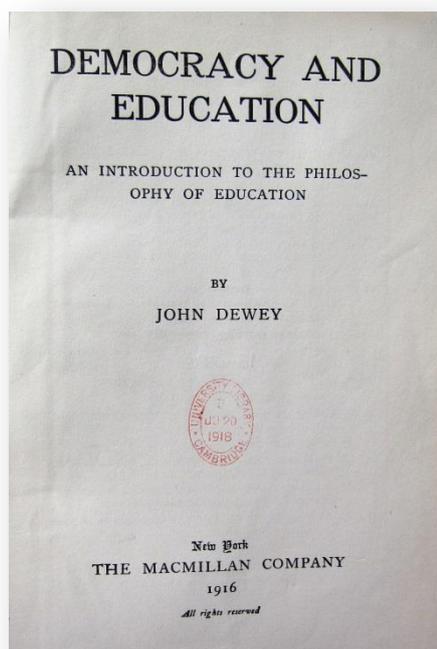


# JOHN DEWEY'S "DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION" 100 YEARS ON: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE RELEVANCE

Conference celebrating the centenary of the publication of John Dewey's *Democracy and Education*

University of Cambridge  
September 28th - October 1st, 2016

[dewey2016.co.uk](http://dewey2016.co.uk)



*Democracy and Education* sets out an argument as to how education should function to enable democratic social relations and the growth and development of the individual. It argues that democracy is a necessary way of living together to protect the individual and maintain social equity. The argument is premised on a social-interactionist theory of knowledge. The book's first publication in 1916 was designed to promote a philosophy of education to meet the needs of a changing democratic society.

The conference focuses both on the 'event' of the publication of *Democracy and Education* - for example by exploring the history of the text, its socio-political context, and its use in different contexts and settings – and on the particular ideas put forward in the book – partly to critically analyse these ideas and partly to assess their relevance for contemporary education.

In the spirit of Dewey the conference is intended to be about actions as well as words and to represent democratic education projects, involving children, practitioners and others actively engaged in Deweyan enquiry. The conference final day will offer an opportunity to engage with plans for forward action, collaboration and engagement.

## Confirmed keynote speakers:

**Alison Peacock.** The Wroxham Teaching School, UK

**Barbara Stengel.** Vanderbilt University, USA

**Rosa Bruno-Jofré.** Queen's University, Canada

**Gert Biesta.** Brunel University London, UK

## Main themes:

- Histories of the text
- Putting Dewey in his place? The social biography of the text
- Democracy and the common school
- Experience
- The role of the teacher

## Organizers:

**Gert Biesta** (Brunel University London), **Catherine Burke** (University of Cambridge), **Peter Cunningham** (University of Cambridge), **Christine Doddington** (University of Cambridge), **Ruth Heilbronn** (Institute of Education, University of London), **Rupert Higham** (University of Cambridge), **Gonzalo Jover** (Complutense University, Madrid), **Richard Pring** (University of Winchester).

history of  
**education**  
society

pesgb

UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE

HOMERTON COLLEGE  
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Organized and supported by the History of Education Society (HES-UK) and the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain (PESGB) in collaboration with the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge

## CONFERENCE THEMES

### 1. Histories of the text

How and where has the text been variously read, interpreted and applied in educational settings over the past century? How has *Democracy and Education* supported different views and methods of education (such as peace education, internationalism, inquiry methods, experiential modes of learning, community education)? How have historical circumstances, after the First World War and subsequently in contemporary times, changed or challenged the understanding of democracy that shapes the book? Does this diminish the power of the text for our times?

### 2. Putting Dewey in his place? The Social Biography of the Text

The book has been translated into many languages and interpreted in many different cultures. What interests and issues arise through the interpretations of the book in individual cultural settings? Drawing on the geographer David Livingstone's thesis that texts are afforded different meanings dependent on the geographical space in which they are read, how did *Democracy and Education* travel over the past century and with what impact? Dewey's influence on educational thought and practice across the globe has been significant, e.g. in the UK, China and Turkey. Where and how has the book been significant and how have individual contexts interpreted the ideas of the book? <sup>i</sup>

### 3. Democracy and the common school

Dewey stated that 'democracy and the one, ultimate, ethical ideal of humanity are to my mind synonymous'.<sup>ii</sup> Democracy as a continual responsibility of school communities is foundational to all his work in education. As Dewey saw matters in 1916, schools should become ever more porous spaces linked to ever changing communities and function to enable students to develop shared interests; learn in an atmosphere of freedom and participation, and engage with a curriculum based on their own interests and experience. He strongly opposed social and intellectual segregation in schools, arguing that this impoverishes all, undermining the possibility of a democratic society. Are these foundational principles for a democratic society and the formation of democratic citizens? Does *Democracy and Education* offer realisable paths towards a democratic society through the common school, and is Dewey's definition of democracy as 'a means of associated living' helpful and sufficient for engaging with modern political contexts and with children's participation in democratic processes?

### 4. Experience

Dewey links experience with thinking and sees learning as a function of the interaction of mind and body (Chapter 11). It is 'the intimate union of activity and undergoing its consequences which leads to recognition of meaning'. This leads him to promote a curriculum which engages students through their own experiencing. He holds a non-dualistic view of knowledge. Knowing is a process engaging people's experience and cognitive processes in an interactive mode which is opposed to an academic curriculum and a transmissive educational model. 'It would be impossible to state adequately the evil results which have flowed from this dualism of mind and body, much less to exaggerate them'<sup>iii</sup>. Contributions on this theme could, for example, cover Dewey's, pragmatism, epistemology and ideas of the curriculum based on experiential learning.

### 5. The role of the teacher

Teachers' roles are crucial in being with students in dialogical and ethical relationships. Half the book (Chapters 13-36) directly concerns teachers. These chapters articulate the kinds of educational experiences which teachers can and should offer, for example giving a general educational context, drawing on the ideas of experiential learning, with implications for vocational education (Chapter 23). During the year leading up to the conference teachers and students are engaging in a number of Deweyan inquiry activities and these will be an integral part of the conference, with exchange and sharing of practices. We encourage broad participation from teachers, students and others in this area. Contributions might consider how teachers in classrooms facilitate inquiry based learning, deliberative discussions and relationships. How has Dewey's thinking on teaching been practically interpreted over the last century? What is it inspiring now?

---

<sup>i</sup> See *The Global Reception of John Dewey's Thought Multiple Refractions Through Time and Space*, Edited by Rosa Bruno-Jofré, Jürgen Schriewer, Routledge – Series: Routledge International Studies in the Philosophy of Education.

<sup>ii</sup> Dewey, J. *Early Works*, 1:128 - Southern Illinois University Press.

<sup>iii</sup> Dewey, J. *Democracy and Education*, Free Press, 1966, p.141.