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CONFERENCE: Democratic Education, sponsored by the John Dewey Society and the Spencer Foundation

WHEN/WHERE: April 2016, Washington D. C.

The John Dewey Society, with generous support from the Spencer Foundation, will host a Conference on Democratic Education, celebrating the centennial of the publication of *Democracy and Education*, April 2016 in Washington D. C.

100 years ago John Dewey, in his magisterial *Democracy and Education*, laid out a framework for democratic education for multi-class, multi-ethnic, urban industrial democracies. Dewey's model grounds education in rich communicative exchanges among and between learners from all representative groups composing society. To this day, *Democracy and Education* is looked to as the definitive statement of the democratic education ideal. The work continues to be cited thousands of times a year – more than all other classics of American educational research combined.

Nonetheless, education in the democratic nations of today's global society faces profoundly anti-democratic challenges. The imposition by elites of fixed, top-down "standards" backed by high stakes standardized tests has converted our schools into little more than test prep academies where the aims of learners are neglected and the autonomy of teachers demolished.

Democratic education is a project activated at many levels. In classrooms, education is democratic to the extent that it is shaped around the aims of learners and engages them in individual and group activities of interest. Schools are democratic to the extent that teachers have sufficient autonomy and resources to work out educational programs with learners that are directed by learner needs rather than top-down agendas. In the local community, public education is democratic to the extent that it is shaped by locally elected officials responsive to the communications of local individuals and groups. Educational policy is democratic to the extent that it allocates resources in a fair manner, draws upon the inputs of communities and public interest groups in shaping policy decisions, and encourages democratic processes at the school and classroom level.

The centennial of the publication of *Democracy and Education* in 2016 provides an ideal occasion for re-consideration the democratic education project. The John Dewey Society has coordinated the publication of special issues of many leading scholarly journals devoted to this reconsideration. At least 50 new research studies will be published in these special issues on this topic in 2016, using Dewey's *Democracy and Education* as a common reference point.

This research seeks to understand the past and present impact of *Democracy and Education* on educational theory and practice around the world, to assess the current state of the democratic education project, and to determine the continuing relevance of Dewey's democratic theory as a guide for advancing democratic education in today's global context.

The John Dewey Society's Conference on Democratic Education, sponsored by the Spencer Foundation, and scheduled for April 2016 in Washington D. C., provides an exceptional opportunity to disseminate this research to scholars, practitioners, leaders of public interest groups and policymakers.