

Original Paper

The Synergy between John Dewey's Educational Democracy and Educational Reforms in New South Wales, Australia

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Abstract

“Education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living. John Dewey
The current study examines the impact of John Dewey's democratic educational principles on the recent educational reforms in New South Wales, Australia, using data collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, with open-ended questions, as part of case studies designed for this purpose. The participants in this study are all Australian educators (n=60), undertaking full-time and part-time academic posts, involving learning and teaching activities at universities and other higher educational institutions/providers in Sydney, Australia. As part of the case studies, the individual, personal, and professional teaching and learning journeys of the educators are sketched in details in relation to John Dewey's four (4) key democratic educational reformative principles. Finally, this research study concludes by providing a realistic response to the following question: Given the current liberal and relatively democratic educational system in New South Wales, are the Australian educators truly given the opportunity to create a positive and constructive future vision for Australia, in general, and the Australian graduates, in particular. The current study further provides a realistic and clear-cut description of the hurdles facing the current educational system in New South Wales, Australia.

Keywords

Interdisciplinary and progressive education, STEM education, educational democracy, progressive learning, interdisciplinary learning, experiential learning, work-integrated learning, evidence-based research

1. Introduction

“Arriving at one goal is the starting point to another.”

John Dewey

John Dewey described education as not merely building a successful life, but as life itself. How is this being applied in educational institutions, at all levels, in terms of both schools and universities, in New South Wales, Australia? John Dewey, an American academic, philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer, was a well-known scholar in the first half of the twentieth century, for his belief in democracy, as it relates to politics, education, communication, and journalism. He equated “democracy”, including “educational democracy”, to “humanity” as synonymous concepts. In broad terms, the question here is what is the relationship between the educational reforms in New South Wales, Australia, and John Dewey’s democratic and philosophical educational principles?

The main research question under investigation in this study is how the four main notions of John Dewey’s democracy, especially in a classroom setting, added to his views on overall progressive education, impacted the recent educational reforms in practice in New South Wales, Australia, in both schools and universities, alike? In other words, being the voice of progressive education and liberalism, how did Dewey’s democratically reformative views impact the more recent educational reforms in New South Wales, Australia?

To answer the above salient questions, Dewey’s four principles of education are individually carved and explored, to individually examine their relationship and practice within the Australian educational system in New South Wales. As such, the purpose of this research study is four-fold, covering the application of each of Dewey’s four educational principles, within the context of the educational system in practice in schools, universities, and other higher educational institutions/providers in New South Wales, Australia.

To this end, this research study explores the following four secondary questions, encasing the above posed main research question. First, do Australian educators practice “learning by doing”? That is, is experiential learning practiced within the Australian educational system, in New South Wales schools, universities, and other higher education providers? Secondly, does the Australian educational system support interdisciplinary teaching, learning, research, and scholarship, where students are inspired to grow, expand, and elaborate on previously attained knowledge? In other words, are students supported in linking new knowledge with the old, as a means of building and expanding on what had been previously learnt within the same subject, related subjects, as well as in different and varied other subjects? Thirdly, do Australian educators facilitate discussions, debates, and reasonable arguments in their classrooms? Fourthly, and finally, are classes held at Australian schools and universities in New South Wales interactive in nature, in the sense that free and reasonable dialogue is encouraged, and students are inspired to engage, voice their views, ideas, and opinions, practice critical thinking, and become active researchers, and life-long learners?

Accordingly, the current research study initially reviews the representative literature related to Dewey’s

educational principles, and their adoption, as an educational reform force. Furthermore, in the same vein, the educational views, and notions of achieved academics, intellectuals, and scholars involved in teaching and learning activities, in New South Wales, Australia, are further considered in relation to the application of Dewey's four reformative principles within the Australian educational system in New South Wales.

1.1 Who is John Dewey?

John Dewey (born in Burlington, Vermont, on October 20, 1859, and died on June 1, 1952, at the age of 92) is an American philosopher, scholar, educator, founder of functional psychology, and one of the early developers of the philosophy of pragmatism (www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/john-dewey-144.php). He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Vermont in 1879, and his doctorate in philosophy from John Hopkins University in 1884, after which he commenced with his academic career, teaching philosophy and psychology.

1.2 What is John Dewey's Democratic Educational Philosophy?

According to Associate Professor Westbrook (1992), a notable and significant letter that John Dewey wrote and sent to his wife Alice, in November 1894, after he had been appointed as the chair of the department of philosophy and the head of the department of pedagogy at the University of Chicago, while she was vacationing in Europe with two of their kids then, discloses to a great extent his democratic educational philosophy. In his letter, John Dewey conveyed the core of his philosophy of education as it consumed his mind throughout the period he spent at the University of Chicago. He clearly explained that he is consumed with an image of the laboratory school, which keeps growing in his mind at all times, where lateral constructive activity will be the focus. He further stated that the benefits of the laboratory school exceed being a mere experimental philosophy and extends into being a social experiment as well. He advised his wife Alice not to worry about taking the kids with her to Europe as they were still themselves, with their own mental capabilities and responses, and, in his opinion, that was more than what could be said about most of the children their age.

Shortly after, the Deweys opened up their Laboratory School of the University of Chicago, with Alice Dewey being the school principal. It soon became one of the most famous elementary schools in the country, and an essential key to the history of education in the United States, and the world (Westbrook, 1992; Chambliss, 2003). The Laboratory School provided John Dewey, and his wife Alice Dewey, the opportunity for considerable reform energies. In addition, his children attended the school, and, as he stated, they remained themselves. Furthermore, the Laboratory School also functioned as a testing base for experimental psychological, philosophical, ethical, and other concepts of democratic education.

As Westbrook (1992) clarified, a democratic community was fostered not just amongst the students enrolled in the Laboratory School, but also among the teacher's community and the adult staff who worked in the school. Dewey had been critical of schools that forbid, or limit, teacher's contributions to matters relating to the manner of public education. Teachers used to meet weekly, to chat about their work, and undertook an active role in forming the school's curriculum. Dewey's educational

philosophy was as much teacher centered as it was child centered, as to Dewey, the teacher served the role of a messenger and a prophet of God (Sutinen, Kallionlehti, & Philstrom, 2015). Upon closing down the Laboratory School due to issues related to the control of the teachers and the rest of its staff, John Dewey then accepted a position at Columbia University, where he served until he retired.

1.3 John Dewey: Four Philosophical Educational Principles

John Dewey's democratic and philosophical educational theory is carved and dichotomized into four (4) educational principles, as follows: 1) Experiential learning: Learning-by-doing and work-integrated learning; 2) Interdisciplinary and progressive education; 3) Democratic learning: Facilitation of discussion, debates, open dialogue, and reasonable arguments in classrooms; and 4) Interactive learning. Dewey's educational principles, listed above, are further elaborated in the following section.

1.4 Experiential and Interactive Learning: Learning-by-Doing, and Work-Integrated Learning

According to Dewey, education is to be undertaken democratically, that is, through the promotion of freedom of activities and thought, and through emphasizing individuality (Reich, Garrison, & Neubert, 2016), that is, educators must begin by understanding the child's capacities, abilities and aptitudes, interests, customs and traditions, behaviors, and predispositions. By allowing the child to do activities that they like, as opposed to taking them through a set of rigid curricula, the child learns through "direct living", and through life itself, that is, through directly interacting with life, and its surroundings (Sullivan, 1966). Dewey defined experience within the context of education as a social process involving the interaction of the child with their environment (Sullivan, 1966). In other words, experience must be based on the child's individual interest, actions, and activities which relate to the present mental powers of the child, as well as with their previous experiences.

What should the school do, according to Dewey, to facilitate the democratic educational system? In Dewey's ideal school, as opposed to a more traditional school, the child learns through social interactions and exchanges with others, and when they have misunderstandings, they get corrected and guided back to correct and proper path. Participation in activities provides opportunity for gaining knowledge. Furthermore, this process of learning should be an extension of home training. According to Dewey, education must create real life situations to provide appropriate experiences which match with the child's present cognitive powers, interests, and needs; and to create new needs that would raise new questions in the child's mind (Carver & Enfield, 2006; Reich, Garrison, & Neubert, 2016). In other words, the child only learns those things which he interacts with and first-hand experiences.

What about the curriculum then? What should its role be? According to Dewey, there should be no set curriculum. It is the social life of the child that provides them with the background and unity for their education (Sullivan, 1966). Once again, the child should participate in engaging and constructive activities, related to their own social life, and to their own previous experiences, where the activities are selected by both the teachers and students together, based on the student's needs and interests.

As per the above, what should then be the role of the teacher in the process of democratic "learning by doing" type education? According to Dewey, the teacher's role is to relate the subject matter to the

student's experiences, so that the student will start to relate to the material and make sense out of it. As per Dewey's theory of education, it is the duty of the teacher to get to know the child closely, that is, the child's needs, interests, and capabilities, so as to guide activities undertaken with the student through interesting discussions and insightful suggestions.

1.5 Interdisciplinary, Progressive and Democratic Education

Other main democratic principle of John Dewey, which lies at the very heart of his educational philosophy, deals with progressive education that allows elaboration and expansion of ideas and notions by students through linking new knowledge with the old, that is, previously acquired knowledge, thus, facilitating a better understanding of the newly encountered frameworks, models, and theories by students.

For example, even though science and education are two different areas of study, each with its own curriculum, according to Lee and Brown (2018), undertaking scientific enquiry is meant to assist students in making informed decisions, nevertheless, it remains hardly ever explained in science education standards, and according to classroom studies, classroom science enquiries do not impact their decision-making to a great extent, as predetermined values take over, while ignoring to initially evaluate their appropriateness to the particular issues at hand. Nevertheless, based on John Dewey's philosophy in relation to interdisciplinary education, which states that during inquiry, each value judgment is a reasonable and sensible ruling that guides action, and that students can indeed enhance their value judgements by evaluating the actions they take during scientific enquiry, Lee and Brown (2018) explored the connection between inquiry and values, and explained how the relationship between scientific inquiry, on the one hand, and value judgments, on the other hand, can indeed contribute to informed decision-making.

The question then becomes what should the role of the teacher be to facilitate the student's learning through progressive education? According to John Dewey, the teacher's role is to find projects, which lead by orderly inter-connection with other subject matter, to assist the student to gradually climb up the education ladder, and shape their cognitive and intellectual development, and their educational end result, through development of intermediate steps leading to it.

1.6 Meaning and Significance of John Dewey's Theory

According to Dewey, education is a social task, that is, students should be educated as a prerequisite to the development of a better society (Sullivan, 1966). As during Dewey's times, one needs to be mindful that the uneasy relationship between democracy and capitalism continues to constitute a major experimental hurdle for educational philosophy up to the present (Reich, Garrison, & Neubert, 2016). Dewey believed that democracy is dependent upon education by both the school and family to confirm its growth, and that due to cultural issues within the American society, education had trailed behind the social movement taking place in the United States then (Sullivan, 1966). In other words, Dewey felt that America was a democracy, but education remained undemocratic, in the sense that forcing a child to study a standard previously developed curriculum, or course of material, is undemocratic. As such,

to him, education should provide conditions for growth, not just in school, but more importantly in adult life (Sullivan, 1966).

In various parts of the world, including New South Wales, Australia, the educational system is the way it is because of the educational theories, views, and notions of John Dewey. His revolutionary attitudes, advances and tactics to education proved to be quite salient for today's education, especially in the area of interdisciplinary and progressive method to teaching and learning, as per today's emphasis on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education. Furthermore, it also reformed education for women, given the shifts in the balance of history and philosophy in Dewey's work, and the work of his followers and students. For example, for Dewey, history was a tool in philosophy, but, for Willystine Goodsell (1870-1962), his doctoral student, the opposite was true, that is, philosophy was a tool in history (Goodman, 2019).

The core of John Dewey's foresight of education lies with his notions on learning by doing. The foundation of his theory is progressive education, that is people learn the most via first-hand experiences, and by building on previously learnt concepts and theories (<https://www.toolshero.com/change-management/john-dewey-theory/>). It is this part of his theory that comprised the underpinnings fundamentals of his educational reforms, being a formidable and effective instrument of his educational change management theory. Even though Dewey had received severe and forceful condemnation due to his egalitarian and self-governing democratic principles, and for his compassionate style to education and learning, his educational approaches continued to augment the curriculum and enabled students' capabilities and facilities to continue tacking a problem all the way through to the very end (Sullivan, 1966).

Furthermore, John Dewey's democratic educational philosophy has additionally been employed in measuring and evaluating various educational systems and issues, including the modern process of internationalization of higher education. For example, to ensure that the purpose of democratic education is not taken for granted within the overall process of higher education internationalization, and based on John Dewey's philosophy of education, a study of the Canadian higher education, based on the employment of qualitative research, where interviews with ten professors, taken from different faculties within a mid-sized Canadian university, aimed at reflecting upon their graduate international students, was recently undertaken by Rebeca Heringer (2020). Her research findings clearly showed that John Dewey's principles of education remain quite germane, apropos, applicable, and momentous, up to the current day.

To better construe and infer from the facts offered by the contributing academics and intellectuals during the sequence of rigorous interviews relating to their understandings with the application of John Dewey's democratic educational reform principles in their classes, as well as the basis of their particular educational methods and tactics, a qualitative method had to certainly be selected. The sample (n=60) consisted of Australian academics, intellectuals, and scholars, residing, and working in New South Wales, Australia.

The main issue under exploration in the current study is what is the relationship between the recent educational reforms in New South Wales, Australia, and John Dewey's democratic and philosophic educational principles? The research problem at hand is two-fold. First, how the four main notions of John Dewey's democracy, especially in a classroom setting, added to his views on overall progressive education, impact the educational system currently in practice in New South Wales, Australia? Secondly, how did Dewey's views assisted in reforming the educational system in New South Wales, Australia? In other words, being the voice of progressive education and liberalism, how did Dewey's democratically reformative views impact on the educational system currently in practice in New South Wales? To this end, the current study posed the following four open-ended and exploratory research questions:

Question 1:

Do Australian educators in New South Wales practice "learning by doing"? That is, is experiential learning practiced within the educational system in New South Wales, Australia?

Question 2:

Does the educational system currently in practice in New South Wales, Australia, encourage interdisciplinary teaching, learning, research, and scholarship, where students are encouraged to grow, expand, and elaborate on previously attained knowledge? In other words, are Australian and international students, currently enrolled in educational institutions in New South Wales, supported in linking new knowledge with the old, as a means of building and expanding on what had been previously learnt within the same subject, related subjects, as well as in different and varied other subjects?

Question 3:

Do Australian educators in New South Wales facilitate discussions, debates, open dialogue, and reasonable arguments in their classrooms?

Question 4:

Are classes held at Australian schools and universities in New South Wales interactive in nature, in the sense that free and reasonable dialogue is encouraged, and students are inspired to engage, voice their views, ideas, and opinions, practice critical thinking, and become active researchers, and life-long learners?

2. Method

"We only think when we are confronted with problems."

John Dewey

2.1 Background and Sample

The participants involved in this study were randomly selected from well-known schools, universities, colleges, and other higher education providers located in Sydney, Australia, to achieve the sample of sixty (60) academics and intellectuals. All these participants, are currently involved in teaching and

learning activities, including curriculum design, development, and innovative curriculum co-creation, and are currently affiliated with various well-known and high performing schools, universities, colleges, and other higher education providers, located in Sydney, Australia.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The qualitative method employed in this study, namely, the case study approach (Helou, 2018), with semi-structured, in-depth, and informal interviews, offered the authors the freedom of building a thorough examination of the influence of John Dewey's democratic educational principles on the recent educational reforms in New South Wales, Australia. The pertinent data was collected using the educator's own reports, explanations, clarifications, and images of their personal and professional encounters that they have faced, in class and out of class. Contributing intellectuals and scholars were interviewed once over a period of six (6) months in 2021.

2.3 Researchers and Participants

This section presents the procedures through which the researchers affianced as part of this study to work out their rapport with the contributing participants over the six (6) months interviewing period, as a means of gaining the participants' confidence, and improving the reliability, dependability, and steadiness of the collected data. As part of this practice, the three authors examined their own prejudices, including their personal beliefs and expectations, and intensified their self-control over the possible influence that may arise given their presumptions (Alshenqeeti, 2014). The first author carried on the interviews with the Australian academics residing in Sydney, Australia, mostly online due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown restrictions being in force in parts of Sydney, Australia. The interviews were held in an informal and relaxed atmosphere, where the questions were open ended and semi-structured, thus, inspiring participants to talk liberally, and unreservedly, and offer reliable and precise narratives about their in-class and out of class experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The significance of proper presentation and appropriate speech cannot be overemphasized during the interviewing process, being main contributing factor of the validity of the gathered data (Alshenqeeti, 2014).

3. Results and Discussion

“Every great advance in science has issued from a new audacity of imagination.”

John Dewey

This study records the recounts of the encounters of contributing Australian educators, academics, and intellectuals, residing, and practicing teaching and learning activities in Sydney, Australia, with the application and employment of John Dewey's democratic educational reform principles. This section presents the results of the case study interview, along with a discussion of their respective outcome.

Question 1:

Do Australian educators in New South Wales practice “learning by doing”? That is, is experiential learning practiced within the educational system in New South Wales, Australia?

Educational Principle 1: Experiential Learning – Learning-by-Doing and Work-Integrated Learning

As per the remarks offered by a considerable number of the contributing educators, they plainly signified that experiential learning, including learning-by-doing, and work-integrated learning, are well fused within the Australian educational system in New South Wales, especially in the area of science, in scientific laboratories, chemistry, physics, biology, zoology, electrical, chemical, and computer engineering, computer science, photography, music, food technology, hair dressing, sculpture and painting, interior design, and in the industrial arts, to mention a few. Furthermore, a considerable number of the contributing educators specified that the concept of first-hand experiences in Sydney is definitely evident in the laboratory sciences, library research, language laboratories, out of class individual and group projects, school excursion, and school field trips, and in internships, apprenticeships, study abroad programs, and other work-integrated learning approaches.

As indicated by the interviewed participants, a primary concern shared by the majority of educators is coping with the conventional physical set up in most schools, universities, and other education providers. After all, as mentioned by a considerable number of the participants, John Dewey himself encountered considerable resistance in his Laboratory School at the University of Chicago, when administering the Dewey's system of education. This confirms with the outcome of previous research (Crismon & Helou, currently under publication consideration).

An additional significant issue that was repeated during the interviews with the Australian intellectuals relates to the resistance to change by the headmasters and principals of existing traditional schools, that were raised and fully practiced the traditional approach, and were used to employing conventional educational tactics. As repeated by a considerable number of the contributing educators, a great deal of negotiations is exchanged before old-fashioned school headmasters and principals permit adaptations and the much-needed educational reforms to be practiced. The hurdle of being more critical of an innovative educational activity, when compared to traditional education, was additionally expressed. Moreover, a good number of educators advised that if a student shows an educational deficiency, it gets attributed to the latest and educational approach. Nonetheless, the mass of the contributing educators agreed that Dewey had certainly provided numerous thought-provoking notions, ideas, and opinions for traditional educators and conventional administrators to both consider and address.

Question 2:

Does the educational system currently in practice in New South Wales, Australia, encourage interdisciplinary teaching, learning, research, and scholarship, where students are encouraged to grow, expand, and elaborate on previously attained knowledge? In other words, are Australian and international students, currently enrolled in educational institutions in New South Wales, supported in linking new knowledge with the old, as a means of building and expanding on what had been previously learnt within the same subject, related subjects, as well as in different and varied other subjects?

Educational Principle 2: Application of Interdisciplinary and Progressive Education

Contributing educators explained that interdisciplinary and progressive learning, such as the application of STEM education, is nowadays the novel style in practice in Australian educational institutions, with the focus being on evidence-based, problem-solving, and project-based learning, both in and out of the classroom. They stressed the integration of technology in teaching and learning activities as a means of highlighting the role and application of technology and science, and better set up students for further future learning. Additionally, they clarified that this is applied on the basis that students need a strong footing in interdisciplinary education, including STEM, so as to become successful and achieved members in today's knowledge-motivated times.

Moreover, contributing educators elucidated that interdisciplinary and progressive teaching and learning, including the employment of STEM education, coupled with the engagement of technological developments and scientific ideologies, triggers students' creativity, and enhance the development of critical thinking proficiencies. In addition, it was clarified that when it comes to creatively re-designing the curriculum, interdisciplinary progressive education permits students to promote a culture of harmony, progression, and development. Unfortunately, it was further stated that, in both schools and universities, whenever money run short, progressive type education and learning activities are the first to be cancelled. This again confirms the outcome of previous research undertaken in the area (Crismon & Helou, currently under publication consideration).

In addition, contributing educators informed that in addition to schools, both primary and secondary, the majority of universities, colleges, and higher education institutions/providers in New South Wales are employing an interdisciplinary mode of delivery to teaching and learning activities, where scientific and logical concepts in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, along other units from other areas of study, are united with real world situations, thus, enabling the students' cognitive processes of perceiving the networks, and connections, and establishing pertinent relationships between material and activities undertaken in the classroom and the worldly events and circumstances around them.

Furthermore, the contributing participants, have explained that the interdisciplinary educational approach to teaching and learning is a primary constituent of today's learning futures, and is presently gaining recognition. The underlying premise is that interdisciplinary and progressive learning advances crucial fund a mental proficiencies, key skills, and vital abilities, comprising, but not limited to, enhanced understanding, critical thinking abilities, problem-solving, innovation and creativity, communication, alliances and teamwork, data literacy and mastery, digital and numerical literacy, and technology-related abilities and skills, including, but not limited to, computer science and computer engineering, among various other equally salient capabilities and proficiencies.

A considerable number of the participating educators additionally informed that the engagement of interdisciplinary and progressive education and learning modes of delivery, including the employment of STEM education, facilitates the process of implementing state-of-the-art educational practices by the

educational institutions' administrators. This confirms that the faculties of the particular educational institution, are at the foremost and prominent edge of contemporary educational practices, thus, offering students successful futures in their respectively chosen careers.

Furthermore, other contributing educators additionally explained that employment of interdisciplinary and progressive education, including STEM education, is a primary focus with recent educational reforms. Additionally, they explained that this includes Science Standards, in a way that facilitate students' understanding, comprehension and application of scientific principles. Moreover, participating Australian educators further informed that the notion of progressive education, in New South Wales educational institutions, has extended to cover the area of research and scholarship, where both interdisciplinary research, i.e., bringing research together to talk about an issue from each other's perspective, get integrated together to build a model, typology, or a framework; and multidisciplinary research, where research is brought together to discuss an issue from each perspective, are currently highly encouraged and supported at Australian universities.

Question 3:

Do Australian educators in New South Wales facilitate discussions, debates, open dialogue, and reasonable arguments in their classrooms?

Educational Principle 3: Democratic Learning-Facilitation of discussions, debates, open dialogue, and reasonable arguments in classrooms

The great majority of the contributing educators explained that Dewey's concept of learning in small, segmented, and interconnected parts and progressive successions of activities, carried on under a more relaxed atmosphere characterized by free discussions, interesting debates, open dialogues, and while articulating sensible classroom discussions has definitely been acknowledged and practiced in Sydney's classrooms, being a salient approach to teaching and learning. Furthermore, contributing educators have repeatedly voiced concerns about finding it challenging to well engage students, who were formerly deterred from stating their thoughts and opinions in class, and were being used to spoon feeding under the conventionally traditional educational approach. They were in agreement that this was more common among international students, in comparison to Australian Students.

In addition, a considerable number of the participating educators explained that they found it challenging to occupy the less confident students at times in performing in an atmosphere characterized by lively classroom discussions, where normally students enjoy expressing their views in debates, expressing reasonable arguments, and delivering class presentations. They found this to be grossly conditioned by the student's language proficiency and personality type. The issue of student participation, pointed out in this study, confirms the outcome of various previous studies (Cross, 2006; Helou & Newsome, 2017; Newsome & Helou, 2017; Helou & Newsome, 2018; Newsome & Helou, 2018; Newsome, Helou, & Crismon, 2019).

Question 4:

Are classes held at Australian schools and universities in New South Wales interactive in nature, in the

sense that free and reasonable dialogue is encouraged, and students are inspired to engage, voice their views, ideas, and opinions, practice critical thinking, and become active researchers, and life-long learners?

Educational Principle 4: Interactive Learning

The majority of the contributing educators advised that interactive learning is definitely currently employed in Sydney's classrooms, and in almost all faculties. Participating educators seemed to be in agreement with Cross's (2006) research outcomes, in terms of having self-confident students with good English language skills finding it easier to settle in and undertake interactive learning activities in and out of the classroom. They further advised that English language difficulties, coupled with certain personality types, have proved to be major obstacles with a student's undertaking of interactive learning activities. Language difficulties, in conjunction with introvert personality types, tend to further limit students from making friends. This finding further confirms previous research outcome (Crismon & Helou, currently under publication consideration). In addition, difficulties with academic English language skills often came up as being a main impediment that impedes students from joining in interactive class activities and discussions and enjoying interactive educational activities.

The purpose of the current study is to improve the understanding of the influence of John Dewey's democratic education principles on the educational reform system in New South Wales, Australia. To this end, the current study recorded the application of Dewey's four (4) educational principles by sixty (60) Australian educators, intellectuals, and scholars, who are involved in teaching and learning activities, including innovative and creative curriculum re-design and development in New South Wales, Australia. The research outcome of the current study was definitely reassuring, in terms of the constructive and productive answers enunciated by almost all of the contributing educators. This did not just include the acknowledgement of the significance of Dewey's democratic educational reform principles, but enthusiastically employing them in class, and actively utilizing them while creatively co-creating the curricula for their corresponding subjects and courses of study.

One methodological shortcoming that could be made of this study is that the participants involved in the current research were randomly selected from well-known major schools, universities and other higher educational institutions located in Sydney, Australia. Future research could overcome this problem by involving a considerable number of academics and intellectuals from various schools, universities, colleges, and other higher education providers scattered in various areas of New South Wales, including remote areas, and having different multicultural blends and socio-economic conditions.

As indicated by the research outcome attained from the academic and intellectual participants in the current study, it becomes apparent that the great majority of the educators in New South Wales are completely mindful of the benefits of the employment of an interdisciplinary and progressive approach to teaching and learning, including the employment of STEM education, whom most of them engage with when time comes to re-drafting and innovatively co-creating the curriculum of the individual units,

subjects, courses, and programs of study that they are individually in charge of.

The current research findings undoubtedly reveal that John Dewey's principles of education remain quite valid, applicable, and substantial, up to the current day. In addition, present research findings further disclose that there is a continued appeal for Dewey's democratic educational philosophy within the modern process of higher education reforms, including higher education internationalization. Finally, it is worthwhile to note that whatever issues are presently being raised up by education reformers nowadays, one might find relief in that the same or similar issues had already been previously thought of, expressed, considered, and voiced by John Dewey, over a century ago.

Finally, sentiments of "freedom" were dear to John Dewey's heart, as such, were the focus of his overall philosophies. Precisely, this, in itself, related to his philosophy of "Democracy", which he even equated to the concept of "Humanity", in his overall equation of "Life". Thus, as education is life itself to John Dewey, so are the concepts of "freedom" and "democracy", currently being the fresh air lungful much-needed by the Australian people, in New south Wales, and otherwise, in light of the unfortunate COVID-19, and its associated vaccines, lockdown restrictions, coupled with the total curfew limitations, in the Greater Sydney Local Government Areas, and in the rest of the world. Needless to say, this represents a world-wide, large-scale, psychological experiment encompassing a full demonstration of the total loss of democracy manifest, not just for educators (Australian or otherwise), but for humanity, and the human race, all around the globe. One wonders what John Dewey would say about the current national leadership in practice, in Australia, and around the globe, had he been alive to witness and evidence the freedom- and democracy-driven street revolutions in Australia and worldwide, the police's forceful reactions, senior government officials' comments and remarks, publicly made in the media and on national and international TV, all under the bandana of public health protection, i.e., lowering the risk of COVID-19 being contracted.

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