Moral Problems as Issues-Centered Social Studies Education: Discovering Dewey as a Guiding Foundation

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Abstract

By considering ethics and morals from a vantage point in which personal and political beliefs become part of our national debate, students could form the habit of political discussion in much the same way that representatives of social and political groups prepare and respond on a daily basis to an ever inquiring media. I will explore several examples of media, including social media, confronting, debating, and disseminating in new ways challenging issues facing today's global communities. As a solid counter-point to social media, indeed all media impact, in a rapidly changing global environment, Dewey provides important messages to encourage today's educators to actively bolster a reflective thinking, issues-centered approach founded on ethics and morals. Dewey's writings on ethics, morals and democracy can open the door and allow students to become socially and politically engaged in the myriad of issues confronting 21st century citizens.

Keywords: John Dewey, ethics and morals, reflective thinking, public and social media, issues-centered education

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Introduction

World cultures today are impacted by an era of continually evolving media communications. Technology has enhanced traditional media creating global communication portability and instantaneous updating. Formal media has morphed into social media. Are the thoughts and actions of our students positively or negatively affected by 21st century media? Is media impacting our ideas of ethical and moral behavior? How does today's media relate to notions of what John Dewey would define as "good judgment" in a global society from world perspectives?

Can our educators prepare students to sort through the ethical and moral implications of the messaging behind 21st century political, economic, and social issues and events? With increasing frequency these occurrences are comprised of evolving or instantaneous aspects of communities and individuals which vary in scope and intensity across the globe. The underlying concern for educators is how to develop citizenship education in a way that critiques the nature of media and its possible effect on students. Is it possible to provide them with reliable tools to determine the ethical and moral implications of actions which are depicted in formal media presentations or spontaneous happenings? Encouraging students to acquire the ability to critique the ethical and moral implications of the media, as opposed to merely accepting what is outwardly or even unofficially declared to be right or just, should become a component of teaching practices. The projected outcome is to enable students to confront ethical and moral problems relating to issues portrayed as right or wrong. I will argue that by considering ethics and morals from a vantage point in which personal and political beliefs become part of our national debate, students can form the habit of political discussion in much the same way that representatives of social and political groups prepare and respond on a daily basis to an ever inquiring media.

In *Ethics*, Dewey and Tufts (1908) stressed that it was ideal to present students with an examination of unresolved questions. Dewey (1909) observed in *Moral Principles in Education* that students need to be presented exercises in forming and experimenting with conclusions or suppositions in order to develop and increase their judgment skills. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1916) argued that "morality is concerned with conduct" (p. 402). Along this line, issues such as how representatives of political parties allege governments should conduct themselves, how governments actually conduct themselves, and how aspects of social media engage with government as a growing community dimension, could and should be considered as ethical and moral issues in today's classrooms. Dewey's writings on ethics, morals and democracy can open the door and allow students to become socially and politically engaged in the myriad of issues confronting 21st century citizens.

I will examine real world media encounters in the United States, Egypt, and Africa which present ethical and moral dilemmas surrounding political, social, and economic events. I will explore several examples of public media, including social media, that confront, debate, and disseminate in new ways the challenging issues facing today's global communities. These discussions will involve questions concerning the role and size of government, how No Child Left Behind is viewed in this context, and how political and social actions around the world are presented and discussed through social media. These cases will illustrate how developing ethical and moral principles in students creates the opportunity to encourage and grow democratic ideals in communities. Reflective thinking skills—in this instance the ability to apply a critical lens to media and the use of media—is the foundation for determining who or what is considered to be ethically and morally acceptable in any given society.

I will review various scholarly opinions such as Michael Apple, Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Donald W. Oliver and James P. Shaver, Anna Ochoa-Becker, William Stanley,

Ronald Evans, and others who support a Deweyan rationale for education. Social media, or any media, can be a foe or a friend. Our students need the best framework to make a well founded determination. I argue that John Dewey—that is, a Deweyan and issues content form of education—builds a path to forming the ethical and moral judgments enabling citizens to reach critically determined decisions.

I argue that in light of the many contentious issues currently confronting this nation, perhaps Dewey's (1909) approach to moral principles in education—and especially his ideas concerning conditions that he deemed necessary "for the formation of good judgment" (p. 55)—should be reevaluated and at long last implemented in our schools. One reason is substantiated by the way national and global media, and in recent times social media, actually engages in using Dewey's basic approach. That is, the recognition that the method of investigation and critical thinking advocated by Dewey is often adopted by global media as well as social media. This is often accomplished through the types of topics and questions regularly presented to politicians and "opinion makers" as well as to global communities. His methodology is also demonstrated by the way in which the public seeks through various types of media the very type of experimentation that Dewey found lacking in the schools.

Case Study: *A Primary Function of Government*

For example, on December 18, 2011, ABC News and the Miller Center of the University of Virginia presented a nationally televised debate. The debate took place in Washington, D.C. and involved what Christiane Amanpour described as, "the intellectual heavyweights of both parties." Congressman Paul Ryan and ABC's George Will were the participants for the right and the left was represented by Congressman Barney Frank and former Clinton Labor Secretary Robert Reich.

Christiane Amanpour of ABC News, acted as moderator. She introduced the debate and framed the overriding issues of the day challenging American democracy by posing fundamental questions: "Has the federal government become too big, too sprawling? Americans have always been weary of Washington…with poll after poll showing trust in government is at an all-time low….And what about this conundrum, people who oppose big government still want to collect their entitlements?"

In response, the representatives from each major political party spoke at length with ethical and moral principles underlying their respective statements. However, their responses were not formed in terms of moral principles. Instead each argument was framed as what may be described as political opinions or broad scoped philosophies of a political nature with moral assumptions at the heart of their statements. For example, a brief portion of the transcript reads as follows:

> RYAN: This time last week I was in Helmand Province with our Marines in Afghanistan. They're out there fighting for our liberties and our security, depriving safe havens for terrorists who can come and attack again. You might not like that. You might have a problem with that.
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> FRANK: They go far beyond it. The point is--
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> RYAN: It is a primary function of the government.
>
> FRANK: You're talking about the construction of society -- I'm in favor of the military stopping bad things from happening and shooting bad guys, (inaudible). But they are far beyond that, into construction of societies and in trying to build. Look, we're still in Iraq—

The problem with discussions like this is that even the issue "what is a primary function of government" does not lend itself to easy or simple answers. Many of our students may assume this type of issue entails an absolute, unequivocal, and unassailable multiple choice (a), (b), or (c) answer. Yet, to our military troops in harm's way, their families, and our nation, the answers are much more complex. What may appear on the surface to be a simple issue about a primary function of government is not static as an idea, nor is it easily addressed as demonstrated in the verbal exchange between Representatives Ryan and Frank.

In reality, this issue is fraught with ethical and moral considerations. That is, even in this two-way exchange of a few words, Ryan and Frank provide divergent ideas that center around contrasting viewpoints on moral and ethical questions concerning what is, in essence, right or wrong when it comes to what should be the functions of our federal government. This includes deeply embedded underlying assumptions and beliefs both as to what is morally and ethically proper for federal government involvement when it comes to protecting its citizens during times of terrorism as well as concerning the manner in which our nation should conduct itself in its dealings with other nations across the globe. In fact, in the revised edition of his work with Tufts on *Ethics*, Dewey (1932) observed that without reflective thinking existing beliefs regarding right or wrong create a barrier to moral theory. He found that moral theory "emerges when men are confronted with situations in which different desires promise opposed goods and in which incompatible courses of action seem to be morally justified" (p. 164). Dewey's view represents an apt description of Ryan and Frank's confrontation over their opposing positions.

More importantly, one statement by Dewey (1909) is especially germane when questions of the size and role of government are debated across the world. He believed the degree that history teaching enhanced ethical value "will be measured by the extent to which past events are made the means of understanding the present,—affording insight into what makes up the structure and working of society to-day" (p. 36).

Case Study: *A Place to Begin a Classroom Discussion or Debate*

As a place from which to begin a discussion that is centered on issues of social justice, the transcript of a debate on December 18, 2011, between ABC's George Will and economist Robert Reich focuses on several basic issues that stem from the question of: Is government too big? The transcript provides the opportunity to closely examine the skillful application by one of the debaters of Dewey's approach on the ethical value of teaching history. To initiate the live debate, Will cites Thomas Jefferson. George Will arguably did so to contrast past historical events involving Jefferson's view of limited government against those who are in favor of a more expansive government today. In so doing, Will presents Thomas Jefferson's view of government as both the starting, and in many ways, the ending point of his primary discussion. By way of introduction, George Will states: "Jefferson understood that you can have a government with minimal attention to the absolute essentials….we want government to build roads, we want government to defend the shores, we want government to deliver the mail." Will's position is that Thomas Jefferson's experience with and insights into the workings of government could be illustrative of and provide evidence toward a historical understanding of how government could operate in the eyes of many who prefer a less intrusive role for government today.

In Will's opinion, American citizens should remember Thomas Jefferson's approach toward government—and concern themselves only with what Will claims Jefferson found to be the "absolute essentials" of government. Will's case for limited government might be described as Deweyan, particularly when contrasting views using historical examples from debaters on the opposite side of the issue are added. For instance, Dewey (1909) concluded

that history teaching requires adopting the position of presenting past events so as to portray historical situations with a present nature that possesses larger aspects.

Following his points about Thomas Jefferson, George Will talks similarly of Ronald Reagan. However, in this case Will delivers an additional moral and ethical value or principle that he attributes to Reagan's approach to small or limited government. Specifically, he presents the argument that under Reagan the concept or outgrowth of limited government involves embracing respect for the institution of government itself. Continuing on this theme, Will expands on what he considers to be an essential part of government that he believes and argues all American citizens want:

> WILL: "But after it [government] does the essentials, understand what Ronald Reagan did. When Ronald Reagan said we're going to have less government—under Reagan, respect for government, something we all want, respect for government rose as government's role declined."

Will attempts to use history as a reference point and as evidence to support his position regarding the nature of society today and in particular how American society is affected by the size and role of government.

The Debate Continues: Big Government's Effect on Equality

Both George Will and Robert Reich continue their verbal sparring, allowing Reich an opportunity to retort.

> WILL: "And most of all, big government today harms equality. It harms equality because concentrating power in Washington, in big government, it makes itself susceptible to the rent-seeking by big, muscular interest groups. The only people who can come to Washington and bend the government to private purposes.

> REICH: "And indeed George, you have said over and over again, and Paul Ryan, you have said, is that yes, there is too much crony capitalism, there is too much of big corporation and the rich and Wall Street. But you seem to believe that if you got rid of government, then somehow individuals would not be imperiled by those same forces….Let's get serious about what we're talking about. And let's make sure that we understand we're living in a society where people care about jobs, they care about wages. They can't get ahead because so much wealth and income are at the top and taxes are not paid at the top to finance education and health care and infrastructure that everybody depends on to get ahead. Upward mobility is being slowed because of that inequality, and that inability of us to actually have the effect we the people, not we the corporations, not we Wall Street, not we the rich want to have."

Case Study: *The Government in the Shape of No Child Left Behind*

A different example entailing the size and role of government involves No Child Left Behind (NCLB). One perspective on NCLB is found in Andrew J. Rotherham's exclusive interview with George W. Bush on January 12, 2012. Rotherham, a Time magazine education columnist, met with former President George W. Bush on the 10th anniversary of No Child Left Behind. In their dialogue, Bush speaks about what he believes is the success of the legislation and provides his rationale as to why, in his opinion, it has become an opportune punching bag for many. This excerpt from the interview provides a succinct synopsis:

> Q: Mr. President, 10 years in, what's your take on No Child Left Behind?

> Bush: "First of all, I am extremely proud of the effects of No Child Left Behind. For the first time, the federal government basically demanded results in return for money. It started by saying, We expect you to measure [student performance]. As a result, there has been a noticeable change in achievement, particularly among minority groups. And I am proud of that accomplishment…"
>
> Q: In your view, how much of the criticism of the law is about specifics, and how much is just partisan politics?
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> Bush: "In some circles, punching No Child Left Behind is a way to basically say, I'm against Big Government. In fact, No Child Left Behind is a way to promote efficient government. In a lot of these debates, you don't hear real detail or analysis about how to improve the law. In essence, its No Child Left Behind is big government. Well, No Child Left Behind basically says, If you're going to fund [schools], like we've been doing for years, we in the federal government ought to demand accountability, which seems to me a very conservative principle. Yet some conservatives are saying No Child Left Behind is an improper role for federal government."

An opposite point of view on NCLB is presented in a national cable television interview during the May 26, 2012, Melissa Harris-Perry cable television program on MSNBC. At that time, Daniel Denvir, a reporter for the Philadelphia City Paper—whose website claims "the award-winning alternative weekly"—criticized the current educational policy in effect. The transcript reads:

> DENVIR: We need to allow—we need to allow teachers to actually teach if we are going to inspire this love of learning in students and this lifelong intellectual passion. What the No Child Left Behind high stakes testing regime has unleashed in our schools is the exactly the opposite. Curriculums have been eviscerated. Literature, American history, arts, music, science, and everything that's not being tested is being cut. Even P.E. [physical education] and recess.

In these two different personal interviews the concept of social efficiency is pitted against the idea of opportunity when it comes to the love of learning. Dewey (1925) developed his theory of criticism in the last chapter of *Experience and Nature*. He pointed out that as soon as one began to talk about values and define them, one was involved in criticism. For Dewey, criticism required inquiry into the conditions and consequences of the object valued.

In their critiques of No Child Left Behind, former President George W. Bush argues for considering NCLB as exemplifying social efficiency while reporter Daniel Denvir arguably follows Dewey's (1925) theoretical process. Bush argues the value of accountability as a social efficiency principle. Denvir speaks of lifelong learning in terms of a value, whose outcome should be protected as well as exemplified in the schools. Then Denvir defines lifelong learning in terms that exemplify what life will look like when that opportunity is lost. He deftly uses his voice as a reporter to set the stage for his criticism. Although neither of these viewpoints addresses the exact nature of the inquiry into the conditions and consequences of No Child Left Behind, the fact that one spokesperson is a former President and the other is a reporter for a respected newspaper leads the viewer to assume with some assurance that both have not only inquired into the issue but also reliably investigated the requirements and concerns of No Child Left Behind as well as the value of lifelong learning as an outflow of education.

However, Denvir concludes that the consequences of this current national education reform not only eliminate academic courses he considers important from schools across the country, but also that these curriculum cuts will have an enormous impact on the interest and motivation of our future citizens to eventually become engaged in lifelong learning. Thus, the value of accountability in the schools is presented as confronting head on the value of the subjects in the schools that are being reduced or eliminated under the No Child Left Behind reform. Denvir argues that the issue of accountability as a value can in fact adversely impact students by producing citizens who through lack of opportunity to take subjects such as art, music and physical education may not have the motivation to even want to be engaged in lifelong learning.

This cable television interview presents the notion that the school subjects that remain untested in this era of accountability are in a strong sense undervalued especially when they are simply ignored or completely cut from the curriculum solely because they are not being tested under NCLB criteria. In Denvir's opinion, a wide range of academic subjects and opportunities are either greatly diminished or entirely lost in this era of educational reform. This is a significant factor in today's public education that potentially may result in long-term and catastrophic effects on the very quality of life our country cherishes and promotes. After all, literature, American history, arts, music, science, physical education, as well as access to recess, are defined by Denvir and many others as components essential to "inspire the love of learning" for a lifetime.

The reason this may be important to this discussion is that in the end, Dewey would appear to agree with Denvir's view on NCLB. Today, the No Child Left Behind legislation currently in place arguably fails due to the intense focus on teaching to the test which is counter to the promotion of reflective thinking in the way Dewey advocated over one hundred years ago. One reason is that a significant portion of Denvir's concerns are addressed in Dewey's thoughts on aesthetics. *Experience and Nature* relates Dewey's (1925) philosophy in theory of aesthetic experience. Dewey's expressed that "Knowledge is a word of various meanings…. 'science' may signify tested and authentic instance of knowledge. But knowledge has also a meaning more liberal and more humane" (p. 161). Later, in *Art as Experience*, Dewey (1934), expressed that

> In art as an experience, actuality and possibility or ideality, the new and the old, objective material and personal response, the individual and the universal, surface and depth, sense and meaning, are integrated in an experience in which they are all transfigured from the significance that belongs to them when isolated in reflection (p. 297).

In support of Denvir's promotion of lifelong learning, Dewey (1938) emphasized the desire to continue learning was a primary attitude to instill in students. If the impetus to learn wanes to any degree, it is not a small consequence. Indeed, the student loses his/her natural capacity to be able to deal with the many situations presented throughout life. However, Ronald W. Evans (2004) laments that: "Rather than an inquiry-and issues-centered approach to instruction, the current trend is toward an emphasis on content acquisition" (p. 175).

Case Study: *Social Media and Egypt's Government*

Next, I will turn to the intense effect of social media on a political crisis that reached into the world's view. The political chaos that erupted in Egypt in mid-2010 has yet to be resolved. It has also not been totally absent from public media since the initial instantaneous explosion of public outcries and demonstrations. The global population became a public group of media watchers. At that time Wael Ghonim was a Google marketing executive, Egyptian born and living in Dubai, who inadvertently became an activist in support of the

Egyptian citizens through social media. While casually browsing through Facebook pages, he stumbled across the Facebook images of an Egyptian man brutally beaten to death by the Egyptian police forces. Personally reacting to the video, Gronim launched his own Facebook page. He quickly wrote that the man, Khaled, was killed that day and expressed that if he did not defend Khaled's horrific death then Gronim himself might be the next one killed.

Gronim's (2012) book, *Revolution 2.0 The Power of the People Is Greater Than the People in Power: A Memoir*, poignantly tells the story of his journey into activism. His Facebook page was joined by 300 people within minutes of launch and over the next three months grew to 250,000. His phrase "Today they killed Kahled" became the Egyptian public outcry. Gronim's Facebook writings continued advocating his idea that oppression was the life experience of all young Egyptians who were denied rights and freedoms. Ghonim was well on his way to reflecting Paulo Freire's, one of few people who is considered to have in reality changed the world, notions about the oppressed lower class tier of the Brazilian class structured society. Freire (1969) believed "that education could help men to assume an increasingly critical attitude toward the world and so to transform it" (p.34). In a related context, both Dewey and Freire advocated that the solution for achieving democratic ideals was education reform. Specifically, they advocated reforming teaching in a strikingly similar manner. In fact, Gadotti (1994) observed: "Ever since he wrote his thesis…Paulo Freire has referred to John Dewey, quoting his work *Democracy and Education*" (p. 117). Their mutual notion that teaching critical pedagogy goes far beyond the confines of textbooks has carried forward.

Gronim's method of informing or educating the public is dramatically different than Freire's long term efforts to educate people in small communities through personally orchestrated culture circles and extensive writings. The culture circle was a pedagogic program designed by Freire to assist members of the community, people of all ages regardless of their educational background and who largely constituted the second tier of citizenship of Brazil, to both attain a critical thinking approach and to put it into actual practice in their lives. Freire's critical pedagogy to educate citizens in methods to evaluate and effect changes in their social status represents an extended educational process.

Today, is social media education of the public equally effective? Is it an enhanced educational tool? Or, in reality, would the Egyptian public's reactions to political and social oppression have been improved if the Facebook browsers had taken a step back and applied critical thinking before moving into action? Boisvert (1998) offers the idea that "The citizens can tend toward the 'mass' or they can tend toward the 'public.' Dewey's political philosophy seeks to articulate the conditions appropriate for encouraging the latter" (p. 94).

Case Study: *The Kony Circumstances and the Impact of Social Media*

With this Deweyan notion in mind, YouTube is another social media outlet making an impact on global communities. Reporting for the New York Times from Kampala, Uganda, on March 8, 2012, Josh Kron and J. David Goodman write retrospectively that Jason Russell, then a 24 year old University of Southern California graduate who had studied film production, was a witness to an attack by Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army. Their article states that as a direct response to his personal view of the atrocities: "Mr. Russell would dedicate the next nine years of his life, often in obscurity, to making them [Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army] a household name."

According to their report, Russell's initial timeline for communicating to the world public his position regarding the events involving Kony's atrocities became tremendously accelerated by postings on YouTube. The New York Times reporters quickly determine that "diplomats, academics, and Ugandans who have worked assiduously on the issue for decades

without anything close to the blitz of attention that Mr. Russell and his tight-knit group of activists have generated." More importantly, the authors point out that the video, posted for only three days, experienced in excess of 50 million YouTube and Vimeo viewer hits that in one single day raised donations in the hundreds of thousands of dollars "rocketing across Twitter and Facebook at a pace rarely seen for any video, let alone a half-hour film about a conflict in remote central Africa."

What made the public's attention to this subject even more remarkable, according to the New York Times reporters, was the idea that Jason Russell "clearly tapped into a vein of youthful idealism." As indisputable evidence, they indicate: "YouTube said the popularity was driven by viewers in the United States and those younger than 25." Their news report further details "Many parents, including at least one in the State Department, discovered the video only after their children showed it to them." The news account adds that after being "bombarded with messages from the campaign's supporters" even celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey, Rihanna and Ryan Seacrest posted messages about it.

The report then points out that Russell is the co-founder of a group called Invisible Children. The authors continue by noting that, although this group's work resulted in a documentary that was "gripping and evocative" and "alarmed many veteran observers of the devastation Mr. Kony and his fighters have left in their wake over the years," critics of Russell's group and their documentary surfaced. They report: "Not until halfway through the film does Mr. Russell mention that 'the war' he describes is no longer happening in Uganda, where he sets the documentary. The Lord's Resistance Army left the country years ago….". Their report also notes an additional critical complaint that the documentary is silent on human rights violence committed by the Ugandan armies while at the same time the film implies that upward of 30,000 children serve in Kony's military. The actual result is, as the authors report, that since leaving Uganda, Kony's resistance army group was dramatically reduced to a few hundred but even this limited group continued to intensely harass civilians.

In response to this criticism, the New York Times reports that Russell indicates he "has not made the most nuanced or academic of films." The article also reports that in Russell's video attempt to chart his "personal odyssey to tell the world about Mr. Kony's reign of terror and bring it to an end," Russell actually admits that "he may have boiled down the issues, but that is what it takes to captivate so many people." Russell reiterates his belief that: "No one wants a boring documentary on Africa." Based on this idea, he adds: "Maybe we have to make it pop, and we have to make it cool." The reporters note that Russell contends: "We view ourself as the Pixar of human rights stories," most likely implying a comparison of his Invisible Children group to the Hollywood film studio known for their striking and fictional animated dramas.

It is very likely that John Dewey can provide thought provoking insight for the public to reflect on this New York Times report that portrays Russell and his campaign against Kony as engaging in a personal narrative with partly true and partly untrue depictions, as well as having serious errors of omission along the way. Teachers and students alike may find food for thought as they consider the role that ethics plays in the work people do in pursuit of ends that justify, in their mind, the means when it comes to what might be described as the common good. While democracy encompasses multiple meanings, if it holds a moral component, Dewey (1920) argued that "it is found in resolving that the supreme test of all political institutions and industrial arrangements shall be the contribution they make to the all-around growth of every member of society (p. 186)."

In addition, reporters Kron and Goodman indicate that critics point out the tremendous funding enjoyed by Invisible Children is largely used to pay "officer salaries, filmmaking costs and travel, as opposed to on-the-ground programs to help rebuild the lives

of people traumatized by decades of conflict." Dewey (1908) illustrated the manner in which the ethics of this posture can be considered in the classroom. In maintaining that society holds responsibility for providing for the common good, he pleaded that individuals needed to acquire well founded ethical and moral notions in order to be able to form their own opinions and judgments as independent citizens. In doing so, they would not become acquiescent to publicly held points of view or passive to private interests.

Important to this discussion, Dewey's consideration of ethics clearly becomes amplified by the concerns that Kron and Goodman highlight in their New York Times article. The authors point out that activism efforts involving international conflicts have produced both benefits and unanticipated outcomes such as recent experiences in the Darfur region. At the same time, they state: "many analysts also argue that the one-sided way activists painted the conflict—highlighting the Sudanese government's crimes against villagers while largely ignoring the atrocities committed by rebels—ultimately made it harder to negotiate an end to the crises."

Dewey (1908) noted a similar ethical conflict between people. Using the sub-title "Moral Democracy," he articulated the idea of individuals striving to do good for others has been historically moved forward as an inheritance rooted in political, religious, and charitable organizations. Dewey argued that moral principles become embedded in these entities. When an individual strives for the social good whether the premise is political, religious, or charitable without soliciting mutual cooperative efforts from others, then the efforts may be held in disregard and result in disappointment. Dewey believed that willing "cooperation must be the root principle of the morals of democracy" (p. 304). The very cooperation that Dewey espoused can also result in fruitful discussions that fall under the term slacktivism surrounding current issues such as the Kony video. The March 8, 2012 New York Times reports:

> Some have called the video [Kony, 2012] a pitch-perfect appeal to so-called slacktivism, a pejorative term for armchair activism by a younger generation, often online. But rather than eschew such digital action, the video takes it as one of its primary goals. Making Mr. Kony infamous, after all, is just a click away.

Case Study: *The Kony Video Enters the Classroom—Lessons from the Media*

In a lesson plan titled "Activism or Slacktivism? The 'Stop Kony' Campaign as a Teachable Moment" the Kron-Goodman report resurfaces on March 13, 2012, in The Learning Network of the New York Times. Sarah Kavanagh, Holly Epstein Ojalvo and Katherine Schulten present this lesson plan intended to assist students in critically evaluating the spectrum of the Kony 2012 issues. This lesson suggests showing photographs and videos of brutality wrought in Africa by Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army. The lesson cautions that the slide shows, videos and articles contain graphic material that may not be appropriate for all students. This warning to teachers is in response to the intense depiction and graphic subject matter contained in the "Kony 2012" video and the "Stop Kony" campaign that was and is featured on YouTube.

Their lesson plan outlines six activities designed to develop a better understanding of the social media campaign waged by Russell against Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army within the context of the current social, economic, and political situation in Africa. Using video techniques as a learning tool, the lesson sections encourage students to "create their own explainer videos that they can share with the school community and family and friends, either live or online (or both)." Or, they had the option of writing a textbook addendum comprised of both pictures and text to tell the story of the Ugandan Acholi war. One section demonstrates methods of engaging students with Kony 2012 criticisms by

creating a video response to criticism they found to be "'oversimplified,' 'inaccurate' and 'proposes superficial solutions'." The students are instructed to concisely sum up the Kony issues, briefly explain their criticisms and cite their resources as well as pointing video viewers to reliable resources to look for additional information.

In the "Considering 'Slacktivism'" section of the lesson, students are encouraged to gain a variety of perspectives on the influence of Stop Kony and other awareness campaigns driven by social media by reading views from experts such as commentator Malcolm Gladwell and columnist Roger Cohen, as well as offer in text and video their ideas about how the Invisible Children group reacted to critical assessments. After evaluating specific questions about whether or not such types of awareness campaigns either promote slacktivism or promote actual change, the students are encouraged to "adopt the persona of an expert, activist, or writer to engage in a roundtable discussion" around questions regarding notions such as whether they should devote more time to listening to people who need their help rather than suggesting probable solutions. Then following this discussion, students are asked to compose "an Op-Ed article or blog post, or make a video, that outlines their own opinion on the Stop Kony campaign."

Under the heading "Raising Awareness About an Issue," students are encouraged to "create a video modeled after the "Kony 2012" video aimed at raising awareness about an issue they care about." They should consider issues such as "How will they highlight the voices and agency of the marginalized?" Students are also encouraged to "examine how the Kony video went viral and glean lessons from the video's popularity to make a plan to disseminate one or more of the videos." Other lesson sections involve students in creating their own videos using Kony 2012 as a model and also in reviewing and comparing different social media campaigns that address current problems or issues. Again, the students are asked to share their results and discuss both the limitations and the power of social media in promoting specific causes.

Under the section, "Looking into History," students are encouraged to review life before the internet or telephone to consider "how did people become aware of conflicts taking place in other parts of the world? How were they engaged in causes?" The students then work in small groups. Each group adopts a conflict from the past that is cause associated and attempt to uncover how the specific cause or causes actually reached the awareness of the general public. As an added dimension to this section, students are encouraged to share their discoveries of historical conflicts using social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and others.

This lesson example from the New York Times Learning Network suggests an approach to teaching and learning that appears to be consummate Dewey. In his discussion on education's role in teaching moral principles, Dewey (1909) stressed that introducing every possible approach was needed to capture students' attention and improve their capabilities to create, build, and produce ways to increase their opportunities to change an absorption in self-endeavors into social service efforts. In this particular lesson plan, the authors, at every step of the process and in every question posed to students, strongly encourage active engagement and, for the most part, the design of the lesson that gives confidence to students to become social, and more critically thinking citizens.

In the case of Kony 2012, the proverbial rest of the story reveals a more dynamic moral principle dilemma of two opposing viewpoints regarding a tragic situation for humankind and a third world country. Despite the significant pro and con reactions to the same video production, the moral contradictions are ripe for critical analysis and evaluation from independent views as the Learning Network lesson plan encourages. Dewey (1908) poignantly and astutely described this type of travesty: "The inherent irony and tragedy of

much that passes for a high kind of socialized activity is precisely that it seeks a common good by methods which forbid its being either common or a good" (p. 304).

This Dewey passage may actually serve as his forward looking reflective thinking on these types of 21st century media presentations.

Historical Perspectives on Methods to Challenge Social Issues

Dewey (1909) observed in *Moral Principles in Education* that students needed to be presented exercises in forming and experimenting with conclusions or suppositions in order to increase their judgment skills. The emphasis, according to Dewey, should be placed on the students selecting problems and executing their own solutions as a final test. This process would allow the student to determine a proposed solution's potential to succeed or to fail. At this juncture, the student would then be able to assess the value of his or her ideas. In a manner similar to the 21st century social studies issues centered community, Dewey inquired: "Does the school, as a system, afford at present sufficient opportunity for this sort of experimentation?" (p. 56). Dewey's own response was that unless the school maintained a focus on active investigation and critical thinking it could not provide the nurturing environment needed to form judgments "which is an integral factor in good character" (p. 56).

Dewey has been closely followed by Paulo Freire and Harold Rugg as well as others such as Michael Apple, Henry Giroux, Stanley Aronowitz, Peter McLaren, Maxine Greene, E. Wayne Ross, William Ayers, Donald Oliver, James P. Shaver, Alan Griffin, Gordon Hullfish, William Stanley, Shirley Engle, Anna Ochoa-Becker, Ronald W. Evans and others. All are notable in their advocacy for teaching critical thinking to examine and problem-solve issues—issues that Dewey believed should be of immediate interest to the student and of vital importance to society.

Michael Apple (1990) advocates that teachers prepare their students by arming them with the "political and conceptual tools needed to face the unequal society in which they also live" (p. 104). He echoes several predecessors. For instance, Harold Rugg's philosophy of education involved the use of first-hand evidence and eyewitness descriptions of powerful events or selections from original source materials. In his textbooks, some chapters started with the descriptions of significant events or an original story aimed at engaging students' interests. Typically, these chapters included sets of exercises and questions. Rugg also frequently used pamphlets to creatively present rhetorical questions, illustrations, cartoons, photographs and other types of presentation tools to communicate facts in an interesting as well as relevant manner to students. The pamphlets provided a good vehicle to raise issues, problems, or questions (Evans, 2007). In analyzing public issues, Oliver and Shaver (1966) point out that:

> Clarification of evaluative and legal issues…becomes a central concern. At this point in the curriculum the student is not taught to believe or accept certain values but rather to clarify his evaluative commitment and to understand the relationships among the justification of a value position, the clarification of a definitional issue, and the proof process involved in a factual issue (p. 115).

In 1976 Anna Ochoa presented a paper at the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) annual meeting that intensely discusses the values that should guide social studies teachers' conduct and ethics. At that time, Ochoa cites Richard S. Peters, a British philosopher whose primary works are in political theory, philosophy of education, and philosophical psychology. She discusses Peters' ideas for specific criteria to follow for teachers' conceptual development, intellectual and character development, and learner consciousness development. A second source that Ochoa cites focuses on democratic ethics

emphasizing peoples' human self-respect and rational processes. She strongly advocates that teachers need to cultivate informed and ethical evaluations to formulate action while at the same time preserving their students' right to learning and privacy.

For Ochoa (1976), the purpose of education is for teachers to apply these particular resources in order to develop students who have acquired the skills, knowledge, and values to be effective contributors in a democratic society. Ochoa discusses the dilemmas encountered by teachers—administrative curriculum restrictions, as well as little support from parents and from communities—in their efforts to empower students through critical thinking. Today, these more or less traditional dilemmas are significantly increased by the impact of social media on students, parents, and, in general, on all citizens. Apple (1990) steps forward to pose this critical question for educators: "one of the most fundamental questions we should ask about school processes is what knowledge is of most worth" (p. vii). With this idea in mind, Deron Boyles, Tony Carusi, and Dennis Attick (2009) assert "there are groups promoting education reform in order to perpetuate status quo norms of power and privilege" and "there are other groups who wish to dismantle such privilege under the auspices of social justice" (p. 30).

From a different perspective, humanization without liberation was meaningless to Freire (1973). This notion was the power behind his "banking method" metaphor in teaching (1970). That is, to simply view a student as an empty vessel in which teachers deposit preapproved information from a top-down hierarchy ignores Freire's commitment to freedom. Freire understood that without discussing liberation, the status quo remained. Freire (1970) wrote that teachers "must be partners of the students in their relations with them" (p. 75). He supported this idea by stating: "The teacher cannot think for her students, nor can she impose her thought on them" (p. 77).

In similar fashion, Ochoa (1976) enters into a discussion on Richard S. Peters' notion that effective teaching requires that teachers reveal reasons to the learner. She reiterates that students should not be treated as mechanical robots or as containers of stimulus connected responses. Stated another way, James P. Shaver and William S. Strong (1982) emphasized that teachers hold the responsibility to establish a well founded educational setting. However, they stressed that teachers **"**should heed Dewey's caution that they ought not act arbitrarily as "magistrates" and impose objectives and activities alien to their students (Dewey, 1964a, pp. 153-155; 164c, pp. 9-10).

Several years later, Anna Ochoa-Becker (2007) identifies current research that shows teachers, particularly in the social studies, "can be more effective by engaging young citizens in issues…that are of interest to them and ones that can be connected to broader and more complex controversies" (p. 62). Ochoa-Becker states that teachers cannot "do so by covering more of the textbooks nor by delivering new and better lectures or by repeatedly testing" (p. 62).

Ochoa-Becker (2007) takes a strong position in favor of developing and maintaining democratic schools and classrooms as supported by this recent research. She admits only some teachers and a small number of schools have been receptive to these studies. According to Ochoa-Becker, countless, if not in fact the majority of schools and classrooms have not made an effort. She admonishes that schools and classrooms that are fostering an environment for democratic ideals "may be as important as the formal curriculum. Perhaps more so" (p. 61). Teachers and educators, however, are not solely responsible. Without the support of families and parents, communities, preschools, public media, religious and social groups, teachers will be precluded from making significant progress.

In order to move forward, educators need to turn from a traditional authoritarian teaching role to a new and different teaching approach that creates conditions where serious intellectual activity can take place. At the same time, Ochoa-Becker (2007) cautions that "important ideas and information must be subject to continuous scrutiny by members of the class and the teacher" (p. 218). She proposes that an issues-centered decision making curriculum can start with one teacher, a pair of teachers, or a departmental group of teachers. This curriculum change needs the support of administrators and department chairs. This redesigned teaching role creates an open classroom environment that fosters exchanging ideas and keeps a continued discussion in a civil manner. Thus, Ochoa-Becker advocates an issues-centered decision-making curriculum in which "neither the teacher nor the textbook should serve as the ultimate source of authority regarding the credibility and validity of knowledge" (p. 217). Ochoa-Becker suggests that strengthening of democracy "refers to improving democracy's policies and practices associated with social justice" (p. 4).

Conclusion

Today's citizens receive information and news in a variety of 21st century formats. Even the standard printed form of international, national, and community newspapers can be viewed in daily, minute-by-minute electronic transmissions. And, then there is all forms of live, instantly received if one so chooses, electronic media communication of news and worldwide information. The importance of current events or news items, in Dewey's estimation, is dependent upon the actual issues presented by public media relative to what any social consequences there may or may not be. The meaning and intent of the news imported by any type of media vehicle cannot actually be established without placing the new in relation to the old—to what has actually happened and been incorporated into the events unfolding. In discussing the types of information presented and the manner in which it was organized, Dewey (1927) adroitly pointed out "when we ask about the intellectual form in which the material is presented, the tale to be told is very different" (p. 180).

I would argue that little is discussed in the public schools on such topics, or similar topics, using an issue centered teaching approach involving moral principles. One reason may have been identified by Dewey years ago. His concern was that, while the teaching of reading, writing, and math was being accomplished, there remained skepticism in his opinion regarding building a moral foundation in students. In Dewey's estimation, while the general population maintains a belief in moral laws and rules, a distinct disconnect exists in society regarding the practical application of morals to everyday life.

To this point, Dewey (1909) believed that morals were not merely a specialized part of life. He emphasized the need to instill morals in individuals in a manner to become part of their personal habits. Dewey believed that the moral and ethical foundation behind issues of the day should be considered on a constant basis through habits of mind. On a different but related note, Eric B. Freedman (2007) offers his perspective that in order to enhance students' skills "to make informed political judgments, teachers ought to present multiple positions on salient public issues and train students in a method of analyzing those positions" (p. 467). Freedman also discusses critical pedagogy as one way to teach social justice. In so doing, he takes the position that he can "help Freirean educators achieve the task laid out for them: to teach for social justice without engaging in indoctrination" (p. 457).

In writing a journal article to answer the key question about whether or not social studies teachers should strive to transmit the status quo or to transform teaching approaches, William H. Stanley (2005) admonishes that schools are responsible for formally training students to be citizens. At the same time, he advises that notions of democracy and action-oriented citizenship are a learning process. Stanley further advises that "Democracy is also a process or form of life rather than a fixed end in itself, and we should regard any democratic

society as a work in progress" (p. 282). In a chapter titled "John Dewey's Vision of Radical Democracy," Richard J. Bernstein (2010) writes that Dewey believed: "The great hope for nurturing individuals who will be sensitive to social injustice and for developing the flexible habits of intelligence required for social reform is democratic public education" (p. 86). In this regard, Evans (2010) poses a key question: "to what extent is schooling leading students to question social injustices and to develop deep dreams of fairness and equity?" (p. 240).

By considering ethics and morals from the vantage point in which personal and political beliefs become part of our national debate, students most likely could form the habit of political discussion as well as interest in much the same way that representatives of the various social and political camps prepare to respond to the inquiring media on a daily basis. Anna Ochoa-Becker (1996) reminds us that results from assessments, surveys, and polls consistently indicate "that many citizens lack the knowledge and/or commitment needed to take advantage of democratic principles in today's complex world" (p. 7). It is reasonable to consider reintroducing Dewey in order to address Ochoa's concern. Dewey (1908) stressed that it was ideal to present students with an examination of unresolved questions. Dewey (1916) argued that "morality is concerned with conduct" (p. 402). Along this line, it would appear logical that how our federal government conducts itself, in addition to how representatives of the two major and other political parties believe the federal government should conduct itself, now and in the future, as well as the myriad of global governments and issues that surround us could and should be considered as moral issues open for discussion. I believe such discussions can be effectively facilitated in today's classrooms by using Dewey's approach to ethics and moral problems structured as issues-centered education. Robert Westbrook (1991) argued that

> Dewey had no doubts that the democratic character he hoped children would develop was morally superior to all other possibilities; this was the first principle, the postulate, of his ethics. His critique of oppressive benevolence, however, indicated that the child had to develop this character for himself if education was to be truly moral (p.107).

Today, over 100 years after Dewey first spoke of ethics in education, it is time that moral principles be discussed and debated in the schools. Certainly the role that governments should play in response to terrorism and to social development in our global community is viable, critical classroom discussion material. Active investigation into what students can identify as actual problems that are being debated in real time concerning the proper function of the government would promote critical thinking. In turn, when the classroom educator fosters an environment to develop the ability to form and ascertain good judgments, then democratic ideals supporting the future of citizenship and character education are cultivated as well (Ochoa-Becker, 2007; Evans, 2007, 2004; Evans & Saxe, 2007, 1996; Parker, 2003, 1996; Engle & Ochoa, 1988; Newmann and Oliver, 1970; Hunt & Metcalf, 1955 and 1968; Oliver & Shaver, 1966; Engle, 1960).

After all, Dewey (1909) expressed his belief that: "The teacher who operates in good faith will find every subject, every method of instruction, every incident of school life pregnant with moral possibility" (p. 58). This includes considering the ethical and moral dimensions of ongoing political debates. Let's pause now and return to 100 year old ideas for social studies education. As a solid counter-point to social media, indeed all media impact, in a rapidly changing global environment, Dewey provides important messages to encourage today's educators to actively bolster a reflective thinking, issues-centered approach founded on ethics and morals.

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