Editorial for Progressive Education: Educating for Democracy and the Process of Authority

Brian Drayton
Center for School Reform, TERC

Bertram C. Bruce
University of Illinois

Reconstruction is a persistent keynote of John Dewey's method and his philosophical program (Dewey, 1920/1988), but more than this, he saw it as the essential activity of education and social renewal (Dewey, 1897/1972, 1916/2008) . As with so many notions in Dewey, more and more nuances and implications of this term appear throughout his *oeuvre*. One can say that he sees it as a kind of inquiry which like all inquiries originates in disequilibrium, a recognition that some aspect of one's situation is puzzling or problematic. In this number of the Special Issue, the "situations" are various, but reconstructive inquiry is common to them all.

Once an object of inquiry has been identified, Dewey writes, the investigation to be productive must be problematized — his term is "intellectualization" (Dewey, 1933/1989, 1938/2008a). The task and opportunity are to understand *What in fact is the problem here? What are the systematic connections (consequences and dependencies)?* In exploring and making explicit some answers to these questions, one has laid groundwork for the meaning-making that may be possible in the final solution, when the new equilibrium includes an accounting of the implications for the system (or some elements of it).

All this sounds very cerebral, but in any inquiry of real value to the inquirer, she has some stake in the search, and this personal interest plays a central role throughout the inquiry as part of its purposefulness. Energy and engagement come from a recognition of and grappling with the questions and process of value, the identification of the human implications of the investigation. Indeed, these implications form part of the problem space, and play a fundamental role in the emergence of the problematic qualities of the situation (Dewey, 1929/2008). When the inquiry is concerned with a social issue, in which the importance of the outcome is related to human betterment, needs and desires, the "stakes" are intensified by the desire to implement a solution that satisfies these needs and desires.

It is these questions of value that make education such a favorite and necessary arena for political and social struggle. Within that arena, education also functions as a tool for reconstruction (or the prevention of it). In a sense, social change or control inevitably gets expressed in educational terms. The articles in this issue illustrate this in a fascinating variety of settings, and it is worth noting that the majority of them are not "school based" at all. They are examples of progressive method applied to social reconstruction with the goal of a broader and more meaningful life, and in each case the educational work involved a re-visioning of the situations described.

In most cases, too, the outcomes are not yet evident. The maturity of democracy (whether of a nation or some other community) can be measured by the extent to which all voices are seen as both welcome and indeed necessary parts of the "process of authority," (Democracy and Education in the world of today, Dewey, 1938/2008b) — and part of the progress comes precisely in the recognition of voices not yet heard. As Clark says,

> if the political function of an ethical discourse of community is to constitute and maintain a democratic collectivity, then participation in that discourse must be guided by an ethics that directs people to value their differences because that is what enables their cooperation as equals (Clark, 1994, p. 62).

The social group enacts its debate by experiment as well as rhetoric. Often a postulated solution to a social problem is embodied in a test, a proof-of-concept, of the solution proposed by a particular contending voice. In so doing, it gives that voice a tactical success, which can create momentum towards a strategic victory by way of "facts on the ground," whose outcomes or consequences can provide evidence for or against the new idea.

But the process of hearing the voices in a diverse group can be strenuous and frustrating, for those whose agenda or desired outcome is already well defined, from their point of view. We can see this at work for example in the development and implementation of educational policy when the "situation" is defined at the national level, for example, and the diversity of voices is very great. At such a scale, it is rare for such experiments not to be defined in terms of a mandated, pseudo-consensus, which if supported forcefully enough and long enough can turn into a conventional wisdom — and no longer seen as the next step of an inquiry, to be evaluated and perhaps abandoned.

A good example of this is the remarkable emergence in recent decades of a rhetoric of "educational reform" in the USA and many other countries. This rhetoric is largely espoused by important ideological and economic interests which severely constrain and interdict an authentically participatory process. The educational debates are proxies for other debates about what shall be valued and indeed part of the struggle is centered upon what is to be valued, and what consequences are to be taken seriously.

Therefore, it is almost always at the smaller scale that we can see experimental educational processes that enable an attempt, at least, at a democratic social inquiry, which is reconstructive in terms of critique, of problematization, of experiment with solutions, and of evaluation of the outcome with reference to many critical dimensions of the setting, including the indeterminate and determinative matters of desire, liking, and disliking.

This is one exciting thing about the articles in this issue: They share this powerful theme of participatory reconstruction. In the specific cases, the actual educational activity or enterprise plays different roles in the reconstructive inquiry — and in each case we see the imaginative blending of "progressive ideas" with the complex ingredients of the concrete situation. On this view, the variety of tone, setting, and method exhibited in these papers is truly thought-provoking, and the editors believe the work of the writing, as a useful growth experience and inquiry for the authors, has added value to the various fields of work in which they are engaged.

One final note: This introduction has been cast very much in Deweyan terms. It may therefore serve to emphasize by contrast the diversity of new theoretical resources that the authors have brought to bear, to enrich and make possible their inquiries in a world that is richer than any one system can encompass. Each new situation requires resources and insights particularly well-suited to the problems and people involved. It is therefore a source of delightful challenge to encounter, in company with these authors, the people with whom they have been in dialogue, from Gandhi or Collins to Habermas and Hawkins, experts on communities of all kinds, and students of individual growth. In each case, the diversity of questions, of resources, and of possible futures have been focused and tested, in good Deweyan fashion, by the goal of the inquiry, and the progress being explored along a particular path of growth.

In *Progressive Education in Georgia: Tradition or Reality?,* Bella Kopaliani, Delwyn L. Harnisch, and Nana Doliashvili describe a program that is literally education for democracy: a civics education course in the new state of Georgia. An international team of educators supports a course that is designed to provide its students with concepts as well as practices to uphold the growth of a democratic civic process. This combination seems to have transformational effects — and the conceptual changes give prospect of being the most far-reaching, as they undergird critical dialogue in a society actively negotiating its values.

Chaebong Nam's paper, *When New Media Meet the Strong Web of Connected Learning Environments: A New Vision of Progressive Education in the Digital Age,* uses Jane Addams' "socialized education" as a lens with which to examine aspects of a campaign against underage drinking, conducted by urban youth of color. "Socialized education" is conceived as furthering social melioration in action grounded in the lives and concerns of the people involved, using relevant and available tools. A "blended" approach employing social networks and the affordances and excitement of new media enriched the developmental and reflective possibilities of the social ecology of the community.

In her paper *Progressive Education as Continuing Education for the Developmentally Disabled,* Boedicker draws on Gandhi's principles of Basic Education, as well as Dewey's, to reflect programmatically upon the education of a marginalized group: developmentally disabled adults. Gandhi's social thinking, permeated with the principle of *swaraj* ("self rule" in its many dimensions) demands that education for the disenfranchised be rooted practically in their most basic social and physical needs. Within this framework, modified by Kitahara's Daily Life Therapy for the education of the autistic, Boedicker brings a challenging critique of an institution in which she works, and begins to envision an approach to educating for these adults' fuller participation in the wider society.

Leo Casey, in *Learning Beyond Competence to Participation*, uses the sociocultural view of learning as change in participation to examine the pathways of learning taken by adults in a basic computer course. Participation — in social and workplace communication — is a prime motivator for the learners and increased freedom and range of participation is the key metric of success for them. Casey suggests a shift in the focus of progressive education: "from the individual to the participant, and from competence to participation as the ultimate goal of learning."

Delywn L. Harnisch, Timothy C. Guetterman, Olga Samofalova, and Yelena Kussis, *Progressive Educational Actions in a Post-Soviet Republic: Meaningful Collaborations and Empowerment,* report on an international education program for health educators in the emerging republic of Kazakhstan. Amidst the turmoil and promise that has ensued as the state has taken shape, health educators used this technology-enhanced program to reach out for new pedagogical methods, as they developed a vision for professional standards and aims for health education. Collaborative investigation in the initial workshop both modeled new pedagogy, and provided the basis for continued reflection and learning amongst themselves, and with their foreign partners. In this case, the participatory frame for learning represents also a prototype for learning and development in other sectors in Kazakhstan, going forward.

A progressive approach to education implies an intelligent and fresh engagement with educational ends, and the appropriate means for achieving them. John Dewey saw that museums and other settings now called "informal education" were a powerful mechanism for supporting a learning that was connected to live social needs, aspirations, problems, and possibilities — and engaged with addressing them. In *Progressive Museum Education: Examples from the 1960s,* George E. Hein shows how the progressive ideal shaped experiments in reconstruction in two iconic museums (the Exploratorium in San Francisco, and the Boston Children's Museum). Movements in "formal" and "informal" education were linked by common ideals, but also by individuals concerned with, and active in, both venues, constituting a movement that continues to have significant influence.

Progressive education in New Zealand: a revered past, a contested present and an uncertain future. Carol Mutch discusses the status of progressive education in New Zealand, at a time of struggle. The mainstream of education "reform" policy in New Zealand, is not compatible with the progressive stance that has been widely influential in the past, and remains popular with teachers and the electorate more broadly. As a focus for her narrative of innovation and change across 150 years Mutch examines early childhood education and schooling as an enterprise that became deeply rooted in community values and efforts for

social improvement, but is now under pressure from standardizing, market-driven policies. The progressive stance has considerable resilience, perhaps precisely because of its close ties with the needs, intentions, and resources of the community.

The next article moves policy into the background while exploring a teacher's practice across a lifetime of students and policy climates. In *Voicing a mindful pedagogy: A teacher-artist in action*, Amanda R. Morales and Jory Samkoff use an interpretive interview of one remarkable educator to address issues of teacher agency and professional growth. As the teacher reflects on her many decades of experience, Morales and Samkoff identify in her narrative a praxis that is defined by what Aristotle called *phronesis*, an informed and reflective mindfulness about the students as well as the curriculum. The imperatives of student growth and condition take precedence over the imperatives of curriculum, or modulate those imperatives as the teacher creates the learning context for her students. In this creative and mindful stance we see teaching as an art with intellectual, aesthetic, and emotional dimensions, which the teacher integrates into a praxis that is not dictated by policy, but interprets and critiques it.

The final article, by Susan Matoba Adler and Jeanne Marie Iorio, addresses *Progressive Teachers of Young Children: Creating Contemporary Agents of Change.* While Morales and Samkoff portray a teacher's praxis that maintains its integrity despite changes in policy weather, Adler and Iorio show us teachers who, in addition, have come to see their work to include the improvement and progress of their field, early childhood education. The authors describe how the teacher education program builds the sense of teacher agency for change, and equips them with theoretical tools to support their active critique of policy mandates as they affect both teachers and children. As with all the previous articles, this one shows us educators as active participants in the reshaping of society as they encounter it — claiming for themselves a share in the "process of authority."

References

Clark, G. (1994). Rescuing the discourse of community. *College Composition and Communication*, 45(1), p. 61-74.

Dewey, John. (1916/2008) *Democracy and education*. In Boydston, Jo Ann, ed. *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899 - 1924*. Volume 9.

Dewey, John. (1938/2008) Democracy and education in the world today. In Boydston, Jo Ann, ed. *The later works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*. vol 13. Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, IL. pp. 294-303.

Dewey, John. (1933/1989) *How we think (rev. ed)*. In Boydston, Jo Ann, ed. *The later works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*. vol 8. Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, IL. pp. 105-352.

Dewey, John. (1938/2008) *Logic: the theory of inquiry*. In Boydston, Jo Ann. *The later works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*. vol 12. Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, IL.

Dewey, John. (1897/1972). My pedagogic creed. In Boydston, Jo Ann, ed. *The Early Works of John Dewey, 1882 - 1898*. Volume 5. pp. 84-95.

Dewey, John. (1920/1988) *Reconstruction in philosophy*. In Boydston, Jo Ann, ed. *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899 - 1924*. Volume 12: 1920. pp77-202.

Dewey, John. (1939/2008) *Theory of valuation*. In Boydston, Jo Ann, ed. *The later works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*. vol 13. Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, IL. pp. 189-252.