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# The teacher is a learner: Dewey on aims in education

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## ABSTRACT

In Chapter VIII of *Democracy and Education*, Dewey objects to all three of the following propositions: (1) education serves predefined aims; (2) Education serves aims that are external to the process of education; and (3) Education serves aims that are imposed by authority. From the vantage point of policy-makers and authors of curriculum guides, these three propositions seem plausible, even self-evident. In this paper, I set forth a critical interpretation and evaluation of Dewey's objections to them and argue that he saw the aims of education from another point of view, that of a learner. From a learner's point of view, propositions 2 and 3 are only half-true because external aims that are not shared by the students cannot successfully guide educative activities. As regards proposition 1, Dewey's philosophy does not accommodate the birds-eye view required to make it literally true. As learners, we cannot have an external view of our entire progress. Some of our aims are, therefore, not predefined but discovered on the way. Dewey's stance on the role of aims in education is worth serious consideration, because the view of curriculum development and school administration that these three propositions engender is as deeply problematic today as it was when Dewey wrote against them a century ago.

## KEYWORDS

Dewey; education; aims; prescriptive curricula

## Introduction

Chapter VIII of Dewey's *Democracy and Education* is entitled 'Aims in Education'. In that chapter, Dewey denies all of the following three propositions and argues for notions that seem diametrically opposed to the currently prevalent views of education as outcomes-based:

- (1) Education serves predefined aims.
- (2) Education serves aims that are external to the process of education.
- (3) Education serves aims that are imposed by authority.

These three propositions are integral parts of the mainstream model of curriculum development that was first formulated by Bobbitt (1918) and then evolved through the works of Tyler (1949) and Bloom (1956) in the middle of last century. This model assumes that school education can be organised from above as work towards predefined aims or learning outcomes (Harðarson, 2017). In recent years, this type of curriculum thinking has, to an increasing extent, affected higher education in Europe where it has largely been incorporated into the so-called Bologna Process (Karseth, 2006; Kennedy, Hyland and Ryan, 2006). It has also had effects on primary education in those countries where governments have imposed centrally mandated learning standards in response to PISA survey results (Breakspear,

2012). Such standards are a salient part of what Pasi Sahlberg describes as the global education reform movement that is changing 'the nature of teaching from an open ended, non-linear process of mutual enquiry and exploration to linear process with causal outcomes' (Sahlberg, 2016, p. 138).

All three propositions seem plausible. There may be disagreement about who should have authority to decide what aims to serve; whether they should be the same for all students; and to what extent they should be subservient to overarching aims such as economic prosperity, social justice or human flourishing. Such disagreement seems, however, to presuppose acceptance rather than denial of propositions 1, 2 and 3.

When a student has completed a course of education, he or she must have gained some improvement from it: some knowledge, skill, virtue or ability. Is the improvement not an outcome that is external to the process of education? If running schools is a rational enterprise, those responsible for organising what goes on must have some predefined purposes in mind and should be able to say just what the whole enterprise is for. Does it not follow from this that the aims are, at least to some extent, predefined and imposed by authority?

Imagine we want to teach some subject, say a biology course in secondary school. How can we choose textbooks, prepare assignments and plan our classes without first deciding what we want our students to be able to do at the end of the term? If we have not made up our minds as to whether we want them to answer questions about the history of life on our planet or to diagnose common diseases in potato plants, our course is probably not going to be very well organised. Successful teaching of biology seems to require predetermined aims and these aims must be chosen by someone who already knows the subject, that is, by someone other than the students. This does not only apply to academic subjects, it seems to be true of organised teaching across-the-board. The aim of what goes on in a driving school, for instance, is a predefined ability to drive safely and follow traffic rules. This aim is imposed in the sense that it is determined and specified in detail by external authorities and is external to the learning process, i.e. it is a competence the students are supposed to have when the course has been completed.

However plausible these three propositions may seem, the view of curriculum development and school administration they engender is deeply problematic. Day (2002) has, for instance, argued that external definitions of student achievement undermine the professional autonomy of teachers and may even diminish their capacity to raise standards. Sahlberg (2016) has also argued that analyses of PISA survey results indicate that externally imposed standards do not lead to better results. Several other scholars have argued that centralised control of school curricula, through imposition of standards and aims, goes hand in hand with managerialism and policies of distrust that erode teachers' professionalism (Codd, 2005; Fitzgerald, 2009; Lingard, Martino, Rezai-Rashti, & Sellar, 2016; Lowe, 2007). Dewey's arguments are important because they are, as Hansen (2006) says in his introduction to a collection of essays on *Democracy and Education*, helpful in criticising the current educational scene. In one of these essays, Page (2006) argues that Dewey's mindfulness stands in stark contrast to the currently prevalent emphasis on standards, accountability and centralised control of schools.

Propositions 1, 2 and 3 are among the most important cornerstones of the educational policies criticised by Day (2002) and Sahlberg (2016). Dewey's arguments against them give us reasons to suspect that these policies are bound to fail. Thus, his stance on the role of aims in education is as relevant today as it was in 1916, when *Democracy and Education* was first published.

### Dewey's objections to the three propositions

In the summary at the end of Chapter VIII, Dewey says that an 'aim denotes the result of any natural process brought to consciousness' and thus, 'signifies that an activity has become intelligent' (Dewey, 1976–1983, Vol. 9, p. 117). It seems to follow from this that Dewey thinks of intelligent action as being guided by aims. Given that successful teaching and learning are species of intelligent action, we can conclude that what teachers and students do serves a purpose. Still, Dewey rejects proposition 1 and denies that education has an end, aim or purpose in the ordinary sense of bringing about, or causing,

a predetermined good which we seek. In the very first paragraph of Chapter VIII, he says that ‘the aim of education is to enable individuals to continue their education [...] we are not concerned, therefore, with finding an end outside of the educative process to which education is subordinate. Our whole conception forbids’ (ibid, p. 107). There is also a similar remark in Chapter IV where he says that ‘there is nothing to which education is subordinate save more education’ (ibid, p. 56).

From some of his remarks in Chapter VIII, it seems evident that Dewey also takes a dim view of aims that are external to the learning activities students engage in. Close to the middle of the chapter he says, for instance, that an end that is imposed, and specifies what is to be attained, makes the work of students a mere means to something else. ‘As compared with the end it is but a necessary evil; something which must be gone through before one can reach the object which is alone worth while’ (ibid, pp. 112, 113).

The following quotation from the summary after Chapter VIII also shows that Dewey explicitly denied proposition 3:

A true aim is thus opposed at every point to an aim which is imposed upon a process of action from without. The latter is fixed and rigid; it is not a stimulus to intelligence in the given situation, but is an externally dictated order to do such and such things. Instead of connecting directly with present activities, it is remote, divorced from the means by which it is to be reached. Instead of suggesting a freer and better balanced activity, it is a limit set to activity. (ibid, p. 117)

Here, Dewey seems also to be rejecting proposition 2 since he is simultaneously talking about aims that are imposed and aims that are external and remote from present activity. The concluding sentences of the summary also make it evident that Dewey objects to aims that are imposed, i.e. commanded by other people. There he says:

In education, the currency of these externally imposed aims is responsible for the emphasis put upon the notion of preparation for a remote future and for rendering the work of both teacher and pupil mechanical and slavish. (ibid, p. 117)

### Why is education not subordinate to predefined aims?

The quotations above from Chapters IV and VIII of *Democracy and Education* indicate that Dewey did not think of education as subservient to ends ‘outside of the educative process’. Nevertheless, in the last two paragraphs of Chapter VIII, he writes about what he calls the ‘larger ends’ of education, and says that ‘the more general ends we have, the better’ (ibid, p. 117). He seems to mean that educators should be mindful of many values, avoiding tunnel vision or focusing on some one type of goods. In other parts of the book, he also hints at a number of general aims or purposes that education serves. In Chapter II, for instance, he declares that through education ‘the older bring the young into likemindedness with themselves’ (ibid, p. 14). In the same chapter, he also touches on the vital role schools play both in transmission of cultural heritage and in counteracting ‘centrifugal forces set up by juxtaposition of different groups within one and the same political unit’ (ibid, p. 26). In Chapter IX, he seems to endorse aims that have to do with justice and equality when he asserts that it ‘is the aim of progressive education to take part in correcting unfair privilege and unfair deprivation, not to perpetuate them’ (ibid, p. 126). In the beginning of Chapter XII, he writes that ‘all which the school can or need do for pupils, so far as their *minds* are concerned (that is, leaving out certain specialised muscular abilities), is to develop their ability to think’ (ibid, p. 159). This seems to be a statement about the main aim of education, although the aim is not very specific. Another such statement is at the end of Chapter XVII where Dewey says:

Knowledge is humanistic in quality [...] because of what it *does* in liberating human intelligence and human sympathy. Any subject matter which accomplishes this result is humane, and any subject matter which does not accomplish it is not even educational. (ibid, p. 238)

It seems to follow from this that for something to count as education at all it must serve the overarching aim of liberating human intelligence and human sympathy.

How does this fit together? How can it be simultaneously true that ‘there is nothing to which education is subordinate save more education’ (Dewey, 1976–1983, Vol. 9, p. 56), and that we, the educators, should work towards aims having to do with the improvement of society and liberation of human

sympathy? Although this may, at first sight, seem paradoxical, these two tenets are, in fact, logically compatible. It is possible for everything that we do, within some particular context, to have a clearly defined aim even though the whole is without purpose. We can take a game of chess as an example. Every move within the game has an aim that is subservient to the end of mating the opponent's king. From these purposes within the game, nothing follows about the purpose of the whole game. It may well be played without any aim. Likewise, from the mere fact that learning activities have ends that are subservient to more overarching aims within the context of education, nothing follows about the purpose of education as a whole. Some of the general aims Dewey mentions belong within the context of school education. Some, such as correcting unfair privilege and unfair deprivation, seem, however, to belong to a wider context. It is, therefore, not plausible that Dewey wanted to forgo all purposes beyond activities within school settings. If he is, tacitly, working with a distinction similar to the one between aims within a game and aims of a game, the relevant context reaches far beyond what goes on in schools.

In the first paragraph of Chapter IX, Dewey sums up the conclusion of the chapter under discussion and says that we 'have just pointed out the futility of trying to establish *the* aim of education—some one final aim which subordinates all others to itself' (ibid, p. 118). It seems implicit here that his target is not aims as such, but attempts to give pride of place to one aim that subordinates all others. If that is the case, however, why does he not simply say that education is subordinate to many aims? If he is only arguing for a plurality of aims, then why does he insist that education is not subservient to anything save more education?

I think there are two different reasons. One of them is not stated, or at least not explicitly, in Chapter VIII. It is explained later, in chapter XVIII, where Dewey describes education as 'identical with the operation of living a life which is fruitful and inherently significant' (ibid, p. 248). In what follows, he points out that education is constitutive of the goods we seek through learning, and says that 'it is a great mistake to regard these values as ultimate ends to which the concrete satisfactions of experience are subordinate. They are nothing but generalisations, more or less adequate, of concrete goods' (ibid, p. 252). In other words, from a description of what is good about education, it does not follow that the goods are consequences subsequent to the process of education. Part of what Dewey means, when he denies that education is subservient to any aims outside of the educative process, is that it is valuable in itself. It can nevertheless serve aims, although they cannot all belong outside the context of education. A teacher of biology can, for instance, set subject-specific aims, and make them serve some more general aims having to do with, say, critical thinking or awareness of environmental issues, realising all the time that the full value of what his students are up to is not to be found in such ends outside the study of biology. Neither does this strand of Dewey's argument exclude a definitive list of all the good aspects of education. Goods that are included or internal to the process can be valid aims. So, although we grant that education is constitutive of a good life, it does not follow that its aims cannot be specified in more detail than Dewey provides when he says that it is not subordinate to anything to save more education.

The argument above discusses one of the two reasons I have found in Dewey's text for casting doubt on proposition 1. This reason, however, only shows that it should not be accepted without some reservations, not that it should be rejected altogether. To explain and evaluate the other reason, it may be helpful to review Dewey's conception of how actions are related to aims. In his view, aims that guide actions are always ends-in-view. An aim unknown to a student cannot guide her action. A teacher can have some aim that the student does not know of. That aim cannot, however, directly guide learning activities, although it may determine what tasks the teacher assigns or suggests, and, hence, what makes the student move onwards.

Aims that guide actions are typically close at hand. We can, however, work towards them in order to reach more distant aims. A student in a driving school, trying to park in a tight space, aims at fitting the car in between two posts. That is her end-in-view or what Dewey called the 'mainspring of present effort' (ibid, p. 61). But that end-in-view may be sought in order to serve more distant aims such as passing a test and getting a driving licence. Possibly some of these more distant aims are aims-in-view

for the teacher and unknown to the student. Such distant aims do not suffice to guide learning because without an aim that is, so to say, internal to the endeavour, the student will not do anything. In most cases, an endeavour to pass a test cannot guide learning activities otherwise than through aims more close at hand.

Ends-in-view are, according to Dewey, hypothetical and tentative. We use them to organise our activities; as we proceed things may turn out otherwise than we expected, and then our ends are revised and new ones emerge. As Israel Scheffler, the American philosopher of education, has pointed out in a chapter about the means-ends distinction in Dewey's philosophy, an end-in-view 'is itself a means of organising present activity' (Scheffler, 1974, p. 230). More recently, Garrison (1999), Whitford (2002) and Saito (2005) have argued that opposition to a sharp dichotomy between ends and means is central to Dewey's philosophy. He saw education as progress where the ends we achieve today provide new beginnings tomorrow. This applies equally to the purposes a teacher has in view and to the ends his students aim at.

If ends that guide our actions are also means that are revised when our situation changes as a result of what we do, then a sharp means-end dichotomy is an illusion, because 'an end which grows up within an activity as plan for its direction is always both ends and means, the distinction being only one of convenience' (Dewey, 1976–1983, Vol. 9, p. 113). In Chapter XIII, Dewey reflects on his own argument in Chapter VIII and takes it to be primarily an argument against ends-means dualism. This reflection concludes with a remark to the effect that ends are means: 'A target is not the future goal of shooting; it is the centering factor in a present shooting' (ibid, p. 182).

We are now ready to look at Dewey's second reason for rejecting proposition 1. In Chapter VI he says that, in static societies, education is, in the main, 'a sort of catching up of the child with the aptitudes and resources of the adult group' and adds that this is not the case 'in progressive communities' (ibid, p. 85). The reason seems to be that in a progressive community the adult group is also learning. In Chapter XXIV, which is the third to last chapter of *Democracy and Education*, Dewey sums up the philosophy behind the account of education given in the first chapters of the book, which shows, he says, that education involves 'growth of both the immature individual and the group in which he lives' (ibid, p. 331). It does not only change the children, but also the adult population. A subgroup of a static society (say schoolchildren) can be directed by fixed aims imposed by another subgroup (say teachers). But if the whole of society is seen as a community of learners then education is, from the broadest point of view, guided, not by the real outcomes that are always to some extent unknown, but by ends-in-view that are tentative and subject to revision. On Dewey's account this is because our aims are revised and reconstructed by means of education. If we already knew all the goods of education then there would be little left for us to learn.

In the light of Dewey's view of culture as dynamic with an open and unknown future, his denial of proposition 1 can be seen as not only an affirmation that education is constitutive of a good life, but also as a reminder that while we are still learning we cannot make a definitive list of what education is good for. It does, of course, not follow from this that we should give up working towards aims we see as good and worthy, only that we should be ready to reconsider them and admit that other goods may be no less important.

Dewey's definition of education in Chapter VI (ibid, p. 82) includes much more than what children learn in school. The arguments I have adduced so far only show that proposition 1 is not true of all education. They do, however, not suffice to exclude the possibility that school education is subservient to predefined aims. To understand why Dewey thought schools could not be organised exclusively to reach aims that are stated in advance, we need to take a look at his arguments against propositions 2 and 3.

### **What is wrong with aims that are external to the process of education?**

Chapter VIII of *Democracy and Education* is divided into three parts. In the first part, entitled 'The nature of an aim', Dewey makes a distinction between aims that belong within the process in which they operate, and aims that are set up from without. In the second part, entitled 'The criteria of good aims',

he distinguishes between those aims that are imposed by some authority and those that are not. The imposed ones are, according to what he says there, typically fixed, static, rigid and 'limit intelligence' (ibid, p. 111) whereas an aim that is not imposed is flexible, 'experimental, and hence constantly growing as it is tested in action' (ibid, p. 112).

It is not clear from the text whether Dewey thinks of these two distinctions as independent. He sometimes lumps them together and seems to assume that external aims are, typically, also imposed. The reader is given the impression that good aims are neither external nor imposed, and that the bad ones are both external and imposed. Dewey does not say anything about aims that are either external or imposed, but not both. Such aims do, however, exist.

For example, when asked what I am doing, while I am studying German, I may answer by saying: I'm translating a news article. I say what I am doing and thereby indicate my aim, typically an aim within the learning process. If I am asked why I am doing that I may state an aim not belonging within the process. I might say, for instance, that I want to be eligible for a job that requires knowledge of German, or that I want to be better able to communicate with some German friends. These aims would be external to the process. Nevertheless, they would be chosen by me, the learner, rather than imposed on me by some authority. This example shows that we are dealing with two different distinctions. Let's begin with the one between aims that are external and aims that are not.

An aim that belongs within a process is, according to Dewey, an aim that 'assists observation, choice, and planning in carrying on activity from moment to moment and hour to hour' (ibid, p. 114). Such aims are action-guiding ends-in-view. Some actions, however, do not seem to have any such internal aims. When, for instance, I pay my energy bill, my aim is to avoid having the electricity cut off. Having electricity until the end of the month is, however, not internal to the process of paying a bill because that is only a single action, not an activity that I carry on. Dewey would, I think, accept this. In the beginning of Chapter VIII he makes clear that he focuses on what he calls 'orderly and ordered activity', which he also describes as work that 'possesses intrinsic continuity' (ibid, p. 108).

Most often when we learn, practice or study something, we are engaged in orderly and ordered activities and these, typically, generate purposes that belong within the learning process. What the student aims at is to complete some task. If a student of biology is writing a report on a potato plant, then his end-in-view is to complete the report, describing, for example, observed symptoms of potassium deficiency. If a student in a driving school is trying to back into a parking space, her end-in-view is having the car properly parked. In both cases, the students are engaged in work that possesses intrinsic continuity.

This, however, does not give us any reason to think that there is anything wrong with external aims. Even though the aims learners seek to achieve are internal to, or tightly coupled with their activities, these aims may be mere means in the larger context that is understood by the teachers or the authorities who designed the curriculum. Dewey has given us good reasons to think of internal aims as vital for education. But why does he speak ill of the external ones?

One possible answer can perhaps be found in an address from 1904, though first published in 1909, entitled 'Education, Direct and Indirect' (Dewey, 1976–1983, Vol. 3, pp. 240–248). There Dewey criticises the 'marking and examination system, as ordinarily conducted' (ibid, p. 243), and describes the 'conventional scheme of rating' as 'externally imposed' (ibid, p. 242). Dewey may have thought of grades to be attained and exams to be passed as paradigm cases of aims that are external to the process of education. The text of *Democracy and Education*, does not, however, give much support to this interpretation. Although Dewey criticises 'reliance upon examinations' in Chapter XXV (Dewey, 1976–1983, Vol. 9, p. 345) he does not associate external aims with examinations, grades and testing.

A clue to a more plausible interpretation can be found in a monograph from 1913, entitled 'Interest and Effort in Education' (Dewey, 1976–1983, Vol. 7, pp. 151–198). There he argues that learning activities are, like other actions, driven by ends the learner has in view. He criticises not only those who try to use harsh discipline to force students to learn, but also those who attempt to make a school subject interesting by 'clothing it with adventitious traits that are agreeable'. Both of these two methods, he says, 'represent failure to ask the right question' (ibid, p. 168). What an educator should do, according to

Dewey, is to find some task that will occupy the students and ‘can be carried forward to its appropriate termination better by noting and using the subject-matter [...] so that when carried to its completion it will naturally terminate in the things to be learned’ (ibid, p. 169). The message to the educator is: Neither try to please nor try to force your pupils. Try rather to find something for them to do that makes them learn. Once they are busy with their tasks, they are driven by ends-in-view that are internal to what they are working on. In a thorough exposition of Dewey’s writings about interest and effort in education, Jonas (2011) argues that when Dewey wrote the 1913 monograph, he did not think that teachers should primarily be teaching that in which their students are already interested. Rather, they should build on students’ impulses, desires and needs to make them work on tasks leading to or promoting interests that are new and educative for them. If this succeeds, students’ work towards their own ends-in-view makes them interested in the content of a school subject. Work that builds on what students are already interested in can neither be standardised, nor described precisely in advance. The aims Dewey endorses are, therefore, not only tentative. They are also continuously adjusted to local needs and conditions. I think this is one of the most important reasons why proposition 1 applies not only to education in general, but also to school education in particular.

Dewey’s objections to external aims can best be seen as arguments against trying to use them directly to drive learning activities. Doing that leads to bad pedagogy, where the educators either try to threaten their students or to please them, rather than make them absorbed in their work. If this interpretation is correct, then Dewey does not see external aims as entirely useless. They may be needed to guide the teacher’s choice of tasks and assignments—what is external from the point of view of a student may be an end-in-view for a teacher. This understanding of Dewey’s opposition to external aims in Chapter VIII appears plausible in light of his discussion in Chapter V about education as preparation for the future. There he concludes that the ‘mistake is not in attaching importance to preparation for future need, but in making it the mainspring of present effort’ (Dewey, 1976–1983, Vol. 9, p. 61).

### **What is wrong with aims that are imposed by authority?**

If a teacher in a driving school commands her student to park a car in a tight space, then the aim that guides the student, while she tries to do this, is probably imposed—a part of a syllabus written by some external authority. Nevertheless, it is hard to see the teacher’s command as oppressive: it is just a normal part of a programme most people want to go through in order to be able to drive safely and legally. So, then, what exactly is wrong with aims that are imposed by authority?

In Chapter II of *Democracy and Education*, Dewey writes about social activities and says that a work-horse is not a co-partner in a shared activity. He ‘does not really share in the social use to which his action is put’ (ibid, p. 17). The reason Dewey gives is that the horse does not have the same interests, ideas and emotions as the people he works for. One possible interpretation of the phrase ‘imposed aim’ in Chapter VIII is that it refers to aims the student does not share, aims that are alien to the student. That would explain why Dewey says that imposed aims make work slavish (ibid, p. 117). Aims that are imposed in this sense make the student work like a horse rather than like a man.

If a teacher asks her student to carry out a task such as writing a report, the student can ask: Why do you ask me to do that? If the teacher cannot give an honest answer that the student sees reason to accept, then the aim is imposed rather than shared. Aims that are suggested or commanded by educators are, however, not imposed in this sense if the learners share the interests of the teachers.

In Chapter III, Dewey touches on ideas, then-recent, about the social construction of the self, i.e. the ‘predominating influence of association with fellow beings in the formation of mental and moral disposition’ (ibid, p. 38). It seems that he believed, rather optimistically, that in a cooperative and friendly school environment students would readily share the purposes of the educators, who could then guide students without imposing aims on them in any pejorative sense. Dewey seems to have thought that when a student concurs with an aim that a teacher has suggested, then that aim becomes flexible, something the student can adjust to circumstances. Without such flexibility, the aim is not useful as a means of organising learning activities because, in complicated situations, acting upon an aim ‘brings

to light conditions which had been overlooked. This calls for revision of the original aim; it has to be added to and subtracted from' (ibid, p. 111).

It is clear from Chapter II that, in Dewey's view, educators have aims. They set up school environments to transmit chosen parts of society's cultural heritage. Dewey points out, though, that setting up an environment to transmit culture can be done without exact, fixed aims—trusting that the students will advance in roughly the right direction. Dewey thought that such purposes have to fit into something the student is ready to work towards. He writes about the impossibility of purely external direction in Chapter III, saying: 'Speaking accurately, all direction is but *re-direction*; it shifts the activities already going on into another channel. Unless one is cognizant of the energies which are already in operation, one's attempts at direction will almost surely go amiss' (ibid, p. 30). Such *re-direction* is normally possible, according to Dewey, because students adjust to the culture in which they grow up, and are ready to partake 'with others in a use of things which leads to consequences of common interest' (ibid, p. 39). He reflects on this again in Chapter XIX, where he says:

In the degree in which men have an active concern in the ends that control their activity, their activity becomes free or voluntary and loses its externally enforced and servile quality, even though the physical aspect of behaviour remain the same. (ibid, p. 269)

It seems to follow from this that successful education requires a cultural environment where learners and teachers share interests and values. Some of these interests differ from one school to another and some are spontaneous and unforeseen. Therefore, standards and mandates from above cannot take them all into account.

Dewey's denial of the third proposition is connected not only to his view of the self as socially constructed, but also to his interest in workplace democracy. As Ellerman (2009) and Jackson (2014) have both pointed out, Dewey emphasised the importance of applying the ideal of democracy and autonomy to the workplace. In some short works published in the first two decades of the last century he advocated a conception of democracy where people's control of their own work is central. The earliest of these works I have in mind is 'Democracy in Education', published in 1903 (Dewey, 1976–1983, Vol. 3, pp. 229–239). After a brief introduction, this paper is divided into two parts: the first one is about empowering teachers, and the second one about giving the learners some control over their own school-work. Another example is a paper entitled 'The Need of an Industrial Education in an Industrial Democracy' (Dewey, 1976–1983, Vol. 10, pp. 137–143), published the same year as *Democracy and Education*. There Dewey explains his ideal of democracy and says that many phases of industry are unfavourable to genuine democracy because machine industry has made work 'mechanical and servile' (ibid, p. 140). A third example, out of many, that connects Dewey's thoughts about education and workplace democracy, is 'Freedom of Thought and Work' published in 1920 (Dewey, 1976–1983, Vol. 12, pp. 8–11), where Dewey says that people 'can get true freedom of mind only when they can exercise their minds in connection with their daily occupations' (ibid, p. 9).

I think it is evident from these works, written both before and after *Democracy and Education*, that Dewey's arguments against proposition 3 are, at last partially, about applying the ideal of workplace democracy to the work of teachers and students. These arguments point to the same conclusion as Sahlberg's (2016) analysis of PISA survey results: namely, that rigid standards imposed from above are not a successful means of school reform.

## Concluding remarks

The paradigm of curriculum design enshrined in propositions 1, 2 and 3 focuses on ends from the point of view of those who design a course of education for others. From the vantage point of policy-makers and authors of curriculum guides, these propositions may seem plausible, even self-evident. Dewey sees the aims of education from another point of view, that of a learner, and advocates a view of educational aims that supports increased autonomy of teachers and learners. Fenstermacher (2006) expresses this very well where he says that in Dewey's text the reader encounters the student as a person, as

the subject of the discourse, whereas in most contemporary writings about education students only appear as the objects of discussion. This view that Dewey advocates is closely tied to principles that are central to his philosophy, such as his stance against ends-means dualism, his social theory of the self and motivation, and his ideal of democracy as a way of life. What he says about the aims of education in Chapter VIII is, in fact, a central message of *Democracy and Education*, one that Dewey refers back to and repeats in later chapters.

From a learner's point of view, propositions 2 and 3 are only half-true because external aims that are not shared by the student cannot successfully guide educative activities.

As regards proposition 1, Dewey's philosophy does not accommodate the birds-eye view required to make it literally true. He does, of course, not deny that a teacher may sometimes be able to view his students' journey through a course of study as if from above, knowing where it leads to, and fixing the aims in advance. As learners, however, we cannot have an external view of our whole progress. We do not see what is ahead of us and thus we cannot predefine the aims in detail, at least not with any certainty. What we say about them is hypothetical and subject to review. For a learner, the aims-in-view are emerging and there is no sharp distinction between ends and means. If we are all learners, then proposition 1 cannot be literally true of the whole of education. Some of our aims are not predefined but discovered along the way. If we are all half-educated, we only half-know what education is good for.

Dewey's arguments against ends-means dualism and for the intrinsic continuity of ends and means is, thus, closely connected to his rejection of another type of dualism that sharply divides teachers from learners. It is also an important aspect of his ideal of democratic society as dynamic and its progress as open ended. He sees the whole of society as advancing, through education, into unmapped territory. On this view, 'the teacher is a learner, and the learner is, without knowing it, a teacher' (Dewey, 1976–1983, Vol. 9, p. 167).

In my view, *Democracy and Education* enshrines a coherent and balanced vision of education where learners see their educative activity as worthwhile and rewarding, in and of itself, and are, consequently, driven by ends-in-view that are internal to what they are working on. In this book, originally published 100 years ago, Dewey argued for the importance of allowing students to be driven by their own ends-in-view and by unforeseen purposes emerging from their work. From what he says about the aims of education, it follows that school-work cannot be directed successfully by detailed mandates. If he is right about this, then current policies emphasising learning outcomes predetermined by external authorities are seriously misguided.

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