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## Introduction

Persons do not become a society by living in physical proximity, any more than a man ceases to be socially influenced by being so many feet or miles removed from others. A book or a letter may institute a more intimate association between human beings separated thousands of miles from each other than exists between dwellers under the same roof. Individuals do not even compose a social group because they all work for a common end. The parts of a machine work with a maximum of cooperativeness for a common result, but they do not form a community. If, however, they were all cognizant of the common end and all interested in it so that they regulated their specific activity in view of it, then they would form a community. But this would involve communication. Each would have to know what the other was about and would have to have some way of keeping the other informed as to his own purpose and progress. Consensus demands communication.

John Dewey, 1916

Around the world, education promotes democracy by teaching peoples to interact with one another, encouraging civic engagement (Glaeser, Ponzetto, & Shleifer, 2007). In many democratic societies today, the relationship between education and civic engagement begins early by means of a formal education. Yet, not every country with a formal education system in place is a democratic society. What features of a democratic society are upheld or sustained as a result of the education of its citizens? What role must formal institutions of education play in the formation of democratic societies? These are the questions that will be discussed in this paper.

## Discussion

A healthy society is one in constant evolution. We can therefore consider democracy as an essential characteristic of an evolving society; however, definitions of democracy are subject to various perspectives, political, ideological or otherwise. For the purpose of this discussion, democracy may be understood as both necessary and the result of representation and participation in societal governance by its members. In essence, representation is central to democratic governance; however, the opposite of representation is not participation but rather exclusion – and the opposite of participation is abstention (Plotke, 1997). Therefore, citizens in a democratic society must first have the right to participate (representation) and then possess an understanding and appreciation of the issues surrounding their wellbeing in order to positively do so.

Neither representation nor participation guarantees a thriving democracy. It is within this void that education serves a purpose. We can thus view the relation between education and democracy (as it relates to this discussion) as one in constant exchange or flow that is necessary for either to truly function. Given this definition, it is not enough for a society to have a formal institution of education for a democracy to thrive. As mentioned earlier, not every country with a formal education structure maintains a democracy. A society that evolves (for the better) with the participation of its members can be considered an active democracy. Education within a society may therefore be qualified based on the extent to which it fosters this participation. A practical view of this association is that education may help citizens through the direct acquisition of knowledge and the skills to communicate.

The prominent and influential American philosopher, John Dewey, equated education to life itself and necessary for any society to endure. The ability to transmit knowledge from one

member of society to another was crucial to the earliest known civilizations in our history.

“...the fact that some are born as some die, makes possible through transmission of ideas and practices the constant reweaving of the social fabric. Yet this renewal is not automatic. Unless pains are taken to see that genuine and thorough transmission takes place, the most civilized group will relapse into barbarism and then into savagery” (Dewey, 1916, 1985). Dewey’s argument forms the basis for society’s institutionalization of education. A formal education, or as Dewey calls it, “the deliberate educating of the young” (Dewey, 1916) is meant to serve that purpose. “If humanity has made some headway in realizing that the ultimate value of every institution is its distinctively human effect -- its effect upon conscious experience -- we may well believe that this lesson has been learned largely through dealings with the young.” (Dewey, 1916)

But education only serves this democratic purpose in as much as it enables members of society to actively engage (participate) in its governance. A vivid portrayal of this relationship is in student activism. In the United States, students were at the forefront of protests regarding a wide variety of social issues like segregation, equal rights, and women’s rights. In countries around the world, students played key roles in opposing nondemocratic governments. “Student demonstrations played a role in the overthrow of Peron in Argentina in 1955, the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, the downfall of Perez Jimenez in Venezuela in 1958, the resignation of the Kishi government in Japan in 1960, the resistance to Diem in Vietnam in 1963, the anti-Sukarno movement in Indonesia and the toppling of the Rhee government in Korea in 1966, the Prague Spring in 1968, and the downfall of Ayub Khan in Pakistan in 1969...Most recently, peaceful demonstrations in which students played a key part helped save democracy in Ukraine against

the aggrandizement by the ex-President who stole the election.” (Glaeser, Ponzetto, & Shleifer, 2007).

It is not enough to say however that these students were active participants because of their education. There is a high correlation between democracy and education in countries around the world, but correlation does not equal causation. Nonetheless, these associations are enough to see the value of education in defending the democratic process. “Education has consistently been found to increase political participation, electoral turnout, civic engagement, political knowledge, and democratic attitudes and opinions” (Hillygus, 2005).

Although Dewey’s (1916) argument on the importance of education to a democratic society has been central to the formation and maintenance of formal educational institutions in democratic societies (especially in the United States), its true expression in education practice is yet to be realized. Dewey’s argument could be understood as “communication as a democratic form of life, that is the development of communicative and deliberative capabilities for democracy. The idea of deliberative democracy as an educational process, where individuals bring different perspectives to an on-going communication” (Englund, 2000)

Communication is central to the idea of education impacting democracy. “Not only is social life identical with communication, but all communication (and hence all genuine social life) is educative” (Dewey, 1916).

### Conclusion

As educators, our goal would not be to simply transmit knowledge but to foster curiosity, the sort that leads to active engagement. In light of the discussions in this paper, it can be said that effective schools – institutions of formal education – are those that are able to light a spark and get students engaged in their living and learning. Relevance would be of utmost importance:

“why is what I am learning useful?” Dewey alludes to this in his contextualization of a formal education and its relevance to a complex society (democracy).

Thus we reach the ordinary notion of education: the notion which ignores its social necessity and its identity with all human association that affects conscious life, and which identifies it with imparting information about remote matters and the conveying of learning through verbal signs: the acquisition of literacy. Hence one of the weightiest problems with which the philosophy of education has to cope is the method of keeping a proper balance between the informal and the formal, the incidental and the intentional, modes of education.

John Dewey, 1916

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