
Democracy & Education

Countering the Neos

Dewey and a Democratic Ethos in Teacher Education

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Abstract

Neoliberalism and neoconservatism are two ideologies that currently plague education. The individualistic free-market ideology of neoliberalism and the unbridled nationalistic exceptionalism associated with neoconservatism often breed a narrowed, overstandardized curriculum and a hyper-testing environment that discourage critical intellectual practice and democratic ideas. Dewey's philosophy of education indicates that he understood that education is political and can be undemocratic. Dewey's holistic pragmatism, combined with aspects of social reconstructionism, called for a philosophical movement that favors democratic schooling. This paper defines neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies and makes a case for including more critique within teacher preparation programs, what Dewey and other educationists referred to as developing a significant social intelligence in teachers. Critical studies embedded within teacher education programs are best positioned to counter the undemocratic forces prevalent in the ideologies of neoliberalism and neoconservatism. My conclusions rely on Dewey's philosophy from his work *Democracy and Education*.

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We are living in times when private and public aims and policies are at strife with each other. . . . The sum of the matter is that the times are out of joint, and that teachers cannot escape even if they would, some responsibility for a share in putting them right. . . . I am not trying here to tell teachers with which of the antagonistic tendencies of our own time they should align themselves—although I have my own convictions on that subject. I am trying only to point out that the conflict is here, and that as a matter of fact, they are strengthening one set of forces or the other.

—John Dewey, *The Social Frontier* (1935)

THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY of the United States, competing ideologies running the spectrum from conservative to progressive have vied for control over

the direction of our country and our educational systems. During various periods, tensions over the nature, structure, and direction of education have increased in response to ideological and socio-political ambitions. Our society is again in a period of increased tensions where public and private aims and conservative and progressive ideologies are competing over the form and direction of education. From kindergarten to the academy, this conflict permeates and saturates our educational institutions in a variety of

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ways due to the social and political nature of schooling. As Dewey alluded to, education is neither immune from politics and ideology, nor can educators feign neutrality while navigating their consequences. Educators must acknowledge the ideological dualism inherently embedded within our societal and political systems, elucidate this dualism for students, and encourage critical democratic thought at all levels.

The global privatization movement, combined with the idea of American exceptionalism, continues to shrink public spaces and public institutions by coupling all facets of life to goal-oriented, instrumental market relationships. The individualistic free-market ideology of neoliberalism and the nationalist exceptionalism associated with neoconservatism seek to replace public schooling with entrepreneurial goals that have little interest in developing critical democratic thinking (Apple, 2006a, 2006b, 2013; Ball, 2007, 2012; Buras, 2008; Buras & Apple, 2005; Molnar, 1996, 2005; Saltman, 2000, 2012, 2014). Boyles argued that “public education has broken down under the weight of economic and political forces of privatization” (Boyles, 2011a, p. 358, see also Baez, 2004). Especially in the United States, we have seen the advent of narrowed curricula that are often bereft of critical perspectives and rich with revisionist histories that are desperately celebratory. Combine those attributes with increased demands for more accountability, excess standardization, hyper-testing regimes, and monitoring strategies; schooling is now part of a corporatized world that operates on jingoistic and authoritarian models of allegiance and efficiency. While neoliberalism has been the primary focus for many scholars, I propose that the confluence of neoliberalism and neoconservatism must be explored more thoroughly.

In the early 20th century, Dewey acknowledged that public and private aims were not aligned with each other and that educators had some responsibility in making sense of the ideological dualisms that were prevalent in society. This idea was reflected in the following quote from Apple (1995), who stated:

We live in a period in which our educational system has become increasing politicized . . . The Spencerian question, what knowledge is of most worth, has now been replaced with an even more pointed question, whose knowledge is of most worth, and the fact that this latter question has become so powerful highlights the profoundly political nature of educational policy and practice. (p. 2)

Rugg, writing in *The Social Frontier*, stated that “politicians have been willing to liquidate the creative intelligence of America’s youth rather than liquidate aggrandizing business exploiters,” further adding that “[they] are so selfish for their own financial and political aggrandizement that they can be regarded as nothing less than public enemies of education, and hence, democratic government” (Rugg, 1936, pp. 12, 14). George Counts, speaking at the National Education Association conference in Chicago, July, 6, 1933, and later publishing this speech in *The Social Frontier*, noted a continued disconnect between education, society, and private aims. Counts stated:

I wonder if it isn’t a fair statement that while we have indulged

ourselves liberally in education, we have not done this so much for the sake of education itself or to add to the culture and graciousness of life, but because of the general belief that by educating ourselves and our children we have been making it more possible to win at the acquisition of wealth. (Counts, 1934, p. 281)

The quotes above exemplify the fundamental tensions between public and private aims, the ideological dualisms—conservative and progressive—as well as a desire for a democratic society.

This article explores the rightist ideological tensions facing education and utilizes a Deweyan analysis of democracy to address the confluence of neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies and how those ideologies impact our educational systems. Dewey believed there was “a crucial relationship between the capacity to learn and the ability to mobilize and sustain a just social and political order” (Sandlin, Burdick, Norris, & Hoechsmann, 2012, p. 139).

Unfortunately, as many critical educational scholars have noted, Dewey’s ideas of education and a democratic “conjoint communicated experience” are now only “spectral presences” in our modern culture (Dewey, 1916/2008; Goodman & Saltman, 2002; Molnar, 2005; Saltman & Gabbard, 2011; Sandlin et al., 2012, p. 139; Schubert, 2006, 2009). Dewey’s conception of democracy provides the potential for a pragmatic response to the concerns that arise within the confluence of neoliberalism and neoconservatism. This article suggests a response can best be transmitted through the arena of teacher education, preparing teachers who educate the next generation and propel Dewey’s concepts beyond their “spectral” domain creating a democratic ethos. While this article is geared primarily to those in the academy, it should also be taken as a call to move the dialogue beyond the academy walls and engage the public through multiple outlets.

Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism

Understanding a Deweyan response to the undemocratic nature of neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies requires an explanation of those two ideologies. While admitting that neoliberalism has been thoroughly discussed in academia, I think it is the confluence of neoliberalism and neoconservatism that poses the greatest danger to democratic education. Critical political theorist Wendy Brown has identified neoliberalism and neoconservatism as “two distinct rationalities [or ideologies] in the contemporary United States” that have “de-democratizing effects” in their “respective devaluation of political liberty, equality, substantive citizenship, and the rule of law in favor of governance according to market criteria” (Brown, 2006, p. 690; Brown, 2015). As mentioned, neoliberalism is quite familiar for educators at this point, and much has been written on neoliberalism’s impacts on education (see Michael Apple, Stephen Ball, Deron Boyles, Henry Giroux, David Harvey, Alex Molnar, Trevor Norris, and Kenneth Saltman, to name a few). Harvey, by and large, has the most quoted historical analysis of neoliberalism, which he has defined as:

A phenomenon that is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills

within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. (Harvey, 2005, p. 2)

While Harvey made for a concise reading of neoliberalism and its impacts, Mirowski and Plehwe (2009) have given a more detailed historical and philosophical analysis of the origins of neoliberal ideological thought in their work *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*. Their analysis traced neoliberalism back to the Walter Lippmann Colloquium held in Paris in 1938, and the Mont Pèlerin Society, begun in 1947. “Neoliberalism straddles a wide range of social, political, and economic phenomena at different levels of complexity” which can range from “highly abstract” to “relatively concrete” examples committed to the idea that the market should be the fundamental organizing construct for all political, social, and economic decisions (Down, 2009, p. 51; Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005, p. 1). As Ball has noted, the prevailing discourse of education produces new subject positions and social relations, and the meaning, force, and effect of this new discourse is framed by “an overbearing, economic, and political context of international competitiveness” (Ball, 2007, p. 2). What we know is, for neoliberals, the capitalist economy and the free-market is the archetype and framework for which all other institutions should be modeled upon, including education.

Neoconservatism is an emergent ideological stance that “both draws from and produces a particular political culture and political subject,” though it, at times, seems to be rarely agreed upon by its adherents (Brown, 2006, p. 697). Neoconservatism has a long history and it is seldom discussed alongside neoliberalism. Buras and Apple (2008) have discussed neoconservatism as a form of anti-utopianism meant to counter and correct the “assumed naïveté of leftist cultural and economic desires” and whose adherents have become a powerful force in domestic policy (p. 291). Buras has discussed neoconservatism as a “rightest formation” consisting of multiple groups whose aim is a political restoration of nostalgic American ideals, whether real or imagined, and the “undermining [of] the limited, progressive gains of the past several decades” using tools such as “narratives of crisis, discourses of fear and instability, and nostalgic desires to restore cultural integrity and the foundations of ‘American’ (and Western) civilization (Buras, 2008, p. 3; see also Apple 2006b and Ball 2003). Neoconservatism has a long history beginning in the 1960s, though many could argue it reaches back even further. Several histories have been written that helps to explain its rise and its different stages over time (e.g., Fukuyama, 2006; Thompson & Brook, 2010; Vaise, 2010). While many conservatives despise a strong state, neoconservatism supports a strong state that utilizes its power to enforce traditional and conventional, albeit more rightist, values and behaviors on its citizens. In other words, a strong state is fine as long as it forces the citizenry to adhere to traditional conservative canon. Neoconservatives advocate for imposing a Protestant-Christian moral codification through the sanction of government power and other regulatory mechanisms, such as schooling, in order to inculcate their form of ideology among the masses—in a way, a form of social reconstruction.

The problem today is the amalgamation of neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies whose adherents are focused on reworking the aims of education. Brown discussed the idea of a “problematic of thinking together neoconservatism—a moral-political rationality—and neoliberalism—a market-political rationality that exceeds its peculiarly American instantiation and that does not align with any political persuasion” (Brown, 2006, p. 693). One only has to look at the recent debates surrounding the ambitions of President Trump’s Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos to understand how the amalgamation of neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies take aim at public education. DeVos, a venture philanthropist, has worked tirelessly to push for charter schools in Michigan while at the same time arguing for schools to teach creationism and the tenants of Christianity. Adherents of neoconservatism tend to exhibit a fundamental distaste and/or distrust for critical public intellectuals, especially scholars working within the Academy, who critique the status quo and conventional norms and mores. Wrapped in the blanket of neoconservative ideology is a Protestant-Christian fundamentalism, a support of government-endorsed Judeo-Christian moral crusades, a revival of patriotism, strong support for the military, and a foreign policy program that perpetuates American exceptionalism and supremacy while spreading so-called American values abroad.

The market-ideology of neoliberalism and the moral-political ideology of neoconservatism leads to a hybrid system, a new form of governmentality that situates citizens in an undemocratic form of society. This blending of ideologies positions citizens as economic units—*homo oeconomicus*—normalized and evaluated against business models and market measurements of worth and performance, subjectified as commodities, while calling for a moral resurgence through government policies that promote Christian fundamentalism and an adherence to American populist ideals of loyalty, patriotism, and nationalism above critique. What has emerged—our contemporary construct of the state and society—is a fundamental realignment in social, political, and economic systems. We have reached an unprecedented time in our history marked by sociopolitical transformation, de-democratization, and the marketization of schooling that has now set the stage for a complete commodification of schooling, including the teaching profession. Since education is a fundamental social system, it demands attention and protection from the undemocratic colonizing effects of neoliberalism and neoconservatism. Students are not being prepared to become critical democratic citizens, but rather docile, obedient workers who have a moral duty to further America’s competitiveness in a global marketplace. The confluence of neoliberalism and neoconservatism is destroying the public aspect of citizen virtue now replaced with citizenship in terms of privatized duties. Because of this conceptual shifting, the philosophy of schooling has changed, fundamentally influenced by rightist rationalities. While neoliberalism reframes education’s purpose as economic, neoconservatism’s influence is manifested through the practices and attitudes of educators and through policy and curriculum choices.

Many state legislatures have advanced charter schools that favor public-private partnerships, which, in turn, renegotiate and realign public tax dollars to fund privately controlled charter schools. Along with the push for charters and the use of school choice to promote some idea of economic liberty, many states (e.g., Texas, Kansas, and Oklahoma) have instituted changes in curriculum that are decidedly more patriotic, anti-evolution, anti-climate change, Christian-based, and more celebratory of America's past. These changes are meant to reflect a decidedly patriotic/nationalistic stance, encourage upper-middle-class Anglo-American value systems, present Americanism as the best cultural value system, limit exposure to any negative American historical narrative, and justify Judeo-Christian moral codification, while attempting to promote critical, alternative views and ideologies as the inappropriate other. Thus, neoconservatism creates a form of cultural politics that becomes embedded and practiced within educational settings through overt curriculum changes and via a hidden curriculum manifested through the actions of educators, educator leaders, policy choices, and parental ideological stances. Furthermore, educational policy and curriculum become mired in social accommodationist aims that focus narrowly on assimilationist, standardized, and jingoistic curricula designed not by educators but by policymakers and corporations. These curricula leave little to no space for critique or alternative perspectives that would promote critical democratic ideals. A reexamination and a reintroduction to Dewey's democratic ethos within teacher education programs is essential in establishing a critical democratic ideal.

Dewey's Conception of Democracy

Dewey, writing in the early 20th century, would not have been familiar with the terms *neoliberalism* and *neoconservatism*. At the time he penned *Democracy and Education* in 1916, the United States had not yet encountered the Great Depression or the social and political upheavals following this period. Regardless, Dewey understood the dynamic interplay among government, industry, and education and the importance of salvaging democratic relationships, not only in education, but through all social, political, and economic mediums. Education is inherently political, and it is consistently pulled back and forth along a political spectrum attributed to local, state, and national influences. Those influences include government and nongovernment agencies and organizations. Thus, it is important to begin with an examination of Dewey's ideas of education within a sociophilosophical context.

Dewey discussed education as a sociophilosophical function that includes either conservative or progressive purposes (Dewey, 1916/2008). Dewey revisited this idea in his later work *Experience and Education*, referring to it as traditional education and progressive education (Dewey, 1938/1997). While Dewey's entire work is important, certain key aspects of *Democracy and Education* are critical in a discussion of the problems described earlier and to provide for a contemporary reading in light of the current state of education and globalization. Educational aims are often examined from the viewpoint that there are knowledge and skills that must

be transmitted from the older generation to the younger generation so as to maintain a stable society. According to Dewey, "without this communication of ideals, hopes, expectations, standards, and opinions from those members of society who are passing out of the group life to those who are coming into it, social life would not survive" (Dewey, 1916/2008 p. 9). The question then is to what sociophilosophical aim are we hoping for with the education of our younger generations? Is it a perpetuation of the status quo, a narrowed sense of what it is to be an educated citizen, or is it some broader understanding and aim? To be fair, Dewey recognized that both traditional and progressive education are necessary to maintain society; however, students should always be offered the opportunity, the democratic right to critically examine the status quo and offer alternatives (Dewey, 1938/1997).

Education occurs within an environment where individuals are susceptible to a multitude of social, political, religious, and economic influences. As Dewey stated, "a being whose activities are associated with others has a social environment," and what that being, or student, does or can do "depends upon the expectations, demands, approvals, and condemnation of others" (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 16). Thus, we must understand that no educational activity is mutually exclusive, or separated, from the social and ideological influences inherent in communities and sociopolitical systems. Activities of a sociopolitical system, or a community, are inherently loaded with ideological biases and ultimately influence the activities of individuals. Contemporary authors have argued, as Dewey, that our realities are socially constructed and reproduced such that our "social environment forms the mental and emotional disposition of behavior in individuals by engaging them in activities that arouse and strengthen certain impulses, that have certain purposes, and entail certain consequences" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2015, Cassell & Nelson, 2013; Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 20). Therefore, if the activity (i.e., educating our youth) becomes too narrowly focused (i.e., narrowed curricula and goals) or too ideologically rigid (i.e., standardization, testing, value-added accountability measures), then those activities will certainly have a negative impact on the student's sociophilosophical understandings and preferences. This is the current dilemma with neoliberalism and neoconservatism—an ideologically rigid, narrowed rationality that defines the social as a market-nationalism. This situation reimagines the individual as commodity and instrument, which is rationality justified through Judeo-Christian moral codification, populism, competition, and rugged individualism.

Dewey's conception of the special environment of the school was that it creates a "simplified environment" that allows for "features which are fairly fundamental and capable of being responded to by the young" (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 23). However, this simplified environment does not imply that students should not be exposed to the troubling issues facing society. This could not be further from the goals of education. Dewey believed that the goal of education was, and is, to cull the undesirable aspects of society and strive to reinforce the most positive attributes—a progressive vision designed for improving society. Dewey's pragmatic views suggest educators should discuss multiple

perspectives in order to expand progressive possibilities for society. Dewey noted:

As society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is responsible not to transmit and conserve the whole of its existing achievements, but only such as make for a better future society. The school is its chief agency for the accomplishment of this end. (Dewey, 1916/2008, pp. 23–24)

Dewey argued in both *Democracy and Education* and *Experience and Education* that the goal of education should not be to primarily perpetuate the status quo, merely transmitting historical knowledge and processes, but rather a combination of cultural transmission and a critique of our history meant to engage and advance students to a more enlightened, democratic, and just society. Only then can education be utilized to progress society in a positive direction. This cannot occur when education is viewed as merely a tool of globalization, competition, and the military-industrial complex. The notion of a school as a chief agent for creating a better society would later be utilized by social reconstructionists such as Counts, Rugg, and others at Teachers College writing in the journal *The Social Frontier/Frontiers of Democracy*, published from 1934 to 1943. Dewey stated that the purpose and aim of the school environment should be:

to balance the various elements in the social environment, and to see to it that each individual gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group in which s/he is born, and to come into living contact with a broader environment (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 24).

This can only be accomplished through an institution of learning designed to bring the full force of critical democratic practice to bear on the educative process.

Schools are those unique social environments that give students the opportunity to explore and experiment with multiple perspectives and decide for themselves that which they will utilize or discard (Dewey, 1916/2008). When school curricula are too narrowly prescribed and educational policies become repressive and limiting, it stymies critical thought and the social and philosophical growth of the student. Repressive curricula and overly structured classrooms and schools, heavily focused on a standardized structure, ultimately lead to an undemocratic, unenlightened, and anti-intellectual school environment. Neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies narrow the focus of schools to serve the aims, desires, and needs of corporate interests and maintains the status quo of capitalism and its need for obedient, docile workers. In so doing, these conservative rationalities create generations of students that have been subjectified and commodified into a product of the economy versus critical democratic thinkers. However, the implications for adherence to the status quo are much larger and much more detrimental to the idea of democracy. It deprives the students of their full potential to acquire a “broad social sense of their own powers” that will allow them to become active democratic beings with a broad social intelligence (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 40).

Education is a continuous process, and formal education is only the start of this educative path.

For it is assumed that the aim of education is to enable individuals to continue their education—or that the object and reward of learning is continued capacity for growth. Now this idea cannot be applied to all the members of society except where intercourse of man with man is mutual (i.e., democratic), and except where there is adequate provision for the reconstruction of social habits and institutions by means of wide stimulation arising from equitable distributed interests. And this means a democratic society. (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 91)

A democratic society allows for flexibility, progressive growth, and a liberated educative process, not a fixed or rigid characterization of ideas. Any time external pressures aim to rearticulate a certain curriculum or idea, it inherently stamps out the potential for democratic thought among our future citizens. Thus, the aim of education should always allow for flexible, student-focused learning environments that stimulate a child’s potential for democratic discourse and critique of the existing sociophilosophical norms (i.e. the existing status quo), as well as the potential to experience and internalize the students’ own methods and processes of discovery and reasoning.

Conservative Education and Its Limits

Before examining the possibilities to counter neoliberalism and neoconservatism within the academy and within teacher education programs, I feel it is of interest to examine Dewey’s ideas regarding conservative education, which he discussed in terms of “recapitulation and retrospection,” and progressive education, which he described in terms of a reconstruction of society, or “social reconstruction” (Dewey, 1916/2008). Dewey utilized aspects of the recapitulation theory of education to demonstrate that the conservative ideas, or the status-quo model of education, are antidemocratic. This theory of education views the child as a biological and cultural savage who must be instructed in some set pattern similar to evolutionary processes—social Darwinism. Cultural recapitulation then occurs through a process of education whereby the individual is exposed to the norms and mores of prior generations and subsequently that individual will grow to maturity by repeating the history and processes produced by prior generations. Thus, for proper education to take place, each generation must merely repeat its predecessor’s existence and educative legacy. Dewey described this as “short-circuited growth” that should be reevaluated in favor of a more progressive educational process allowing for the emancipation of the young “from the need of dwelling in an outgrown path” (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 68).

In his later work *Experience and Education*, Dewey acknowledged the importance of traditional, or conservative, education for passing on critical skills needed to navigate our current social environment. There are essential skills that must be recapitulated in order for society to maintain the fundamental knowledge required for our society to function. However, education becomes stagnate and undemocratic when recapitulated knowledge becomes the standard for all knowledge and, thus, a limiting factor in the growth of a society. Education should be seen as a democratic experience whereby individuals have the opportunity to evaluate the current norms and determine the best course to

reconstruct society in a different image than their forefathers; it's an opportunity for our current generation to examine the previous generations' norms and mores and evaluate them in terms of what is truly best for modern societal conditions. This idea—of taking the best of our past and our current knowledge to make a better society—is at the core of Dewey's pragmatic philosophy.

With this in mind, Dewey provided a technical definition of education stating that “it is that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases the ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 71). Viewing education from this perspective brings to mind a couple of ideas: (a) The increment of meaning corresponds to the increased perception of connection and continuities of activities in which we are engaged, and (b) the other side of an educative experience is an added power of subsequent direction or control—a genuinely educative experience, one in which instruction is conveyed and ability increased and is distinguished from a routine activity on one hand and a capricious activity on the other (Dewey, 1916/2008, pp. 71–72). As Dewey explained:

Education may be conceived either retrospectively or prospectively. That is to say, it may be treated as the process of accommodating the future to the past, or as a utilization of the past for a resource in a developing future . . . [and as such] education is both a social and a philosophical function. Particularly is it true that a society which not only changes but—which has the ideal of such change as will improve it, will have different standards and methods of education from one which aims simply at the perpetuation of its own customs. To make the general ideas set forth applicable to our own education practice, it is, therefore, necessary to come to closer quarters with the nature of present social life. (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 75)

Society has a plurality of meanings, whether viewed from a descriptive or normative sense. Education, then, as a social function, can also be examined from a descriptive or normative standpoint. However, one common thread exists: “Any education by a group tends to socialize its members” such that “the quality and value of the socialization depends upon the habits and aims of the group” (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 76). A cogent point that Dewey presented in his work is that “a democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 80; see also Dallmayr, 2010).

What, then, is the version of society that we wish to achieve for ourselves, and how does education play a role in that society? Dewey stated that “obviously a society to which stratification into separate classes would be fatal, must see to it that intellectual opportunities are accessible to all on equable and easy terms” and must provide for opportunities to critique that stratification (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 80). Society made up of classes is inherently at risk of primarily serving the needs and desires of the ruling class or, for our purposes, business, industry, and their pursuit of global competitiveness and American exceptionalism. Furthermore, education should be especially concerned with equity and inclusiveness because “education proceeds ultimately from the patterns

furnished by institutions, customs, and laws” and if those laws are skewed to business and industry, then education will surely be skewed to those same interests (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 81). This is the concern for educators today: We find ourselves in a sociopolitical system that prioritizes the knowledge required for global economic competition undergirded by a sense of a moral nationalistic duty—the blending of neoliberalism and neoconservative ideologies. Education policy, especially as the recent events would indicate, is bound to become further skewed to the interests of business and industry rather than critical democratic practice and discourse. The problem is that “each generation is inclined to educate its young so as to get along in the present world instead of with a view to the proper end of education; the promotion of the best possible realization of humanity as humanity” (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 87).

Education is currently situated such that “rulers [government, the wealthy, industry] are simply interested in such training as will make their subjects [students and society] better tools for their own intentions” (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 87). In contrast, education should be taken as a freeing of the mind, “freeing the individual capacity in a progressive growth directed toward social aims,” the betterment of all of society, not just an elite few (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 87). Dewey, in concluding his chapter titled “The Democratic Conception of Education,” suggested that since education is a social process, and there are many kinds of societies, a criterion for educational criticism and construction should imply a particular social ideal.

The two points selected by which to measure the worth of a form of social life are the extent in which the interests of a group are shared by all its members, and the fullness and freedom with which it interacts with other groups. An undesirable society, in other words, is one which internally and externally sets up barriers to free intercourse and communication of experience. A society which makes provisions for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustments of its institutions through the interaction of the different forms of associated life is then considered democratic. Such a society must have a form, or type, of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships, social control and progress and the habits of mind that would secure future social changes. (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 90)

For Dewey's conception of a desirable society to take hold, education should be constructed with the aim of providing critical habits of mind, the progressive feeling of individual capacity for growth, the development of social relationships, and the freedom to critique our current socio-political mechanisms. Dewey argued all members in society should have an equal stake and an equal opportunity to share in society—otherwise, “the influences which educate some into masters, educate others into slaves” (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 77).

As adherents of neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies continue to narrowly define what knowledge is of most worth, “the more activity is restricted to a few definite lines . . . [and] the more action tends to become routine on the part of the class at a disadvantage, and capricious, aimless, and explosive on the part of

the class having the materially fortunate position (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 78). Neoliberalism and neoconservatism breed restrictive, market authoritarian views of societal relationships bound up in a nationalistic-moral codification focusing on efficiency, cost of production, and adherence to the tenets of the ruling and/or business class. Under this scenario, human beings are treated simply as vessels to be filled with the appropriate information to fulfill their place in the market. This is an undemocratic educative process focused on skill training and not a form of education that promotes individual self-actualization. Thus, for society to liberate itself from neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities, those rationalities must first be exposed and articulated to current and future generations. While education must recapitulate, to some degree, the necessary skills and knowledge required to function in society, it also must usher in a democratic reconstruction. For education to be considered democratic, it must inform our current understandings and offer possible alternatives to rationalities that may act to oppress and repress groups through consumerism, classism, competition, rugged individualism, and racism—all counter to the democratic ideal.

As mentioned earlier, in the opening quote from Dewey, educators are constantly inculcating ideological preferences, whether actively or passively, in the way they choose to educate students. Our society is continually constructed and reconstructed around ideological agendas. With our current neoliberal and neoconservative construction of society, there is a sense of loss of control and a creation of binaries: good versus bad; us versus them; what knowledge counts versus what knowledge does not count; industry versus nonindustry; democratic versus undemocratic; and critical intelligence versus anti-intellectualism. Apple has stated that “these binary oppositions distance most people of color, women, and others from the community of worthy individuals (Apple, 1995, p. 19). I believe it would be crucial to add to the list immigrant and transient populations, religious minorities, and LGBTQ communities. Binaries are often expressed in the following ways: “we are law-abiding, hard-working, decent, virtuous, and homogenous,” while they are “lazy, immoral, permissive, and heterogeneous, thus causing a threat to our society” (Apple, 1995, p. 19). According to Apple, the “original impulse of social constructionism to connect schools to progressive [democratic] social purposes is not dead”—it has basically gone underground (Apple, 1995, p. 25). Where it is now reemerging is in a new form of revolutionary grassroots movement that is just beginning to scratch the surface as witnessed in the push back against such things as school privatization and the proliferation of charter schools (Buras, 2013; Levine & Au, 2013). This revolutionary style movement must be given fertile ground in teacher education programs and through continued grassroots action. This grassroots action also should promote democratic thought, critique, and a Deweyan pragmatic stance utilizing multiple possibilities and perspectives.

Unfortunately, due to neoliberal and neoconservative ideological pressures, teachers are losing a battle for the right to utilize professional insight in administering their own classroom

culture and environment, and students are becoming further disempowered to pursue their own interests. Pedagogical practices of teachers are becoming nondistinctive and standardized because they have become services and products, commodified like any other economic measurement (Davis & Bansel, 2007). Watkins stated that “teaching desire, pedagogy, and neo-liberalism [and neoconservatism] seem intertwined” with conservative ideologies, becoming legitimized “through a seamless incorporation within the contemporary common sense of teaching” that starts in colleges of education and is further reinforced in classroom practices (Watkins, 2007, pp. 302–303). This is exactly what teacher educators should expose and resist. Teacher education must promote the idea of teacher as a Deweyan democratic leader in understanding culture, cultural agents who help students navigate their worlds and their own processes of producing meaning and understandings. A reexamination of Dewey’s *Democracy and Education* and *Experience and Education* may help us reevaluate and adjust how we think about educating future teachers to counter the hegemonic ideologies of neoliberalism and neoconservatism and reconstruct education so as to foster a truly democratic experience for all students—a democratic ethos.

A Democratic Ethos in Teacher Education

The challenge in education is to foster action, especially when educators are encumbered by the oppressive rules that govern teachers’ actions and curriculum delivery in classrooms, including the marginalization of critical studies within teacher education programs. As a consequence of the ideologies of neoliberalism and neoconservatism, there is a budding movement made up of a coalition of educators, parents, the labor movement, and communities as resistance—a counter-hegemonic force, questioning the validity and ethics of neoliberal and neoconservative ideological agendas. Apple stated that “action in education is made that much more powerful, and more likely to succeed, if it is organically connected to democratic social movements in the larger society” (Apple, 1995, p. 26;). Utilizing Dewey’s philosophy, what makes democratic values transcend neoliberalism and neoconservatism are their inclusive, critical, and deliberative expectations that broaden human cooperation, enlightenment, and the possibilities of emancipation from existing ideological hegemony. Broad democratic inclusiveness enhances the legitimacy of public policies by means of considering diverse perspectives, which in turn, enhances the substantive and normative outcomes applied to the public at large. This again is directly in line with Dewey’s pragmatic stance toward educating, making use of multiple perspectives to move society forward.

Giarelli, who utilized Goodwyn, argued that the contemporary challenge for teacher educators, teachers, and education communities—an inherently sociopolitical and philosophical challenge—“is to bring human energy to bear on existing social spaces by creating mass institutions of democracy in them” (Giarelli, 1995, p. 40; Goodwyn, 1980, p. 38). As such, education is “inevitably one of the arenas in which critical issues are fought out” because it is the “major institution that deliberately shapes the next generation” (Wallace, 1995, p. 43). School becomes the focal point

for the struggles embedded within society—it becomes a microcosm of the larger worries and cares of society. Wallace, who made use of a quote from Dewey’s review of George Counts work “School and Society in Chicago,” stated that “every vibration that agitates the social structure must sooner or later reach the public school” (Dewey, 1929, p. 231; Wallace, 1995, p. 43). Neither Counts nor Dewey believed that schools should passively and blindly absorb the results of ideological conflict, but rather, schools should serve as sites of critical thinking, creativity, and self-actualization by reconstructing the predetermined cultural transmission of knowledge to the next generation. Dewey argued this point in *Experience and Education*—making the use of traditional knowledge and education and then critically examining that knowledge to scout for areas of improvement, in order to advance a more progressive democratic ideal. Whereas Counts argued for a radical progressive reconstruction of education, Dewey believed in a more balanced, pragmatic approach favoring multiple viewpoints and perspectives so as to not disrupt worthwhile transmission of certain societal ideals.

Public education is consistently called upon to educate all of our children, yet it is continually blamed for the socioeconomic problems that detract from students’ potential for success. Exposing this trend and the underlying crisis discourse is the job of critical educators utilizing critical foundational studies within colleges of education and activism. Unfortunately, much of this exposure rarely extends beyond the walls of the academy. We must extend the discussion beyond scholarly discourse and engage directly with the American public. The American Right has made wonderful use of the media to further their ideological agendas and educators could make use of the Right’s playbook in this regard.

In addition, courses such as *Critical and Contemporary Issues in Education* offer the chance to evaluate and discuss current educational, societal, philosophical, and ideological issues experienced by teachers, students, and communities. This course, a social foundations course, offers the chance to investigate and discuss different ideological impacts on education in general, and more specifically teachers and students. The readings in this course offer the chance to debate current issues, discuss the ideological roots to those issues, and provide future teachers a chance to determine how they may or may not act on certain deeply held ideological stances. The pragmatic approach of this course allows students to investigate conservative and progressive viewpoints, a Deweyan approach, producing possibilities for action in education. Dotts (2013) pointed out that that critical studies programs in colleges of education, whether through formal social foundations programs or integrated coursework, perform a unique role in addressing broader issues facing education today. Specifically, he stated that critical studies should fundamentally include “the development of interpretive, normative, and critical perspectives in academia”—a critical intellectualism that can foster democratic processes (Dotts, 2013, p. 148). Dotts added that “all three perspectives serve to create a scholarly framework within which students and academicians interpret and normatively reflect upon existing

education, political, historical, religious, economic, and social institutions critically” (Dotts, 2013, p. 148).

Faced with the pressures of neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies on our current educational systems, I argue that it is within colleges of education that teacher educators foster critical social intelligence in future teachers by providing a democratic forum to compare and contrast ideologies and rationalities. Embedded within this discussion is an examination of how we, as educators, may perpetuate neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies in our practice, how colleges and universities are rapidly diminishing tenure track professor positions, and how colleges and universities are steadily increasing standards-based student teacher evaluation mechanisms like edTPA, minimizing the influence of colleges of education over teacher certification. It is within our own spheres of influence that we should introduce future educators to inequities and biases created and manifested in ideological extremes, acknowledge our place in perpetuating neoliberal and neoconservative ideological trends, and embolden the upcoming teaching force to facilitate a path for democratizing classrooms—setting an example for their own future practice.

The emphasis in critical studies and broader critical foundational studies should interweave the history, philosophy, politics, sociological, and anthropological aspects of education. Future educators should come to understand their field more completely and begin to develop a critical social intelligence—a broad intellectual perspective regarding society and philosophy—not merely pedagogical training. Colleges of education should reexamine and reinforce the combination of theory, philosophy, and practice to promote democratic classrooms. Neoliberal and neoconservative ideological agendas place pressures on colleges of education to emphasize pedagogical training versus philosophical and sociological understandings, which would otherwise aid in critical understandings. Teachers are becoming technicians rather than critical intellectuals. The pressures to de-democratize and streamline education programs can be seen in the requirements for undergraduate degrees in education, which further marginalize critical studies often situated within social foundations of education programs in favor of standards-based programs such as the use of edTPA. In the last three decades, we have seen continuing marginalization of social foundations of education courses and programs to the point at which some are disappearing completely (Butin, 2007; Carter, 2008; Dotts, 2015; Hardee & McFaden, 2015; Hess, Rotherham, & Walsh, 2004; Lewis, 2013; Morrison, 2007; Sirotnik, 1990; Swain, 2013a & 2013b; Tutwiler et al., 2013). This process of marginalization occurs through legislation and subterfuge as standardization and clinical aspects of education become the focus. The discourse surrounding teacher quality is directly tied to neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities of quality, efficiency, accountability, and scientific-laden (positivistic) language and is linked with an idea of American exceptionalism and noncritical, nationalistic duties. In addition, public universities are witnessing a starvation of public funding in favor of special-purpose, focused private funding that disenfranchises the humanities and critical programs in education in favor of what serves the best interest of

industry and the economy. How, then, do we generate a democratic ethos within the educational community under these circumstances and ideological pressures?

First, we must begin with our teacher education programs shifting the emphasis from primarily, or only, pedagogical and/or technical aspects of teaching to emphasize theoretical, philosophical, and sociopolitical understandings allowing for critical examination of our current state of education. This does not mean that pedagogical training must be ignored, but there must be a balance of theory and practice, a pragmatic approach. Teacher educators must not be afraid to tackle tough issues and provide a forum of critique reestablishing the idea “education is a public good and essential to the cultivation of a democratic civil society” (Tutwiler, et al., 2013, p. 108). Second, critical foundational studies should be demarginalized, reconstituted, and reinforced in order to promote examination of “the diverse epistemological frameworks, the dominant assumptions [currently in education], and participate in critical and systemic analysis of power structures” impacting our educational systems (Tutwiler et al., 2013, p. 108). This includes exposing the “narrow conceptions of education and schooling which marginalize, or otherwise minimize, the knowledge, culture, and experiences” of our diverse society, brought on by the results of neoliberal and neoconservative ideological pressures on education reform (Tutwiler et al., 2013, p. 108). Third, teacher education programs must articulate the need for, and the promotion of, activism within the educator ranks to replace, or circumvent, neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities. While arguing that Dewey in *Experience and Education* found usefulness in both conservative and progressive forms of education, we also must respond to the dominance of conservative ideological education reform initiatives, which breeds a lopsided and undemocratic educational agenda. Dewey’s ideas focused on a balanced, pragmatic approach that fostered a democratic ideal. In my opinion, we have lost this ideal in our colleges of education and in classrooms across the country. The process of creating an emboldened cadre of teachers begins by instilling the idea of cultural politics and reinforcing the role of the professional teacher as informed intellectual (Bright, 2015; Giroux, 1988).

Earlier, I cited Dotts (2013) regarding the interpretive and normative perspectives fundamental to educational programs and how those perspectives help democratize education. Interpretive perspectives are related to concepts and theories found most often in the humanities and social sciences. This perspective aids in exposing future educators to the differing social, philosophical, historical, and cultural perspectives that are interwoven in the fabric of educational theory. Normative perspectives are related to value assumptions and orientations that can be somewhat subjective, but none the less, inform the dialogue and practice of education. Normative perspectives, in addition, include an axiological component—what educators and students value in terms of democratic education. These perspectives assist future educators in developing inquiry skills to question assumptions and power arrangements (e.g., social, political, and economic) and identify the multitude of contradictions and inconsistencies found among

social and educational values, policies, and practice. Critical perspectives engage educators in employing democratic values to assess educational beliefs, policies, and practices in light of their origins, influences, and consequences (Tutwiler et al., 2013, p. 112). This challenge can be met by teacher educators choosing to present education as a product of our social, economic, and political world and allowing for a democratic exchange among competing ideologies. Saltman (2014) identified three fundamental responsibilities of teachers when choosing curriculum and determining pedagogical theory and practices: (1) teachers must be in tune and respond in some way to existing broader public discourses; (2) teachers must understand their responsibility for the “ethical and political implications of what they knowingly and unwittingly affirm or contest in schools and classrooms,” much as Dewey argued; and (3) teachers must understand that they are bound in a “relationship of responding to students and the socio-political contexts inhabited by teachers and students such that teaching and learning is understood as being dialogic and driven by a [democratic] exchange of meanings” (pp. 4–5). The preceding points are fundamental to a democratic environment within an educational framework that acknowledges modernity, while also aiding in a critique of that modernity in line with Dewey’s pragmatic approach. A democratic exchange of ideas that fosters a discussion of different ideologies, their current impacts on society, and the value of those ideologies in the progress of society should be modeled in teacher education.

Teacher education requires the examination of “the act and aims of teaching” and how “teaching itself is philosophical; questioning what it is teachers are attempting to achieve raises important philosophical questions” (Kerr, Mandzuk, & Raptis, 2011, p. 123). Studying philosophical underpinnings of teaching then becomes “an epistemological and moral act intended to promote better thinking and reasoning by students in ways that are morally” and, for that matter, more democratically, acceptable (Kerr et al., 2011, p. 123). It is within this moral aspect of education that neoconservatives often float an argument that defines a curriculum reflecting American exceptionalism and a Judeo-Christian value system. Teachers must be aware of this bias as they define and implement their own pedagogical practices. From a sociological and historical perspective, teachers must come to grips with the relationships among society, ideologies, the historical and present mechanisms of educational reform, and how those reforms are linked to different ideological movements stemming from changes in the sociopolitical environment.

If we truly wish for democratic education or a democratic educational experience focused on social justice, equal opportunities, fairness, and freedom, then we have to promote these qualities in all of our educational institutions and in our own pedagogy. The challenge in teaching future educators becomes how to continually navigate between educating students in what they absolutely must know and encouraging students to make up their own minds about those facts; critically examining the current nature of our society (Kerr et al., 2011; Kerr, 2006). A concern is in how we encourage a democratic exchange of alternate viewpoints and critique while also avoiding creating another undemocratic process within our

own pedagogical practices. Teachers present knowledge in the form of reason-giving and claims, which teachers inherently present from the position of power. Understanding the ontological, epistemological, and axiological aspects of education is essential in defining how that power is to be manifested and utilized as moral, ethical, and democratic—fostering a democratic community and dialogic thinking in the classroom. I believe Dewey would argue it is in the teacher’s sphere of responsibility to encourage active, concerned, and enlightened citizens who understand the nature of society, history, philosophy, and how government and education can work to benefit all of society or, conversely, how government and education can be co-opted for iniquitous ideological reasons. The role of teacher educators is to provide a democratic environment that encourages critical discourse, providing knowledge from a variety of disciplines, presenting future educators the skills and knowledge to reason through the actions of school and government leaders—a free exchange of competing ideologies—so that teachers can determine what is best for their future students, their career field, and society. As Giroux has often suggested, the heart of our current crisis in education comes down to the foundations of democracy and the role of educators as civic [and political] intellectuals (Giroux, 1988; Giroux, 2012). More to the point, teachers must feel empowered to create a formative culture in schools that promotes critical intelligence, embraces civic discourse, and allows for critical dialogue regarding ideological influences over schooling and current political structures. Teachers must feel emboldened to act on their professional experience and as experts in their disciplines and empower their students in becoming their own meaning-makers situated within a democratic ethos.

Conclusion

This article was designed to expose the impacts of neoliberalism and neoconservatism on education and how those ideologies de-democratize education. In so doing, I felt it necessary to reexamine Dewey’s dualistic ideas of individual growth and democratic communities of learning, to encourage a democratic reconstruction of society, schooling, and teacher education that utilizes Dewey’s philosophy, as well as the need for a critical democratic process within colleges of education. Dewey specifically spoke on democracy and the dueling mechanisms of conservative and progressive ideological thought in regards to schooling. Dewey’s pragmatism and philosophical ideas elucidate the need for a critical transformative process that, in turn, may expose the ways in which neoliberal and neoconservative ideological influences are attempting to redefine education. Neoliberalism and neoconservatism ultimately lead to undemocratic practices within schools and create an oppressive environment narrowly defining what it means to be a successful teacher and student. Countering those ideological pressures with Dewey’s pragmatic democratic philosophy is paramount for refocusing our schools toward democratic dialogue and exploration while fostering an empowered atmosphere for teachers and students. For this to occur, similar strategies used by the adherents of the conservative canon must now be incorporated and utilized by the progressive community to balance the dialogue

of education reform. Colleges of education can aid in this process by exposing the mechanisms that noneducators use to sway educational policy, helping to elevate progressive democratic agents into key positions and shifting the agenda away from market fundamentalism to critical democratic idealism. Embedded within the halls of the academy and colleges of education, measures can be taken to incorporate Dewey’s philosophy and instill in our educators a critical social intelligence that will serve the educational community writ large. If the idea of a truly Deweyan democratic ethos is to exist, as exemplified in his work *Democracy and Education*, future teachers must be exposed to theories and practices that extend their social intelligence beyond predetermined ideological impositions. Only then can teacher education, public education, and the larger educative process act as a democratizing force to counter neoliberalism and neoconservatism.

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