

DEWEY, EXPERIENCE, AND EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY:
A RECONSTRUCTIVE DISCUSSION

Andreas Reichelt Lind

Department of Primary and Secondary Teacher Education
Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway

ABSTRACT. In this article, Andreas Reichelt Lind explores the possibilities of a Deweyan account of education for democracy. To that end, an account emphasizing democratic habit formation, direct experience of democracy as a way of life, and the distinction between being and becoming is explicated and discussed. Lind shows how these elements together point to the issue of designing educational environments and then discusses in a preliminary way the implications of this insight from the perspective of education for democracy. The article's contribution is twofold. First, it explicitly contributes to a reconstruction of Dewey in relation to the issue of educating for democracy. This represents a reframing of his writings. Second, it highlights and discusses some theoretical implications of the possibilities inherent in the Deweyan account of education for democracy.

KEY WORDS. being/becoming; communication; Dewey; educational environment; education for democracy; experience; habits

INTRODUCTION

John Dewey's *Democracy and Education*, has had a lasting impact on how the relationship between education and democracy has come to be understood.¹ In the preface of the book, Dewey writes that he aims to provide "a critical estimate of the theories of knowing and moral development which were formulated in earlier societies, but still operate ... to hamper the adequate realization of the democratic ideal."² He argues that the realization of democracy is closely related to the understanding of epistemology and moral development upon which society and its educational system are grounded. He implies that for education to be truly democratizing, the theories of knowledge and moral development underpinning education must be in line with a democratic way of life.

As Leonard Waks observed on the book's centenary, it is a "living classic" still used by contemporaries "to address the overriding concerns of our time and to fashion a contemporary vision of democratic education."³ Similarly, Stefan Neubert, adopting Dewey's reconstructive ethos, argues that "the best use we can make of Dewey's work today ... is to reconstruct it ourselves in and for our own contexts."⁴ In this article, I seek to contribute to a reconstruction of Dewey's views in relation to the issue of educating for democracy.

1. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (1916), in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899–1924*, vol. 9, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976).

2. *Ibid.*, 3.

3. Leonard Waks, "Democracy and Education at 100," *Educational Theory* 66, no. 1–2 (2016): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12154>.

4. Stefan Neubert, "Reconstructing Deweyan Pragmatism: A Review Essay," *Educational Theory* 59, no. 3 (2009): 353, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2009.00323.x>.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that “education for democracy” was *not* a phrase Dewey himself used, signaling that what Dewey left us is not a “cook-book recipe for democracy.”⁵ As Robert Westbrook comments, although most of what Dewey had to say about democracy and education is at least indirectly relevant to this question, he “had relatively little to say about the particulars of civic education.”⁶ The contribution of this article lies in the explication and elaboration of some of these particulars and some of their inherent possibilities for classroom practice.

Consequently, the questions asked here might be formulated as: What guidelines, if any, does Dewey supply us with for the task of educating for democracy? What are the possibilities inherent in these guidelines? It is not my intention to supply a definitive answer to what education for democracy *is* but rather to suggest possibilities as to what such an education *can* be. The goal of the article, accordingly, can be understood in an exploratory and preliminary sense. Nor is it my intention to argue that educating for democracy is necessarily more important than other educational aims. After all, as Nel Noddings argues, education is a multi-aim enterprise.⁷

The article is made up of three main parts. First, I outline and discuss Dewey’s democratic theory, with an eye to its transactional foundations. Second, bearing in mind the centrality of the concept of experience in Dewey’s democratic theory, I discuss some possibilities for the task of educating for democracy as a way of life. To do so, I outline a Deweyan account of education for democracy that emphasizes the formation of democratic habits through transaction with an educational environment in which students, understood as beings rather than merely becomings, can directly experience the democratic way of life. Finally, I conclude by showing how this framework points toward the issue of designing educational environments, in particular the communicative elements of these environments. Some implications of this claim, relevant for the task of educating for democracy, are discussed in a preliminary way.

DEMOCRACY AS A WAY OF LIFE: THE SHARING OF EXPERIENCE THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNICATION

In every account of education for democracy, there is necessarily an understanding of what democracy is or should be at the core, which has implications

5. Jessica Ching-Sze Wang, “Reconstructing Deweyan Democratic Education for a Globalizing World,” *Educational Theory* 59, no. 4 (2009): 410, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2009.00328.x>.

6. Robert B. Westbrook, *Democratic Hope: Pragmatism and the Politics of Truth* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 231.

7. Nel Noddings, *Education and Democracy in the 21st Century* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013), 3.

ANDREAS REICHELTL LIND is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Primary and Secondary Teacher Education at Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway; email andreasr@oslomet.no. His primary areas of scholarship are citizenship education, philosophy of education, democracy, pragmatism, pedagogy and education, and democratic theory.

for the kinds of citizens one is aiming to educate. This makes it necessary to treat ideas of democracy in common with ideas on education for democracy, as they are intimately connected — especially so in the case of Dewey. Throughout his scholarship, he developed a democratic theory that is distinct in both its explicit connection to and mutual interdependence with education. Consequently, it is necessary to outline Dewey's understanding of democracy before embarking on a meaningful discussion of what a Deweyan account of education for democracy might entail.

Emil Višnovsky and Štefan Zolcer argue that “[t]he spirit of Deweyan democracy is participatory through and through.”⁸ However, the participation Dewey has in mind is not merely of a political-institutional nature. His conception of participation is broader. He even went so far as to argue that “[t]he identification of democracy with political democracy ... is responsible for most of its failures.”⁹ What, then, does the participation Dewey has in mind entail? What, specifically, is it that individuals should be predisposed toward, willing to do, and participate in doing in a Deweyan democracy?

We can approach these questions through Dewey's oft-cited definition of democracy as “primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.”¹⁰ The concept of *experience* can be argued to be central here, as it is often understood as the basic element of Dewey's philosophical system and the source of its coherent unity and continuity.¹¹ To understand the implications this concept has for democratic participation, it is necessary to briefly consider Dewey's transactional realism, where the concept of experience is applied most concretely.

Dewey's point of departure lies in the *transactions* taking place in and with our social and natural surroundings. That is, all the things around us — the things that are potentially available in some way. These include both the effable and the ineffable. The surroundings are what simply *are*. This transactional realism forms the foundation of Dewey's epistemology,¹² as it is through transactions with our surroundings that we potentially approach knowledge and develop morally. It is within this transactional framing that Deweyan democratic participation must be understood.

Experience is the specific name that Dewey gives to the transactions of living organisms and their *environments*, embracing “all that is encountered by

8. Emil Višnovsky and Štefan Zolcer, “Dewey's Participatory Educational Democracy,” *Educational Theory* 66, no. 1–2 (2016): 67, <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12152>.

9. John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920), in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899–1924*, vol. 12, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 200.

10. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 93.

11. John Quay, “Not ‘Democratic Education’ but ‘Democracy and Education’: Reconsidering Dewey's Oft Misunderstood Introduction to the Philosophy of Education,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 48, no. 10 (2016): 1018, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2016.1174098>.

12. Jim Garrison, “John Dewey's Theory of Practical Reasoning,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 31, no. 3 (1999): 291–312, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.1999.tb00467.x>.

an intelligent being" in these transactions.¹³ Accordingly, Deweyan experience encompasses modes such as action, emotion, cognition, and communication.¹⁴ As is evident from his definition of democracy, communication plays a key role in the democratic way of life. Dewey describes communication as "a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession."¹⁵

The notion of environment is central to the Deweyan concept of experience. The environment consists of those things in our surroundings that are considered during a course of transaction.¹⁶ As Dewey puts it, the environment denotes the "continuity" between our surroundings and our "active tendencies"; it is "those conditions that promote or hinder, stimulate or inhibit" our activities.¹⁷ In other words, our environment is those elements of our surroundings that are made meaningful in the context of a specific activity.

Importantly, our surroundings — and, by extension, our environment — are subject to change. From this follows Dewey's insight that democracy "cannot stand still."¹⁸ More specifically, "it has to be constantly discovered, and rediscovered, remade and reorganized."¹⁹ If not, "it is already starting on the backward road that leads to extinction."²⁰ As the surroundings and environment of society evolve and change, so too should democracy. Democratization, in other words, is never a finished project, and democracy itself is never a finished idea.

However, this alone does not differentiate democracy sufficiently from what Dewey understands as the limited political-institutional view. While participation in political institutions can be seen as a special case of democratic participation, the democratic way of life should not be delimited to this. The differentiation becomes clearer in his formulation of democracy as "a way of life."²¹ As a way of life, he argues, democracy must be "buttressed by the presence of democratic

13. John E. Smith, "The Reconciliation of Experience in Peirce, James and Dewey," *The Monist* 68, no. 4 (1985): 549, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27902942>.

14. Hansjörg Hohr, "The Concept of Experience by John Dewey Revisited: Conceiving, Feeling and 'Enlivening'," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 32 (2013): 25–38, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-012-9330-7>.

15. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 12.

16. David T. Hansen and Carmen James, "The Importance of Cultivating Democratic Habits in Schools: Enduring Lessons from *Democracy and Education*," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 48, no. 1 (2016): 94–112, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2015.1051120>.

17. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 15.

18. John Dewey, "The Challenge of Democracy to Education" (1937), in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 11, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 183.

19. *Ibid.*, 182.

20. *Ibid.*

21. John Dewey, "Creative Democracy: The Task Before Us" (1939), in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 14, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 226.

methods in all social relationships."²² Thus, what is important for the realization of democracy is not just what goes on in political institutions but also what occurs in the daily lives and relationships of citizens and all the situations in which they are involved. Democracy, for Dewey, begins in these *situations*.

This notion of situation is another key element in Dewey's transactional realism. Situation is that which gives experience its form and content in the *present* moment, by giving some direction as to which elements of our surroundings are made meaningful as our environments. Situations are scenes of activity that we continuously enter, transform, and leave.²³ A situation, according to Dewey, is a transaction between the two factors in every experience: the objective conditions and the internal conditions. As Dewey puts it, "[a]ny normal experience is an interplay of these two sets of conditions. Taken together, or in their interaction, they form what we call a *situation*."²⁴ While the "objective" conditions can be understood as our surroundings, the "internal" conditions are best understood as *habits*. Importantly, the Deweyan conception of habit is deeper and broader than the conventional understanding of habit, as "more or less fixed ways of doing things."²⁵ While Dewey's understanding of habits includes this aspect, which I will return to below, it also entails a "special sensitiveness or accessibility to certain classes of stimuli, standing predilections and aversions."²⁶ One of the basic characteristics of habits, then, are that "every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects ... the quality of subsequent experiences."²⁷ Habits thus make us predisposed to certain experiences by embodying the ways in which our surroundings become meaningful for us.

Situations, in other words, constitute the environment by habitually directing our attention toward some rather than other elements of our surroundings and by making these elements meaningful in certain habitual ways rather than others. Some of these transactions progress rather smoothly, while others do not. Such *indeterminate* situations are those in which the transactions between the surroundings and our habitual perspectives, ends-in-views, and ways of doing and being are out of balance; in short, where there is a problem to be solved.

Returning to Dewey's definition of democracy one last time, it is in response to these indeterminate situations that democracy as an "associated" way of

22. John Dewey, "Democracy and Educational Administration" (1937), in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 11, ed. Boydston, 225.

23. Hansen and James, "The Importance of Cultivating Democratic Habits in Schools," 100.

24. John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (1938), in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 13, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 24.

25. *Ibid.*, 35.

26. John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (1922), in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899–1924*, vol. 14, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 132.

27. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 18.

living *begins*. Accordingly, as Kathleen Knight Abowitz argues, in Deweyan democracy “the people ... mobilize around particular problems ... and they are best understood not as the public, but as multiple publics.”²⁸ These publics are “fundamentally ad hoc, called into existence by an emerging situation.”²⁹ In other words, democracy as a way of life can be understood as something that *begins* in several small publics — rather than in *the* Public. These small publics come together associatively in and around a multitude of shared scenes of activity; in conjoint communication of experience, to find solutions regarding what *to do* about the indeterminate situation at hand.

Due to the importance of the process of experience for democracy, Dewey argues that “the measure of the worth of any social institution ... is its effect in enlarging and improving experience.”³⁰ In other words, a society and its institutions, relations, processes, and so on can be characterized as democratic to the degree that they contribute to enlarging and improving our transactional experiences. Accordingly, democracy is a way of life that is realized to the extent that it is qualitatively present in all social relationships and institutions.

Bringing together the argument above in consideration of this democratic criterion, we see that the specific kind of participation Dewey has in mind, to facilitate the enlargement and improvement of experience, is participation in *sharing* experience *through* communication *in* emergent publics. The important questions for a Deweyan account of education for democracy, then, are *how* such an enlargement and improvement of experience can be brought about and the possible roles formal education can play in achieving that.

EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY: A DEWEYAN FRAMEWORK

While I have outlined experience as a general concept, I have not gone into detail. Consequently, to approach a more concrete answer as to what the call for an enlargement and improvement of experience might entail for the task of educating for democracy, I now take a closer look at some aspects of the Deweyan concept of experience through the lens of his educational philosophy.

Such a broad notion as experience must naturally be delimited according to relevance for a specific purpose. David Hildebrand³¹ highlights three aspects of Deweyan experience that are useful for an educational context and, accordingly, useful for grounding an account of education for democracy: (a) experience as

28. Kathleen Knight Abowitz, *Publics for Public Schools: Legitimacy, Democracy, and Leadership* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2013), 16.

29. Chris Higgins and Kathleen Knight Abowitz, “What Makes a Public School Public? A Framework for Evaluating the Civic Substance of Schooling,” *Educational Theory* 61, no. 4 (2011): 370, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2011.00409.x>.

30. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 9.

31. David Hildebrand, “The Paramount Importance of Experience and Situations in Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*,” *Educational Theory* 66, no. 1–2 (2016): 73–88, <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12153>.

experimental, (b) the distinction between direct and indirect experience, and (c) the significance of present experience for education.

EXPERIENCE AS EXPERIMENTAL: KNOWING, INTELLIGENT ACTION, MORAL DEVELOPMENT, AND DEMOCRATIC HABITS

First of all, Deweyan experience is experimental. This is because experience is necessarily “an active-passive affair,”³² involving an alteration between acting and being acted upon. Whenever “we experience something we act upon it, we do something with it; then we suffer or undergo the consequences.”³³ Essentially, this experimental method consists of a process of trial and error in which a person — more or less consciously — puts his or her ideas and hypotheses to the test by applying them to practice and thereby *potentially* discovers correlations between actions and their consequences in a given situation.

The stable results of these inquiry processes are what Dewey understands as knowledge.³⁴ As such, the contribution of knowledge, according to Dewey, is “the possibility of intelligent administration of the elements of doing and suffering.”³⁵ Experience, then, *potentially* results in knowledge. Knowledge is concerned with grasping the relationship between our actions and their consequences, thus helping us gain more control — but never complete mastery — over the consequences of our actions in other similar situations. Importantly, as Deron Boyles³⁶ points out, knowledge for Dewey is not founded on a justified true belief about correspondence to an external world, but on a warranted assertion that one has reached a temporally satisfactory solution to a problem at hand. Knowledge, accordingly, supports or informs our transactions in situations occurring in a world that is not separate from our use(s) or place(s) in that world,³⁷ rather than supplying ready-made methods or heuristics for the manipulation of a world that is external to the knower. However, as Boyles adds, it is *knowing* — that is, the processes of inquiry themselves — rather than knowledge that is the focal point of Dewey’s epistemology.³⁸

The crucial difference here lies in the distinction between *blind* trial and error and what Dewey calls *intelligent* action.³⁹ It is only when the experimenting is

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

33. *Ibid.*, 146.

34. Deron R. Boyles, “Dewey’s Epistemology: An Argument for Warranted Assertions, Knowing, and Meaningful Classroom Practice,” *Educational Theory* 56, no. 1 (2006): 57–68, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2006.00003.x>.

35. John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (1925), in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 1, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 29.

36. Boyles, “Dewey’s Epistemology.”

37. *Ibid.*, 61.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Gert Biesta, “Pragmatizing the Curriculum: Bringing Knowledge Back into the Curriculum Conversation, but via Pragmatism,” *Curriculum Journal* 25, no. 1 (2014): 29–49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2013.874954>.

conducted in an intelligent manner that knowledge is a possible outcome. The difference between blind trial and error and intelligent action lies in the intervention of thinking, which Dewey understands as a “dramatic rehearsal (in imagination) of various competing possible lines of action.”⁴⁰ Acting in an intelligent manner thus involves being able to suspend from actualizing an action while trying to act out the given action and its consequences in the imagination. Thinking is not to be understood as monological here. As Dewey puts it, “[s]oliloquy is the product and reflex of converse with others ... If we had not talked with others and they with us, we should never talk to and with ourselves.”⁴¹ This signals a crucial link between intelligent action and democracy, as the sharing of experience through communication implied in the democratic way of living is taken as primary to monological reflection.

The process is never completely imaginary, however. It is important to keep in mind that, for Dewey, action must follow if one is to *know* the relationship between certain actions and their likely consequences in different situations. In short, a combination of reflection *and* doing is needed for the intervention of thinking to reach its potential conclusion, knowledge.

This is also the point where we see the connection between knowing and moral development in Dewey most clearly, as intelligent action becomes part of the moral realm. The processes of knowing are couched in morality in at least three ways relevant for the democratic way of life. To begin with, as Sarah Stitzlein⁴² points out, the civic reasoning inherent in small publics forming around indeterminate situations is ethical in two senses. First, knowing is ethical because the manner in which we act toward each other in these inquiry-processes have moral meaning; they require us to act respectfully by treating each other as having legitimate standing in the situation and consider each other’s claims.⁴³ Second, Stitzlein adds that knowing is related to moral development, as it impels us to evaluate and decide which means and ends-in-views we ought to choose and how these might affect others.⁴⁴ Consequently, to the degree that knowing helps us anticipate the consequences of our future actions, these processes of inquiry become morally relevant. Third, it is in relation to this aspect of knowing that Israel Scheffler further observes that the “subjection to personal and social habits of the past, or haphazard action in accordance with caprice become immoral.”⁴⁵

40. Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 132.

41. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 135.

42. Sarah M. Stitzlein, “Defining and Implementing Civic Reasoning and Discourse: Philosophical and Moral Foundations for Research and Practice,” in *Educating for Civic Reasoning and Discourse*, ed. Carol D. Lee, Gregory White, and Dian Dong (Washington, DC: National Academy of Education, 2021).

43. *Ibid.*, 26.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Israel Scheffler, *Four Pragmatists: A Critical Introduction to Peirce, James, Mead, and Dewey* (New York: Routledge, 1974), 197.

This begets normative relevance to the imperative of reconstructing our habits when they no longer serve desirable ends. Intelligent action, then, is not only related to knowledge. It is both couched in morality and potentially facilitates moral development, making it unethical *not* to act as intelligently as possible.

The continuity with Dewey's democratic theory is obvious here. As democracy is understood as the way of life most conducive to the enlargement and improvement of experience, it also becomes the way of life most conducive for intelligent action and its potential correlates — knowledge and moral development. Acting as *intelligently* as possible, then, equals acting as *democratically* as possible. This is the essence of Dewey's argument for democracy. The central aim in a Deweyan account of education for democracy, then, must be to educate toward some sort of *dispositions* to experiment intelligently and democratically in small publics when faced with indeterminate situations.

Following Dewey, in that "the specific elements of an individual's method or way of attack upon a problem are found ultimately in his native tendencies and his acquired habits and interests,"⁴⁶ it becomes clear that such dispositions can be understood as habits in a Deweyan framework. This brings us to another characteristic of the concept of habits, in addition to the "world-building" aspect of habits alluded to above. A habit, for Dewey, is also "an acquired predisposition to *ways* or modes of response."⁴⁷ In other words, habits have a role both in constituting the environment as well as predisposing us for certain responses to the situation at hand. It is particularly in the latter sense that the notion of habits becomes relevant for the task of educating for democracy, as it is our habits that predispose us to actions that either make or break the democratic quality of our responses to indeterminate situations.

The educational relevance of the notion of habit — considered as an aim for education — is clear, although still a bit fuzzy in relation to practical application. According to Dewey, habits can only be affected through "objective conditions."⁴⁸ As an example, in the case of bad habits, "[c]onditions have been formed for producing a bad result, and the bad result will occur as long as those conditions exist."⁴⁹

This has some interesting implications for education, some of which will be discussed later in the concluding discussion. What is important to point out here is how the essence of these implications are made explicit when Dewey argues that "[w]e never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment," and further that "[w]hether we permit chance environments to do the work, or whether we design environments for the purpose makes a great difference."⁵⁰ In other

46. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 180.

47. Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 32.

48. *Ibid.*, 24.

49. *Ibid.*

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

words, it is by designing certain educational environments that formal education can either support or not support the personal habituation of democratic habits.

Dewey explicitly discusses one such democratic habit, which he names “the habit of amicable cooperation.”⁵¹ He defines this as a habit “to treat those who disagree ... with us as those from whom we may learn.”⁵² Taking his cue, several writers have tried to specify habits that are conducive to a democratic way of life. Jim Garrison discusses the habit of thoughtful listening; a habit that entails “risking and reconstructing our social habits in open dialogues across ... differences.”⁵³ Lucretia Hubler-Larimore discusses the habit of speaking up in the classroom and school.⁵⁴ Kathy Hytten suggests habituation for experiment, pluralism, and fallibilism, signaling, yet again, the close connection between democracy and intelligent action.⁵⁵

Stitzlein suggests several habits that she argues are key components of successful living in a democracy.⁵⁶ First of all, as an alternative to nationalistic patriotism, she suggests cultivating habits of citizenship as a shared fate. Second, she suggests the habit of cooperation and collaboration. Third, she suggests the habit of deliberation, where she specifically underscores the role of listening. Fourth, she suggests the habit of analysis and critique. Finally, she also lists the habit of hope, and she explicitly discusses stories as a helpful tool for nurturing such habits in school.

Hansen and James, building on several of these contributions, argue that democratic habits are those related to interaction and communication. They further argue that all these habits are bound up with cultivating “the highly active habit of patience, without which reflection and its correlate, judicious conduct, cannot get anywhere.”⁵⁷

The essence of these suggested habits is the enlargement and improvement of the process of experience via habits that support processes of *thinking together*. This has a certain continuity with the previously stated point that acting intelligently, in the Deweyan sense, equals acting democratically. Democratic habits are those that facilitate intelligent action, by predisposing persons toward seeking out and taking account of the perspectives of others, when up against indeterminate situations.

51. Dewey, “Creative Democracy,” 228.

52. Ibid.

53. Jim Garrison, “A Deweyan Theory of Democratic Listening,” *Educational Theory* 46, no. 4 (1996): 429, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.1996.00429.x>.

54. Lucretia M. Hubler-Larimore, “Pedagogical Practices: Nurturing and Maintaining Democratic Habits” (PhD diss., West Virginia University, 2011).

55. Kathy Hytten, “Deweyan Democracy in a Globalized World,” *Educational Theory* 59, no. 4 (2009): 395–408, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2009.00327.x>.

56. Sarah M. Stitzlein, “Habits of Democracy: A Deweyan Approach to Citizenship Education in America today,” *Education and Culture* 30, no. 2 (2014): 61–86, <https://doi.org/10.1353/eac.2014.0012>.

57. Hansen and James, “The Importance of Cultivating Democratic Habits in Schools,” 106.

It is important to keep in mind, as Michalinos Zembylas⁵⁸ reminds us, that no matter how noble the intentions, there is an inevitable risk of politicizing habit-formation, to the effect of devolving education from democratic possibility to indoctrination. This becomes especially troublesome when seeing habit-formation as so tightly connected to the deliberate design of educational environments. After all, if this is true, what is there to stop the teacher from manipulating educational environments in ways that facilitate the formation of nondemocratic habits? However, this is a reduction that Dewey guarded against. Accordingly, we can see that none of the suggested habits are oriented toward particular outcomes. Instead, they are oriented toward open-ended processes of communication, reconstruction, and growth.

This introduces an important distinction in Dewey, intended to guard against indoctrination: the distinction between reflective habits of reconstruction, conducive for intelligent action, and unthinking habits. Without an intelligent element in our habits, Dewey argues, “they reduce themselves to routine ways of acting, or degenerate into ways of action to which we are enslaved.”⁵⁹ Accordingly, as Scheffler observes, Dewey faces us with the challenge of developing “a second-order habit of intelligent assessment and adjustment ... a superordinate habit of habit-improving and reconstruction.”⁶⁰

THE EDUCATIONAL ROLES OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT EXPERIENCE

Hildebrand observes that Dewey makes another educationally significant distinction, between direct and indirect experience.⁶¹ Accordingly, this distinction must also be central for a Deweyan account of education for democracy, because it serves to clarify and elaborate the Deweyan postulate that we educate indirectly via the environment.

Direct experiences, according to Hildebrand, are those that are “*had* ... rather than *known*,”⁶² and they engage “motivations and interests already possessed.”⁶³ In Dewey’s words, experience is direct when it is “a personal thing.”⁶⁴ Indirect experiences, in contrast, are experiences that have been abstracted “away

58. Michalinos Zembylas, “Dewey’s Account of Habit through the Lens of Affect Theory,” *Educational Theory* 71, no. 6 (2021): 780, <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12505>.

59. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 53–54.

60. Scheffler, *Four Pragmatists*, 215–216.

61. Hildebrand, “The Paramount Importance of Experience and Situations in Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*.”

62. *Ibid.*, 79.

63. David Hildebrand, “Experience Is Not the Whole Story: The Integral Role of the Situation in Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 52, no. 2 (2018): 291, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12286>.

64. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 162.

from direct (or had) experience."⁶⁵ The distinction between direct and indirect experiences, as Dewey formulates it, is similar to "the difference between reading a technical description of a picture, and seeing it; or between just seeing it and being moved by it; between learning mathematical equations about light and being carried away by some peculiarly glorious illumination of a misty landscape."⁶⁶ One example of such indirect experience, then, is the "immense bulk of communicated subject matter" often referred to as information or — mistakenly, according to Dewey — knowledge.⁶⁷

This distinction between direct and indirect experience is crucial to education in a Deweyan framework. While both forms of experience have a pedagogical role, Dewey emphasizes the importance of direct experience as this is the mode that formal education tends to neglect. Accordingly, Dewey argues that constructing "genuine situations in which personal participation brings home the import of the material and the problems which it conveys" is the most important educational task.⁶⁸ Direct experiences are what occur in such *genuine* situations. They are *genuine* in that the aims, ends, and means of the transaction between the surroundings and the individual student are of interest for the student rather than something merely externally imposed. As such, Dewey argues that it is when the student wrestles "with the conditions of the problem at first hand, seeking and finding his *own* way out"⁶⁹ that an educational situation is genuine. Accordingly, the opposite of a genuine situation is where the teacher either fails to appeal to the student's interests or fails to take "a sympathetic attitude towards the activities of the learner."⁷⁰

It must not be forgotten, however, that Dewey does understand indirect experiences as "all-important in interpreting and expanding" direct experience.⁷¹ As it is just such an improvement and enlarging of experience that is the foundation of the democratic way of life, one must not denigrate the importance of indirect experience in a Deweyan account of education for democracy. Nevertheless, Dewey does put *special* emphasis on direct experience. Consequently, this is where I will focus the discussion.

What does this emphasis on direct experience in genuine situations entail for the task of educating for democracy? Seemingly, the Deweyan suggestion is

65. Hildebrand, "The Paramount Importance of Experience and Situations in Dewey's *Democracy and Education*," 79.

66. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 241.

67. *Ibid.*, 194.

68. *Ibid.*, 242.

69. *Ibid.*, 167.

70. *Ibid.*

71. John Dewey, *The School and Society* (1899), in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899–1924*, vol. 1, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976), 51.

straightforward; that is, students must experience democracy, not merely “know” what it entails. In itself, this is a common argument in much scholarship on education for democracy.

However, we need to explore further what is meant by direct experiences of democracy, and the educational implications of this. In short, the keynote of Deweyan democracy is the participation in shared experience through communication in emergent publics. The implication, then, for a Deweyan account of education for democracy becomes that of designing educational environments that facilitate genuine situations wherein students can have direct experiences of such communicative processes, namely, processes of thinking together. It is easy to assume that it would be sufficient to engage the students in cooperative activities to achieve such a goal. This, however, does not necessarily constitute a genuine situation that gives direct experience of the democratic way of life. The challenge arising from a Deweyan account of educating for democracy is to facilitate situations that are genuine in that the individuals in the classroom form small publics around indeterminate situations, where the aims, ends, and means engage their interests. How can the teacher facilitate and guide such educational situations?

We have seen that Dewey argues that the teacher must deliberately design educational environments. One promising example, relevant for the task of educating for democracy, of creating genuine situations by designing an educational environment, is presented and discussed by Tuure Tammi and Antti Rajala.⁷² They designed an intervention based on a fourth-grade teacher’s dilemma: that when students voiced concerns and initiatives, often related to the everyday life of the class, responding to them took too much lesson time. The intervention consisted of four basic elements. First, creating a “chat box” where the students could put their written suggestions and initiatives. Second, allotting time in the weekly schedule during which these could be dealt with. Third, involving the students in negotiating which of these suggestions and initiatives were to be discussed and, importantly, how. Fourth, discussing how these suggestions and initiatives would be dealt with. While the authors do not discuss this intervention from a Deweyan perspective, it is possible to discern the possibilities inherent in this designed environment for the construction of a genuine situation. It is genuine in that the aims and ends are of interest for the students, as the issues being discussed are the students’ own. It is genuine in that the means are the students’ own, as they have defined these in cooperation with the teacher. And last, it is genuine in that the students’ wrestle with the problem firsthand.

This idea of deliberately designing educational environments is complicated, however, by the Deweyan insight that students carry with them their embodied habits into these environments, affecting the meaning they make out of the environment set up by the teacher. As an example, while the importance of

72. Tuure Tammi and Antti Rajala, “Deliberative Communication in Elementary Classroom Meetings: Ground Rules, Pupils’ Concerns, and Democratic Participation,” *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 62, no. 4 (2018): 617–630, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2016.1261042>.

participation might be emphasized, there is no guarantee that the students attach the same meaning to this imperative as the teacher does. The students may, for example, take this to imply the need for *they themselves* to participate, while the teacher, on the other hand, might think of it in broader terms, as in contributing to the co-construction of an environment that supports the participation of *others*.

This illustrates the difficulty, or even the impossibility, of knowing what meaning the students might attribute to the different elements of the educational environment set up by the teacher. While the teacher-student relationship is inherently asymmetrical, the meaning-making that takes place in an educational environment is always affected by the habits of the students. This illustrates how the intersubjectivity in Dewey's philosophy not only manifests itself in an epistemological sense, but also in an ontological sense. In other words, intersubjectivity refers not only to solving common problems together, but also, as Carl-Anders Säfström and Gert Biesta put it, to a "creative co-construction of an *intersubjective* world."⁷³ This highlights that creating genuine situations requires profound care toward and knowledge of the student's personality, prompting Dewey to declare that "the child's capacities, interests, and habits" must be the basis of the educational process.⁷⁴ Without such care, education will be "haphazard and arbitrary,"⁷⁵ as it will fail to construct genuine situations in which direct experience is possible.

Accordingly, the only thing that is certain is that there cannot be any guaranteed method for succeeding in designing educational environments where genuine situations emerge. There are no panaceas, no one-size-fits-all solutions — only possibilities. One crucial key, however, lies in navigating and acknowledging the need to address the distinction between understanding children as beings and as becomings.

CHILDREN AS "BEINGS" RATHER THAN MERELY "BECOMINGS"

Hildebrand further highlights Dewey's emphasis on the *present* experiences of the student in contrast to the *future* experiences of the student.⁷⁶ In related terms, children should be understood as beings rather than merely becomings. The view that Dewey in effect disagrees with here, that children are merely becomings, is an Aristotelian conception of childhood. In this conception, the child is merely a potentiality, an immature specimen of the human species that may develop into something fuller — an adult — eventually.⁷⁷ Children, then, are viewed as

73. Carl-Anders Säfström and Gert Biesta, "Learning Democracy in a World of Difference," *The School Field* 12, no. 5–6 (2001): 11, <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12151>.

74. John Dewey, *My Pedagogic Creed* (1897), in *John Dewey: The Early Works, 1882–1898*, vol. 5, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), 86.

75. *Ibid.*, 85.

76. Hildebrand, "The Paramount Importance of Experience and Situations in Dewey's *Democracy and Education*."

77. Gareth Matthews and Amy Mullin, "The Philosophy of Childhood," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (2018), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/childhood>.

adults in the making who, given time, will develop traits like rationality and competence.

Dewey, in contrast, advocates a view of the child as a being here and now — as a social actor in his or her own right. As Hildebrand observes, this approach, for Dewey, is “not just a pedagogical but a *moral* obligation, an acknowledgment of the real dignity of the *child present now*.”⁷⁸ Educationally speaking, then, it is “the interaction of present organic tendencies with the present environment” that is of importance.⁷⁹ In contrast, when the focus instead lies on the future experiences of the child and what the child is to become, “[s]ome implicit whole is regarded as given ready-made and the significance of growth is merely transitory.”⁸⁰

There is an obvious connection here with Dewey’s argument for the significance of direct experience. The denial of the child’s actuality, which is inherent in the becoming conception, gives a pretext to impose perspectives, methods, values, and standards “from above and from outside.”⁸¹ This stands in contrast with the idea of direct experience in genuine situations, as such experiences demand that the interests, aims, ends, and means are the child’s own, not externally imposed. Consequently, the possibility of designing educational environments where genuine situations can emerge necessitates a view of the child as a being.

The distinction between the child as a being and the child as a becoming has profound implications when applied to the task of educating for democracy. The question becomes whether “democratic” is understood as something children are taken to be *here and now* or if this is something children merely *become* at some point in the future. On the one hand, if democratic is taken to be something the child potentially becomes at a point in the future, then the task of educating for democracy must be understood as a preparatory task. In a certain sense, democratic *is* something the child becomes, at least in an institutional context. As an example, because democratic societies have institutionalized age thresholds for certain democratic activities, education for democracy must necessarily be understood as preparatory to a certain degree. The act of voting in elections based on informed choice is a case in point. Moreover, there are also certain skills and pieces of knowledge that one might argue will be more meaningful for a child in future democratic living than they are *now* (e.g., reading and understanding statistical representations with a critical outlook, or understanding the difference between editorials and opinion pieces in newspapers). The importance of such skills and knowledge might not be immediately obvious to children.

On the other hand, there is an obvious paradox in understanding education for democracy as mere preparation. To the degree that inclusion is taken to be a

78. Hildebrand, “The Paramount Importance of Experience and Situations in Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*,” 80.

79. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 73.

80. *Ibid.*

81. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 6.

central principle of democracy, as it often is, there is a paradox in basing education for democracy on exclusion. Understanding children merely as democratic beings at a point in the future, something they are to become, is exclusionary. They are not taken seriously as democratic beings who can participate in democratic processes in the present. Moreover, seeing education for democracy as mere preparation is also contrary to the Deweyan emphasis on direct experience. If the child experiences democratic action as meaningful *only* at a point in the future — not *now* — designing educational environments where children can have direct experiences of democracy in genuine situations becomes a difficult, if not impossible, task.

However, both of these approaches represent exactly the kind of one-sided thinking that Dewey warns about in his educational philosophy. While he emphasizes the need to anchor education in the present experience of the child as a being in the here and now, he acknowledges that preparing children for their future is, undeniably, an important part of education. Accordingly, while describing “preparation” as a “treacherous idea,” Dewey also acknowledges that “every experience should do something to prepare a person for later experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality.”⁸² The future, however, is inherently uncertain. The future that children are to be prepared for, then, must never be understood as more than an *imagined* and *potential* future. As Dewey concludes, “[t]he mistake is not in attaching importance to preparation for future need, but in making it the main-spring of present effort.”⁸³ What Dewey rejects is the *controlling* use of preparation where the value of education will be realized only on some prospective future date. The educational implication of this, Dewey argues further, is “that attentive care must be devoted to the conditions which give each present experience a worth-while meaning.”⁸⁴

Dewey further warns that “the relation of the present and the future is not an *Either-Or* affair” because the future is necessarily affected by the present.⁸⁵ Those who have achieved what is often termed maturity can be expected to have some idea of the connection between present and future experiences and how the interaction between them can be employed educationally. All of this effectively brings the teacher into the picture as the one who must be devoted to the care of these conditions and who has responsibility “for instituting the conditions for the kind of present experience which has a favorable effect upon the future.”⁸⁶

A useful distinction to employ here, in order to understand Dewey’s recommendations, is that between a predetermined and a more indeterminate perspective on preparation. Both the inherent uncertainty of the future and the

82. *Ibid.*, 28.

83. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 61.

84. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 30.

85. *Ibid.*

86. *Ibid.*

imperative of genuine educational situations render as antithetical to education any predetermined ideal of what *kind* of democratic being the child is to become. What is needed in the face of these premises is a more indeterminate perspective on what the child is to potentially become. In relation to the task of educating for democracy, this is what Dewey supplies with the goal of educating toward habits that are conducive for the enlarging and improvement of experience through participation in communication. Here, nothing is predetermined when it comes to the nature or qualities of these experiences. At the same time, neither is it entirely indeterminate, as it is clear that indeterminate situations should be approached in a certain habitual way — namely, democratically.

Andrew Stables has suggested one interesting avenue for thinking about children as beings that is relevant for the sense of “being” democratic that is discussed here. He argues for what he terms a “fully semiotic perspective” on childhood.⁸⁷ He builds this perspective on the insight that children, just like adults, are interpreters of the world. Insofar as they are interpreters of a common world, they are no more or less legitimate participants in the sharing of experience of this world than adults are. This perspective allows understanding children as democratic *now*, as equal participants in interpreting the world.

THE POSSIBILITIES OF A DEWEYAN FRAMEWORK OF EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY

The Deweyan account of education for democracy is outlined here in relation to three educational aspects of experience as understood by Hildebrand.⁸⁸ Each raises issues a teacher needs to deal with or questions that need to be posed. It is in relation to these issues that the *possibilities* of the Deweyan account for classroom teaching and learning become visible by elaborating the notion of what educating for democracy might entail. Although my discussion here focuses on a classroom context, the processes and contexts relevant for education for democracy are not limited to formal schooling, nor do they all necessitate the interventions of a classroom teacher. Nevertheless, reflection on the context of classroom teaching helps to illuminate some of the broader conditions of education for democracy.

First of all, the Deweyan account expands our understanding of what needs to be learned to include the notion of democratic habits. This is an expansion in relation to a focus on skills, knowledge, values, competencies, and so on. Accordingly, a teacher needs to ask him- or herself: What kind of habits are my students forming in my classroom? Are these habits conducive for a democratic way of life? Democratic habits can, in a Deweyan framework, be understood as those habits that are conducive to processes of thinking together, which are necessary for intelligent action in indeterminate situations. Such habits support the democratic way of life

87. Andrew Stables, *Childhood and the Philosophy of Education: An Anti-Aristotelian Perspective* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 182.

88. Hildebrand, “The Paramount Importance of Experience and Situations in Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*.”

through the enlargement and improvement of experience. The habits of students are formed in transaction with their environments.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that habit-formation is not something that happens exclusively in a classroom, as students transact with a world outside of the classroom as well. Students, consequently, do not come to school as blank slates habit-wise and the habits formed outside of school might very well be at odds with the habits required for a democratic way of life. Nonetheless, classroom environments can be understood as special environments considering that they are deliberately designed for educational purposes. As Dewey points out, they are “the typical instance of environments framed with express reference to influencing the mental and moral dispositions of their members.”⁸⁹

This brings us to the second element of a Deweyan account of education for democracy: that these environments should be designed in such a way that they facilitate *direct* experiences of democracy. This entails the co-construction of genuine situations that are, as Hildebrand formulates it, “*had* ... rather than known”⁹⁰ and that engage “motivations and interests already possessed.”⁹¹ Accordingly, the second question a teacher interested in educating for democracy must deal with is: What kind of environments are my students directly experiencing? Do these environments support the formation of democratic habits?

Third, the Deweyan account emphasizes a distinction between understanding children as beings versus seeing them as becomings. In other words, children should be understood as democratic here and now rather than merely at some point in the future. At the same time, one must acknowledge that democracy, to the degree that it is an already-institutionalized form of governance, also puts some preparatory demands on the task of educating for democracy. This does not merely imply socialization. It also implies a sensitivity to the insight that for critique and dissent to be as effective as possible, these must *sometimes* be voiced through the institutionalized forms of participation already in place. Accordingly, the third question a teacher educating for democracy should ask is: How can I meet the preparatory demand of educating future democratic citizens while also acknowledging the imperative of designing educational environments that are meaningful for the students as democratic beings *now*?

Of course, these are not the only issues relevant for the task of educating for democracy, but they do highlight at least two further questions for consideration. First, what role can a teacher play in designing educational environments? And second, what kind of educational environments should be designed? In this concluding section, these questions are investigated in a preliminary way.

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

90. Hildebrand, “The Paramount Importance of Experience and Situations in Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*,” 79.

91. Hildebrand, “Experience Is Not the Whole Story,” 291.

Regarding the first question, we have seen that Dewey argues that we educate indirectly via the educational environment, and further that “[w]hether we permit chance environments to do the work, or whether we design environments for the purpose makes a great difference.”⁹² In other words, the teacher plays a crucial role as the designer of the educational environment, but not in a paternalistic sense.⁹³ Designing an educational environment, for Dewey, is not about constructing a predictable environment nor one in which conduct is prescribed. If it were, it would be counter to *both* the emphasis on direct experience *and* on treating children as beings. It would be counter to the emphasis on direct experience because the aims, ends, and means of the transaction between the materials of the environment and the individual student would be externally imposed. It would be counter to the emphasis on treating children as beings because the educational focus would be exclusively on becoming the kind of democratic person that democracy — i.e., the teachers’ sense of democracy — needs.

Designing an educational environment, in the Deweyan sense, is therefore not about control. It is about direction. Or rather, *redirection*. As Boyles observes, the Deweyan view underscores that “directing relations is actually redirecting relations in an ongoing process of meaning making and understanding.”⁹⁴ In other words, the students, as we have seen, bring their embodied habits into the classroom — making the question of designing environments for the emergence of genuine situations more a question of redirection, rendering control impossible. As Dewey points out, one of the key issues in relation to designing educational environments becomes that of educational goals: “The problem of direction is ... the problem of selecting appropriate stimuli for instincts and impulses which it is desired to employ in the gaining of new experience. What new experiences are desirable, and thus what stimuli are needed, is impossible to tell except as there is some comprehension of the development which is aimed at.”⁹⁵

This brings us to the second question: What kind of educational environments should be designed? While this has been touched on indirectly throughout this article, it requires further scrutiny. In the context of education for democracy, it is necessary to be mindful of *what* democracy one is educating toward.⁹⁶ In a Deweyan framework of education for democracy *as a way of life*, the desirable educational environment is one that supports processes of thinking together and

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

93. David T. Hansen, “Dewey’s Conception of an Environment for Teaching and Learning,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 32, no. 3 (2002): 270, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-873X.00228>.

94. Deron R. Boyles, “Dewey, Ecology, and Education: Historical and Contemporary Debates over Dewey’s Naturalism and (Transactional) Realism,” *Educational Theory* 62, no. 2 (2012): 159, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2012.00440.x>.

95. John Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902), in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899–1924*, vol. 2, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976), 283.

96. As well as *whose* democracy, a notion that introduces the question of power into the discussion.

intelligent action in genuine situations. Such environments, following Dewey, potentially facilitate the formation of democratic habits in students.

However, *environment* is a rather broad notion consisting of all those things in our surroundings that are considered during a course of transaction. In a classroom context, the environment might be conceived as the material elements with which the students interact in the classroom as well as the social setup of the classroom. It can be understood as everything from the organization of the desks in the classroom to the rules of discourse, to the degree that these elements are considered by the students during their transactions. Are some of these elements more important than others in the context of education for democracy?

While Dewey does emphasize the educational role of the general environment, arguing that we only educate indirectly by means of the environments we design, he also puts a special emphasis on communication, arguing that “education consists primarily in transmission through communication.”⁹⁷ The communicative elements of the educational environment, accordingly, can be argued to be more central for educational purposes than other elements of the environment, in a Deweyan framework for education. This emphasis points to the importance of classroom discourse, the conversations taking place in the classroom, the use of language, and so on. Because the sharing of experience through participation in *communication* is understood as the foundation of the democratic way of life, communication can be argued to be the most important mode of experience in a Deweyan account of education for democracy.

Bringing this full circle, back to Dewey’s definition of democracy as a “mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience,”⁹⁸ it is important to remember that different publics, as they form around different indeterminate situations, take different forms. Most important in this context, as Higgins and Knight Abowitz point out, “public associations have diverse ... ways of communicating.”⁹⁹ This insight further underscores the necessity of approaching the preparatory demands of education for democracy in a more indeterminate way — as we cannot in advance know *for certain* what kinds of publics the students will participate in.

The imperative of educating toward democratic habits in an environment where the classroom discourse is the most central element, then, must not be reduced to educating for specific *ways* of communicating. Democratic habits are not merely ways of doing; they are not reducible to specific skills in deliberation or argumentation. Education for democracy must not, in other words, be reduced to merely a specific way of doing democracy. Democratic habits are also ways of approaching, or *being in relation to*, indeterminate situations given the associative facts of life; it entails a habit of acknowledging something as a situation

97. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 12.

98. *Ibid.*, 93.

99. Higgins and Knight Abowitz, “What Makes a Public School Public?,” 373.

that should be solved in communicative association with others whenever the situation calls for it.

On the other hand, while it is impossible to predict the nature of the publics the students will participate in, it can be reasonably expected that these publics — or at least aspects of them — will be *similar* to the institutionalized publics of today. This is one point where the knowledge of the teacher is indispensable, especially in relation to having an idea of the connection between the present democratic experiences of the students and their potential future democratic experiences, and how the relation between these experiences can be employed educationally.

CONCLUSION

While Dewey does not supply us with an explicit theory of education for democracy, his ideas do highlight some possibilities for such an educational purpose. My goal has been to outline these possibilities and discuss them in a preliminary way, as grounds for further conversation, empirical research, creative classroom practice, and so on — as tools for further inquiry, in short. To highlight these possibilities, I discussed Dewey's concept of experience in relation to the issue of educating for democracy, understood as one aim of education among others. It is important to remember that this entails a reframing of his writings — a reframing that makes his writing more relevant for some contemporary issues — but a reframing, nonetheless.

The possibilities highlighted lie first and foremost in elaborating the idea of what educating for democracy entails by introducing the notion of democratic habits. Importantly, democratic habits are not reducible to specific ways of doing democracy. They also entail ways of being in relation to indeterminate situations. A further insight lies in the notion that such habits are formed through direct experiences with a democratic way of life in transaction with an educational environment deliberately designed by the teacher. This entails the co-construction of genuine educational situations. Finally, the distinction between being a democratic person and becoming a democratic citizen is important; we need to focus on the child *now* and not merely what they might become at a point in the future. Failure to do so makes it impossible to provide children with direct experiences of democracy as a way of life. These three possibilities point toward the challenge of designing educational environments, especially the question of what role the teacher can play in designing such environments to support the formation of democratic habits. In a Deweyan account of education for democracy as a way of life, the communicative elements of the educational environment are the most central and the teacher must be careful to design these environments in a nonpaternalistic way.