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With Socrates on Your Heels and Descartes in Your Hand: On the Notion of Conflict in John Dewey's *Democracy and Education*

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Abstract: This paper is about the notion of conflict in the work of John Dewey. Special attention is given to *Democracy and Education* (1916) because of its centennial and its acclaimed status of "magnum opus". After depicting "conflicts as gadflies" that stir thinking—reflection and ingenuity—and relating it to Socrates, in particular, we present a definition of conflict that guides our research. From then on a detailed analysis is carried out on the different notions of conflict in *Democracy and Education*. It is concluded that Dewey spends considerable attention to the place of conflict in education in *Democracy and Education*. We identified 14 distinct references to conflict. The notions range from conflicts between traditional and modern education, retrospective and prospective aims of education, the conflict between closing off and opening up of education, social and national aims of education, conflicts between certain knowledge and thinking, between ready-made and problem-posing education, between holding to customs and tradition or aiming at social change, between easy to chew education or allowing to make mistakes, between researching contrary beliefs or following proclaimed truth, conflicts between individual aims or the aim of society, and vocational versus intellectual education. Conflicts are conditional for "reflection and ingenuity" is Dewey's most iconic conception of conflicts. Conflicts challenge thought by questioning and doubting certain knowledge. The act involves a risk. We ask two questions at the end of this paper. The first is about the nature of contradictions and the second is about the use of conflicts in education. We propose that Dewey was too engaged in resolving contradictions and dualism to understand the positive, constructive, and conditional nature of conflicts for education. We need our opponents to grow and we suggest that we probably do not use them enough in education. Concerning the practical use of conflicts in education, Dewey expects a lot from dialogical cooperation and communication which will bring agreement and certainty. Dewey does not engage in confronting power, though he has a clear view on injustice in society, neither does he give prolific directions for including conflicts as a teaching method in education.

Keywords: John Dewey; Democracy and Education; education; teaching; conflicts

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> A Socrates is thus led to declare that consciousness of ignorance is the beginning of effective love of wisdom, and a Descartes to say that science is born of doubting [1] (p. 147).

1. Introduction: Conflicts as Gadflies and Their Role in Education

Being part of a culture that had recently discovered the power of conflict through the ideas of Darwin in biology, Marx in sociology, and Freud in psychology, John Dewey reflected in the following way on the idea and use of conflicts in philosophy and education:

> What is to be done with these facts of disharmony and conflict? After we have discovered the place and consequences of conflict in nature, we have still to discover its place and working in human need and thought. What is its office, its function, its possibility, or use? In general, the answer is simple. Conflict is the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observation and memory. It instigates to invention. It shocks us out of sheep-like passivity, and sets us at noting and contriving. Not that it always effects this result; but that conflict is a sine qua non of reflection and ingenuity. When this possibility of making use of conflict has once been noted, it is possible to utilize it systematically to substitute the arbitration of mind for that of brutal attack and brute collapse [2] (p. 301).

There can be no doubt that the gadfly metaphor is a reference to Plato's *Apology* where Socrates compares himself to a gadfly:

> And now, Athenians, I am not going to argue for my own sake, as you may think, but for yours, that you may not sin against the God by condemning me, who am his gift to you. For if you kill me you will not easily find a successor to me, who, if I may use such a ludicrous figure of speech, am a sort of gadfly, given to the state by God; and the state is a great and noble steed who is tardy in his motions owing to his very size, and requires to be stirred into life. I am that gadfly which God has attached to the state, and all day long and in all places am always fastening upon you, arousing and persuading and reproaching you. You will not easily find another like me, and therefore I would advise you to spare me. I dare say that you may feel out of temper (like a person who is suddenly awakened from sleep), and you think that you might easily strike me dead as Anytus advises, and then you would sleep on for the remainder of your lives, unless God in his care of you sent you another gadfly [3] (p. 2).

Socrates not only explains the need for gadflies, but reminds us also to regard gadflies as a gift: love thy enemies. Of course he knows that those in power do not like gadflies and nor do the common people. Dewey states clearly, however, that conflicts are necessary to start thinking [2]. Conflicts act as a gadfly. Most of us do not like gadflies and are disposed to swat them immediately. Neither do we like conflicts and we are inclined to avoid or deny them or, even worse, destroy those who cause conflicts. This, however, may not be a good idea, since their function, as Dewey argues, is to awaken reflection and thinking.

The question Dewey raises is how we could use conflicts for solving our problems, or in his words, promote progress, without violence but by using intelligence instead. Dewey wants to awaken people to live deliberately, is critical of conventions, and wants to facilitate individual growth and transform society through education into a more democratic form. Dewey criticised the formalistic and disconnected character of education of his day. It seems that he wanted to awaken the intellectual establishment. As we will discuss below, *Democracy and Education* can be seen as one ongoing denunciation of all kinds of habits, conventions, and old theories that determined education in Dewey's days [1]. Dewey, being the gadfly, criticizes the existing situation and offers inspiring alternatives.

If conflicts stimulate thought and reflection, then the question this raises is why we do not use conflicts in education, as a method for promoting reflectivity and ingenuity. Why does much education persist in an endless separation of buildings, disciplines, and courses offering a disconnected cafeteria-counter curriculum [4] without using the power of contradiction and controversial issues in education? The discussion or "disputation" of controversies is necessary "as a tool in the construction of knowledge". According to Dascal [5], Leibniz argued that intellectual "cooperation would be best

served by infusing it with a critical spirit that values the confrontation of opposed positions, not for the doubtful pleasure of winning, but for its potential contribution to advancing our knowledge. Rather than presuming harmony, knowledge should be built out of the variety of diverging views" [5] (p. xxi). In this paper we explore Dewey's views about the value of conflicts in education, focusing on his book *Democracy and Education*.

There are not only many conflicts in life but also many definitions and descriptions of what conflicts are (see, for example, [6–9]). The Cambridge on-line dictionary provides the following definitions: (a) "a conflict is an active disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principles"; and (b) "a fighting between two or more groups of people or countries" [10]. For the purpose of this paper we suggest to see conflicts as severe contradictory opinions about principles and ideas concerning knowledge, behaviour, and practices. Conflicts can be about goals, interests, and values and all different spheres of life, the truth, the good, and the beautiful, can be subject to conflicts. Forms of struggle and fight and dichotomous oppositions are key elements of conflicts. Conflicts can be latent ("cold") or manifest ("warm"). Latent conflicts can be characterised by frozen communication, apathy, procedures of avoiding contact, or full separation and written bureaucratization. Manifest conflicts can be characterized by the adoration of "sacred ideals", celebrating leaders, and crushing collision [9] (pp. 55–92). To become a manifest conflict the contradictions within a conflict need an active encounter or confrontation. Contradictions and conflicts become destructive when the encounter or confrontation is aimed at conquering the other or even eliminating the other(ness). "Violent conflicts are extreme forms of confrontation, where latent antagonisms become explicit and apparently irresolvable except by the use of force" [7] (p. 281). Contradictions and conflicts, on the other hand, become constructive when the encounter or confrontation aims at changing or improving knowledge and understanding.

2. Notions of Conflict in *Democracy and Education*

We have identified 14 distinct references to notions of conflict in *Democracy and Education* [1]. We have listed them in the table below (Table 1), indicating where the notion emerges and trying to characterise the conflict at stake. In the sections that follow we present the different ways in which Dewey discusses conflict in *Democracy and Education* and provide brief commentaries.

Table 1. References to notions of conflict in *Democracy and Education.*

Number	Chapter	Page	Nature of Conflict
1	4. Education as Growth	34	Traditional versus Progressive
2	6. Education as Conservative and Progressive	59	Past versus Future
3	7. The Democratic Concept in Education	69	Closing off versus Opening up
4		77	Personal versus National
5	11. Experience and Thinking	116	Knowledge versus Thinking
6	12. Thinking in Education	122	Easy versus Difficult
7	14. The Nature of Subject Matter	146–147	Certainty versus Uncertainty
8	15. Play and Work	153	Domesticated versus Wild
9	18. Values in Education	181	Person versus Society
11	20. Intellectual and Practical Studies	178–245	Dualism as a problem of its own
		203	Theory versus Practice
12	22. Individual and World	226	Knowledge versus Thinking
13	23. Vocational Aspects	238	Vocational versus Cultural Education
14	24. Philosophy of Education	249	Certainty versus Uncertainty

2.1. Traditional versus Progressive Education

Dewey often made reference in his work to the conflict between traditional education, aiming at conformity, and education aiming at communicating experiences and changing society in a democratic spirit. In the paragraph below we find Dewey's views on the conflict between traditional closed off (retrospective and conservative) and modern open (progressive and democratic) education.

> Natural instincts are either disregarded or treated as nuisances—as obnoxious traits to be suppressed, or at all events to be brought into conformity with external standards. Since conformity is the aim, what is distinctively individual in a young person is brushed aside, or regarded as a source of mischief or anarchy. Conformity is made equivalent to uniformity. Consequently, there are induced lack of interest in the novel, aversion to progress, and dread of the uncertain and the unknown. Since the end of growth is outside of and beyond the process of growing, external agents have to be resorted to induce movement toward it. Whenever a method of education is stigmatized as mechanical, we may be sure that external pressure is brought to bear to reach an external end [1] (p. 43).

We read this first explicit mention of conflict in *Democracy and Education* as the conflict between conventional educational thoughts and the conflicting nature of young and new people that have a right to live their future lives. The idea of immaturity as a positive power for growth is essential for Dewey's philosophy of education. This paragraph also resonates very well with the gadfly metaphor. In fact, the function of youth should neither be ignored nor destroyed, but viewed as a moment of reflection, an impulse for learning.

2.2. Past versus Future

Dewey strongly criticizes education that seeks it goals in the past (retrospective) or in parents either through "recapitulation", "unfolding", or "training faculties". Instead, he urges us to search for goals in the future. Growth and change do not come from "a strict traversing of past stages", Dewey claims:

> Development, in short, has taken place by the entrance of shortcuts and alterations in the prior scheme of growth. And this suggests that the aim of education is to facilitate such short-circuited growth. The great advantage of immaturity, educationally speaking, is that it enables us to emancipate the young from the need of dwelling in an outgrown past. The business of education is rather to liberate the young from reviving and retraversing the past than to lead them to a recapitulation of it. The social environment of the young is constituted by the presence and action of the habits of thinking and feeling of civilized men. To ignore the directive influence of this present environment upon the young is simply to abdicate the educational function [1] (p. 59).

This second notion of conflict in *Democracy and Education* is getting closer to the conflict in (school) education itself. What are we doing there? Are we refreshing what we already know, offering boring stuff and pouring it in inactive receptive minds that reproduce the knowledge on exams? Or are we looking with them on what is going on outside, now, trying to understand it and improve it with the help of older "certain" knowledge and habits that have proven its value? This realization leads Dewey to probably his most quoted statement a few pages further on, where he presents a technical definition of education as "a reconstruction or reorganisation of experience which adds to the meaning of experience and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience." [1] (p. 62). It is conceivable that such a definition entails the encounter with conflicts.

2.3. Closing Off versus Opening Up Education

Wars are ultimate responses to conflicts and intend to kill and destroy. During Dewey's long life many wars were fought and the alleged benefits of war related to development of species or nations were much discussed in and beyond social Darwinism. Dewey promotes free interchange (interaction), free communication, different life experiences, and democratic relations throughout *Democracy and Education*:

> The essential point is that isolation makes for rigidity and formal institutionalizing of life, for static and selfish ideals within the group. That savage tribes regard aliens and

> enemies as synonymous is not accidental. It springs from the fact that they have identified their experience with rigid adherence to their past customs. On such a basis it is wholly logical to fear intercourse with others, for such contact might dissolve custom. It would certainly occasion reconstruction. It is a commonplace that an alert and expanding mental life depends upon an enlarging range of contact with the physical environment. But the principle applies even more significantly to the field where we are apt to ignore it—the sphere of social contacts. Every expansive era in the history of mankind has coincided with the operation of factors which have tended to eliminate distance between peoples and classes previously hemmed off from one another. Even the alleged benefits of war, so far as more than alleged, spring from the fact that conflict of peoples at least enforces intercourse between them and thus accidentally enables them to learn from one another, and thereby to expand their horizons. Travel, economic and commercial tendencies, have at present gone far to break down external barriers; to bring peoples and classes into closer and more perceptible connection with one another [1] (p. 69).

Here Dewey states, literally, that intercourse and openness evoke and demand reconstruction of knowledge and practices, and that closing off and sticking to one's own customs will obstruct growth and development and the expansion of horizons, a key element of Dewey's philosophy of education as laid down in chapter four. Surely Dewey cannot be accused of extolling warfare, but even more than war, he despised isolation and rigidity, let alone to regard aliens as enemies.

2.4. Personal versus National Education

In the same chapter on democracy Dewey relates conflicts more fundamentally to the political organisation of a nation. He is very well aware of the danger of state interest in education (Germany, for example) for pursuing its goals compared to the interests of individuals or groups or society as distinguished from the state:

> One of the fundamental problems of education in and for a democratic society is set by the conflict of a nationalistic and a wider social aim. (...) This contradiction (for it is nothing less) between the wider sphere of associated and mutually helpful social life and the narrower sphere of exclusive and hence potentially hostile pursuits and purposes, exacts of educational theory a clearer conception of the meaning of "social" as a function and test of education than has yet been attained. Is it possible for an educational system to be conducted by a national state and yet the full social ends of the educative process not be restricted, constrained, and corrupted? [1] (p. 77).

Dewey's question is still very relevant, probably even more in today's complex societies, which rely heavily on the quality, content, and "output" of education for their prosperity. Dewey's contemporary, the Indian pedagogue and poet Tagore, was even more aware of the specific Western attitude towards nationalism and its effect on education [11]. Both share common thoughts and aspirations:

> The emphasis [of democratic education] must be put upon whatever binds people together in cooperative human pursuits and results, apart from geographical limitations. (...) This conclusion is bound up with the very idea of education as a freeing of individual capacity in a progressive growth directed to social aims. Otherwise a democratic criterion of education can only be inconsistently applied [1] (p. 78).

2.5. Knowledge versus Thinking

In chapter 11, Experience and Thinking, Dewey distinguishes between experience and mere activity. An experience involves change but should be "consciously connected with the return wave of consequences which flow from it". This is where thinking comes in making "reflective experience" different from "blind and capricious trial and error":

> To say that thinking occurs with reference to situations which are still going on, and incomplete, is to say that thinking occurs when things are uncertain or doubtful or problematic. Only what is finished, completed, is wholly assured. Where there is reflection there is suspense. The object of thinking is to help reach a conclusion, to project a possible termination on the basis of what is already given. Certain other facts about thinking accompany this feature. Since the situation in which thinking occurs is a doubtful one, thinking is a process of inquiry, of looking into things, of investigating. Acquiring is always secondary, and instrumental to the act of inquiring. It is seeking, a quest, for something that is not at hand. (...) It also follows that all thinking involves a risk. Certainty cannot be guaranteed in advance. The invasion of the unknown is of the nature of an adventure; we cannot be sure in advance. The conclusions of thinking, till confirmed by the event, are, accordingly, more or less tentative or hypothetical [1] (p. 116).

Here Dewey hints at the act of learning from experience through reflection, something that happens in the "twilight zone" when things are uncertain. He mentions a few general features of such a reflective experience. When there is no evident answer to an experience and more responses are possible, thinking starts, and learning starts. Dewey is not against knowledge, since it "controls thinking and makes it fruitful", but Dewey seems to argue that "going to school" could be somewhat of a dangerous enterprise as it entails the possibility that you will be changed, at least if you want to learn something new and not remain in your own local parochialism.

2.6. Easy versus Difficult Education

In chapter 12, Thinking in Education, we are getting closer to the art of teaching itself. Of course Dewey stresses the doing of something, to experience and think about something, rather than just mentally or intellectually rehearse sure knowledge: "The doing is of such nature as to demand thinking, or the intentional noting of connection" [1] (p. 120). But how?

> The material of thinking is not thoughts, but actions, facts, events, and the relations of things. In other words, to think effectively one must have had, or now have, experiences which will furnish him resources for coping with the difficulty at hand. A difficulty is an indispensable stimulus to thinking, but not all difficulties call out thinking. Sometimes they overwhelm and submerge and discourage. The perplexing situation must be sufficiently like situations which have already been dealt with so that pupils will have some control of the meanings of handling it. A large part of the art of instruction lies in making the difficulty of new problems large enough to challenge thought, and small enough so that, in addition to the confusion naturally attending the novel elements, there shall be luminous familiar spots from which helpful suggestions may spring [1] (p. 122).

As we have seen earlier, thinking is inseparably connected to experience, and experience should be difficult, not too difficult, to serve as educational material. Dewey did not like "sugar coated" education.

2.7. Certainty versus Uncertainty

Number seven in our list of direct references to conflicts in *Democracy and Education* is important since it refers to the unsettling function of education, while these days education's first deliverance seems to be safety. The result of inquiry is knowledge, to cut it short, yet this cherished result seems to capture humans in a retentive spirit. Do we not know that the "battle" of experience and thinking goes on? Yet, we fall asleep again, unnoticed. That is why we need the gadfly or infuse him in our education.

> The mind of man is taken captive by the spoils of its prior victories; the spoils, not the weapons and the acts of waging the battle against the unknown, are used to fix the meaning of knowledge, of fact, and truth [1] (p. 146).

> In its honorable sense, knowledge is distinguished from opinion, guesswork, speculation, and mere tradition. In knowledge, things are ascertained; they are so and not dubiously otherwise. But experience makes us aware that there is difference between intellectual certainty of subject matter and our certainty. We are made, so to speak, for belief; credulity is natural. The undisciplined mind is averse to suspense and intellectual hesitation; it is prone to assertion. It likes things undisturbed, settled, and treats them as such without due warrant. Familiarity, common repute, and congeniality to desire are readily made measuring rods of truth. Ignorance gives way to opinionated and current error,—a greater foe to learning than ignorance itself. A Socrates is thus led to declare that consciousness of ignorance is the beginning of effective love of wisdom, and a Descartes to say that science is born of doubting [1] (p. 147).

Education, for Dewey, is an exciting and "dangerous" adventure with Socrates on your heels asking irritating questions and with Descartes in your hand reminding you to doubt whatever you see, hear, or read. Dewey goes more on psychology and preludes the findings of Leon Festinger [12] on cognitive dissonance, when writing:

> Even in the case of failure, we are inclined to put the blame not on the inadequacy and incorrectness of our data and thoughts, but upon our hard luck and the hostility of circumstance. We charge the evil consequence not to the error of our schemes and our incomplete inquiry into conditions (thereby getting material for revising the former and stimulus for extending the latter) but to untoward fate. We even plume ourselves upon our firmness in clinging to our conceptions in spite of the way in which they work out [1] (p. 147).

2.8. Domesticated versus Wild Education

For Dewey learning is a matter of trial and error. Well-organised through reflection and argument, an experience becomes educative. It works by experiencing and experimenting and putting up ideas and knowledge for judgement of truth and effectiveness. Making mistakes is crucial.

> Not merely manual training specifically so called but many traditional kindergarten exercises have erred here. Moreover, opportunity for making mistakes is an incidental requirement. Not because mistakes are ever desirable, but because over zeal to select material and appliances which forbid a chance for mistakes to occur, restricts initiative, reduces judgment to a minimum, and compels the use of methods which are so remote from the complex situations of life that the power gained is of little availability [1] (p. 153).

Dewey makes an interesting statement for not taming or domesticating or sugar-coating education, making it smooth and ready to chew:

> Only by starting with crude material and subjecting it to purposeful handling will he gain the intelligence embodied in finished material. In practice, overemphasis upon formed material leads to an exaggeration of mathematical qualities, since intellect finds its profit in physical things from matters of size, form, and proportion and the relations that flow from them. But these are known only when their perception is a fruit of acting upon purposes which require attention to them [1] (p. 153).

2.9. Person versus Society

In chapter 18 on "Educational values" Dewey engages again in the struggle between the power of personal values, a person's right to his own values and ideas, and those of the given society. In fact Dewey is accusing education of developing a conflict within the person. A situation later intelligently analysed by David Riesman [13] in the 20th century in what he called the "other-directed" personality seeking social approval. Dewey explains:

> His "knowledge" is second-handed; it is only a knowledge that others prize unselfishness as an excellence, and esteem him in the degree in which he exhibits it. Thus there grows up a split between a person's professed standards and his actual ones. A person may be aware of the results of this struggle between his inclinations and his theoretical opinions; he suffers from the conflict between doing what is really dear to him and what he has learned will win the approval of others. But of the split itself he is unaware; the result is a kind of unconscious hypocrisy, an instability of disposition [1] (p. 181).

That is unequivocal. Education is causing a conflict between personal values and societal values. The accusation is extremely urgent since Dewey adds that the child is not aware of it at all, with almost Freudian consequences. Yet, there is a way out of mechanical rehearsal and adherence to social conventions, which is through imagination and play, something Dewey already explored in chapter 15.

> The imagination is the medium of appreciation in every field. The engagement of the imagination is the only thing that makes any activity more than mechanical [1] (p. 181).

> An adequate recognition of the play of imagination as the medium of the realization of every kind of thing which lies beyond the scope of direct physical response is the sole way of escape from mechanical methods in teaching. (...) It is by imagination that symbols are translated over into a direct meaning and integrated with a narrower activity so as to expand and enrich it [1] (p. 182).

2.10. Dualism as a Problem of Its Own

We regard chapters 18–26 as a third part in *Democracy and Education*. In these chapters Dewey fundamentally criticizes the ongoing attempt to separate important aspects of life by presenting them as opposites instead of understanding their connectedness. He subsequently deals with the apparent contradictions like: aims and values; labour and leisure; intellectual and practical studies; theory and practice; physical and social studies; the individual and the world; body and mind; vocational and cultural education; duty and interest, etc. While discussing these dualisms, these alleged oppositions, he persistently tries to prove that this is a misinterpretation. The opposites represent a unity. It is not either or, but and. Dewey regards this as a fundamental conflict in Western thought and he is strongly motivated to change this way of thinking and explains and stresses the interconnectedness of opposites, which has of course major consequences for education.

He discusses the origin of the opposition and the arguments that separate education for the leisure class and the common people and, e.g., divide intellectual and practical labour:

> As livelihood and leisure are opposed, so are theory and practice, intelligence and execution, knowledge and activity. The latter set of oppositions doubtless springs from the same social conditions which produce the former conflict; but certain definite problems of education connected with them make it desirable to discuss explicitly the matter of the relationship and alleged separation of knowing and doing [1] (p. 201).

The major consequences for education could be to challenge and question the "social conditions which produce the former conflict" and "to discuss explicitly the matter of relationship" between the two. Here again we perceive an implicit advocacy for an education that we would like to call a teaching of conflicts themselves. Dewey points to the need to use both elements of the opposition to realise a unity that he desperately seeks in the world and in education: experience and thinking, which is another word for reflective inquiry.

> Experience is always hovering, then, on the edge of pretense, of sham, of seeming, and appearance, in distinction from the reality upon which reason lays hold [1] (p. 203).

2.11. Theory versus Practice

Being a philosopher by heart, Dewey recognizes, nevertheless, the power and need of experience to challenge habit, customs, and existing knowledge. This controversy is about the tension between general statements and opinions about the world and life, and the actual, local, and concrete appearances of phenomena in daily life. It is, in other words, the ongoing confrontation of theory with practice. Dewey foresees and articulates that well-reasoned experiences would certainly disrupt common knowledge and social relations but that the inquiry attitude is necessary to change the world and the way we think about the world.

> Only the single, the uniform, assures coherence and harmony. Out of experience come warrings, the conflict of opinions and acts within the individual and between individuals. From experience no standard of belief can issue, because it is the very nature of experience to instigate all kinds of contrary beliefs, as varieties of local custom proved. Its logical outcome is that anything is good and true to the particular individual which his experience leads him to believe true and good at a particular time and place. Finally practice falls of necessity within experience. Doing proceeds from needs and aims at change. To produce or to make is to alter something; to consume is to alter. All the obnoxious characters of change and diversity thus attach themselves to doing while knowing is as permanent as its object. To know, to grasp a thing intellectually or theoretically, is to be out of the region of vicissitude, chance, and diversity. Truth has no lack; it is untouched by the perturbations of the world of sense. It deals with the eternal and the universal. And the world of experience can be brought under control, can be steadied and ordered, only through subjection to its law of reason [1] (p. 203).

We need reflective experiences that challenge and question our beliefs, ideas, and assumptions. Experiences, in other times and other places, show evolution, change, and diversity. Dewey stresses the interplay of theory—we need a theory to see—and practice, and articulates their different aims.

2.12. Knowledge versus Thinking

As we saw earlier, Dewey strongly believes that we need conflicts to awake us from sheep-like passivity, from our natural credulity, and to stir us to re-think and re-construct our opinions and behaviour. Quite regularly throughout the book Dewey distinguishes between certain and established knowledge and "new" thinking. The latter comprising a risk, and being of an uncertain nature. This conflict is about what certain knowledge and thinking actually is, and the difference between the two. In chapter 22 he writes:

> Yet there is a valid distinction between knowledge which is objective and impersonal, and thinking which is subjective and personal. In one sense, knowledge is that which we take for granted. It is that which is settled, disposed of, established, under control. What we fully know, we do not need to think about. In common phrase, it is certain, assured. And this does not mean a mere feeling of certainty. It denotes not a sentiment, but a practical attitude, a readiness to act without reserve or quibble. Of course we may be mistaken. What is taken for knowledge—for fact and truth—at a given time may not be such. But everything which is assumed without question, which is taken for granted in our intercourse with one another and nature is what, at the given time, is called knowledge. Thinking on the contrary, starts, as we have seen, from doubt or uncertainty. It marks an inquiring, hunting, searching attitude, instead of one of mastery and possession [1] (p. 226).

In chapter 24, Philosophy of Education, Dewey repeats:

> Knowledge, grounded knowledge, is science; it represents objects which have been settled, ordered, disposed of rationally. Thinking, on the other hand, is prospective in reference.

> It is occasioned by an unsettlement and it aims at overcoming a disturbance. Philosophy is thinking what the known demands of us—what responsive attitude it exacts. It is an idea of what is possible, not a record of accomplished fact. Hence it is hypothetical, like all thinking. It presents an assignment of something to be done—something to be tried. Its value lies not in furnishing solutions (which can be achieved only in action) but in defining difficulties and suggesting methods for dealing with them. Philosophy might almost be described as thinking which has become conscious of itself—which has generalized its place, function, and value in experience [1] (p. 248).

> Philosophy was stated to be a form of thinking, which, like all thinking, finds its origin in what is uncertain in the subject matter of experience, which aims to locate the nature of the perplexity and to frame hypotheses for its clearing up to be tested in action [1] (p. 253).

Dewey distinguishes thinking explicitly from knowledge and emphasises the ongoing tension between the two. Thinking is imaginative, hypothetical, trying to define aspects and difficulties, and trying to find ways to deal with matters and issues. Thinking goes beyond that what we already know. At the same time thinking challenges that what we consider true.

2.13. Vocational versus Cultural Education

The chapter on vocational education is, in our view, the most politically-inspired chapter. It entails the conflict between vocational and cultural education and reflects the inequality in society. Dewey regards this antithesis between vocational and cultural education also as a result of the other oppositions he discussed earlier: labour and leisure, theory and practice, body and mind, and mental states and the world. Of course doing and experience become the heart of the argument in this chapter in which all former arguments of doing, real world, experience, and communication return to support the need of concretely experiencing subject matter beyond mere intellectual knowledge transfer. However, Dewey insists on an intellectual appreciation of vocational education forcing both recognition and liberation of vocational education:

> When educators conceive vocational guidance as something which leads up to a definitive, irretrievable, and complete choice, both education and the chosen vocation are likely to be rigid, hampering further growth. In so far, the calling chosen will be such as to leave the person concerned in a permanently subordinate position, executing the intelligence of others who have a calling which permits more flexible play and readjustment. And while ordinary usages of language may not justify terming a flexible attitude of readjustment a choice of a new and further calling, it is such in effect. If even adults have to be on the lookout to see that their calling does not shut down on them and fossilize them, educators must certainly be careful that the vocational preparation of youth is such as to engage them in a continuous reorganization of aims and methods [1] (p. 238).

However, Dewey is very well aware of the abuse that could be made of a specific form of vocational education. He identifies the contrasting vocational and cultural education as means to continue the power distortion between the fortunate and the less fortunate people in society. His worries are taken up by Freire later in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and discussed in detail in concepts as conquest, divide and rule, manipulation, and cultural invasion [14]:

> There is a standing danger that education will perpetuate the older traditions for a select few, and effect its adjustment to the newer economic conditions more or less on the basis of acquiescence in the untransformed, unrationalized, and unsocialized phases of our defective industrial regime. Put in concrete terms, there is danger that vocational education will be interpreted in theory and practice as trade education: as a means of securing technical efficiency in specialized future pursuits. Education would then become

> an instrument of perpetuating unchanged the existing industrial order of society, instead of operating as a means of its transformation [1] (p. 242).

Schutz [15] confirms that Dewey's awareness of the conflict between cultural and vocational education was central to improving democracy (dialogic conflict). Yet he criticizes Dewey's approach to conflict that does not confront the power balance, like, for example Alinsky and Martin Luther King did, but relied on dialogic cooperation for future change. He also confirms the danger Dewey already described. "Dewey-ish approaches to collaboration are completely acceptable, especially since they are increasingly seen as deeply relevant to the new capitalism (...) while still not very threatening (...)" [15].

2.14. Certainty versus Uncertainty

In the chapter titled "Philosophy of Education" Dewey tries to integrate philosophy and education and to overcome the opposition between the two. He concludes that philosophy cannot do without education: "Education is the laboratory in which philosophical distinctions become concrete and are tested" [1] (p. 251); philosophy is the "general theory of education" [1] (p. 250). Considering conflicts in life Dewey states:

> If there are genuine uncertainties in life, philosophies must reflect that uncertainty. If there are different diagnoses of the cause of a difficulty, and different proposals for dealing with it; if, that is, the conflict of interests is more or less embodied in different sets of persons, there must be divergent competing philosophies. With respect to what has happened, sufficient evidence is all that is needed to bring agreement and certainty. The thing itself is sure. But with reference to what it is wise to do in a complicated situation, discussion is inevitable precisely because the thing itself is still indeterminate. One would not expect a ruling class living at ease to have the same philosophy of life as those who were having a hard struggle for existence [1] (p. 249).

A plea for "conflict education" or "teaching controversial issues" can be discerned here. We know that there are lots of "genuine uncertainties in life" and contradictory opinions and bodies of knowledge on issues are easily available. It seems that Dewey opens up a case for giving floor to the teaching of "divergent competing philosophies". Sufficient evidence is probably not enough to bring agreement and certainty. Perhaps this is not really what education should be about if learning and growing is the aim of education. What we need is a well-structured educational approach to deal with contradictory claims to truth and values in education since we have no reasons to assume that conflicts over important issues will disappear (see [16,17], for such an approach).

3. Discussion and Conclusions

In our reading of Democracy and Education we tried to identify ways in which conflict plays a role in Dewey's thinking and in the ideas he put forward in the book. Our reading brought to light a significant number of references to conflicts in education and a more fundamental and overarching treatment of the conflicting dualism in Western history. What can we conclude from this exercise?

We found, as was to be expected, strong arguments in favour of progressive education instead of traditional education; strong arguments for education oriented towards the future instead of the past; strong arguments for opening up to strangers and new ways of thinking instead of closing off to one's own certain knowledge and habits; a strong case for the growth of the person instead of a focus on the aims of society or the nation state. With regard to teaching we find Dewey arguing for the need to make education difficult, complex, and wild instead of reduced, easy to chew, and domesticated. We also found strong arguments for the importance of introducing conflict in education. Dewey's critique on the presence of dualisms in Western thought is present in the conflict of theory versus practice and in the conflict between vocational versus cultural education. All of these tensions and contradictions are not just part of the past but are, in our view, still at stake in today's educational policy and practice.

Reading *Democracy and Education* through the lens of conflicts raises a number of questions. We wish to raise two. The first concerns the nature of contradictions or dualism. Reading *Democracy and Education*, and particularly the latter parts of the book, it seems that Dewey was more or less obsessed by a desire for combating dualism and alleged contradictions. By stressing the "connectedness" of things he wanted to resolve apparent oppositions, in a truly Hegelian way [18,19], yet, at the very same time, Dewey believed that conflicts are necessary for growth, development, and learning. The question this raises is why Dewey wanted to overcome dualisms rather than seeing them as productive for (democratic) growth of the individual and society. What is important here is to acknowledge that dualisms are not so much incompatible positions as two ends of a spectrum. In this regard the opposite positions of a dualism actually belong together, something Dewey acknowledges.

Thus viewed, contradictions are positive and carry a congeniality, but occupy the extremes of a spectrum. As Herakleitos has said in a rather cryptic manner: "the path up is the same as the path down". And more importantly, the ends need each other. What is our notion of "good" if we do not have any experience of "bad". What is light without the dark? What is theory without practice and what is practice without theory? Conquering, possessing, eradication, or destruction of the one end would leave the other end paralyzed and meaningless. Communication, so important for Dewey, must be made fit for the ends to meet. Such a meeting entails conflicts and should be dealt with in an intelligent matter to start education; "a reconstruction or reorganisation of experience which adds to the meaning of experience and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience." In education, if aimed at growing and change, we should not conduct an educational fight, and intellectual struggle between contrary positions on a subject aimed at winning the argument, winning the playing field, or resolving the conflict. It should be aimed at using conflicts in education for understanding and weighing the arguments of both sides, in real situations. We need our opponents, our enemies, to understand ourselves and improve our decisions on the issue at stake.

Our second question is about the application of conflicts in education. Dewey is discussing a great number of conflicts facing the organisation of education within a complex, industrializing society. He discusses many contradictions in life to make his point regarding the necessity of a new educational approach in schools. Dewey strongly believes that we need conflicts to awaken us from passivity, from our natural credulity, and to stir us to re-think and re-construct our opinions and behaviour. Dewey does acknowledge the comforting and practical use of "certain" knowledge in daily life. However, to go a step further—that is, in terms of Dewey—to grow as a person, as well as to grow as a society, education needs to link up with reality, put real difficulties on the table, and evoke an inquiring attitude in the mind of the students. For that matter, we suggest, that conflicts between opposing ideas and practices can, and should, be taken on board in education, as the last example showed convincingly.

However, *Democracy and Education* does not provide us with practical ideas and tools to build a structured educational practice with a clear pedagogy. To rely on "sufficient evidence which will bring agreement and certainty after having reflecting uncertainties", seems a bit naïve—or perhaps we should call it optimistic—given the power relations in society that Dewey is well aware of. Schutz's critique of Dewey's "collaborative democracy", namely that Dewey did not confront power relations to fight for social reform, preferably in a non-violent way, sounds plausible and confirms our reading of *Democracy and Education*.

The final chapter of *Democracy and Education*, "Theories of morals," might help to understand why clear guidelines for education and pedagogy are absent in the book. In this chapter Dewey once more argues against the unwarranted oppositions created in Western moral philosophy between inner and outer morality, between moral intention and moral behaviour, character and conduct. However, more importantly, he repeatedly shows his problems with routine and habits in education: "the dominion of routine habits and blind impulse" [1] (p. 264), "routine habits" (...) "dictated directions" (...) "capricious improvising" [1] (p. 266). Dewey states implicitly, but clearly, that current education is nurturing this aptitude in students. Questioning, doubting, and hesitation, so important for people's deliberate cooperative decision making, hampers action and it seems that, in general, people like action-doing

and dislike hesitation and uncertain situations. Dewey is afraid that people, when confronted with uncertain situations, will not start conscious deliberation, overt action, ingenious observation, and personal readjustments:

> Under such conditions, men take revenge, as it were, upon the alien and hostile environment by cultivating contempt for it, by giving it a bad name. They seek refuge and consolation within their own states of mind, their own imaginings and wishes, which they compliment by calling both more real and more ideal than the despised outer world [1] (p. 264).

> In other words, there is a tendency to identify the self—or take interest—in what one has got used to, and to turn away the mind with aversion or irritation when an unexpected thing which involves an unpleasant modification of habit comes up. Since in the past one has done one's duty without having to face such a disagreeable circumstance, why not go on as one has been? To yield to this temptation means to narrow and isolate the thought of the self—to treat it as complete. Any habit, no matter how efficient in the past, which has become set, may at any time bring this temptation with it. To act from principle in such an emergency is not to act on some abstract principle, or duty at large; it is to act upon the principle of a course of action, instead of upon the circumstances which have attended it [1] (p. 267).

The disinclination to dealing with conflicts, the aversion against the unexpected, seems rather a human disposition in Dewey's moral philosophy than an expression of the social power relations of which Dewey was very well aware. In this regard his philosophy is more pedagogical than political. This moral conviction supports the "collaborative democracy" concept that Dewey developed rather than moving towards a more explicit consideration of power and the need to address the problems of power. In this regard it appears, at least from our reading of *Democracy and Education*, that Dewey's appreciation of the value of conflicts in human action remained at the individual and to some extent to the inter-individual level, but was not lifted to the larger societal level, where Dewey's appreciation of conflict remained more analytical than connected to clear educational ambitions.

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