Article

The Significance of Dewey's *Democracy and Education* for 21ˢᵀ-Century Education

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Abstract

This paper explores the significance of Dewey's *Democracy and Education* for "21ˢᵗ-century education," a term used by proponents of curricular standardization and digital ubiquity in classrooms. Though these domains have distinct advocacy groups, they often share similar assumptions about the primary purposes of schooling as career preparation. In *Democracy and Education,* Dewey argues for a broader purpose of education—that of cultivating a social spirit in students. Because of contemporary dispositional challenges in the broader society, Dewey's perspective offers a timely and relevant way to reconceptualize the purposes of schooling in ways that can effectively address current social challenges.

This paper explores Dewey's landmark book *Democracy and Education*[1] and the insights it holds for 21ˢᵗ-century education. Regarding the term "21ˢᵗ-century education," Alfie Kohn aptly notes that "we can take whatever objectives of teaching strategies we happen to favor and, merely by attaching a label that designates a future time period, endow them and ourselves with an aura of novelty and significance."[2] The intention of this paper is to re-appropriate this term from two groups that tend to employ it. The first of these is the standardization movement, which includes proponents of high-stakes testing and the concomitant narrowing of curricula. The second group is advocates for digital ubiquity in K–12 classrooms, as evidenced by 1-to-1 laptop computer and tablet initiatives, the proliferation of learning apps, and the use of educational video games and social media in classrooms. Because even a cursory reading of *Democracy and Education* would reveal Dewey's opposition to curricular standardization, the intent here is to focus on the latter contingent. While the movements for standardization and digital educational technology have partially distinct advocacy groups within the field, they often employ similar justifications and assumptions about the purposes of schooling, as has been identified in previous scholarship.[3] A recent example is a press release for the Partnership for 21ˢᵗ Century

Skills, which touts the benefits of the recently passed Every Student Succeeds Act, the successor to No Child Left Behind, while lauding the reestablished bipartisan Congressional 21st-Century Skills Caucus. The press release argues that the caucus will promote "discussion about effectively promoting 21st-century skills in the nation's education system and [foster] partnerships among education, business, community, and government leaders working to prepare Americans with the right knowledge and skills for learning and work in the global economy."[4] This vision promotes new technologies as central to pedagogical advancement, while simultaneously positioning schools primarily as job training centers. In addition, the emphasis on knowledge and skills reveals a positivistic focus on a universalized and decontextualized set of ideas and abilities that will make students economically marketable.

Although a diverse array of academics have aligned themselves against the standardization movement, many of these same scholars are uncritical proponents of new educational technologies. However, their assumptions about the purposes of learning often trend strongly toward the narrow utilitarian reasoning consistent with standardization proponents, who privilege technical concerns that avail themselves of solutions provided by digital tools. For example, David Shaffer and James Gee, in their argument for the inclusion of video games in K–12 classrooms, assert that

> our standards-driven curriculum . . . is not preparing children to be innovators at the highest technical levels—the levels that will pay off most in our modern, high-tech, science-driven, global economy. Inspired by the goal of leaving no child behind in basic skills, we are leaving all of our children, rich and poor, well behind in the global competition for innovative work.[5]

The technological race metaphor and emphasis on education as technical job training in this passage demonstrate that while these authors criticize standardization, they accept the standardization movement's premises about the fundamental purposes of education. Given Gee's stature, this rationale can be understood to represent a prominent position among proponents of educational technology.

In *Democracy and Education,* Dewey[6] offers a divergent vision for education. As opposed to schools as mere centers of career preparation, Dewey posits citizenship as the central purpose of education,[7] which he contends can be achieved through the development of what he calls a "social spirit" in students. In contrast to emphasizing the acquisition of knowledge and skills, Dewey's social spirit has a dispositional focus, which can help students cultivate what he calls *habits.* In Dewey's conception, knowledge and skills are only useful as far as they are embodied in habits that are flexible and thus pliable to many different situations and contexts. By focusing on education for the narrow purpose of future employment, the curriculum vision of standardization and educational technology advocates would hamper the ability of teachers to cultivate a social spirit with students. Dewey's

philosophy of education highlights the dangers that these arguments pose for cultivating a social spirit by failing to broaden students' horizons, while attaching their development of problem-solving skills to mechanistic algorithms. In *Democracy and Education,* Dewey recognizes the non-neutrality of technologies through his conception of organism-environment interactions, what he later comes to call transactions.[8] Dewey locates the possibilities for adjusting habits in the particulars of environments, which include the tools and objects therein. Thus, exploring the relevance of *Democracy and Education* requires us to consider changes to both educational environments and to the broader culture that have been facilitated by digital media technologies. In the book, Dewey identifies four habitually rooted attitudes that are crucial to achieving a social spirit: directness, open-mindedness, single-mindedness, and responsibility. Cultivating these attitudes requires reconsidering the purposes of 21st-century education.

The point here is not to disparage the inclusion of new technologies in the classroom. Rather, the goal is to reframe the purposes of 21st-century education toward contemporary challenges that transcend a narrow emphasis on career preparation. Of course, reconsidering educational purposes would alter how technologies are used by virtue of repositioning the entire curriculum. While a Deweyan approach to curriculum would not foreclose the possibility of using, for example, video games in classrooms, emphasizing Dewey's dispositional outcomes would lead to a reassessment of the appropriate contexts for such games.

Challenges from the Broader Culture

Dewey wished to collapse the separation between school and the outside world to make learning more meaningful for students. In *Democracy and Education,* Dewey[9] readily acknowledges, in relation to habit formation, that school learning is relatively superficial compared to the "curriculum" of the broader culture. Dewey endeavored to use the institution of school to make outside behavior more intelligent. Thus, in considering the relevance of Dewey's classic text today we must consider the challenges of the broader culture, as a brief survey of recent cultural developments suggests that many factors work against fostering a social spirit. For example, researchers have asserted that the play of young children has become increasingly structured in recent years, which is detrimental to fostering flexible and imaginative minds.[10] In *Democracy and Education,* Dewey[11] identifies play as a crucial factor in forging social sympathies that make students more responsive communicators and listeners. This intersects with an increasing focus on academics in early childhood education, brought on by the aforementioned demands of high-stakes testing.

In considering the influence of the broader culture on education, the habits that are encouraged by new media environments should also be explicated. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman writes about the individualization inherent in online

environments, in which the appeal is geared toward the atomized individual, with interactions that lack the complexity and ambiguity of offline environments:

> For the young, the main attraction of the virtual world derives from the absence of the contradictions and cross-purposes that haunt offline life. Unlike its offline alternative, the online world renders an infinite multiplication of contacts conceivable—both plausible and feasible. It does this through reducing their duration and, consequently, by *weakening* such bonds as call for, and often enforce duration—in stark opposition to its offline counterpart, which is known to find its bearings in a continuous effort to *strengthen* bonds by severely limiting the number of contacts while extending and deepening each of them.[12]

Bauman argues that a strong sense of self and deeper understandings of difference are fostered by the quality and depth of human interactions, which is consistent with Dewey's analysis in *Democracy and Education* that will be explained later. Bauman warns that online environments are negatively affecting these developments.

Qualitative research lends support to Bauman's conclusions. Sherry Turkle examines what she identifies as diminished social expectations in online environments. In her research on youth and social networking sites, Turkle notes that relationships become objectified online as friends turn into fans. She describes vulnerable youth who anxiously craft their social networking profiles in what she labels a "hyper-other-directness" that is deeply dependent upon the approval of peers.[13] Many of the youth interviewed by Turkle prefer the isolation and control afforded by mediated online interactions, while finding face-to-face interactions discomforting in that they do not allow calculated and carefully controlled responses. Turkle's latest work connects this research to the conception of empathy, or the ability to understand and share others' feelings. She concludes that new media environments have facilitated a flight from open-ended, spontaneous conversation. Turkle cites a wealth of research that connects the use of social media and digital tools to decreased ability to read and respond to others' emotional cues.[14]

Similar insights have been articulated in the context of education. Howard Gardner and Katie Davis identify a "paradox of *action* and *restriction*" in the online interactions of youth,[15] who roam the virtual world encapsulated by computer software that restricts possibilities. The authors describe contemporary youth as socially risk-averse, while immersed in media environments that "push toward an overall packaged sense of self"[16] that is largely commodified and externally oriented with behaviors that are increasingly circumscribed by digital code.

As additional evidence for these concerns, quantitative research suggests that college students in the new millennium demonstrate far less empathy compared to previous generations when measured in both cognitive and affective domains.[17] This finding correlates with studies that show a sharp rise in narcissism over the same period,[18] a trend that correlates with use of social media[19]and exemplifies

dispositional traits that contrast with empathy. Other research has found similar connections between new media and "individualistic, self-focused aspirations,"[20] while still other studies suggest that those with weaker social skills may use social media as a crutch and thereby fail to develop stronger abilities in face-to-face communication,[21] which is associated with more positive social outcomes.[22] All of this suggests that the attendant practices surrounding new media technologies encourage users to interact with others in ways that inhibit the development of deeper forms of empathy and senses of self. Thus, a robust educational rationale for confronting 21st-century challenges has to look beyond job training toward a stronger conception of how pedagogy can help forge more positive and healthy dispositional traits for students. Formal education should respond to these concerns, yet standardization and digital technologies have much to do with current problems, which calls into question their roles as foundational components of any pedagogical solution. Dewey's philosophy of education rooted in his conception of habits and articulated most powerfully in *Democracy and Education* can help educators craft a more compelling response to these matters.

The Centrality of Habits

Dewey's conception of habits is at the root of his social psychology, and it integrates both naturalistic and cultural factors—positing human organisms as active agents who achieve growth by modifying impulses through engagement in a multitude of environments. In *Democracy and Education,* Dewey says of habit that "an individual undergoes a modification through an experience, which modification forms a predisposition to easier and more effective action in the like direction in the future. Thus it also has the function of making one experience available in subsequent experiences."[23] Habits are formed as a result of prior experience and operate unconsciously, allowing human organisms to function efficiently by saving conscious attention for novel occurrences. This conception of habit can be distinguished from standard descriptions of socialization that describe organisms as passively acted upon by environmental forces. As Colapietro asserts, "we are first and foremost agents, beings not so much goaded into activity by external stimuli, as always active by our own inherent constitution."[24] Dynamic transactions[25] between organism and environment change the organism, but also afford the organism power to effect environmental changes.

In Dewey's social psychology, human action is initiated by impulses, which are natural tendencies to engage with the world. However, this engagement is continually disrupted by contextual factors. An environment may provide physical obstructions to activity, or an individual's impulses may conflict with existing social customs. In the latter case, the social environment in the form of other people may push back against the individual's desires. This disruption of activity, according to Dewey, activates consciousness and subsequent reflection on the part of the individual, as she must now adjust herself to an unexpected situation. The individual

becomes conscious because her habits have failed and she must now actively attend to the matters at hand and choose a course of action. Over time and repeated experiences in which such adjustments lead to successful outcomes, these intentional actions become incorporated within the organism as unconscious habits.[26] Once incorporated, these habits add to a stock of embodied, experiential knowledge that not only helps the individual navigate similar situations more smoothly, but can also be imaginatively brought to bear on new situations as they arise.

In *Democracy and Education,* Dewey defines education as "that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experiences."[27] Considering this definition in light of Dewey's emphasis on the primacy of habits in experience, Dewey's vision of education can be understood as accenting formal processes by which teachers engage students in directed experiences designed to cultivate increasingly flexible and intelligent habits. Intelligence, for Dewey, "is a complex of habits of a certain character (discriminating, nuanced, modifiable)."[28] The role of education, in this formulation, is to immerse students in environments that will create disruptions that trigger reflection and encourage behavioral modifications by students that will lead to developing habits that are more intelligent.

Dewey's conception of dispositional growth through cultivating habits is distinct from utilitarian focuses on career preparation. Rather than centering on preparing children for a remote future in a rapidly evolving society where desired knowledge and skills change quickly and are difficult to predict, Dewey places an emphasis on fostering the dispositional qualities necessary for students to thrive in spite of whatever societal changes take place.

The Role of the Environment

Dewey stresses the formative features of the environment in the makeup of the human organism, stating "human nature exists and operates in an environment. And it is not 'in' that environment as coins are in a box, but as a plant is in the sunlight and soil. It is of them, continuous with their energies, dependent upon their support, capable of increase only as it utilizes them."[29]

Following this organic metaphor, the environment provides the nutrients and support that cultivate human organisms and allow them to thrive, while also fixing the boundaries of growth in particular ways depending upon what the environment provides. Dewey elaborates on this point in *Democracy and Education*:

> the particular medium in which an individual exists leads him to see and feel one thing rather than another; it leads him to have certain plans in order that he may act successfully with others; it strengthens some beliefs and weakens others as a condition of winning the approval of others. Thus, it gradually produces in him a certain system of behavior, a certain disposition of action.[30]

In Dewey's conception, the environment plays a definitive role in forming disposi-
tions, acting as a social control on behavior as individuals seek to coordinate their
action with others. With this understanding, a carefully calibrated social environ-
ment can be used to cultivate a social spirit by orienting students toward goals that
require evermore robust and nuanced communication with others. In *Experience
and Nature,* Dewey explains that human communication is based upon an antici-
patory structure rooted in empathy for the other's position. This communication
is undertaken not merely for the purpose of exchanging information, but also for
coordinating action. Dewey asserts, "to understand is to anticipate together, it is
to make a cross reference which, when acted upon, brings about a partaking in a
common, inclusive, undertaking."[31] In classrooms, such undertakings not only
require cooperative learning, but also require a flexible curriculum that considers
the interests of the participants, without reducing the curriculum possibilities to this
dimension. Dewey argues that one acquires social habits in a largely unconscious
manner by being immersed in environments that require careful consideration of
others' concerns and perspectives. This requires that individuals be wholeheartedly
drawn into the learning process so their conscious attention is on the activity itself
rather than the social interaction. The teacher must be thoughtful in considering
how curriculum goals can be met while aligning activities with the interests and
past experiences of her particular students so they are effectively engaged. This
requires a familiarity with students' preferences in academic material and general
interests and tastes outside of school, which can be drawn upon to intersect with
curricular goals. Without such considerations, communication between students,
in the expansive Deweyan sense, is either left to chance or would be severely inhib-
ited and restricted to actions outside of the formal curriculum.

In *Democracy and Education,* Dewey explains that classroom conditions
should "enable an individual to make his own special contribution to a group inter-
est, and to partake of its activities in such ways that social guidance shall be a matter
of his own mental attitude."[32] By coordinating the interests of separate individuals
with the purposes of the class as a whole, students can become more empathetic
and imaginative in understanding the positions and perspectives of others. The
social environment of the classroom works to continuously improve these habits
through requiring adaptations by students, working to form a "predisposition to
not have predispositions,"[33] as such flexible adjustments are made a necessary fea-
ture of achieving both individual and class objectives.

Cultivating a Social Spirit

To Dewey, humans are inherently social creatures, but because of the plasticity of
habits, such social tendencies can manifest in a multitude of forms depending upon
the particulars of social environments. If education is to make a positive contribu-
tion toward a robust and thriving democratic life, educational environments must

cultivate what Dewey calls a "social spirit" in students, which he characterizes by four habitually rooted attitudes: directness, open-mindedness, single-mindedness, and responsibility. Taken together, these attributes underwrite what Dewey identifies as a democratic disposition.[34]

In *Democracy and Education,* Dewey defines directness as a confident approach to situations.[35] By this, Dewey does not mean self-confidence, but rather a lack of self-consciousness. Dewey explains, "self-consciousness, embarrassment, and constraint are its menacing foes. They indicate that a person is not immediately concerned with subject matter. Something has come between which deflects concern to side issues."[36] Self-consciousness is the trait observed in the research of both Turkle as well as Gardner and Davis regarding students and social interaction. This suggests two factors that are crucial for contemporary classroom pedagogy. The first is choosing subject matter that has the potential to profoundly engage students. This places a premium on teachers knowing their students well enough to assist them in making connections between the curriculum and their personal interests. The second is the need to regularly feature rich and robust interactions between students. Over time, such interactions would help concerns of self-consciousness fade away, while allowing students to gain experience in direct, face-to-face communication.

While arguments for new educational technologies in the classroom often meet the first criterion, the second factor of deep and rich interaction should be afforded greater consideration in contemporary classrooms. A pragmatic response to changing cultural dynamics suggests that increasing the depth and richness of direct interaction between students should be a primary concern of any new pedagogical initiatives. The point here is not to disparage educational technologies, but to challenge teachers to reconsider the fundamental purposes of classroom learning, and part of this requires teachers and teacher educators to jettison the notion that new technologies are necessarily progressive. With a more sober analysis, teachers could begin to realize that new pedagogical tools are only as useful as the goals they help one achieve, and can just as easily detract from the quality of a lesson as enhance it.[37]

Dewey describes open-mindedness as "accessibility of mind to any and every consideration that will throw light upon the situation that needs to be cleared up."[38] To understand how to cultivate open-mindedness, one must explore the role of reflection in the acquisition of habits. In Dewey's formulation, reflection is a secondary phenomenon that arises as a response to a halted action, which may or may not involve overt bodily movement. The halted action precipitates an emotional impulse from the organism—a disruption that ignites reflection as the individual attempts to adjust to an unexpected occurrence. The problem in social matters, in Dewey's analysis, is that most people are not generally inclined to investigate social matters more thoroughly, often due to prevailing social customs. More often, individuals are quick to withdraw or find an otherwise agreeable way out of the

situation, and this trend is seemingly being encouraged by contemporary cultural dynamics and facilitated by new media technologies. Research shows that political opinions have become more polarized in recent years,[39] and a variety of factors may be influencing this result, including a growing diversity of news sources that cater to preconstructed interests, increasingly sophisticated news aggregators that expose users only to their preferred points of view, growing cultural segregation by political beliefs and income levels,[40] and reduced participation in community activities, which limits interaction with diverse others.[41] Simply put, a lack of empathy may stem not only from not understanding others' perspectives, but also from not feeling the need to consider the perspectives of others in the first place, making open-mindedness a crucial attitude necessary for combating what has been a deeply divided contemporary culture. The role of education, in this case, is to cultivate habits that will result in more thoughtful and nuanced reactions to such unexpected disruptions, particularly regarding social interactions.

Dewey's perspective offers clues for how the strong opinions of a polarized culture can be used by incisive educators to better cultivate open-mindedness. This begins with the teacher introducing a problem, which must be wide enough in scope to allow a diversity of input from various angles, as Dewey argues that students become engaged in social affairs through their emotional investment in the matter. Yet the teacher must also not allow emotional impulses to overrun a careful consideration of the variables. Dewey recognizes this difficulty, calling it "one of the chief paradoxes of thought. Born in partiality, in order to accomplish its task it must achieve a certain detached impartiality."[42] Recourse for the teacher in this regard falls back upon the matter of reflection. Here, a careful attention to students' perspectives pays dividends, as she must find ways to further problematize assertions that will draw more dogmatic thinkers back toward reconsidering the issue in a more open-ended way. This can be achieved by inserting a pointed question or thoughtful comment that will halt students' impulses and move them back toward reflection and a closer attunement to classmates' perspectives. In the long run for the teacher, such tasks with a particular group of students should become easier as social habits are cultivated through continual immersion in this process. Dewey states, "gradually, and with a widening of the area of vision through a growth of social sympathies does thinking develop to include what lies beyond our *direct* interests."[43] With immersion in such social environments over time, students can become more inclined to conduct civil discourse that more faithfully honors the perspectives of others. A key test for any pedagogical initiatives or new educational technologies is whether the social engagement they encourage helps cultivate open-mindedness or merely offers students avenues for disengagement that may work against this aim. Answers to such questions will vary depending upon particular contexts and the specific uses made by various teachers, but prioritizing the above outcomes should help sharpen what has thus far largely been an uncritical appropriation of digital tools in K–12 classrooms.

By single-mindedness, Dewey means an undistracted unity of purpose.[44] In *Democracy and Education,* Dewey warns against divided attention, which he calls "double-mindedness,"[45] since it saps intellectual energy and dampens possibilities for rich meaning-making with others. In contemporary discourse, some proponents of media and technology education have argued that multitasking is a useful means of handling increasing volumes of continuous information streams,[46] but empirical research has demonstrated that multitasking only leads to doing several tasks poorly[47] and is also associated with a range of unhealthy socioemotional outcomes, such as getting less sleep and feeling less socially successful.[48] Dewey asserts that attending to multiple tasks also fosters divided attention, which has dispositional consequences of wasting opportunities for students to engage reflectively in matters of social import. In such cases, the natural, spontaneous energy of a student, rather than being focused on the material at hand, is dissipated in numerous directions and the potential for deep attunement to others is lost, or is at least not fully realized.

Dewey believes that occupational habits of skilled technicians and scientists are a desirable template for educators to examine concerning single-mindedness and open-mindedness. Consider the example of a highly skilled computer technician investigating a computer problem. Such a problem may lead a casual user to consult his user manual, or call technical support for assistance, in which case he would likely be led through a programmatic series of steps in order to correct the difficulty. If these steps do not resolve the problem, the technical support worker is likely to forward the problem to an employee with greater skill and experience. When a highly skilled computer technician considers the problem, she will look at the matter more closely and carefully. She is likely to take an open-minded approach that allows her to look beyond rote responses to the problem, and instead collect as much information as possible while surveying the variables before deciding upon a course of action. The greater knowledge possessed by this high-level technician affords her a superior perception of connections between the problem and potential solutions. Yet for Dewey, greater knowledge is not merely a matter of having a greater storehouse of information in one's mind. Though knowing details about the matter is important, the knowledge possessed by the technician is part of the embodied habits of engagement that she employs. The intimate knowledge of the machine's hardware or software aids in the investigation, which is carried through by an attitude of single-mindedness and directness—a forthright approach buttressed by self-confidence—that with an adequate explication of the variables, a solution to the problem can and will be found. In Dewey's formulation, there is no fundamental separation between the things that the technician knows that help her solve particular problems, and the habits that she employs to conduct the investigation. Both are part of the embodied knowledge that encompasses the expertise of the technician regarding these matters.

The computer technician may have formed these habits concerning her professional work, but may not have developed these attitudes regarding social relations with

her coworkers, friends, or family. While she may be adept at open-mindedly considering all of the permutations of a computer problem, she may not employ these same traits in social matters. Dewey asserts that the habituated response from the high-level technician has an equivalent in social affairs. In either case, habits are acquired by immersion in environments that promote particular adaptations to stimuli.

The classroom, to Dewey, represents an ideal environment in which to develop such socially spirited habits through the give-and-take of intersubjective communication oriented toward common action. The robust habits formed by the technician's genuine interest in the material form a clue for teachers to consider students' interests in crafting environments that will similarly draw students toward a more careful investigation of class objectives. A key difference between open-mindedness in technical and social matters is that, regarding social affairs, one has to consider positions that may be in stark contrast with one's own beliefs. This complicates the teacher's task of developing open-mindedness in the social domain, while highlighting Dewey's emphasis on careful construction of educational environments. One key question to ask about the implementation of new curricular materials and tools is whether they can be utilized to widen the social scope of students' interests, or whether they will be used primarily for narrow utilitarian purposes. For example, Shaffer and Gee's arguments for game-based learning[49] fall largely in the latter category. This approach may connect with some students' interests and may even assist in acquiring new skills and knowledge. While such moves might be contextually useful, it is also important to consider Dewey's challenge to educators to use the interests of students to broaden their horizons. Regarding new technologies, one productive way to approach this in a Deweyan spirit would be to make the social consequences of using new media technologies a part of the classroom curriculum. Such an approach would allow students to bring their real-life experiences with media into the classroom in order to create shared meaning around them, while also allowing the teacher to guide inquiry toward matters of larger social import.

Dewey states that the habit of responsibility, or what he also calls intellectual thoroughness, means "seeing a thing through."[50] This may be the most difficult trait to acquire, as it would require the other aforementioned qualities as a precondition. To be responsible in social matters entails close attunement to the opinions and perspectives of others, along with sensitiveness to how the outcomes of inquiry would affect a broad range of diverse others. Dewey acknowledges that such a trait can only be acquired through active practice,[51] and the aforementioned example of beginning with the real-life experiences of students would be a productive place to begin. The culture's contemporary emphasis on speed and convenience would seem to make each of the above characteristics more difficult to achieve with students, as responsibility would require the highest degree of empathy toward others' positions and perspectives in order to forecast the otherwise unintended consequences of actions.

The aforementioned traits, when thoroughly cultivated, offer the possibilities of fostering what Dewey calls a "disciplined disposition," which he contrasts with a personality that merely seeks immediate emotional satisfaction:

> Except where there is a disciplined disposition, the tendency is for the imagination to run loose. Instead of its objects being checked up by conditions with reference to their practicability in execution, they are allowed to develop because of the immediate emotional satisfactions which they yield.[52]

A disciplined disposition would make an individual less prone to making quick judgments and more likely to seriously consider others' perspectives, while also forging a tendency to probe for deeper levels of meaning. It should also be noted that students who are forming more disciplined dispositions are also crafting selves that are more robust. Dewey conceptualizes a fully embodied self that is rooted in habits and is thus in continuous transaction with the environments from which selves are forged. Dewey states, "all habits are demands for certain kinds of activity, and they constitute the self. In any intelligible sense of the word, they *are* will."[53] Simply put, humans are constituted by their habits, and these are forged by the specificity and variability of their environments. In *Democracy and Education,* Dewey argues that the self is inherently social and emerges from immersion in social environments:

> As a matter of fact every individual has grown up, and always must grow up, in a social medium. His responses grow intelligent, or gain meaning, simply because he lives and acts in a medium of accepted meanings and values. Through social intercourse, through sharing in the activities embodying beliefs, he gradually acquires a mind of his own. The conception of mind as a purely isolated possession of the self is at the very antipodes of the truth. The self *achieves* mind in the degree in which knowledge of things is incarnate in the life about him; the self is not a separate mind building up knowledge anew on its own account.[54]

To Dewey, the self is an achievement won by individuals who begin to differentiate themselves from their environments. If educators hope to assist students in cultivating more robust dispositions and senses of self, then they must thoughtfully consider the specifics of the educational environments that they design for their students, particularly with an eye to how classroom environments can work to balance some of more problematic biases of the broader culture that may work against more disciplined dispositions and hardy senses of self.

Conclusion

This paper considered Dewey's classic text *Democracy and Education* in light of 21st-century education. Arguments for 21st-century education have generally focused on curriculum standardization, along with the ubiquitous presence of digital technology

in K–12 classrooms. While it is clear that Dewey's philosophy of education would oppose standardization, *Democracy and Education* also provides the resources to reconsider the role of educational technologies in K–12 education by reformulating purposes for education away from narrow utilitarian concerns of job training and toward a more serious engagement with contemporary social challenges.

While not rejecting any new tools or methods outright, Dewey's *Democracy and Education* suggests that stronger and more direct connections should be made between formal schooling and the education of the broader culture. Because evidence indicates that the social practices of youth surrounding new media technologies have some problematic social consequences, a Deweyan approach advocates bringing these concerns directly into the classroom for student inquiry. It also suggests that schools should at least partially reassess their purposes to address these issues, in particular by making direct, face-to-face social interaction a more central facet of contemporary curriculum. Dewey asserts, "we may produce in schools a projection in type of the society we should like to realize, and by forming minds in accord with it gradually modify the larger and more recalcitrant features of adult society."[55] Dewey's *Democracy and Education* provides the tools for reconstructing education in a way that can bring renewed focus to democratic education. Doing so requires educators and policymakers to take a hard look at contemporary society and to begin to construct a vision of education and society that transcends narrow utilitarianism and considers the real-world challenges that confront society in the 21st century. Many of the biggest challenges faced by contemporary society are social in nature and thus require a renewed emphasis on Dewey's aims to develop a social spirit in students.

Notes

1. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education.*
2. Alfie Kohn, "21st-Century Schooling," 38.
3. See Lance E. Mason, "Locating Dewey's 'Lost Individual,'" 75–87; Dianne Ravitch, *Reign of Error.*
4. Partnership for 21st Century Skills, "P21 Applauds Congressman Loebsack and Costello."
5. David W. Shaffer and James Paul Gee, "Before Every Child is Left Behind."
6. Dewey, *Democracy and Education.*
7. Lance E. Mason, "Cultivating Civic Habits." 87–110.
8. See John Dewey and Arthur Bentley, *The Knower and the Known.*
9. Ibid.
10. Susan Linn, *The Case for Make Believe.*
11. Dewey, *Democracy and Education,* 195.
12. Zygmunt Bauman, *44 Letters,* 15.
13. Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together,* 177.
14. Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation.*
15. Howard Gardner and Katie Davis, *The App Generation,* 24.
16. Ibid., 61.

17.   Sara Konrath, Ed O'Brien, and Courtney Hsing, "Changes in Dispositional Empathy," 180–98.

18.   See Jean M. Twenge, "The Evidence for Generation Me and Against Generation We," 11–6; Jean M. Twenge, Sara Konrath, Joshua D. Foster, W. Keith Campbell, and Brad J. Bushman, "Egos Inflating over Time," 875–901; Jean M. Twenge, Sara Konrath, Joshua D. Foster, W. Keith Campbell, and Brad J. Bushman, "Increase in Narcissism among College Students," 919–28.

19.   Laura E. Buffardi and W. Keith Campbell, "Narcissism and Social Networking Web Sites," 1303–14; Soraya Mehdizadeh, "Self-Presentation 2.0," 357–64; Eileen Y. L. Ong, Rebecca P. Ang, Jim C. M. Ho, Joylynn C. Y. Lim, Dion H. Goh, Chei Sian Lee, and Alton Y. K. Chua, "Narcissism, Extraversion, and Adolescents' Self-Presentation on Facebook," 180–85.

20.   Yalda T. Uhls, Eleni Zgourou, and Patricia M. Greenfield, "21st Century Media, Fame, and Other Future Aspirations," Article 5.

21.   Luigi Bonetti, Marilyn Anne Campbell, and Linda Gilmore, "The Relationship of Loneliness and Social Anxiety," 279–85; George C. Nitzburg and Barry A. Farber, "Putting up Emotional (Facebook) Walls?", 1183–90.

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23.   Dewey, *Democracy and Education,* 339.

24.   Vincent Colapietro, "Embodied, Enculturated Agents," 68.

25.   Dewey and Bentley, *The Knower and the Known.*

26.   Peter J. Nelsen, "Intelligent Dispositions," 86–97.

27.   Dewey, *Democracy and Education,* 76.

28.   Vincent Colapietro, "Social Practice and Pragmatic Inquiry," 199.

29.   John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct,* 296.

30.   Dewey, *Democracy and Education,* 11.

31.   John Dewey, *Experience and Nature,* 178–79.

32.   Dewey, *Democracy and Education,* 301.

33.   Jason Kosnoski, *John Dewey and the Habits of Ethical Life,* 131.

34.   Dewey, *Democracy and Education.*

35.   Ibid., 174.

36.   Ibid., 173.

37.   Lance E. Mason, "Commentary: Science, Technology, and Society."

38.   Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 174.

39.   Pew Research Center, *Political Polarization and Media Habits.*

40.   Bill Bishop, *The Big Sort.*

41.   Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone.*

42.   Dewey, *Democracy and Education,* 147.

43   Ibid., 148.

44.   Ibid., 176.

45.   Ibid., 177.

46.   Henry Jenkins, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture.*

47.   See Flora Beeftink, Wendelien van Eerde, and Christel G. Rutte, "The Effect of Interruptions and Breaks on Insights and Impasses," 358–64; Ulla Foehr, *Media Multitasking among American Youth*; Eyal Ophir, Clifford Nass, and Anthony D. Wagner, "Cognitive Control in Media Multitaskers," 15583–87.

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49. David W. Shaffer and James Paul Gee. "Before Every Child is Left Behind."

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