

Dewey's Philosophy of Education: Representing and Intervening

Dewey's insights into learning still provide rich ground for addressing fundamental questions of education. Educationalists continue to wrestle with problems that he defined and delineated. The polarisations that he contested but saw as a necessary element in the development of thought and action are as pertinent today as at the time of his writing. Questions of pedagogy, access and knowledge are still much to the fore: on the one hand, the concern amongst educators to see 'schooling as a site of knowledge construction' (Yandell 2014); on the other, a demand that curricula should consist of the transmission of the 'best of what is thought and said' (Arnold in Yandell, 2014). Dewey appreciated that such oppositions fail to capture all the issues at stake; or to put it in more Hegelian terms the oppositions themselves have an expressive role to perform.

As might be expected disputes do not follow tidy battle lines. For instance those preferring the phrase 'knowledge construction', to capture what they see as most important in classroom teaching in terms of the activity of the learner, are not simply counter posed to those who place the main emphasis on knowledge. Those who argue for the importance of subject knowledge are not restricted to a camp containing those who have not appreciated the significance of learner access in education and of arguments driven by social justice. Yet these oppositions have great significance when the practice of teaching becomes a political football or the conditions that teachers work within - conditions which limit the time and space for thinking – foster alignment with one or other position with the result that they fall into, what Dewey called, "sects".

This chapter refers to these contemporary concerns about education to articulate some of Dewey's philosophical insights into seemingly intractable problems of pedagogy and knowledge. In doing so it takes Dewey's work as representative of a movement of thought still being worked through by contemporary philosophers attending to the articulation of concepts. This movement cuts through the debate in education which has meaning-making on the one-side and the transmitting of knowledge on the other. The chapter begins by considering examples of the way that Dewey's emphasis on starting from the child has been applied in practice. These 'child-centred' examples are based on highly questionable interpretations of Dewey's work. However they raise a problem – how do teachers understand the notion of children's interest and how is the linked to knowledge? This problem of knowledge is set in the context of these polarised positions, positions that Dewey was critical of. Although many aspects of Dewey's work are relevant, for instance his understanding of method, logic or experimentalism, what will be considered here is an area that have increasingly become a focus of interest, that of normativity. To illustrate the issue there is a brief discussion of a debate concerning the limitations of Dewey's naturalism and its implications for his conception of interest. Consideration of this debate serves to bring out the issue for teaching in relation to knowledge. By considering Dewey's discussion with Bertrand Russell on 'warranted assertibility' it is hoped to show that Dewey was fully aware of the inferential background to understanding and that awareness of this would assist teachers in appreciating the significance that Dewey attached to knowledge.

At a time when access and meaning-making are lined up against subject knowledge, aspects of Dewey's rejection of intellectualism - which can be taken as a criticism of abstract knowledge - are worth serious re-consideration. The Hegelian underpinnings of his philosophy are particularly significant in this connection since they contribute so much to his

account of education (Good, 2005). Dewey's recognition that Hegel left a 'permanent deposit' on his thinking opens the way to retrieving neglected elements of his thinking and, in doing this, suggests further resources found in contemporary philosophical work that address issues that both concerned Dewey as well as being relevant to ongoing debates over education today. In addition further consideration of the development of work following Hegel today helps to address problems arising in the interpretations of Dewey. His rejection of a Mind World dualism with truth as an unmediated correspondence has particular significance as it leads to seeing truth as firmly located in social practice conceived as an appreciation of our inextricably connected activity in the world: Our actions are 'adjustments of the environment not merely to it.' It is this approach that provides grounds for the re-examination of contemporary concerns about curricula, knowledge and learning at a time when polarisations have diminished the possibility of detached examination of what is at stake.

Dewey's conception of individual interest and his naturalism are especially relevant here in particular to see to what extent interpretations of his work are justified or whether they are interpretations based on presuppositions that he himself did not make. Despite his anti-representationalism, and the influence that his philosophy had on those who followed him current education practice is still steeped in what Brandom calls a representationalist paradigm i.e. put simply, the dominance of a way of thinking about reference which ignores the inferential connections that make reference possible in the first place, as though there were a direct unmediated relation between word and world (Derry, 2008). Dewey was concerned about the harm that the dominance of this way of thinking causes to the way that learners are introduced to disciplines. However despite a shift towards anti-representationalism in philosophy, and to some extent in education theory, it continues to

pervade educational practice. When teachers adopt an approach that they believe to be influenced by Dewey all too often they encourage children to pursue their own interests without defining any framework and limits to the expression of those interests. A focus on the ‘constructing of knowledge’, without attention to the relevant knowledge fields fails to take account of Dewey’s Copernican turn. Though somewhat of a caricature, the following examples below illustrates this point:

In a particular RE lesson the topic of study was the Bible. In part the aim of a lesson of this kind is to foster understanding and appreciation of the practices and beliefs of different faith communities. The children were given a handout asking them to ‘construct their own bible’ and as part of its design to include an illustration of concepts to be found in the Bible i.e. laws, prophesy etc. Clearly teachers who wish to follow Dewey’s work in conditions that require that lessons have pre-given aims have to accept that there are limits to how far they can allow learners to pursue their own interests. Their attempt to create conditions where students can ‘learn by doing’ requires the task be open ended but the conditions in which they are working prevent this. However the children proceeded to make a variety of ‘bibles’ including a fashion bible in which the concept of ‘law’ is illustrated with pictures under which are sentences with rules about the age it is acceptable to wear particular items of clothing. The concept of prophesy becomes, in this fashion bible, predictions about when a popular fashion shop will go bankrupt and be replaced by another. Following the lesson students exhibit their ‘bibles’ and enjoy looking at the scrap-book style pictures which they contain. Thus ends the children’s study of the Bible and they move on to a new topic. The question here is whether this is, to any extent, consistent with Dewey’s conception of education? For instance is it consistent with children being driven by their own motives?

What of warranted assertion, the process by which inquiry results in warrants that constitute assertions? What of the role of the teacher?

2. Another lesson illustrates a related point. A group of children are looking at a set of paintings. The 'dialogue' goes something like this - each child announces which picture they most prefer. The teacher comments 'I like this one', a child points and remarks 'this one'. Many choose the Monet. The teacher's comments are restricted to reinforcing the position that it's acceptable to have different opinions. But what of the comments of children about other pictures? One passionately exclaims of the Van Gogh Sunflowers, 'I don't like that, it's all prickly, it doesn't look cared for!' The teacher moves on to the next child 'which one do you like?' The teacher's focuses on ensuring that each child takes a turn and that each has a say. But what happens to childrens' comments, such as the comments about Van Gogh's Sunflowers that are dropped like a stone? Although there is much to be drawn from what the child says, much that would take primary aged children to a level more akin to that expected at secondary school (there is a problem of low expectations here), the children's comments are taken simply as expressed preferences. By contrast a teacher following Vygotsky could take their comments as the beginnings of an appreciation of aesthetics that through the teacher's intervention can expand to become an exploration of what it is to communicate 'prickliness' or the ethical dimension involved in 'not being cared for'. Why did the teacher not pursue this approach? An anxiety about driving the children's responses in a particular direction? A limited conception of facilitation as an alternative to teaching that might curtail children's creativity and exploration? These are limited examples of teaching and learning that contrast with rich work that goes on in the name of child-centred education however they do indicate a problem faced by teachers denied the opportunity to continue their own learning and who work in conditions that foster a representationalist approach to knowledge and

encourages the separation of emotion from cognition, in other words the very issues that Dewey himself tackled.

While Dewey is often adopted in the name of child-centred forms of progressive education his work belies a simple treatment leading to the familiar rhetoric of ‘learning by doing’ which fails to give due regard to the content of teaching and learning. Progressive education has been heralded as the bugbear of those sympathetic to Arnold’s conception of curricula. Richard Pring relates his experience of a dinner with Keith Joseph (previously secretary of State for Education and close adviser to Margaret Thatcher) at Oxford in which Joseph held Pring responsible for all the problems in our schools claiming that he was guilty of introducing teachers to the works of Dewey (Pring, 2007, p. 3). The association of Dewey with progressivism, as it was understood by Joseph, is taken here to deny learners a proper education. Subsequently a later minister of education, Michael Gove in a talk entitled ‘The Betrayal of Progressivism’ cites H.D. Hirsh’s use of Gramsci to argue that schools should be teaching the canons and the facts that comprise them. In his defence of knowledge Hirsh argues that Gramsci “held that political progressivism demanded educational conservatism. The oppressed class should be taught to master the tools of power and authority – the ability to read, write and communicate – and to gain enough traditional knowledge to understand the worlds of nature and culture surrounding them. Children, particularly the children of the poor, should not be encouraged to flourish “naturally”, which would keep them ignorant and make them slaves of emotion” (Hirsh cited in Gove, 2013). It would be hard to deny children the ‘knowledge to understand the worlds of nature and culture surrounding them’. However, there is more to be worked out here to understand ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ and whether this knowledge is understood as dynamic or set. Dewey dealt with this issue directly.

In *The Child and Curriculum* Dewey developed the idea of thought developing through oppositions as the means to gain this understanding: '[p]rofound differences in theory are never gratuitous or invented. They grow out of conflicting elements in a genuine problem.' However, he bemoaned the lack of effort in thought required to resolve oppositions arguing that it is easier for supporters of different 'schools of opinion' or sects to maintain assumed positions buttressing them against attack:

Each selects that set of conditions that appeals to it; and then erects them into a complete an independent truth, instead of treating them as a factor in the problem, needing adjustment...is easier to see the conditions in their separateness, to insist upon one at the expense of the other...than to discover a reality to which each belongs...the child vs. the curriculum; ... the individual nature vs. social culture. Below all other divisions in pedagogic opinion lies this opposition.

(Dewey, 1915/2008, p.273-4).

Describing the tension between competing approaches to education, one of which ignores the dynamic quality of the child's own experience and only wants to direct and control and another which expects that a child will work things out without appropriate regard to the conditions to guide thought, he captures a problems as relevant today as at the time of his writing.

For critics of Dewey what matters here, is the particular conception of naturalism which they see as involving the idea that children will flourish independently on the basis of their own interests and that this being the case there is no need for the formal transmission of content. A

number of problems arise here. Putting aside his uneasy prose Dewey's philosophy of education might appear to the uninitiated to entail ideas of the individual's pursuit of their interests and desires understood as examples of contemporary *possessive individualism*, consumerism and choice. With inadequate attention to the philosophical environment in which Dewey fashioned his ideas it is all too easy to concentrate on the worst excesses of progressivism and embrace the idea that children left to their own devices will learn by discovery. Dewey was well aware of these excesses, but the fact that his theory of education was part of a broader approach to the construction of a better society, dependent on the nature of the political milieu, means that his guide for education is steeped in difficulty.

There would be appear to be a considerable gulf between the way that Dewey has been received and what he actually intended. Ravitch notes the use of Dewey's work to defend the construction of schools governed by the interests of the child at the expense of subject matter (Ravitch, 2000, p.59). Dewey's work as a philosopher of education is not easy to read (Saito, 2005) and it is little wonder that its reception has led to much debate and disagreement (e.g. Hickman, 2007 on Brandom, 2004; Levine, 2015 on Pinkard, 2007). Dewey himself pointed to tensions and complexity in his own work when in his autobiographical chapter he wrote: "I envy... those who can write their intellectual biography in a unified pattern...By contrast I seem to be unstable, chameleon-like, yielding one after another to many diverse and even incompatible influences; struggling to assimilate something from each..."

(Dewey,1930/2008, p.111)

It is perhaps unsurprising that Dewey has been read in terms that are at one with contemporary thought about individualism, interest, desire and relativism. He wrote about the difficulties presented by the 'baggage' carried by particular terms leading to

misunderstanding. There is little doubt that his work requires an interpretive reading but one that pays sufficient regard to the meaning of his terms. Dewey's background in German Idealist philosophy and his knowledge of Kant and Hegel entail that his understanding of these terms was not their common meaning. For instance his conception of interest is not the reductive utilitarian idea mistakenly assumed by some contemporary philosophers, according to Brandom, in the reception of pragmatism caricatured as 'the grasping selfishness of a bourgeois shopkeeper, whose answer to every question is, "Well, what's in it for me? How can I get some advantage from this?"' (Jeffrey, 2013). According to this common conception pragmatism fosters a reductive form of instrumentalism and utilitarianism where pre-given interests govern and actions are purely instrumental. This notion of interest is far from the rich notion involving disposition and habit developed socially found in Dewey's work.

If we are to exorcise the polarisation between 'Child and Curriculum' to which Dewey was so opposed and, at the same time give full expression to Dewey's ideas and avoid the errors of teaching made in his name, we need to give attention to the issue of normativity. This has become an area of considerable significance in recent years. The complexity of the issue is great indeed with issues ranging from enquiries into moral norms, at a macro level (Korsgaard, 1996), to considerations of the distinctive nature of human awareness and responsiveness to reasons, at a micro level (Brandom, 1994). Here our concern with normativity focuses on the relation of norms to knowledge or in more Deweyian terms of normativity to knowing. It is in relation to knowledge that attention to norms bring into view the crucial role that Dewey gave to interconnection of inquiry and knowledge.

In a context where the criticisms that Dewey made of schooling ring true, that is a context which includes shallow and impoverished curricula content, lack of connection between

learners' orientation to topics of study and teachers' 'delivery of knowledge' it is unsurprising to find a turn towards interest-driven learning and a consequent neglect for knowledge domains but this turn towards interest, it must be emphasised, poorly reflects Dewey's picture of learning since interest, for Dewey, arises from the process of learning.

When Dewey's interest driven learning is misconstrued as the type of possessive individualism in neoclassical economics it is unsurprising that educators give little weight to the specificities required to enter a knowledge domain. Precisely what Dewey's naturalism consists of is crucial here and whether or not it prevented him from giving due regard to normativity is a matter of interest not only for understanding his work but also for the implications for schooling.

Pragmatism in general and Dewey's thinking in particular owes a debt to Kant's 'Copernican revolution' that marked a watershed in the comprehension of the conditions of our knowledge. Rather than attempting to explain how our knowledge conforms to objects Kant started from supposing 'that objects must conform to our knowledge' (Kant, 1787/1999, B xvii p.110) An implication of this move was that humans were no longer understood as answerable to a power outside of themselves; rather the standards (i.e. norms) by which they live were understood as being set by themselves for themselves.

Freedom arises from our ability to set for ourselves the norms that we respond to and in so doing to become self-determined. Part of this ability to be free is our capacity to institute norms through processes of collective recognition, that we may bind ourselves too. Following Kant, Hegel's investigation of the presuppositions of claims to knowledge led to seeing reason, not as detached but as situated in experience. In the process of making thoughts explicit, thought itself changes. Rather than being based on secure external foundations,

Hegel sees new knowledge arising out of expressing what is already present in the existing. He showed that what we take to be the means by which we acquire our knowledge falls far short of explaining how knowledge actually arises and called into question the representational paradigm. Dewey followed Hegel on this point and criticised the dominance of this form of representationalism seeing it as a source of the polarisation between subject matter and the means for coming to know it:

The dualism here is between knowledge as something external, or, as it is often called, objective, and knowing as something purely internal, subjective, psychical. There is, on one side, a body of truth, ready-made, and, on the other, a ready-made mind equipped with a faculty of knowing -- if it only wills to exercise it, which it is often strangely loath to do. The separation, often touched upon, between subject matter and method is the educational equivalent of this dualism.

(Dewey, 1916/2009, p.288)

For Dewey, following Hegel, mind is not separated from world and can only be understood as a moment within its conditions. Rather than starting from a position that determines what consciousness must consist of, if it is to 'know', Hegel started from forms of consciousness themselves and what each of their claims to know comprises. His elaboration of the revolution in thought by Kant took a decisive step 'toward *naturalizing* the picture of conceptual norms by taking those norms to be instituted by public social cognitive practices' (Brandom, 2011, p.4). The influence of this way of thinking on Dewey in his naturalised account of the growth of mind founded in the recognition of others through

democratic forms is unquestionable. Rather than considering human activity a secondary aspect of epistemology, the life process comes first.

For Hegel, as Pinkard puts it, knowledge is not simply apprehended but is expressed through our practical projects:

To see the subject as part of life is to see the object of knowledge not as being like the kind of metaphysically construed objects... that we can only *apprehend*; it is rather to see how these objects fit into the demands of the life of the subject himself - that is, into his various practical projects.

(Pinkard, 1996, p. 48)

Pinkard lists numerous misapprehensions of Hegel, including ideas such as that Hegel thought reality was spiritual and that he saw the Prussian state as the culmination of history (Pinkard, 2000). While Dewey, reacting against the British Hegelians, distanced himself from what he took to be Hegel's metaphysics, he retained the essence of Hegel's thought (Fairfield, 2009, p. 97). The knowledge that comprises disciplines is not to be understood as the result of discoveries of nature made by detached minds, but rather as arising in practical projects and orientations. The particular concepts forming particular bodies of knowledge are not detached from this process but derive their meaning from their relations to other concepts in the terms in which they are used and from the purposes they serve i.e. they are systemic. Not at all abstracted, they are located in a system of relations. Instead of restricting how we think of conceptual content to its representational aspect, conceptual content is understood in terms of its conceptual role (Brandom, 1994, p.618).

Dewey rejects the dualism between subject matter and method and therefore the position that knowledge was solely external and knowing solely subjective. For Dewey the manner of knowing constitutes what is known. Disciplines are dynamic, their truths are not set in stone but develop according to ongoing inquiry. For Dewey knowledge is an instrument of successful action. (Russell, D. R., 1993, p.183). The problem of curricula is not subject knowledge per se but the impoverished abstracted way in which it is taught. What is important in domains of knowledge is not representation of that knowledge but the mode of orientation to it. To put it in terms more akin to Brandom, rather than learners appreciating what they are committing themselves too and what is entailed in their use of a concept in a particular way, the process is truncated and the knowledge that learners acquire is simply an empty shell. Dewey wanted this to end.

It is important to recognise that in Dewey's view of humanity we have a rich idea of agency and character and one grounded in a conception of humans as plastic, active and purposeful. The process of learning, as Dewey saw it, is not one of acquisition where learners appropriate particular abstracted skills or pieces of ossified knowledge as a result of being taught, but rather one of formation resulting from motivated activity and responsiveness to the claims made by others in conditions of existence. From this activity and responsiveness habits, dispositions and goals develop and change.

A difficulty presented by an overly reductive conception of naturalism is the suggestion that the ground in which motivations develop starts with 'evolutionary determined pre-set interests – in survival, procreation etc. – whose satisfaction are fostered or hindered by the environment' and these pre-given interests are the source of desires (Levine, 2015, p. 2). This reductive conception of naturalism fails to recognise a distinctive feature of human

beings i.e. that we are constrained not simply by an external nature but by norms that we ourselves establish as a result of our ongoing activity in the world. This is a mark of our freedom – the capacity to establish what we, in concert with our environment, are responsive to (i.e. to reasons we have instituted) rather than simply being subject to natural causes.

According to Pinkard, the idea of pre-given interests moderated only by environmental forces gives insufficient weight to the normative authority in ‘historically generated forms’ however it is precisely this understanding of pragmatism which leads to it being conceived as ‘reductive instrumentalism or utilitarianism’ according to Levine (2015, p. 2.). What do these contrary positions entail? Pinkard is worried that an evolutionism based on interests pre-given by nature can minimise the importance of the normative constraints on our actions laid down in historically generated forms; while Levine, argues that these forms should be understood as interwoven with the process of development itself - agency arises in norms, habits and dispositions in the context of ongoing growth.

Levine argues that ‘It is true that for the pragmatist rational creatures have instrumental dealings with the environment which are anthropologically very basic, but nonetheless these dealings must be placed within a context of practices whose norms of success are mostly not themselves instrumental’ (2015, p.6). What matters here is that, contrary to a conception of the human animal simply sharing with other species natural drives and needs, humans are active in already existing practices and react to norms established, modified and developed in those practices. While Levine accepts that the communicative nature of human life is under-theorised in Dewey’s work he contests Pinkard, arguing that; ‘...the supposition that the ends of action are grounded in a creature’s pre-given interests ignores that fact that the pragmatic action-cycle is a *learning process*’ (2015, p.6). This implies that for Dewey there is no straightforward unthinking connection between what is desired and what is desirable, that

is to say, there is only ongoing growth where what is desired is adjusted in the light of intelligent thought, action and its consequences. But his emphasis on reflective intelligence engaging through inquiry, experimentally, and mediated by democratic form counter balances knowledge as an abstract notion upon which many educational practices rely.

Too little credit is given to the intertwining nature of thought and action. Actions are more than what behaviour makes visible, since they emerge from conditions, dispositions and habits which in turn arise in an ongoing process of attempting to secure stabilisations in order to determine what is at first experienced as indeterminate. While Dewey appears to reject an idea of antecedent norms, the point here is that these norms are present but they are not external to the process itself. For instance, deliberation and inquiry are tightly interwoven; ‘the standard of evaluation is formed in the process of practical judgment or valuation. It is not something taken from outside and applied to it’ (Dewey 1915/2008 p. 37)

For Dewey a desire is not the primitive ‘liking’ that is generally understood but a ‘union of prizing and appraising’ (Dewey 1939, 2008b p. 218) and as such the result of a process:

The “desirable,” or the object which *should* be desired (valued), does not descend out of the a priori blue nor descend as an imperative from Mount Sinai. It presents itself because past experience has shown that hasty action upon uncriticized desire leads to defeat and possible catastrophe’

(1939/2008b, p.219).

This complex notion of interest and desire may be cited as a response, in part at least, to the criticism made by Pinkard that Dewey’s evolutionism prevented him from fully appreciating

the significance of normativity. The important point here is for Dewey that normativity is the outcome of interaction between organism and environment but this is the environment of 'second nature' i.e. of culture and traditions, formed in the ongoing enterprise of human sociality. While this interaction operates with selective force, in the Darwinian sense, determining what survives or fails, Dewey's sophisticated account includes a rich conception of the development of habits and dispositions formed in this process.

So is the disagreement between Pinkard and Levine merely a matter of semantics?

Historically generated norms are in the picture whether pre-determined or generated in the process of activity. When we come to matters of education in the context of schools more is at stake. Here the issue of the conditions that foster learning, i.e. children's orientation to knowledge, matter and even more than this, the importance of teachers, in Deweyian terms, acting as 'guides'. Dewey himself put it that 'social conditions and pressures are part of the conditions that affect the execution of desires' (Dewey, 2008b, p.219) and in so doing tacitly implied the responsiveness to reasons, i.e. normative significance, at the centre of any process of learning.

Returning to the earlier examples, the question arises of what presuppositions do the teachers lack that lead them to neglect the knowledge domain. Why does it seem acceptable to allow children to construct their own conception of the Bible without further critical examination involving the placing of the Bible in a context that is not restricted to the child's own 'interest'? Dewey emphasised that if we attend only to the childrens' 'present inclinations, purposes and experiences' (Dewey, 2008c, p. 280) we may arrest their development. What more is involved in 'the conditions that affect the execution of desires'?

An approach that places importance on instruction in contrast to facilitation is that of Vygotsky. For Vygotsky the teacher plays a central role in initiating the learner into the relevant knowledge field by setting boundaries within which the learner's meaning is articulated (i.e. within the normative constraints that delimit different fields of knowledge). It's helpful to consider the emphasis that Vygotsky placed on systematicity as the condition for awareness. Awareness of the meaning of a concept arises not simply by virtue of an individual representation standing for an event or object but when the concept's role is evident as a consequence of its particular relation to other concepts: 'Only within a system can the concept acquire conscious awareness and a voluntary nature. Conscious awareness and the presence of a system are synonyms when we are speaking of concepts, (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 191). This position is not so distant from Dewey; concepts are not abstract but are articulated in the context of a particular activity, through the inferential links that they have to other concepts and meaning results from their functional role. The use of the word 'force' in physics has a different meaning to its use in a literary context – 'the force of destiny'. In dialogue with learners, teachers expand learners' concepts by locating them in an appropriate set of inferential connections. For instance, prophecies are not mere predictions of the order of a shop closing and laws are not merely rules that can be changed according to whim. However, the idea that the teachers provide the normative context in which meaning is made, adjusting it in the light of learners' responses, might seem to be at odds with the romantic ideals of progressive education so often associated with Dewey.

Earlier, as we argued, a crucial issue for Dewey's idea about education is the issue of naturalism. Dewey understood the naturalism he referred to as 'cultural naturalism' and he recognised the ambiguity and the danger involved in the use of the word 'naturalistic', that this could be misunderstood for instance by reducing 'human behaviour to the behaviour of

apes...But man is naturally a being that lives in association with others in communities possessing language, and therefore enjoying a transmitted culture' (Dewey cited in Faerna, 2014, p.371). Faerna (2014) notes that for Dewey, intelligent action is constituted in linguistic practices and that the physical environment is experienced within the cultural environment which involves normativity. The significance placed on an object or event, for instance, is determined by the relation of that object or event to other things. These connections are not arbitrary but are entailed by norm-instituting social practices. Situating intelligent action, not simply in the physical environment but within the social environment that encompasses it, distinguishes Dewey's naturalism;

In every interaction that involves intelligent direction, the physical environment *is part of* a more inclusive social or cultural environment...Man, as Aristotle remarked, is a social animal... in another sense than the bee...since his activities are encompassed in an environment that is culturally transmitted, so that what man does and how he acts is...embedded in traditions, institutions, customs and the purpose and beliefs they both carry and inspire'

(Dewey, 1986, p.49).

Dewey's approach may appear at odds with the idea of systematicity, i.e. the normative constraints delimiting fields of knowledge, but his approach to language shows this is not the case. Dewey distinguished ways of thinking about language. Faerna explains that, for Dewey, in the broadest sense language does not have a systematically articulated structure:

meanings are coarse and many of them are inconsistent with each other...One meaning is appropriate under certain institutional group conditions; another, in some situation and there is no attempt to relate the different situations to one another in a coherent scheme.

(Dewey cited in Faerna, 2014, p. 366).

Nevertheless, Dewey also has, what Faerna calls, a 'thin' notion of language, where concepts have definite relations to each other as part of a system: 'Each meaning... is expressly determined in its relation to other members of the language system. In all reasoning or ordered discourse this criterion takes precedence over that instituted by connection with cultural habits' (ibid.). It is precisely this form of language that makes up what Dewey called studies (i.e. disciplines). There is an affinity here with the distinction that Vygotsky, grounding his argument in favour of teachers guiding student learning in a strong sense, drew between scientific and everyday concepts. Without systematicity, as a condition of existence for reasoning, 'warranted assertibility' is not possible. It is the stabilising of connections to other ideas arising out of a particular inquiry that constitutes and verifies the meaning of an assertion, thus providing the ground for reasoning.

The status of truth is often presented as major problem in interpretations of Dewey's work. The earlier examples of lessons given above appear to suggest that there are no constraints on what is to be known and how it is to be learnt. Whatever the children construct qualifies as *their* 'Bible'. There are no normative constraints which delimit what the children might engage with. However, this practice of learning and teaching is hardly Deweyian. It is hardly an example of the 'warranted assertibility' which was at the centre of in his discussion with Bertrand Russell and reflects Dewey's inferential position. Warranted assertibility plays a

pivotal role in his account of learning. His discussion with Russell serves to illustrate this point.

In his paper *Propositions, Warranted Assertibility and Truth*, Dewey (1941) took Russell to task for his misunderstanding of his views when at Harvard, in a lecture entitled *An Inquiry into Truth and Meaning*, Russell accused Dewey of substituting warranted assertibility for truth. In response to Russell, Dewey made clear that warranted assertibility is a definition of knowledge ‘according to which only *true* beliefs are knowledge’ (Dewey, 1941, p.169).

When Russell remarked that an important difference between their approaches to philosophy was that Dewey gave priority to theories and hypotheses, while he was ‘mainly concerned with assertions about particular matters of fact’ (Russell cited in Dewey, 1941, p. 170)

Dewey responded that there is no difference with matters of fact since his approach merely ‘states the *conditions* under which we can reach warranted assertibility about particular matters of fact’ (1941, p. 170). He then pointed out difficulties in Russell’s own view of propositions in which the perception of redness, for example, presupposes an elaborate physiological theory connecting visual and motor centres of the brain in order to assert redness in the first place. Where Russell suggested that Dewey was more concerned with theories and hypotheses, Dewey retorted that it would seem as though a hypothesis of causation was also involved in Russell’s account of a proposition about ‘redness’.

It is this attention to the conditions of our knowing that characterises Dewey’s pragmatism and distinguishes it from the sort of philosophy that is detached from the lifeworld. He suggested that ‘the belief in certain qualities as “sensible”’ in the way that Russell proposes ‘is an inferential matter’ (1941, p. 172). For Dewey, Russell’s failure was to see his own assertions as presuppositionalist, as entailing little more than the causal relation between sense

datum and the perceived quality of redness. As he pointed out this is a recipe for scepticism and leaves us with, what McDowell (1996) has called, an anxiety about how we can be in touch with the world at all.

Dewey took from Hegel the idea of the movement of thought that already entails far more than has been fully understood. Communication is the medium through which thought moves ‘The communication which insures participation in a common understanding is one which secures similar emotional and intellectual dispositions—like ways of responding to expectations and requirements’ (Dewey, 1916/2008, p.10). The significance of communicative action, which was central to Dewey’s idea of the interweaving of democracy with schooling, is that it requires the expression and hence social articulation of the ideas being communicated and it is in the process of being understood by an interlocutor that the idea is located in a network of inferential connections that determine its precise meaning. For Dewey, the process of ‘working up’ meaning, locating meaning in particular relations, was crucial to social life: ‘Not only is social life identical with communication but all communication (and hence genuine social life) is educative’ (ibid.). Communication is a transformative process:

[In communicating] some experience to another...you will find your own attitude towards your experience changing...the experience has to be formulated in order to be communicated. To formulate requires getting outside of it, seeing it as another would see it, considering what points of contact it has with the life of another so that it may go into such a form that he can appreciate its meaning.

(ibid.)

Pring makes a point which might be easily misunderstood if read to mean that the disciplines are not important in schooling: ‘a young person whose interests are taken seriously and whose teacher seeks to develop those interests (that is, enable the young person to engage with them more intelligently and reflectively) will be disciplined by the pursuit of those interests – making the regime of externally imposed discipline irrelevant’ (Pring, 2007, p. 16). However, the reference to ‘intelligent and reflective engagement’ conjures up a different picture involving normativity and as such is quite different from a reading of Dewey which concerns learning either being driven solely by pre-given interest or a ‘learning by doing’ which neglects normative constraints. The responsiveness to the particular reasons that inform the commitments of learners necessarily takes us into the inferential field of the discipline itself.

Dewey was well aware of a problem that still pervades education today; namely the idea that teaching abstract knowledge has no connection to the meaning-making, interests and experience of learners. Despite his concern that disciplines were disconnected from the experience of the child, he did not neglect the importance of fields of knowledge and believing that education should involve sensitivity to the connecting threads that constitute ‘studies’ i.e. disciplines. However he was concerned with the separation of the experience of children from the knowledge obtained at school, particularly given its abstract character, but he recognised that: “[a]s societies become more complex in structure and resources, the need of formal or intentional teaching and learning increases.” (Dewey, 1916/2008 p. 14).

In utilising particular means that have already been established by countless generations, the learner is, in the sense that Pring remarks, disciplined by the inquiry itself and by the existing concepts as tools that she draws upon. However guidance with respect to the normative

constraints of disciplines is essential if the learner is to draw upon the resources already established by generations before her and to develop dispositions rather than simply become a 'specialist' in inert, so called, 'knowledge'.

When the normative elements in Dewey's work are taken seriously the idea of teachers as facilitators can be set aside in favour of emphasis on their orientation to fields of knowledge domains and their capacity to guide. To educate is to relocate ideas and this is different from the excesses of either progressivism or of didactic approaches. The attempt to grow a higher understanding exclusively from children's experiences fails as completely as the attempt to implant a higher understanding without regard to these experiences. But relocating the ideas of a young person in the network of inferential relations, which will assist that person in developing new meaning, requires attending to normativity i.e. to what is a reason for what, and thus to the distinctive character of relations between concepts in different knowledge domains.

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