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A MORE PRACTICAL PEDAGOGICAL IDEAL: SEARCHING FOR  
A CRITERION OF DEWEYAN GROWTH

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**ABSTRACT.** When Dewey scholars and educational theorists appeal to the value of educative growth, what exactly do they mean? Is an individual's growth contingent on receiving a formal education? Is growth too abstract a goal for educators to pursue? Richard Rorty contended that the request for a "criterion of growth" is a mistake made by John Dewey's "conservative critics," for it unnecessarily restricts the future "down to the size of the present." Nonetheless, educational practitioners inspired by Dewey's educational writings may ask Dewey scholars and educational theorists, "How do I facilitate growth in my classroom?" Here Shane Ralston asserts, in spite of Rorty's argument, that searching for a more concrete standard of Deweyan growth is perfectly legitimate. In this essay, Ralston reviews four recent books on Dewey's educational philosophy — Naoko Saito's *The Gleam of Light: Moral Perfectionism and Education in Dewey and Emerson*, Stephen Fishman and Lucille McCarthy's *John Dewey and the Philosophy and Practice of Hope*, and James Scott Johnston's *Inquiry and Education: John Dewey and the Quest for Democracy and Deweyan Inquiry: From Educational Theory to Practice* — and through his analysis identifies some possible ways for Dewey-inspired educators to make growth a more practical pedagogical ideal.

When Dewey scholars and educational theorists appeal to the value of educative growth, what exactly do they mean? Is an individual's growth contingent on receiving a formal education? Is growth too abstract a goal for educators to pursue? Richard Rorty insisted that the request for a "criterion of growth" is a mistake made by Dewey's "conservative critics," for it unnecessarily restricts the future "down to the size of the present."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, educational practitioners inspired by Dewey's educational writings may legitimately ask Dewey scholars and educational theorists, "How do I facilitate growth in my classroom?" In other words, how can educators foster Deweyan growth if the content and direction of growth are uncertain?

A knee-jerk reaction to these kinds of questions is that philosophers and theorists have little to offer veteran teachers; one group is engaged in theory, the other in practice. However, forging continuity between pedagogical theory and practice is an ever-present concern for both theoreticians and practitioners, and especially for pragmatists. So, despite Rorty's contention, I proceed on the assumption that searching for a more concrete standard of Deweyan growth is a perfectly acceptable course of inquiry. Moreover, that search is not reserved exclusively for Dewey's critics on the ideological Right. A more nuanced reaction to the sorts of questions noted previously would be to avoid the temptation to make growth relative to some other ideal and offer criteria of growth to practitioners wishing to organize their efforts in light of the ideal.

In this review of four recent books on Dewey's educational philosophy — Naoko Saito's *The Gleam of Light: Moral Perfectionism and Education*

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1. Richard Rorty, "Education as Socialization and as Individualization," in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 114–126, 120.

in *Dewey and Emerson*, Stephen Fishman and Lucille McCarthy's *John Dewey and the Philosophy and Practice of Hope*, and James Scott Johnston's *Inquiry and Education: John Dewey and the Quest for Democracy* and *Deweyan Inquiry: From Educational Theory to Practice* — I tease out some possible ways for Dewey-inspired educators to make growth a more practical pedagogical ideal.<sup>2</sup> Three candidates for “fuzzy utopias,” or accounts that do not make growth contingent on another ideal and still manage to give practical suggestions for realizing growth in the classroom, are (1) Emersonian self-overcoming or moral perfectionism (Saito), (2) Deweyan inquiry (Johnston), and (3) hope (Fishman and McCarthy, and Saito). I begin with brief summaries of the four works, identifying the shared theme of growth. To each author we might pose the question, “Is it possible to make Deweyan growth a more practical pedagogical ideal?”

#### FOUR WORKS, ONE THEME

In *The Gleam of Light*, Naoko Saito argues that the concept of growth that undergirds Dewey's philosophy of education and democracy can be helpfully reconstructed “in the light of Emersonian perfectionism” (*GL*, 5). The need to reconstruct Deweyan growth arises because several critics, including Boyd Bode, Randolph Bourne, Allan Bloom, and John Patrick Diggins, have challenged Deweyans to identify a proper end for growth. If Deweyans cannot locate such an end, these critics charge, then “Dewey's philosophy of education and its principle of growth will lead children to moral relativism, uncertainty, and chaos — all insidious forms of democratic freedom” (*GL*, 6). However, growth in the absence of final ends is not a slippery slope to the position that anything goes. On the contrary, Dewey's notion of growth can be recovered without appealing to a telos or final end and without sinking into a relativistic quagmire. One must acknowledge that at its core Deweyan growth has an Emersonian spirit, allowing “us to transcend the tragic toward hope” (*GL*, 9). Furthermore, Dewey's account of educative growth is perfectionist in Emerson's sense because of its secularity, sensitivity to alterity, process-driven character, and concern with aesthetic education.

In *John Dewey and the Philosophy and Practice of Hope*, Lucille McCarthy documents her qualitative study of Stephen Fishman's course “The Philosophy and Practice of Hope.” Fishman's course exemplifies what Dewey described as “organized subject matter,” connecting the curriculum with the “ripe fruitage of

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2. Naoko Saito, *The Gleam of Light: Moral Perfectionism and Education in Dewey and Emerson* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005); Stephen M. Fishman and Lucille McCarthy, *John Dewey and the Philosophy and Practice of Hope* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2007); James Scott Johnston, *Inquiry and Education: John Dewey and the Quest for Democracy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); and James Scott Johnston, *Deweyan Inquiry: From Educational Theory to Practice* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009). These works will be cited in the text as *GL*, *PPH*, *IE*, and *DI*, respectively, for all subsequent references.

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[the students'] experience" and improving the quality of their engagement with, and hopefulness about, the world (*MW* 9, 190). McCarthy not only describes the course content, but she also explores the backgrounds of the course's ten undergraduate students and documents their reactions to the subject matter. She announces that her "primary focus" in the study "will be on the ideas about hope that students were most able to use in their own lives" (*PPH*, 105). Combining a series of homework assignments, formal essays, informal in-class writing exercises, and cooperative teacher-student inquiries, Fishman's course challenges the students to reconstruct a theory of hope from the writings of John Dewey (such as *A Common Faith*), of others (such as the works of Gabriel Marcel, Paulo Freire, and C.R. Snyder), as well as from their own experiences. What stands out from the many conclusions of McCarthy's study of Fishman's course on hope is the transformative effect the curriculum has on the students' individual and collective lives.<sup>3</sup>

James Scott Johnston's two books show surprising continuity with respect to the theme of growth. In *Inquiry and Education*, his goal is to build a bridge between the positions of those who claim that Dewey pressed inquiry into the service of narrow scientific aims and those who insist that he made inquiry an equally subservient tool for producing consummatory experience. To accomplish this goal, Johnston construes inquiry more broadly than either the scientific or the experiential positions permit. On this expansive reading, the meaning of inquiry encompasses "a cluster of specific methods, together with past experiences and attitudes . . . brought to bear on specific problems" (*IE*, 45). In *Deweyan Inquiry*, Johnston provides a general sketch of Deweyan inquiry, with its familiar stages and operations, and then demonstrates how inquiry functions in different parts of the school curriculum: (1) science and science education, (2) social science instruction, (3) art and art education, and (4) physical or athletic skills education. Growth of student capacities in each of these areas — science, social science, art, and physical activity — demands that in each instance the form of inquiry be flexibly defined and revisable, not fixed and determined in advance.

#### EDUCATION AS A GROWTH CATALYST

For anyone familiar with Dewey's educational writings, it is clear that for him education functions as a catalyst for growth. But what did Dewey mean by "growth"? First, let's examine what Dewey himself wrote in *Democracy and Education*:

Since life means growth, a living creature lives as truly and positively at one stage as at another, with the same intrinsic fullness and the same absolute claims. Hence education

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3. McCarthy writes, "Although all of Fishman's ten students had trouble with constructed knowing — applying philosophy to their lives — six eventually succeeded. . . . [T]hese six had something akin to what Carolyn Kamionka called a 'bolt of lightning' experience, moments in which a theoretic concept from literature led them to reconceive some aspect of their lives. Five of these six claimed that, as a result of bringing their school and non-school lives together at these moments, they became more hopeful" (*PPH*, 157).

means the enterprise of supplying the conditions which ensure growth, or adequacy of life, irrespective of age.<sup>4</sup>

Educative growth occurs when a learner develops his or her potentialities under propitious conditions, that is, in an environment designed by a thoughtful educator.

Does this mean that growth can only occur within the school environment? Dewey's response might seem out of character for a university professor:

The everyday work of the school shows that children can live in school as out of it, and yet grow daily in wisdom, kindness, and the spirit of obedience — that learning may, even with little children, lay hold upon the substance of truth that nourishes the spirit, and yet the forms of knowledge be observed and cultivated; and that growth may be genuine and thorough, and yet a delight. (*MW* 1, 66)

Educative growth, then, does not appear to depend on receiving a formal education. So, to what extent should Dewey-inspired educators make it their overriding goal to nurture growth? The following review attempts to answer this question by considering (1) growth's plural senses, (2) growth's relation to inquiry, (3) growth's connection with hope, (4) growth as the product of curricular design, (5) growth as the pursuit of moral perfection, (6) growth in school as modeled after growth in the home, and (7) a recurring difficulty in these and other works devoted to the practical (and political) implications of Dewey's educational ideas.

#### GROWTH'S MANY MEANINGS

According to Johnston, the term "growth" for Dewey has three possible meanings. First, it is a biological or "organismic" capacity that humans and other living things have for developing and adapting to their environs. Second, growth indicates the emerging evaluative or "judgmental" skills that humans display in solving problems. Third, it is "experiential" in the sense that humans can learn from experiences and change their behavior accordingly, thereby cultivating intelligent habits (*IE*, 106–107). More recently, Johnston has clarified this third sense, asking his reader to "visualize this [growth] process as a circle; a circle in which meanings, patterns, concepts, propositions, techniques, and methods of inquiry lead to further, better experiences, and these further and better experiences lead to further and better meanings" (*DI*, 69). Obviously, these three senses of growth are not mutually exclusive. They overlap considerably, especially under circumstances where humans grow through learning.

For Saito, Deweyan growth has three senses, some of which differ from Johnston's three meanings. In one sense, growth is development "without fixed ends" or, in the educational context, "continuous reorganization of a child's experience in his or her interaction with the adult world" (*GL*, 5). In the second sense, growth is "a contingent and endlessly evolving natural process" (*GL*, 5), an account that

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4. All references to Dewey's works will be to *The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Electronic Edition*, ed. Larry A. Hickman (Charlottesville, Virginia: Intelex, 1996). This electronic edition comprises *The Early Works, 1882–1898*, *The Middle Works, 1899–1924*, and *The Later Works, 1925–1953*, the 37-volume critical edition of Dewey's work edited by Jo Ann Boydston and published by Southern Illinois University Press. These will be cited in the text as *EW*, *MW*, and *LW*, respectively. For instance, the citation (*MW* 9, 56) refers to *Middle Works*, volume 9, page 56.

shares some ground with Johnston's initial meaning. In Saito's third and final sense, growth for Dewey involves the intergenerational transmission of ideas, "an ongoing interaction between the innovation of the younger generation, on the one hand, and the wisdom and cultural heritage of the older, on the other" (*GL*, 5).

Educative growth is also a function of fruitful teacher-student interactions. For Dewey, interaction means that living organisms, whether sea anemones or human learners, are intimately connected with their environments. According to Tom Burke, the "basic picture, generally speaking, is that of a given organism/environment system performing a wide range of operations as a normal matter of course — scanning, probing, ingesting, discharging, adapting to, approaching, avoiding, or otherwise moving about and altering things in routine ways, in order to maintain itself."<sup>5</sup> Whether within simple biological systems or complex social ones, environmental disruptions stimulate efforts by organisms to restore equilibrium, to adapt their (functionally-defined) internal and external environments (in a process biologists call "homeostasis"), and to subsequently develop in viable and meaningful ways. Creating an environment that is conducive to learning is incumbent upon the educator. Indeed, Dewey stated that "we [as educators] design environments" (*MW* 9, 23).<sup>6</sup> When information is mechanically presented by the teacher and students are expected to passively receive and regurgitate it (what Paulo Freire called the "banking concept" in education), the environment undermines the aims of learning and growth. Moreover, mastery of the subject matter taught is not a sufficient condition for being an effective educator. Rather, good pedagogical practice integrates the subject matter and innovative teaching methods within a learning environment that both appeals to and disciplines students' natural impulses. For example, inquiry-based educational methods leverage the teacher's ability to design projects that pique the students' natural curiosity. These same projects should also channel students' native energies by focusing attention on mastering techniques of inquiry and securing reliable outcomes.

Sympathetic communication facilitates growth. Communication plays a crucial role in educational inquiry or problem solving, as does language, the quintessential means or "tool of tools" (*LW* 1, 134). Etymologically, to communicate is to make common (*LW* 10, 248–249). Logic is the term of choice for Dewey in describing the pattern of inquiry common to scientific and ordinary discourse. Indeed, logic for Dewey signifies the "need for the development of a general theory of language in which form and matter are not separated" (*LW* 12, 4). Form is nothing less than the techniques of inquiry and analysis, whereas matter is the subject matter or content for inquiry and analysis. Through language use, form and matter, as well as techniques and subject matter, can be viewed as reciprocally (or transactionally) related aspects of the same process: the process of meaningful communication. By converting objects in everyday experience into "things with a meaning,"

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5. Tom Burke, *Dewey's New Logic: A Reply to Russell* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 23.

6. Cited by James W. Garrison, "John Dewey's Philosophy as Education," in *Reading Dewey*, ed. Larry Hickman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 69.

communication — “whether it be public discourse or that preliminary discourse termed thinking” — reconstructs conventional terms into precise instruments for resolving common problems (*LW* 1, 132). In Dewey’s *The Public and Its Problems*, democratic methods encompass communication and collaborative inquiry undertaken by citizens against a rich background of supportive institutions (*LW* 2, 332).

Growth involves the development of intelligent habits. According to Dewey, education conceived as integral to philosophy is a “process of forming fundamental dispositions” so that they “take effect in conduct” (*MW* 9, 338).<sup>7</sup> These dispositions are beliefs and, more generally, habits that together form a person’s character. Dewey defines a habit as “a way or manner of action, not a particular act or deed” (*LW* 12, 21). In other words, a habit is a mode of conduct, not the conduct itself. According to Jim Garrison, “philosophy as education involves the critical acquisition of habits of conduct, controlled by the ideal values that nurture human growth.”<sup>8</sup> Values direct choice and action when existing habits prove unhelpful or obstructive to good conduct. Indeed, both values and habits can be evaluated naturalistically, instrumentally, or conventionally (*LW* 7, 285–309). Yet, the ultimate test of a habit’s value is whether it directs inquiry in fruitful ways — that is, in ways that fund experience with meaning, render new connections, create helpful tools for future inquiries, and develop the inquirer’s native abilities. According to Johnston, “education is the formal means for the development of the habits and attitudes of inquiry such that growth can occur” (*IE*, 110). Not surprisingly, the test of a habit’s value is identical to the test for the value of education. As Dewey described it, “What [the student] has learned in the way of knowledge and skill [or habit] in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow” (*LW* 13, 25–26). Accordingly, learning occurs through the accretion of intelligent habits that reflexively guide human action and inquiry, and thereby enrich experience.

Finally, growth indicates a threshold capacity. In more primitive societies, individuals and communities must satisfy basic needs — food, water, and shelter — if they wish to survive. With advances in industry, technology, and quality of life, the meaning of growth as threshold capacity shifts from accruing basic survival skills to refining native impulses through formal education. Fishman and McCarthy note that “Dewey’s ultimate hope is for a society that enables its citizens to grow” — that is, for a flourishing democracy (*PPH*, 21).<sup>9</sup> Dewey biographer Alan Ryan also affirms the importance of establishing a standard of growth in order to shift from old to new, aristocratic to democratic, education:

What was needed was a criterion of growth-promoting experience, and Dewey found it . . . in the concept of democracy. Old or traditional education was essentially aristocratic, and when

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7. Cited in *Ibid.*, 63.

8. *Ibid.*, 64.

9. See also Shane Ralston, “In Defense of Democracy as a Way of Life: A Reply to Talisse’s Pluralist Objection,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 44, no. 4 (2008): 639.

done well, it was good aristocratic education, capable of producing a disciplined and trained elite. New education had to ask those questions that Dewey had broached in *Democracy and Education* twenty-odd years before [*Experience and Education*]. How were we to acquire and hand on a capacity for wider, deeper, more organic experience and the capacity to communicate it?<sup>10</sup>

Personal growth through democratic education enables collective growth, whether measured in social or economic terms — a truism borne out by contemporary political rhetoric in the United States concerning the need for more and better science and math education programs in primary and secondary schools. As Dewey reminded us, “democracy is a way of life controlled by a working faith in the possibilities of human nature” (*LW* 14, 226). Of course, to realize these “possibilities of human nature,” these opportunities for growth, requires more than wishful thinking; it also demands rigorous and dedicated inquiry, both individually and collectively.

#### GROWTH AND INQUIRY

Dewey’s most significant legacy for educators might be his theory of inquiry.<sup>11</sup> According to Johnston, the value of inquiry to educative growth resides in two key features: (1) its sensitivity to context, and (2) its ability to self-correct. The thesis of Johnston’s book is that Dewey scholars, both in education and philosophy, have tended to overemphasize either the experiential or the scientific credentials of Dewey’s notion of inquiry. In the book’s introduction, Johnston claims that equally crucial aspects of inquiry, such as its ability to induce growth and educate, have been neglected: “Inquiry must presuppose experience and growth, as the increase in the fund of meaningful, as well as satisfying [educative] experiences” (*IE*, 9). If inquiry is understood not just as instrumental to aesthetic experience, but also as an ongoing source of intelligent habits and meanings, then the experiential and scientific aspects of Dewey’s philosophy can reunite in the growth-inducing activity of education. Johnston demonstrates that on Dewey’s view, growth, democracy, and community are integrally related.

Context-sensitivity permits inquiry to perform both as an all-purpose method and as a fund of habits, meanings, and dispositions reflecting the inquirer’s prior experiences. In his 1938 work *Logic*, Dewey argued that inquiry, in a manner similar to science, can confirm and correct its own results. Johnston identifies precursors to this argument in several of Dewey’s educational writings, including the 1899 works *Interests in Relation to Training of the Will* and *Lectures on the Philosophy of Education*:

The characteristics necessary for inquiry to be self-correcting are present as well [in these earlier works]. Dewey does not, as he does in the *Logic*, describe his inquiry as self-correcting, but considering the developing nature of inquiry set out in these early lectures and writings,

10. Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1995), 282.

11. See Donald Schön, “The Theory of Inquiry: Dewey’s Legacy to Education,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 22, no. 2 (1992): 119–139.

he would no doubt at least insist that inquiry has the capacity for change, for refinement, and for growth. (*IE*, 144)

With respect to social science education, Johnston tells us in *Deweyan Inquiry* that facilitating growth requires integrating current research into the curriculum: "It [social scientific research] seeks . . . to develop the habits of inquiry . . . [and] the desire to see natural and physical problems in the context of social situations, and the desire to use nature to help people to solve these" (*DI*, 144). In other words, if students are to improve their habits of inquiry, to make these habits more intelligent, then the curricula must be made relevant to the concerns of ordinary people in day-to-day life. Johnston concludes, therefore, that "quantifying social-scientific data is often inappropriate" (*DI*, 45). While this point is in keeping with Dewey's own emphasis on the practicality of social inquiry, evaluating the relative merits of quantitative versus qualitative methods is outside the purview of most elementary courses on doing social science research. Most courses are limited to developing mastery of those quantitative and qualitative techniques, not engaging in meta-level critiques and comparisons. Nonetheless, debates in the social sciences between "quants" and "quals" could probably be informed by a Deweyan voice of conciliation.<sup>12</sup>

Since inquiry and growth are open-ended, evolutionary processes guided by human intelligence, it is tempting to conclude that realizing educative growth means engaging in successful inquiries. However, by definition, the inquirer does not know in advance where an inquiry is headed, whether it will deliver good outcomes or run off the rails. Still, through repeated involvement in problem-solving activity, the experienced inquirer learns to recognize guideposts in successful inquiries, an ability that itself signals an unfolding process of growth.

#### GROWTH AND HOPE

Most philosophers have viewed hope as either a state of existence or a habitual disposition. While Dewey would agree that hope is infused with emotion, expectation, and habit, his insight is that hope can also manifest as an original impulse. Fishman and McCarthy explain, "Humans [for Dewey] have a native sense that their activities will yield positive rather than negative results" (*PPH*, 14–15). Even when reason persuades us that a future goal is unachievable, hope enables us to persist, to struggle, to attempt the impossible. In other words, it is a natural reaction when confronting daunting challenges to hope for a better future.

What, then, is the relation between hope and growth? Since the natural pattern of life is oscillation between equilibrium and disequilibrium, hope allows us to perpetually seek to renew balance and harmony when the situation we are in has been disrupted or become problematic. For instance, a teacher attempts to return a classroom of screaming students to a state of order. In the process of renewing

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12. See Shane Ralston, "The Relevance of Deweyan Inquiry to Teaching Social Science Research Methods" (November 24, 2009), available at the *Social Science Research Network* (SSRN): <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1513014>.



equilibrium, the teacher not only manages to make the classroom a quieter space and, thus, a place more conducive to learning; she also hopes to adjust, adapt, and, as a result, progressively grow as a teacher. How can we specify what form growth should take in the classroom? How does hope become an instrument to generate personal and professional development?

Adjustment returns harmony and balance to a previously disturbed environment or state of affairs. Accommodation and adaptation are two species of adjustment. By accommodating, we acquiesce to the stubborn conditions of our environment, conforming to "our physical and social surroundings" (*PPH*, 17). In the aforementioned situation, for example, the teacher might accommodate by walking out in frustration, prompting the students to respond by becoming silent. Alternatively, she can adapt by actively manipulating the conditions of her environment so that she "regain[s] harmony and achieve[s] . . . [her] desires" (*PPH*, 17). In this case, while the teacher may be tempted to leave the classroom in frustration, she instead decides to calm the students by playing music or drawing their attention to a curious object. Consequently, she adjusts, adapts, and thereby facilitates growth, both in herself and her students.

Even in light of this connection between growth and hope, operationalizing growth, or saying what it *is* in the concrete, proves difficult. Is it a positive outlook toward the future? Is it a process of biological adaptation? Or is it an outcome of social development? Surely, it would be mistaken to understand Dewey's concept of growth in terms of Herbert Spencer's notion of social evolution. Returning to the connection between inquiry and growth, hope could be that regulative principle that links the inquirer's means (tools, instruments, even logical forms) to the end, goal, or "end-in-view." It orders the instrumental relations between means and end, not just in terms of an efficient relation, but as a desire, a longing, and an aspiration that effectively spurs the inquirer on in the face of adversity. It is thus a motivator for growth.

Another way that hope relates to growth is through the medium of the school curriculum, to which we now turn.

#### GROWTH AND THE CURRICULUM

Some lessons about the relation between growth and curriculum design can be learned from the 1930s debate between John Dewey and University of Chicago president Robert Hutchins.<sup>13</sup> Their dispute concerned the relative merits

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13. Dewey wrote two articles in the journal *The Social Frontier* reviewing Hutchins's book *The Higher Learning in America*, based on the 1936 Storrs Lectures. *The Social Frontier* then published Hutchins's terse response, and a final reply by Dewey. See Robert M. Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1958). The three articles by Dewey are "Rationality in Education" (*LW* 11, 391–397), "President Hutchins' Proposals to Remake Higher Education" (*LW* 11, 397–401) and "'The Higher Learning in America'" (*LW* 11, 402–407). Hutchins's response is "Grammar, Rhetoric, and Mr. Dewey," *The Social Frontier* 3, no. 23 (February 1937): 137–139. For more on this exchange, see Shane Ralston, "The Prospect of an Ideal Liberal Arts College Curriculum: Reconstructing the Dewey-Hutchins Debate," *Journal of Black Mountain College Studies* 1, no. 1 (2010).

of progressive educational ideals and the Great Books approach as a means for promoting educative growth. While Dewey emphasized learning through practical problem solving, in a dynamic mix of subject matter and method, Hutchins stressed exposure to and discussion of at least 100 primary texts in the Western canon, from Plato and Aristotle to Ralph Waldo Emerson and John Stuart Mill. Hutchins resisted what he saw as the progressive educator's push to transform the proper end of educating the whole person into training students for a particular vocation. Dewey, in turn, criticized Hutchins's insistence that there existed a "hierarchy of truths" and that higher learning should remain aloof to the concerns of everyday life (*LW* 11, 399).

Besides the Dewey-Hutchins debate, the text of *Democracy and Education* also reveals the relation between the subject matter taught and the quality of lived experience:

Organized subject matter [in schools] represents the ripe fruitage of experiences like theirs [students'], experiences involving the same world, and powers and needs similar to theirs. It does not represent perfection or infallible wisdom; but it is the best at command to further new experiences which may, in some respects at least, surpass the achievements embodied in existing knowledge and works of art. (*MW* 9, 190)

For Dewey, the content of school curricula should not be remote from the content of everyday experience. Both must be continuous if educators are to expect progress in epistemic and aesthetic inquiries. While all four books broach the topic of school curricula, Johnston's *Deweyan Inquiry* and Fishman and McCarthy's *John Dewey and the Philosophy and Practice of Hope* are specifically concerned with how to select subject matter that relates to ordinary experience and enables growth.

#### GROWTH AND MORAL PERFECTION

Does Deweyan growth aim at some ultimate end? It does not. According to Saito, Dewey's answer to the request for a criterion of growth would be to reaffirm the experiential continuity between past, present, and future, and to insist that growing is "a contingent and endlessly evolving natural process" with no ultimate boundaries (*GL*, 5). In response, critics have associated Deweyan growth with ethical relativism, moral nihilism, and an anything-goes mentality. Saito claims that rebutting this objection, especially its implications for education and democracy, demands recourse not only to Dewey's writings on growth, but also to Emerson's works on perfectionism. Perfection is often construed as the pursuit of a fixed end, a state of perfectness. However, for Emerson, particularly according to Stanley Cavell's reading of him, "each state of the self is final," and perfection, rather than a fixed end, is a process of becoming, of moving through these stages of development (*GL*, 111).

How then is educative growth related to moral perfection, if not as a means to achieve an ultimate end? The idea of continuous growth in the absence of fixed ends can be extended to educational practice by forgoing the "fixed conceptualization of criteria" for measuring pedagogical progress (think of classrooms as sites for preparing students for NCLB testing) and substituting "Dewey's aesthetic idea of directive criteria" (think of classrooms as sites of open discourse and integration

of “diverse aspects of the curriculum”) (*GL*, 150–151). According to Saito, “the lesson of perfectionist education is indeed the art of transcendence, the pragmatic search for the better through patient dialogue as the most practical, intelligent means to live with suffering and to convert it to hope” (*GL*, 156). Saito’s appeal to Emersonian perfectionism does appear to answer the critics who contend that Deweyan growth lacks a proper end. However, her approach still fails to provide a concrete conception of Deweyan growth. What would, for instance, be the design of a classroom that facilitates “patient dialogue” and the conversion of “suffering . . . [in]to hope”? Although Saito does not mention it, a floor plan for an ideal school can be found in Dewey’s *The School and Society*, published in 1889. It contains “a workshop” and “a miniature laboratory,” as well as an extension “out of doors to the garden, surrounding fields, and forest” (*MW* 1, 50). Dewey envisioned four rooms in the ideal school, each on the corner of a central museum/library and each devoted to an individual area of study (for example, physical and chemical science, biology, music, and art). Four recitation rooms, each straddling the boundary between a classroom and the central museum/library, serve as spaces “where the children bring the experiences, the problems, the questions, the particular facts which they have found, and discuss them so that new light may be thrown upon them, particularly new light from the experience of others, the accumulated wisdom of the world — symbolized in the library” (*MW* 1, 51). Dewey’s school design is based on the hypothesis that if we create shared public spaces for the purpose of pooling our ideas and sharing our experiences, then we can effectively increase opportunities for discussion and learning (that is, social intelligence).

#### GROWTH IN THE HOME AND SCHOOL

One glaring omission in these four books is the lack of any discussion of the vitally important analogy Dewey drew between the school and the home. In the second chapter of *The School and Society*, titled “The School and the Life of the Child,” Dewey situated the ideal school relative to the ideal home. Both, Dewey argued, should nurture children as “intensely distinct beings that we are acquainted with out of school, in the home, the family, on the playground, and in the neighborhood” (*MW* 1, 22). In contrast, the traditional approach to schooling, what Dewey called “old education,” neglects the uniqueness of the learner by “handling as large numbers of children as possible,” standardizing teaching methods and curricula, providing “no opportunity for adjustment to varying capacity,” and demanding “ready-made results” from students, teachers, and administrators (*MW* 1, 23).

Dewey asked his reader to imagine “an ideal home.” It is a place where family life naturally ensues, where child and parent engage in constant conversation, where

statements are made, inquiries arise, topics are discussed, and the child continually learns. He states his experiences, his misconceptions are corrected. . . . [T]he child participates in the household occupations, and thereby gets habits of industry, order, and regard for the rights and ideas of others, and the fundamental habit of subordinating his activities to the general interest of the household. (*MW* 1, 24)

According to Dewey’s model of the ideal home, the child learns without the artifice of the classroom, as an active participant, rather than a passive spectator,

who asks questions, proposes ideas, and toils to complete daily chores, all under the guidance of a concerned parent. What makes the concerned parent an expert teacher, Dewey claimed, is that he or she "is intelligent enough to recognize what is best for the child, and is able to supply what is needed" to the child. By integrating learning with family life, the concerned parent generates a series of cascading benefits, particularly the development of social virtues ("industry, order, . . . regard for the rights and ideas of others, and . . . subordinating his activities to the general interest") that enrich the child's future adult life.

In order to transition to the ideal school, Dewey said that we must "organize and generalize" the advantages of the ideal home. One of the ways to accomplish this is through the intelligent design of schools, making them roughly resemble the layout of ideal homes (as described in the previous section). While opportunities for communication are abundant in the ideal home, the objective of the parent-teacher should not be to talk aimlessly with the child-student:

The child is already intensely active, and the question of education is the question of taking hold of his activities, of giving them direction. Through directions, through organized use, they tend toward valuable results, instead of scattering or being left to merely impulsive expression. (*MW* 1, 25)

In other words, the aim of schooling is not to curry favor with the child or to permit the child's natural curiosities to have full reign in determining the content of the curriculum — what is sometimes called "child-centered education." Instead, appealing to the child's native interests and impulses becomes an initial entry point into the educational process, but does not exhaust the instruments for facilitating learning. Whether in the home or the classroom, the progressive educator, on the model of the concerned parent, should provide discipline and guidance in order to, in Dewey's words, "direct the child's activities, giving them exercise along certain lines . . . [that] thus lead up to the goal" of the child's growth (*MW* 1, 25–28).

Given this lacuna in the Dewey literature, including these four books, little attention has been given to the connection between Dewey's educational theory and the homeschooling movement. Although a few scholars have attempted to rectify this omission,<sup>14</sup> serious consideration of the relation between family life and school life in Dewey's writings is still, unfortunately, wanting.

#### A FINAL DIFFICULTY

All four books make noteworthy contributions to the burgeoning literature on Dewey's educational ideas and their influence on contemporary pedagogical theory and practice. They also shed light on the ways in which Deweyan growth can be converted into a more practical ideal or a clearer standard for what constitutes positive learning. In particular, two portions of Johnston's *Inquiry and Education* stand out as especially helpful in understanding Dewey's ideas on pedagogy and

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14. See Patricia M. Lines, "Homeschooling Comes of Age," *The Public Interest*, no. 140 (summer 2000): 77. See also Shane Ralston, "A Deweyan Defense of Homeschooling," in *John Dewey's Great Debates — Reconstructed* (Charlotte, North Carolina: Information Age Publishing, in press), chap. 6.

their relation to contemporary debates. In the third chapter of this book, Johnston canvasses a series of criticisms E.D. Hirsch leveled at Dewey's views on literacy and progressive education (*IE*, 70–72). Hirsch objected that Dewey's learning-by-doing approach was antibookish and thus contributed to the documented decline in literacy among average Americans. However, the curriculum at Dewey's Laboratory School did include extensive reading. Hirsch's mistake provides lessons for resolving more recent controversies over educational policy (for example, in the online literacy debate).<sup>15</sup> In the penultimate chapter of *Inquiry and Education*, Johnston shares lessons from Dewey's Laboratory School in Chicago (*IE*, 142–156). He not only demonstrates that these experiments in curricular development were consistent with Dewey's characterization of inquiry as self-correcting and context-sensitive; he also shows that these experiments were inconsistent with another progressive approach to pedagogy that is often incorrectly associated with Dewey's educational philosophy: namely, child-centered education.

Besides their silence about the home-school relation, another difficulty lurks in these four texts. None adequately addresses the problem of the hidden curriculum, or the tacit ideological dimension of what is taught in the schools, as discussed by Philip Jackson and Michael Apple, among others.<sup>16</sup> Whether it is the Straussian/neoconservative agenda implicit in the Great Books approach or the Progressive agenda underlying child-centered learning, the politicization of today's school curricula is an ever-present concern. Although Dewey never addressed the hidden curriculum, he did speak to the perennial problem of the "hiding curriculum," one that widens the gap between the specialized subject matter of a formal education and the commonsense subject matter of an informal education (*MW* 9, 12, 141, and 255).<sup>17</sup> While Johnston demonstrates how we can integrate Deweyan inquiry into multiple areas of the school curriculum, he does not address a likely objection from political conservatives, namely, that such integration merely institutionalizes the ideological Left's agenda. Instead, Johnston assumes (as many Dewey scholars do) that Dewey's educational ideas lack a political valence. Unfortunately, this is a weak position that invites more aggressive incursions by the ideological Right.

In addition, a paradox emerges: by promoting growth through the revision of curricula, the course designer can engineer preferred social outcomes and thereby limit autonomous efforts at self-creation or growth. Thus the Deweyan teacher

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15. See Shane Ralston, "Click on Deweyan Democracy: John Dewey Joins the Online Literacy Debate," in *Communication and Creative Democracy*, ed. Omar Swartz (Bury St Edmunds, UK: Abramis Academic Publishing, forthcoming).

16. Michael Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); and Phillip W. Jackson, *Life in Classrooms* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1968).

17. See Reba N. Page, "Curriculum Matters," in *John Dewey and Our Educational Prospect: A Critical Engagement with Dewey's Democracy and Education*, ed. David T. Hansen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 39–65. Although Dewey does not use the term "hidden curriculum," one could argue that the idea is implied in parts of *Democracy and Education* (*MW* 9), *Interest and Effort in Education* (*MW* 7, 151–200), and *The Way Out of Educational Confusion* (*LW* 6, 75–89). I am indebted to one of the reviewers for this point.

risks putting the cart before the horse. Coupled with the prospect of politicizing the curriculum, the paradox of growth poses another danger — specifically, a noxious form of politically motivated pedagogical paternalism — to a democracy otherwise committed to pluralism and tolerance.

Though Rorty should not have prejudged as mistaken (and conservative) every request for a practical criterion of Deweyan growth, he *was* nevertheless correct in reminding educators “that the direction of growth is unpredictable” and “Dewey’s exaltation of . . . growth for its own sake . . . [is] as fruitful as it is fuzzy.”<sup>18</sup> If growth is to be achieved through so-called “progress in curriculum development,” then the hidden curriculum objection must be addressed. Put differently, if growth is to become a more practical pedagogical ideal, then Dewey-inspired educators and educational philosophers must at least confront, if not overcome, the politically polarizing influences on curricular design in their (and our) times.

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18. Rorty, “Education as Socialization and as Individualization,” 125–126.