Education in the North

ARTICLE

Shedding Social Media: Dewey and the changing needs of education for democratic engagement

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Abstract

This paper focuses on Dewey's rejoinder to the classic text which occasioned the conference on *Democracy and Education*. Dewey wrote *Freedom and Culture* with the hindsight provided by world wars and the rise of totalitarian states. In this work, he focusses on the learning for democracy that happens in people's everyday lives and on the dynamics that thwart and deliberately deform civic life. In particular, he is concerned about the impact of media on democratic judgement. Dewey argues that media manipulation of public opinion can put "hate in place of attempts at understanding". In this article I look at Dewey's analysis of the problem and his proposed line of redress in light of more recent scholarship. This provides the lens for analysing recent political engagement in the UK that is relevant to dynamics across the Global North. I argue that social media has intensified the dynamics which concerned Dewey and at the same time have changed the rules of engagement and the kinds of critical media literacy required. If democracy is the art of associative living, it requires not only scientific inquiry but relational skills, grounded in opportunities for concrete experimentation such as those provided by the shed movement.

Key Words: Dewey, Social Media, Critical Media Literacy, Democracy, Community Education

Introduction

This article focuses on the political dynamics, issues and concerns that Dewey raises in *Freedom and Culture*, his rejoinder to his classic text *Democracy and Education* in order to investigate contemporary educational dilemmas in the current socio-political climate. Along with the planet, one could say the socio-political climate seems to be both warming and weirding. Dewey wrote *Freedom and Culture* in 1940, with the hindsight provided by world wars and the rise of totalitarian states. His focus is on the learning for democracy that happens in people's everyday lives, and on analysing how that learning can be thwarted or deliberately deformed. He argues that more attention needs to be paid to the range of opportunities across society that can be used to develop the habit of scientific inquiry. This article's main concern is largely theoretical, comparing Dewey's argument with more recent educational theorists. However, as a community educator committed to praxis, any engagement with theory must include reflection on practice. Consequently, I draw on recent research in Scotland and continued practitioner reflection as well as wider knowledge on informal education and social media activity across the Global North to ground my analysis.

In *Freedom and Culture*, Dewey is concerned about the impact of media on democratic judgement. He argues that media manipulation of public opinion can put "hate in place of attempts at understanding," and create conditions in which judgment, "cannot act effectively so dispersive is the material about which it is called upon to exert itself," (Dewey 1940:45). Social media has intensified the dynamics that concerned Dewey, whilst changing the rules of engagement and the kinds of critical literacy practices required. Current research in critical media studies (Kellner and Share 2007) draws attention to the importance of Dewey's conception of democratic education which emphasised active learning, experimentation and problem solving. However the argument in *Freedom and Culture* goes further than advocating these skills to look at the broad landscape of affect across democratic societies. Dewey asks pertinent questions about the interaction amongst media, social dynamics, habits of thought and affect. If democracy is the art of associative living (Dewey 1917:101), education for democracy requires not only developing judgement but relational skills, and a further understanding of affective dynamics in civic discourse. Here, I propose to look at Dewey's arguments to examine how social media use changed opportunities for democratic education starting with the step change in social media use during Scottish Independence campaign, and contrasting these developments to recent events in the US Elections drawing on case study research and media discourses analysis to do so.

In the introduction to *Freedom and Culture,* Dewey challenges popularly held beliefs about democracy, asking if the belief that self-government is prized above all other rights is justified. He cites Jefferson's caution that, though the United States had gained its physical freedom, its moral emancipation was "nominal" and that, "the inquisition of public opinion overwhelms in

practice the freedom asserted by laws in theory". Dewey is concerned with the development of a culture of freedom, without which "political freedom cannot long be sustained" and sets as the purpose of the book to inquire: "what kind of culture begets political freedom," (Dewey 1940:7). He defines the task quite broadly: "the struggle for democracy has to be maintained on as many fronts as culture has aspects," (Dewey1940:172). One of Dewey's central concerns is to bridge the localised development of democratic skills with a better ability to apply them to a widening political landscape. This sense-making bridge as it interacts with current media developments is the concern of this article.

Firstly I outline the methodological resources that inform praxis in this inquiry before identifying the key planks of Dewey's analysis of the problem and the lines of engagement he proposes to address them, noting the resonances and further developments of his arguments made by more contemporary thinkers along the way. With these resources I turn to current political dynamics and the demands they make on informal educators working alongside communities experiencing post-industrial hyper-capitalism.

Praxis in Turbulent Times

It is worth stating these are bewildering times in which to try to discern the effects of media upon individuals, groups and communities as they struggle to make sense of political dynamics or the part they can play in shaping them. Western democracies in particular are finding old certainties until recently taken for granted now shaken. Over the course of presenting at the conference and writing this article events continue to confound expectations and eclipse established conventions for political engagement across Europe, the UK and the United States. It is a daunting context in which to try to sift through events to identify the significant moments and discern any developing patterns. Smith reminds us that praxis commits us to thinking through theory into practice by asking the question, how do we recognize within our context the moments to act and the cumulative effect of our actions (Smith 1994)? In these times the tools for doing so require an engagement with complexity in order to discern the emerging patterns as they cross levels of scale of activity, from individual conversations and on-line comments to participation in campaigns that straddle on-line and concrete locations.

I come to this task with 35 years of experience as a social activist and community educator. Over that period, interactional socio-linguistics, as framed by Bloomaert (2017) and Rampton (2013), and the exigencies that institutional ethnography (Smith 2005) sensitises me towards has come to ground my work. This blend of analytic frame uses interactional socio-linguistics to pay particular attention to the material and semiotic flows of communication where intended strategies and spur of the moment action interact with contexts over time to create, as systems theory inquiry suggests, both intended and unintended consequences. Systems theory asks that attention be paid to the ways in which these micro interactions taken together over time weave larger patterns of intended and unintended consequences that have more in common

with self-organising systems than they do with a rolling out of a centralised strategy (Cross, in press). Lessons from institutional ethnography sensitise this analysis to how institutions both act as conduits of these flows and are constituted and reconfigured in the process. Thus, in reviewing documentation from recent research on citizenship education and public engagement (Cross, in press) and continuing to read subsequent events to understand how Dewey might still hold lessons for an educator's practice, I seek to analyse complex mechanisms that either foster or erode the bridge from personal experience to a capacity to read the wider socio-political arena that Dewey saw as crucial to democratic health.

Whilst the Scottish research involved interviews and participation observation, in this article I draw predominantly on social media analysis that these interviews informed. I widen my reflections to include continued analysis of publicly available political discourse as it weaves across media and platforms, for they seem pertinent to the same political moment and the shift between one political settlement and what is yet to emerge. Although the dynamics under scrutiny are complex and global in scale, in grounding this analysis I have kept in mind an adage from my own agricultural up-bringing about rounding up strayed livestock: look near before you look far. Concern with flows of emergent networks should not mean overlooking what is happening, to use an American phrase, in our own back yard, or, in the UK context, what is happening on local wasteland. In these marginal industrial spaces productivity is being reclaimed as a right and an important legacy to foster in communities across generations (Golding 2015) in what has become known as the shedding movement (http://menssheds.org.uk/). As the title suggests, I explore here the potential such sheds have as a space of experiment, synthesising the kinds of learning Dewey argued are crucial for democracy where important conversations about media, about expanding those included in political conversation and action, and about the values such engagement should embody can take place.

How Does *Freedom and Culture* Speak to the Contemporary Context?

Dewey argues that a naïve belief that democracy will naturally perpetuate itself may form conditions that are hostile to it. He argues that democratic citizenship, if it is to endure, requires much more active engagement and scrutiny. He goes on to characterise a mind-set common yet corrosive:

> . . . so many persons in the high places of business talk as if they believed or could get others to believe that the observance of formulae that have become ritualistic are effective safeguards of our democratic heritage. The same principle warns us to beware of supposing that totalitarian states are brought about by factors so foreign to us that "it can't happen here". (Dewey, 1940: 35)

In a sense, Dewey is cautioning that citizens would do well to engage in the central task of ethnography: to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar, that is, to make a habit of calling into question that which we think of as already decided.

Dewey reminds his readers that Jefferson, one of the architects of the American "experiment with democracy", argued that a largely agrarian based society provided many of the conditions for democratic learning that the experiment's success relied upon. Farming requires constant cycles of actioned decision making and provides tangible awareness of consequences of them and are thus a test bed of pragmatic learning. Crucially, farming communities also provide the capacity to readily compare the outcomes of one's own decision making with that of others, as well as the necessity for locally based collective decision making to build, maintain and modernise the infrastructure that would ensure crops continued to move to market. This held true not just for those directly involved in agriculture but the network of small tradesmen and businessmen who supported them. Dewey feared that industrialisation and urbanisation was eclipsing this pragmatic preparation for democratic participation:

> Persons acutely aware of the dangers of regimentation when it is imposed by government remain oblivious of the millions of persons whose behaviour is regimented by an economic system through whose intervention alone they obtain a livelihood. Organisations that were invented in the name of freedom contradict it. The kind of working together which has resulted is too much like that of the parts of a machine to represent a cooperation which expresses freedom and also contributes to it. (1940:167)

Whilst Dewey is concerned about the effects of industrialisation and urbanisation that came with it, from a Marxian perspective it is argued that exactly these kinds of conditions (that of skilled workforces in close communication with each other, engaged in sophisticated networks of interdependence) are necessary to bring about conscientisation. This debate has now been superseded by a further question: how applicable are Dewey's concerns in a post-industrial context where automation and artificial intelligence significantly rewrite the terms upon which meaning, worth and value are earned or recognised?

The proportion of citizens that have either agrarian or industrial forms of familiarisation with actioned decision making and its consequences has become greatly reduced. Small farm holdings and unionised workforces hold on in very fragmented, pressured circumstances. The flexible service sector, which has seen the biggest increase in worker numbers, has massively decreased worker's rights, choices and capacity for productive work as the focus is on meeting the demands of others' choices in ergonomic routines prescribed by multinational corporate strategies (Johnston 2015). These are conditions far from the conditions for learning necessary for democracy Dewey articulated.

The shift in labour patterns not only decreases the opportunity for learning derived from workplace democracy, but also contributes to deeper forms of alienation in terms of constrained opportunities for associative living, and thus for associative learning. Dewey points out there is a difference between an association and a community observing, "electrons are associated but there ties are not deliberate or based on mutual recognition" (Dewey 1940:159). Economic forces have immensely widened the scope of "associational activities", but it has done so largely at the expense of the intimacy and directness of communal group interests and activities. Such conditions are ripe for the manipulation of propaganda Dewey argues:

> The void created by lack of relevant personal experiences combines with the confusion produced by impact of multitudes of unrelated incidents to create attitudes which are responsive to organised propaganda, hammering in day after day the same few and relatively simple beliefs asserted to be truths essential to national welfare (which) . . . provokes acquiescence rather than critical inquiry. One chief reason for underestimation of the influence of generalities or principles is that they are so embodied in habits that those actuated by them are hardly aware of their existence. (Dewey 1940: 46-47)

Cognitive scientist George Lakoff (2016) also draws attention to the importance of embodied habits, particularly habits of thought. He argues the basic orientating metaphors through which we live our lives frame our political attitudes. If we leave these frames unexamined, they are ripe for exploitation by political agendas, most virulently, by the politics of hate that drive to extremes what is framed as "in" and associated with care and family and what is "out" and, therefore, a threat. At its most extreme these conditions can give rise to "rabble rousers (who) create a factitious sense of direct union and communal solidarity— if only by arousing the emotion of common intolerance and hate" (Dewey1940:159).

Spectacle plays an important role in the politics of hate, more so in a social media age. Debord alerts us to the dynamics of spectacle which have a trenchant bearing on recent events.   He argues that images have become so ubiquitous "we no longer remember what we have lost," (Debord 2008). The rapid current of spectacles competing for attention, each seeking to outdo the other creates conditions of blurring disorientation not unlike, pace Marx, a "permanent opium war" in which:

> Commodity completes its colonization of social life. It is not just that the relationship to commodities is now plain to see—commodities are now all that there is to see. . . . in which alienated consumption is added to alienated production. (Debord 2008:29)

Debord points out how these dynamics play a role in suppressing critique and engagement, and have proven highly prescient given how closely the strategy he articulates is emulated by

far right campaigns of the moment. Debord's description bears a striking resemblance to one contemporary politician in particular:

> The spectacle proves its arguments simply by going round in circles, by coming back to the start, by repetition, by constant reaffirmation in the only space left where anything can be publicly affirmed. Spectacular power can similarly deny whatever it likes, once or three times over and change the subject knowing full well there is no danger. (quoted in Zaretsky 2017)

This spectacle of hate has created political conditions with which community educators must now grapple. What tools enable educators to make the body politic more aware, adroit, empowered and resilient to this kind of attack? Dewey has a contribution to make here too.

Dewey concedes: "the enlightenment course anticipated has not come to fruition is obvious without argument," (1940:141).   He suggests that the enlightenment project underestimated the power of affect and habit and the obduracy of these within our institutions and customs. In analysing the power of propaganda, he asks a question that turns the problem on its head: Is it possible to admit the power of propaganda to shape ends and deny that of science? Here he asks the reader to imagine a culture in which science lays down habits that counteract those which propaganda feeds upon. To date society has valued science primarily for the products of its results. He argues the advantage that needs to be more widely recognised is that of the habit of scientific inquiry itself. In envisioning a society in which the scientific attitude becomes "such a weighty and widespread constituent of culture that, through the medium of culture, it shapes human desires and purposes," he looks not to the classroom but to community. Democracy must begin at home and its home is the neighbourly community (1940:158). Dewey proposes that it is in community that the scientific project of experimenting with new forms of governance both stable and flexible should be undertaken.

> Our first defence is to realize that democracy can be served only by the slow day by day adoption and contagious diffusion in every phase of our common life of methods that are identical with the ends to be reached . . . American democracy can serve the world only as it demonstrates in the conduct of its own life the efficacy of plural, practical, and experimental methods in securing and maintaining an ever-increasing release of the power of human nature in service of a freedom which is cooperative (1940: 176).

In order to understand what Dewey broadly outlines here, I want to turn now to look at how more recent theorists help us understand the affective aspect of a continuing experiment with democracy and thus inform methods that best serve a "freedom which is cooperative". Biesta, drawing on European perspectives, also asks us to question what we think we know about

democracy and its guarantee. He argues democracy is not fundamentally about rational decisions, defining it, instead, as an inherently affective endeavour

> There is nothing . . .more driven by a desire for the particular mode of human togetherness that has developed over the centuries and to which the name 'democracy' has been given. (Biesta, 2013)

Biesta takes seriously the emotional dynamics that fuel political debate. He argues not just for an inclusion of marginalised persons, but a recognition of marginalised aspects of humanity. Blommaert (2017) takes up a similar line of argumentation in his exploration of the relevance of Durkheim's anomie to current social media practices.   What these thinkers have in common with Dewey is an interest in investigating the multiple dimensions of interaction that make society more than the sum of its parts. Biesta argues "deliberation are not to be nullified by entry conditions of impartiality but take place where power is always already in play" (Biesta 1913:90). If the affective is to be included, rather than masked as impartiality or dismissed as hyperbole, important distinctions about affective dynamics and terms for engaging with them need to be agreed.   Biesta turns to Mouffe who defines an adversary as a "legitimate enemy, one with whom we have some common ground because we have a shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy: liberty and equality" but with whom "we disagree on the meaning and interpretation of those principles" (Biesta 2009:97). Antagonism is the struggle between enemies who have no such underlying common interest. Agonism, in contrast, refers to the struggle between adversaries where there is a common good worth reaching. In a media context, where underlying truths are treated as a form of entertainment or decor that can be chosen to suit, the task of revitalising common ground which makes encounters agonistic and not antagonistic is increasingly important.

Like Dewey, Biesta also argues for an open-ended framing of this task. For Biesta as well, democracy is an "ongoing experiment", not the routine set pieces, but their "sporadic" disturbance by events that breach their conventions. Referendum which directly ask the populace to decide policy, rather than elect others to make policy, are, then, particularly important moments for political inclusion, and worth paying attention to for an understanding of the democratic health of that populace (Biesta 2009: 86, 2014: 101). As dangerous as the current moment may seem, it may be the process whereby, in ever evolving conditions, a polity works out for itself how to engage in agonistic struggle that does not become antagonistic.

A democratic laboratory without walls:

It is precisely several referendum and an election with the characteristics of a referendum that are the conditions I now turn to examine. These events have rapidly shifted the political climate from one of settled norms to chaotic uncertainty in which limits can no longer be assured. As engagement with complexity systems teaches that conditions far from equilibrium can

precipitate dramatic restructuring of underlying organisational structures that have long resisted change (De Landa 2006). Are western democracies at such a complex tipping point?

A quite strong contrast is evident when comparing the social media activity around the Scottish Independence Referendum, the Brexit referendum and that of the recent US Presidential Election.   An analysis of social media use during the Scottish Referendum revealed a distinctive feature of the Scottish Independence Referendum was the degree to which it was used to call the mainstream media to account for under-reporting, selectively reporting and even mis-reporting events (The Drum 2015). This included correcting biased reporting of the size and character of events. One of the tactics used to do this was to check the source of a photo used to portray events through Google to find its origin and to broadcast across Twitter the search findings (Buchanan 2016, Robertson 2015). This technique of fact checking became common practice. Moreover social media hubs such as Wings Over Scotland (Campbell 2014) modelled the use of linking to Hansard, Audit Scotland and the UK Treasury Department to correct the record on quite detailed aspects of the referendum debate. Unlike the other recent political contests, this was enabled, in part, by a government that had set out a quite detailed policy programme which could be debated. Twitter as fact checking media, once modelled, became widely replicated. In effect citizens were taking it upon themselves to school journalists in doing the investigative dimension of their job instead of repeating truncated version of campaign press releases. Activists who previously had little or no social media experience were drawn into this sphere of engagement and schooled themselves in fact checking as well as spin detection and redirection (Haggerty 2014). Creative content was also developed that encouraged not only citizen journalism but citizen satire as well. The frustration at uneven broadcast coverage led to the development of a satirical newscast, *Dateline Scotland*, (Devoy and Foster 2014), which relied on wide Facebook and Twitter attention to create its audience. Whilst some content was widely inaccurate and distorted, the intent was not to convince the audience that this content was true, but rather to sharpen the audience's critical faculties to more subtle forms of the same ploys within mainstream media.

This social media community of inquiry was much less evident in the British Referendum on leaving the EU. Social Media did not have as strong a countervailing presence to that of the conservative press, rather the trends within social media amplified a strong emotional narrative that played on xenophobic fears much as the US Election did. A review of social media use around the US Presidential Election found that fake news without credible sources was shared more often across social media than was actual news. According to BuzzFeed News, 17 of Facebook's top 20 fake articles were pro-Trump and anti-Clinton. The site reports that these stories were collectively shared, liked or commented on more than 8.7 million times (Real 2016).   Whilst deliberate misinformation may be playing an increasing role in grabbing the attention and swaying the votes of viewers, the deregulation of broadcast media in the United States during the Regan era, which released broadcasters from any obligation to fair and

balanced reporting, laid the groundwork for this eventuality. This may be one reason these tactics proved more effective in electoral terms in the United States than in Europe.   What has resulted are stark divisions in which webs of self-reinforcing social media shrink the area of commonly agreed upon facts, such that both critics and proponents of Trump accuse the other of fake news.

Social activist have not remained silent spectators within this struggle. The interconnections amongst real events and social media activity are becoming more complex as are the interactions of creativity within them.   Commonly now a Facebook post can link to blog posts, such as Huffington Post articles, which review satirical Twitter hashtag use in response to events highlighted in the media. These stories embed the Tweets within the blog so the reader can directly interact with the tweets cited by retweeting or commenting upon them thus broadcasting their commentary and the conversation it is part of further.   There is also a growing link between on-line and off-line interaction. In the wake of the US election the upsurge of activism has been accompanied by the developments of apps that help activist link activity from the digital cloud to real town halls and politicians' fax machines. One app lets activists know when their representatives attend Town Hall and other public engagements where they can directly challenge them. The use of this app may be a contributor to the upsurge in Town Hall debates that is having an impact on the Republican Congresses' attempt to repeal healthcare. The interaction is also creating a new blend of protest. One can make a hand-lettered sign on posterboard, photograph it and via Instagram, Twitter and Facebook become part of public discourse, inspiring similar acts. Many of these speak back to the tropes of the dominant discourse and subvert it. Digital technology has literally become embedded in street activism, where hand-held devices project material shared across the internet onto prominent urban facades along protest march routes and rally locations. In the case of Scotland, an impromptu march against Trump's ban on travel for majority Muslim countries featured a mix of images first articulated at the Women's March on Washington. Images and the colourful use of Scots language from this march made their way back onto Twitter--to the extent that #PresidentBawBag first trended in Scotland, then across the UK and was finally having to be explained to an international audience on 24 hour news channels in America. The speed at which this international interaction of internet and street level demonstration is taking place poses new possibilities as well as dangers.   An interesting dimension of this emerging activity is the speed at which technology tactics are recalibrated.

High tech is being used to broadcast information on how to use low tech strategies as well. For instance, the campaign to resist the repeal of the Affordable Care Act (2009) successfully inundated Congressional phone lines. Undeterred by this limit to success, activists then resorted to the use of digital fax apps to circumnavigate blocked phone lines (Goldenberg 2017). Another campaign championed the use of the lowly post card. The Ides of Trump (2017) campaign, inspired by the comical protest signs form the Women's March (2017)

already circulating on the internet, called for a worldwide postcard avalanche of these and other home-made inventions to descend upon the Whitehouse on the 15th of March.

Clearly experimentation with "new forms of suffrage" is alive and well, though this may not have been what Dewey envisioned. It shows there is capacity to take back social media from its hi-jacked status. However, this landscape is not standing still. It is highly likely that this Congress will legislate the end of net neutrality. This will change the speed at which content circulates and inevitably skew interconnectivity towards the agenda of those who can purchase speed.

What sheds, social media and community educators can do

As this grassroots activity demonstrates, people are not waiting for educators, formal or informal, to intercede for them and with good reason. Citizenship education has centred upon the transfer of factual content of the history and form of governance and, at a stretch, the opportunity to practice skills of argumentation. An exploration of how we live together has been side-lined. Although Clark (1996) has argued for a conception of Deep Citizenship which has correspondences to the concept of intimate citizenship (Plummer 2003) and Heater's (1999) multiple citizenship, these more holistic conceptions of citizenship that would take on board Dewey's concern about affect and culture remain marginalised.

Initiatives gaining prominence in response to the US presidential election along with similar strategies taken up within the Scottish Independence Referendum are taking a more holistic and grounded pedagogical approach that provide important lessons for community educators. Each takes up Dewey's challenge to make communities the setting for educational engagement. Knock Every Door has much in common with a range of initiatives within the Scottish Independence Referendum. It is a network of activist engaged in what is termed "deep canvassing" (Knock Every Door 2017). This approach does not seek to push an agenda or party allegiance, rather the focus is a set of questions designed to get the person thinking more deeply and deliberatively (Denizet-Lewis, 2016). The approach makes the doorstep the setting for an experiment in value based education that it is learner-centred and learner-directed. The approach asks canvassers to engage voters in two prejudice-reduction behaviours at the door: "perspective taking" (the ability to empathize with another's experience) and "active processing" (deep or effortful thinking).

The premises behind this approach resonate with So Say Scotland's project which sought to encourage engagement in the independence referendum by fostering conversations about values and long term vision (Escobar 2011). One of the approaches asked people to write a letter to the future Scotland that they aspired to. Again, engagement with the affective element of important political decisions is not shied away from, but tapped into as an important part of sharing perspectives.

Finding Steady Ground (2017) is a further initiative addressing the affective aspect of citizenship engagement. Developed by a small group of socially engaged psychologists, it seeks to provide "a baseline for maintaining emotional well-being in hard times". The project suggests taking time regularly for seven activities and provides a platform for sharing learning about incorporating these into work for social justice. The suggestions balance the networked intelligence of digital engagement with that of grounded face to face interaction. Specifically they recommend taking a day off-line and checking in with people in face to face discussion, utilising the informal spaces of every day routines such as bus rides or gym locker rooms to do so. They also suggest balancing the difficult work of countering falsehoods and protesting damaging legislative actions with taking time for creativity. They explain the importance of continued creativity within everyday activities thus:

> The goal of injustice is to breed passivity — to make us believe that things happen to us, events happen to us, policies happen to us. To counteract this, we need to stay in touch with our sense of personal power. One goal is to see ourselves as people who create, whether it's cooking a meal, organizing a dazzling dramatic action, knitting a hat, making a sign, or playing the piano. We are more than consumers, and our humanity must be affirmed. (Finding Steady Ground 2017)

The creation of Pussy Hats to connect those who could knit with those who could march, is a striking example of this form of empowering creativity in action (Chan 2017). Finding Steady Ground also recommends striking another form of balance. Whilst advocating taking time to regularly reflect on the impact of oppression, they balance this with an awareness that oppression:

> is not all of your reality: you also may have joys with your folk around you, be surrounded by beautiful music or nature, and take delight in creation. Joy in the face of hard times is not a luxury, it is a necessity. (Finding Steady Ground 2017)

Deweyan educational philosophy emphasises creating the right conditions. This project seems attuned to doing just this. It incorporates the relational with tangible creative engagement as every day cultural acts.

In Scotland both during and beyond the referendum there has been concerted work to increase the access to and range of spaces of re-engagement with communal creativity and productivity. Some of these, such as Galgael, consciously work to make these creative spaces also ones of democratic deliberative conversation as well. The shed movement and its cousin the hutting movement provide spaces where means of production are reclaimed as are cooperative relations within production. Local sites of meaning making, creativity and decision-making have a vital role to play but will be equal to the times only if they are outward looking and inculcate the habits of reading the wider political landscape as well. It is this possibility that

gives this article its name.   If social media is to be salvaged as a space of distributed deliberation it needs to be put through a process of localised shed discussions where fact checking and relational checking go hand in hand. I am suggesting that shedding social media of its worse effects may be done best in sheds, huts, allotments and choir rehearsal rooms. In the current climate these spaces for creative activity can combine the habits of experimentation and inquiry with those of social deliberation. So Say Scotland, Knock Every Door and Finding Steady Ground can provide important pointers for such projects.

If the intensifying forms of alienation, productive alienation, consumer alienation and relational alienation are to be challenged, community educators have a crucial bridging role to play, particularly where they can bring social media expertise and localised community development knowledge together. At this juncture, community educators can serve to cross-pollinate creative forms of engagement and give them a wider platform of sharing that can inspire others. The challenge for community educators is to keep the different elements of culture in conversation with each other, both the practical and the philosophical, the local and the international. In Dewey's words, "the struggle for democracy has to be maintained on as many fronts as culture has aspects; political, economic, international, education, scientific, artistic, and religious," (Dewey 1940: 176).

Conclusion

I began this article with an allusion to global warming and end by inviting us to see a metaphor for the work of citizenship education in one of the more aesthetically inspiring climate change solutions: vertical gardening. This greening of cities is being developed across levels of scale, from kits now designed by IKEA (Hawkes 2017) to the commissioning of cityscapes in China (Philips 2017).   Likewise community educators must look for opportunities at different societal vantage points to develop more resilient conditions for encouraging affective, relational citizenship development. Vertical gardens take advantage of a series of ledges and troughs within a vertical wall to establish horizontal rhizomatic purchase. As such they are analogous to the plateaus Deleuze and Guattari (1987) envisioned. In complex societies where dynamics drive increasingly vertical hierarchies, there are yet opportunities at different heights for horizontal networks to form, extend, join up and work to turn to advantage the vertical spaces that pose disadvantages. As part of this project the importance of sheds and their gardens should not be underestimated as places that look outward and ground social media exchanges in real conversation.

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