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Two Concepts of Education

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Two Concepts of Education

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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You give but little when you give of your possessions.

It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.

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Introduction

The two rows of students, seated on beige chairs with a desk attached to the base, focused intently as I wrote the oft-quoted, and grossly oversimplified, opening sentence of the American Declaration of Independence:

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for **one people** to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.¹

I circled the words, “one people.” Two arms, one well-built and the other slender, shot up. Both students stared intently at the blackboard. The first to speak, an articulate white man, questioned the legitimacy of the claim that the writers of the Declaration, as a group of white slave-owning statesmen, employed the term in a manner that was not only exclusionary but also undermined the strength of their argument within the document. An African-American man of robust constitution, who had patiently waited for his turn, nodding in agreement as his fellow student spoke, responded with an alternative reading of this phrase within the authors' argument. He acknowledged the hypocrisy of claiming to speak for the people while tacitly espousing the legitimacy of slavery, a practice that is heinous and antithetical to the historical and contemporary understanding of political freedom; however, the fundamental commitment to political equality, he argued, untethered from the unsatisfying lack of congruence between the authors' argumentative position and their actions, remains intact within this document, providing

¹ Richmond, Goff, *The John Dunlap Broadside: The First Printing of the Declaration of Independence*. (Washington: Library of Congress, 1976), 24 (emphasis mine).

a powerful framework to better understand our patrimony, considering the fact that this document is the bedrock of the egalitarian commitment engendering the United States of America.

In retrospect, it became clear to me that our understanding, as a collective within the classroom, was constructed by the range of interpretations that surfaced in response to the Declaration; however, by allowing for the space to *agree, contest* and *refute* each others interpretations, our understanding was in fact the result of a *reconstructive* process. One people, in the first sentence of the Declaration, was initially understood to imply the American people represented solely by the authors of the document. The students then scrutinized this perspective and subsequently diagnosed the racial undercurrents that functioned through the dividing, not unifying, phrase “one people.” The nuanced reading that emerged following the discussion of the aforementioned interpretations, led to the recognition of the hypocrisy of the statesmen who had not only drafted the declaration but also had simultaneously preserved the revolutionary nature of the sentiment of equality that openly declared itself independent from the rule of the British Crown. The severance of ties with an oppressive force was only possible due to the bridging of ties between those who declared the “causes which impel them to the separation.”

The dialogue had developed with several students, all contributing *partners* in the *shared activity*, listening and responding to the various readings of this phrase situated within the first sentence of the Declaration. The socio-historical backgrounds of the students, often introduced in the form of anecdotal evidence to bolster their readings of the text, imbued our dialogue with textured meaning emerging from a pool of diverse hermeneutical resources. The eclectic collection of interpretations, during the discussion, interacted in order to produce a *co-created*, and still contested, meaning of the phrase, *one people*, and its relation to the broader argument of

the Declaration. The bell rang and the correctional officer briskly marshalled the inmates in the Eastern Correctional Facility back to their cells. This tutoring session, as part of the Bard Prison Initiative (BPI), concluded underscoring, not the end of the dialogue or our understanding, but rather a mere pause in a *reconstructive* process of *dialogue, sharing and co-creation*.²

As I left the facility, reflecting on the experience to which I was both a participant and a witness, I realized that the classroom holds a privileged status as being a dialogic space where human beings of different social backgrounds interact with each other in order to expand the horizons of their world. As children, we are privy to the environment of our immediate family. The medium within which we grow is determined by our parents or guardians and so we submit to the elders in our world because they nourish us nutritionally and educatively. When we reach the age when the formal process of education begins, distinguished from the markedly unstructured mode of living prior to enrollment in a school, our world changes.

When we enter the classroom, a space designated for education as an autonomous practice, argue scholars across a range of academic disciplines, two parallel shifts occur.³ It is noteworthy that this view of education is presupposed by currently serving political figures as well.⁴ First, the broadening of our experience, in terms of the students we interact with, owing to the fact that we discover, through sharing, the worlds from which they have entered this

² The course, for which I served as a Writing Fellow, was *Symbolic Logic: Critical Reasoning in Everyday Life*, taught by Professor Daniel Berthold. This course was taught, as part of the Bard Prison Initiative, during Fall 2017.

³ Thomas, Piketty. *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*. (Cambridge Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 57-64. Piketty, an economist, considers education to be a practice based on rule-following that aids in the “diffusion of knowledge,” overseen by the structures that facilitate the educative process.

⁴ Trump, Donald J. "President Donald J. Trump's State of the Union Address." *The White House*, January 30, 2018. In this address, President Trump said: “*Let us open great vocational schools so our future workers can learn a craft and realize their potential. Let us invest in workforce development and job training.*”

environment. Second, having built bonds only within our family or with intimate social similars, the bridging between students from different social worlds occurs. Although one may argue that an assumption that all familial bonds are homogenous is problematic, as well as the fact that bonds between students often evolve into a form of kinship that may transcend the depth that was never felt within familial bonds, it is not my concern here to delve into the nature of the bonds.⁵ Considering the reasonable observation that the *origin* of familial bonds and those built between students in a classroom are dissimilar, even though they may ultimately converge over time, it is crucial to recognize both the difficulty and the profound necessity, at this time, to cultivate these linkages between students thereby expanding their world.

Social structures, like the school within the purview of institutionalized education, form the basis by which we have organized our experience through patterns of association. Historically, we have chosen to send children, following the widespread implementation of public education, to a specific place, apart from society, in order to be educated. Parents, for generations, have decided that socializing within the classroom is beneficial and children socialized in school are better prepared to enter life after graduation. Consequently, the school, as a space to build ties between students, metonymically represented by the classroom, occasions a critical outlook on the kinds of associations forming within the educative environment.

Social Capital, the term employed by scholars old and new, filters the nature of association through the lens of social networks and the sharing of resources.⁶ This term is exported beyond its disciplinary boundaries by a variety of scholars but its provenance, when

⁵ Ronald, Burt, Nan, Lin, and Karen, Cook. *Social Capital: Theory and Research*. (New York: Routledge, 2017). For a discussion on the nature of bonds and ties, within the frame of 'social capital,' please see this collection of essays on the nature, operation and implications of social capital on learning.

⁶ Pierre, Bourdieu. "Forms of Capital." In *Sociology of Education: A Critical Reader*, by Alan R. Sadovnik and Ryan Coughlan, (3rd ed. New York: Routledge, 2016), 83-97.

applied to education, is located in the writings of Pierre Bourdieu.⁷⁸ The salient features of his concept for my purpose can be explained as follows: i) Social networks do not emerge organically and ii) Individuals develop through their social networks, by receiving, giving and sharing information pertaining to a pool of hermeneutical resources that traverses academic, occupational and even personal boundaries; however, there are types of linkages formed within such environments.⁹¹⁰ Principally, we understand three types of associations. Bonding ties, which are typically the strongest in their tenability, are the associations that connect families and close social similars to one another. The limits of your world are defined by these bonds. In contrast, bridging ties, which are generally weaker than bonding ties, connect people across demographic categories including, but not limited to, race, class, occupation, age, religion and the like. Linking ties are the vertical associations between people at different levels within a hierarchy, as seen within organizations that distinguish between employees via designated titles and roles. Bridging ties, as opposed to both bonding and linking ties, are the hardest to cultivate. Bonding ties, by the nature of the evolution of associations within families, sustain themselves; bridging ties are an epiphenomenon of a social structure, emerging within spaces, like the classroom, that allow diverse people, charting their own course, to intersect, share and co-create meaning.

⁷ It is an uncontested fact that the first organized, contemporary analysis of social capital was provided by Bourdieu, who defined the concept as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition.” A rudimentary version of the conception was mentioned in his brief “Provisional Notes” that can be found in the *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, published in 1980. The first English translation, concealed in the pages of his writings on the sociology of education, were left thoroughly unexamined until the turn of the 21st century.

⁸ Alejandro, Portes, "Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (August 1998): 1-24.

⁹ Bourdieu, 86.

¹⁰ Danielle, Allen, “A Connected Society,” *Soundings: Politics and Culture*, no. 53 (2013): 103-13.

The genealogy of education, conceptualized by a titanic voice within the discourse on the Philosophy of Education, John Dewey, employed the development of tribes as the lasting image that charted the evolution of education. Contemporary thinkers, like Danielle Allen, having continued the dialogue in light of this image, have attempted to unearth, and reconstruct, the genealogy of education when understood as a social, autonomous practice. For Dewey, although he did not employ the language of social capital, and Allen, who has picked up this register as a result of her interdisciplinary method, education seeks to not only expand the world of each student but also treats this expansion as an outgrowth of the bridging ties fostered between students. Bridging ties expand a student's world and are fundamental to the educative process, properly understood.

Schools, for example, are social structures that, if properly organized, would bring people from diverse backgrounds together. As a consequence, such schools become an environment for the cultivation of bridging ties. A society that is able to engage in the reconstructive process of dialogue, as seen in the prison, characterized by the co-creation of new worlds, *must* promote the development of bridging ties through the associational experience of education. However, the current condition of education, in the American context, paints a bleak picture.

The foundation of the current discourse on education is grounded in the funding and distribution of a 'good' called education. The Common Core State Standards, as a set of shared goals stipulated by the federal government, considers education to be a "stepping stone" towards joining the workforce in a competitive global marketplace.¹¹ The lexicon of economic commodities instrumentalizes education due to its tacit assumption that education is a means to an occupational end. It treats education as an individual possession deposited by a school, via its teachers, into the student, viewed as a receptacle, as opposed to a shared possession which

¹¹ Danielle Allen, *Education and Equality*. (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2016), 4.

emerges *through* dialogue. It has been the economists and politicians who have dominated public discourse by focusing on the distributive questions in relation to education.¹² The basis of their conception of *education as training* so as to enter the workforce has neglected the dialogic and, by extension, democratic nature of the educative process. Furthermore, this compartmentalization of the educative process, represented by the unilinear process by which information is deposited into the student, oriented towards securing employment, prevents the fostering of bridging ties. The positive vision of a truly democratic education that comes closer to realizing the fundamental egalitarian commitments, held by the drafters of the Declaration of Independence, unmoored from their discriminatory personal choices, emerges from the coupling of two philosophers, separated by a century, yet bridged by a common recognition of the profound necessity of dialogue, sharing and co-creative participation: John Dewey and Danielle Allen.

In his *Democracy and Education*, written as a textbook to study the philosophy of education, we are given his genealogical explanation that tracks the development of education as a fundamental process of life itself. The explanation of the elder, mature members of the tribe inculcating the customs and norms of their tribe into the younger members has often been read as a form of social reproduction. If the dominant habits of a community are transmitted to the next generation, then a reasonable assumption upon reading this text in particular, as influential Dewey commentators such as Nel Noddings and Robert Westbrook have furthered, is that this indiscriminate transmission of information leads to *continuity, not change*.¹³¹⁴ The reinforcement

¹² Danielle, Allen, and Rob Reich, *Education, Justice, and Democracy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 12.

¹³ Robert, Westbrook "Democracy and Education." In *John Dewey and American Democracy*. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 150-95.

of the traditions of the past, communicated, or rather imposed upon the immature members of the tribe supports a model of education that will preclude those very individuals from questioning and reconstructing the structures outside of the school as a collective. The treatment of each student as an individual being educated *qua* individual is presupposed in these criticisms of Dewey. In contrast, being educated as a collective through their associations, in response to presented subject matter or otherwise, signifies an inalienable facet of Dewey's philosophy of education, jettisoned by the assumption that education is a process that initiates a relationship with each student, independent of the other students participating in the process. Although the above mentioned criticism has its merit, in terms of prompting further scrutiny of Dewey's text, its conservative outlook misses the broader, defiantly radical, implications of wholeheartedly embracing Dewey's understanding of *education as life itself*.

In *Education and Equality*, published last year, Danielle Allen provides a fresh, and much needed, perspective on the intrinsic relationship between education and equality. She diagnoses the attenuation of education by the social justice theorists and economists who instrumentalize education, as the means to "alleviate poverty and secure employment" respectively.¹⁵ This realization prompts Allen to reconstruct our understanding of education from the perspective of the student being educated. She argues for an educative model oriented towards the cultivation of the expressive 'capacities' within each student.¹⁶ According to Allen, the ability to articulate a viewpoint and dialogue with harmonious or conflicting positions generates shared meaning *through* the interactions between students.¹⁷ These capacities, once honed, empower students to

¹⁴ Noddings, Ned. "Dewey's Philosophy of Education: A Critique from the Perspective of Care." In *The Cambridge Companion to Dewey*, edited by Molly Cochran. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 242-64.

¹⁵ Allen, *Education and Equality*, 12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

develop and express their views thereby preparing them, in the long run, to participate politically following their departure from school and bridge ties across social cleavages.

Her interdisciplinary method, drawing from political philosophy, sociology and educational research, has been regarded with both admiration and skepticism. In particular, her account of learning in the classroom has been regarded as susceptible to, what I label as, the “structuralist critique.”¹⁸ Briefly, the critique encapsulates the worry that meaning generated through the interactions between individual agents, students in Allen’s case, is not consonant with the structuralist premise that meaning is generated by the interaction between agents and the structure of the practice, such as education, within which the agents are situated. This line of criticism questions Allen’s notion of the creation of shared meaning between students. Further, the broader implications of the critique involves three interconnected results: i) the conspicuous lacuna left if Allen either accepts the structuralist critique or disavows this fundamental component of her theory of meaning; ii) the erosion of Allen’s understanding of education as a form of preparation, and iii) the inability of her theory of meaning to “support our capacity to bridge with those different from ourselves in order to preserve the democracy which we are a part of.”¹⁹ John Dewey’s philosophy of education, as the antecedent of Allen’s work, avoids the structuralist critique by grounding his theory of meaning with the notion of the educative environment as constituted by the students’ associations within it, rather than separate from it as seen in Allen’s theory; by treating the educative process as one that involves participation within a group as opposed to a process that occurs between the institution and the student as an

¹⁸ Tommie Shelby, “Justification, Learning and Human Flourishing” in *Education and Equality*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 54. Shelby’s critical response gestures towards the tension between the “social-theoretic” assumptions behind Allen’s account and a structuralist understanding of practices.

¹⁹ Allen, 43.

individual; and fundamentally by embracing the profound, yet pithy, conception of education, not as preparation for life ahead, but as a form of living.

Chapter 1 delineates Dewey's genealogical argument. By specifying the moments where Dewey's critics have suggested that the notion of education as transmission engenders a cyclic reproduction of customs and norms, I will provide a reoriented view of his communicative theory of meaning in order to address these scholarly concerns. His theory of communication serves as a precursor to his theory of meaning that will be subsequently outlined. When the Deweyan approach towards meaning is understood as a result of *association*, it becomes plain that it is the educative process, not the outcomes, that define his philosophy of education.

Chapter 2 introduces Allen's theory of meaning. The contours of her argument are sketched following which the susceptibility of her claim to the 'structuralist' critique is made explicit. The implications of Allen's understanding of education within a preparatory paradigm, and oriented towards fostering bridging ties, are eroded by the structuralist critique.

Chapter 3 begins with illustrating the manner by which Allen's theory of meaning, as well as her democratic and egalitarian goals, are safeguarded by inserting Dewey's theory of meaning within the frame of her argument. Allen's theory of meaning is fortified by the Deweyan understanding of the educative environment, the treatment of education as a process that occurs within a group as opposed to an individual student and the shifting of the origin of meaning from the intersection between the structure and agent to the associations between students. The capability to bridge ties across social cleavages, in light of this reconstructed vision of education is enhanced.

Although it is Dewey's conception that is buttressing Allen's account, important questions raised by the latter in relation to the evaluation of growth within education,

unaddressed by Dewey, highlights the fact that both these architects of democracy and education clarify our understanding when treated symbiotically. Mirroring the educative process, a bridging tie between Dewey and Allen, scholars arising from dissimilar social backgrounds and existing within socio-historically dislocated moments, allows us to conceive of a democratic ideal of education, properly understood.

Dewey and Meaning

The Critique of Continuity

Dewey's genealogical argument, tracing the evolution of education through the image of the tribe, often invoked when tracing the development of education as a process, leads to the centrality of communication, meaning and dialogue within his philosophy of education. This section will: i) underline the indispensable elements of his anthropological account of the emergence of education, ii) present salient objections of Dewey's image as a form of social continuity, and iii) respond to the objections by providing an alternative interpretation of his understanding in relation to the relationship between students and their environment within the school.

There is a marked difference, which every adult who has received a formal education can attest to, between the educative process that occurs when living, associating with others and the deliberate education of the young. In the former case, education is incidental, arising from unfettered dialogue between human beings but it is not the primary reason prompting the association. When formally directed into the school, as a social institution, ideally motivated to expand the boundaries of the students' worlds, students are introduced to the rules of a structure; however, it is critical to recognize that the informal forms of association, prior to the entrance into school, primarily involves bonding ties sustained by familial relations. When a student arrives in school, the diversity of perspectives occasions a broadening of their world by the fact that they share their worlds. Dewey considered this intrinsic condition of association between human beings as a foundational aspect of his genealogy of education.²⁰

²⁰ John Dewey, "Democracy and Education" in *John Dewey, the middle works, 1899-1924 Vol 9*. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 9.

His argument, given the image of tribe as the primordial constituent of human communities, highlighted the necessity of education due to the asymmetric relationship between the elder members of the tribe and the younger, immature members who required instruction in order to preserve the customs of their community. As the gap between the capacities of the young and the concerns of the adults within the tribe widened, learning by direct sharing between the adults and the children became increasingly difficult without any social structure. In actuality, Dewey argued that there was not, in fact, “any such thing as the direct influence of one human being on another, apart from the use of the environment as an intermediary.”²¹ Consequently, a designated place for learning was sought in order to initiate a formal process of learning, a practice that has become commonplace. This partitioning of space, which divorced the process of schooling from living, precipitated a reigning orthodoxy within the philosophy of education, still prevalent today, that education is preparation for life after successfully graduating from the academic medium, which Dewey had resisted.

Dewey’s prescience can be seen in his diagnosis of the precarious transition from natural associations to formal schooling:

There are conspicuous dangers caused by the transition from indirect to formal education. Sharing in actual pursuit, whether directly or vicariously in play, is at least personal and vital. Formal instruction, by contrast, easily becomes remote and dead, or abstract and bookish.²²

Dewey recognizes the manner by which association, prior to the transition to formal schooling, preserves the vitality of interaction. It is evident that the inordinate focus on content, which Dewey referred to as “subject matter,” weakens the animating pulse of pedagogical pursuits unrestrained by structures. The contrast between the vitality of indirect association and

²¹ Dewey, 33.

²² *Ibid.*, 9.

deadening practices bespeaks his commitment to ‘play,’ as a form of living that embraces the uncertainty of orientation when humans engage with each other. Schools designed syllabi, structured courses and produced subject matter in order to emphasize the contrast between schooling and living.

In particular, the development of subject matter, in light of teaching students within formal education, resulted in the isolation of academic content from the experiences beyond the confines of a classroom. When technical information, in the sciences, or conceptual apparatus, in the humanities, are presented to students, the interconnectedness of these pedagogic symbols with life, outside of school, and the manner in which different students make sense of the subject matter is often ignored. Therefore, this attenuated form of education, which Dewey designated as ‘ordinary,’ displaces the vivifying strain of sharing interests between students, instead focusing on the dissemination of information through historically agreed upon, and thoughtlessly recycled, systems of signs and symbols.

Hence, a salient and persistent problem with which the philosophy of education has to cope, and continuously revisit across generations, is the method of maintaining a proper balance between the informal and the formal; “the incidental and the intentional modes of education.”²³

This unwieldy transition, often handled with a pernicious lack of sensitivity, is a watershed moment in Dewey’s genealogical reconstruction charting both the genesis and the development of education, as defined by the instrumental role played by communication prior to, during and after the transition.

Human beings live in a community owing to the interests that they share in common. Communication, as conceptualized by Dewey, was the means by which the tribes, as the primordial communities, bonded due to the familial ties that branched outward. To share

²³ Ibid., 10.

common interests, a division of cognitive labor concomitant with the pursuit of conjoining aims was essential; however, such features of a community cannot be apportioned to its members, as one would distribute a commodity or good. Communication of the aims orienting a community, like a renewable resource, does not preclude participation or ownership by the fact that a few people possess these intellectual resources. By contrast, it is through communicating the shared goals of a community that participation is ensured and every individual member of the tribe is aware of their common interests, strengthening the bonds within the community.

Dewey, drawing from a symbol of the Industrial Revolution, the machine, neatly distinguished between a group of individuals and a community:

Individuals do not even compose of a social group because they all work for a common end. The parts of a machine work with a maximum of cooperativeness for a common result, but they do not form a community. If, however, they were all cognizant of the common end and all interested in it so that they regulated their specific activities in view of it, they would form a community. But this would involve communication. Each would have to know what the other was about and would to have some way of keeping the other informed as to her own purpose and progress.²⁴

It is evident that the giving and taking of orders, analogous to the functions fulfilled by the parts of a machine, modifies actions and results; however, this does not in and of itself inspire a communication of interests and, in turn, a sharing of commonly held purposes. Cooperativeness, which is the alignment of a goal imposed by a system outside of the agent working to fulfill the goal, occludes the members of this group from fostering a community, properly understood. The classroom, as one of the remaining spaces for the interaction of diverse perspectives in a sustained manner, can only become a community when bridging ties are cultivated by the sharing of interests.

²⁴ Ibid., 5.

Although Dewey adopts the register of bureaucracy, as seen by his use of the term ‘regulation,’ the organic emergence of community, within the classroom, does not require a structure in order to initiate association. Human association is an ineliminable feature of our condition, requiring dialogue and sharing to recur; however, this recurrence of social interaction, which is a plainly observable aspect of Dewey’s genealogical argument, has been employed *against* Dewey’s position as a means to effect change.

Robert Westbrook and Ned Noddings have both, in separate texts yet interwoven by their common interest in the implications of Dewey’s philosophy of education on societal change, recognized the value of inheriting Deweyan thought in the twenty-first century; however, they also realized two ‘distressing’ features of his position on the recurrence of interaction as the basis for change. Westbrook writes:

Dewey considered the question of education and change to be a task for us; however, he does not offer a plan or design to realize his vision. In fact, his discussion of the machine, with several interacting parts working towards a common result, as dissimilar to the interactions within class is undermined by his recognition that the elders of his imagined tribe, when educating the immature members, may not consider the interests of the young as worth exploring. It would seem that the machine, with “maximum cooperativeness,” reinforces patterns of actions and similar outcomes but ensures a result that will not defy expectation, illustrating a congruence between the motivations of education within the tribe as consistent with the goals met by the cogs of a machine.²⁵

Westbrook expresses the dissatisfaction with the evasion of a prescriptive response to the question, repeatedly raised by Dewey, pertaining to the vision of democracy and education he himself continuously advocated for. This concern, raised by a variety of scholars in response to Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*, is valid; however, if we return to the motivation that guided Dewey’s hand as he wrote the text, explicated in his Preface, we recognize that this text was “an

²⁵ Westbrook, 163-164.

endeavor to diagnose the problems facing education in nominally democratic societies.”²⁶

Although I share the dissatisfaction that arises when a conceptual vision for a democratic ideal of education is presented without concrete steps to realize this vision, it is critical to recognize this text in particular as, not a manual for the execution of a plan, but rather a companion that advocates for dialogue, sharing and participation when engaging in questions of education in relation to the text itself. This aspect of Noddings’ and Westbrooks’ objection remains significant owing to the fact that, as inheritors of Deweyan thought, our ‘task’ involves the realization of these ideals in practice; nevertheless, the second aspect of Westbrooks’ criticism is not only apposite to the concerns of this project but also delineates a dominant strain of interpretation that considers Dewey’s educative model as a form of social *continuity*.

Westbrook connects the working of the machine, an image utilized by Dewey in his discussion of community and change, to the idealized conception of a Deweyan community wherein individuals share interests and thus function symbiotically with the achievement of these goals in mind. Although Dewey employed the machine as a counterpoint to his understanding of an organic community, with each member aware and actively interested in other members’ activities, Westbrook reads the ‘cooperativeness’ within the interconnected parts of a machine as a form of interaction that aligns with the Deweyan image of the tribe. The elder members, when educating the immature members of the tribe, are motivated by the preservation of the tribe impelling their decision to teach the younger members about the customs and social norms of the tribe.

Westbrook recognizes that Dewey considered “working towards a common end” to be an insufficient condition to create a community, which supported the use of the machine as an analogy illustrating several members of a process, albeit mechanistic, oriented towards a

²⁶ Dewey, 2.

common goal; however, building upon this recognition, Westbrook returns to the Deweyan image of the tribe in order to highlight the fact that not only were the elders educating the young with the motivations of communal preservation and socio-cultural inculcation in mind but also that the interests of the young, in contrast to Dewey's understanding, are invariably ignored not by choice, but rather by circumstances. The genealogical argument, employing the image of the tribe, *must* account for the consonance between the educative practices within it and the functioning of the parts of a machine. Furthermore, this observation buttresses the interpretive stance that casts Dewey's educative model as a form of social reproduction, oriented towards the maintenance of a certain course determined by the elders of the tribe without consideration for the interests of the community being educated.

By recognizing the fundamental assumption, acknowledged by Westbrook, that education only occurs *indirectly* through the environment, a response to the aforementioned objection materializes.

For Dewey, the environment is the means of educative influence. The teacher, directly or without an intermediary, does not provide the stimulus within a classroom; the environment generates stimuli.

Dewey's concept of an educative stimulus is interactive, illustrated by the relationship between students and their environment. Stimuli are salient factors in guiding educative activity. They are not, however, important as causes of action for this presupposes that the students are inactive beings; the students are already active, and the stimuli arise and are experienced in the course of educative activities. Dewey writes:

The painful heat of an object stimulates the hand to withdraw but the heat was experienced in the course of reaching and exploring. The function of the stimulus is – as the case just cited illustrates – to change the direction of an action already going on.

Similarly, a response to a stimulus is not the beginning of activity; it is a change, a shift, of activity in response to the change in conditions indicated by a stimulus.²⁷

Although Westbrook connected Dewey's notion of the community with the machine, cooperating in service of a common goal, the nature of a genuinely educative stimulus as opposed to a signal sent to the interlinked parts of a machine abrades the understanding of Dewey's educative model as a form of social reproduction. As illustrated above, a stimulus is a factor that introduces a sensation that *changes* the conditions of the environment. The student, within the educative medium, responds to the stimulus through a *change* in her activity. In a machine, the mechanism requires a causal chain where identical stimuli are producing expected responses in order to carry out the process; students, in a classroom, are independent and form bridging ties with their peers in a manner that, unlike the cogs of a machine, cannot be automated. Although the goal of a machine and a Deweyan community align in their need for all the members to work towards a shared goal, the fostering of such an interest must arise from dialogue and participation, not the programming by an individual that imposes aims external to the agents involved in the process.

The interactive nature of a stimulus also reflects the ability of a Deweyan environment to avoid the critique of social reproduction by realizing, and promoting, the non-linearity of the educative process. The machine, as Westbrook explained, reinforced "patterns of action." These patterns, following a set of prescribed rules requiring specific responses, flows in a linear manner. By contrast, the Deweyan notion of a stimulus allows for responses, prompted by changes within a students' course of events, not to achieve an externally imposed goal, but rather to walk their own way in the general direction shown by the teacher. The student, unlike the inert elements of a machine, can dialogue with the medium within which she is present and, as we will

²⁷ Ibid., 392.

see in the next chapter, can interact with other students who essentially constitute the Deweyan educative environment. By sharing, dialoguing and responding, the interaction between students may still fall into patterns of association; however, as these patterns arise, not from the imposition of an aim external to the students, but rather from the sharing of interests within the community, the educative process is truly *reconstructive* as it builds upon its past in order to progress towards a *changed* future.

This iterative process wherein students share their diagnoses of the world, in response to subject matter, realizes the reconstructive vision that Dewey hoped to see in the classroom. Although communication is the means through which community forms, it is integral for our purposes, as it was for Dewey, to highlight the significance of meaning, as the passenger within the vehicle of communication. If communication is the circulatory system, through which blood is pumped across the body, meaning is the oxygen being transported that initiates, sustains and renews the life of the organism, that is society.

Communication and Participation:

If we are to dutifully understand democracy and education as fundamentally *reconstructive*, a delineation of his understanding of communication, at this point, would be particularly instructive.

All natural events, Dewey averred, are subject to reconsideration and revision; creation and recreation are concomitant with dialogue, and are achieved through dialogue. Although philosophers of education, old and new, have circumscribed communication, through language, within the academic environment as distinctly educative by the fact that it is “shaped by the practice of education,”²⁸ Dewey resisted this philosophical propensity.

Social interaction and institutions have been treated as the products of a ready-made *specific* physical or mental endowment of a self-sufficient individual. Dewey, in contrast, argued that the world of inner experience is dependent on an “extension of language which is a social product and operation.”²⁹ Language itself is a natural function of human association and its expressions react with events, physical or human, creating meaning. The prevalent conception of communication, which persists even today, is that the process of communication acts as a mechanical intermediary to convey observations and ideas that have a prior and independent existence. Dewey, for the means of his philosophy of education, apropos to this discussion, reoriented the view of communication in *reconstructive* terms.

Communication, for Dewey, was the establishment of cooperation in an activity in which there are partners, and in which the activity of each is modified and regulated by the partnership itself. The process produces meaning that is shared between two dialoguing individuals. He

²⁸ Noddings, 78.

²⁹ Dewey, 125.

explained communication as a process in which person A and person B coordinate their actions in the following way such that:

B's understanding of A's movement and sounds is that he responds to the thing from the standpoint of A, that is perceiving the thing as it may function in A's experience, instead of simply egocentrically.³⁰

In this situation, B responds to the *meaning* of A's movement and sounds, rather than to the movement and sounds itself. Similarly, A conceives the thing not only in relation to herself, but as a thing being grasped and handled by B. She sees the thing as it may function in B's experience. This view of communication, as a form of *meaning-building*, led Dewey to the conclusion that *meaning* is a property of association. The distinctively cooperative aspect of communication, the occurrence of which is independent of the physical environment within which it is structured, involves not only the co-creation of meaning but also the sharing of this meaning. Consequently, we develop an understanding of communication, beyond its conventionally transactional iteration, involving the exchange of expressive content, as a distinctly cooperative process that effectuates a common understanding and the sharing of a common world.

A question, worthy of our attention, is the need for Dewey's comprehensive theory of communication as opposed to the formulation of a theory of instruction or learning. The problem of education was framed as, neither being about individual development nor about adaptation to the existing social order, but rather as the coordination of the individual with the associative aspect of learning through communication. The central question for Dewey, inherited by Allen, was: how can meaning be communicated?

³⁰ Dewey, 178.

Although he initially argued that education consists primarily in “transmission through communication,” he recognized the need to clarify that it is not a process of “direct contagion or literal inculcation.”³¹ Communication, properly understood, is a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession. As a consequence, the central educational mode is *participation*.

Participation, within this vision, is neither achieved by physical proximity or the situation in which all merely work towards a common end. It is only when all are cognizant of the common end and are interested in it that participation is realized. Furthermore, it is only this kind of participation which modifies the disposition of every partner who undertakes it. Education, in light of this notion of communication, does not emerge from simply *being in* a social environment but rather by *sharing* a social environment. A human being, connected with other beings, cannot perform her own activities without taking the activities of others into account as they are the indispensable conditions for the realization of each partner’s tendencies. The co-creative facet to Deweyan communication is foundational to the development of a community of partners, whilst accounting for individual development that occurs through association.

This vision of communication, when applied to the distinction between education and training, further demonstrates not only the notion of development through association but also the capability of education to expand beyond the confines of its structural environment.

Training is illustrated by situations in which those who learn do not share in the use to which their actions are put. They are, in Deweyan terms, not a partner in a shared activity. Education, in contrast, requires the sharing of a common activity within which every partner is both participating and interested in its accomplishment. A partner’s ideas and emotions are changed as a result of the activity. Dewey explains:

³¹ Ibid., 41.

One does not merely act in a way agreeing with the actions of others, but, in so acting, the same ideas and emotions are aroused in oneself that animate the others.³²

It is not, therefore, that meaning is transmitted from one person to another. It is because partners share in a common activity that their ideas and emotions are transformed as a result of and due to the function of the activity in which they participate. The co-creation of meaning, as the term suggests, is made through association. The recognition of this distinction highlights the fact that a common understanding is *not* a condition for cooperation. It is not that we first need to come to a common understanding and then proceed to coordinate our actions. It is precisely the other way around: common understanding is produced by and is the outcome of successful cooperation in action.

Dewey considered the mutual intelligibility of the sounds of language to be sufficient evidence in support of the premise that meanings depend upon connections with a shared experience. Let us consider the manner by which an adult understands the word 'book' as opposed to the phonetic explanation by which each syllable within the word is explained to a child. The word 'book,' unbeknownst to the child prior to her learning of its meaning, and employed by the adult, acquires meaning through its use. Thus, the word 'book,' used by the adult and child in a common experience, within which both partners are interested in the activity, exemplifies the sharing of meaning through dialogic participation.

³² Ibid., 17.

Meaning and Co-Creation:

The Deweyan understanding of communication figured into a social framework for his theory of meaning. While participation in a joint activity is central in Dewey's account of communication, he emphasized the importance of the role played by things – both the things around which action is coordinated and the sounds and gestures that are used in the coordination of action. It is often argued that a person learns in the following manner:

By merely having the qualities of things impressed upon his mind through the gateway of the senses. Having received a store of sensory impressions, associations or some power of mental synthesis is supposed to combine them into ideas – into things with meaning.³³

However, the meaning of stones, trees or the fruits which hang from its branches is not to be found in the things themselves. As a matter of fact, it is the characteristic *use* to which the thing is put that supplies the meaning with which it is identified. Thus, to share the same ideas about things that others have is to attach the same meanings to things and to acts which others attach, which is precisely brought about through communication, through conjoint action.

The significance of Dewey's communicative theory of meaning is found in a rejection of the idea that the child can simply discover the meaning of the world – and of the things and the events in the world – through careful observation of the 'outside.' The meaning of the world is not located in the things and the events themselves, but in the dialogic associations in which things, gestures and sounds play a role. We could, thus, say that because meaning only exists *in* association, it is, in a sense, located through the interactions between partners in a joint activity. This is why communication is not about the transportation of information from person A to B,

³³ Dewey, 34.

that is fundamentally transactional in its nature, but is properly understood through participation. Further, if it is the case, as Dewey argues, that meaning exists *in* association, then it follows that meaning can only be represented in and through association.

For education this implies, *inter alia*, that we should approach questions about dialogue and meaning in terms of the representations of practices not only within the walls of a school but also beyond the physical confines of an academic structure. This means, for example, that the teaching of a software in a professional environment or the instruction of history within a museum should involve bringing the practice of mathematics, computer science, history and anthropology, among other things, into view as these are distinctly educative processes regardless of their environment. The compartmentalization of the educative process as realizable only within a practice untethered from the world neglects the fundamental role played by education in our socio-cultural development, as evidenced by the genealogy of education itself, when properly understood.

Dewey's theory of communication, concomitant with its embrace of the ubiquity of the educative process, engenders profound implications for how we understand teaching and the impact of the teacher on the student.

The idea of communication as participation underscores the fact that the teacher's effect on the student is not direct, but *indirect*. Teaching is not a kind of input that is simply installed into the mind of the student without any noise, disturbance, transformation or resistance. Teaching, in contrast, is constituted by the construction of a social situation and the effects of teaching only result from the ways in which students interact with the social situation.

One may wonder: who actually educates? The intuitive response would dictate that educators educate, which is, in essence, true. However, if it is the case that there is no direct

relationship between the activities of the educator and the learning of the student, that teaching is not direct input into the minds of the students, then the conclusion must follow that it is the social situation which emerges from the interaction between the teacher and student that really educates. Dewey succinctly argues that we never educate directly, but indirectly by “means of the environment.”³⁴

Dewey’s ideas about the social origin and ‘location’ of meaning also imply that reflection itself has a social origin, in that reflection only becomes possible once one is able to make a conscious distinction between things and their possible meanings. The difference between an adjustment to a physical stimulus and a mental act, Dewey argued, is that the latter involves a response to a thing in terms of its meaning whilst the former does not. This imbues one’s behavior with a mental quality and it is only when one has an idea of a thing that one is able to respond to the thing in view of its place in an inclusive scheme of action. It becomes possible, then, to foresee the drift and possible consequence of the action of the thing upon us and of our action upon it. This makes the transition, or rather the evolution, from action to intelligent action possible for Dewey, a significant realization within the scope of his educational philosophy.

Dewey, as we should by now acknowledge, approaches education first and foremost as a process of communication. Contrary to the long-standing tradition in educational theory and practice, Dewey’s theory does not focus on questions about teaching or instruction as such. He does not conceive of education as something that is done to children and students instead of *with them*. However, Dewey does not fall onto the opposing extreme on this spectrum, which would be an adherence to a theory of learning that only looks at the activities of ‘learners’ without the influence of the educative medium.

³⁴ Ibid., 23.

Dewey acknowledges the pivotal role of the activities of the student in the educational process; nevertheless, the configuration of this process as a process of communication – of participation in a joint activity – is the central notion animating his philosophy. It is not a child-centered approach, but rather a philosophy of education oriented towards the emergence of communication and dialogue as a natural process of evolution. Consequently, if learning takes place through participation and communication, then the role of the learner changes from a recipient of meaning to a creator of shared meaning.

The engagement of the student in education, as opposed to training, implies that education is no longer, as the detractors of Dewey aver, a purely reproductive process but is in fact a *reconstructive* process achieved through the new meanings and insights generated by the participating and dialoguing students. Although this philosophy of communication can never guarantee social harmony or peaceful coexistence, and it would be naïve to place such an expectation upon it, the strength of this position emerges from its championing of interaction and engagement over the self-evidently less preferable isolation and disengagement. As linguistic and co-creative beings, it is the sharing of meaning through educative dialogue, beyond the conception of education as an autonomous practice within a structured environment, that will secure, not agreement, which should not be the aim of our educative process in any case, but rather healthy, and profoundly necessary disagreement, contestation and, at times, consensus.

Allen and Meaning

Logic and Structure:

Allen's conclusion, that meaning is produced by the interaction between students, is preceded by three distinct, yet interwoven, conceptual steps. They are: i) the application of the Rawlsian distinction between actor and practice, in his *Two Concepts of Rules*, to the case of education; ii) the import of structuralist assumptions in her account of the practices which fall under the institution of education; and iii) her explanation of the logic of the practice of education in the classroom.

Rawls, in his *Two Concepts of Rules*, argued that the debate among penal theorists between a utilitarian justification, aimed at deterrence, and a retributive justification, based on a commonplace morality, derived from a failure to understand the logic of practices.³⁵ He argued that, for any given practice, there is a distinction between "justifying a practice and justifying a particular action falling under it."³⁶ Allen transposes this distinction to the case of education.³⁷ Thus, the distinction becomes a case of understanding why *education*, as a formal institution, is justified vis-à-vis why *educating* an individual is justified.

Allen proceeds, from this distinction, to provide her account of the emergence of a practice. She utilizes the analogy of a baseball game:

Take the game of baseball for example. The emergence of the game as a social practice is explained by the goal of leisure. But the actions of the individuals participating in the game – swinging at balls, running around bases, catching and throwing balls, are *justified* by the goal not of leisure but of scoring more runs than the opponent. And the actions of

³⁵ John Rawls, "Two Concepts of Rules" in *Collected Papers* by Samuel Richard Freeman. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁷ Allen, *Education and Equality*, 13.

corporate actors who have co-opted the game of baseball to develop, for instance, a professional version of the sport are *justified* by the goal of profit.³⁸

According to Allen, the goals that explain the emergence of the practice ('leisure'); the goals that justify the effort to regulate the practice ("the rules of the game"); and the goals that justify actions undertaken within the practice ("swinging at balls, running around bases") are all logically separate.³⁹ If such logics turn out to be identical, Allen considers such a coincidence as purely accidental. Consequently, it is imperative that we recognize that, as with the case of punishment in Rawls, the logic of education makes two different types of justification relevant to the practice. Therefore, as with the "corporate actor" who converted the practice of baseball into a money making franchise, appreciated by millions of people in America, the co-optation of practices by the state can have a utilitarian justification; however, the goals of the actions within the practice do not *necessarily* have to be utilitarian. Allen suggests that, for the case of education, the goals of the particular instances of teaching that fall under the practice of education are 'eudaemonistic.'⁴⁰

Although her account of Aristotelian eudemonism is complex, for the purposes of this Chapter, a brief definition will suffice. Allen defines eudemonism as an ethical outlook organized around the efforts of individuals to achieve their "full human flourishing by means of the development of their internal capacities."⁴¹ She continues to explain the method by which students, through their interactions, fulfill the eudemonistic goal of education by creating meaning:

³⁸ Ibid., 10.

³⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

For a democratic society, the egalitarian potential of education, in the creation of meaning through deliberative forums within the practice of education, will animate the potential of political participation.⁴²

Allen's theory of meaning is constituted by two salient features: reflection and expression. Each student, in their dialogic interaction, expresses a viewpoint and attempts to internalize their counterparts' expression. Reflection precedes understanding as, Allen notes, "the mediating influence of the teacher prompts further inquiry in order to achieve understanding."⁴³ The process by which meaning is shared involves the cyclic exchange between the interacting students which continuously refines and reshapes meaning. It is both an iterative and reconstructive process; however, another associated, and critical, feature of her theory is the framing of the dialogue within the confines of the educational structure.

The practice of education is the 'architecture' within which the deliberative activity takes place.⁴⁴ The educative medium, for Allen, is located in the dialogic relationship between students from which meaning emerges; however, the students, as they interact, are engaging, in parallel, with the structure of the educative practice.⁴⁵ This structure, defined by the walls of the classroom, the formal criteria of the educative task or the rubric by which the students are assessed, modulates the behavior and actions of the students. Although the interaction between student and structure is not explicitly recognized by Allen, it is picked up by the those who, in reference to her work, articulate the structuralist critique.⁴⁶

⁴² Ibid., 113.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 40.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 42.

⁴⁶ Shelby, 53-54.

The Structuralist Critique:

Prior to the reconstruction of the structuralist critique, I will outline two salient assumptions in structuralist thought, rule-following and social fields.⁴⁷ I will then illustrate the integration of these concepts in Allen's project following which I will present the structuralist critique. Subsequently, I will explain the implications of this line of criticism on not only Allen's theory of meaning but also, by extension, on her overarching argument related to the egalitarian potential of education. Following the consideration of a conceptual pivot that Allen could employ in order to circumvent the structuralist critique, I will underscore the conspicuous lacuna in her argument left by this pivot.

Allen's understanding of education as a practice originates from structuralist assumptions unearthed by commentators on her text.⁴⁸ One of the salient features of structuralism within the field of education, apropos to this discussion, is the emphasis being placed upon *physical* experience as well as *intellectual* experience within the classroom.⁴⁹ Simply, in the case of the classroom, an analysis of the interactions of the students within the spatial structure of the practice, the concrete walls of the classroom, must be accompanied by the interactions of the students with the normative structure itself. Normative structures, as the name suggests, are constituted by the rules which guide the actions of the agents within the practice. More precisely, the influence exerted by the structure upon the behavior, whether physical or linguistic, of the agents, students in Allen's case, provided the basis for the structuralist concepts of *rule-following* and *social fields*.

⁴⁷ Deborah Reed-Danahay, *Locating Structuralism*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005). In Chapter 4, Education, Rules and Fields, Reed-Danahay provides a structuralist account of the notion of rules and rule-following in discursive activities and practical experiences within the classroom.

⁴⁸ Shelby, 52.

⁴⁹ Reed-Danahay, 66.

Rule-following can be understood as a disposition of the mind with twinned functions. As an instrument that structures observations into patterns of associations, the mind understands a practice, such as the workings of a classroom, by observing and thereby acquiring the rules that regulate the class; as a responsive tool, the mind, having learned the rules of the practice, adapts to the structure in order to guide their actions and behavior within the practice. In essence, rule-following is the way individuals learn to behave and navigate the practice within which they are situated.

This learning involves an interaction with the structure. To substantiate, in the context of Allen's argument, a student would, upon observation, realize that raising one's hand during a discussion is a sign of readiness to express oneself. This is a case of the rule-following disposition acquiring the rules of the practice. If a student, who is quick-witted and formulates their thoughts swiftly, raises their hand constantly so as to increase the frequency with which they speak, their behavior has been modulated by the structure in order to accelerate their learning, presuming that speaking more often does in fact generate a faster understanding of ideas.

The disposition by which humans follow rules is an intrinsic form of conditioning that is regulated by the rules of a practice.⁵⁰ Such structuralist concepts presuppose complete obedience to the rules, not a "free interaction" with them that would allow for individuals to associate with each other through the framework of the practice within a social field.⁵¹

Rule-following is produced through an interaction of the individual with the rules of the game of different social fields. Scholars, often in their explanation of social fields, like Rawls

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 104. Bourdieu, in his criticism of structuralism, proposes such a "free interaction" with the social practice of education.

and Allen in their accounts of practices, employ the analogy of a game.⁵² A social field is any practice with its own set of rules, accepted behaviors and norms. The school is often cited within explanations of social fields.⁵³ An individual would, through experiencing the rules within a social field, develop their rule-following disposition in order to adapt to the practice within which they were located. As a consequence, the agent-field interaction, used interchangeably with agent-structure interaction, results in the individual's learning through the acquisition and subsequent use of the rules that structure the practice.

Allen's theory of meaning originates from these structuralist assumptions undergirding the sociological theory of practice. This observation, made by Allen's early commentators, forms the basis of the structuralist critique.⁵⁴ Students, as the agents within the social field of a classroom, learn through their dialogic interactions. The social field, with its rules, frames the deliberative activities that engender the opportunities for meaning to emerge from dialogue; however, it is foundational to the structuralist position that the agents, in this case students, first acquire the rules of the practice, independent of interpersonal interaction. Allen, who explicitly acknowledges the provenance of the social theory enlivening her account as structuralist in nature, must import such foundational features within the context of her argument.⁵⁵ This stage of learning, generated by an interaction between student and structure, *precedes* the dialogic exchanges that produce meaning within Allen's account. The rule-following propensity develops by learning the rules of the practice and thereby modulates its behavior and actions in response to the structure within the practice. However, this propensity cannot create meaning through an interaction with another agent in the social field; the dispositional tendency creates meaning

⁵² Reed-Danahay, 69.

⁵³ Portes, "Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology," 18.

⁵⁴ Shelby, 54.

⁵⁵ Allen, 112.

solely through an interaction with the normative structure itself. This is the fundamental premise of the structuralist critique. Allen's theory of meaning *requires* students, as agents within the same social field, to have the capacity to generate meaning through dialogic interactions between each other. However, having imported a structuralist social theory, Allen's theory of meaning cannot generate meaning through interactions between students as it is *only* by the interactions between a student and the structure of the practice of education through which meaning can emerge.

By employing a structuralist theory of practice, as the grounding for Allen's theory of meaning, she imports, according to the structuralist critique, the aforementioned premise that meaning is generated, not by interaction between students, but rather by interactions between students and the normative structure framing the practice of education. However, Allen's diagnosis of the inordinate prevalence of structures within education in the American context is a cause of the instrumental treatment of education.⁵⁶

This finding is evidenced by her research into the structures guiding students' normative behavior. Allen highlights the presence of assessments, standardized testing and internal systems of monitoring and evaluation which characterize the social field of education today.⁵⁷ It is only with these structures, argues the dominant logic of the current education system, that students recognize the normative standards of behavior and performance, learn the rules of the practice in order to meet these standards, and modulate their behavior when they have violated a standard.

A conspicuous example is the Value-added model (VAM) of teaching.⁵⁸ It is a collection of complex statistical techniques that uses multiple years of students' test score data to estimate

⁵⁶ Allen, 11.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵⁸ D.F. McCaffrey, J. R. Koretz, Hamilton L. S, "Evaluating value-added models for teacher accountability" (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2003).

the effects of individual schools or teachers. This model directly effects salaries of the teachers in schools. In light of this model, several teachers instrumentalized the normative structures, the rules, of the practice to produce higher test scores.⁵⁹ The students respond by learning the rules of the “game of schooling” in order to satisfy the criteria for ‘success.’⁶⁰ The rules of the practice, involving assessment, grading criteria and examinations, have not changed; however, the educative activities have been shaped to achieve increases in test scores, not the creation of meaning through deliberative forums.

The structuralist critique, instantiated by VAM, illustrates the students’ inability to *create meaning* through interactions between each other. The structuralist account of education as a practice enabled agents, within social fields, to generate meaning by interacting with the structure of the practice. Allen’s theory of meaning, grounded in structuralist practice theory, argues for meaning through interactions between the students within the practice, not through interactions with the structure itself. For the case of education, within Allen’s context of American education, the reality evidences the role of external influences, such as policy makers, to inhibit the creation of meaning through dialogue. Allen, cognizant of this reality, locates the origin of meaning through an interaction between students; the structuralist critique highlights the necessary condition that meaning can only be created through an interaction between student and structure.

It becomes clear that Allen’s theory of meaning, undergirded by structuralist theory, is susceptible to the structuralist critique. Her theory of meaning, which is grounded in an

⁵⁹ Gary D. Fenstermacher, “Rediscovering the Student in *Democracy and Education*” in *John Dewey and Our Educational Prospect* by David T. Hansen. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 97-112. Fenstermacher utilizes empirical data, following the application of the VAM, alongside a reading of Dewey, to highlight the instrumentalization of education by a modification of the rules guiding the practice of education.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

understanding of shared meaning as generated between students, would be bolstered by an alternative foundation in a theory that understands meaning as generated between students, rather than via an agent-structure interaction. Allen, who cites John Dewey's philosophy as her intellectual ancestor, would profit from his theory of meaning that avoids the structuralist critique.⁶¹

⁶¹ Allen, 4.

A 'Deweyan' Environment and the origin of Meaning:

Allen situates her philosophy of education as an extension of Dewey's project in *Democracy and Education*. Although Allen does not explicitly utilize Deweyan concepts in her argument, she acknowledges that her "method is pragmatist" in its spirit.⁶² Considering the difficulty of responding to the structuralist critique in Allen's theory of meaning, Dewey's theory of meaning, which circumvents this line of criticism, with harmonious overarching goals for education in a democratic society, would fortify Allen's account.

In the opening chapters of *Democracy and Education*, Dewey focuses on the question: how can meaning be communicated? Dewey argued that "education consists primarily in transmission through communication"; however, he qualified this assertion, as we saw in Chapter 1, by highlighting that this process does not occur by literal inculcation.⁶³ Communication, properly understood, is a process of "sharing experience until it becomes a common possession."⁶⁴ The foundational element of the educative process for Dewey, and Allen, is participation.

Participation, for Dewey, is not constituted only by the physical proximity of the students within an activity. His notion of participation is defined as follows:

It is only when all are cognizant of the common end and all are interested in it that there is real participation. It is only this kind of participation which modifies the disposition of both parties who undertake it.⁶⁵

From the account above, it becomes clear that participation, through communication, requires a shared interest in the common end of the activity itself as well as a modification in the

⁶² Allen, 99.

⁶³ Dewey, 14.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 38.

disposition of all the partners engaged in the dialogic activity. This account of Deweyan communication figures into his theory of meaning by emphasizing, in conjunction with communication, the dialogic manner by which communication with the world itself produces meaning.⁶⁶

It is often argued, as Dewey noted, that a person learns merely by having the qualities of things impressed upon his mind through the gateway of the senses. Having received a store of sensory impressions, associations or some power of “mental synthesis” is supposed to combine them into ideas, “into things with meaning.”⁶⁷ However, meaning is not to be found in the things themselves. It is, as Chapter 1 elucidated, the characteristic ‘use’ to which the thing is put which supplies the meaning with which it is identified.⁶⁸

From this account of meaning creation, it is evident that meaning only exists *in* social practices. It is the dialogic interaction between both the practices and students, as well as the students themselves, that generate meaning. At this point, one could contend, and plausibly so, that this account looks similar to the structuralist account of practice theory imported by Allen. The crucial step, which completes Dewey’s theory of meaning, is his final premise: the environment within which meaning is created *is* the discourse itself.⁶⁹

In accordance with the structuralist account of practices, the structure of the practice, constituted by its rules, is regarded as *separate* from the interactions between students. The interactions between students is contingent on the interaction between each student and the structure. The interaction between students, independent of the structure, in terms of the

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶⁷ Gert Biesta, “The Communicative Turn in Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*” in *John Dewey and Our Educational Prospect* by David T. Hansen. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 23-40. I am indebted to Biesta’s account of Dewey’s theory of communication which figures into his theory of meaning.

⁶⁸ Dewey, 34.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

structuralist account, is not possible. In contrast, the interactions between students, for Dewey's account, *is* the structure or, as Dewey would say, the educative medium.

The educative medium, or environment for Dewey, was conceptualized as follows:

A being whose activities are associated with others has a social environment. The particular medium in which an individual exists leads him to listen and feel one thing rather than another...it gradually produces in him a certain disposition of action. The words "environment," "medium" denote more than the surroundings which encompass an individual. Water is the environment of fish because it is necessary to the fish's activities – to its life.⁷⁰

The Deweyan environment, by contrast with structuralist theory, conceives of the environment as both vivified and vivifying. The social environment, constituted by the communicative exchanges between its inhabitants, is itself active. This dynamic environment stimulates the students within it by the expressions of the participants within the activity. The analogy between the necessity of 'water' to the life force of a fish and the necessity of dialogic exchange to the life of the educative medium evinces the fact that meaning is produced, sustained and continuously reconstructed by dialogic action.

The structuralist critique questions the students' ability, within the structuralist account of practices, to *create meaning* through interactions between each other. The necessity of the interaction between student and structure as the mediator in order to generate meaning abrades against Allen's theory of meaning which proposes the creation of meaning between students. The Deweyan account, which shifts the structure of the practice from being *independent* of the participants to being *constituted by* the participants themselves, circumvents the deleterious implications of the structuralist critique. Dewey's theory of meaning creation, as generated by the interactions between students, remains intact in light of the structuralist critique.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 11.

If Allen, within the context of her argument, were to reconstruct her understanding of the structure of social practices along Deweyan lines, she not only bypasses the structuralist critique but also salvages the broader implications of her argument. The egalitarian potential of education, achieved through the generation of shared meaning and dialogic interactions between students, is achievable for Allen, when coupled with Dewey's theory of meaning. Further, Allen's reconstructed account would be further fortified against the associated lines of criticism in relation to the structuralist critique. Principally, the notion that what students learn most effectively, during their time within the social field of school, is the practice of schooling itself, that is, how to "play the game of schooling" by interaction, not necessarily with other students, but chiefly with the rules of the structure guiding their activities.⁷¹ By envisaging the normative structure *as* the participants of the educative activities themselves, Allen's account, with the context of American schooling in mind, can better fulfill its aim of shifting the instrumental treatment of schooling to the participative mode so as to attain her 'eudaemonistic' goal of education, properly understood.

⁷¹ Fenstermacher, 103.

Democracy and Education in Motion

Education as Preparation or Living:

Dewey and Allen are unified by their commitment to both democracy and education as the requisite foundation in order to initiate change within society; however, their concepts of education bifurcate in a manner that powerfully represents two dominant concepts within the philosophy of education. Dewey treated education as *life itself*; Allen considers education as *preparation for living*. This stark contrast, like two branches stemming from a single tree, remain rooted to the development of the expressive capacities of the student. Fostering bridging ties, across social cleavages, a fundamental objective for both the architects of democracy and education, prompted an emphasis on the process of co-creating meaning as a way of expanding the worlds of the participating students. Through dialogue and the sharing of interests, both Dewey and Allen envisioned a democratic ideal of education, properly understood, but their fundamental understanding of education itself differed. One wonders, and rightly so, why this point of divergence? A critical, and potentially devastating, consequent question remains: whose conception realizes the goal of fostering bridging ties better?

In this closing Chapter, in order to put forth a positive response to the aforementioned questions, three interwoven steps will be delineated: i) an explanation of the implications on Allen's theory of meaning when fortified by the Deweyan conception of the environment; ii) an illustration of the productive tension that emerges between Dewey and Allen's conceptions of education; and iii) a brief formulation, in light of the positive contributions by both the architects of democracy and education, of an educative vision that will better cultivate bridging ties in the classroom.

Allen's argument, as the previous chapter illustrates, locates the origin of meaning at the intersection between students and the structure of a school. A student's engagement with the rules of the structure produces a response from which meaning is derived. When viewed as an autonomous social practice, education is understood as separate from life beyond the four classroom walls, apart from the patterned interactions mediated by the academic structure. Allen's argument, which embraces this assumption, rests upon the necessity for educational practices to have surfaced in an enclosed space specifically designated for the deliberate educating of the young. This separation of the educative environment from the world outside of its circumference is vital to her view.

As a consequence of this retro-concocted picture tracing the genealogy of education, Allen, unlike Dewey, who also employed the image of the tribe, furthers the reigning orthodoxy within the philosophy of education that life and education are fundamentally separate experiences; education is a stepping stone that prepares students for life after graduation. Dewey, as seen in Chapter one, recognized the ineluctable dangers of transitioning from living to formal education, preempting the attenuation of associations caused by an inordinate focus on subject matter. Although Dewey was not opposed to rules within the classroom, as a minimalist framework that preserved decorum in service of pedagogic and co-creative dialogues, he did remain skeptical of the modulation of behavior owing to the imposition of rules. The negotiation between an interaction with the rules and the ability for students to redirect themselves, in response to the course towards which they are constantly steered by subject matter, is a *reconstructive, vitalizing process*.

When we invoke Allen's laudatory aim of cultivating the expressive capacities in students so that they can participate in co-creative dialogues, her theory of meaning, undergirded

by a structuralist conception of social interactions, does not entirely miss its aim of fostering bridging ties; nevertheless, her account, when fortified by the Deweyan conception of the environment, shifts the origin of meaning from the agent-structure interaction to the associations between students engaging freely within the educative environment. Moreover, as the physical structure of a classroom, with its walls, desks and chalkboards, no longer is the educative medium, the associative ties between students, who themselves constitute the structure, become the loci for the creation of meaning. The desperate need to promote bridging ties between students, recognized by Allen and indispensable to Dewey's project, is better served by a fortified account of her theory of meaning.

From Dewey's account of meaning, it becomes clear that meaning is located, not in the things themselves, but in the social relations in which partners dialogue so as to create shared meaning. Therefore, meaning exists, as we saw in Chapter 1, *in* association. This understanding of meaning is mirrored in Dewey's explanation of democracy itself. Democracy is more than a form of government; it is "a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience."⁷² This rendering of democracy, akin to his theory of meaning, emerges from association and, more importantly, *through* association.

Allen, retracing the etymological roots of the term, defines democracy as "the capacity of a broad and inclusive public to effect change."⁷³ Considering that the purpose of democracy, and education, in light of her definition, is to empower individual citizens and give them "sufficient control over their lives to protect themselves against domination,"⁷⁴ the development of a student's expressive capacity is a *sine qua non* of her educative model.

⁷² Ibid., 135.

⁷³ Allen, "A Connected Society," 104.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 105.

It is reasonable, in light of the two definitions, to interlace their conceptions of democracy, built a century apart. The foundations of their educative model, supported by their common conceptualization of democracy, produces a condition where education, based on communication and co-creative dialogue conducted by interested participants, leads to social change. As Chapter 1 illustrated, Westbrook's objection treated the Deweyan model of education as a form of social *reproduction* that merely transmitted the dominant ideas, cultural myths and patterned associations across generations. By embracing the *reconstructive* process of meaning creation, formulated by Dewey and espoused by Allen, students are not cogs in a machine, trained to respond to specific stimuli with conditioned actions; students share interests and, through dialogue, become the educative stimuli that propels the process of co-creating meaning. Allen's theory of meaning, as we have seen in Chapter 2, which locates the origin of meaning between agent and structure, cannot adequately fulfill her own goal of fostering bridging ties between students from diverse backgrounds.

In the classroom itself, when the origin of meaning is located in the associations between students, the role of the teacher transforms. The teacher is customarily the purveyor of rules, regulating discourse and modulating the behavior of students through interactions. These engagements are not associative as the teacher is merely an instantiation of the structure. When framed within a Deweyan conception of the environment, the teacher becomes the means of educative influence, teaching, not directly, but indirectly through the presentation of subject matter and participation in response to the students' readings. In other words, the teacher educates by means of the environment. The Declaration of Independence, as we saw in the opening sketch in the Eastern Correctional Facility, generates meaning through dialogic interactions that allow particular students to associate through their interpretations of the text;

however, following this engagement in relation to the subject matter, the ongoing relationship wherein students continue to share their interests, becoming the educative stimulus for each other, not only promotes the cultivation of bridging ties but also strengthens existing ties. In this instance, education, reaching towards associations beyond the structural confines of a school, illustrates the potential for expanding social networks beyond the family, furnishing connections across social cleavages that solidify during the educative experience.

Bridging through Dialogue:

The conception of education as a form of preparation, as Allen avers, is accompanied by her *eudaemonistic* motivation for each student. This *eudaemonism*, an ethical outlook that seeks to furnish an environment for the flourishing of every student, treats education as an interaction between the agent and structure. Consequently, each student, embodying this individualistic outlook towards their education, which they reproduce as they notice the school treat them as an individual in this process, creates meaning through interactions with the structure. To substantiate, as students, we are evaluated in terms of our performance individually. Consequently, the only interest that is often nurtured is the relationship between the rules, used to evaluate the student, and the activities stipulated in accordance with these rules. A democracy, as understood by both Dewey and Allen, broadly speaking, sustains itself through participation in dialogues where each citizen is interested in the collective's growth. Allen's preparatory paradigm, motivated by the preservation of democracy and the promotion of bridging ties, is not oriented in its application to the goals that animate it. Education as preparation reinforces the notion that students are evaluated individually so as to ready them for the manner in which institutions post graduation, whether they are companies or governments, will view each person as an individual. In this way, the preparatory paradigm conditions students to mirror the model of education that individuates and enumerates each child within the structure, prompting rule-following and isolation, not unbridled curiosity and collaboration.

Dewey, in his vision of education as *life itself*, wrestled with the messiness of this model. The students, viewed as a collective, are therefore taught as a collective. The cultivation of shared interests emerges from activities wherein associations, through dialogue, develop and are strengthened by the continuity of education.

Although Dewey, unlike Allen, does not lay as much emphasis on the guarantee of change as a result of his educative model, it is a disquieting embrace of this risk that exemplifies wholeheartedly accepting his radical vision. Consensus is not a precondition for communication; the opposite is the case. In fact, agreement is not, as Dewey attested, a guaranteed outcome within his associative model of education. This profound necessity to recognize the need for free thought and action, unfettered by excessive regulation within the classroom, is realized by the Deweyan environment, where education occurs by providing a course for students that occasions their self-initiated *redirection*. The empowerment of students, as wayfarers, requires the loosening of a well-intentioned grip so that they can choose their own path collectively. The pooling of diverse hermeneutical resources within a group of individuals occasions the cultivation of bridging ties, across social cleavages, due to the participative experience that students discover *in school, not after*.

It is noteworthy that Allen, writing several decades after Dewey's socio-historical moment, raises the persistence problem of segregation within American schools as an enduring conflict that erodes the conception of democracy outlined above.⁷⁵ Without the lack of diverse perspectives in the average American classroom, not to say that racial differences are the sole marker by which worlds can be co-created, across social cleavages, through dialogue, we must realize that a prescriptive response to such conditions is desperately needed. Dewey, as noted by his critics, remains disappointingly unhelpful in terms of concrete steps required to realize his vision. Allen, by contrast, and beyond the concerns of this project yet noteworthy, has explored pedagogic methods, such as project learning and collaborative learning processes, in order to

⁷⁵ Allen, "A Connected Society," 108.

better cultivate the verbal capacities of each student.⁷⁶ The lamentable paucity of research in relation to the cultivation of the expressive capacities within children, with the goal of creating bridging ties between students, shall hopefully pave the way for avenues for research; however, the tragic irony in this country is seen by the fact that segregated schools severely delimit the capabilities of researchers to better understand our social fragmentation.⁷⁷ A diversity of perspectives, as participants in an educative dialogue, will signal a conversational shift in not only how people across social cleavages understand each other but also how groups of students learn through association, not inordinate rule-following to which children become inured.

From a theoretical perspective, the radical potential of embracing the Deweyan environment, as the foundation of Allen's theory of meaning, will expose the policy makers and economists, who instrumentalize education by orienting the process towards an occupational end; resuscitate the dialogue, among the philosophers of education, in relation to the question of educating for civic participation; and provide a stable foundation for the increasing number of preparatory programs for teachers in America.⁷⁸ When children are educated in classrooms that treat them as participants in a collective dialogue, where the teacher is the means of the educative influence, we will bridge ties as we co-create worlds. Although consensus is prized, it is not the primary goal. To embrace contestation, refutation and association is to recognize the profound

⁷⁶ Danielle, Allen, "Understanding the Contributions of the Humanities to Human Development: A Methodological White Paper." *Project Zero – Harvard University*, May 15, 2016: 1-34. This paper describes Allen's methodology for analyzing "humanist craft practices and developing assessment tools." The paper outlines a theoretical argument for their approach to studying and building tools for assessment in the humanities. The second section of the paper describes the methodology that Allen has developed to study the "craft logic of humanistic practices in order to build assessments from this understanding."

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁸ Cochran-Smith, Marilyn, and Kenneth M. Zeichner. *Studying Teacher Education: The Report of the AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education*. (Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum, 2006).

and conflictual portrait of democracy and education as fundamental to experiencing life itself, rooted in the present.

Epilogue

The inspiration for introducing the first sentence of the Declaration, within the frame of a class on Symbolic Logic in the Eastern Correctional Facility, originated from Danielle Allen's close-reading of the document with both her undergraduate students at the University of Chicago and the general public during her night classes.⁷⁹ The motivation for my own pedagogic move, within the prison, stemmed from the inclination to furnish an educative environment that allowed for the sharing of experiences in relation to subject matter and thus, the promotion of bridging ties. In *Our Declaration*, Danielle Allen frames her text as both a line by line analysis of the content of the American Declaration of Independence and an account of the iterative drafting process of the document itself. Initially, her treatment of the text was, as she acknowledges, 'instrumental.'⁸⁰ It was chosen due to its short length so as to allow for swift perusal by her adult students, during the night classes, in light of their busy schedules.⁸¹ However, the transformative experience of teaching the Declaration for Allen, and her students, served to illustrate a process of co-creation where meaning was shared between partners and bridging ties were strengthened.

The dialogue within the walls of the prison, like Allen's account of her pedagogic experience, demonstrates the need to *participate* in order to co-create a common world. Each participant can help to build the world in which one lives. Like an 'architect,' every member of a dialogue has the capacity to determine the pattern and structure of the ideas being discussed.⁸² This democratic engagement allows for meaning to be a result of co-creation. However, it is

⁷⁹ Danielle, Allen, *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality*. First edition, (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W. W. Norton & Company, 2014).

⁸⁰ Allen, "Our Declaration," 11.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 34.

crucial that this process of co-creation, like democracy itself, continuously recurs in order to preserve the vitality of meaning. It is only by engaging all members of a community equally in the work of co-creating and constantly *re-creating* meaning that democracy as a form of living renews itself.

The dialogue in the class at the Eastern Correctional Facility was constituted by the students clarifying their own principles, contesting certain readings of the text and transposing the ideals of the document into the current moment to diagnose the political maladies of our time. The reading of the document itself was interposed between these dialogic interludes. The experience transformed as each student contributed to a common understanding of political equality that was co-created through dialogue. Crucially, as the two classes, one taught by Allen and the other under the auspices of the Bard Prison Initiative, proceeded, the understanding of political equality, in response to the accretion of details as the students explored the Declaration further, was “constantly questioned, revised and ultimately re-created.”⁸³

The writing of the document itself, built upon a process which involved dialogue and the co-creation of meaning, figured into classroom discussion. The Declaration provided an exemplar for the way in which people, with ideas, conversations and decision-making committees could weave an agreement, through dialogue and deliberation, so as to define a common purpose. The version of the Declaration, approved and signed by congress, was the result of several layers of conversation, debate through epistolary correspondence and close scrutiny, by various sets of eyes, on each sentence, word and punctuation mark. Although the text is frequently attributed to Thomas Jefferson, regarded as the principal author of the document, Allen reorients this view by meticulously cataloguing the myriad official discussions, fifty-seven to be precise, so as to illustrate the polyvalence of voices that have shared in the co-

⁸³ Danielle, Allen. Interview. By Vikramaditya Joshi. *Harvard University*. 25 Sept. 2017.

creation of this document.⁸⁴ This “conscious redescription” of the dialogue, writing and editing process that formed the basis for the Declaration inherited by every subsequent generation, inspired the experience of the classroom discussion of the text itself.⁸⁵ There is no ultimate end to dialogue, only pauses to reflect on the shared meanings which emerge through collaborative participation.

The instrumental treatment of education orients the process towards a final goal. Allen’s teaching of the Declaration, and the dialogues within the Prison, demonstrate the fact that certainty, whether epistemic for the social theorists or fiscal for the economists, within the scope of an educative process guided by a democratic ideal, is a chimeric goal. The transformative power of co-creation, which treats education as dialogic, allows for each student, as part of the body politic within the classroom, to participate in the generative process. The reconstructive feature of this process of co-creation prompts the participants to constantly engage in the dialogic mode to recreate meaning. The conspicuous lack of a definitive telos for this process, accompanied by the destabilizing conclusion that the conception of democracy is itself subject to this reconstructive process and therefore fluxional, requires educators, philosophers and scholars to embrace the fugitive nature of a truly democratic education.

This democratic ideal of education teaches us to co-create, revise and reconstruct meaning. Democracy itself, during this process, can *fail*. The chimera of certainty, sought by the economists shaping education policy, is held onto tightly so as to avoid the acceptance of failure. It is noteworthy that democracy can *fail*; nevertheless, it is crucial to realize that this failure is fugitive. The democratic ideal, through its iterative and reconstructive nature, has endowed itself with immortality. Although it may be doomed to failure, it cannot be sentenced to death. The

⁸⁴ Allen, “Our Declaration,” 80-81.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Declaration of Independence was a memorandum, whose etymological roots tell us that it is derived from a Latin word meaning, “something one must remember.”⁸⁶ The co-creation of shared meaning, by partners in dialogue, will continuously create and re-create; write and rewrite; construct and reconstruct; build and rebuild; and define only to redefine our shared course of human events.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 31.

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