

### John Dewey's Theory of Progressive Education

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#### Abstract

*The aim of this article is to present John Dewey's philosophy of education with the purpose of affirming the relationship between education and ethics as exemplified by virtues in the integral development of the personality and to demonstrate that neither education nor ethics can exist alone in the integral development of the personality. Dewey's contribution to the philosophy of education is unique and gives a special perspective as he responded to unique demands both in education and in Ethics. This uniqueness gave his principal contributions a context, a meaning and an enduring influence that has persisted to the present times. His background, education and work experience came in handy in his endeavor to link education and ethics and in coining the concept progressive education. This article will begin with an introduction in which the objective will be laid out. The second part of the article will elaborate on the purpose of education according to John Dewey which includes giving the students a pragmatic approach to life. This will be followed by Dewey's theory of enquiry exemplified by psychology as the basis of education and experience as a method, Positive Account of Experience, Reconstruction in moral concepts, Reconstruction in moral concepts. We will conclude by giving the implication of education as a fundamental process in human life and in the development of an integral personality.*

**Keywords:** Education, Ethics, Character, Integral, Philosophy, Progressive

#### 1. Introduction

The main objective in this article is to analyze the relationship between education and Ethics Dewey's Philosophy. We will examine the theory of inquiry from the perspective of the relation of the subject to the object, progress in education with the emphasis of learning by doing and psychology as the basis of learning since learning begins at self-consciousness. The paper

analyzes Dewey's concept of experience of knowing, perception and the positive account of experience where experience is taken as a method. The study concludes by examining the practical end of education which Dewey demonstrates by tracing the theoretical foundation of human conduct from the Greeks giving it a rational nature rather than leaving it to the dictates of custom. By this paper demonstrate that progressive education is an instrument of man's life as demonstrated in his ethical, social and political aspects. The article is therefore organized in such a way that it gives John Dewey's Theory with reference to the progress of education which includes the purpose of education, theory of inquiry and knowledge, education as progressive, progressive versus traditional education, and progressive versus traditional education. The conclusion provides a major analysis of the John Dewey's Theory with reference to the progress of education based on the review content.

## **2. John Dewey's Theory with Reference to the Progress of Education**

This section presents John Dewey's Theory with Reference to the Progress of Education. The aspects covered include the following: Dewey's purpose of education, Dewey's theory of inquiry and knowledge and education as progressive.

### **2.1 Dewey's Purpose of Education**

Dewey's endeavors to show the importance of education rather than how and what children should be taught. He doesn't deny traditional purpose of education as the endeavor to develop the learner, teach those values, stimulate their intellect and make them understand tolerance for disagreeable belief systems, challenge them to question what exists and contribute to the growth of human society. In this way education serves as an art of appreciating life. For Dewey, the importance of education automatically dictates what should be taught and how. Many philosophers have written on the purpose and the role of education and schooling. Among them are Aristotle, Plato, John Locke, Rousseau, Mo Tzu, and Confucius schooling in their respective societies, one of the perennial questions that they addressed was who should be taught and how (Noel Noddings, 1996). These early thinkers shared many common ideas about what it is that schools should exist to do, but each of them also had their own unique perspectives on the role of schooling within a given culture and civilization.

Dewey on his part argued that the primary purpose of education and schooling is not so much to *prepare* students to live a useful life, but to teach them how to live pragmatically and *immediately* in their current environment. Dewey calls for a shift in perspective from viewing the school from a teacher-student confinement to another perspective which is the natural progress made by the individual child of our acquaintance, his normal physical development, his advance in ability to read, write, and figure, his growth in the knowledge of geography and history, improvement in manners, habits of promptness, order, and industry. It is from such standards as these that we judge the work of the school. He stated that "the end and aim of education is the formation of careful, alert, and thorough habits of thinking" (Dewey, 1910). The good thoughts of the school itself, that it hopes to realize through the new possibilities thus opened to its future self. This becomes the meeting point between individualism and the social aspect of the individual. Only by being true to the full growth of all the individuals who make it up can the society achieve its potential since there is a great relationship between the school and the larger

life of the community, and the necessity for certain changes in the methods and materials of school work, that it might be better adapted to present social needs.

It is the business of education to cultivate deep-seated and effective habits of discriminating tested beliefs from mere assertions, guesses, and opinions; to develop a lively, sincere, and open-minded preference for conclusions that are properly grounded and to ingrain into individuals working habits, methods of inquiry and reasoning appropriate to the various problems that present themselves (Dewey, 1910, 82).

The image of the school is multifaceted, that is the first face deals with the school in its social aspects, and the necessary re-adjustments that have to be made to render it effective in particular social conditions. The second face deals with the school in relation to the growth of individual child with different background, talents, potentialities, powers and weaknesses while the third face deals with the school as an institution both in relation to society and to its own members, the learners. It deals with the question of organization, because all waste is the result of the lack of it, the motive lying behind organization being promotion of economy and efficiency.

## 2.2 Dewey's theory of inquiry and knowledge

Dewey's logical theory was developed with the intention of impacting existential affairs. Dewey's account of logic was his theory about the process of inquiry, where inquiry arises when an organism encounters an indeterminate situation (Burke, 1994). By examining his concept of inquiry alone, one will see the relevance that it has to organisms and how they interact with common affairs. In this case organisms refer specifically to human beings who have the capacity to reason. Thus, logic is a theory that formulates the methods by which an organism gains and maintains control over their environment, not with the subject- predicate analysis of linguistic statements.

Dewey's theory of inquiry rejected earlier empiricists' and rationalists' models in favor of understanding the achievement of knowledge from a naturalistic and developmental perspective. For Dewey, inquiry must be understood genetically, as a developing activity, the features of which play certain functional roles in this developmental process. Thus facts, perceptions, ideas, concepts are not independent preexisting entities that are artificially combined in inquiry, but are distinguished in the roles they play as instrumentalities or "tools" in the accomplishment of completed inquiry. Thus Dewey himself called his theory "instrumentalism." Dewey's account is much more broad and encompassing than the theories developed by his predecessors and contemporaries, including Frege and Russell. The role that logical notions play in Russell's, Frege's, and Dewey's theories, such as propositions, truth, warranted assertibility, and judgments, serve to differentiate their accounts of logic from one another. For Dewey, propositions can only be understood in their relation to inquiry, which arises out of an indeterminate situation. For Dewey, propositions and judgments have to be understood in relation to their function in inquiry, in terms of their role in bringing forth a warrantably assertible judgment. Dewey argues that:

Propositions are logically distinct from judgments, and yet are the necessary logical instrumentalities for reaching final warranted determination of judgment. Only by means of symbolization (the peculiar differentia of propositions) can direct action be deferred until inquiry into conditions and procedures have been instituted. The overt activity, when it finally occurs, is, accordingly, intelligent instead of blind. Propositions as such are, consequently, provisional, intermediate and instrumental (Dewey, 1938, 41).

### 2.3 Education as progressive

Dewey described progressive education as “a product of discontent with traditional education” which imposes adult standards, subject matter, and methodologies. He believed that traditional education as just described was beyond the scope of young learners. Progressive education as described by Dewey should include socially engaging learning experiences that are developmentally appropriate for young children (Dewey, 1938). Dewey thought that effective education came primarily through social interactions. Further, he indicated that school setting should be considered a social institution (Flinders & Thornton 2013). He considered education to be a “process of living and not a preparation for future living”. In contrast to traditional classrooms, Dewey thought that schools and classrooms should be representative of real life situations, allowing children to participate in learning activities interchangeably and flexibly in a variety of social settings (Dewey, 1938). He was of the idea that abruptly introducing too much academic content, out of context with children’s social lives, bordered on unethical teaching behavior (Flinders & Thornton 2013). This notion would be a point of conflict in education today, as it is vastly different from what is happening in classrooms with the strong emphasis on implementing the Common Core standards. The strong focus on increasing academic achievement through the use of Common Core standards in today’s classrooms makes finding evidence of John Dewey’s philosophies in classrooms less common than it used to be (Theobald, 2009).

He held that education is progressive and incremental. Progressive education by definition is essentially a view of education that puts emphasis on the need to learn by doing. Dewey believed that human beings learn better through a “hands-on” approach which involves providing direct practical experience in the operation or functioning of something. This makes his philosophy an educational philosophy of pragmatism. Pragmatism is the theory that holds that reality must be experienced. It is a philosophical approach that evaluates theories and beliefs in terms of their workability, success and practical application. Therefore an ideology or proposition according to pragmatism is true if it works satisfactorily, and the meaning of a proposition is to be found in the practical consequences of accepting it, and that unpractical ideas are to be rejected. From the point of view of John Dewey, this means that students must interact and adapt with the environment in order to learn. Dewey holds that education ‘warranted assertibility’ which he substitutes for ‘truth’ if it has certain kinds of effects. He argues that:

Russell refers to my theory as one which “substitutes ‘warranted assertibility’ for truth.” Under certain conditions, I should have no cause to object to this reference.

But the conditions are absent; and it is possible that this view of “substitution” as distinct from and even opposed to definition, plays an important role in generating what I take to be misconceptions of my theory in some important specific matters. Hence, I begin by saying that my analysis of “warranted assertibility” is offered as a definition of the nature of knowledge in the honorific sense according to which only true beliefs are knowledge (Dewey, 1941, 102).

Here, Dewey argues against the view that warranted assertibility can be substituted for truth.

### 2.3.1 Progressive versus Traditional Education

The nature of knowledge is critical to Dewey's experiential learning theory. He saw significant discrepancies in how traditional education viewed knowledge and how it should be viewed in experiential learning. Dewey's supposition was that in traditional education knowledge consists of bodies of information and skills that have been worked out in the past. The role of a school is to pass this knowledge to children. Therefore, traditional education imposes education from above and outside. One such method is learning by acquisition from what is in books. The life experiences of students are irrelevant to the acquisition of knowledge. Therefore, in traditional education knowledge is something that is predetermined and controlled beyond the influence of the students. The goal is for students to accumulate as much knowledge as possible to prepare them for their future endeavors.

In contrast, progressive education, or experiential learning provides for learning from the opportunities of the present as opposed to learning for a remote future. The past is not the end of education; it is merely a means to help learn about the present. In traditional education, content is organized by mature people and is outside of the present life experience of the immature. Dewey argues that this external control should be rejected.

Dewey makes a contrast between traditional and progressive education. For him the underlying ideas of the traditional education are formulated broadly, without the qualification required for accurate statement. The subject-matter of education therefore consists of bodies of information and of skills that have been worked out in the past and the chief business of the school becomes to transmit them to the new generation. Dewey recognizes that in the past, there have been developed standards and rules of conduct but notes that moral training consists in forming habits of action in conformity with these rules and standards. He gives the general pattern of school organization by which he emphasizes on the relationship between students themselves and between students and the teacher making the school kind of institution sharply marked off from other social institutions with a "pattern of organization."

Dewey recommends harmonizing the aims and methods of instruction and discipline with the purposes of preparing the young for future responsibilities and for success in life, by means of acquisition of the organized bodies of information and prepared forms of skill, which comprehend the material of instruction. In learner-centered classrooms, one can see much of

John Dewey's social learning theory and educational beliefs in action. He viewed the classroom as a social entity for children to learn problem-solving together as a community. In these classrooms children are viewed as unique individuals; they can be found busy at work constructing their own knowledge through personal meaning, rather than teacher-imposed knowledge and teacher-directed activities (Schiro, 2012). Children will be seen learning-by-doing in these classrooms and they will be solving problems through hands-on approaches. When teachers plan for instruction, student interests will be taken into consideration and curricular subjects will be integrated with an emphasis on project learning. The educational experience encompasses the intellectual, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual growth of the whole child, not just academic growth. Today these ideas are being used to promote student engagement in classrooms through the use of technology.

### 2.3.2 Psychology as the basis of education

John Dewey relied heavily on psychology in the development of his philosophy of education; he hoped that this discipline would provide answers to philosophy's deepest questions. This approach was akin to Hegelian Idealism though he did not incorporate Hegel's dialectical logic but instead sought to incorporate new methods in psychology. He endeavored to overcome long standing divisions such as between subject and object, matter and spirit and show how human experiences, physical, psychical, practical, and imaginative were all integrated in one, dynamic person. His aim at this point was to show psychology as the new science of self-consciousness. This is what he called "completed method of philosophy" (Dewey 1929). Thus he made his book, *Psychology* an introduction to psychology's study of the self as ultimate reality.

Dewey sees a strong correlation between interaction and continuity of experiences. It is through interaction that a child brings in experiences from society. Because of such continuous interactions, environments are created. These environments are the fields in which situations and conditions interact with personal needs and purposes, and create life-long experiences.

These experiences are given value and direction by the teachers, therefore, there should be order and direction of a child's experiences, which gives him a composed and integrated personality. He gives example of the games children play, in which they follow rules of the game willingly to continue the game. Similarly, students are involved in class activities in groups and the moving force is to get the activity done. This learning process allows students the freedom of thought, judgment, and power to execute decisions.

These learning experiences should have a clear purpose, an understanding of the surrounding conditions, knowledge of what occurred before, so that it could allow reaction and analysis of issues and experiences. Such structured interactions turn an impulse into a plan of action. This brings forth Dewey's philosophy of humanism. As a child discovers by doing, the child is explicitly realized as the main actor of the entire learning process. The child's role is no longer vulnerable or a subject of imposition. Rather, a child is a free individual with his aptitude and interests. As he is actively involved in the learning process, the child is an active social actor who participates in social experiences.

Among other prevailing ideas that influenced Dewey in this development included by introspections a concept arising from association or mentalist. Earlier on British empiricists, such as John Locke and David Hume, accounted for intelligent behavior with internal entities, such as perceptual experiences or “impressions which comprehend all our more lively perceptions, when we hear, or see, or feel, or love, or hate, or desire, or will (David Hume, 1748). This for him is what constitutes intelligence by way of an elaborate process of associative learning. Discovery-by-introspection was indispensable for many empiricists, and for physiological and experimental psychologists.

From the theoretical, physiological, and experimental psychology, Dewey conducted experiments on attention. Although introspections would give an organic and holistic model of experience capable of overcoming the subjectivist dualisms plaguing the older, it was in the associations’ models that Dewey found physiological psychology retaining an atomized and mechanistic view of experience based on “sense data”. From the Hegelian perspective, this psychology could never account for the wider world of lived meanings, the socio-cultural environment. This means that “organism” entails “environment”, and “environment” entails “culture”. Eventually a rigorously empirical psychology cannot merely study “the” mind, but has to forge connections with other sciences.

Dewey sought an account of psychological experience fully conscious of experimental limits and cultural influence. Compared to William James’s *The Principles of Psychology*, which modeled how consciousness and intelligence can be explained in relation to the self even without appeals to a transcendental Absolute, Dewey *Principles*’ was an emphatically biological conception of mind which gave his thinking “a new direction and quality” and “worked its way more and more into transformation of old believes (Dewey, 1887). Rather than measuring psychic phenomena against preexisting abstractions, William James showed how one might employ a “radical empiricism” that starts from the phases and elements of actual, lived experience. The goal here would be to understand experience’s functional origins from a perspective that was, typically, coherent and whole

### 2.3.3 Experience of knowing

In Dewey’s work, the development of knowledge fundamentally brings into play the notion of “situation”. The importance accorded to this notion marks the non- separation of elements of experience, the idea that they are apprehended in a comprehensive, syncretism way, or exist through the relations they maintain with one another for the active subject. What is designated by the word ‘situation’ is not a single object or event or set of objects and events, for we never experience nor form judgments about objects or events in isolation but only in connection with a contextual whole (Dewey, 1929).

Dewey’s concept of experience allows a holistic approach to education, in the sense that it is based on the interaction between the human being and the world. It takes all sides of human existence, its being in the world, as the methodological point of departure. Experience is a central

aspect of this interaction and thus a communicative, historic and cultural phenomenon rather than an individual or mental one. There are several reasons for the interest in Dewey's concept of experience today. With respect to the ongoing political discourse on education, the concept counteracts a developing culture of reification, of surveying, testing and measuring. It is clear that some aspects of experience can be measured. But experience as an integral event is beyond such an approach. Moreover, a growing number of voices within the science of education field are warning against the reductionist traits in actual education policies.

Dewey guides us to the realization that amid all uncertainties there is one permanent frame of reference: namely, "the organic connection between education and personal experience" (Dewey, 1929). This means that the new approach of education is committed to some kind of empirical and experimental philosophy. Though experience and experiment are not self-explanatory ideas, their meaning is part of the problem to be explored. Therefore to know the meaning of empiricism we need to understand what experience is.

Even with the assertion that experience brings about genuine education Dewey does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are mis-educative and any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. An experience may be such as to engender callousness; it may produce lack of sensitivity and of responsiveness. Then the possibilities of having richer experience in the future are restricted.

Again, a given experience may increase a person's automatic skill in a particular direction and yet tend to land him in a groove or rut; the effect again is to narrow the field of further experience. An experience may be immediately enjoyable and yet promote the formation of a slack and careless attitude; this attitude then operates to modify the quality of subsequent experiences so as to prevent a person from getting out of them what they have to give. Again, experiences may be so disconnected from one another that, while each is agreeable or even exciting in itself, they are not linked cumulatively to one another. Energy is then dissipated and a person becomes scatter-brained (Dewey, 1929, 231).

The disadvantage of disconnectedness in experiences is the possibility of generating dispersive, disintegrated, centrifugal habits. The consequence of formation of such habits is a person's inability to control future experiences. They are then taken, either by way of enjoyment or of discontent and revolt, just as they come. Under such circumstances, it is idle to talk of self-control. Traditional education offers a plethora of examples of experiences of the kinds just mentioned. It is a great mistake to suppose, even tacitly, that the traditional schoolroom was not a place in which pupils had experiences. Yet this is tacitly assumed when progressive education as a plan of learning by experience is placed in sharp opposition to the old. In the traditional education many students were rendered callous to ideas and many lost the impetus to learn because of the Way in which they experienced learning. Many acquired special skills by means of automatic drill and their power of judgment and capacity to act intelligently in new situations was limited. Many came to associate the learning process with ennui or dissatisfaction and

boredom while still many found what they learn so foreign to the situations of life outside the school as to give them power of control over the latter.

Worse still many came to associate books with dull drudgery, so that they were "conditioned" to all but flashy reading matter. Dewey therefore condemns the traditional method for its defective and wrong character; this is from the standpoint of connection with further experience. The positive side of this point is even more important in connection with progressive education. It is not enough to insist upon the necessity of experience, nor even of activity in experience. Everything depends upon the quality of the experience which has two aspects; There is an immediate aspect of agreeableness or disagreeableness, and there is its influence upon later experiences. The first is obvious and easy to judge.

The effect of an experience is not borne on its face. It sets a problem to the educator. It is his business to arrange for the kind of experiences which, while they do not repel the student, but rather engage his activities are, nevertheless, more than immediately enjoyable since they promote having desirable future experiences Just as no man lives or dies to himself, so no experience lives and dies to itself. (Dewey, 1929, 91)

Wholly independent of desire or intent every experience lives on in further experiences. Hence the central problem of an education based upon experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences.

### **2.3.4 Dewey's Theory of Experiential Continuum**

The philosophy of experiential education, according to Carver (Rebecca, 2001), can be traced to Plato and has at its core principles what were developed by John Dewey. This is not to suggest that experiential education programs are always informed by John Dewey's thinking, but rather that at the core of any strong example of experiential education lays the embodiment of what Dewey expressed. Experiential education ties to integrate the life experience of students into the curriculum. Examples of experiential education can be found in a variety of settings, including the following types of programs: wilderness-based adventure, community development, advocacy, art and music and service-learning.

However, the belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. For Dewey, experience and education cannot be equated to each other. Students in traditional schools do have experiences. The trouble is not the absence of experiences, Dewey argues, but their defective and wrong character wrong and defective forms the standpoint of connection with further experience. This traditional scheme is, in essence, one of imposition from above and from outside.

Accordingly, Dewey points out that a coherent theory of experience, affording positive direction to selection and organization of appropriate educational methods and materials, is required by the attempt to give new direction to the work of schools. The fundamental philosophy of these new

schools called “progressive schools” by Dewey is found in the idea that there is an intimate and necessary relation between the process of actual experience and education. A system of education based upon the necessary connection of education with experience must take the environment and other conditions into account. Experience does not go on simply inside a person as Dewey argues. It does go on there, because it influences the formation of attitudes of desire and purpose. However, this is not the whole of the story. Every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had.

Dewey’s theory of continuity states that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after. Experiences are complex temporally, penetrating one another, earlier ones leaving deposits or residues which influence later ones. Dewey explains that people develop habits of emotional response, perception, appreciation, sensitivity, and attitude. These habits, developed from past experiences, affect future experiences. Every experience has continuity: it is permeable, taking something from the past and leaving tracks which shape the future. In this sense, Fishman and McCarthy say, “continuity is educationally effective when a sequence of experiences, despite occasional and detours, is so driven by deeply held purposes that it coheres, develops, and finds fulfillment.”

A major characteristic of knowledge is that it is incremental. Dewey therefore comes up with the concept of *experiential continuum* a principle whose importance Dewey emphasizes for the purpose of educative experience. In his words philosophy of education, like any theory, has to be stated in words and in symbols. But so far as it is more than verbal it is a plan for conducting education. Just like any other plan, it must be framed with reference to what is to be done and how it is to be done. Based on the fact that education is a development within, by, and for experience, then more important it is that there be a clear conception of what experience is. When experience is so conceived that the result is a plan for deciding upon subject-matter, upon methods of instruction and discipline, and upon material equipment and social organization of the school, it becomes very clear. However progressive education has a plan of improvisation.

### 2.3.5 Perception and Sensation

On perception and sensation, Dewey shifted from the common view of his time that it was simply and externally caused, completely occupied a mental state, and that it was passively received into an empty mental space. He saw in the three elements a “psychophysical dualism”, a radical separation of perceiver and the world. He aimed at giving an account of intellectual operations and conditions from the standpoint of the role played by them in the business of drawing inferences. He avoided considering Perception as simply and externally caused something that had been contravened by the Darwinian theory, ecological model where ongoing interactions between organism and environment include, but are not ontologically reducible to, “minds”, “bodies”, and their impingements the so-called “impressions” and “ideas” of modern philosophy. While there are events which are unbidden, surprising, or not under our control, for Dewey this does not justify the metaphysical conclusion of a world “out there” and a mind “in here”. On the other hand while experience is profoundly qualitative, qualities are never merely packages received by the mind nor are they simple or context-free. This is, in effect, a new way

of looking at the qualities at the same time rejecting a dualism between the “objective” and the “subjective”. For example A lemon’s “yellowness” is neither in a perceiver nor in a lemon; the quality emerges from complex interactions and later becomes characterized as (“yellowness”) for reasons proper to the inquiry making that designation. The quality was never in the organism but is always a quality of interaction arising from extra-organic things and the organism itself partaking together.

Regarding perception as pervading mental states, Dewey borrows an important point made by William James in *The Stream of Thought* which stated that “while a perception may occupy the focus of awareness, each has an attendant “fringe” which contributes a contrast and, to the wider situation, an “underlying qualitative character” (William, 1940). In the example of lemon, the “tartness” has its character amidst a slew of “fringe” conditions such as immediate past flavors, anticipations *inter alia*.

Finally, regarding the idea that perception was passively received into an empty mental space, Dewey argued that perception is an activity of “taking up” by organisms already functioning in situations but not an instant, passive apprehension of stimulus. This means that there are always selective adjustments; quick or slow and that they always take time. Perception is therefore a confrontation with some “given” content already imbued with inherent meaning. Wilfred Sellars had dismissed the passive-perception-encounter as modern empiricism’s “Myth of the Given”, but Dewey rebuked such claims thus concluding that all seeing is seeing *as*—adjustments within larger acts. Over time, these habits of adjustment change and, as a result, what is perceived can also shift; subsequent selections and interpretations are modified. Dewey's conclusion is that man's logical and cognitive activity does not take place in intellectual vacuum. Rather man lives, thinks and acts within the context of time and space. This Dewey calls “the business of living”. (William, 1940) James Intellectual activities and cognitions are not outside the moral processes of the individual. With the realization of the moral process the more conscious and formal education becomes the most economical means of social advancement of social advance and reorganization giving meaning and purpose to all social institutions. In this way the human individual's capacity is set free and developed objectively irrespective of race, sex, class or economic status. The test of the value of moral processes in progressive education “is the extent to which they educate every individual into the full stature of his possibility” (John Dewey 1962)

### 2.3.6 Dewey’s Positive Account of Experience

According to Dewey experience is a process, transactional, socially mediated, as opposed to categorically prefigured as “rational” or “emotional”. This experience is also experimental and comes either as primary or secondary and that experience is methodological. Experience exhibits a fundamentally experimental character as seen in a variety of educational roles. Children’s experiences involve alternating phases which include acting and being acted upon. Such phases become “experimental” when the agents consciously relate what is tried with what causes events and eventually understand which actions are significant for controlling future events. “Learning” is the final product or outcome of experience as experimental.

Secondly experience is “felt” or “had”. Dewey calls such experience direct primary. This experience is barely regulated or reflected upon, whereas other experience is characterized by “knowing” or mediation-by-reflection; Dewey calls such experiences “indirect”, “secondary”, or “known”. Known experience abstracts away from *had* (or direct) experience in purposeful and selective ways; knowing isolates certain relations or connections.

Situations are experienced in two ways and are of two distinct types. Some take place with only a minimum of regulation, with little foresight, preparation and intent. Others occur because, in part, of the prior occurrence of intelligent action. Both kinds are properly described as had; the person undergoes them, enjoyed them and/or suffers them. The first are not known; they are not understood; they are dispensations of fortune or providence. The experienced ones give meanings that present the funded outcome of operations that substitute definite continuity for experienced discontinuity and for the fragmentary quality due to isolation. In this way of Dewey describe existence without presupposing a dualism between appearance and reality.

### 2.3.7 Experience as a method

An experience may be such as to engender callousness; it may produce lack of sensitivity and of responsiveness. Then the possibilities of having richer experience in the future are restricted. Again, a given experience may increase a person's automatic skill in a particular direction and yet tend to land him in a groove or rut; the effect again is to narrow the field of further experience. An experience may be immediately enjoyable and yet promote the formation of a slack and careless attitude; this attitude then operates to modify the quality of subsequent experiences so as to prevent a person from getting out of them what they have to give. Again, experiences may be so disconnected from one another that, while each is agreeable or even exciting in itself, they are not linked cumulatively to one another. Energy is then dissipated and a person becomes scatter- brained.

Traditional education offers a surplus of examples of experiences of the kinds. It is a great mistake to suppose, even tacitly, that the traditional schoolroom was not a place in which pupils had experiences. Yet this is tacitly assumed when progressive education as a plan of learning by experience is placed in sharp opposition to the old. The proper line of attack is that the experiences, which were had, by pupils and teachers alike, were largely of a wrong kind. How many students, for example, were rendered callous to ideas, and how many lost the impetus to learn because of the Way in which learning was experienced by them? How many acquired special skills by means of automatic drill so that their power of judgment and capacity to act intelligently in new situations was limited? How many found what they did learn so foreign to the situations of life outside the school as to give them no power of control over the latter?

For generations, philosophy started examining situations with various theoretical conceptions such as “substances”, “mind and body”, “pleasure as natural aim”, *inter alia*. Dewey criticized such kind of presuppositions in a Meta philosophical perspective. That is how these conceptions enter into the practice of philosophy as presuppositions. He reversed a situation where philosophy puts the (theoretical) cart before the (practical) horse. Which terms and theories are

*necessary* for an analysis of a novel situation should never be the issue. Nevertheless, much philosophy has assumed such necessities. This is a theoretical starting point that only produces endless dialectical exchanges that has caricatured and hollowed out many complex and changeable subject matters. It isolates philosophy from empiricism which could engage with humanity's most important problems.

### 2.3.8 Reconstruction in moral concepts

According to John Dewey alteration in methods of scientific thinking has an impact in that Goods or Ends are multiplied. Rules are softened into principles and principles are modified into methods of understanding. Ethical theory traces its roots from the Greeks in the attempt of finding regulations of human conduct and giving it a rational basis rather than leaving it to dictates of custom. In addition Ethical theory has the task of discovering some final end or good or some ultimate supreme law. This is the common element in the diversity of theories whether the end is taken as loyalty, obedience to a higher power or authority understood as Divine Will or the rational consciousness. All theories agree that there is a single, fixed and final good. Dewey suggests a pragmatic rule where in order to discover the meaning of an idea the consequences have to be examined. "...it surprisingly turns out that the primary significance of the unique and morally ultimate character of the concrete situation is to transfer the weight and burden of morality to intelligence". (Dewey, 1920). This means that responsibility is not destroyed but only located. It calls for judgment and choice antecedently in order to overt action since there are conflicting desires and alternative apparent goods. The subject needs to find the right action in terms of the right good. This requires an intelligent process which includes observation of the detailed makeup of the situation, analysis into its diverse factors; clarification of what is obscure, tracing the consequences of the various modes of action. In the end the objective here is to "adopt the moral reflection of the logic that has been proved to make for security, stringency and fertility in passing judgments upon physical phenomena" (Dewey, 1920)

Moral theory has always been burdened by rules and fixed ends which need to be transferred to the detection of ills that need remedy in a special case and the formation of plans and methods of dealing with them. This helps in eliminating controversies from moral theory and making it more practical. Moral theory that is fixed leads thought to disputes that cannot be settled. However the question of *summum bonum* that is the highest good, one supreme end still persists. What is this *summum bonum*? Natural ends such as health, wealth, honor or good name, friendship, beauty sometimes conflict with each other calling for a standard to decide the right way. General good can never be attained. Action is always concrete, individualized and unique. Meaning that every action where good is to be achieved must be accompanied by judgments that are rational. Again the concepts of health and justice do not mean exactly the same thing exactly as it means to any other person. "In every action in search of good each situation has its own unique end and the whole personality should be concerned with it" (Dewey 1920). As far as health is concerned, what a particular person needs is to live healthily and this end affects the activities of his whole life. His intelligence has to be free and flexible rather than rigid and dogmatic.

Moral goods call for an action to be done to overcome deficiencies and evils in particular situations. This helps to discover the good of the situation from within since the good can never be injected into the situation from without. On this Dewey says;

Yet it is the part of wisdom to compare different cases, to gather the ills from which humanity suffers, and to generalize the corresponding goodness into classes. Health, wealth, industry, temperance, amiability, courtesy, learning, esthetic capacity, initiative, courage, patience, enterprise, thoroughness and multiple of other generalized ends are acknowledged as goods. But the value of this systematization is intellectual or analytic (Dewey 1920, 67).

John Dewey affirms that morals are neither catalogue of acts nor a set of rules to be applied like medical prescription.

### 2.3.9 Education as Basis of Ethical and Social Theory

Dewey's point of departure can be located in the emergence and development of the term “ethics”. The origin and determination of the said term accurately defined in ancient Greek philosophy includes the behavioral ways, the customs and habits, as does the corresponding Latin term “moral” to which he ascribed equivalent importance. This definition, as to the contents of ethics, viewpoint adopted by Dewey led him to neither accept nor espouse any form of transcendence in the establishment of ethical rules, but to adopt an empirical and naturalistic viewpoint that is subject to a specific order: first of all, to “habit” that is born out of necessity and the repetition of sound ways and practices and is therefore recorded and applied as a necessary condition for the survival and evolution of man; second, to “customs” which are perceived and act as a recording, adoption and application of consistent precepts ensuring them; third, to “behavior” that follows the efficacy of habits and ethos, whilst at the same time and within the development of things, solves the problems that arise from the existing and simultaneously evolving viewpoint. If, subsequently, we examine the term “ethics” and the parallel term “moral” from a wider perspective, we can conclude that, as Dewey advocated, they are closely linked to “conduct”. (Dewey, 1909) It is to be noted that conduct, as well as attitude and behavior, undoubtedly relates to practices and always has a form of empirical basis. However, they are neither dealt with the limitation of each event’s viewpoint either perceived or comprehended the event in general from the viewpoint of the values they possess or create. This gives rise to a value system that can have a normative function, yet arises and is renewed by the existence of problems, by real life itself. It should be noted that it is within this framework that Dewey explored the notions of good.

Dewey's theory of knowledge is intimately linked to ethics in its founding conceptual framework and naturalistic standpoint, Ethics and knowledge according to Dewey are complementary in nature due to the social dimension of inquiry both in its processes and its consequences. The human individual according to Dewey is a social being from the start, and the individual satisfaction and achievement can be realized only within the context of social habits and institutions that promote it. In this way Dewey rejected Thomas Hobbes theory of social contract which holds that the cooperative aspect of the human life is founded on a logically contracted pact based on the interests of the individual thereby rising from the jungle law to a moral law. In

*Experience and Nature* Dewey advances the theory that the collections of meanings that constitute the mind have a social origin.

Moral and social problems are about guidance of human action in the pursuit conventionally accepted objectives that serve the human life that make meaning and give satisfaction to the individual within the social context. The ends, goods or objectives which satisfy the individual are however defined within social-historical contexts. In his book *Ethics* he emphasizes that ends are the cultivation of interests that recommend themselves in the light of calm reflection. Dewey therefore has an ethical concern of the individual and the collective means for their realization as the paramount question of his political policy. Dewey argues in *School and Society* and *Democracy and Education*, that learning on democracy and social interaction must begin in the earliest years of a child's educational experience. Dewey rejected the notion that a child's education should be viewed as merely a preparation for civil life, during which disjoint facts and ideas are conveyed by the teacher and memorized by the student only to be utilized later on. The school should rather be viewed as an extension of civil society and continuous with it, and the student encouraged to operate as a member of a community, actively pursuing interests in cooperation with others. It is by a process of self-directed learning, guided by the cultural resources provided by teachers that Dewey believed a child is best prepared for the demands of responsible membership within the democratic community.

Dewey's submissions reminisces the Aristotelian ethics, concentrating on the central role of habit in formulating the dispositions of action that comprise character. This shows the importance of reflective intelligence as a means of not only modifying habits but also controlling disruptive desires and impulses in the pursuit of ends that are worthwhile.

### 3. Conclusion

The main objective was to presents Dewey's philosophy of education in relation to Ethics. The study has achieved this by examining and affirming the relationship between education and ethics as exemplified by virtues in the integral development of the personality. The study clearly demonstrated that neither education nor ethics exists alone in an integrated personality. The study further analyzed Dewey's theory of inquiry from the perspective of the relation of the subject to the object, progress in education with the emphasis of learning by doing and psychology as the basis of learning since learning begins at self-consciousness culminating in the analysis of Dewey's concept of experience of knowing, perception and the positive account of experience where experience is taken as a method. The paper examined the practical end of education which Dewey demonstrated by tracing the theoretical foundation of human conduct from the Greeks and giving it a rational nature rather than leaving it to the dictates of custom. Hence progressive education becomes the basis of man's life as demonstrated in his ethical, social and political aspects. The implication of Dewey's theory on progressive education is a call to integrated education curriculum where the teacher guides the learner to solve everyday problems thereby transforming education from mere theories to a tool of pragmatic life guided by a code of Ethics.

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