

## Dewey and Vocational Education: Still Timely?

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John Dewey lived and worked in an environment where the manual training movement was ever-present. Nevertheless, over the years, what Dewey meant by manual training—aka occupations and vocational education—has been either misinterpreted or ignored for a plethora of reasons. In fact, what Dewey meant by occupations and what he believed vocational education should be have become blurred and confused.

Dewey's notion of occupations, as a method of learning by doing, did transform manual training and offer a new view of knowledge and knowing;<sup>69</sup> however, he also transformed vocational education. Numerous sources refer to Dewey's notion of vocational education and in many cases misinterpret what he meant by it. This paper will examine how Dewey's view of vocational education has been misunderstood, the vocational education context that Dewey was a part of, and what specifically Dewey meant by vocational education—with its social, political, moral and educational dimensions. Finally, the paper will recommend that Dewey's notion of vocational education is needed as much today in schools as it was when he first suggested it and what educators need to do.

### Relevant but Misunderstood

<sup>69</sup> Anthony DeFalco "An Analysis of John Dewey's Notion of Occupations - Still Pedagogically Valuable?" *Education and Culture*. Vol. 26: Iss. 1, Article 7. (2010), 88-89.

The relevance of Dewey, as discussed by Emily Robertson, shows the value of Dewey today with regard to vocational education. His vision, the issues he identified in his writings, are either unresolved or undetected, but still important. Robertson explains:

But even without being mainstream, Dewey's vision continues to stand as a critical conscience that draws attention to the far-from-completed agenda of making all students masters of their economic and social fate. Concepts such as the intelligent worker, the employer and employee, public control not ownership of the economy, schools not doing enough or doing the wrong thing are still issues raised by Dewey and still need to be examined.<sup>70</sup>

No one can question the importance of vocational education today. Nevertheless, as Christopher Winch<sup>71</sup> points out, vocational education is a relatively neglected topic in educational theory.

***Vocational education is a topic that is connected with broader ethical and political questions about the education of students, the kind of society they will live in, and how the schools can be part of the answer.***

Yet it is a subject of great importance. The way we prepare young people for work; their ability to determine the quality of the work<sup>72</sup> that a society offers them, and the is-

<sup>70</sup> Emily Robertson, "Is Dewey's Educational Vision Still Viable?" *Review of Research in Education* 18 (1992):335-381.

<sup>71</sup> Christopher Winch, *Education, Work and Social Capital: Towards a New Conception of Vocational Training* (Florence, KY, USA: Routledge, 2000), 19.

<sup>72</sup> See Joe L. Kincheloe, *Toil and Trouble*. (New York: Peter Lang, 1995).

sues related to economics, must all be addressed. Winch echoes Dewey by stating that in discussing the subject of vocational education, one cannot ignore issues of the quality of working lives and the broader aims of economic and social policy. Vocational education is a topic that is connected with broader ethical and political questions about the education of students, the kind of society they will live in, and how the schools can be part of the answer.

One can find numerous references to Dewey and vocational education. Scholars use different aspects of Dewey's writings to support their position on vocational education and seem to either ignore or miss Dewey's comprehensive vision. Three examples of scholars using Dewey to discuss vocational education are Richard Becker,<sup>73</sup> Norton Grubb,<sup>74</sup> and John Goodlad.<sup>75</sup> Each of these writers provides help in understanding Dewey's thoughts on vocationalism, though individually, they each fall short of providing the comprehensive approach with which Dewey approached the topic.

Becker discusses Dewey's notion of vocational education as offering the objectives of what vocational education should consist of: 1. democracy, 2. play and work, 3. culture, 4. society, and 5. educational process. However, Becker's discussion of Dewey's thought are not so much incorrect as they are incomplete. Although Becker codifies Dewey's thought on vocational education into five ingredients, they are not explained in any depth, nor do they leave the educator with a good understanding of what Dewey was stating.

Norton Grubb<sup>76</sup> explains Dewey's view of vocational education and uses a theme which he repeats in other writings: that Dewey's view of vocational education is best understood though the notion of education through occupations.

The limitation in Grubb's writings on Dewey's view of vocational education is that he equates Dewey's view of occupations with Dewey's view of vocational education and does not share Dewey's social and political concerns with regard to vocational education. Grubb seems to realize their importance, but does not elucidate Dewey's position.

Finally, Goodlad, in discussing the four goals of education, identifies vocational education as one of the four. However, in describing vocational education, Goodlad identifies five points that comprise the goals of vocational education, separating them from academic goals and absenting them from any discussion of social and political issues. Goodlad also discusses vocational education in the context of the flawed dualism of liberal education and vocational education. Here he echoes Dewey's concern about two types of education and is in agreement with Dewey that all children need both a liberal education and a vocational education. Nevertheless, I do not believe he reflects Dewey's notion of an "enlarged"<sup>77</sup> educational vision that would eliminate this dualism.

In short, vocational education is still discussed by contemporary scholars, still seen as important, but not in the way that Dewey envisioned it. It is time to revisit this theme in Dewey's writings.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Becker, "What Are the Objectives of Vocational Education?" *Phi Delta Kappan*, (April 1980): 534-536.

<sup>74</sup> Norton W. Grubb, "Not There Yet: Prospects and problems for "Education Through Occupations," *Journal of Vocational Education Research* v. 22 no. 2. (1997): 77-94.

<sup>75</sup> John I. Goodlad, *A Place Called School*, 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984).

<sup>76</sup> Norton W. Grubb, "Not There Yet: Prospects and problems for "Education Through Occupations," *Journal of Vocational Education Research* v. 22 no. 2. (1997): 77-94.

<sup>77</sup> Dewey, CD Rom, "Learning To Earn: The Place Of Vocational Education In A Comprehensive Scheme Of Public Education", Address at the annual meeting of the Public Education Association, Hotel Biltmore, February 20, 1917, The Middle Works.10.144.

## The Historical Context of Vocational Education: Social Efficiency versus Education for Democracy Models

Historically, vocational education was not initially a part of public education. In the early 1800s, public schools were for the elite. Advocates for vocational education believed that by introducing vocational education into the schools, it would: 1) make schools more meaningful; 2) encourage children to spend more time in school; 3) create better educated and more skilled workers, with the ability to earn more; 4) have an indirect and positive effect on the aims and methods of general education; and, 5) result in better teaching and learning by employing “learning by doing”<sup>78</sup> and not mere book learning.<sup>79</sup>

Some scholars believe there were two distinct models of vocational education in the early twentieth century: education for social efficiency and education for democracy.<sup>80</sup> David Snedden is identified with the former, John Dewey with the latter.

However, that clean distinction is not obvious when one looks at the vocational education movement. Even within the social efficiency model, one can find variations. Ultimately, however, it is the social efficiency model that has prevailed.<sup>81</sup>

Julius House explains<sup>82</sup> that the vocational education of the 1920s—that found in the technical schools—was based on the social efficiency model; its goal was to fit the child for the job. The child was taught to accept the present social system with little or no criticism, and there was no connection between vocational training and social purposes.<sup>83</sup>

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House remarks that vocational education was based upon habit, not thought—as well as the separation of technical schools from rest of the school system. This type of education wanted student to “get the right answer” quickly, an automatic response was favored, and ethics was not a concern.

House explains this model of vocational education saw two kinds of individuals: 1) leaders or managers; and 2) followers or workers. According to House, vocational education favored the exploitation of workers and was there to ensure that current institutions were perpetuated.

Interestingly, there was support from both educators and the business community for this type of vocational education—but for different reasons. From the business perspec-

<sup>78</sup> ‘Learning by doing’ is not Dewey’s notion of ‘learning by doing’ but refers to manual training.

<sup>79</sup> Michael Wonacott, “History and Evolution of Vocational and -Career-Technical Education. A Compilation.” Eric ED 482 359 (2003): 4.

<sup>80</sup> Also see “An Assessment of the Historical Arguments in Vocational Education Reform,” Emery Hyslop-Margison. Volume 17, Number 1, Spring 2001, <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JCTE/v17n1/pdf/>

<sup>81</sup> Kincheloe, *Toil and Trouble*. (New York: Peter Lang, 1995).

<sup>82</sup> Julius House, “Two Kinds of Vocational Education” *The American Journal of Sociology* (Sept 1921): 22-225.

<sup>83</sup> If you look at Arthur Wirth “Issues Affecting Education and Work in the Eighties: Efficiency versus Industrial Democracy, A Historical Perspective.” *Teachers College Record* 79 (1977): 55-67 there are the two models of vocational education discussed. Different terms but the same concepts. There was an early debate according to Wirth over which model of voc ed to follow 1] business civilization 2] populist model or economic outlook efficiency vs wholeness of the person, self-realization, democratic ethos [55].

tive, the pervasive attitude was that “we pay the bills,” and in return, “we should have what we need”—workers. Teachers who supported this type of vocational education saw children entering the world ill prepared for jobs, with few skills, and that their chief task was therefore “to fit” youth for a place in the economic process.

House is critical of this model because it institutionalizes class separation and stratifies society: workers are the laboring class, there is no provision for their role in leadership, and their social intelligence is disregarded.<sup>84</sup> According to House, the other model, education for democracy, was opposed to the technical school model. And this is where John Dewey comes in.

This education for democracy model has children studying vocations to make intelligent choices that relate work to the scientific method, delay individuals’ choice of vocation, and end vocational training as traditionally practiced. Instead, students examine lines of work and seek to ascertain the service that such work renders society. Under this model, schools and society need to socialize work, and workers need to receive a living wage.

As noted earlier, the vocational reformers during the period from 1890 to 1920<sup>85</sup> had various agendas: skills training, fitting child to job, docile workers, and restoring the creative impulse unto industry. According to Kantor, the reformers seldom raised the question of who controlled the economy and for what purposes. Whatever their agenda, many vocational education reformers saw vocational education as socialization through the schools. The National Association of Manufactures [NAM] is an example of such advocates for

vocational education. They wanted the schools to produce good workers. Furthermore, the manufacturers argued that public schools adopt curriculum to meet that would meet their specific needs.<sup>86</sup>

## David Snedden: An Example of the Social Efficiency Model

David Snedden, Commissioner of Education for Massachusetts, set the context for vocational education as he saw it, circa 1910. His vision was the antithesis of Dewey’s view of vocational education. For Snedden saw a clear distinction between liberal education and vocational education. Vocational education, according to Snedden, was specialization and training.

Snedden divided vocational education into five areas: 1) professional education preparing lawyers, physicians, engineers, teachers, clergy, military personnel; 2) commercial education preparing bookkeepers, clerks, stenographers, commercial travelers, and business leaders; 3) industrial education preparing bricklayers, machinists, shoemakers, metal workers, factory hands, and others in higher manufacturing pursuits; 4) agricultural education providing skill and knowledge for the tillage of the soil and the management of domestic animals; and 5) education in the household arts, preparing girls for dressmaking, cooking, and management of the home.<sup>87</sup>

Although Snedden saw a social purpose behind the vocational training offered in the schools, that was about as far as it went regarding agreement between Dewey and Snedden. Snedden’s view was that vocational education was provided at public expense for all.

<sup>84</sup> House, “Two Kinds of Vocational Education,” 222-223.

<sup>85</sup> Harvey Kantor, “Work, Education, and Vocational Reform: The Ideological Origins of Vocational Education, 1890-1920,” *The American Journal of Education*, vol. 94, no. 4 (Aug. 1986): 401-426.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 403-404.

<sup>87</sup> Wonacott, “History and Evolution of Vocational and Career-Technical Education” 5-6.

This included the unfortunates—delinquents, dependents, and defectives for whom the home no longer exists.

For Sneed liberal education and vocational education were two distinct tracts within the public school experience. And although individuals with various intellectual abilities would benefit from vocational education, Sneed believed not all students could or should engage in the more demanding levels of vocational education. For those lacking in the higher intellectual abilities the unfortunates would receive a vocational education that prepared them for a trade but a model whose goal was to fit the child for the job. The child was taught to accept the present social situation.<sup>88</sup>

### Dewey; Social, Political, and Moral Issues; and Vocational Education: The Education for Democracy Model

Dewey's writings<sup>89</sup> on vocational education begin in 1901 and continue until 1944. In 1917, John Dewey addressed the Public Education Association, explaining that popular education has always been largely vocational, and that the issue should not be framed as a choice between vocational and cultural education. Furthermore, the notion of "learning for earning" is not so much incorrect as it is

badly conceived. Dewey explains that children were trained to enrich the system, not themselves. This conception of learning for earning, explains Dewey, is not for the worker, but for the business: "the ability of the learner to add to the earnings of others rather than to his own earnings has been the main factor in selecting materials of study and fixing methods."<sup>90</sup>

**... the issue should not be framed as a choice between vocational and cultural education.**

What Dewey wanted was a reconstruction of the educational system, one touching on social, political, moral, and education issues. He states in a response to David Snedden<sup>91</sup> that he, too, wants education to be vocational—but in a quite different sense of that term.

When Dewey discussed the kinds of vocational education he wants he focuses on what sorts of industrial education there might be and whom it might serve. Although the business community wanted workers, preferably docile ones, Dewey saw his vision as an enlarged educational plan. As an example, Dewey wanted a kind of social studies curriculum<sup>92</sup> that would encourage individuals to be politically astute, not docile workers who would be turned into automatons:

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>89</sup> References to Dewey's collected works are to the Electronic Edition, 1996. Larry A. Hickman, General Editor Director, The Center for Dewey Studies. This present edition is based on the critical edition, but differs from it in significant ways. Previously unpublished materials were transcribed and delivered in hard copy. Consequently, no machine-readable text was produced at the Center as a part of the editorial process. The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953. The Electronic Edition Folio Bound VIEWS ver 3.1a. Distributed by IntelLex corp. Future references to the Collected Works will be noted Dewey, CD Rom.

<sup>90</sup> Dewey CD Rom, "Learning To Earn: The Place Of Vocational Education In A Comprehensive Scheme Of Public Education," The Middle Works.10.144, Address at the annual meeting of the Public Education Association, Hotel Biltmore, February 20, 1917.

<sup>91</sup> Dewey, CD Rom, "Education Vs. Trade-Training: Reply To David Snedden" [Page The Middle Works.8.411] [First published in New Republic 3 (1915): 42-43. For David Snedden's letter to which this is a reply, see "Vocational Education," 40-42 (print edition, Appendix 2).

<sup>92</sup> Dewey, CD Rom, "Learning To Earn: The Place Of Vocational Education In A Comprehensive Scheme Of Public Education", Address at the annual meeting of the Public Education Association, Hotel Biltmore, February 20, 1917, The Middle Works.10.144.

So far as it takes in civic and social studies at all, it will emphasize those things which emphasize duties to the established order and a blind patriotism which accounts it a great privilege to defend things in which the workers themselves have little or no share. The studies which fit the individual for the reasonable enjoyment of leisure time, which develop good taste in reading and appreciation of the arts, will be passed over as good for those who belong by wealth to the leisure class, but quite useless in the training of skilled employees.<sup>93</sup>

Dewey's vocational education would prize freedom more than docility; initiative more than automatic skill; insight and understanding more than capacity to recite lessons or to execute tasks under the direction of others. Some examples? Consider Dewey's claims about the needs for a wide-spread "industrial intelligence:"

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select the materials and the technique of the trades not for the sake of producing skilled workers for hire in definite trades, but for the sake of securing *industrial intelligence*<sup>94</sup>—a knowledge of the conditions and processes of present manufacturing, transportation, and commerce—so that the individual may be able to make his own choices and his own adjustments, and be master, so far as in him lies, of his own economic fate.<sup>95</sup>

Consider, too, that Dewey lamented the waste of human talent in the educational system and argued that:

Waste of natural resources and carelessness as to human life, together with almost exclusive attention to raw materials and coarse methods, was the mark of the former [style of education]. Conservation of resources and of life, together with preparation of individuals with trained imagination and resourceful skill for expert action in a complex society, must be the mark of our future America—unless degeneration is to set in.<sup>96</sup>

Consider, finally, that Dewey supported socializing industry. His notion of socializing<sup>97</sup> asserts that industry exists not for profit, but

for the needs of ciety. In discussing the realignment of vocational education, he refers to what America has learned from the First World War about the idea of

education for social service. Dewey asserted the need for public control of the economy toward the goals of full employment, socially responsive business practices, and meaningful work that is democratically managed (that is, work that would be socially useful and aesthetically fulfilling):

While, as I have already said, political action is not basic, concentration of attention upon real and vital issues such as attend the public control of industry and finance for the sake

<sup>93</sup> Dewey, CD Rom, "Learning To Earn: The Place Of Vocational Education In A Comprehensive Scheme Of Public Education," Address at the annual meeting of the Public Education Association, Hotel Biltmore, February 20, 1917. mw.10.148

<sup>94</sup> Italics mine.

<sup>95</sup> Dewey, CD Rom, "Learning To Earn: The Place Of Vocational Education In A Comprehensive Scheme Of Public Education," mw 10.149.

<sup>96</sup> Dewey, CD Rom "Vocational Education Learning to Earn by John A. Lapp and Carl, The Middle Works.10.303. H. Mote." Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1915.

<sup>97</sup> Dewey, CD Rom, "Vocational Education In The Light Of The World War" The Middle Works.11.58 First published as Bulletin No. 4 (Chicago, 1918), 9 pp., of the *Vocational Education Association of the Middle West*, from an address to the Association, Chicago, 25 January 1918.

of social values would have vast intellectual and emotional reverberations. No phase of our culture would remain unaffected. Politics is a means, not an end. But thought of it as a means will lead to thought of the ends it should serve. It will induce consideration of the ways in which a worthy and rich life for all may be achieved. In so doing, it will restore directive aims and be a significant step forward in the recovery of a unified individuality.<sup>98</sup>

Industrial intelligence, the cultivation of human talent, and the socialization of the economy—these are all themes that run across Dewey’s thinking about the relationship between the economy and society. However, any movement toward the realization of this vision must mean a thorough reorganization of the schools. For Dewey opposed the dual school system: one for a liberal education and one for vocational education. In a response to such a dualism, Dewey wanted a complete overhaul of schools, representing “newer social needs.”<sup>99</sup>

Dewey believed that a dual system of education was (and will continue to be) dangerous for the future of any democracy. The dual system would strengthen class divisions whereas an integrated system would do more

to strengthen democratic ways of life.<sup>100</sup> Industrial education should not be for the sake of industries—but for the sake of citizenship.<sup>101</sup>

Dewey sought social democracy through the reconciliation of the liberal and vocational dualism in schools. For Dewey, social democracy must oppose the belief that there are two different aims of life, located on different planes; that there are those few who are educated to live on a plane of exclusive and isolated culture, while the many toil below on the level of practical endeavor, directed at material commodities. Dewey claimed nothing less than that the problem of modern life is the

doing away with all barriers that keep up such divisions.<sup>102</sup>

For Dewey, social democracy is moral democracy, and it is needed along with a political democracy. Social democracy is:

a state of social life where there is a wide and varied distribution of opportunities; where there is social mobility or scope for change of position and station; where there is free circulation of experiences and ideas, making for a wide recognition of common interests and purposes, and where utility of social and polit-

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<sup>98</sup> John Dewey, *Individualism Old and New* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1930), 118-119.

<sup>99</sup> Dewey, CD Rom, “Splitting Up The School System,” The Middle Works 8.126 First published in *New Republic* 2 (1915): 283-84. For Charles P. Megan’s response, see “Parochial School Education,” *New*

*Republic* 3 (1915): 72 (print edition, Appendix 4). For Dewey’s rejoinder, see this volume, pp. 416-17.]

<sup>100</sup> Dewey, CD Rom, “Some Dangers In The Present Movement For Industrial Education.” The Middle Works. 7.104 First published as “An Undemocratic Proposal” in *American Teacher* 2 (1913): 2-4. Revised and reprinted in *Child Labor Bulletin* 1 (1913): 69-74.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, The Middle Works 7.101.

<sup>102</sup> Dewey, CD Rom, “As Concerns The College.” The Middle Works. 1.300 First published as “Are the Schools Doing What the People Want Them to Do?” *Educational Review* 21 (1901): 459-74. Reprinted as “The People and the Schools,” *Education Today*, ed. Joseph Ratner (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1940), pp. 36-52.

ical organization to its members is so obvious as to enlist their warm and constant support in its behalf.<sup>103</sup>

Democracy, according to Dewey, must be born anew every generation—education must be its midwife.<sup>104</sup> His views on vocationalism, I hope to have shown, were at the heart of such claims.

## Personal Power and Individualism

Dewey's version of education would empower each with a certain personal control, or power, discontent for external control of their mental capacities, and self-discipline. Each would have the ability to delay gratification so as to secure powers that will enable them to adapt to change. Furthermore, instead of "being prepared for a special, exclusive, practical service, as a hide might be prepared for a shoemaker, he is educated into ability to recognize and apply his own abilities—is given self-command, intellectual as well as moral."<sup>105</sup>

This concern with the power of the individual can be contrasted with the type of "individualism" that American society can all too quickly buy into. Dewey worried that capitalism would have a negative effect on individuals and their education. As discussed by Martinez Aleman,<sup>106</sup> if capitalist business interests dictate educational policy, students receiving a vocational education would not be provided with equal opportunity. Individuality would be sacrificed for individualism as school con-

tinue to value high stakes testing policies and the perpetuation of a stratified society.

In short, Dewey worried that capitalism was bringing about a type of individualism that would pervert the individual. A "vocational track" and an "academic track" in public schools signaled to Dewey a formalized subjugation of individuality.<sup>107</sup> He states that the "perversion of the ideal of individualism is simply the distortion by capitalism of the ideal of individuality, a parody of democratic ends."<sup>108</sup> In Dewey's view, mass production and the alienation of the worker would infuse social policy with an understanding of the American democratic mission that valued the attainment of private gain and individual autonomy—not true individuality.<sup>109</sup>

## A New Form—A New School Model

***Dewey worried that capitalism was bringing about a type of individualism that would pervert the individual.***

In 1912, Dewey noted that because of the changes in society, namely the growth of democratic ideals, the industrial revolution, and the emergence of experimental science and evolution,<sup>110</sup> schools needed to reorganize and develop a new kind of general education. This general education would be built upon "both new subject-matter and new methodol-

<sup>103</sup> Dewey, CD Rom, "The Need Of An Industrial Education In An Industrial Democracy." The Middle Works.10.137 First published in *Manual Training and Vocational Education* 17 (1916): 409-14.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., The Middle Works 10.139.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 10.141.

<sup>106</sup> Ana Martinez Aleman, "The Ethics of Democracy: Individuality and Educational Policy Educational Policy," *Educational Policy* (2001) 15: 379.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 394.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 388.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 388.

<sup>110</sup> Dewey, CD Rom, "Contributions to A Cyclopaedia of Education" Volumes 3, 4, and 5. The Middle Works.7.308. First published in *A Cyclopaedia of Education*, ed. Paul Monroe (New York: Macmillan Co., 1912-13), Vols. 3, 4, and 5.

ogy [and] a recognition of the intellectual value of labor.”<sup>111</sup>

Nevertheless, as late as 1936,<sup>112</sup> Dewey maintained that vocational education had subsisted in missing the point:

It may prepare them quite effectively on the technical side and yet leaves graduates with very little understanding of the place of those industries or professions in the social life of the present, and of what these vocations and professions may do to keep democracy a living, growing thing.<sup>113</sup>

So Dewey’s asks what kind of vocational education is needed and whom it shall serve. His answer was as follows:

reorganization of existing schools as will give all pupils a genuine respect for useful work, the ability to render service, and a contempt for social parasites whether they are called tramps or leaders of "society." Instead of assuming that the problem is to add vocational training to an existing cultural elementary education, it will recognize frankly that the traditional elementary education is largely vocational, but that the vocations which it has in mind are too exclusively clerical, and too much of a kind which implies merely ability to take positions in which to carry out the plans of others. It will make much of developing motor and manual skill, but not of a routine or automatic type. It will rather utilize active and manual pursuits as the means of developing constructive, inventive and creative power of mind.<sup>114</sup>

As Sidney Hook<sup>115</sup> explained, when educational leaders talked about “making a living,” they were speaking of a curriculum that would make students efficient workers, but not a curriculum that would liberate them. In short:

To find out what one is fitted to do and to secure an opportunity to do it is the key to happiness. Nothing is more tragic than failure to discover one's true business in life, or to find that one has drifted or been forced by circumstance into an uncongenial calling. A right occupation means simply that the aptitudes of a person are in adequate play, working with the minimum of friction and the maximum of satisfaction.<sup>116</sup>

## Conclusion

Vocational education is still caught between the two schools of thought. For example, in the “Unfinished Agenda—The Role of Vocational Education in the High School: National Commission on Secondary Vocational Education,”<sup>117</sup> there still is no apparent consensus on the definition of vocational education. The report states that the Commission wants a balance of both academic and vocational experiences. However, the report still sees vocational education as myopically preparing students for work. The Commission’s expectations are vague and do not really touch on either the political or the social issues that Dewey sought to put front and center.

<sup>111</sup> Dewey, CD Rom, “The Need Of An Industrial Education In An Industrial Democracy,” The Middle Works.10.142 First published in *Manual Training and Vocational Education* 17 (1916):409-14.

<sup>112</sup> Dewey, CD Rom, “The Challenge of Democracy to Education.” The Later Works.11.181 First published in *Progressive Education* 14 (February 1937): 79-85, from a transcript of an address on 13 November 1936 at the Eastern States Regional Conference of the Progressive Education Association in New York City.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.188.

<sup>114</sup> Dewey, CD Rom, “Learning to Earn,” The Middle Works.10.149.

<sup>115</sup> Sidney Hook, Introduction for *Democracy and Education* Page [The Middle Works.9.1 Dewey, CD Rom] [First published by Macmillan Co., New York, 1916.]

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.318.

<sup>117</sup> “Unfinished Agenda. The Role of vocational Education in the High School. National Commission on Secondary Vocational Education”, Washington, D.C.; Ohio State Univ., Columbus. National Center for Research in Vocational Education. Office of Vocational and Adult Education (ED), Office of vocational 1984.

Unfortunately, then, vocational education has not moved much closer to what Dewey envisioned. A badly conceived conception of “learning for earning” is still very much on the top of the vocational education agenda, as it was when Dewey wrote about vocational education over a century ago.

Most Americans agree that high school students should receive more education about possible career choices. Most also feel there should be more emphasis on preparing students for career fields with better employment opportunities. However, when we look at the kind of vocational or work-study programs wanted, there is no shared view. Ignoring social, political, and moral issues of school reform, many still express concern about students not possessing the specific skills needed for particular jobs. Many still seem to find Dewey in the wrong.

***Deweyan educational reform can help to alleviate the exploitation of workers—if schools sincerely want to become instruments for democracy instead of maintaining the status quo.***

Yet Michael Handel<sup>118</sup> explains that, although there is concern that students graduating high school do not possess adequate work skills, the data does not necessarily support this concern.<sup>119</sup> Handel notes that “employers are less concerned about cognitive skills deficits than what they consider poor work habits,

motivation, demeanor, and attitudes.”<sup>120</sup> In other words, the concern is still on the social—even the moral—level.

Instead of vocational education being a peripheral concern of reformers, a superficial reference, it might yet become an education that will integrate social, political and moral issues along with reform in curriculum and methodology. The result? Individuals who are intelligent workers in charge of their own economic destiny.

As pointed out by Michael Zweig, director of the Center for Study of Working Class Life at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, there are literally millions of workers who are unequipped to be masters of their own fate, not because of a lack of intelligence, but because of a lack of material resources: individuals who are not allowed to become intelligent workers in charge of their own economic destiny. People whose education has done little to prepare them for life:

They are cashiers, home health care workers, truck drivers, janitors, retail salespeople, secretaries, and many other people we see and rely on every day. They are people whose income is so low they cannot rise above the lowest twenty-five percent of housing stock for a family of their size in the community where they live without spending more than the government standard of thirty percent of income for housing. In short, they are over sixty million people in nearly twenty-three million households with eighteen million kids who can't afford to pay for the basic necessities of housing, food, medical care, and transportation.<sup>121</sup>

Deweyan educational reform can help to alleviate the exploitation of workers—if schools

<sup>118</sup> Michael J Handel, *Worker Skills and Job Requirements: Is There a Mismatch?* (Washington, D.C: Economic Policy Institute, 2005).

<sup>119</sup> Also see “The Workforce Readiness Crisis,” By Susan McLester and Todd McIntire, November 15, 2006

URI:

<http://www.techlearning.com/showArticle.php?articleID=193700630> where there article basically supports Hende’s study on what employers are looking for from high school graduates from “The Workforce Readiness Report Card.”

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>121</sup> Commentary: Bailing out distressed workers, for a change on Fri Sep 26, 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/reutersComService4/idUSTRE4808JD20080926>

sincerely want to become instruments for democracy instead of maintaining the status quo.

Perhaps Richard Rorty<sup>122</sup> says it best when he argues that it is time to educate our students not just about the history of labor unions, and not just that labor unions are America at its best, but more specifically: that workers have the right and the obligation to change society from the bottom up.

What Rorty wants our students to learn is that social justice cannot happen without civil disobedience. He explains

The students need to know that the deepest and most enduring injustices, like the unending humiliation of African-Americans and the miserable wages paid to unorganized workers, are always downplayed by the political parties, and by most of the press. They need to remember that the same argument now used against raising the minimum wage—that doing so will discourage economic efficiency and productivity—was once used against the eight-hour day. They need to be able to spot the resemblances between what the politicians were indirectly and gently bribed to ignore at the beginning of this century and what they are being indirectly and gently bribed to ignore now. They need to realize that the last hundred years of our country's history has witnessed a brutal struggle between the corporations and the workers, that this struggle is still going on, and that the corporations are winning. They need to know that the deepest social problems usually go unmentioned by candidates for political office, because it is not in the interest of the rich to have those problems discussed in public.<sup>123</sup>

Dewey, in his writings about vocational education, warned us that unless education was reformed, America would continue to be

plagued by economic inequality and the forming of economic castes. He asked what would happen if teachers became courageous and free to insist that educating children means creating discriminating minds—instead of minds that are able to be duped by others. When this happens, Dewey believed, the schools will become the “dangerous” outposts of a humane civilization: interesting places.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, First published in *Dissent*, Winter 1997, volume 44, number 1 “Back to Class Politics,” (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 255-6.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>124</sup> Dewey, CD Rom, 1922. “Education as Politics”. The Middle Works 13.334. First published in *New Republic* 32 (1922): 139-41. Republished in *Characters and Events*, ed. Joseph Ratner (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1929), 2:776-81, and in *Education Today*, ed. Joseph Ratner (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1940), pp. 157-63.