Experimenting with Education: John Dewey and Ella Flagg Young at the University of Chicago

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Although John Dewey is often described as a “child-centered” philosopher, a careful reading of his writings indicates that he did not believe children could learn well without teachers to help link their prior experience to the experience available in school. The crucial role Dewey assigned teachers has not been fully recognized because Dewey said relatively little about teachers in his major educational writings, including Democracy and Education (1916). During his Chicago years, while working closely with teacher advocate Ella Flagg Young, Dewey wrote incisively about teachers and the political constraints that limited their effectiveness. However, after leaving Chicago, this was not a focal point of his major educational works. The significance of this oversight is explored in this article, especially in relation to Dewey and Young’s brief but close and important collaboration.

However appealing John Dewey’s thought may be, there is no denying that it lacks a sense of realpolitik. Dewey’s descriptions of democracy as associated living, of schools as embryonic communities, and of politics as the education of publics have stirred the imagination of many people because they resonate with deeply humane and widely shared values. His most memorable phrases, for example, “what the best and wisest parent wants for his child, that must the community want for all of its children” (Dewey [1899] 1976a, p. 5) portray worthy social ideals and important social relationships with unusual clarity. Despite that, when one reads Dewey’s writings wanting to know how the kind of democracy, education, or politics he described might be developed, one comes up lacking.
Perhaps a philosopher should not be taken to task for failing also to be a reformer. Surely there is a need for social criticism even when it is not joined to plans for social improvement. That notwithstanding, it seems fair to fault Dewey for not attending more centrally to strategic concerns because he called for a philosophy that would illuminate the real problems of this world. My purpose, however, is not so much to judge Dewey as to understand what his ideas do and do not offer and to call attention to significant problems he failed to address. More specifically, I hope to suggest that by acknowledging the shortcomings of Dewey’s thought, educators today can move beyond the common use of Dewey’s name as an icon in order to grapple afresh with what he believed.

Such reengagement could yield many benefits including the dispelling of myths that have long clouded understanding of crucial aspects of Dewey’s educational thought. Among these, none has been more pervasive or pernicious than the claim that Dewey advocated child-centered education. Although it is true that Dewey thought learning had to build from the experience of the child and did not think teachers should impose discipline on children or rely on directive, authoritarian teaching methods, he was firmly convinced that teachers played a central role in education. He did not believe children could learn well if left totally to their own devices. Teachers, he maintained, should link the experiences children brought to school with the activities, relationships, and materials that could be marshaled in school to help them grow. In Dewey’s thought, teachers were indispensable guides and organizers of the educational process and the success of educational reform would depend on their effectiveness (Dewey [1902] 1976b, p. 285; [1903] 1977, p. 235).

Although Dewey was clear in his disavowal of child-centered education and therefore cannot be held responsible for misinterpretations that portray him that way, he was responsible, I believe, for widespread misunderstanding of the important role he assigned teachers. Though clearly stated in his writings (and demonstrated throughout his life),

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the importance of teachers was not featured in Democracy and Education or in other major educational works. The silence is unfortunate and difficult to understand, but examining Dewey’s relationship with Ella Flagg Young may shed light on why it occurred.

A longtime Chicago schoolteacher and administrator, who studied and worked with Dewey from 1895 until 1904, Young was one of Dewey’s most important tutors in education and especially important in shaping his understanding of teachers and teaching. According to Dewey’s recollections of his Chicago years (1894–1904), Young exercised more influence on his educational ideals, especially “his ideas of democracy in the school,” than anyone else except his wife, Alice Chipman Dewey (Jane Dewey 1951, p. 29; Boydston 1975). Although Young’s influence on Dewey was thus acknowledged and profound, it was also partial. Young had a clear understanding of the subtlety and centrality of politics in education, which Dewey echoed briefly while they worked together in Chicago but never fully incorporated into his educational thought. It is therefore to what Dewey did and did not learn from Young that one must turn, I think, to understand his failure to emphasize the significance of teachers, which helped skew interpretations of his thought and limited the practical value of his philosophy.

Ella Flagg Young: A Teacher Advocate

At the time Ella Flagg Young became John Dewey’s student, public schooling in the United States was undergoing very significant change. More children were staying in school beyond the elementary grades, and the administration of schools was more and more likely to be treated as a function distinct from and superior to classroom instruction. Increasingly, too, universities were establishing departments and schools of education, which were seeking to train principals and other educational leaders and to engage in research. As a result, schools came to be linked to universities in a variety of hierarchical relationships. University professors developed tests and texts for school use. They also served as outside consultants to school boards and, as was true of Dewey himself, interpreted educational problems in their speeches and writings.

As Ella Flagg Young knew from her own observations and experience, many of these changes had negative consequences for teachers. Thanks to increasing bureaucracy and professionalization, teachers in metropolitan centers like Chicago lost autonomy and status in palpable ways. Increasingly subject to work rules that specified how they could
and could not relate to the youngsters in their charge, teachers became ever more subordinate to administrators, and, because elementary teachers tended to have fewer years of schooling, they were losing rank relative to high school teachers (Murphy 1990).

A strong advocate for teachers, Young was extraordinarily astute in her understanding of the changes going on around her, and she shared her insights with Dewey. Fifty years old when she became Dewey’s student, Young was tough, savvy, articulate, and deeply intellectual. One acquaintance claimed she was rather “brusque and plain looking with piercing looking eyes that could read people through and through” (Dora Wells, in Donatelli [1971], p. 89). Another stated that “in fighting for a principle, Mrs. Young could be as ‘hard as nails,’ and she could match her wits with anyone” (Elmer A. Morrow, in Donatelli [1971], pp. 241–42). Margaret Haley, the longtime leader of the Chicago Teachers’ Federation, who was one of Young’s great admirers, remembered her as “the nearest approach I have ever seen to thought in instantaneous action” (Reid 1982, p. 141). According to Haley, “her intellect was a machine gun,” but “it was her moral courage rather than her mental capacity that made her a leader of women” (Reid 1982, p. 140). Dewey simply said: “I have hardly known anyone who made the effect of genuine intellectual development the test and criterion of the value of everything as much as she” (Dewey, in McManis [1916], p. 121).

As a student in Dewey’s seminar at the University of Chicago, Young was the undisputed star. One of her peers remembered the class as a two-way conversation between Dewey and Young that pretty much excluded everyone else (McManis 1916, pp. 102–3). Because she had quite literally grown up as a teacher, Young had a great deal of hands-on experience to contribute to Dewey’s emerging educational thought. In turn, Dewey believed he had “a specific intellectual point of view and terminology” to offer Young, which gave her “greater intellectual assurance” (Dewey, in McManis [1916], p. 120).

Having moved to Chicago from Buffalo, New York, with her parents and two older siblings in 1858, when she was 13, Young had attended elementary school and then the Normal Department of the high school before beginning to teach at the age of 17. Thereafter she had moved steadily up the administrative ladder, becoming a principal in 1876 and a district superintendent of schools in 1887. She had remained in that post until 1899, when she resigned in protest. Chicago’s new superintendent of schools, E. Benjamin Andrews, former president of Brown University, was attempting to centralize control of the curriculum, which Young vehemently opposed. In fact, she had recently proposed the organization of teachers’ councils in all the Chicago
schools to facilitate the involvement of teachers and principals in decisions concerning curriculum. According to Margaret Haley, Young had made this suggestion because she insisted that "the experience gained by teachers in the actual work of teaching should not be ignored" (Reid 1982, p. 88). The Chicago Board of Education did not agree. Although some teachers' councils were established on a voluntary, outside-of-school basis, the board would not give them official status. This defeat, combined with her sense of being "in discord professionally with her superiors in office," led to Young's departure (Young to Mary Lynch, June 9, 1899, in Donatelli [1971], p. 133).

Reforming the Laboratory School

Young's resignation was fortunate for Dewey. Free of administrative responsibilities within the Chicago schools, she was now willing to accept an appointment in Dewey's department at the University of Chicago and to become supervisor of instruction at the University Elementary School that Dewey had just organized. "The Laboratory School," as Young dubbed it, was an outgrowth of Dewey's growing disenchantment with philosophy conceived as abstract theorizing and his growing interest in determining whether and how education might provide philosophy with a basis for empirical experimentation (Young, in Donatelli [1971], p. 7). Personally important to Dewey because his children were students there, the Laboratory School was also vital to Dewey's intellectual development. That Young was able to help him understand the workings of the school in terms that were quite literally relevant to his philosophical queries helps explain the great influence Dewey attributed to her.

Although the Laboratory School was growing in size when Young joined its staff, its place within the university was not as secure as Dewey would have liked. To Dewey, the importance of the school was clear. As he had told the university's trustees, he was convinced that trying to teach pedagogy without an experimental school "partakes of the nature of a farce and imposture—it is like professing to give thorough training in a science and then neglecting to provide a laboratory for faculty and students to work in" (Dewey to [university trustees], [spring 1896], in McCaul [1961], p. 153). University of Chicago president William Rainey Harper agreed, but he also worried about the school's management and its expense and insisted that the university could not and should not provide the school with the levels of financial support Dewey thought it required.

May 1996 175
Respected by Harper, who was active in Chicago school politics and aware of the high regard in which Chicago teachers held Young, and trusted by Dewey, Young was able at least for a time to advise Dewey and reassure Harper. Soon after beginning at the university, she told Harper that she and Dewey were working on plans “to make the work of the Elementary School really available in the pedagogical department” and that she was preparing “a study of the working out of theory and method of the school as a preliminary to an expert report, thorough and searching, to Mr. Dewey” (Young to Harper, December 2, 1899, in Smith [1979], pp. 69–70). Presumably it was this that prompted Dewey subsequently to remark that “in the reorganization of the laboratory school after certain weaknesses in its original scheme of administration had become apparent (due largely to my inexperience in administrative matters) her influence with that of Mrs. Dewey were the controlling factors. It is due to these two that the laboratory school ran so much more systematically and definitely—free from a certain looseness of ends and edges—in its last three or four years” (Dewey, in McManis [1916], p. 120).

From the start, Dewey had held weekly meetings with the Laboratory School teachers to discuss the activities of the week in different classes and to consider how those pertained to the school’s general principles. The “principles,” he explained later, were equivalent to “a kind of working hypothesis,” and “their application was in the hands of the teachers,” who were totally free to apply them as they saw fit (Dewey, in Mayhew and Edwards [1936], p. 371). Although the meetings were intended to promote cooperation in the experimental aims of the school, Dewey believed they were not initially successful in doing that. They were too centered on “practical” problems, he thought, “too much given to matters of immediate import and not sufficiently intellectual in content” (Dewey, in Mayhew and Edwards [1936], p. 371). Apparently the school was in a rather chaotic state, the teachers’ concern with “practical” problems likely having arisen from a lack of clear expectations and clearly designated responsibilities.

After Ella Flagg Young and Alice Dewey became involved, however, things changed. They instituted a departmental structure, which helped alleviate some of the problems that had been so troublesome previously and ensured that one person with special knowledge and experience in a particular area would bring a weekly report to the teachers’ meetings, presenting “the results of testing certain educational theories in the actual practices of her classroom” (Dewey, in Mayhew and Edwards [1936], p. 374). This ensured the smooth running of the school. It also produced the kind of cooperation on questions of educational theory and practice that Dewey was searching
for and proved to him, he said later, that freedom combined with intellectual cooperation provided a better way to ensure effective teaching than “supervision, critic teaching, and technical training” (Dewey, in Mayhew and Edwards [1936], p. 371). Opposed to the growth of central supervisory personnel in the schools, Dewey became convinced that “primary teachers should have the same power, the same freedom (and the same pecuniary recompense that now goes to university and, in less measure, to high-school teachers)” (Dewey, in Mayhew and Edwards [1936], p. 372). He wrote later that “in recollection of many things in our school practice and results that I could wish had been otherwise, there is compensation in the proof our experience affords that the union of intellectual freedom and cooperation will develop the spirit prized in university teachers, and that is sometimes mistakenly supposed to be a monopoly of theirs” (Dewey, in Mayhew and Edwards [1936], p. 372).

“I Was Constantly Getting Ideas from Her”

Even though Dewey was careful to couple his wife, Alice Chipman Dewey, with Ella Flagg Young in discussing positive changes in the operation of the Laboratory School, it is abundantly clear that it was Young who was his primary tutor. Candidly confessing that he was “constantly getting ideas from her,” Dewey explained that “It was from her that I learned that freedom and respect for freedom mean regard for the inquiring or reflective processes of individuals and that what ordinarily passes for freedom—freedom from external restraint, spontaneity in expression, etc.—are of significance only in their connection with thinking operations” (Dewey, in McManis [1916], p. 120). Young’s suggestions for the Laboratory School apparently showed Dewey that giving teachers clear expectations and assignments did not constrain them. Quite the opposite was the case. More important, her suggestions demonstrated that what was crucial for good teaching were opportunities to think and experiment within a context of frank exchange and full respect.

Exemplified at the Laboratory School, Young’s views about the importance of freedom for teachers were also embodied in the dissertation she wrote under Dewey’s supervision and defended in 1900. This offered another medium for intense and profoundly educative exchange.

Entitled Isolation in the School, Young’s dissertation presented a compelling description of what was needed to improve education at all levels. Most important, Young argued, was social equality between
and among all the participants in the educational system—students and teachers, teachers and administrators, and school and university teachers. This was a prerequisite to the cooperation and the continuous, collaborative discussion, modification, and reaffirmation of aims that made effective education possible. Not surprisingly, given the importance she assigned to intellectual and pedagogical autonomy for teachers, Young was critical of “non-teaching supervisors” (Young 1901, p. 29). They were costly and their presence demeaned the actual work of “class teachers,” she said. As would always be the case when “the highest ranking officer is a person in power rather than a person of power,” they were also a source of “petty jealousy,” she observed (Young 1901, p. 30).

In Isolation in the School, Young revealed herself to be a master of practical philosophic application. Although the study could be read as a treatise on Deweyan psychology, its focus was problems of educational policy and practice. It contained a great deal of theory—ideas about the importance of will, the value of knowledge rooted in experience, and the inseparable relationship between character and conduct. But it did not present these constructs as ends in themselves. It used them to explain the thoughts, emotions, ideals, and behaviors of real people, in real situations.

From Isolation in the School, it is also clear that Young was willing to speak forthrightly and critically about the subtle, yet powerful changes in education that were transforming the actual work of teachers as well as causing a decline in their status. “The young men who look toward the schools wish to undertake some new line of work, not of instruction, but of investigation; to measure and weigh the little ones with machines,” she noted with not a little sarcasm (Young 1901, p. 42). Disdainful of university professors bent on research into child hygiene, she was also suspicious of “the young women of parts [who] wish to be special teachers—to teach the teachers, not the children” (Young 1901, p. 42). She understood, however, that a wish to escape the elementary classroom was not a personal failing but was rather a reflection of public thinking. “So closely associated with drudgery is the ideal of teaching the young, that trained minds and cultivated personalities shrink from entrance into the direct work,” she explained realistically (Young 1901, p. 42). But “close supervision,” which was “un-American” and undemocratic, in Young’s view, and would not be tolerated within colleges and universities, was also at fault.

In Isolation in the Schools and in others of her writings, Young demonstrated a keen sensitivity to the differences of gender, class, age, status, and profession that can lead to competition and conflict between and among groups of people. She wryly observed, for example, that
“woman was far behind man” in understanding her “inherent right” to express herself through work (Young 1901, pp. 40–41). Men, said Young, would not tolerate the low salaries or “the mechanism, drudgery, and loss of individuality which the method of organization and administration has tended to make characteristic of the graded school” (Young 1901, p. 41). On another occasion, she applauded the involvement of “club women” in literacy campaigns among the foreign born, while carefully noting that “it should always be remembered that it is the teachers and not the club women who are experts in education, and while the club women may lead in the movement, when it comes actually to doing the work they should leave it to the teachers” (Young 1916a, p. 1). Describing the gender politics involved in teacher unionization, she explained on yet another occasion that teachers had learned through long and hard experience that “the men, in their own station and rank in life, the college-bred men, were not ready to do anything for them; therefore they were compelled to go in with those who had felt the oppression and the grind of the power of riches” (Young 1916b, p. 358).

However intellectual Young may have been, she was first and foremost a teacher advocate and a seasoned politician. Whether it was this or other aspects of her experience that account for her powerful insights into politics is difficult to discern from extant sources about her life. Like others among her equally strong, equally feminist, and equally intellectual female contemporaries, notably Jane Addams, Young lived much of her adult life with other women (she had been deserted by her husband after a very brief marriage), one of whom, Laura Brayton, became her intimate, lifelong companion, and this relationship may have contributed to the strength, independence, and feminism that supported her political vision. Whatever its sources, Young’s grasp of the politics of education was unusually subtle and deep.

During Dewey’s last years in Chicago, Dewey and Young were engaged in conversations that were “so continuous and detailed that the influence resulting from them was largely insensible,” Dewey said later (Dewey, in McManis 1916b, p. 119). In fact, even assuming mutual influence, it is striking how much Isolation in the School presaged views Dewey subsequently expressed. One particularly interesting example of this was an article Dewey published three years after Young’s dissertation was presented, which, tellingly, was entitled “Democracy in Education.” Commenting on the politics of education in a style that was nearly as forthright and critical as Young’s and using language that was characteristic of her, Dewey spoke out against the “close supervision” of teachers and urged “the adoption of intellectual initiative,

May 1996 179
Experimenting with Education: Dewey and Young

discussion, and decision throughout the entire school corps” (Dewey [1903] 1977, p. 232). He argued further that a lack of freedom for both teachers and students was the greatest barrier to developing a school system that would prepare people for life in a democracy. He insisted that freedom was necessary to recruit able people into teaching. And he maintained that all other reforms were “conditioned upon the reform of the quality and character of those who engage in the teaching profession” (Dewey [1903] 1977, pp. 196, 198). In “Democracy in Education,” John Dewey was an unflinching teachers’ advocate.

Democracy and Education

Sadly, the close collegiality that Dewey and Young shared at the time Dewey wrote “Democracy in Education” was not to last. In the fall of 1903, the Laboratory School was merged with a school that had been founded by Colonel Francis Parker, and Alice Dewey was appointed principal of the new venture. Her appointment alarmed many of the teachers in the former Parker School because she was known to be critical of the school and was believed to be willing to fire teachers of whom she did not approve. The protests of the Parker School teachers caused President Harper to promise that Alice Dewey would only be allowed to serve for one year, though Harper did not make that clear to either of the Deweys. When he refused to reappoint Alice as principal in the spring of 1904 both Deweys therefore resigned. Though evidence is scant, Young apparently sided with the teachers against Alice Dewey. After the Deweys left Chicago in 1904, Young never saw them again.

After Young’s untimely death from influenza in 1918, Dewey wrote warmly of her influence on his thought. And yet, despite that, after 1904, he seems to have turned away from consideration of “democracy in education” to concern himself instead with the broader issues of “democracy and education.” Even though Democracy and Education, the title for his post-Chicago masterwork, was selected by the book’s publisher, it accurately reflected the direction of Dewey’s thought. Although he continued to be deeply interested in education throughout his life and remained active in many educational organizations, after leaving Chicago direct participation in educational experimentation was no longer an important part of his life. At Columbia, Dewey was a member of the Department of Philosophy and his closest colleagues were found there and in the various Columbia social science departments. On occasion, Dewey lectured at Teachers College, which was affiliated with Columbia, but his contact with Teachers College
was sporadic and quite limited. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that the essential outlines of his educational thought did not change a great deal after he left Chicago, even though other aspects of his thought, including the political dimensions, changed, evolved, and matured quite fundamentally (Lagemann 1989; Westbrook 1991). In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey simply brought the various strands of his thinking together.

Focusing in *Democracy and Education* on the aims of education in a democratic society and what would be required to realize those aims, Dewey provided a lengthy discussion of school curricula but rarely mentioned teachers (in fact, teachers are not even a subject category in the book’s index). The few comments he did make were entirely compatible with his earlier calls for intellectual freedom, to wit, the claim that a “distrust of the teacher’s experience” was translated into a “lack of confidence in the responses of the pupils” (Dewey [1916] 1980, p. 116) But comments of this kind were too brief and sketchy to provide a clear understanding of why the circumstances under which teachers worked were so important. What is more, there was no indication given in the book that freedom, respect, equal pay, classroom autonomy, and intellectually challenging professional training—democracy in education—were necessary conditions for democratic education.

In other post-Chicago works, Dewey took positions that were also compatible with the views he had expressed in “Democracy in Education” (Dewey [1933] 1986, pp. 127–35; [1937] 1987, pp. 217–25). From *The Sources of a Science of Education*, one could discern, for example, that he was not in sympathy with advocates of a formally defined, university-generated “science of education.” He thought a science of education should include “any portions of ascertained knowledge that enter into the heart, head and hands of educators, and which, by entering in, render the performance of the educational function more enlightened, more humane, more truly educational than it was before” (Dewey [1929] 1984, p. 39). In pointing this out, he might well have noted that a formally defined, university-generated “science of education” eclipsed the intellectual freedom of teachers, but he failed to do that. That advocates of this kind of educational science were helping to create and legitimate hierarchical relationships between the mostly male professors who were to generate knowledge about education and the mostly female teachers who were to apply that knowledge went unremarked. Even though Dewey understood and criticized the validity and usefulness of so-called laws of learning, he failed to appreciate and comment upon the social functions such formulas fulfilled as different groups vied for relative rank and power.

May 1996 181
Experimenting with Education: Dewey and Young

What all this suggests, I think, is that Dewey learned only a part of what Ella Flagg Young was willing, able, and eager to teach. Although he deeply respected teachers and acquired from Young a clear sense of the importance of intellectual freedom to the teaching art, he did not enduringly learn that because the status and authority of teachers was contested terrain politics had to be a first priority in promoting educational change. To be sure, Dewey did join the teachers’ union in New York City and he did write in support of progressive political causes that would enhance teachers’ power. However, it was only while he was conversing with Young on a daily basis that changing the distribution of power in education achieved the kind of central place in his writing that Young would have thought was deserved. Very different from Young, Dewey’s understanding of conflict between people of different interest and position was more episodic than enduring. It was at the periphery rather than the center of his concerns. Certainly, Dewey knew that conflict existed and certainly he knew that it had social sources. He made that abundantly clear in The Public and Its Problems, Liberalism and Social Action, and Individualism Old and New, as well as in others of his political writings. However, in his major educational writings, he did not give primary attention to questions of power.

Because he did not feature the central importance of politics in education, Dewey could write about education and democracy without saying much about the wherewithal necessary to connect the two. He said a good deal about the importance of the child’s experience because that point was essential to the psychology on which he based his conception of learning. But he said little about teachers and the circumstances required to enable them to teach effectively. That was not necessary because he seems to have assumed that once education and democracy and their relation were rightly understood, rational people of good will would follow the dictates of science and collaborate in an educational reformation. To be fair, Dewey was not naive and he did argue that “a reorganization of education . . . can only be accomplished piecemeal, a step at a time” (Dewey [1916] 1980, p. 144). Nonetheless, the point remains that understanding and analyzing the political aspects of educational reform was not his strong suit. He was better at describing the aims of education than he was at considering how those aims might be achieved, not merely in an unusual school or classroom, but more generally throughout the nation’s schools. In consequence, he said too little about teachers and did not provide anything like a comprehensive analysis of the myriad relationships and circumstances that defined what teachers could and could not do. This did not cause misinterpretations of Dewey’s views as child centered, though it may
have opened the door to them. But it did unwittingly obscure the complex social and political aspects of educational reform.

Temperament, perspective, and Dewey's characteristic habits of mind may help to account for the fact that he did not enduringly absorb all aspects of Ella Flagg Young's perspective, despite his great admiration for it. Perhaps because he never totally shed his essentially Hegelian mental template, he was not nearly so incisive as Young about the irreconcilable differences of interest that can and do exist between and among different categories and groups of people (Dewey, in Adams and Montague [1930], p. 21; Frankel, in Cahn [1977], p. 13; and Bernstein 1986, p. 271). A moralist, Dewey held an unshakable, essentially religious faith in rationality, science, and the ultimate goodness of all people, and that, too, had a profound effect on his perceptions (Rockefeller 1991, chap. 5). So did his persistent optimism, which enabled him tenaciously to hope that science could help people transcend the differences in which politics begins. Whatever the reasons, Dewey did not fundamentally incorporate Young's penetrating sense of the centrality of politics into his own philosophy of education.

Obviously, that does not invalidate or even lessen the brilliance of other aspects of Dewey's thinking about democracy and education. But it does require attention, I think, if erroneous attributions of child centeredness are to be shed in favor of reanalysis of what Dewey's ideas can mean in the world today. Once one recognizes that Dewey's perspective requires not only study of the child and the curriculum, but also of relationships between teachers and educational scholarship—all that Dewey would have included in a science of education—then one can move from thinking of educational reform in terms merely of school redesign and curriculum change to thinking of it also in terms of relationships between schools and all the institutions that help shape what teachers can do. Central among these, of course, are universities where new knowledge is developed and teachers are educated, not only or most importantly about what and how to teach, but more subtly and essentially about the ways in which education is regarded in American society. Sadly, as Ella Flagg Young understood with typical incisiveness, if universities have participated in the improvement of education, they have also constrained the effectiveness of teachers in many, often subtle ways. The place of schools and departments of education within universities and the attitudes of noneducation students and faculties to education have often had a corrosive influence on would-be teachers and have sometimes helped siphon off the most able to other fields and professions. Clearly, then, if teacher effectiveness is important to the effectiveness of education, university reform must be considered.
Not a central theme in Dewey's writings, the importance of university reform to the development of democracy in education is nevertheless evident when one turns to the strategic questions of implementation and concrete reform that Dewey left aside. It is but one example of what can be seen when the implications and peripheral concerns of Dewey's major educational writings are given the emphasis they deserve. Approaching Dewey this way involves making connections between democracy in education and democratic education that Dewey slighted after he left Chicago. If doing so rekindles possibilities that the sad ending of Dewey and Young's relationship foreclosed for a time, then perhaps the isolation of schools and of education, which concerned them both, may finally begin to decrease.

Notes

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1. Obviously, differences of race can also lead to conflict, but, to my knowledge, Young never wrote about race.

References


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