

What Can Pakistan Learn From John Dewey?

"My Lord! Enrich me with knowledge.." (Quran, 20:114)

Zoab Mirza

Ultimate Medical Academy, FL, USA

[Abstract] This article offers a reflection on John Dewey's educational theories to determine which aspects could be used to inform and define a new educational system in Pakistan. The analysis focuses on main Dewey's main themes on democracy, ethical principles, and progressive education tenets that may be useful in re-engineering educational systems. It describes and analyses two landmark publications by John Dewey written in 1916, *Democracy And Education: An Introduction to The Philosophy of Education* and *Education for Social Change*.

[Keywords] Democracy, Educational Philosophy, Comparative Education, Participative Decision Making

Democratic Conception in Education

Key concepts of Dewey's ideas and structural features for developing and maintaining democratic education can help develop a conceptual framework as other countries seek to implement such structures. Democratic education has the potential to educate citizens to become the effective change agents in transforming their society. In his early writings, Dewey emphasizes that education improves our society and his ideas focuses on working towards an ideal democratic society. He envisioned that education could reduce the boundaries between class, race, and national origin to focus on the common interest of the citizens. He suggested that educators should work with an understanding of societies and with an ideal society. Dewey provides various notions of society to identify an ideal one and reviewed three historic philosophies of education to indicate what educators will have to accomplish to build toward such an ideal society.

The Implication of Human Association

Society is comprised of people who come from a various diverse group representing various political, cultural and religious sectors. To this point, Dewey (1916) writes "the terms society, community, are thus ambiguous" (Dewey, 1916, p. 95) because there is not one unity, but the division of societies with that have good and bad influences. The influences are driven by criminals, political, business and religious agendas which impacts the common man who despite any education is forced to follow the norms of the society which has resulted in low literacy rate and economic disparity. Dewey explains that society can have two different meaning one *de jure* (in law) and one *de facto* (in practice). According to Dewey (1916), *de jure* is a society that would correspond to a united whole. However, he has suggested that some societies of human associations comprise this society *de jure*. There are *de factors* that hinder in making sure that the society operates as one. With various practices, it is important to acknowledge the differences and find common groups to increase the number of common interests of the members of the society *de jure*.

The Democratic Ideal

Dewey defines an ideal society as democratic. Democratic society as defined by Dewey has two elements. First, in addition to various points of views of shared common interest, there should be strong collaboration between those who have those mutual interests. Second, continuous improvement that leads to changes to common interests that can lead to the betterment of society. A democratic society would eliminate the barriers existing between the conflicting interests to sustain the common interests of the citizens. This will allow the society to be mobile as it goes through collective changes based on common interests, instead of being caught in changes that are not relevant.

A key driver of democracy is communication. Irrespective of various caste, creed, and system the common thread that connects everyone is communication without which a democratic system will fail.

The Platonic Educational Philosophy

Dewey focuses on the Platonic educational philosophy that society is organized when every member in it does what is useful to others. Platonic goals of education were to identify the abilities that members would apply to do what is useful to others and to develop those skills. Plato defined three classes of people – lower, middle and ruling and that education would assign everyone to one of these classes. Dewey admired that Plato recognized the three classes and that education varies based on it. But, he emphasized that this will limit social progress and that there are more levels of classes based on the types of people, and it not be fixed to the three classes defined by Plato and not appropriate for a democratic ideal.

The social, political, and economic system in Pakistan has not promoted the mindset to support others. Every community is only focused on working for the welfare of their people, which has resulted in many political parties, caste, and creed.

The “Individualistic” Ideal of the Eighteenth Century

Dewey explains that Rousseau’s educational philosophy is antisocial where the objective of Rousseau’s movement was the liberation of the individual from the prejudices of the feudal society. This had entailed replacing the feudal system by the ideal of humanity.

Education as National and as Social

Dewey explains the political state of Germany in the nineteenth century after the end of the Napoleonic war which separated Germans between the Kingdom of Prussia, the Russian Empire and the Austrian Empire. In this context, German nationalism had emerged. According to Dewey, the naturalistic ideal of Rousseau was not adequate to supply nationalists with patriots. Germans decided to develop an organized system of education. This system aimed at raising patriotic citizens.

The Need of an Industrial Education in an Industrial Democracy

Dewey explained that due to accidental inequalities, the current democratic system had created a feudal society where few people have more power than the others. Social democracy is a moral democracy which provides wide and varied opportunities for everyone to grow and prosper. This can happen when there are wide and varied opportunities available for everyone, ideas and experiences can be freely shared, and common interests and proposals can be created and supported

by the social and political organization. This will bridge the social and economic gap between people at various ranks within an industry. Otherwise, there will be stratified classes which created a feudal society. To avoid creation of a feudal system, Dewey urges that we change our methods in education to teach students to have lifelong learning skills to adjust to changing times, instead of learning skills specific which might get obsolete. There should be no segregation of technical and non-technical skills which can also create classes. The education system should not focus on tasks that are repetitive and can become obsolete. Change is constant and our education should create a mindset for learners to be able to adapt and learn with changing times.

Ethical Principles Underlying Education

Dewey attempts to validate the importance of schools as an integral part of the social life of a community and the development of ethical characteristics of students. He advocates for an end to rote memorization and isolated learning, to one where instruction emphasizes construction and giving out. Dewey speaks of presenting subjects like math and history into a context that is relevant to the student. Dewey (1916) advocates for history being taught by relating the past to the present. This brings social value into the characteristics of the student. Dewey (1916) connected the inability to expect a well-rounded, mentally adjusted, and engaged student if they were taught in a format that did not allow for the individual growth and ownership of their learning. He focused on putting learning into practice with an emphasis on judgment and contributing to the betterment of the society. Learning through experience is key, but it should be a positively unique experience that can be measured with a defined, monitored outcome. The outcome should be applied to the nature of learning and its environment.

Progressive Organization of Subject Matter

Dewey (1938) addresses the use of standardizing subject matter in schools and recommends to replace it with a more experienced-based process of learning. He recommends that the beginning of all instruction must start from the current experiences that learners already have and that should be in line with the course content which is expanded through the growth of that experience. He believes these measures are ignored. He focused on reconstructing experiences into a form that allows an individual to continue to learn from experience to promote continuous growth. Contact with people, incidents, and events expand the horizon of our experience which makes the process of education enduring. Therefore it is the role of the educators to create learning experiences within the existing experiences that presents new problems and link present to the future, which is the basis for progressive education.

Dewey focuses on the scientific methods that allow ideas to be framed as hypotheses, not mere truths as they are to be continuously tested and revised to be verified thoroughly. Additionally, the scientific system keeps track of ideas, activities, and consequences. It provides a reflective review and summary for further developing experience. Therefore progressive education must use a scientific approach in dealing with the issue of organization of subject matter through cause and effect, thus making it creative and dynamic always

The Global Receptions of John Dewey's Thought

John Dewey was not only influential in education and social reforms within the USA, but Rust (2012) shares that he made an impact on Spain, Argentina, Mexico, Chicago, Japan, Brazil, Mozambique, Portugal, Germany, and Russia. A prominent Soviet scholar at Marburg University

stated that “John Dewey is far and away the most influential voice of the century.” (Rust, 2012, p. 721). Bruno and Schriewer (2012) explain that Dewey global inspirations were able to attract educators in Latin America, and Spain, who were anti-traditional in their educational practices, mostly liberal in politico-social reforms, and advocates of secular tradition. Dewey promoted measures that separated the state from the Church to “free education from religious dogmatism but still kept a transcendental vision of the human being.” (Bruno & Schriewer, 2012, p. 21)

Conclusion

Since its partition from India in 1947, Pakistan has been struggling to improve literacy rates in the country, which is currently one of the lowest in the world. Multiple reasons attribute to lower literacy rates, but one of the main reason is due to the past military dictators and democratic leaders. Having failed by becoming corrupt in the social, political and economic systems, they could not improve the education system. In August 2018, a new leader, Imran Khan after 22 years of hardship and struggle became the first Prime Minister of Pakistan. He has been able to break the status quo and has embraced policies for the betterment of the citizens of Pakistan. His goal is to increase literacy rates, improve education quality of government and religious schools, and provide skill-based learning.

Dewey explanations about a democratic education, as described in this article, are all very applicable to the current educational state in Pakistan. Although Dewey’s thoughts date to the early 1900’s, the issues that he stated are valid to the current situation of Pakistan, which continues since the partition of Pakistan from India in 1947 with continuous political, social, and economic opportunities.

In light of Dewey’s work, it is important that if Pakistan needs to improve its education system, it needs to create a democratic environment that promotes social equity and justice. Pakistan has 11 major political parties and 28 regional parties, with a strong overall influence of feudal lords who have impacted the social, political and economic conditions of the masses and led to the current lower literacy rate of the country. As Dewey, focuses on finding common interests, it is important that all political parties acknowledge their differences and focus on common interests for the betterment of the society.

Dewey explains German independence. The series of events explained by Dewey is similar to how Pakistan came into existence. Pakistan got independence from India by freely practice Islam as their religion, and later from Bangladesh due to religions and political difference. Pakistan’s constitution clearly states that all the practices should be in accordance with the Quran (the holy book) and the Sunnah (authentic practices of Prophet Mohammed Peace Be Upon Him). So far Pakistan has not defined its education system that supports the identity of the constitution. Although Dewey separates states from Church, in Pakistan both are an integral part of one education system.

There is hope with the new leadership in Pakistan. Therefore, it is a great opportunity to apply Dewey’s pragmatic principles and focused on developing skills that can prepare the Pakistan students for the future. The only difference would be to figure out how to make Islamic philosophy as one of the foundations of the education system.

References

Bruno-Jofré, R., & Schriewer, J. (2012). The global reception of John Dewey's thought: Multiple refractions through time and space. *Routledge International Studies in the Philosophy of*

- Education*, 28. Routledge.
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. Macmillan.
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Education for social change*. New York: Macmillan.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education*. Macmillan.
- Rust, V. (2012). *Comparative Education Review*, 56(4), 721-723. doi:10.1086/668489