1938).
- Gałkowski, S. (2003). *Rozwój i odpowiedzialność. Antropologiczne podstawy koncepcji wychowania moralnego* [*Development and responsibility: Anthropological foundations of the concept of moral education*]. Lublin: Catholic University of Lublin Publishing House.
- Gutek, G. (2003). *Filozoficzne i ideologiczne podstawy edukacji* [*Philosophical and ideological foundations of education*] (A. Kacmajor & A. Sulak, Trans.). Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne.
- Gutowski, P. (2002). *Między monizmem a pluralizmem. Studium genezy i podstaw filozofii Johna Deweya* [*Between monism and pluralism: Study of the origins and foundations of John Dewey's philosophy*]. Lublin: Catholic University of Lublin Publishing House.
- Koczanowicz, L. (1994). *Jednostka – działanie – społeczeństwo. Koncepcje jaźni w filozofii amerykańskiego pragmatyzmu* [*Individual – action – society: Concepts of the self in the philosophy of American pragmatism*]. Warsaw: Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences.
- Miś, A. (1998). *Filozofia współczesna. Główne nurty* [*Contemporary philosophy: Main trends*]. Warsaw: Scholar Scientific Publishing House.
- Nysler, Ł. (2007). Natura ludzka – jaźń – indywidualność. Filozoficzno-antropologiczne i etyczne podstawy koncepcji demokracji Johna Deweya [Human nature – self – individuality: Philosophical and anthropological and ethical foundations of John Dewey's concept of democracy]. *Studia Philosophica Wratislaviensa*, 2(1), 55–76.
- Pieter, J. (1967). *Wybór pism pedagogicznych* [*A selection of essays on education*] [Introduction]. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.



- Postman, N. (2001). *Building a bridge to the 18th century: How the past can improve our future* (R. Frąć, Trans.). Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- PWN. (n.d.). Dojrzałość [Maturity]. In *Słownik językowy polski* [Polish dictionary]. Retrieved December 10, 2019 from <https://sjp.pwn.pl/slowniki/dojrzaosc.html>

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE

Bartłomiej Zdzisław Krasny MA
Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow
Faculty of Pedagogy
Institute of Educational Sciences
e-mail: bartlomiej.krasny@o2.pl