Prof.As.Dr. Jani SOTA

THE ROOTS OF EDUCATIVE TENDENCIES OF JOHN
DEWEY AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN MODERN WORLD

Abstract

Article aims to identify the educative tendencies of John Dewey 1859-1952 as a part of intellectual debate in the modern world since the XIX about the topic of relationship between school and society. It examines first dominant models of the nature of reaction of society to education, but also tries to understand in what ways changes the vision of Dewey regarding the discussed topics from other models. He tries to place the Dewey ideas through the traditional frame and modernisation in cooperation with his point of views for time and space also from other ideas of other fields related to education. The article stresses the educative ideas of Dewey flow from “His alternative philosophy of life process” philosophy that may come as a result of his understanding of fundamental texts on education values, events and his history and with the argument that has philosophy of education guarantees a valuable alternative for both the classical education system and western education contemporary system.

The key to success of his educative ideas stays in his formulation of schooling and social progress. Amongst the numerous problems that he encountered during his lifetime, the greatest focus belonged to the role of woman in society, progress of education, rights of educators, humanist movements and peace into the world. Finally the article stresses the importance of philosophy of education of Dewey not simply his humanitarian messages of love, peace tolerance and dialogue, but also toward his pluralist values that the globalised world needs.

Key words: Education, school, philosophy, method, social progress, globalisations

1 Prof.As.Dr. Jani SOTA, Universiteti “Aleksandër Moisiu”, Durrës, jani_sota@yahoo.com
Introduction

John Dewey was an American philosopher of the first half century of the XX century. His career covers three generations and his voice can be heard in cultural discussions in USA and other western countries since the 1890 until he died 93 years in 1952. During his long career Dewey developed a philosophy that requires the unity of theory with practice. With his intellectual and political activity he gave his example in this unity. His idea was based in moral ethics that “Democracy is freedom” and dedicated his life creation of convincing philosophical argument and a follower of an activity that will provide its practical achievement. The democracy and the theory integration with practice was the most noted duty of Dewey in his career as education reformer.

While he started the work as the head of department of philosophy, psycology, and pedagogy at Chicago University in 1984, Dewey in his memories wrote that: “I sometimes think to give up teaching philosophy and to start teaching through pedagogy”. However he never stopped teaching philosophy; straight to Dewey views presenting them to the readers through books such as: “School and society” (1899) “How we think” (1910), “Democracy and education” (1916) and “Experience and education” (1938).

With his works Dewey gained enough fame to get invitations from universities and different governements to teach there, respectively to organise their schools. In this way he held speeches at the Beigin University, Turkey Meksico and other states as well. It must be pointed out that no lecturer besides Pestalocit have not experienced such an international reputation as Dewey.

John Dewey the key figure of pedagogic American pragmatism has developed his pedagogic and philosophic concept at the time when the life in USA, especially at the central and western part was developing rapidly. It is natural that the objections between the wealth and poverty have lead Dewey to understand the social and political point of view of the time. The time when Dewey start to think and act intensively was also the time of the great

scientific achievements. For this reason in many places were encountered great materialistic impacts, influenced mainly by the Hegel philosophy.

Dewey being faithful to pragmatic meaning did not understand the existence of a permanent thing, but he considered the truth as something exclusively relative and he denied the stability of everything⁶. In his philosophical point of view the experience also played a special importance that was connected closely to pragmatism. The knowledge according to Dewey cannot be anything else besides an opinion that is proved in the individual activity. The knowledge is identical to our experience, whilst the activity is predecessor of the true knowledge⁷.

“What is the true purpose of our knowledge? The knowledge makes us able to adapt to our needs, purposes and desires, in general to adjust to the situation where we exist. Only such a knowledge is true. The fundamental factors according to Dewey are in psychology (the child is at the center of everything) and in sociology (education is a life experience)”⁸.

Dewey knows 4 different interests: the interest for conversation and the contact with people, interest for inquiry, interest for work and interest for artistic expression. “Interest and effort in education and learning, - thinks Dewey, - must be completed mutually because they are complementary”⁹. But according to his opinion the successful learning is achieved when the activity for the student has a certain value, if this has any sense for them. It is interesting for him that at the learning point of view has influenced the German lecturer Herbarti who understood the interests’ stereotypically. Frobel idea of development influenced him but Dewey was not convinced. He was satisfied much more by the idea of Development as he found it in biology by the Darwin, which he interpreted later in philosophy and pedagogy.

Dewey, in accordance to his meaning of experience teaches us that the “Pedagogy experience is the stone of evidence for the philosophical and scientific ideas” ¹⁰. Because of that comes the saying “Education is the laboratory where

---

⁸ Ibid.
⁹ Ibid.
are made true and proved various ideas”

In 1986 Dewey founded in Chicago city the laboratory school, which was the first experimental school in America\textsuperscript{12}. At this school he accomplished philosophical principles. For this reason the school was not like other schools. After Dewey determined the key principles of pragmatism pedagogy, besides the fundamental problems of this pedagogy orientation will be clearer his awareness of his ideas in general.

1. The relationship between the pedagogy of pragmatism and progressive pedagogy

\textit{At the beginning.} The pragmatism and progressive pedagogy were not totally agreeable. The progressive pedagogy- which in fact in principle is a branch of individual pedagogy is not unified but it is separated. Some representatives of these branches are distinguished for their point of views. The best scholars of this pedagogy define it in various ways.

It is comprehensive that this comes from the fact that the progressive pedagogy has not its theoretical bases nor its philosophical ones. This type of pedagogy is created as a counterweight for the conservative schools, but they were not able to explain any special theoretical basis but teaching children without any philosophical pedagogy.

\textit{Later.} The dangerous consequences of such action were almost as it was told before. For this reason the “Progressive lecturers” used the cases when in 1916 was published the masterpiece of Dewey “Democracy and Education” (translated in Albanian) which criticized the conservatory school with the philosophical argument, seeing it from different point of views\textsuperscript{13}. This was clear later especially when Dewey was forced to seclude the pedagogy of pragmatism by the progressive pedagogy.

But however the representatives of progressive pedagogy could admit the necessity of the method use of experiencing as they called it “the pedagogy of pragmatism”. Experimentalists also needed the progressive pedagogy, because they think that their representatives would introduce elements of pragmatism

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{12} Leon Zhlebnik, \textit{Histori e përgjithshme e shkollave dhe e ideve pedagogjike} (hereinafter: \textit{Histori e përgjithshme ...}), botim i Entit për Botimin e Teksteve i Republikës Socialiste të Serbisë, Beograd, 1961, f. 102.

principles. Because this could be taken into account by the conservatory schools. In this way was seen as a necessity for unification, nevertheless the experimentalists did not change their philosophy in ratio to the principles of the progressive pedagogy. They were joined only by the common argument to oppose the traditional school.

In the end. The distance between the progressive pedagogy and experimentalists was increased further for the fact that the reality showed that the progressive pedagogy was not leading them anywhere. And furthermore had to share the responsibility for the nonsuccess of the progressive pedagogy at school. Dewey himself criticized the progressive pedagogy, individual pedagogy respectively. But his critics against this pedagogy is somehow blurred and without basis today. This proves the fact that the individual pedagogy is admitted as ideology by Dewey himself. This is clearer when we talk about educative purposes. It is necessary to know the critical thinking of some fundamental issues of pragmatism pedagogy or experimentalism.

2. Issues of experience in pedagogy

Characteristics. The experience has indicated that in the meaning of experimentalism there are two main characteristics.

1. The first typical feature is the intervention among itself. Man acts against the world and the world acts against men. The experience to this action is a double action that includes the outer world and the sensory organs, nerve system, thinking, feelings and actions so the object and subject.

When the child acts when he acts into objects, the objects act against him as well, he faces the experience. The example that Dewey liked is this:

“The child put the hand on fire but he does not get burned. The experience: if he gets burned he fears the fire. The experience changes every day for man. Changing the conditions should change our activity as well to adjust to the new situations. With these changes of activity also the experiences and activities change too”\(^\text{14}\).

2. The second characteristic of the experience stays in the continuity of experience, which means that the present experience changes the effect of previous experience, completes it if it an experience of the same kind, or reduces it if it in contradiction to the previous one\(^\text{15}\). This is how the qualities of the men

\(^{14}\) J. J. McDermott, *The Philosophy ....*, p. 76.

\(^{15}\) *Ibid.*
are shaped that influence in the formation of qualities and expressions. In each new experience are filled the old qualities according to the demands of the new situation.

In this context we may bring up the pragmatism pedagogy. This change and enriching of experience means education. Dewey gives the education this definition:

“Education is the reconstruction and reorganizing of experience. Education is the laboratory where are checked various knowledge”\textsuperscript{16}.

On other words Dewey admits in unison the educational process and the result of this process.

\textit{Shaping the experience.} One of the key issues is the way the experience is shaped, how the factors of child development are interwoven such as: inheritance, circle, education.

In each experience that is formed by the activity between the individual and the circle two factors are involved: individual and circle. Both those factors play their part. In this context the pedagogy of pragmatism stresses more than the social pedagogy the influence of the individual, whilst the influence of the circle more than the individual pedagogy. As matter of fact it stresses the fact that: “\textit{none of the mentioned factors is more important than the next one}”\textsuperscript{17}.

Some scholars of the education criticize the pedagogy of experimentalism, stressing more the individual. While some others do not stress the necessity of the cycle. Also in the discussion of the followers of this pedagogic discipline are encountered individuals who stress either the first or the second but this is not of a vital importance. As matter of fact it is not important that at what extend is the cycle or the individual the pedagogy of pragmatism, but how it realizes the factors that act during the child development. This stand into the idea that:

“Pedagogy of pragmatism is not seeking ways for education neither in the isolated cycle by the individual nor to the individual isolated by the district. The district and the individual are considered as functional factor changes its relation to one another. While for the directions for education the pedagogy wins by experience the individual and cycle come into a mutual dependency”\textsuperscript{18}.


\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{18} John Dewey, \textit{Moral Principles in Education} (hereinafter: \textit{Moral Principles ...}), The Riverside
Cycle-Individual. The way how the character of the individual is shaped by the moral and educational policy, depends directly by the “factors of development”. In the case of Dewey this theoretical aspect of his education practice is not related to the issues of inheritance, cycle and education but only two factors – individual and cycle- that form the experience and step by step is linked to the conscience of the of the man himself. The our third factor – education- in this relationship is the same with the experience. The child is educated living the experience, while the experience is the product of two factors – man and cycle.

“Individual in each experience puts a trace of his nature in the cycle of education, his previous experience but cycle too - according to his point of view of this pedagogy – with each experience that he faces puts the traces of individual experience. This is because the cycle comes into experience, it gives a specific color”\(^{19}\).

On other word we can say that different people cannot have a same cycle even if they may be surrounded by the same things. This is for the fact that all individuals use the objects but each of them acts in different ways; and each of them has his own peculiarities – object of their influence. Which means: the individual and the cycle are functional factors and they change – one related to the other.

Type of the cycle: the pedagogy of pragmatism distinguishes many types of cycles. Everything that surrounds the person is not part of the cycle. The true cycle is made up by the things with which the person is placed in mutual relationships. The potential cycle on the other hand is made by objects that the person may have mutual relationships and as a consequence he is subdued to the effective action, acting himself on them. Some objects are not involved in the potential cycle.

Now we will understand more easily when they say that in experience change both factors, subject (individual) and object (cycle). The subject in experience is “reconstructed” in the way that it influences the quality of the previous experiences.

---

Press Cambridge, The Project Gutenberg, Produced by Barbara Tozier, Bill Tozier and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net, Release Date: April 25, 2008 [EBook #25172].
http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=768523

\(^{19}\) Ibid.
“When the individual changes, reconstructed by experience then his cycle changes too (now he lives changes in his activity, because this changed experience is represented in a changed way of his care for the cycle. Both factors of experience are changed subjective and objective ones. This is for the fact that each experience is changed real actual cycle and potential cycle”\textsuperscript{20}.

Critics. By the philosophy point of view the dialectic materialization is not difficult to criticize the meaning of the ideas related to the factors of the child development, that discovers a wider philosophical meaning of their authors. The fundamental point of view of dialectic materialization stands in this:

“Exists the outer world of objects, and does not depend by the knowledge of the man, but is reflected in his awareness. By the meaning expressed for experience comes out that the material, outer world (“cycle”) is not something primary independent from man, but they are mutual in mutual relationship, one in function of the next. So the objective world does not exist excluded by the subject”\textsuperscript{21}.

If the individual and the circle are factors of development, created by the experience, then it is clear and necessary that outside that cannot exist other things that may influence in childhood, because in this respect will become a factor of development.

Also we may judge that the pragmatists accept the existence of the objective world, that can be that circle, that does not exist in real or potential way, but this has no relation to the man or the child. As soon as the circle becomes real right after it start to influence to man and man to it may come in its experience losing in this respect its objectivity\textsuperscript{22}.

“Anything that acts in childhood influences to him through his experience that shapes “Construon”. The same thing is worth for the object of child recognition: topic, object of his recognition is his experience, not the outer world that exist objectively. The outer world (circle) is adjustable for knowing only as psychic factor as a part of the experience. So man


\textsuperscript{21} J. Dewey, \textit{Reconstruction in ...}, p. 112.

\textsuperscript{22} L. Zhlebnik, \textit{Histori e përgjithshme ...}, f. 219.
does not know the outer world but his own experiences.\textsuperscript{23}

Such an example: anyone can see the interest of the child in a special activity is now a criterion of what is already known? As matter of fact such criterion seen in the aspect of this philosophy does not correspond to the accurate reflection of the objective world, according to the meaning of this philosophy the objective world does not exist, but the quality of the experience is the only criterion of what is known.

3. Pedagogy of pragmatism and purposes of education

Critics of the social pedagogy by the pragmatism pedagogy point of view. Each direction of social pedagogy would be criticized first of all by the point of view: whom is subdued the individual this or that direction of social pedagogy. (for example the fascist pedagogy) subdues the individual a direction of social pedagogy and the Marxist one subdues him to another direction, and then either we would accept the assigned direction to social pedagogy or leave him.\textsuperscript{24}

Anyway this would be the main and the most precious criterion, so the choosing of a direction of social pedagogy. For the value of social pedagogy we can talk only when we know the society that assigns the purposes. Even the socialist pedagogy is social if the educational purposes are taken by the society.

\textit{How do the experimentalists criticize?} The pedagogy of experimenting criticizes the social pedagogy in a special way. First of all it is interested in the third factor – education. The pragmatism pedagogy or experimenting knocks down any pedagogic purpose that pedagogy (education) takes from outside and society. Dewey writes:

“If we seek education purposes, then it is not a business to the purposes out of education process to which we must subdue the education – our fundamental pint of view excludes it. But when it is for the contradiction between the purposes found at the education process, where influences the purposes that the education takes from outside”\textsuperscript{25}

The pedagogy of pragmatism denies educational purposes assigned from outside, whomever they are and is distinguished by the social pedagogy.

\textsuperscript{23} J. Dewey, Reconstruction in ..., p. 112.
\textsuperscript{24} L. Zhlebnik, Histori e përgjithshme ..., f. 220.
\textsuperscript{25} A. Boydston, The Later ..., p. 246.
Contradiction. Dewey says that the natural abilities are developed through the activity and actions. While the duty of the social circle is according to his opinion to run the development guiding the natural abilities in a more useful direction.

Immediately will come the question: how come to run the development if we have no direction? No matter the leading, without the direction is not possible the leading. The educational purposes are assigned by the society.

When the pragmatist criticize the individual pedagogy admit openly the directions for education by outside, because without them is not possible to defeat consequently the individual pedagogy. With this is passed in the position of social pedagogy. ‘‘Education purposes, - stress the experimentalists, - should raise and should exist in practical education situations and true one’’.

Elements of the situations. The elements of the situations are: child with his own abilities, need interest, experience (this is according to Russo) his circle, elaborative abilities, educator abilities, taking into consideration all these elements of the assigned situation so that the experience of the child to be enriched because as we said the education purpose is to reconstruct the experiences.

‘‘Experimentalists do not take into consideration the education situations so it can be accomplished by the society. When the situation does change than naturally the education purposes are changed as well. While the key element of this situation is the child. At this point the experimental critics approaches to the individual pedagogy point of view’’.

The misunderstood freedom. This is proved by the argument that the pragmatic pedagogy repeats after the individual pedagogy, that the child must be free. On this occasion with freedom is understood in an idealistic way a kind of breakthrough from the necessity: if the teacher takes the education purposes idealistically assigned previously. This means that: as the teachers are obstacles for the reason that they must admit without choice the education purposes the same obstacles the children.

‘‘The followers of pragmatist pedagogy cannot understand if it taking the purpose of social improvement f the teacher and student they still remain free. If the man must be really free it is necessary to learn and to know the

27 Ibid.
moral norms and to subdue to them. Only after the recognition of the norms he may use them. This is the freedom of understanding materialistically, where the key element is the child with his needs and his interests”28.

**The flaws of the individual pedagogy.** The pedagogy of pragmatism tries to criticize two things. Individual pedagogy that according to it is not possible to be run according to the education purposes, which are gained once and forever by the child nature and against the social pedagogy.

On this occasion this pedagogy attracts the attention by some weak points of the individual pedagogy and some other weak points of social pedagogy.

“We had to also compiled a comprehensive list of children’s needs and interests, it can still develop a more comprehensive list of typical needs and interests and this still is not saying that we have proven needs and interests of certain specifically children at the time of the given situation, and that these needs and interests can have their causes in a special about”29.

Even though the needs and interests of the children are known we educate in accordance to the needs of the child at the moment when we educate.

The principal realization of the demand of the individual pedagogy at school is impossible. And for this reason the pedagogy of pragmatism requires that the education purposes should not be taken out from the nature of the child once and forever, but should prove always starting from the true educative situation. Since the child is the main element of this situation this pedagogy goes further more in an extremity rather than the individual pedagogy.

**Weak sides of social pedagogy.** The pragmatism pedagogy related to the weak sides of some social pedagogy directions, criticizes the practical admission, admission of the norms of behavior, values of the demands, ideas, principles and understanding of the world.

It must be admitted that this is reasonable. The dogmatic admission and the dogmatic education without a deep reasoning is not democratic. Such an admission is typical for the education in medieval times.

**The essence of the pragmatic mistake.** The essence of the Dewey’s mistake, widely of the pragmatic pedagogy stays in the fact that he considers the presentation of the education purposes from the outside, by the society is sign of


class contradiction: where the education take the educational purposes form the outside, by the society, there where the society is divided in classes that are in contradiction between each other30.

Also after the society in USA according to Dewey is democratic, educational purpose must be extracted by the child experience. Here lies the relationship between the educational democracy and due to that the masterpiece of Dewey is called “Pedagogy and education”. Dewey presents this mistake in a clear way:

“If the government is not democratic than the assigned parts of the social involvement take their educational purposes from the outside and they are not born by their experiences formed in a freeway. So it is understood that educational purposes for the ruling class have introduced the tools, and if this is true than the human freedom is possible only when exists democracy”31.

Critics. First of all it is not true that the educational presentation of the purposes by outside from the society is a sign of class antagonism in the meaning that the society is not democratic there where they find purposes. The democratic part of the educational purposes that is the loyalty to the human development is not depended by the fact that if the society admits them. The education has always taken its purposes by the generalization.

“With the birth of the society with classes the education gained class meaning, meaning assignments to strengthen the existing productive relationships or to fight against them. The democratic part of the education, loyalty of the educational purposes now depends from the social improvement”32.

If the democratic purposes are taken by the classes that obstacles the development of productive powers then this is not democratic, if it fights against these purposes realizing purposes against that class then this is democratic.

Dewey cannot distinguish this one. The same criterion is valuable for the determination of the assigning of the values of the society, of the democratizing of the educational society that may come from the nature of the child. The last element is social too. Even those purposes may strengthen the productive powers

30 R. J. Bernstein, John ..., p. 148.
31 J. Dewey, Shkolla dhe ..., f. 28.
32 Ibid.
(for example the purposes of Ruso in his time) may destroy or weaken them.

Should be taken into account the fact that the society will not perform its social duties, of the class and individual as well: to take care for the social development of the individual development.

“If the education serves to the exploring it may spoil the individual, does not perform properly its individual functions and on the contrary the education that serves to the purposes of the social purposes has conditions for the individual development”

We think that democratic is not only the education that supports its contribution in the social development or the contribution for the overall development of the individual and has personality. The education today is made possible and it exists anywhere in the world USA, anywhere where the social developing forces influence or wherever those forces are in government. This also stresses the loyalty of Dewey to the bourgeoisie classes.

Importance

The experimentalist importance, pedagogy of pragmatism or Dewey above all stands in the fact that they have tried through two traditional directions individual pedagogy and social one to find the third direction that would have to leave the experiments to two traditional directions. The individual pedagogy as matter of fact has reached to the last individualization which was against the oppression of the state in education. There is no doubt that Dewey and experimentalists have had a great success in something but the solution of the principles of these objections is obstacle the capitalist system and its philosophy.

Regarding the Dewey need to be stressed that he has reached deeply in the American and Western Europe schools. It is typical today that all the pedagogical attitude in the world today are depended on the fact that how close or how fare they stay to Dewey. This is enough to consider the John Dewey one of the key mentalists or perhaps the most important one in the pedagogy studies.

The pedagogic opinion of Dewey has influenced so much the practice of the American school. He deserves to be the studied by the pedagogy critics. In this direction must be sought elements of his pedagogy which are acceptable for us.

BIBLIOGRAPHY