Democracy, Education, and Value Creation[1]

Larry A. Hickman

I'D like to begin by thanking my hosts at the Institute of Oriental Philosophy for the opportunity to speak to you today. It is with great pleasure that I recall my visit to Japan just last year. Highlights of that trip included visits to the Soka High School, Soka University, and the Institute of Oriental Philosophy.

I am especially grateful to SGI President Ikeda, who invited me to meet with him during that trip. During our conversation, he generously agreed to serve as honorary chair of several events during April, May, and June of 2002 that were organized to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the passing of John Dewey, on June 1, 1952.

Those events were held at the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and the SGI Community Center in New York City.

My visit to Tokyo on this occasion coincides with events organized to celebrate 30 years of dialogue between the leadership of SGI International and the leadership of China. During the next two weeks I will be visiting China, where I will present lectures at universities in Shanghai and Beijing on the life and work of John Dewey.

Many people in China know that Dewey spent two years, from 1919 to 1921, lecturing on democracy and education in their country. Now, as the people of China move toward more democratic forms of association, it is especially important to recall Dewey's visit there, and to discuss the ways in which his ideas about democracy can be relevant to that developing situation.

Especially at this time-a time during which religious and other cultural divisions are tearing apart the fabric of social life in many parts of the world—especially now it is important that we re-affirm the importance of humanistic education and the role that it can play in healing such conflict and creating a better future.

Connection between Dewey and Makiguchi

It is in this connection that the life and work of educators such as

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and John Dewey continue to be important. They have demonstrated to us the importance of creating value during each moment of our lives.

Dewey visited Japan in 1919, but we do not know whether he and Makiguchi met. Since research on the life of Makiguchi is not yet complete, we can only speculate about such a meeting. There is one thing, however, about which we can be certain: the two great educators had much in common.

Both Dewey and Makiguchi gained deep insights into the processes of education as a result of their early experiences as teachers in one-room school houses. What they learned in those settings awakened in them a deep understanding of the delicate balance between the needs of the child and the importance of a well-designed curriculum.

As a result of their experiences as educators, both Dewey and Makiguchi understood that education must extend beyond school rooms and school yards into ever wider communities, creating and fostering perspectives that are global in nature. Both men urged the creation of an educational system built on a partnership of school, home, and community in which each of those partners would be responsible for a specific aspect of the larger educational task.

Both Dewey and Makiguchi were committed to a type of experimentalism that honors the ability of humanistic education to generate the new ideas and the new values that are required for the growth of individuals and communities. They taught us that ideas must be judged in terms of their implications for human life, not in terms of their source as dogma or *a priori* belief. This commitment led one of Makiguchi's biographers to describe him as an advocate of an "indigenous Japanese pragmatism." And it has led SGI President Daisaku Ikeda to observe that "Science is based on tested proof or empirical evidence. You conduct a test or experiment and then observe the results." Nothing beats actual proof.

And even on the difficult and often divisive issue of the nature and function of religious experience, Dewey and Makiguchi held remarkably similar views. As President Ikeda has written in an essay that is now available on the Website of the Center for Dewey Studies, "[Makiguchi's] refusal to acknowledge 'the sacred' as a self-sufficient value and his insistence that religion has value only to the degree that it concretely advances the human condition is deeply resonant with Dewey's rejection of the supernatural and his understanding of 'the religious' as that which can 'unify interests and energies [that are] now dispersed...'"[2]

Perhaps most significantly, however, Dewey and Makiguchi came to similar conclusions about the nature of value and the means by which it can be created. Both men rejected the tradition of European philosophy that treats facts and values as independent of one another. Both men held the view that facts are richly endowed with values, and that values are therefore able to be factually based. Put in Dewey's terms, what is merely *valued* is merely immediate and uninformed. But what is *valuable* has become so as a result of experimentation and refinement. Put in Makiguchi's terms, what has been determined to be valuable is the result of an act of creation.

The list of what is common to the intellectual legacies of these two great men is far too long to recite in the time available to me today. But I must not fail to note that both men regarded their ideas as open ended, as works in progress, and as the basis for further development by those who would follow them and continue their work.

Dewey's Democracy

Since June 1 of 2002 marked the 50th anniversary of Dewey's death, I'd like to honor his memory by taking a few minutes to discuss some of his main ideas. Born in 1859 in Burlington, Vermont, Dewey was one of America's greatest philosophers, educators, and public intellectuals. Inside the classroom he trained several generations of public school teachers and administrators. Outside the classroom he worked for social reform in the areas of economic justice, war and peace, racial relations, civil liberties, and perhaps most importantly, the function and politics of the public school.

Dewey was by any measure a global citizen. In addition to his numerous trips to Europe, he spent two years (1919–1921) lecturing in Japan and China. As his reputation as an educator grew, he accepted invitations to visit schools in the U.S.S.R., Turkey, Mexico, and South Africa. In 1937 he traveled to Mexico City as chair of a commission of inquiry into the charges brought by Stalin against Leon Trotsky.

Despite a heavy schedule of teaching and public lectures, Dewey continued to publish books and articles, both professional and popular, at a remarkable pace. The critical edition of his *Collected Works*, edited at the Center for Dewey Studies at Southern Illinois University Carbondale between 1961 and 1990, contains 37 volumes—some 8,000,000 words. In 1949, on the occasion of his 90th birthday, the *New York Times* hailed Dewey as "America's Philosopher." Given his commitment to the ideals of democracy and education, however, and given the dozens of languages into which his works have been translated, it might have been

even more appropriate to have honored Dewey as "the philosopher of global citizenship."

When Dewey was asked to characterize his own work, he invariably located education at its very center. He described his 1916 work *Democracy and Education*, for example, as one of his most important books. Nevertheless, his relation to public school education in the United States is best described as paradoxical. On one side, it can be said that he was probably the single most important American educational theorist of the 20th century. On the other side, it is a notorious fact that many of his ideas have been massively distorted by admirers and critics alike, and that American educators in general have yet to come to terms with his work, in the sense of putting it to rigorous test. Now, as we gain a toehold in our new century, his ideas continue to be controversial and tend to be applied only sporadically. It remains to be seen whether his work will have an important influence on the education of the boys and girls who will become the global citizens of our new century.

As a *philosopher*, Dewey was one of the founders of American pragmatism. One of the central ideas of pragmatism is that a true idea is a tool for action, and not something complete in itself in the absence of a specific context. He thought that his philosophical predecessors had not fully appreciated this idea, and therefore that philosophy needed to be reformed. He wanted to find a way of inviting philosophers to make a fresh start. He wanted them to recognize that true ideas are never absolute. Ideas are true only relative to a context, and they are true only as they continue to work. Put another way, true ideas do not work by themselves. It is we who must put them to work.

Dewey's novel view of ideas as tools had important consequences for Dewey's vision of democratic life. It led him to conclude, for example, that democracy cannot be exported. Economic and other conditions favorable to the growth of democracy can be fostered, but as a form of associated living democracy is always unique to its cultural context. Democracy is not a specific form or system of government, but a way of living. If it is to flourish, it must grow out of the concrete practices of boys and girls, men and women, as they go about their daily affairs.

Dewey's Pedagogy

In the field of *pedagogy*, Dewey wanted to minimize the role of memorization, inflexible standardized curricula, and norm-based tests as primary pedagogical tools. He argued that the stimulus to learning is not *external* to the student, but an organic state of the student in his or her lived context. The interface between child and curriculum must conse-

quently be designed in ways that take into account the social context in which learning occurs, as well as the talents, needs, and interests of the individual learners.

In other words, Dewey thought that the talents, needs, and interests of the individual child must be balanced against a curriculum that is sufficiently rigorous that it can ensure that the child is socialized into a community. But the curriculum must also be sufficiently plastic that it can adapt itself to novel and unforeseen circumstances.

Dewey thus rejected the 19th-century idea (an idea that is unfortunately still widely held) that the sole or primary function of a school is to serve as a conduit for the transmission of traditions or received values. He thought that the new men and women of his century, the 20th century, would need more than mere training, and certainly more than simple indoctrination. They would need to be educated in schools that were also laboratories: their schools would need to be places where received ideas were taught, to be sure. But they would also need to be places where such ideas were examined for continuing relevance and where new ideas were tested by means of their application to real-life situations.

In all of this Dewey rejected the outmoded authoritarian and totalitarian educational systems that had limped into the 20th century after having failed so miserably during the 19th—and that are still in evidence in many places around the globe. He was not particularly interested in teaching his children *what* to think, since he had great faith in the open-ended possibilities of experience. He was interested in teaching them *how* to think. He realized that the *content* of knowledge changes through time, sometimes even radically so. But a good *method* of learning—learning how to learn—is a tool that endures because it is self-corrective.

Democratic Faith

It is perhaps in the field of *social and political thought* that Dewey's ideas shine most brightly. His rich notion of democracy as both the root and the flower of successful social inquiry; his profound concern with the ways in which learning is a form of growth and adaptation to novel circumstances; and his commitment to social amelioration through cooperative ventures—these ideas are summed up in what is perhaps his most evocative characterization of democracy. In 1939, a year in which democratic ideals were under attack all around the globe by Fascism, Nazism, and totalitarian forms of Marxism, Dewey chose democratic faith as the topic of a speech presented on the occasion of his 80th birthday.

He began by saying that democratic faith:

> is belief in the ability of human experience to generate the aims and methods by which further experience will grow in ordered richness. Every other form of moral and social faith rests upon the idea that experience must be subjected at some point or other to some form of external control; to some "authority" alleged to exist outside the processes of experience. (LW.14.229)[3]

This idea issues a clear and unequivocal call for humanistic education, Dewey rejects the notion that ideals must, or even can, be imposed on experience from a source outside of experience itself. Authoritarianism and supernaturalism are ruled out as tools for knowledge-getting, for personal growth, and for associated living. Dewey rejects the notion that democracy is a one-size-fits-all form of government that can be imported or exported. He refuses to identify democracy with a particular system or a particular content.

He characterizes democracy instead as a process of evaluating our experiences, individual and communal alike. In his view, democracy is a tool or method by means of which our ideas about ourselves and our communities can be continually reformed and reconstructed in the light of emerging needs and opportunities. He denies that tools for action are delivered from transcendent or supernatural sources, outside of experience itself. Instead, they evolve out of a rich blend of theory of practice as they are tested against real-world conditions. And perhaps most important, faith in democracy is more or less equivalent with faith in education. In short, Dewey tells us that democracy and education are the methods of value-creation, or what he called, quite simply, "growth."

As I said, Dewey thought that democracy does not name any particular institution or set of institutions, nor does it name any particular form of government. Japan, for example, has institutions that are quite different from those of the United States. Our two educational systems are different, for example, as are our legislative structures. Even though our two countries have different forms of government, we nevertheless call both countries "democratic."

Nor is democracy simply the will of the majority: we all know from the study of history that majorities can be wrong. When majorities mistreat minorities, or in the extreme case when a majority subjects a minority to "ethnic cleansing," we speak not of democracy, but of the tyranny of a majority. The Bill of Rights of the United States Constitu-

tion enshrines the concept that the majority is not always right.

If the term "democracy" does not name any one existing thing or set of things, then what does it name? In Dewey's view, it is a kind of belief, or faith, in certain possibilities.

Here are the key ideas that Dewey wishes to put into play:

a) Since democracy is a matter of belief or faith, and not any particular existing state of affairs, the task of securing democratic ideals is never finished. Why is this so? Because a faith in democracy is a faith in the ability of experience—your and my experience, and ours together as we continue to communicate—to generate the tools, methods, and ideals that will be required for its own growth and enrichment. This includes the experience of past cultures and present ones as they are interpreted to us by historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and so on.

b) Other forms of association—the non-democratic ones—rest on the notion that something has to be brought to experience from the outside—that *a priori* or authoritarian methods are necessary if human association is to be orderly. What is wrong with non-democratic forms of association is precisely that they discount the power of individual and communal experience to generate its own tools and aims. They attempt to take a short-cut to some predefined or prepackaged goals that are foreign to our experience and simply imposed on it.

c) Like science, democracy is a method and a process. Its success or failure does not rest on any particular result. The fate of science as method does not rest on the success or failure of any one particular physical experiment, and the fate of democracy as a method and an ideal does not rest on the success or failure of any particular social experiment. Science and democracy are fallible—they are always open to correction and they are self-correcting. They constitute the only self-correcting methods we know of.

d) Perhaps most important, democracy is education. This is because a faith that experience can generate the aims and methods by which further experience can grow in ordered richness is also faith in education. It is the faith that we can grow individually and as communities.

But what is meant by experience in this context? Dewey's answer is that "[experience] is that free interaction of individual human beings with surrounding conditions, especially the human surroundings, which develops and satisfies need and desire by increasing knowledge of things as they are." (LW.14.229) It is this "knowledge of conditions as they are" that is the only solid basis for communication. Every alternative involves the subjection of some persons to the personal opinion of other persons.

Development of Dewey's Thought

Given the idea that democracy is faith in the ability of experience to generate the aims and methods by which further experience is able to grow in ordered richness, then, how can education be structured so as to honor that faith? I offer the following suggestions.

First, we must recognize that we are now living in a new technological milieu. Japan, the United States, and other countries are rapidly evolving from industrial societies to societies dominated by information technology. Our schools must reflect this change. Schools devoted entirely to the transmission of skills or to the development of discipline are no longer adequate to this new milieu.

The new schools must be places of interaction with the life of the new technological culture. To this end, the actual interests of the students must be nurtured and developed: these include interests in communication, in finding out about things, in making things, and in artistic expression. There must be a reciprocal relation between the school and the wider society. What goes on outside the school must be the subject of education, and what goes on inside the school must be applicable within the society beyond its walls.

Second, education is evolutionary in that it is an ongoing experiment in which the teacher leads the student to discover ways in which he or she can actively adjust to novel circumstances. Consequently, there can be no set rules for education. There are, however, sound methods for educational experimentation and those methods themselves evolve as they are applied in an intelligent fashion.

Third, human life, like all other forms of life, is concerned with growth. Education is just the most efficient means of effecting growth. Its goal is the enrichment of the capacity for continuing renewal. We must reject the view that education is only preparation for some future occupation. And we must deny that its proper concern is only the absorption of accumulated knowledge or only the unfolding of capacities that already lie dormant in the student.

Fourth, Education is both a tool and an outcome of democratic practice. Education equips individuals for full participation in social life, and in its finest form it is the result of free and open social interaction. It is by means of education that individuals come to have a stake in society, and it is by means of the strengthened democratic institutions that result from education that the tools and techniques of education are improved.

In his book *Democracy and Education*, Dewey joined the controversy regarding the place of "values" in education. It is the business of educa-

tion, Dewey wrote, to teach the student to appraise what is just "valued" with a view to determining what may prove to be "valuable." These terms are analogous to "eaten" and "edible." Just as it is the case that some things that have been eaten do not prove to be edible, some things that are valued do not prove to be valuable. What is merely "valued" remains private and personal. As such it tends to cut short interchange between individuals. On the other hand, what is "valuable" is what has been experimentally tested and proven to be of value. Since the very notion of experimental proof depends on communication within a democratic community of inquiry, what proves to be "valuable" will have been worked over, debated, refined, and reconstructed in a public forum.

One of the most important issues in education is the relation of knowledge to conduct. Knowledge that does not affect conduct is of little or no value. Education is thus a training of character and a training for citizenship. Character is built up as the individual comes to understand and appreciate the consequences of his or her conduct and the relationships that such conduct involves. The school, as a miniature community, serves as a laboratory in which relations and connections can be explored. Good citizenship is one of the expressions of character. Because of his belief that education develops the capacities of the student to share effectively in social life, Dewey argued that all meaningful education is moral education, and moral education is what prepares us to take our place in a democratic society.

Education for the New Global Citizens

Even before his death in 1952, Dewey's ideas had already begun to be eclipsed by events within his own country. In the field of politics there were the anti-democratic effects of the Cold War. Exacerbating this situation was the launching of Sputnik by the Soviet Union in 1957, which shifted public sentiment toward a more strictly curriculum-driven educational system.

Dewey's pedagogy continues to be controversial. It continues to be attacked from both the right and the left wings of the political spectrum. Conservatives object to his idea that education should involve what we know as "value creation," arguing instead that schools should be places where traditional values, especially those that involve fixed and absolutist religious content, should be transmitted without question. Particularly unsettling to Dewey's conservative critics was his support of "secular humanism," which they view as a retreat to radical relativism with respect to moral values. But as I have already indicated, Dewey did not reject the idea that we must have norms. He merely rejected the idea that

norms do not change through time as a result of increased understanding of novel possibilities and contexts.

Despite continuing criticism from both left and right, however, Dewey's ideas are now, at the beginning of the 21st century, enjoying a major revival of interest. This is due in no small measure to the relevance of Dewey's thought to the many problems faced by those whose task it is to educate the new global citizens of the 21st century. Dewey recognized that the men and women of the 21st century will have global involvements, in any case. But what will be the quality of their global citizenship? What kind of men and women will our new global citizens be? Will they be productive or unproductive? Will they honor the old divisions of race, religion, tribe, and culture, encouraging division and fostering strife, or will they seek new ways of compromise, of value creation, of associated living?

Whether or not our new century will see the growth of democratic ideas and institutions will depend to a great extent on the manner in which our new global citizens are educated. Perhaps now would be a good time, at last, to put Dewey's ideas to the test.

In this troubled time, then, when religious and cultural conflict seems to be on the increase, it is highly appropriate that we remember both Makiguchi and Dewey for the contributions they made to the creation of value. It is also appropriate that we remember Makiguchi's successor, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, for his efforts in the promotion of holistic and humanistic education. We know that Mr. Ikeda has contributed greatly to the values of peace, culture, and education. He has actively promoted understanding between peoples and nations through meetings with the world's political leaders, as well as with leaders in the fields of education, environmentalism, and the arts. His message, like that of other great humanists such as Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King, is that education and culture are the prerequisites for peace.

In these and many other ways, Mr. Ikeda carries on the rich tradition of Dewey and Makiguchi. Thank you very much for the opportunity speak to you today.

Notes

[1] An earlier version of this lecture was published in *John Dewey: Half-Century Memorial Seminar and Lecture Series* (Cambridge, MA: Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, 2002), pp. 99–116.

[2] This essay can also be found in Daisaku Ikeda, *Soka Education* (Santa Monica, CA: Middleway Press, 2001), pp. 1–32.

[3] In this article, references to John Dewey's published works are to the critical (print) edition, *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882–1953*, edited by Jo Ann Boydston

(Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967–1991), and published in three series as *The Early Works: 1882–1898*, *The Middle Works: 1898–1924*, and *The Later Works: 1925–1953*. These designations are followed by volume and page number. "Later Works 1.14," for example, refers to *The Later Works*, volume 1, page 14. In order to insure uniform citations of the standard edition, the pagination of the print edition has been preserved in *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882–1953: The Electronic Edition*, edited by Larry A. Hickman (Charlottesville, Virginia: InteLex Corp., 1996). A commonly used alternative form of reference to *The Collected Works*, used here, abbreviates *The Early Works* as EW, The Middle Works as MW and *The Later Works* as LW.