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# **A Qualitative Historiographical Case Study of the Educative Properties of Eugene V. Debs and John Dewey: 21st Century Implications for Education**

Bradley Counterline  
*Indiana State University*

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## VITA

Bradley Countermine

### EDUCATION

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 2015 | Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana<br>Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction, Concentration in History Education  |
| 2009 | The College of Saint Rose, Albany, New York<br>M.S. in Adolescence Education, Concentration in Social Studies Education    |
| 2005 | University at Albany, State University of New York, Albany, New York<br>M.A. in History, Concentration in American History |
| 2003 | Siena College, Loudonville, New York<br>B.A. in History  |

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 2014-Present | Beekmantown Middle School, West Chazy, New York<br>Special Education Teacher      |
| 2013-2014    | Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana<br>Graduate Assistant              |
| 2011-2012    | Beekmantown High School, West Chazy, New York<br>Driver Education Teacher         |
| 2009-2011    | Whitehall Jr/Sr High School, Whitehall, New York<br>Social Studies Teacher        |
| 2005-2009    | Shenendehowa Central Schools, Clifton Park, New York<br>School Bus Driver/Trainer |

A QUALITATIVE HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CASE STUDY OF THE EDUCATIVE  
PROPERTIES OF EUGENE V. DEBS AND JOHN DEWEY:  
21st CENTURY IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies

Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Media Technology

Indiana State University

Terre Haute, Indiana

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Bradley Countermine

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Keywords: Democracy, Education, Reform, Socialism, Privatization

## COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Committee Chair: Susan Kiger, Ph.D.

Professor of Curriculum, Instruction, and Media Technology

Indiana State University

Committee Member: Noble Corey, Ph.D.

Professor of Curriculum, Instruction, and Media Technology

Indiana State University

Committee Member: Lisa Phillips, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of History

Indiana State University

## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to shed light on the current state of educational reform rhetoric through an analysis of previous attempts to shape public education for the benefit of all. Analyzing Eugene V. Debs's and John Dewey's views on democracy and education during the Progressive Era promotes a version and vision of education that inspires people to think critically, to navigate contemporary society, and to acknowledge current issues within public education and United States society at large. Because education both reflects society and has the power to transform it, the struggle for fair, equitable, and enlightening education is paramount to the success of future generations within any society. By linking Progressive Era educational reform rhetoric to issues prevalent in United States educational reform today, I illustrate the consistencies between both periods and the underlying fundamental social, economic, and political issues shaping both educational and societal reform in the 21st century. Further research can focus on intervening historical variables especially as they contribute toward the motivation behind the current corporate educational reform movement and the push toward privatization at the expense of public schools created to make education the great equalizer.

## PREFACE

This study intended to determine the parallels that exist between educational reform rhetoric of the Progressive Era and the current reform climate. A case study approach examining both Eugene V. Debs's and John Dewey's relationship to educational reform allowed for a comparison of two seemingly different philosophical approaches to education. Debs, a prominent labor leader and Socialist politician during the Progressive Era, promoted a Socialist perspective of education through his involvement (1914-1917) with The People's College, a short-lived Socialist correspondence school based in Fort Scott, Kansas. John Dewey, one of the most influential of the Pragmatic philosophers and teacher-educators of the late-19th and early-20th centuries, helped lay the foundation of the United States's public education system. He spent his academic career advocating an educational system that he thought best benefited society by fostering and protecting democracy. Dewey's foundational educational premise embraced respect for and empowerment of the individual through democratic educational practices that would ultimately lead to citizen cooperation to create a better society.

Both Debs's and Dewey's views on democracy and education are relevant today. Standards created to promote critical thinking have been enacted in numerous states throughout the country. Then, as with today, detractors argue that notions of choice in education, whether of schools (charter/private/public) or content (college and career ready) particularly presented within the context of poverty and as a cure-all, selling education as the great equalizer ignore larger issues of class, race, and economic opportunity. The push for neoliberal school reform emanating from failing schools, competition, and corporate funding of alternative approaches

focusing on standardized test data and results has had a damaging effect on public education.

Viewing Debs's and Dewey's perspectives toward education within the current climate offers an opportunity to return to the discussion of the function of education in a democratic society. Understanding the Socialist perspective on schooling and linking many of Dewey's lectures, speeches, and essays to the same position not only places Debs and Dewey in a new light regarding education reform, it also exposes the flaws in the current system and offers some alternatives. Ultimately, I argue, based upon the comparative evidence presented, that an education that places emphasis on critical thinking and interaction within society rather than a system with standards based on task completion and work, thought, and results *for others*, whether corporate or state, would benefit all.

Conclusions drawn from this study allow for further research into the motives behind the current educational reform climate. Many educational reform critics (Apple, Barnes, Bowles & Gintis, Giroux, Hagopian, Jones, McLaren, Ravitch, Schneider) have already discussed the function of schooling for state and corporate purposes; however, this study links the past to the present through Progressive Era reform rhetoric. The conversation has not changed in over 100 years, pointing to the prominent social, economic, and political issues and factors prevalent in the United States and reflected in the current public education system and reform movement.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Reform does not take place in a vacuum. Educational reform results from the social, economic, and political forces present at the time of its development and implementation. With the expansion of mandatory public education (elementary and secondary schools) in the United States in the late-19th and early-20th centuries, educational reform has vacillated in response to changing social, political, and economic conditions. Regardless of the breadth of the vacillation, the central concerns remain the same: *who* to teach, *what* to teach, and *how*. In various time periods, educators debated whether people of African descent, immigrants, women, and people with special needs among others were “worth” educating (Fraser, 2001). They also debated what to teach. Should the public school system’s goal be to produce responsible citizens, should its graduates be trained to lead the world in math, science, and space exploration, and how should “success” be measured?

Whatever the time period, examining how and for what purpose an educational system functions reveals the hegemonic role schools play in promoting values especially important to the society at large and, in particular, to those holding power (Bowles & Gintis, 1976/2011; Mirel, 2010). How to teach reflects the same dynamic. The shift, in the last 100 years, from a teacher-centered, one size fits all approach to a learner-centered, individualized and culturally sensitive approach (Dewey, 1900/1990; McLaren, 1989; Tyler, 1949/1969) and back again tells us as much about the time periods in which the styles were advocated as it does about the

benefits of each approach. Although vacillation on all these fronts is central to the history of education, similarities between the Progressive Era and the early 21st century are particularly striking and prove especially instructive. Although separated by 100 years, not only does our current system have origins in the era, the reform measures undertaken then and their consequences can guide educators as they seek to improve the current system.

Distinct parallels can be drawn between the Progressive Era and the present. Demographic shifts, immigration, poverty, cost, standards, and curriculum reform dominated discussion then as they do now. Many reformers in the Progressive Era sought to orient the public school system toward preparing students for college or industrial jobs. With the shift toward the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010b) from approximately 2010 to the present (a full 100 years since the zenith of the Progressive Era), the rhetoric is eerily similar, though the educational system has always sought to prepare children for the world after school, whether it is college or industry. Common Core State Standards focus on skill acquisition and are intended to “ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to enter credit bearing entry courses in two or four year college programs or enter the workforce” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010b, para. 2).

The Common Core State Standards that are the basis of today’s educational system not only address student deficiencies but also *standardize* attainment opportunities throughout the United States. Regardless of the time period during which reform is attempted, its proponents are put in the position to explain and defend their approaches. Such has been the case with Common Core’s advocates. The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and



the Council of Chief State School Officers (NGACBP & CCSSO), authors of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, contend that “the *Standards* were informed by the best in the country, the highest international standards, and evidence and expertise about educational outcomes” (NGACBP & CCSSO, 2010c, p. 1). The standards, they argue, deliver content and create skills within a framework that emphasizes college and career readiness. These standards were developed with teacher input while enabling states participating within the Common Core State Standards to retain local and state control of the curriculum (NGACBP & CCSSO, 2010c, pp. 2-4).

The NGACBP and CCSSO have been criticized for increasing the emphasis on standardized testing as the measure by which students’ attainment of content and skills is measured. The emphasis on standardized testing has been met with trepidation as students, teachers, and parents approach the new standards (Doorey, 2012/2013). In March 2014, Indiana became the first state to backtrack on the Common Core State Standards, opting out with state legislation. In support, governor Mike Pence offered

I believe when we reach the end of this process there are going to be many other states around the country that will take a hard look at the way Indiana has taken a step back, designed our own standards and done it in a way where we drew on educators, we drew on citizens, we drew on parents and developed standards that meet the needs of our people. (as cited in Nicks, 2014, para. 3)

Given that the proposed standards attempt to raise educational achievement through a competitive process, the federal “Race to the Top” was designed to link educational dollars to the adoption of Common Core, federal government-approved standards (United States Department of Education, 2013). Considering the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation almost exclusively

funded the development of the Common Core State Standards, which creates questions about whose interests are being served, communities around the United States are concerned (Layton, 2014; Ravitch, 2014b; Schneider, 2014a).

These concerns vary. How should or can the Common Core State Standards be implemented while retaining local control? Is it possible to assess skills and objectives promoted within the Common Core State Standards in a non-standardized and fair context that both assesses what students have learned and accounts for state curricular differences (Barone, 2014; Paulson, 2013; J. P. Williams, 2014)? Although educational reformers' goals remain similar in tone or substance to reform measures of 100 years ago, what is different is the extent to which the federal government and the states link reform to standards, cost, and resource allocation. That link, critics argue, is responsible for widening the achievement gap (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012; Ravitch, 2010). As Darling-Hammond and Lieberman (2012) found

During the 1960s and 1970s, when federal investments were greatest in poor urban and rural schools, the Black-White achievement gap in reading decreased by about 75%. Had the policies that supported school funding equalization, desegregation, and investments in high-quality teaching for high-need schools not been rolled back in the 1980s when federal funds for education were cut in half, this progress would have eliminated the racial achievement gap by the year 2000. (p. 39)

Reformers in the Progressive Era struggled with how to educate and remediate students from diverse backgrounds, specifically those from Southern and Eastern Europe who were perceived to be of lower intelligence (based on tests developed to illustrate cognitive differences). Today, five “mega-states,” including “California, Florida, Illinois, New York, and Texas enroll close to 40% of the nation’s public school students” (National Center for Education

Statistics [NCES], 2013b, p. 1). This statistic becomes important because, of the 18.7 million students educated within these five states, of the approximately 40 million educated throughout the entire country, 2.9 million are English Language Learner (ELL) students (NCES, 2013b). The ELL students within this context align with their immigrant counterparts during the Progressive Era. As many ELL students have newly immigrated—both legally and illegally—to the United States, policymakers have struggled with how best to educate them (and whether to at all in the case of illegal immigrants). Specifically, the debate takes place along assimilationist lines, with two competing perspectives consisting of using strictly English in the classroom versus using the student’s native language for instruction (National Education Association, 2014; NGACBP & CCSSO, 2010a). Assimilation remains a deeply divisive issue within education. During the Progressive Era, education served to create citizens of immigrants, creating American customs and notions of work and success (Mirel, 2010).

Further, the cost associated with education has a threefold effect. First, since the social efficiency movement of the early-20th century (Kliebard, 2004), with its emphasis on school cost, effectiveness, and efficiency, American politicians and the general population have remained occupied with bottom-line funding, public education’s overarching purpose, and its results. Second, the state or region in which a student grows up dictates the amount of money spent on his or her education. According to the Nation’s Report Card issued by the NCES (2013b), cost per pupil ranges from \$8,562 in Texas to \$17,746 in New York for school year 2010-2011 (p. 2, Table 1). Third, the variance between per pupil expenditure has pushed many states and the Federal Department of Education to develop ways to educate students for less while tying achievement results to state and local funding (Ravitch, 2011).

Within the past 20 years, the charter school movement has developed to offer an educational alternative. Typically, public charter schools, with state funding but “exempt from some state and local rules and regulations” (NCES, 2013a, para. 1), crop up mostly in urban areas to offer a choice for families with students in failing city schools. Critics argue, however, that the shift to charter schools is, essentially, a shift toward privatization and the implementation of a for-profit model. State funds are being drawn away from local public schools, put into for-profit charter schools, all within a dominant paradigm that promotes evidence-based school reform, an unequal economic system, and free-market solutions based on competition (Cannella & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 2014; Ravitch, 2011).

Failing public schools face declining enrollment (to which state and federal funding is tied through taxes and facilities grants), poor state report card scores, and being placed under state administrative oversight continue in a cycle of failure (Ritz, 2013). Further, many charter schools have continually failed to improve student scores serving to divert funding from public schools while failing to remediate the problems they were created to address mainly within poor and immigrant communities, though the founders, executives, and vendors involved with the charter school often profit handsomely (Schneider, 2014a; Schneider, 2014c)—a perceived answer to problems of educational reform, graft, and greed addressed, exposed, and alluded to in the Progressive Era (Patton, 2014). Instead, many charter schools have their charters revoked during the review period and the educational achievement gap remains (Ball State University, 2013; Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2013; Maul & McClelland, 2013).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Educational reform has been instituted in various ways throughout the past century. As we enter the second decade of this century, the education system is still charged with competing

notions of who, what, and how to teach, resulting in the current state of reform flux. Moreover, reformers are still concerned with issues of achievement, funding, and assessment. The specific demographics of immigrants and poor of the Progressive Era have changed, yet the numbers of these groups have persisted into the first two decades of the 21st century. Though immigrants today come from different areas of the world than those in the Progressive Era, they face similar issues and potential barriers (education and poverty) as their counterparts of 100 years ago (Migration Policy Institute, 2013). Poverty, social class, and parental educational attainment still overwhelmingly determine student achievement (Dubow, Boxer, & Heusmann, 2009). Thus, insight into reform rhetoric of the past may offer helpful remedies for current efforts.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the ways in which Eugene V. Debs and John Dewey, two of the leading figures during the Progressive Era, thought about the relationship between education, democracy, and society during the period. Identifying Debs's and Dewey's views within their context (the Progressive Era) can enable early 21st century reformers to formulate approaches informed by the debates engaged in by reformers who dealt with issues of who to teach, what to teach, and how to teach. Debs's and Dewey's thinking has implications for reform in the 21st century and their views still hold weight today. Although certainly none of Debs's views on education permeated the mainstream educational reform movement, his notions of class and capitalist exploitation had a considerable impact during the Progressive Era. Dewey has had a significant reach and impact on educational reform, though often his ideas have been taken out of context (Kliebard, 2004; Martin, 2002; Westbrook, 2005). Perhaps, because the issues persist, a 21st century retrospective may illuminate potential insights to inform current reform efforts.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the collection of data and determined the results of this study. Broadly speaking, this study drew links between Eugene V. Debs and John Dewey, two contemporary reformers during the Progressive Era. To what extent did Debs's social vision and perspective coalesce with Dewey's? How did social and economic conditions present in the Progressive Era shape and focus United States education and do parallels exist today? The following questions set the parameters of this case study:

1. In relationship to education of the populace, what intersections existed between Eugene Debs's social vision and John Dewey's philosophical perspective on education as influenced by, and as a product of, democracy and society in the Progressive Era?
  - a. What evidence exists, if any, of direct interactions between Debs and Dewey that support a dialectical relationship between their visions and philosophical perspectives?
  - b. What evidence exists, if any, in documentation independent of direct interactions between Debs and Dewey that support a dialectical relationship between their visions and philosophical perspectives?
  - c. If a dialectical relationship is found, what parameters can be deduced to explain the nature of that dialectical relationship?
2. What parallels to the Progressive Era exist in the current social, political, economic, and educational milieus in view of the social vision held by Debs and the philosophical perspectives held by Dewey?
3. In what ways might Debs's and Dewey's visions and perspectives inform educational practices in the current era?

## **Significance**

What has happened in the past 120 years of educational advancement and reform ties directly to experiences and events within the Progressive Era. The same social, political, and cultural issues revolve around education in the present context. On a national and state level, education has been associated with achievement later in life. How the federal government and states respond to the call for more educational improvement will shape how students learn and teachers teach in the future.

The issues faced in the Progressive Era—what to teach, how to teach, and which students to teach, and whether to vary what was taught to which students—persist. An analysis of both Eugene Debs's and John Dewey's perspectives—Debs's on social conditions and education for change and Dewey's on education and democracy—yielded fruitful results and general conclusions about how the Progressive Era shaped American society and how reformers (both on the fringe and within the mainstream) sought to create opportunity. Specifically, understanding that Debs's and Dewey's views of the world and experiences within American society align with many comparable characteristics within today's educational reform context which closely associates with that of the Progressive Era (revolving around reform, cost, and citizenship) can add perspective to the current interpretation and implementation of education. Analyzing history and how contemporary thinkers and reformers acted within the Progressive Era illustrates our need to return to the past, using it as a prism to discuss and interpret the U.S. educational system, its focus, and coinciding reform efforts today dealing with the same political, social, and economic issues today regarding immigration, socioeconomic status, and standardization of educational standards and outcomes.

### Limitations

As both the researcher and the research tool, I bounded this case study. Its limitations consisted of

- solely a focus on Eugene V. Debs and John Dewey within the context of educational reform in the Progressive Era specifically centering on democracy and education.
- because both Debs and Dewey are deceased, I relied on primary source documents and triangulation to complete this study. Implications for educational reform produced by this study came from my role as researcher; a different interpretation of the primary sources used in this case study is possible.

### Definition of Terms

*Acculturation.* As defined by Balls Organista, Marin, and Chun (2010), acculturation is “a culture learning process experienced by individuals who are exposed to a new culture or ethnic group” (p. 102).

*Americanization.* In research of the Progressive Era, particularly in relation to assimilation, acculturation, and social hegemony, historians use the terms *Americanization* and *Americanize* within both their historical and discipline-specific contexts (Mirel, 2010; Ravitch, 2000). The terms refer to the process of assimilating newly arrived immigrants into the dominant culture and values of United States citizens. Though *American* denotes the whole continent, in this study, it refers to the process to become normalized and accepted into United States society.

*Assimilation.* Assimilationists believe immigrants and newcomers must deny their cultural traits from their home countries while adapting to and adopting the traits of their new country (Mirel, 2010, p. 25).



*Experientialists/Developmentalist.* In the late-19th and early-20th centuries, this faction of curriculum reformers believed education and curriculum should attend to the developmental needs of children through experiential learning with the express intention of developing the learner through differentiation based on the needs of the individual (Kliebard, 2004, pp. 11-20, 24; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995, pp. 78-89).

*Hegemony.* When one segment of society has inordinate influence over the other through political, social, cultural, and structural influence. Those of the dominant class control and dictate the message the underclass receives in a hegemonic relationship, through “the media, the church, or the schools” (Feinberg & Soltis, 2004, pp. 47-48).

*Hidden Curriculum.* As defined by Feinberg and Soltis (2004) the hidden curriculum “refers to the organizational features and routines of school life that provide the structure needed to develop the psychological dispositions appropriate for work and citizenship in industrial society” (p. 21).

*Ideology.* An ideology is a prevailing view or perspective used to justify, rationalize, legitimize, or reconceptualize an event, action, or social reality, which often serves a hegemonic function (Apple, 2004, pp. 18-19). Within the context of this study, ideology pertains to the various reforms of the Progressive Era, educational reform perspectives, and the current state of educational reform.

*Intellectual Traditionalists/Humanists.* In the late-19th and early-20th centuries, this faction of curriculum reformers believed in education as a process of passing on the “Great Works” of Western civilization. In their view, subjects should be taught the same way to all students in isolation of each other to develop reason (Kliebard, 2004, pp. 5-11, 23-24; Pinar et al., 1995, pp. 70-78).

*Progressive Era.* The Progressive Era denotes the period of time in United States history between the 1890s and 1916 when significant social, political, and economic reform took place. Though the Progressive Era ended in 1916, much of the reform spirit remained throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

*Social Behaviorists.* In the late-19th and early-20th centuries, this faction of curriculum reformers took two distinct perspectives toward students, curriculum, and society. Social efficiency reformers promoted a view of curriculum that tracked students into specific future roles in society. Students fulfilled society's needs based on their place within society. On the other hand, social meliorists proposed a curriculum and educational system that would alleviate the ills of students while transforming them into social reformers on the quest to improve society (Kliebard, 2004, pp. 20-23, 24; Pinar et al., 1995, pp. 90-102).

### **Summary**

The Progressive Era was a time in flux. Social, economic, and political conditions congealed to create an era of reform in the United States. Currently, conditions within the educational reform movement mirror those in the Progressive Era. Reformers today still aim to determine what to teach, to whom, and how within a society influenced by immigration, notions of failing schools, various views of federal recommendations on state standards (tied to funding), and the purpose of schooling in the 21st century.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONTEXTUALIZATION: A REVIEW OF THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

Progressive Era educational reform came during a bustling time in the United States. After the Civil War and Reconstruction, the path was now open for massive industrialization, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest. With it came a similarly massive influx of workers of all races and nationalities. The shift from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy favored northern cities; however, with the rise of industrialization in the 1870s came social and economic issues heretofore unseen in the magnitude with which they presented themselves.

School and educational reformers dealt with a variety of factors and perceived crises associated with industrial growth. New immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe changed the landscape of immigration during this period. Though many of these new immigrants gradually moved west, authorities writing at the time focused on people's countries of origin. Some were concerned with the reduction of the United States's purely "American," as they called it, racial stock in relation to the new racial "impurities" immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe brought with them (Cubberley, 1919/1934). Marginalized immigrants (Chinese and Mexican) were not considered within the early educational reform movement as most reformers undertook their studies on and pushed recommendations for immigrants within public education in the Midwest and Northeast, neglecting the Western United States.

Previous immigrants came mainly from Western and Northern Europe. Decades later, as Americans, these former immigrants fueled White Anglo-Saxon backlash against the tired, poor, and weak from Southern and Eastern Europe resulting in a milieu of questions regarding the education of new immigrants, children, and the establishment of compulsory high school education. Specifically, reformers questioned the purpose of schooling. Some sought to increase efficiency, some to promote assimilation and Americanization, and others to stress democratic values.

The term *progressive education* used during this period encapsulated a variety of reforms and reformers all trying to determine how to change and mold both the education system and the students participating in the process. Reformers agreed, however, that urbanization and the social conditions experienced within the city had to be mediated and adjusted to create reliable students and citizens for future decades. Cities and their social situations proved rife for study and experimentation during the Progressive Era because of the population shift from the country to the city and also because of the influx of immigrants to city centers. Small country schools faced enrollment and teacher qualification issues, forcing the conversation away from rural education and toward the cities, because, as the epicenters for teachers colleges and normal schools, educational reform and experimentation took place in cities mainly in the Northeast and Midwest.

Many scholars have examined the Progressive Era of educational reform. A large portion of the sources used for this literature review consists of college-level educational history and foundations textbooks from the 1960s through the 2010s to determine whether perceptions of the central tenets, actors/theorists, or contextual influences of the movement have changed. In fact, perceptions have not changed so much as they have expanded to illustrate a more nuanced view.

However, the immigrant experience in particular remains generalized in many of the textbooks. To gain further information about specific subsets of Progressive Era immigrants, I consulted some historical sources to broaden the perspective (Bankston & Caldas, 2009; Callahan, 1962; Cubberley, 1919/1934; McClellan & Reese, 1988; Mirel, 2010; Parkerson & Parkerson, 2001). Further, a few primary source readers were used to elicit contemporary primary source evidence (Burgess & Borrowman, 1969; Fraser, 2001; Hillesheim & Merrill, 1971; Lazerson & Grubb, 1974; Mondale & Patton, 2001; Tussey, 1970). Finally, I consulted specific writings by John Dewey and Eugene Debs concerning education to illustrate the conceptual and contextual spaces they inhabited during the Progressive Era.

The purpose of this literature review is to flesh out major Progressive Era themes and to discuss how other authors filled in the gaps and expanded our knowledge of the nuances of Progressive Era reform. Attention will be paid to eight specific themes: urbanization and economic growth, social conditions and corresponding change, immigration, education as promoting democracy, social efficiency of education, race, curricular change, and class. Following the delineation of the themes, a brief discussion will be undertaken to contextualize both Dewey and Debs within the Progressive Era, and to draw a parallel to present social and economic conditions.

## **Progressive Era Themes**

### **Urbanization and Economic Growth**

With the massive movement from rural areas to cities in the late 19th century, mainly due to industrialization, immigrants and country dwellers brought many perceived obstacles with them. These perceived obstacles were political and economic, and revolved around social status and assimilation into the American culture. Growth of cities spurred by economic development

and corporate consolidation added to the economic and political demands placed on local and state governments (Bowles & Gintis, 1976/2011). As Urban and Wagoner (2008) contended, with urbanization came machine politics and rampant corruption. Politicians benefitted from financial kickbacks and had no interest in reform of any kind. The burden, then, fell almost solely on volunteer organizations to push social reform efforts (Urban & Wagoner, 2008, pp. 176-177).

Because of the dominant laissez-faire attitude toward industrial development, the federal government was reluctant to regulate big business, fearing that doing so would impede economic growth. It was not until the 1890s and early 1900s that business regulation of any kind was implemented. Theodore Roosevelt began to enforce trust regulation in the early 20th century and the government began to act more as a regulatory agent, taking an active role in big business's actions and dealings. By 1912, Woodrow Wilson shifted focus away from federal regulation and toward the development of "small-scale enterprise and competition. . .under the programmatic label of a 'new freedom'" (Urban & Wagoner, 2008, p. 176).

Though the late 1800s and early 1900s dealt primarily with urban and economic growth, the spoils rarely trickled down to the masses. The Depression of 1893 coupled with rising corporate profits helped turn public opinion against massive corporate entities. The 1880s and 1890s saw large-scale worker protests beginning with the 1877 Railroad Strike, continuing through the Haymarket Affair in 1886, and spreading to numerous industrial sectors, particularly in steel and on the railroad with the Homestead Strike of 1892 and the Pullman Strike of 1894. Workers, in this period, consisted of immigrants who had traveled to the U.S. for the very jobs that were so low-paying; they caused them to engage in massive rebellion. Rather than see the numerous strikes as elicited by low pay and poor working conditions, business interests

emphasized immigrants' radical backgrounds (given the militant labor strife in Eastern and Southern Europe at the time) as the cause of labor unrest (Constantine, 1990a).

The move to the cities coincided with the up-tick in new immigrants (from Eastern and Southern Europe) to whip up nativist sentiment among the old immigrants and expose harsh working and living conditions synonymous with unfettered industrial growth during this period. The economic instability of the early and mid-1890s forced many off the land and into the cities in search of employment. Most importantly, civic, government, and educational leaders had to determine how to deal with the massive influx within the housing, employment, and educational sectors (Mirel, 2010).

Public schools could not keep up with the tremendous immigrant population explosion. During the Progressive Era (1890-1916), enrollment increased twofold or threefold in many cities, including New York, Chicago, and Detroit; however, cities in Western states would not see this type of growth until after World War II (Gray & Scardamalia, 2012, p. 1; Mirel, 2010, p. 19). Many of the new enrollees came from immigrant families, with “almost 58 percent of the pupils in the nation’s thirty-seven largest public school systems [having] fathers who were born outside the United States” (Mirel, 2010, p. 19). As immigrant and rural children moved into cities, compulsory education laws cropped up around the country.

Compulsory education laws served two purposes. First, many officials saw immigrant children as backward, slow, and uncivilized. Second, children, without the benefit of child labor laws, took industrial jobs away from adults during economic downturns. As Hutt (2012) explained

It seems clear that an increase in the number of immigrants entering the country and the rise of industrialized capitalism [combined] with the anxieties of an increasingly insecure

middle class to make the work of the common schools appear more important than ever.

(p. 5)

Though compulsory education laws pertained to common schools (primarily grades K-8), the high school began to gain importance during this period for precisely the same reasons, to educate, acculturate, assimilate, and create a future workforce.

### **Social Conditions and Corresponding Change**

Social conditions at the turn of the 20th century, especially in cities, were an outgrowth of immigration, rapid expansion, and nativist reaction. As cities expanded, local governments had to keep pace. The educational system, in particular, had to adjust accordingly. Reformers struggled with education's purpose. How should immigrant children be Americanized? Should it create a docile and obedient workforce? Should students be prepared for college, or for the workforce, or for both?

During the Progressive Era, change came through trial and error. Because educational rules and regulations were decentralized, change came slowly and haphazardly. Reese (2011) noted, "Everywhere the stuff of learning depended upon memorization, recitation, and textbooks" (p. 109). Curriculum was not uniform and depended highly on the textbooks used in each particular course. In the 1890s, there was still an overemphasis on memorization. Even if reforms were made, teachers still taught the way they learned (in a traditional sense). Those who advocated education reform (many were not teachers) did not stay in the classroom because change rarely came, and if it did, it did not come soon enough. Instead, they spoke out for more change in an endless cycle of pushing reform, seeing very little change, and pushing for more reform. Most of the early reformers, however, ended up as principals, superintendents, or in



schools of education, where they could inspire future educators to change the system from within (Reese, 2011, pp. 115-117).

During the early 20th century, public education became a locally regulated public undertaking. As Reese (2011) noted, “Between 1900 and 1950, the average school year in America grew from 144 to 178 days. . .investment increased from 1.2 – 2 percent per capita, and schools were typically the largest budget item in most communities” (p. 119). Education for older children began to flourish and expand in the 1920s and 1930s when the youth labor market dissolved. Taking children out of the labor market created jobs for adults and kept students in school longer to acclimate and assimilate to society.

Within the context of the Progressive Era, schools had a mighty proposition to maintain and uphold. Reese (2011) noted,

Schools were expected to firm up the social order, teach group norms, and maintain high standards, while identifying and promoting the needs, interests, and potential of each individual. They were also supposed to keep youth on the farms, African Americans from moving North, young people out of the unemployment lines, and everyone out of trouble, while ensuring that youth had mastered the three Rs. (pp. 120-121)

As such, progressive school reformers took to two general camps. On one side, reformers wanted education to address child development, social justice and democracy, and on the other, some progressives promoted efficiency and scientific management (Reese, 2011, p. 122).

Kliebard (2004) identified the differing camps of the educational reform movement during the Progressive Era. Among them, humanists, developmentalists, and, later, the social meliorists sought to provide education to care for students. Humanists focused on an academic curriculum, developmentalists aligned curriculum around child development stages, and social

meliorists attempted to change society through education. Social efficiency educators believed proper schooling would create workers to benefit a smoothly running, efficient society (Kliebard, 2004, pp. 23-24).

Although many reformers strictly adhered to their educational reform ideology, some, like John Dewey refused to be labeled. Kliebard (2004) noted that

Dewey thus set himself against the growing tendency in educational policy not only to educate the child based on predictions of what society would be like, but to differentiate the curriculum based on the particular role an individual would be expected to occupy in that society. (p. 47)

Dewey spent a considerable amount of time fleshing out his perspectives toward educational reform during the early 20th century. Kliebard (2004) explained,

It is likely that what Dewey saw as the basic function of education, the development of the kind of intelligence that would lead to a command of the conditions of one's life and ultimately to social progress, was not what most people saw as the major requirement of a modern industrial society. The appeal of a stable social order, with each person efficiently fulfilling his or her appointed tasks, was far more compelling. (p. 75)

Though he never ascribed to the differing camps regarding educational reform, Dewey created an educational philosophy that combined effective aspects from each ideological perspective.

## **Immigration**

Throughout the Progressive Era, "immigration surged, peaking at more than a million per year by the early 20th century" (Rury, 2005, p. 137). Immigrants came for a variety of reasons and because of a variety of factors, but the main impetus for arrival in the United States was the quest for a better future. As immigrants arrived predominantly in cities, they formed ethnic

centers within their new communities. In a conspicuous way, many immigrants transported their culture, beliefs, and ideals to their new homes in America.

New immigrants came not from England and Western Europe (the preferred American stock), but rather from Eastern and Southern Europe. Explaining the need for social efficiency educational reform, Cubberley (1919/1934) wrote under the subject heading *Change in character of our immigration*:

These Southern and Eastern Europeans were of a very different type from the North and West Europeans who preceded them. Largely illiterate, docile, often lacking in initiative, and almost wholly without the Anglo-Saxon conceptions of righteousness, liberty, law, order, public decency, and government, their coming has served to dilute tremendously our national stock and to weaken and corrupt our political life. (pp. 485-486)

Cubberley's views as the Dean of Stanford's School of Education held tremendous influence. Indeed, his ideas about education and its duty to create American citizens were born from his views of the new immigrants. Cubberley believed education was the vehicle to civic virtue and assimilation, and he was not alone.

During this period, fellow researchers at Stanford developed IQ tests to corroborate their findings that different races have different capabilities and capacities. Educational elites pushed the field *toward* a scientific grounding and understanding and *away* from lay people during the early 20th century (Mirel, 2010, p. 19). Using testing and tracking (differentiation), progressive reformers determined the futures of U.S. children based on "scientific" analysis (though IQ tests largely tested for intelligence within a white racial framework).

Further, to thwart immigrant control of inner-city schools, some progressive reformers pushed for citywide boards of education or appointments by the mayor to restrict and resist

community-controlled schools (which, ironically, opponents of forced busing in the 1970s after the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, KS* ruling wanted to return to in an effort to keep *de facto* segregation, specifically in Northern and Northeastern cities). Because many new immigrants did not speak English, congregated together in their own enclaves, and kept predominantly to themselves, some reformers viewed them as unable to assimilate naturally and as a threat to the American way of life.

Mirel (2010) placed the immigration education debate into a new context. Those who wanted to reform education to “benefit” immigrants came in three types. First, assimilationists wanted immigrants to become uniquely Americanized, adopting American culture and turning their backs on their native land. Cultural pluralists believed immigrants could coexist with Americans, with each sect creating a common culture cognizant of each other’s traditions and views. Finally, amalgamationists promoted a new race created from the combination of immigrants and Americans. Each approach was conceived to create civic nationalism (Mirel, 2010, pp. 25-35).

Within this context, backlash took two forms. First, immigration restrictionists viewed any efforts at assimilation, pluralism, or amalgamation as a threat to the American race and its superior stock. Unsurprisingly, many immigrant leaders took the same approach, believing that intermingling would destroy their identity within their new country. Though restrictionists were concerned about dilution of the American race, immigrant leaders were concerned about the dissolution of their race (Mirel, 2010, pp. 25-35).

### **Education as Promoting Democracy**

Educational reformers in this context took two distinct views of the purpose of education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Either reformers sought to create a unified society

through assimilation, acculturation, and amalgamation, or they focused on increasing efficiency, training students (usually of immigrants and the poor) for vocational and industrial futures in concert with perceived or promoted needs of business groups (Mondale & Patton, 2001, p. 65). Reformers who sought to create democratic schooling situations looked to Americanize newly arrived immigrant students. Often without a command of English or of American cultural norms, many immigrant families pushed education as a symbol of freedom. Education was perceived as a way to overcome poverty and current living and working conditions moving immigrants and their offspring toward a brighter future (Fraser, 2000, pp. 115-116).

School was seen as an opportunity to completely develop the child. John Dewey advocated an occupations style of teaching and learning, integrating reading and writing into the discovery method he proposed. Dewey's students would learn about their past and interact with their present through a hands-on, inquiry-based approach. As Dewey concluded,

When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with a spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guaranty of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious. (Dewey, 1900/1990, p. 29)

Instead of indoctrinating students toward a particular goal, Dewey believed education should attempt to create "fuller minds" (Dewey, 1900/1990, p. 80) and healthier bodies.

Within Dewey's method, the school became a community. Through this community of learning, students grasped the skills of working and developing together (Good & Teller, 1973; Hillesheim & Merrill, 1971). In this learning context, students gained valuable interpersonal skills important to their future success in society. Dewey believed that learning in this manner would tie students back to their communities, a pastoral pastime largely lost in urban centers.

Building such a social intelligence would enable students to create communities, connections, and creativity in the face of complex contemporary issues of individuality and rapid urbanization through a democratic method (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2001, p. 132).

However, a major criticism of Dewey's teaching method was the lack of quantifiable data associated with student learning within his paradigm. Though students worked together to complete tasks, no discernable difference could be gleaned from Dewey's approach. Further, Dewey's disciples misused his ideas of child-centered learning and his methods could not translate to public schools with large student populations. Instead, Dewey's contemporary legacy became a cliché of "learning by doing" often used with varying degrees of effectiveness in small middle and upper class progressive private schools (Ravitch, 2000, p. 59). Because his vision of schooling was so different from traditional education, Dewey naturally bore the brunt of criticism from traditionalists and social efficiency experts.

### **Social Efficiency of Education**

The Social Efficiency movement sought to assuage the educational system of its ills associated with the influx of immigrants. School administrators and experts turned to the physical space schools inhabited and focused on reforming and organizing the school and curriculum to include only "useful" subjects to serve society's economic needs and create a compliant citizenry willing to work for the perceived greater social good. Though Dewey sought to mold students into solid citizens through a democratic, communal learning process, social efficiency reformers like Cubberley saw themselves as creating citizens with the abilities to fill specific roles in society. Based largely on Social Darwinism and the doctrine of survival of the fittest, social efficiency began the process of differentiation within the school setting (Kliebard, 2004). The push toward tracking students based on perceived ability led to the rise of the

vocational education movement as a reaction to the literary emphasis for all in public education (Lazerson & Grubb, 1974; McClellan & Reese, 1988; Ravitch, 2000). No longer was the high school a place of reading and writing, it was also a place that readied students for future careers in industry, and the United States for “industrial peace through home economics” (Spring, as cited in Mondale & Patton, 2001, p. 91).

The Gary Plan, or Platoon System, developed by William Wirt in 1907 extended the school day and kept facilities open at night and on the weekends to provide a school/community center in an attempt to “relieve social problems caused by unexpected urban growth” (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2012, p. 227). It also rotated students throughout the school day to educate the whole child at the secondary level (as a former student of Dewey’s, Wirt applied Dewey’s rationale to the social efficiency movement). Students would go to traditional classes, learn manual labor skills, and participate in physical education.

Under the work-study-play plan, Wirt created an efficient use of the Gary Public schools. However, as Wirt tried to implement the system in New York City, detractors, including students, parents, and local labor leaders accused him of preparing students solely for low-paying industrial jobs at the expense of knowledge development in the name of school plant efficiency (Mondale & Patton, 2001). John Hylan, Democratic candidate for New York City mayor in 1917 exclaimed to the sitting mayor, John Mitchel, “I say to you, Mr. Mayor, hands off our public schools. Our boys and girls shall have an opportunity to become lawyers, doctors, clergymen, musicians, poets or men of letters, notwithstanding the views of the Board of Education” (Hylan, as cited in Mondale & Patton, 2001, pp. 91-92). As Joel Spring (1996) explained

Elites and educational leaders might have wanted the school to expand as a social agency to provide order and discipline and training and control of future workers, but these desires were often countered by students and parents who wanted to use the schools as a means of gaining upward mobility and greater political power. (p. 218)

Between these contradictory interests, what seemed like a way to prepare students for their future was perceived by liberals and many immigrant leaders as a way to keep mostly poor immigrants in the working class *without* social mobility. The purpose of progressive reform and the faith it placed in schooling as a socialization process afforded students the opportunity to realize the American Dream, though it increasingly looked like a dream within a corporate, profit-creating and profit-driven society (Bankston & Caldas, 2009, p. 61). Education aimed to prepare students for their role in society as adults, making the system a producer of employable human capital necessary for material creation and consumption.

Callahan clarified how the push toward efficiency moved education from a knowledge acquisition model to a business model (pushed by Cubberley in his quest to professionalize and corporatize educational administrators). Callahan (1962) wrote, “The record shows that the emphasis was not at all on ‘producing the finest product’ but on the ‘lowest cost.’ . . . It was not evidence of the excellence of the ‘product’ which was presented, but data on per-pupil costs” (p. 244). Business methods applied to schooling took a bottom-line approach, transforming educational administrators from school leaders into business professionals. The process forced school administrators (at the mercy of local school boards and communities clamoring for cost efficiency) to focus more on cost-effectiveness rather than on curriculum, a delicate balance still an issue today (Callahan, 1962).



## Race

Though they dealt with immigration, assimilation, and acculturation, progressive reformers focused less on race in education during the Progressive Era. Meanwhile, African American leaders differed in their approach to obtaining educational reform. Among African American intellectuals, thoughts varied on how and what to teach to other African Americans (Rury, 2005, p. 167). In 1899, Booker T. Washington advocated teaching vocational training including agricultural advancement and industrial lessons. He argued that African Americans first needed to support themselves before they could gain further status in society. Washington wanted African Americans to better their present situations. Once African Americans gained present stability, they could focus on the future. Washington wrote

Let it be understood, in every corner of the South, among the Negro youth at least, that knowledge will benefit little except as it is harnessed, except as its power is pointed in a direction that will bear upon the present needs and conditions of the race. (as cited in Fraser, 2001, p. 125)

Washington wanted African Americans to fix their current situation and *then* strive to “look the white man in the face” (Washington, as cited in Fraser, 2001, p. 124).

Yet Washington did not espouse the importance of knowledge and analytical ability for which W.E.B. DuBois pushed. Washington wanted African Americans to slowly acclimate to their surroundings, become self-sufficient, and then agitate for social equality. DuBois wanted sudden change and equality (Fraser, 2001).

DuBois disagreed with Washington because he felt Washington acquiesced to the dominant culture. DuBois agreed that African Americans needed to learn and educate themselves, but they should be free to learn what they want. In DuBois’s perspective,

Washington's gradual education based on specific needs (similar to the social efficiency movement) and not on future struggle did not sit well with many in the African American community. DuBois wrote, "Mr. Washington has encountered the strongest and most lasting opposition, amounting at times to bitterness, and even to-day continuing strong and insistent even though largely silenced in outward expression by the public opinion of the nation" (as cited in Fraser, 2001, p. 130). DuBois felt "deep regret, sorrow, and apprehension at the wide currency and ascendancy which some of Mr. Washington's theories have gained" (DuBois, as cited in Fraser, 2001, p. 130). DuBois viewed Washington as a sell-out. Washington could get some menial immediate changes from white society because he did not advocate full equality, stating, "In all things purely social we can be as separate as the five fingers, and yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress" (Washington, as cited in Fraser, 2001, p. 129). Remaining in their "place," African Americans could not gain small rewards without upsetting the racial social order; however, lasting significant change would not come until decades later.

African Americans had a complex relationship with education during the Progressive Era and before the modern Civil Rights movement. While progressive educational reformers viewed immigrants as a race and stock worthy of assimilation, cultural pluralism, or amalgamation, most did not take up the cause of African American education in the North, and especially not in the South, where assimilation, cultural pluralism, and amalgamation did not apply. Shackled by Jim Crow laws and rarely attending (segregated) schools past elementary school, if at all, generations of African Americans fell by the educational wayside during the Progressive Era. While they struggled for progress, African Americans remained "separate but equal" legally until 1954, and socially for another 15 to 20 years. Progress came slowly as Civil Rights movement gains could not correlate to a desegregated public education system because of white flight to the suburbs in

the late-1960s, forced busing desegregation disasters in cities like Boston and Detroit in the mid-1970s, and remaining school *de facto* segregation in cities like Washington, D.C. in the 1980s.<sup>1</sup>

### **Curricular Change in the Progressive Era**

Social and economic conditions present within the Progressive Era spurred change. While school reform took many different perspectives, each side tried to determine how to approach the question, “What should students learn and what role should the school play?” During the Progressive Era, industrialization and urbanization, among other factors, led to millions of new immigrants. These new immigrants, from different regions of Europe than previous immigrants to America came to the United States to work in Northern and Northeastern factories. As they settled in cultural enclaves, whole city blocks became homogeneous immigrant neighborhoods.

Adding immigrant children to the educational equation brought forth curricular change. Already, during the late 19th century, various figures within the educational movement published accounts of present-day schooling and developed committee reports to determine the path and focus of curricular development. At the same time, by the 1920s, the high school became commonplace in the United States (especially in the North). Combined with compulsory education laws (to keep children out of the workforce, specifically as the 1920s moved into the

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of forced integration at South Boston High School from 1974 to 1977, see Malloy, I. (1986). *Southie won't go*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press. For specific Supreme Court cases regarding school busing as a form of integration and the definitions and ramifications of *de jure* and *de facto* segregation, see *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971) [North Carolina] and *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) [Detroit]. On school resegregation (specifically laws, housing patterns, and poverty) from the 1980s to the early 2000s (regional, state, and city), see Frankenberg, E., Lee, C., & Orfield, E. (2003). *A multiracial society with segregated schools: Are we losing the dream?* Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project. Retrieved from <http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/a-multiracial-society-with-segregated-schools-are-we-losing-the-dream/frankenberg-multiracial-society-losing-the-dream.pdf>, and Rothstein, R. (2014) The racial achievement gap, segregated schools, and segregated neighborhoods: A constitutional insult. *Race and Social Problems*, 6(4). Retrieved from <http://www.epi.org/publication/the-racial-achievement-gap-segregated-schools-and-segregated-neighborhoods-a-constitutional-insult/>

1930s and the Great Depression), high schools revolutionized the U.S. education system. Questions of what to cover in high school, and what students should be prepared to do pervaded the U.S. educational scene.

Publishing *Our Public School System: A Summary*, in 1893, Dr. Joseph Rice analyzed and reviewed the U.S. education system. He believed schools could be divided into three classes. Within the first class, Rice wrote,

I place those schools that are still conducted on the antiquated notion that the function of the school consists primarily in crowding into the memory of the child a certain number of cut-and-dried facts, ignoring the modern view that the aim of the school should be to develop the child in all his faculties, intellectual, moral, and physical. (as cited in Hillesheim & Merrill, 1971, p. 353)

Rice continued, “While the aim of the first class of schools is simply to give the child a certain amount of information, that of the second class is the natural development of the child in all his faculties” (as cited in Hillesheim & Merrill, 1971, p. 354). “The third class of schools,” Rice explained, “in spirit, similar to those of the second class, . . . differ from them so considerably [they have reached] a higher stage of development” (as cited in Hillesheim & Merrill, 1971, p. 355). Rice explained,

In the second class of schools an attempt is made to teach scientifically, yet each branch of knowledge is still taught in large part independently, while in the third class. . .the walls between the various branches. . .disappear, an attempt being made to teach the subjects in their natural relations to each other. (as cited in Hillesheim & Merrill, 1971, p. 355)

Within the three classes of schools, Rice delineated the difference between each type. Writing in favor of the second and third classes shows a shift in thinking between traditional education and the budding progressive educational movement. One can see similarities in Rice's descriptions of the second and third class schools with Dewey's educational stance regarding naturally occurring learning in a communal (or at least cross-curricular) setting, rather than with the traditional fact retention and regurgitation method of late-19th century teaching and learning.

In the late 19th century, two reports changed the course of American curriculum. The Committee of Ten recommended a standardized curriculum for high school students instead of a differentiated approach (tracking), which depended on their plans after high school. The report repudiated tracking and called for high schools to prepare students for life after their schooling through a college preparation curriculum because most students enrolled in high school at the end of the 19th century were there because they had the means to be there. High school at the end of the 19th century consisted mainly of those students

—a proportion small in number, but very important to the welfare of the nation—who show themselves able to profit by an education prolonged to the eighteenth year, and whose parents are able to support them while they remain so long at school. (Committee of Ten, as cited in Hillesheim & Merrill, 1971, p. 357)

The Committee believed high school was a place for future leaders. As such, it should focus on academic intelligence.

The Committee focused on high school course alignment with college admissions requirements so students would be prepared for college, however the writers declared, "The preparation of a few pupils for college or scientific school should in the ordinary secondary school be the incidental and not the principal object" (as cited in Hillesheim & Merrill, 1971, p.

357). The Committee recommended a series of core English, math, and history courses, along with a push toward a science-based sequence to prepare students for college if they chose to attend, because, after all, most of the students enrolled in high school at the end of the 19th century were there because they did not have to support their families through work.

To better prepare students for college, the Committee report called for more highly trained teachers to implement the new curriculum. The Committee recommended that colleges of education offer higher-level content courses, public schools offer professional development, and that superintendents instruct teachers (as many were content experts) and create department chairs to instruct other faculty in advanced coursework for implementation (Hillesheim & Merrill, 1971). Furthermore, the Committee called for higher standards for teacher education programs and for them to take “an active interest. . .in improving the schools in their respective localities” (Committee of Ten, as cited in Hillesheim & Merrill, 1971, p. 359).

After the Committee of Ten released its report, criticism focused on three main issues. G. Stanley Hall, a proponent of child development who focused on the natural progression of a child’s intellect, believed the Committee pursued unattainable goals (Kliebard, 2004). First, Hall took issue with the Committee’s insistence on a standard college preparatory curriculum. Hall believed that standardization did not account for the changing landscape of high school students. He thought the Committee’s insistence on college readiness denied students of an education that would benefit them in their futures. Teaching a college preparatory curriculum did not take those who were not going to college into consideration. Hall also believed that not all subjects were equal. As the Committee insisted on improving teachers and pedagogy, Hall insisted that they missed the point. In Hall’s opinion, subjects were the emphasis, not the teaching. Good teachers teaching useless subjects would not improve students’ future prospects. Finally, Hall

took issue with the Committee's view that preparing students for college prepared students for life. He saw this perspective as a way for colleges to dominate high school curriculum, using the high schools as places where students prepared for college, rather than for life after school (Kliebard, 2004).

The Committee's leader, Charles Eliot, responded to Hall's claims against their findings, specifically their recommendation of high schools preparing students for college. Hall pushed for a curriculum that considered the student's needs, focusing on college preparation or life preparation depending on the student and his/her aspirations (differentiation). However, Eliot countered,

. . .The American public [does not intend] to have its children sorted before their teens into clerks, watchmakers, lithographers, telegraph operators, masons, teamsters, farm laborers, and so forth, and treated differently in their schools according to these prophecies of their appropriate life careers. Who are [we] to make these prophecies? (as cited in Kliebard, 2004, p. 13)

Though Eliot proposed teaching all high school students for a potential continuation of their studies in college, rejecting the notion of student tracking based on their perceived educational ability, Hall's perspective of differentiation became the norm in the early 20th century.

The Committee of Fifteen met in 1895 to chart the course of education within the elementary schools. However, the Committee of Fifteen attempted to somewhat distance itself from the Committee of Ten's findings that school should be utilitarian and college preparatory, and instead focus on subjects to transmit the knowledge of Western civilization and culture. The Committee of Fifteen advocated a curriculum steeped in grammar, literature and art, mathematics, geography, and history to instill American children with a civilized culture

(Kliebard, 2004). Though the Committee of Fifteen differed from the Committee of Ten, both sought to center curriculum on subjects rather than move toward tracking and differentiation. Both Committees worried of training students, firmly dissociating from vocational education.

More interesting, though, is the Committee of Fifteen's report on teacher training. In it, the Committee called for specific teacher training schools, educational pedagogy courses, and professional schools. However, the Committee determined that professional schools should develop in concert with academic schools because "he who learns that he may know [academics] and he who learns that he may teach [professional] are standing in quite different mental attitudes" (as cited in Hillesheim & Merrill, 1971, p. 363). Creating teachers with academic interests and subjecting them to professional development through training, learning about the science of teaching, and then practicing the art of teaching would give "pupil teachers" a solid foundation in "psychology. . .methodology. . .school economy. . .and history of education" before they observed other teachers and practiced "under criticism" (Committee of Fifteen, as cited in Hillesheim & Merrill, 1971, p. 364).

The Smith-Hughes Act brought together both agrarian and industrial interests as it created industrial and vocational education (Kliebard, 2004). A response to the call for preparation in both of these fields, the Smith-Hughes Act (1917) allocated funding beginning in June 1917 to pay the salaries of "teachers, supervisors, or directors of agricultural subjects, . . . teachers of trade, home economics, and industrial subjects" and create a "Federal Board for Vocational Education. . .to consist of the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of Commerce, the Secretary of Labor, and the United States Commissioner of Education, and three citizens [manufacturing, agriculture, and labor] appointed by the President" (as cited in Hillesheim & Merrill, 1971, pp. 369-370). To receive funding, courses had to be given within public schools,



by public school teachers. The purpose of vocational education was to make students over fourteen years old “fit for useful employment. . .[in] a trade or industrial pursuit” (Smith-Hughes Act, as cited in Hillesheim & Merrill, 1971, p. 371). The federal government, because of progressive (specifically social efficiency) pressure provided funding for worker development. The Committees of Ten and Fifteen had given way to differentiation, tracking students into industry if they were not placed within the academic track (which was often based on race and class).

In 1918, the National Education Association convened a Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education to determine the objective of educating high school students. The Commission listed “Seven Cardinal Principles of Education,” including “health, command of fundamental processes, worthy home-membership, vocation, citizenship, worthy use of leisure, and ethical character” (as cited in Hillesheim & Merrill, 1971, p. 373). High schools would take a stance reflective of progressive education reformers, producing students with adequate health habits, without which would be a “serious danger to the individual and the race”; command of fundamental processes (proficiency in English, though not too much theory); worthy home-membership to create an affinity for the family while “interpret[ing] and idealiz[ing] the human elements that go to make the home”; vocational education to “equip the individual to secure a livelihood for himself and those dependent on him”; civic education (Americanization) to “act well his part as a member of neighborhood, town or city, State, and Nation; . . .[consisting of] loyalty to ideals of civic righteousness. . .and the comprehension of American democracy and loyalty”; worthy use of leisure to “prepare pupils worthily to utilize leisure in adult life. . .by guiding and directing their use of leisure in youth”; and ethical character which “becomes paramount among the objectives of the secondary school. . .in a

democratic society” (Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, as cited in Hillesheim & Merrill, 1971, pp. 373-376). With this report, the National Education Association called for schools to create solid citizens from students of all types by focusing on the individual in relation to the dominant culture in American society. All students would be assimilated into adult culture and taught American beliefs, roles, and attitudes.

These reports, acts, and recommendations proposed a United States education system that would respond to society’s needs and create useful citizens. A mix of social efficiency and assimilation (even beyond immigrant assimilation), these guides shaped American education until the 1960s. While the aims were lofty and sounded acceptable in an abstract sense, education served to create what the reformers wanted, at the expense of individuality while perpetuating class divisions through differentiation and tracking based on student “desires.” However, educational decisions were clearly influenced by perceptions of those within the system toward immigration (race and class) and usefulness (vocational education versus college preparation) charged with changing a heterogeneous group into future contributing adults of a hopefully more homogeneous character.

## **Class**

Though one gathers the sense that class played a role in education during the Progressive Era—immigration was an all-inclusive racial and classist paradigm—not much has changed. Writing in 2000, Barnes promoted a socialist agenda, which viewed the current educational system as one that “[ensures] that *your* family’s children have the best shot at getting ahead in the lifetime struggle of each against all” (p. 1). He noted that children of those with property within a capitalist system were the only ones worthy of education to perpetuate the propertied class, while poor and working class children were tracked into industrial and worker-oriented

educational programs to keep them subservient (as was the case in the Progressive Era and beyond). Education, according to Barnes (2000), should be used to teach classes (especially the lower and working class) to “throw off the self-image the rulers teach us, and to recognize that we are capable of taking power and organizing society as we collectively educate ourselves and learn the exploiters in the process” (p. 1).

Barnes (2000) continued, “The purpose of education is to give ‘the educated’ a stake in thinking they are going to be different—slightly better off, slightly more white collar—than other people who work all their lives” (p. 19). Those who go to college become *more* indoctrinated to the ruling class and pursue capitalist means at the expense of workers, a direct alignment with Eugene Debs’s view a century earlier. Because they are slightly different from those who work for them, the educated serve as pawns of the capitalist system. It is not “education, it is confusion and corruption. . . .It gives certain social layers a license to a higher income, to a portion of the surplus value workers produce with our labor” (Barnes, 2000, p. 19). Within the dominant paradigm, the propertied class uses education as a justification for allowing some to have more than others, while keeping those who have more in check because they have more to lose. Giving the middle class and some college graduates a slightly bigger piece of the pie, makes them act as a buffer between the demands of the working class and the profits of the propertied business and capitalist class, as Debs (1915d) explained, “The colleges and universities are for. . .the sons and daughters of the rich. . . .[A] poor boy who is admitted here feels like a beggar. . . .His education. . .serves[s] to make him a refined and polished retainer and apologist [of the capitalist system]” (p. 2). This keeps class stagnant and static, though in recent years, the middle class is disappearing and more educated elites that could previously depend on a decent job find themselves in the lower class.

Much as social meliorists believed in the 1930s, the income gap between college-educated and high school educated has grown, not because college education has made graduates more marketable, but because “. . .the union movement has gotten weaker and real wages have been pushed down. The price of our labor power has been driven down by the bosses. . . .Higher wages won by workers means less profits for capitalists” (Barnes, 2000, p. 22). Barnes believed that education should be a social issue, an issue for young and old, and a collective experience that “creates humanity” (Barnes, 2000, p. 22). Schools should promote solidarity, discipline to study and read, and humanity. Currently education promotes obedience, not economic or job literacy. Using the job, workers can become skilled and literate in job, work, and social functions. Organization and collective action is the key to educational and job success. Education will not be truly reformed, because its function, in Barnes’s (2000) view, is to prepare people to work within the current economic and political system.

### **Discussion**

Within the Progressive Era, Eugene Debs and John Dewey both advocated change. Immigration, urbanization, race, class, curricular and organizational recommendations, and action all came together to shape the future of U.S. education. Though Debs focused more on workers’ rights, his utopian view of the world had implications for the American educational system. If lower and working class students were differentiated into vocational schools and settings, only the middle and upper classes received the college preparatory, mind-opening, and economically advantaged educational track. Sons and daughters of workers and immigrants often found themselves in programs to perpetuate their place in American society.

Dewey disagreed with vocational education and tracking because it prepared students for a specific segment of industrial society to profit contemporary businesses. Instead, Dewey

believed a vocational education track was “not one which will ‘adapt’ workers to the existing industrial regime” which could become “an instrument in accomplishing the feudal dogma of social predestination” (as cited in Kliebard, 2004, pp. 125-126). Instead, Dewey focused on occupations as learning experiences, not a process to create specific types of future workers.

### **Debs and Dewey**

Though Debs, a socialist labor leader, was clearly a radical, John Dewey played the role of mainstream reformer as an American pragmatic philosopher more closely aligned with *situational* change rather than *systemic* change. However, Dewey in his own right had radical moments. Late in the 1920s, Dewey (1929) commented

I do not see how any honest educational reformer in western countries can deny that the greatest practical obstacle in the way of introducing into schools that connection with social life which he regards as desirable is the great part played by personal competition and desire for private profit in our economic life. . . . The Russian educational situation is enough to convert one to the idea that only in a society based upon cooperative principle can the ideals of educational reformers be adequately carried into operation. (as cited in Burgess & Borrowman, 1969, p. 106).

An article written by Debs in 1896 entitled *The American University and the Labor Problem* shows a striking similarity. Debs (1896) observed that universities “created a class of superior beings as separate and distinct from labor [the poor and working class] as if the lines defining their limits had been rivers of fire” (as cited in Tussey, 1970, p. 55). Further, he stated

A university education is reserved for those who have money to purchase it, and the fact that universities confer degrees is in itself a power employed for constituting a species of nobility which, however well deserved in certain cases, considered from an educational point of view as rewards of merit, serves nevertheless, and always served the purpose of

creating an aristocracy of D.D.'s, LL.D.'s, etc., often as obnoxiously exclusive as a titled nobility created by kings. (Debs, as cited in Tussey, 1970, pp. 55-56)

Debs in 1896 and Dewey, 30 years later in 1929, agreed that education (universities in Debs's instance and public education in Dewey's instance) would have to separate from capitalism and align with the masses to "represent the American democracy rather than the American aristocracy" (Debs, as cited in Tussey, 1970, p. 59).

Particularly interesting is Dewey's philosophical and pedagogical evolution to such a place where he claimed in 1935

"Materialism". . . does not proceed from science. It springs from the notion, sedulously cultivated by the *class in power*, that the creative capacities of individuals can be evoked and developed only in a struggle for material possessions and material gain. We either should surrender our professed belief in the supremacy of ideal and spiritual values and accommodate our beliefs to the predominant material orientation, or we should through organized endeavor institute the *socialized economy of material security* [emphasis added] and plenty that will release human energy for pursuit of higher values. (Dewey, as cited in Burgess & Borrowman, 1969, p. 107).

Within the context of the Progressive Era, both Debs and Dewey came to believe that education only promulgated the dominant paradigm at the expense of the poor and powerless. Indeed, because reformers and educators sought to prepare students for civic duty, the education system took the form of indoctrination into passivity, which served the function of the state.

### **Curricular Changes Through a Progressive Prism**

Curriculum vacillated based on progressive reformers' concept of school and schooling. Schooling during the Progressive Era (specifically secondary schooling) sought to prepare

students for life after their educational experience. As more states moved to compulsory education (to remove children from the workforce and create jobs for adults), reformers viewed the function of secondary schooling as a socialization and preparation process, not in the sense of necessarily preparing students for further educational prospects, but to assimilate and acculturate students, particularly immigrant students, into an American culture, creating an American perspective (Mirel, 2010).

Within this context, some reformers sought to create schools and curriculum to promote the best ideals of American values: democracy and education. However, others viewed the educational system as a machine that necessitated efficiency. Yet within both perspectives rested the fundamental issue of developing an adult citizen. Creating a standardized schooling experience and preparing students for either college or career benefited the American social and economic order. To a social efficiency reformer, schooling served the function of preparing mainly immigrant and lower class students for an industrial future, while middle and upper class students moved toward college preparation (Kliebard, 2004). To them, school was not a democracy, but a function of it, a tool for enhancing American society through preparation of students for their roles within society (which generally aligned along racial and class lines).

### **Summary**

During the Progressive Era (between roughly the 1890s and 1916) and its aftermath in the 1920s and 1930s, reformers sought to change the shape of education and society for different reasons based on varying perspectives. At issue was the social and economic impact of recent immigration, the immigrants, and their children. Not only were businessmen interested in creating American workers, many educational reformers sought to use the emerging secondary school to inculcate children with American values in an authoritative setting while preparing

them for their place in society. Further, with the rise of urbanization and a changing cultural makeup, reformers of different perspectives and with different agendas attempted to shape the United States educational system to serve a specific purpose.

Notions of democracy, utility, and function pervaded and promoted educational (and other) reform during the Progressive Era. The reform spirit of the Progressive Era resulted from the political, social, and economic contexts present between the 1890s and 1930. As noted in Chapter 4, Eugene V. Debs and John Dewey approached their changing society from different perspectives with some similarities and differences. Particularly important to conclude from this literature review and contextualization is that reform does not take place in addition to the social, political, and economic environment but rather results from it.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The methodology of a historian differs from that of an educational researcher (Rousmaniere, 2004). Though differences exist, historical research is relevant because it “provides perspective for interpreting a part of the contemporary educational context” (Wiersma, 1985, p. 175). Because my study aimed to trace the connections (real, perceived, and interpreted) between Eugene V. Debs and John Dewey regarding education, democracy, and society, a qualitative approach grounded in historical study was used. Further, the historical approach applied “the process of critical inquiry into past events to produce an accurate description and interpretation” (Wiersma, 1985, p. 176) of the relationship between Debs and Dewey.

Wiersma (1985) identified four steps in historical research methodology. Wiersma’s steps included

1. Identification of the Research Problem.
2. Collection and Evaluation of Source Materials.
3. Synthesis of Information from Source Materials.
4. Analysis, Interpretation, [and] Formulation of Conclusions. (p. 177)

From an educational research perspective, these steps were sufficient for undertaking a historical study. However, as history consists of “chronicling and explaining the past” (Rousmaniere,

2004, p. 33), development of the research question, selection of primary and secondary source documents, synthesis of the sources, and presentation of findings and conclusions must be done and presented in a careful, reflexive, and reflective way. Historians become experts and thus able to analyze and synthesize arguments, perspectives, and contexts through immersion in primary and secondary sources, participation in research, and peer review (Tosh & Lang, 2006). As a budding historical and educational researcher, my aim with this study was to begin the process of analysis and synthesis necessary for further scholarship within both history and education.

Understanding and accepting that historical research is not completely objective (as questions, sources, and conclusions are developed and scrutinized from the researcher's perspective) is crucial. Acknowledging that historians select the sources they use is critical to reading, reviewing, and undertaking historical research. As Benjamin (2010) stated, "Every author has a perspective on his or her subject and. . .is making an argument in support of a thesis" (p. 110). Having clear intentions and research guidelines from the outset preserves integrity and gives others the opportunity to examine my data collection and interpretation process.

### **Research Questions**

Broadly speaking, I aimed to analyze the possible link between Eugene V. Debs and John Dewey, two contemporary reformers during the Progressive Era. Did Debs's social vision and perspective coalesce with Dewey's? How did social and economic conditions in the Progressive Era shape and focus United States education, and do parallels exist today? For the sake of brevity and to further focus my research, I developed specific questions to set the parameters of this case study:

1. In relationship to education of the populace, what intersections existed between Eugene Debs's social vision and John Dewey's philosophical perspective on education as influenced by, and as a product of, democracy and society in the Progressive Era?
  - a. What evidence exists, if any, of direct interactions between Debs and Dewey that support a dialectical relationship between their visions and philosophical perspectives?
  - b. What evidence exists, if any, in documentation independent of direct interactions between Debs and Dewey that support a dialectical relationship between their visions and philosophical perspectives?
  - c. If a dialectical relationship is found, what parameters can be deduced to explain the nature of that dialectical relationship?
2. What parallels to the Progressive Era exist in the current social, political, economic, and educational milieu in view of the social vision held by Debs and the philosophical perspectives held by Dewey?
3. In what ways might Debs's and Dewey's visions and perspectives inform educational practices in the current era?

## **Research Design**

### **Case Study**

Undertaking a case study involves a nuanced approach. Though the methods of case study are straightforward, developing a course of action and understanding why the researcher chose what to research combined with the various facets of the study involves analysis and reflection. Both Stake and Creswell offer approaches to and constructs of case study as a research tool and framework.

Stake (2005) defined a case study as “not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied” (p. 443). Within this framework, the researcher chooses what to study, based either on an intrinsic question generated from the researcher’s interests with little generalizability, or as an instrument to “provide insight and produce generalizations” (Stake, 2005, p. 445). Researchers must determine the reasons for the study to bound the subjects and produce a synthesis and analysis of the research question in relation to boundaries set in advance. To say a case study is inductive in nature denies the fact that the researcher plays a central role in determining which questions to ask, which subjects to study, and what results to report. Though some case studies may come from a grounded theory approach where evidence leads the researcher to ask questions and report answers, the act of selecting the evidence is deductive. In essence, understanding the role of the researcher is crucial when creating a case study.

As the case study begins, Stake (2005) argued that researchers must account for the social, economic, political, and ethical contexts present throughout the study. Because my study intended to compare and contrast Eugene Debs and John Dewey, understanding the social, economic, political, and ethical contexts in both the Progressive Era (1890s–1916 with continuing influences into the 1930s) and current period was essential to contextualize Debs, Dewey, and the current state of educational reform. Further, what began as an intrinsic case study, on a topic that interested me, provides certain insights and generalizations because parallels can be drawn between the Progressive Era and today.

Creswell (2013) explained the basic process of a case study. Researchers must first determine a case study is the correct approach, identify the case, purposefully sample, collect extensive data, analyze the data, develop and analyze themes, and interpret the results (Creswell, 2013, pp. 100-101). Using a case study approach within a historiographical paradigm allowed

for Debs's and Dewey's views on education, society, and democracy to be unearthed, compared, contrasted, and analyzed in relation to each other, their historical context, and applied to the present context. A case study approach was the most practical way to conduct primary source document analysis.

## **Historiography**

As Parenti (1999) explained

If all we know are a few bare facts, we comprehend little of importance. . . .It is seldom the case that the facts speak for themselves. While factual data are a prerequisite for understanding social realities, we must find ways of making sense of them, of appreciating their import and showing their relevance to larger developments. (pp. 7-8)

Utilizing the historiographical method in this case study situated Debs's and Dewey's primary documents within the context of the Progressive Era. Further, it enabled an analysis of their views in both their time and ours. Historiography, the "study of techniques of historical research and historical writing" (Rousmaniere, 2004, p. 33), combines knowledge of primary sources and analysis with "the different arguments made by other historians about how [events developed]" (Rousmaniere, 2004, p. 33) to shape understanding in the current context. My review of the literature not only contextualized Debs and Dewey, it also explained what other historians have gleaned from the Progressive Era. Further, my conclusions aim to add to the historiography of educational reform in the United States.

In the words of Tosh and Lang (2006), "to understand our social arrangements, we need to have some notion of where they have come from" (p. 2). Historical interpretation and historiography gives researchers the opportunity to challenge assumptions through a reinterpretation of specific events or topics. In this instance, though much work has been done

on Debs regarding his role in promoting socialism and labor organization (Freeberg, 2008; Ginger, 1949; Salvatore, 1982; Westbrook, 2005), very little research has been undertaken to ascertain his views on education. Additionally, though much research has centered on Dewey (Dykhuizen, 1974; Martin, 2002; Westbrook, 2005), his philosophical views and theories of education, I did not find any interpretation of Dewey's work with education in relation to Debs's views. Both espoused changing society for the better, but they have not been studied concurrently as contemporaries through the lens of educational reform.

Completing this case study in a historiographical and historical context not only "tells a story about the past. . .[it] also helps to make meaning about the present. . .through understanding and interpreting change" (Rousmaniere, 2004, p. 50), events, and processes, to recommend approaches and interpretations of education and educational reform today. Taking a historical approach using primary sources told the story through Debs's and Dewey's writings and speeches. A historiographical case study affords the opportunity to delve into seemingly different perspectives to draw conclusions about education in the past while providing recommendations for educational reform in the present.

### **Researcher Role**

I was the key instrument used to plan, implement, analyze, and report this case study. According to Creswell (2013), "Qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants. . . .They do not tend to use or rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers" (p. 45). Because this study consisted mainly of primary source collection and document analysis, I am present in all aspects of the study as both researcher and research instrument.

As the research instrument, my potential bias was bracketed to avoid misrepresentations and misinterpretations. As a public school teacher living in a period where state and federal educational reform has affected me personally (as I lost two teaching jobs to state-mandated public school budget cuts), I contained my emotions from this contentious topic. Undertaking this research helped me understand the function of schooling within both the Progressive Era and the current era.

Regarding my ideological perspective and potential biases, I became more liberal during my graduate school experience at SUNY Albany. Working part-time jobs to fund my college career took its toll, both mentally and physically. When I became a school bus driver, I joined the local union and served roles as both a grievance representative and shop steward. My affinity for and affiliation with the working class began behind the wheel of a bus and shaped my ideological views as I proceeded through graduate study learning about the labor wars of the late-19th and early-20th centuries. I felt (and feel) a kinship with workers, who, a century before, paved the way for me to enjoy my weekend, overtime pay, and health insurance. I appreciate the work unions have done for the working class and have also joined the teacher's union during my career in public school education. My interest in Eugene V. Debs began during my graduate study at SUNY Albany, which, years later, pushed me to pursue this dissertation topic.

I utilized my dissertation committee as both a sounding board for my interpretations and as an additional set of eyes to help me pinpoint possible inaccuracies. While curriculum and education is indeed a political endeavor, choosing professors with experience and grounding in United States educational and curriculum development and labor history allowed me to work with experts in both fields with a wider perspective and more extensive experience to control for

my potential biases. Further, using primary sources allowed my dissertation committee and audience to determine whether my interpretation holds as they can return to the sources and observe the evidence I collected.

### **Site Selection**

Site selection in this study was based on evidence and relevance procured from preliminary research conducted during the Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 semesters. Specifically, I developed an early framework for my research questions while reading predominantly secondary sources on educational trends and development in the United States during the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Further research carried out in the Debs Collection at Indiana State University's Cunningham Memorial Library refined the scope of my study and pointed me to more primary sources centering on Debs and education.

### **Sampling**

The primary source data collected for this study was a purposefully selected sample. Using a purposefully selected sample—primary sources from archival collections pertaining to Eugene Debs and John Dewey—best helped me “understand the problem and research questions” (Creswell, 2003, p. 185). Further, tailoring data collection to the problem and question under review in this study “[took] into account the relationship of the piece[s] to the whole” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006, p. 60). Through a purposeful sample, conclusions about Debs and Dewey and their relationship to society, democracy, and education were drawn.

### **Data Collection**

Historical analysis follows a specific path. Tosh and Lang (2006) reported historical analysis can take either an inductive or a deductive approach. Applying an inductive approach, the historian “takes one source or group of sources that falls within his or her general area of



interest. . .and extracts whatever is of value, allowing the content of the source to determine the nature of the enquiry” (Tosh & Lang, 2006, p. 89). Conversely, the problem-oriented approach “is the exact opposite. A historical question is formulated, usually prompted by a reading of the secondary authorities, and the relevant primary sources are then studied. . .the researcher proceeding as directly as possibly to the point” (Tosh & Lang, 2006, p. 89).

While this study took a deductive approach based on my research questions, an inductive interpretation of primary source documents collected as a purposeful sample drove further phases of data collection. As Strauss and Corbin (1998) explained, “Whenever we conceptualize data or develop hypotheses, we are interpreting to some degree. . . .We are deducing what is going on based on data but also based on our reading of that data along with our assumptions” (pp. 136-137). Data and questions arising in each phase informed the next phase of data collection while concurrently addressing issues of relevance and reliability.

### **Phase 1: Published Work**

Initial data were procured from already published work of Eugene Debs’s (1896), an article titled “The American University and the Labor Problem” collected in Tussey’s (1970) *Eugene V. Debs Speaks*, where Debs considered the American university a class solidifying, perpetuating, and alienating institution. Furthermore, two John Dewey quotations cited in Burgess’s and Borrowman’s (1969), *What Doctrines to Embrace: A Study in the History of American Education*, discussed education within the context of competition, materialism, and class hegemony. These instances propelled my research into the Debs Collection at Indiana State University on a quest for further primary sources related to Eugene Debs and education. Dewey’s record on education has been vastly documented and disseminated throughout the past century.

## **Phase 2: Debs Collection (Indiana State University)**

In the Debs Collection, I uncovered correspondence J. H. Doyle to Eugene Debs (Doyle, 1921) concerning a book Doyle wrote and enclosed entitled *The Call of Education*. In Debs's attached note to his brother, Theodore (n. d. – though presumably after receipt of the letter), Debs instructed Theodore to thank Doyle for the book, telling Theodore that Doyle, “strikes at the root of the false system which has spread error and untruth in the name of education” (p. 1). More important to the current study though was Debs's affiliation with The People's College in Fort Scott, Kansas, a Socialist Party-sponsored correspondence course college begun in 1914 as “a college of the working class with two aims. 1. To bring education within the reach of every man, woman and child. 2. To teach from the viewpoint of the working-class” (The People's College, 1915a, p. 2). Further research led to an article about education and The People's College written by Debs (1915d) entitled, “The School for Masses,” in the September 18, 1915, edition of *The American Socialist*, the official paper of the Socialist Party of America. During my time in the Debs Collection, I was able to identify many of the players involved in the day-to-day operations of People's College, shaping my future research.

During the summer months of 2014, I delved into more primary source research regarding Eugene Debs and education based on Phases 1 and 2, while also accessing John Dewey's documents located at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois. In Phases 1 and 2, I identified additional repositories of Eugene Debs's correspondence and copies of *The People's College News*. Accessing and analyzing Debs's views on education and society before proceeding to Dewey's collection enabled me to focus my research once in Dewey's voluminous document collection at the Center for Dewey Studies at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, of which I searched for lectures and essays revolving around democracy and education.

### **Phase 3: Tamiment Library (New York University)**

The Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives housed in the Bobst Library at New York University contain correspondence, articles, and clippings written by and related to Debs. Of particular interest was correspondence pertaining to The People's College and articles written by Debs. These were located in Series 1: Correspondence, 1899-1955, and Series 2: Subject Files: 1892-1966. Further, the library holds microfilm of *The People's College News*.

### **Phase 4: Christian Balzac Hoffman Collection (University of Kansas)**

Christian Balzac Hoffman and Eugene Debs corresponded during the early 20th century. Michaelis (1975) noted, "Eugene V. Debs, at the urging of Hoffman, who had become acquainted with him while living in Chicago, was named chancellor [of The People's College]" (p. 178). Hoffman also played a role in The People's College as its president, though he resigned in September 1914 as a result to a connection with management during a labor strike in Kansas City. In the collection, folders of interest included primary sources consisting of Eugene V. Debs's correspondence, resignation from People's College, the People's College News, and Journal-People's College Activities.

### **Phase 5: Leonard H. Axe Library (Pittsburg State University, Pittsburg, Kansas)**

Of note in the Leonard H. Axe Library was the Jacob Ingraham Sheppard Collection. Sheppard was secretary of The People's College during Debs's and Hoffman's tenures. Additionally, Sheppard was the main thrust behind the founding and creation of The People's College, through his successful *Appeal to Reason* Law Correspondence course begun in 1911. Primary sources included in this collection consist of contemporary newspaper articles about Sheppard in the *Fort Scott Tribune and the Fort Scott Monitor* (June 19, 1914-May 27, 1922)

and the *Girard Daily Press* (July 6, 1911-July 17, 1919). Also included in the collection was correspondence between Sheppard and Debs (of which I discovered a letter pertaining to People's College in the Debs Collection at Indiana State University), a master's thesis written by Julie Sheppard Hughes in 1963 (Sheppard's granddaughter) on Eugene Debs's Kansas years, articles pertaining to The People's College in the *Fort Scott Tribune* and the *Fort Scott Monitor*, copies of *The People's College News*, and background information on The People's College provided by former Head of Special Collections, Gene DeGruson.

#### **Phase 6: Gale Family Library (Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota)**

The Gale Family Library, the main repository of the Minnesota Historical Society, holds the Meridel Le Sueur Manuscripts Collection. Meridel was stepdaughter of Arthur Le Sueur and daughter of Marian Wharton. Arthur Le Sueur and Wharton both taught at The People's College, Le Sueur taught law and co-edited *The People's College News* with Wharton, who also created the *Plain English* textbook used in the Plain English correspondence course. Principally important to my study was Box 45: People's College News and Catalog, which contained three folders of the monthly *The People's College News* published by The People's College during its existence.

#### **Phase 7: Center for Dewey Studies (Southern Illinois University at Carbondale)**

The Center for Dewey Studies at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale contains the largest collection of Dewey's published and unpublished correspondence and work. Of particular use for this study were Dewey's published works on education and democracy along with correspondence and class lecture notes related to social melioration and engineering through education of which the Center for Dewey Studies holds the electronic editions of *The Collected Works of John Dewey*, *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, and *The Class Lectures of John*

*Dewey*. Dewey's published works served as a juxtaposition to Debs's views and actions during the Progressive Era through a progressive reform lens.

### **Data Analysis**

As historical and educational research converged within this study, a combination of approaches were formed into a standardized way to analyze the evidence procured throughout the research process while also assuring trustworthiness, both within the sources (i.e., the authenticity and accuracy of the sources) and within my interpretation of the sources in relation to one another. Using a holistic approach to primary source analysis allowed me to survey the sources in relation to each other, generate commonalities, and, combined with my knowledge of the Progressive Era, determine the dominant ideas evident in the primary sources. In the analytical process, I aimed to compare and contrast the sources in relation to each other (Debs and Dewey) and within the appropriate historical context.

Historical analysis follows a specific path. Strauss and Corbin (1998) explained data analysis and triangulation through a grounded theory paradigm. Their process begins with “*perusing the entire document*” and asking “‘What is going on here?’ and ‘What makes this document the same as, or different from, the previous ones?’ . . . [then] returning to the document [and looking] specifically for similarities and differences” (p. 120). Using Strauss and Corbin’s method within the historical approach promoted by Benjamin (2010), Tosh and Lang (2006), and Wiersma (1985), consisted of asking questions pertaining to authenticity/external criticism (Tosh & Lang, 2006, pp. 93-95; Wiersma, 1985, p. 179), internal criticism (Tosh & Lang, 2006, pp. 95-98; Wiersma, 1985, p. 180), context (Tosh & Lang, 2006, p. 100; Benjamin, 2010, p. 112), and weighing sources against each other—triangulation—(Tosh & Lang, 2006, pp. 103-105) to ensure effective data analysis and trustworthiness.

The questions below are a combination of each concept explained and described by Benjamin (2010), Strauss and Corbin (1998), Tosh and Lang (2006), and Wiersma (1985) used to analyze sources procured for this study. The questions are

- 1) Is it authentic?
- 2) Can the source be traced back to the author?
- 3) Is the source consistent with historical facts?
- 4) What historical context was this source created in?
- 5) Is the source reliable?
- 6) What were the intellectual and social contexts during the period the source was created in?
- 7) Are there other contemporary sources about this topic?
  - a. What is their perspective?
  - b. How do multiple primary source perspectives treat the topic?

The questions for data analysis allowed for an in-depth understanding and the ability to draw conclusions across the primary source data collected.

### **Ethical Dilemmas**

Because this study consisted of primary source document/content analysis, no overt ethical dilemmas persisted. However, within my interpretation of the primary sources could exist some ethical issues, specifically trustworthiness, fidelity, and congruence of my interpretation of the documents within a historically accurate context. However, as the critical theory paradigm attempts to reconceptualize and revise perspective and implications, a differing interpretation of the primary sources (or, in the case of Debs, an initial interpretation of primary

sources regarding education) can create a new narrative lens with which to view educational reform rhetoric.

As this study aimed to critically examine Debs's and Dewey's views on education and implications for education reform today, a critical theory approach to the data, analysis, and formulation of implications was necessary. As Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) explained, a critical theory approach consists of "critique and transformation, historical revisionism, [and] historical situatedness" that "offers challenges to predecessor paradigms" to advocate for change (p. 99). Acknowledging that social, political, economic, and cultural values shape reality (Lincoln et al., 2011), examining the context of the Progressive Era and applying perspectives developed as a result of the social, political, economic, and cultural values (which still generally align with the current era) to today, can become a way to both promote socially—just and culturally—responsive educational reform while reinterpreting the function of schooling in the United States.

### **Trustworthiness**

Understanding my role in this process while utilizing the experience and heeding the recommendations of my dissertation committee to specify my research aims and firm up my inquiry led to reliable results. As I was the main research instrument in this case study, bracketing my potential bias allowed me to "select and organize the facts and data to show congruence without distorting either data or theory" (Krathwohl, 2009, p. 613). Moreover, having a specific framework to analyze and interpret the primary source documents collected ensured a standardized approach to each source.

To achieve authenticity within this study, I used triangulation to "locate evidence. . .in different sources of data" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). Utilizing a variety of primary and secondary

sources consisting of Debs's correspondence, articles written by Debs, advertisements, newsletters, and catalogs published by The People's College, and Dewey's correspondence and published work enabled me to determine their perspectives of education and social conditions, while allowed me to interpret the evidence I found within the context of the Progressive Era. Additionally, using primary sources from academic special collections and state historical society archives denotes a measure of reliability and authenticity.

### **Summary**

The confluence of historical inquiry and educational research within this study allowed my topic to be addressed and analyzed through a particular framework to ensure quality sources were selected. A methodology consisting of a case study approach within a historiographical frame called for data to be collected, used, and triangulated to draw conclusions about both Debs and Dewey in respect to education, democracy, and society. As the primary sources used in this case study were attributed to and associated with Eugene Debs and John Dewey and housed in special collections and other archival resources, authenticity was not an issue. However, interpretation and the researcher's role in the process (as the data collection and analysis instrument) should necessarily be explained. Document analysis questions developed from the combined perspectives and approaches of Benjamin (2010), Strauss and Corbin (1998), Tosh and Lang (2006), and Wiersma (1985) assured that collection and analysis included both historiographical and social science research. Finally, following this methodology achieved a level of trustworthiness through triangulation of multiple primary sources in consultation with secondary sources accounting for historical (including social, political, and economic) context.



## CHAPTER 4

### CASE STUDY RESULTS

During the Progressive Era, educational reform rhetoric centered on notions of what the public education system would look like and what its function would be. Would it prepare students for college? Would it prepare students for careers? Further, would different *types* of students utilize the education system for different ends? Or, would the education system funnel these students into different directions based on their perceived value to society as a whole?

Reformers advocated for all kinds of change. From the socialist perspective, Eugene V. Debs had very clear views of social justice pertaining to civil and labor rights during the late-19th and early-20th centuries (Constantine, 1990a; Ginger, 1949; Salvatore, 1982; Westbrook, 2005). As evidenced by his endorsement of and affiliation with The People's College in Fort Scott, Kansas, Debs maintained a clear vision of the purpose of education. In his mind, the public education system's main goal should be to promote social justice. The People's College (n.d.) creed stated, "We believe in the type of education of which the keynote is not profits, but service; education of the hand, the heart and the head; . . . we believe that such education will herald the day of the brotherhood of man" (para. 6).

John Dewey also believed the public education system was in need of reform. Within Dewey's correspondence, published work, and lectures, one can see his evolving view of public education's role in maintaining democracy. Dewey believed that cooperative educational

endeavors undertaken by students and teachers within a constructivist framework would create learning communities and foster democracy (e.g., Dewey, 1896a, 1899b, 1902a, 1903-1906b, 1912-1914b, 1915b, 1900/1990). Debs and his fellow socialists, those aligned with The People's College, were also concerned about promoting democracy through education. They thought institutionalizing a class-conscious education, divorced from the influence of capitalism, was the only way to create a democratic society (e.g., Debs, 1896, 1914a, 1915d, 1916b, 1916c, 1917a).

### **Eugene V. Debs**

#### **Background**

Born in Terre Haute, Indiana in 1855, Eugene V. Debs began his career on the Terre Haute and Indianapolis Railroad in 1870 after leaving public school (Constantine, 1990a). For the next four years, Debs spent his time working in various locations on the railroads of western Indiana (the Terre Haute and Indianapolis), Evansville, Indiana, and St. Louis, save for a brief experience in a wholesale grocer's warehouse in Terre Haute (Constantine, 1990a, p. l). In 1874, Debs returned to Terre Haute and began another five-year stint in the grocery business working for Herman Hulman, founding the Occidental Literary Club, continuing his education (mostly self-taught at this point), and sponsoring a speech by Susan B. Anthony when the Occidental Club declined to support her visit (Constantine, 1990a, pp. li-lii).

In 1875, Debs joined the Vigo Lodge of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen (BLF), recruiting, organizing, and finally serving as secretary of the Vigo Lodge and becoming editor of the *Brotherhood of Locomotive Fireman's Magazine* in 1880 (Constantine, 1990a). In 1879, Debs ran as a Democrat for the position of Terre Haute City Clerk (Constantine, 1990a). By 1884, he had been elected to the Indiana General Assembly (Constantine, 1990a, p. liii; Ginger, 1949, p. 42). Debs "introduced. . .railroad workers' safety and employers' liability bills. . .but

[they were] so badly mangled by the Senate that he withdrew them from consideration, and a woman-suffrage bill in which he was particularly interested was defeated” (Constantine, 1990a, p. liii). Debs characterized his one term in the General Assembly as a failure and he did not seek reelection (Salvatore, 1982).

Throughout the 1880s and into the early 1890s, Debs maintained his position with the BLF and as editor of the magazine; however, by 1892, his purpose had shifted to creating an inclusive railroad union to bring together all railroad workers rather than dividing them by skill (Constantine, 1990a; Ginger, 1949; Salvatore, 1982). In 1893, Debs formed the American Railway union to bring unskilled workers together with their skilled brethren, replacing the brotherhoods with a united labor union more representative of and responsive to those working on the railroad (Ginger, 1949, pp. 92-98; Salvatore, 1982, pp. 115-117). After a victorious strike of the Great Northern Railroad in 1894, Debs garnered national attention for the Pullman Strike (1894), also known as “The Debs Rebellion” in the national press (Constantine, 1990a; Ginger, 1949). By the time the strike was broken in July 1894, Debs was arraigned on charges of obstructing mail and interstate commerce, and jailed in Woodstock, Illinois, for six months (Constantine, 1990a, p. lxiv).

Early in 1897, Debs had lost all interest in the two-party system, officially proclaiming his support for socialism in the January 1, 1897, edition of *The Railroad Times* as “a result of his experiences in the Pullman Strike and in the 1896 election [in which he supported William Jennings Bryan on the Democratic-Populist platform], his reading on the subject, and the influence of [Victor] Berger and other socialists” (Constantine, 1990a, p. lxvi). Debs briefly entertained an effort to create utopian colonies based on socialist principles but turned his effort to political action for the socialist cause, first as part of the Social Democratic party, and finally

within the merged Socialist Party of America in the early 20th century (Constantine, 1990a; Salvatore, 1982).

Throughout the last two decades of his life, Debs continued to agitate for change. He ran for President on the Socialist ticket five times between 1900 and 1920, campaigning across the country on a platform that emphasized morality, friendship, organization, freedom, and economic justice (Ginger, 1949). Debs served as editor of the *Appeal to Reason*, the *National Rip-Saw*, and various other working class publications, while writing and lecturing profusely on economic, social, and political injustice at the hands of collusion between capitalism, big business, and corrupt government against the masses (DeGruson, 1994; Hughes, 1963).

### **Views on Education and Democracy**

Through his numerous speeches on behalf of labor during his long career (e.g., Debs, 1906, 1911, 1912, 1918a, 1918b, 1927), it is clear that the ability of the working class to determine its destiny through the organization of production and labor was central to his idea of democracy (e.g., Debs, 1904, 1905a, 1905b, 1908, 1912, 1918a; Westbrook, 2005).<sup>2</sup> Early on, he advocated a kind of system that recognized the mutual interests of capital and labor, businessmen and workingmen had common interests (Westbrook, 2005).

The influence of the Pullman Strike on working class organization and on Debs's views on democracy cannot be understated. Instead of encouraging a harmonious relationship between capital and labor, the Pullman Strike illustrated to Debs that the anti-trust legislation being proposed did not go far enough. In his view, governmental forces would side with economic forces (capitalists) against the people (Westbrook, 2005, pp. 84-86). Under the guise of obstructing the mail, the Pullman Strike was crushed (with President Grover Cleveland's

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<sup>2</sup> A concise collection of select articles and speeches written and given during Debs's public career appears in J. Y. Tussey (Ed.), (1970), *Eugene V. Debs speaks*. New York, NY: Pathfinder.

support), and Debs went to jail, realizing his approach to working class notions of democracy must change (Constantine, 1990a). Soon after his release from Woodstock Jail, he began to align himself with the Socialist party (Constantine, 1990a). Democracy for the worker consisted of collective action against the ills of capitalism in an attempt to improve the masses' economic and social lot. Democracy for the workers began with class-consciousness. Within this perspective Debs began to address educational opportunities (both public and self) for the workers.

Debs's evolving views on education can be traced back to an article written in 1896 for *The Adelbert*, a college newspaper in Cleveland, Ohio (Tussey, 1970). In the article, titled "The American University and the Labor Problem," Debs characterized the university as an "aristocratic institution" (as cited in Tussey, 1970, p. 55). The purpose of universities, Debs explained was to "[create] a class of superior beings as separate and distinct from labor as if the lines defining their limits had been rivers of fire" (as cited in Tussey, 1970, p. 55). Debs (1896) continued, "A university education is reserved for those who have the money to purchase it. . . . The graduates of universities. . . as a rule regard themselves, as compared with the 'common people,' of superior mold" (as cited in Tussey, 1970, pp. 55-56). Debs's perspective of the function of the university system in relation to class-consciousness, class power, and class division mirrors that of Bowles and Gintis nearly 100 years later.

Debs believed that the American university, beholden to capitalist influence, particularly the "corporations, trusts, and syndicates," could not address the labor problem because "it is from such sources that it gets its money" (Debs, as cited in Tussey, 1970, pp. 58-59). Additionally, the university would have to separate from capitalist money and influence while "array[ing] itself against a corrupt judiciary and hold[ing] it up as a target for the maledictions of liberty-loving Americans" to ". . . represent the American democracy rather than the American

aristocracy” (Debs, as cited in Tussey, 1970, p. 59). Debs, like Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977/1990) concept of cultural reproduction and Bowles and Gintis’s (1976/2011) thesis of social reproduction, believed the university system, and by extension, the public education system, reproduced social and cultural conditions of exploitation between classes. Without a self-conscious system of knowledge attainment that acknowledged societal issues, education served only to reinforce the dominant perspective, inculcating students (mostly middle and upper class) with capitalistic views of the relationship between labor and capital; the wealthy, and those that produced wealth with wage work (Debs, 1915d).

Debs’s animosity toward a capitalist influenced education system was not based upon his own personal experiences. He, like many of his time, only completed the 9th grade. Though it was typical for boys his age to quit school to go to work, he seems to have been especially disappointed that he quit. Ginger (1949) wrote, “In the spring of 1873, when his class graduated from high school, Debs lay on his bed and cried with anguish” (p. 16). No other sources consulted for this study corroborate Ginger’s claim, though Debs’s later support for The People’s College illustrates his belief in the value of education. Instead, Constantine (1990a) argued that Debs’s family standing within the community as middle class grocers afforded him the opportunity to continue with his schooling, and that “his home life was one in which ideas and the life of the mind were cherished” (Constantine, 1990a, p. xlix). Additionally, Salvatore (1982) explained, “Although he left high school after one year, Eugene remained impressed with the potential for advancement available to an educated man and attended a business college at night during the next three years” (p. 12).

Debs’s support for Socialist Sunday Schools in an article written for the *Socialist News* on September 4, 1915, offers evidence of his further articulation of the use of education within

the socialist ranks. Debs (1915c) began, “Every child is a potential revolutionist. Whether he becomes one in *fact* will depend upon his intellectual environment and training during the formative period of his career” (p. 3). Without access to an education untainted by capitalism, children “taught to revere the institutions of capitalism. . . in schools, both public and private” (Debs, 1915c, p. 3) would continue to perpetuate the system of exploitation and oppression in which they live. Because “the beneficiaries of capitalism control every avenue of information and education from the cradle to the grave” (Debs, 1915c, p. 3), a socialist perspective was needed to educate the working class and their children about the world they inhabited. Debs challenged “Socialist father[s] and mother[s]” to strike back against the capitalist system by bringing their children to Socialist Sunday Schools to “checkmate this work of capitalism in the mind of the child” (Debs, 1915c, p. 3). As Debs wrote the “Socialist Sunday School” article, he was also committed to The People’s College in Fort Scott, Kansas, of which an in-depth treatment is undertaken in the next section. During his involvement with The People’s College, Debs continued to speak out for education of the working class from a socialist perspective.

### **Involvement with The People’s College**

**Beginning.** Christian Balzac Hoffman, the principle catalyst behind The People’s College met with Jacob Sheppard and Marian Wharton between May 12 and May 14, 1914, and discussed asking Eugene Debs to join the People’s College Union advisory board (Hoffman, 1914b, p. 1; Michaelis, 1975, p. 178). Evidently, Debs accepted the overture as future publications of *The People’s College News* and *People’s College Catalog* list Debs as President of The People’s College Union and Chancellor of The People’s College. In a letter from Debs to Hoffman on June 20, 1914, Debs wrote, “I would have rather you had not honored me as you have done in the matter of the school but you know of course that I am ready and in fact, eager to

serve in any way I can” (Hoffman, 1914a). Perhaps Debs was humbled by the offer to become the President of The People’s College Union and Chancellor of The People’s College. However, 3 years later, Debs, in his resignation letter from all formal participation with The People’s College, alluded to his busy schedule as a reason why he could not fulfill his duties to his satisfaction (Debs, 1917c).

The next year, a letter from Arthur Le Sueur on The People’s College letterhead in 1915 read in part, “You have been unanimously relected [*sic*] as President of the Advisory Board, by the College Union Membership, and I take more than a little pleasure reporting. . .to you and hope there will be no objection to serving another year” (Le Sueur, 1915, para. 1). Debs responded to Le Sueur on October 5, 1915, in the affirmative, writing, “Please allow me to return my hearty thanks for this great honor and to say that I shall esteem it a pleasure as well as a privilege to serve the College membership to the very best of my ability” (Debs, 1915e, para. 1). Debs (1915e) concluded, “Thanking you for your very kind communication. . .with all good wishes for the success of the College. . .this greatest of all educational undertakings, I am as ever, yours fraternally, Eugene V. Debs” (Debs, 1915e, para. 2).

And serve Debs did. Throughout his tenure as Chancellor of The People’s College and as President of The People’s College Union (1914-1917), Debs wrote supportive and explanatory articles about The People’s College in the *National Rip-Saw* (1915a) and *The American Socialist* (1915d) and dealt with administrative problems as they arose. Further, Debs wrote articles for the *People’s College News* exhorting readers to spread the word of The People’s College, use education to their advantage to further their lot, and to develop class-consciousness (e.g., Debs, 1915a, 1916c, 1917a). Finally, Debs provided a textbook review for *Plain English* written by



Marian Wharton and developed for the *Plain English* correspondence course offered through The People's College (Debs, 1916d).

**Debs's Publicity Role.** Early in The People's College's existence, Debs journeyed to Fort Scott to garner support for the school. Two weeks before he arrived, on November 10, 1914, the *Fort Scott Tribune and Monitor* ran a column announcing Debs's plans to visit the city on November 23 to lecture on "Socialism, Its Aims, Ethics and Ideals" ("Debs in Convention Hall," 1914, p. 4). The article mentions that over 1,000 seats will be "reserved and sold at 25 cents. The receipts go for the benefit of the People's College," and that "an effort will be made to pack Convention hall on this occasion" ("Debs in Convention Hall," 1914, p. 4).

Relating Debs's time in Fort Scott, front-page news on November 23, the author explained,

Eugene V. Debs, socialist candidate for the presidency from a time when the memory of man runneth not to the contrary, arrived here this morning from Terre Haute. He was met at the train by J. I. Sheppard and put in the day at the People's College, of which he is the chancellor. This was the first time Mr. Debs has seen the People's College, though he is familiar with its work and its objects. He was astonished at the progress made in so short a time. Mr. Debs lectures this evening at Convention hall. He will have an immense crowd. . . .Mr. Debs will spend tomorrow in Fort Scott, looking into the work of the college. . . . ("Eugene Debs in Town," 1914, p. 1)

An article on the front page of *The Fort Scott Tribune and Monitor* the next day (November 24, 1914) described the event. The author wrote,

It is the work of the socialist party to make clear thinkers. Not by violence, but by education and organization they hope to increase the class conscious members of their

party. The People's College is bound to be a mighty power in the education of the masses and will remain a monument to the memory of its originator, when other deeds are forgotten, said Debs in tribute to Jacob I. Sheppard. . . ("A Messenger of World Peace," 1914, pp. 1, 2)

After the success of his visit to Fort Scott, Debs began to take his message about the importance of educating the working class masses to the radical and socialist press.

As editor of the *National Rip-Saw* during his association with The People's College, Debs used his position to promote Socialist education. In the February 1915 edition, Debs explained, "Education in its broad sense has always been for the few, never for the masses, and this accounts for the fact that the few have always ruled the earth and the masses have always been their dependent subjects" (Debs, 1915a, p. 20). He continued, ". . . The chief purpose of education has always been to maintain class rule, to keep many at the mercy of the few, and to clothe idleness in robes and industry in rags" (Debs, 1915a, p. 20). Outlining his objection—not to education, but to capitalist control of education—Debs (1915a) wrote, ". . . There has never yet been a college, university, or other educational institution, or school system of any kind, designed to develop the mental faculties and the moral nature of the toiling and exploited masses of mankind" (p. 20).

To Debs, the answer was clear. A socialist school, not beholden to capitalist interests, endowed by the working class, and espousing socialist views was the only way to bring "light instead of darkness, freedom instead of slavery, plenty instead of poverty. . ." (Debs, 1915a, p. 20). The People's College, "your school and the school of your class," aimed to "clear up the working-class mind, develop working-class power," and "make this in the highest sense the world of the workers" (Debs, 1915a, pp. 20-21). In a call to action at the end of the article, Debs

exclaimed, “This is but the beginning of what the Workers of the World are going to make the greatest College in the World” (Debs, 1915a, p. 21). Debs certainly believed The People’s College would change the shape of education and thus promote the emancipation of the working class.

Justifying The People’s College, Debs, in “The School for the Masses” published in *The American Socialist* on September 18, 1915, wrote,

The colleges and universities are for the few only, the sons and daughters of the rich and such of the sons and daughters of the poor as are willing to be intellectually prostituted in the service of the rich. . . .Just so long as the capitalist class control the education of the masses, just so long will they ride on their backs and despise them as beasts of burden.  
(Debs, 1915d, p. 2)

Reaching his crescendo, Debs (1915d) exclaimed,

The People’s College at Fort Scott, Kansas is the beginning of a worldwide revolution in education. It marks the awakening of the masses to the necessity of establishing their own colleges and universities and educating themselves with the one supreme object of getting at the truth in all things, knowing that the truth alone can make them free and fulfill their destiny. (p. 2)

As with his article in the *National Rip-Saw*, Debs again urged the working class to join him in seeking *truth* from the working class perspective. Without a fundamental shift in the education of the working class, workers were destined to be in typical Debs analysis, beasts of burden. The function of socialist education was to simultaneously unite working class and free working men, women, and children from capitalist control. With Debs’s public support, The People’s College was able to place advertisements in leading socialist magazines, *Pearson’s*, the *International*

*Socialist Review*, and various labor magazines and circulars (see The People's College Background section). However, Debs not only wrote about and promoted The People's College, he also performed administrative duties.

**Debs's Leadership Role.** Debs's commitment to The People's College as Chancellor and President of The People's College union shines through in three separate instances. Early in The People's College existence, Debs wrote a letter to Jacob Sheppard concerning a rift between Sheppard and another socialist working for The People's College, Stephen Marion Reynolds. In the letter, dated December 22, 1914, Debs related a conversation he had with Reynolds in Chicago about Sheppard's treatment of Reynolds. Debs (1914b) told Sheppard

Reynolds said that if you would meet him with me present he felt certain that an understanding could be effected. I need not say that I would gladly do anything in my power to heal the wounds and to bring you two comrades to a happy understanding. (p. 2)

Debs asked Sheppard to "drop Reynolds a note of half a dozen lines. A few words of kindness from you at this time would work wonders," (Debs, 1914b, p. 2) a task no doubt designed to temporarily solve the issue, perhaps even permanently. Crisis averted, Debs continued on with his public schedule.

Debs's devotion to The People's College is evident in a letter to Arthur Le Sueur (Vice President of The People's College) dated July 24, 1915. Debs (1915b) apologized for not writing an article for *The People's College News*, owing to his hectic schedule. He admitted that he had been following the publication of the *News*, stating, "You are getting out a rattling good College journal. Each issue bristles with the virile nature and revolutionary purpose of the cause it represents. . . .Its appeal is as stimulating as a cold shower on a sultry day" (Debs, 1915b, para.

2). Signing off, “Yours in full and right along,” Debs continued to show his support for the educational cause.

Taking an executive role, Debs had to resolve a more lasting and potentially critical issue that developed toward the end of 1915. According to Caroline Lowe (First Vice President of The People’s College), Arthur Le Sueur was overstepping his position and attempting to take control of the College and Advisory Board (as substantiated in correspondence between Lowe and Debs during December 1915 and February 1916). In a letter to Lowe dated January 31, 1916, Debs tried to assuage her conflicted feelings toward Le Sueur’s perceived actions. The issue worried Debs. He wrote,

It would be useless for me to attempt a general review of this matter by correspondence.

I have concluded to make a personal visit to Fort Scott at my earliest opportunity....I

hope we can then all get together and go over the matter in a frank, open-handed manner, bringing out every essential point in the controversy and arrive at an understanding as to what is best for the school and for all concerned. (Debs, 1916a, p. 2)

Taking his role as Chancellor of The People’s College seriously, he continued:

The school is of course the issue and for the school I feel my full share of responsibility and I should make any personal sacrifice or expose myself to any extent of criticism or condemnation to safeguard the school and to prove myself worthy of the confidence reposed in me by those who on my account enrolled as students and have given of their meagre [*sic*] and hard-earned means to support the institution. (Debs, 1916a, p. 2)

Perhaps foreshadowing his resignation from official duties with The People’s College in November of 1917, Debs concluded

I hope this will be satisfactory to you and Comrades Sheppard and Brewer, as also to the other comrades. I am extremely sorry to be so hard pressed by so many other matters that I cannot give immediate attention to the school for the school lies very near to my heart. *I should not as a matter of fact have allowed myself to be placed in a position of responsibility I had not the time nor the opportunity to give me attention to* [emphasis added]. I protested but yielded to comrades I absolutely trusted and believed could and would work together. But I am going to express no vain regrets. I realize my position and shall stand by the school. If there is anything wrong it must be brought and the interest of the school protected by those intrusted [*sic*] with that responsibility. (Debs, 1916a, p. 2)

Understanding his role with The People's College, Debs attempted to keep the peace until he could remedy the situation in person. His reply to Lowe appears to have worked, as she replied to him on February 4, 1916, "I should not have [written] to you in such detail if I did not feel so sure that you, too, have agonized over critical situations. . . in which a mistake would be fatal to a cause most dear to you" (Lowe, 1916, p. 3).

Debs attempted to quell infighting associated with differing perspectives within the ranks of The People's College leadership. Debs noted that he did not have the time required to do a satisfactory job (Debs, 1916a, p. 2); however, he required those within the leadership to work together. Considering Debs continued his public appearances and other obligations, the fact that he spent the time to attend to Sheppard's and Lowe's concerns illustrates his commitment to his role as Chancellor of The People's College and President of The People's College Union.

**Debs's People's College News Articles.** Meanwhile, Debs continued to promote The People's College. Tackling the premise of public education, Debs wrote an article in the April

1916 edition of *The People's College News*, titled, "Why Education Must Be Free." Debs railed against mainstream political influence on public schooling. Education, "resisted to the last by the privileged few [because it is] the greatest of liberating forces," Debs (1916c) asserted, is "called free but it is not free. It is controlled by the same capitalist class which controls the government under which we live" (p. 1). Debs targeted the "politicians who as a rule serve as trustees on our school-boards" as "of the same party as the rich exploiters who secure their appointment. . .and their policy generally accords with the interests of the money bags in the background" (Debs, 1916c, p. 1). Debs (1916c) finished,

Education to be of real value and to accomplish its true purpose must be free-free as air and sunshine. . .The passion to serve was not kindled in their [students'] breasts in the classroom of the capitalist college but on the contrary their selfish instincts were developed and they were taught and trained how to profit by their "education" at the expense of their uneducated fellow-beings. . . .There is but one clean, sure, honorable way for the workers to solve the problem of education and that is by securing control of it and educating themselves. Education itself must be freed from ruling class control before it can be made effective in promoting working class emancipation. (p. 2)

Calling upon working class persons support for The People's College, "the real beginning of free education among the workers," according to Debs (1916c), would give workers "the power, mental and moral, economic, political and otherwise, to conquer their exploiters, put an end to their servitude, achieve their freedom, . . .and take possession of the earth and the fullness thereof in the name of the people" (p. 2).

Writing in the March 1917 edition of *The People's College News*, Debs's article titled, "Feed Your Head" once again explained the importance of education for the working class.

Debs (1917a) began, “It so happens—why has always been a mystery to us—that most men’s hands are subject to a few other men’s heads. It is indeed a grotesque arrangement” (Debs, 1917a, p. 1). Invoking religion, somewhat strange for a socialist publication (and while Constantine (1990a) and Salvatore (1982) considered Debs strictly non-religious though tolerant of religion, as he often refers to God and corresponding morality), Debs (1917a) continued, “To say that it [exploitation of the working class by capitalists] expresses the creative plan is to impeach the Almighty. If He intended most men to be the mere hands of others, why did He not create them headless?” (p. 1).

Debs stressed the significance of education, urging readers to “Feed your head! Nourish your brain! Cultivate your intellect! Develop your mind! . . . To have the power of a giant and cower beneath the scorn of a pigmy is not your misfortune but your disgrace. Cease to beg and help yourself” (Debs, 1917a, pp. 1-2). Only through education could the working class increase its lot. Only “when the working class uses its brain it will know its power, seize its heritage and reign supreme” (Debs, 1917a, p. 2). The peaceful revolution Debs espoused would result from class-consciousness through education.

Although Debs did not publish many articles for *The People’s College News*, the ones he did submit followed the typical theme of working class education for advancement and revolution. Repeatedly, Debs associated the mainstream public school system, including public colleges and universities with capitalist influence, dominance, and corruption. The only answer to the status quo of capitalist indoctrination was a school with a working class perspective—The People’s College. Throughout his tenure with The People’s College, Debs dutifully explained the purpose and benefit of a school with a socialist standpoint to fight the dominant view and promote positive social change.



**Resignation.** Whether Debs found his role as Chancellor of The People's College and President of The People's College Union tedious, one cannot discern from his correspondence and public stance. However, it was clear by the middle of 1917 that Debs was still feverishly working for socialism. He had devoted much of his time and energy to his failed 1916 campaign for Congress on the Socialist Party ticket (Constantine, 1990a; Salvatore, 1982). In a letter to his brother dated August 30, 1917, on *The Boulder-Colorado Sanitarium* letterhead, Debs (1917b) wrote, "When I get back I'll be in fitter condition for platform work than I've been for years. I will soon make up for lost time" (Debs, 1917b, p. 1). Later in the letter, Debs asked his brother to contact The People's College and request "2 copies of the August issue of 'People's College News' [be sent] to me here [the sanitarium]" (Debs, 1917b, p. 2). That Debs continued to follow The People's College even from a sanitarium suffering from poor health shows his continued interest in the cause.

Yet he could not keep up. In November, Debs wrote a letter to the secretary of The People's College resigning from his official positions with the institution. Debs (1917c) lamented,

It has long been a matter of regret to me that I have been unable to give the College in which I have felt so deep an interest the personal attention due it but I have been so constantly overburdened with other duties that with the best will I have found it impossible to do so. Under these circumstances I feel that I can no longer in justice to the College or to myself withhold my resignation, and that it is my duty to sever all official connection with the college. Allow me to take this occasion to thank all the comrades at the College for the kindness and consideration they have always shown me and earnestly

wishing for the College a future of increasing usefulness and success, I remain, yours  
fraternally, Eugene V. Debs. (Debs, 1917c, para. 3)

With Debs's resignation, Le Sueur's move to Minnesota, and Sheppard's inconsistent involvement with The People's College (though he remained part of the school, he was often held back by his law practice and seemed to shuffle—by late-1917 and early-1918—between editor of *The People's College News* and later president of The People's College in an attempt to keep it alive), the school of the masses lost its stature, momentum, and potential influence (DeGruson, 1994). Curiously, or perhaps on purpose, Debs's resignation was not printed in *The People's College News* until January of 1918 (*The People's College News*, 1918, p. 10).

### **The People's College**

#### **Background**

To address inequalities during the Progressive Era and to enlighten workers, C. B. Hoffman, Jacob Sheppard, Eugene Debs, Charles P. Steinmetz, Caroline Lowe, Marian Wharton, and Arthur Le Sueur founded the People's College in Fort Scott, Kansas, in July of 1914 (Hoffman, 1914b, p. 1; M. Le Sueur, 1955/1984, p. xix). Sheppard, the founder of the popular *Appeal to Reason* law school correspondence course offered the use of land in his hometown of Fort Scott in a meeting with Hoffman on May 13, 1914. In a 1915 article written for the *National Rip-Saw*, Eugene Debs (1915a) described the college as “located at Fort Scott, Kansas, the residence of J. I. Sheppard, who originated the idea and has the honorable distinction of being its secretary and founder” (p. 20). In the *People's College Pamphlet*, Debs explained,

...[The People's College] is the outgrowth of his [J. I. Sheppard] as the head of the Correspondence Law School [through the *Appeal to Reason*] which he has been conducting with such marked success during the past several years. The idea of

extending this educational work to other departments of learning, including economics, politics, sociology, literature, science, history, in fact the whole range of human knowledge, and of establishing a People's College, through which to carry forward this great and vital work, must appeal to everyone who knows enough about the struggle of the working class to know that education and enlightenment are absolutely essential to their emancipation. (as cited in Hughes, 1963, p. 57)

Capitalizing particularly on Debs's popularity—he garnered almost 6% of the popular vote in the election of 1912 (National Archives, n.d.)—a form letter written on People's College Union letterhead by Debs and addressed to “Comrade” (July 23, 1914) stated

I have been with you in many campaigns and now I am enlisting your services in the greatest campaign of all—a campaign for education. The results of this campaign will reach every worker, bring freedom, and establish equal opportunity in truth. I can conceive of no greater work in which you and I can unite. (as cited in Constantine, 1990b, p. 111)

In the same letter, Debs continued,

This is our College. Not a dollar of profit is to be made out of the school. It belongs to the people and is only endowed as the people endow it. No master class can endow and control this school. It is ours. Let us make it worthy of the great class to which we belong—the workers of the world. (as cited in Constantine, 1990b, p. 112)

Debs ended the call for change with a question and a statement:

Shall not we who build all the schools have one school of our own? Join with us in building up a great national school for the education of the toiling and producing millions

who have always designedly been kept in mental darkness by their exploiters and oppressors. (as cited in Constantine, 1990b, p. 112)

Growing the coffers mattered, but public reception of the college would determine whether its early days would be successful.

The Fort Scott press and public seemed to react favorably to the location of a socialist school within city limits. Articles written in *The Fort Scott Tribune and Monitor* between June and July 1914 reported on the progress of The People's College. A June 19, 1914, headline read, "Get charter for big school here. J. I. Sheppard prominent worker in it. Erect buildings in this city. To teach hundreds by correspondence method--To teach according to ability--First of its kind" ("Get Charter for Big School Here," 1914, pp. 1, 5). The next day, Jacob Sheppard (1914) wrote "People's College a big thing for Fort Scott," gaining front-page attention for the school, informing the citizens of Fort Scott that "after a few months, thousands of strangers will be among us" and that "from time to time our town will be visited by the leaders of international thought" (p. 1). Debs, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Helen Keller, and Walter Thomas Mills all made appearances during The People's College's existence (DeGruson, 1994, p. 1). Sheppard (1914) asked the public to "live up to the Fort Scott reputation for courtesy and kindness to the stranger" (p. 1).

*The Fort Scott Tribune and Monitor* covered the planning stages of The People's College well, informing the public of meetings, happenings, and important events. Articles summarized the main points of speeches and even a call to citizens on behalf of local businessmen to "show [the organizers of The People's College] the welcome and friendly feeling that is due them" ("Extend Welcome to New College," 1914, pp. 1, 5) complete with free transportation to and from the event provided by "every public spirited citizen in Fort Scott owning an automobile"

who responded to the call (“A Royal Welcome,” 1914, p. 3). Clearly, the city went out of its way to welcome The People’s College with private citizens offering free transportation to People’s College events (“Reception a Big Success,” 1914, p. 6). Most interesting of the Fort Scott Tribune Articles in support of The People’s College was “a letter from the mayor and city commissioners” written on July 31, 1914 urging the “nearly five thousand registered voters in this city. . .[to become]. . .member[s] of the People’s College Union” (Louderback, 1914, p. 2). Louderback and the city commissioners issued a call for participation: “Every citizen, and by that we mean every adult man and woman, [to] at once enroll and help to make this College the great success that it is intended to be” (Louderback, 1914, p. 2).

In the November, 1914, issue of the *Journal of the Switchmen’s Union of North America*, a column entitled “A College of the People” (1914) clarified education’s purpose in the United States. The author explained

Two great indictments may be brought against our educational system of today. . . .First, our public schools as well as our colleges and universities are controlled by the master class and by a subversion of the truth [and] a potent factor in keeping the capitalist system in power; second, economic necessity has robbed the working class of all educational opportunity. . . .The working class must demand the right to an education, along with the right to organize. They must take over and control the public school system, and build a great college of their own. (pp. 743-744)

From a working class perspective, then, the purpose of public education was seen as a continuation and formation of class division and an introduction to the capitalist system.

In an article that ranged from scathing to hopeful, William E. Williams (1915), writing for *Pearson’s Magazine* condemned the public education system, noting that “each year brings

its fresh crop of futile fads and freakish fancies” (p. 298), referring to public education reform, while focusing on the positive potential of the People’s College. W. E. Williams (1915) explained, “Let it be repeated: the college [People’s College] is more than a school; it is a movement. . . .Intended to appeal directly to all who, for one reason or another, had been deprived of common or special schooling” (pp. 300-301). The People’s College served to provide the working class with “. . . ‘education of the workers—by the workers’” (The People’s College slogan as cited in W. E. Williams, 1915, p. 304).

W. E. Williams (1915) also reported the appeal of potential teachers’ courses within the People’s College as “producing an entirely new and free kind of school teacher, who is to be the instrument of the deliverance of the public-school system from the slough of inefficiency” (p. 302). In what basically amounted to an advertisement for the People’s College, W. E. Williams frequently quoted Jacob Sheppard on the purpose of People’s College. A particularly purposeful quote from Sheppard explained, “We propose to create here an opportunity and an atmosphere in which the truth may be taught in freedom without fear, rebuke, or oppression” (as cited in W. E. Williams, 1915, p. 304).

Throughout 1915-1916, People’s College advertisements appeared in *Pearson’s Magazine* and *The International Socialist Review*. Repeatedly reiterating the conflict between “capital” and “labor,” the advertisements attempted to rally workers to the educational cause, exclaiming in one advertisement developed by The People’s College (1915c)<sup>3</sup>, “Who shall control education? . . .Whatever may be our opinions concerning tactics or policies, on the educational basis we all unite” (p. 512). Another People’s College advertisement (1915d) asked, “Are you satisfied with your English? Can you find the word you want, spell correctly, write a

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<sup>3</sup> As The People’s College advertisements ran in the advertising section, page numbers refer to the page number present in the Hathitrust document, see The People’s College references in the References section for further details.

good letter, hold your own in argument, talk convincingly, say what you want to say?” (p. 640).

The appeal to workers taking the “Plain English” correspondence course was that they could study at their own pace, in their own home, while still working, and taking courses from the People’s College that “does not exploit you [the worker]” (p. 640). The People’s College Union even quoted Debs in an October 1915 advertisement in *The People’s College News*. The quote reads, “The People’s College was founded by the working class, is financed by the working class and controlled by the rank and file. . . .It is fundamentally democratic and no shadow of caste falls across the threshold” (as cited in *The People’s College News*, 1915f, p. 41)

The People’s College Law School headed by Jacob Sheppard (and later Arthur Le Sueur) became a popular course of study. Testimonials in a June 1915 People’s College advertisement entitled, “You Can Do What 4,000 Others Have Done” portray successful working-class lawyers, particularly one from Texas who “after 18 months hard work at night and digesting what I had read between plow handles the next day, . . .passed the examination with five others and beat the four year university students” (The People’s College, 1915e, p. 772). In the W. E. Williams (1915) article, Sheppard explained the need for well-versed workers: “They [workers] cannot secure the proper enforcement of the laws for their protection because of the lack of class-conscious advocates. Very well, we’ll produce a crop of class-conscious advocates” (p. 300). The People’s College aimed to arm the working class with knowledge to battle the system on its own terms (through the law and the English language).

Debs (1916b) even wrote an article in the *International Socialist Review* promoting The People’s College as “tainted by no ruling class subsidy and subject to no restricting or contaminating influence whatsoever. It is in the fullest sense a people’s school” (p. 570). Later, in June 1916, Debs reviewed Marian Wharton’s *Plain English* for the *International Socialist*

*Review* as “a marvel of clearness and simplicity. . . a revolutionary text-book, and not a mere treatise on how to use words to conceal thoughts. . . .The first volume. . .to constitute the proletarian literature. . .[and] to dispel the darkness of ignorance” (Debs, 1916d, p. 767). True to the working class perspective, the first exercise in Wharton’s (1916) *Plain English* concerned the difference between basic sentences and descriptive sentences. The exercise written by Wharton (1916) reads,

Select from the following sentences those which it is possible to express by a look or tone or gesture, and those which can not [*sic*] be expressed without words:

1. I am glad.
2. I am glad because men are struggling for freedom.
3. I am hungry.
4. I am hungry for the chance for an education.
5. Come.
6. Come, let us reason together.
7. I am afraid.
8. I am afraid that we must wait long for peace.
9. Go.
10. Go, search the world over for the truth.
11. I am disgusted.
12. I am disgusted with those who will not think for themselves.
13. I am tired.
14. I am tired of these petty squabbles among comrades. (Exercise 1, para. 1)



Within the rhetoric of working class struggle, Wharton attempted to teach workers (likely immigrants and those unable to finish their primary schooling) the functional English necessary for success in the workplace.

Though The People's College advertisements promoted the school as a nascent university brimming with potential, Constantine (1990b) noted that The People's College, at its height only consisted of approximately "4,000 correspondence and residence students enrolled in courses in law, history, English, mathematics, bookkeeping, and shorthand" (p. 103).<sup>4</sup> By late-1917, The People's College had lost Arthur Le Sueur and Eugene Debs, whose resignation came in November and was made official in *The People's College News* in January 1918 (The People's College News, 1918, p. 10). Sheppard literally mortgaged the future of The People's College, buying the Hughes Ranch in 1919 under the auspices of starting a dairy farm ("The Biggest Land Deal," 1919, p. 1). Within two years, Sheppard was dead, within three, The People's College was bankrupt, its building in foreclosure and sold off to a local businessman ("A College Receiver," 1922, p. 1; "People's College Closed," 1922, p. 4; DeGruson, 1994, p. 3).

Though its influence never reached the potential Debs, Hoffman, Sheppard, Le Sueur, Lowe, and Wharton envisioned, the premise of public schooling for the public's sake resonated during the Progressive Era. The People's College offered an alternative to mainstream educational ideology. Particularly important and forceful were The People's College's views on education and democracy as explained in *The People's College News*.

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<sup>4</sup> In the February 1919 issue of *The People's College News*, the College maintained that "there has been enrolled to date in the various departments more than 6,000 students. They live in all parts of the United States and some are to be found in foreign countries" (p. 71).

## Views on Education and Democracy

Within *The People's College News*, the organ of information of The People's College, guest writers wrote columns and articles that involved education, both public school education and university education. Repeatedly, the call came for educational opportunity for all and for the removal of capitalist and corporate interests from all levels of education. The editorial pages echoed the calls for a universal educational system to teach their perception of the truth rather than capitalist propaganda.

**Columns and Articles.** The columns and articles within *The People's College News* centered on common themes of education's purpose, role, and consequences. Unsurprisingly, the rhetoric came from a pro-labor, pro-working class slant. In the September 1914 issue, an article written by *The People's College News* editors<sup>5</sup> Arthur Le Sueur and Marian Wharton (1914a) on "Labor Unions and Education" explained, "Educational processes still look to the education of a leisure class. Our schools. . .do not turn out men and women trained to produce, but rather trained to exploit the producer" (p. 1). The public education system, under capitalist control, served to reproduce power relations between the wealthy and the working class.

To remedy the situation, the editors called for working class control of the educational message, because "our parasitic men of learning. . .can never put red blood into the anaemic [*sic*] educational system of yesterday. . .since [they are] saturated with the capitalistic point of view. . . since they owe their jobs to the master" (p. 1). Without a system of education to awaken the masses, run by the masses, workers would stay in a perpetual state of obedience. Le Sueur

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<sup>5</sup> Unsigned articles appearing in *The People's College News*, have been attributed to Arthur Le Sueur and Marian Wharton between September 1914 and June 1917 when Le Sueur resigned his position with The People's College. Editorials and articles without an author and thus attributed to "the editor" after June 1917 appear to have been written by Marian Wharton; however, DeGruson (1994) explained that Jacob I. Sheppard may have taken an editorial role. Eventually Wharton left The People's College and married Arthur Le Sueur, though it seems that she remained editor of *The People's College News* until the end of 1917 (DeGruson, 1994, pp. 2-3).

(1914), in “A Voice in the Wilderness,” criticized “education that denies the supremacy of the rights of property over the rights of man,” as he promoted “education that teaches the rights of humanity as the base upon which property rights must rest” (p. 3). The fundamental existence of the public education system in a capitalist society, according to Le Sueur, was to promote capitalist perspectives. Only through a working class educational system could workers “educate to emancipate” (Cherdron, 1914a, p. 9).

The October 1914 issue of *The People’s College News* discussed contemporary educational reform. At issue was the Gary Plan (also referred to as the Gary System) instituted in Gary, Indiana, by Superintendent William Wirt (see Chapter 2 for a brief explanation of the Gary Plan). Samuel W. Ball wrote a largely satisfactory piece about the influence of the Gary System. Addressing social progress, Ball (1914) wrote,

The thoughtful reader is by this time wondering what relation so efficient a system of education bears to social progress. This is a question largely left to conjecture. Time alone can answer, yet we may venture the suggestion that while the aim and purpose of the management is to lessen the expense of education and to prepare for the relations existing between employer and employee today—scientific management introduced into the public schools will mean larger ambitions, greater opportunity, and a higher standard of living among the masses. (pp. 3-4)

The unintended effects of the Gary System, according to Ball, would be the ability for working class children and parents to utilize school facilities and programs. This act alone, opening up the school to the community and offering more services to the poor and working class, would give the masses a taste of opportunity previously denied them. Ball saw this as a positive result, explaining

Boys and girls trained to make use of modern facilities for comfort and convenience accustomed to pleasant and sanitary conditions, permitted to enjoy freedom of mind and body, and to develop normally under refining influences will make more efficient rebels against the tyranny of cunning and greedy masters. (Ball, 1914, p. 4)

Once students and those within the community began to profit socially and potentially economically from the Gary System, they would expect more from their employers. Ball (1914) finished, “In education as in every other endeavor of capitalism to maintain itself, the very effort to make labor efficient as a creator of profits, tends undeniably toward insistent demands for larger opportunity and fuller expression” (p. 4).

Ball (1914) contended that students, through participation in the Gary System, would become accustomed to the finer things in life, including modernity, convenience, pleasant and sanitary conditions, and freedom of mind and body. Because of those experiences, Ball posited that graduates of the Gary System “[would] be less likely to settle into the standard slave virtues of self denial and obedient service” (p. 4). He concluded, “Today education cannot produce efficient workers, without producing efficient rebels” (p. 4).

Le Sueur and Wharton (1914c) called for a renewed interest in vocational education. At the time, both public education professionals and educational reformers were trying to determine how to prepare students for industrial jobs after they completed their increasingly compulsory schooling (Kliebard, 2004). Though the benefits of vocational training in the school gave students experience in a trade, Le Sueur and Wharton (1914c) asked, “Shall our public schools become corporation schools?” (pp. 5-6).

The labor press and *The People’s College News* viewed vocational training in the schools skeptically. Many saw vocational training as a thinly veiled attempt to create a mass of semi-

skilled workers ready to enter the workforce when necessary (as potential scabs and strike-breakers; Ball, 1914). Le Sueur and Wharton (1914c) explained, “When the two students of Corporate Vocational Training<sup>6</sup> are both educated and both want the same job and neither is educated to do anything else, the Boss will find it easy to dictate the terms of employment” (p. 5). Once again, without an education to free the workers’ mind from a capitalist perspective, the theory of vocational educational training would not translate into the practice of a job after schooling was completed. Instead, the spirit of competition would drive down wages and adversely affect working conditions for both the new entries (recent graduates) into the industrial trades, and veteran workers. Le Sueur and Wharton (1914c) suggested

To get vocational training, it is not necessary that it come through the complete surrender of our public school system to the trusts, nor that we get it through Corporation Schools run in connection with the Factory. The remedy is for the Public School *to be made Democratic, and made to serve the public needs through real public control* [emphasis added]. . . .The remedy is to have education both Social and Vocational, so that the child, when it becomes of age, will enter the struggle with a rounded knowledge, not only of the levers on the Machine, but the way to the fire escape, through social understanding. (p. 6)

Without democratic public schools, the working class would continue to be exploited by industries and corporations using the schools to prepare what *they* needed in terms of compliant, skilled workers. Only by educating the whole child could conscious workers be created and groomed to take up and continue the socialist struggle for fairness and equality of opportunity.

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<sup>6</sup> The Corporate Vocational Training system (also known as the *Schneider system*, see “Another Futile Expedient,” in *The People’s College News*, I(11), 1-3, is characterized as “The plan most generally adopted...to allow the student to work in the factory one week, and attend the school the next week, working in pairs as it were” (Le Sueur & Wharton, 1914c, p. 5).

However, the cause went beyond preparing workers for a conscious role within the workplace. Le Sueur, Wharton, and the others who wrote articles for *The People's College News* continually extolled the virtue of education for education's sake. For instance, in an article written in the February 1915 issue, Le Sueur and Wharton (1915a) explained The People's College stance toward education. Beyond creating class-conscious workers, Le Sueur and Wharton (1915a) on behalf of The People's College declared

We are vitally interested in the education of the masses believing that a democracy is only possible with an educated mass; but we are also interested in the education of the favored seven who go through this educational mill for they become the teachers in our schools, those who control and direct the system of education for tomorrow. . . . (p. 8)

Not only were workers' children considered in the educational mission of The People's College, those who would teach the workers' children, and for that matter, all children were addressed. Unless teachers were able to teach from the working class perspective, the public education system would continue to promote capitalist ideals.

Le Sueur and Wharton explained that education was a social issue. Determining how and what students would learn was "the most important social function of the community" (Le Sueur & Wharton, 1915a, p. 8). Further, they explained, "It determines the kind of manhood which we shall have in the future. Nothing is more pregnant with menace to the progress and democracy of this country than a subsidized and biased education" (Le Sueur & Wharton, 1915a, p. 8). The control of the public education system would dictate the future. An educational system catering to the needs of the business class would continue on as a society based on exploitation.

Cherdrone continued the analysis of the function of public education. Particularly important to the cause were her articles on public school textbooks. In "Are our Schools

Democratic?” published in the October 1914 edition of *The People’s College News*, Cherdron (1914b) wrote

Today great book companies can hold up the public school treasury every time they swing a deal for a city wide change of textbooks. . . .Here you have another big business reaching its long fingers into your public pocketbook. . . .[while pushing textbooks] peculiarly written by the book’s authors to favor capitalism. (p. 9)

She continued her critique of textbooks in the following month’s edition. Reiterating the premise that big business controlled learning in the public schools, Cherdron (1914c) asked readers, “What do you do to control the course of study?” (p. 8). Through a series of provocative questions, she condemned history textbooks for distorting facts related to labor clashes, literature textbooks for “bending the children’s minds toward tolerating and abetting the abuses of capitalism,” and math text books for failing “to train the children to understand the figures which explain present economic conditions” (Cherdron, 1914c, p. 8).

Often, writers for *The People’s College News* framed the education debate in terms of how much education the ruling class would allow the masses. Considering the deleterious effect of capitalist schooling, Thompson, in a celebratory article on The People’s College wrote in the November 1915 issue, “During these years of capitalistic ascendancy and supremacy, that crowd that does nothing but own, have not been idle or dilatory in getting control of the press and the schools” (Thompson, 1915, p. 28). He offered as evidence “the fact that most of the men and women that go through the schools and colleges reverence the chains that bind them” (p. 28). Thompson’s solution was an appeal to the readers to help fund and develop The People’s College. By supporting the College, workers could develop their minds free from the “servile spirit” (Thompson, 1915, p. 28) of capitalism.

The concept of slave psychology arose in another article. Attempting to explain why capitalism had an injurious influence on the worker's psyche and day-to-day activity, Pannell asserted, "Our entire educational machinery, both urban and rural, is based upon the idea of class distinctions, of leader and led" (Pannell, 1916, p. 3). The slave psychology bound the subservient class to its master through a repetitive relationship developed in the schools. Pannell (1916) insisted, "Right or wrong, the school master or school mistress is held out to [students] as the personification of imperial power that must be obeyed without question or demur" (p. 3). The consequence of the ingrained subservience carried over to the workplace. Children, now adults, instilled with the slave psychology were less likely to disturb workplace power relations. Students educated in the schools "will obey the powers of political and industrial lordship without question, a slave whose only chains are false ideas, produced by an irrational system of education which placed 'credits' and 'diplomas' above the natural development of the child's mind" (Pannell, 1916, pp. 3-4). To Pannell, schooling in the United States served as a function of the wealthy to subjugate the working class.

To battle the slave psychology, Le Sueur and Wharton called for worker control of the public education system. They argued

If organized labor could but grasp the fundamental importance of understanding what the crippling of the minds in the public schools means to the race, it would be but a short time, indeed, until the workers would be in control of the school system, either patronizing only their own, or through capturing the system of public education. (Le Sueur & Wharton, 1916b, p. 5)

Defeating the slave psychology would take action and organization. The articles in *The People's College News* continually called workers to action to create their futures through their own



means. Evident in the articles were the dual qualities of self-help and solidarity only possible through Socialist control of education. However, it was the editorial page that truly called workers to action for the cause.

**The Editorial Page.** In his resignation letter from The People's College published in *The People's College News* in June 1917, Arthur Le Sueur (1917) wrote, "The problems to be met and conquered, the obstacles to be overcome, were all sources of inspiration in the fight for working-class education by the Working Class" (p. 21). Throughout his almost three-year career with The People's College as both the Dean of the Law School and editor of *The People's College News*, Le Sueur's writing projected a view of United States education that reproduced social and economic roles while advocating working class control and input in their education. Marion Wharton (later Le Sueur's wife) co-edited *The People's College News* during this time and stayed on for a while after Le Sueur resigned, though how long is uncertain (DeGruson, 1994). Either way, from 1914 to 1917, *The People's College News* editorial page was a source for alternative educational theories and reactions to contemporary issues in education, societal, and world events.

Le Sueur and Wharton heavily influenced *The People's College News*. Once Le Sueur resigned, Wharton left soon after, and Debs severed official ties with The People's College. Throughout its existence, *The People's College News* remained committed to a socialist perspective; however, after Le Sueur, Wharton, and Debs left the fold, it began to cover more of the day-to-day activity of the college, in an attempt, perhaps, to maintain enrollment and promote the school.<sup>7</sup> Regardless, Le Sueur and Wharton's time with *The People's College News*

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<sup>7</sup> See *The People's College News* issues published between 1918-1919, particularly November 1918 and February 1919.

characterized the high point of editorial analysis and criticism of contemporary Progressive Era educational theory, reform, and rhetoric.

Le Sueur and Wharton began the September 1914 editorial page with a blueprint for action. They stated

Education is the great need of the Revolution. We cannot gain the solidarity of the working class for Revolution without it. We cannot take over the industries of the world save as we educate the man lowest down to a consciousness of his place and power. (Le Sueur & Wharton, 1914b, p. 20)

Placing the onus on capitalism, Le Sueur and Wharton (1914b) continued, “The public schools, magnificent as they are, are owned by the master class. The teaching furthers the system and is a potent force in keeping the capitalist system in power” (p. 20). Similar to the articles expressing the need for social change, Le Sueur and Wharton, through their socialist perspective, viewed the capitalist system as the enemy, with the only recourse being The People’s College and schools like it where “class-conscious workers shall be taught the ethics of their own class; a school from which they shall go forth to teach,—to work,—to become centers of revolution in every community” (p. 20). Much like Debs, Le Sueur and Wharton exhorted the working class to take initiative and create the world they wanted and deserved. Only through a socialist takeover of the public schools would children learn the truth about the system they suffered under thereby removing themselves from capitalist indoctrination and opening their eyes to the world around them (Le Sueur & Wharton, 1914b).

Concerning vocational education, Le Sueur and Wharton believed the master class used the public school system to their advantage. Explaining that differentiation took place, Le Sueur and Wharton (1914d) wrote, “THEIR [the master class’s] children are in the High school and

University. It is OUR children they wish to educate vocationally. Why? Because they are interested in our children? No—because they are interested in BUSINESS—in PROFITS” (p. 19). Educating working class children in a vocational setting only perpetuated and legitimated class division between the master class and the working class. Public schools, Le Sueur and Wharton contended, served the purposes of the rich against—and at the expense of—the working class.

Delving into the slave psychology, Le Sueur and Wharton (1914e) declared . . .workers of the world. . .grow up thoroughly imbued with a slave psychology taught them in schools absolutely controlled by the master class, whose teachers are the hirelings of capitalism. They give education—yes, just enough to make intelligent effective workmen—and at the same time teach the lies concerning history and economics that make the willing slaves who swallow the campaign dope of the pretense of democracy, the sovereign rights of the people and who are led by the nose—slaves, dupes eternally. (p. 19)

Education provided by schools run within the capitalist system turned workers against their class. By promoting a social and economic vision that valued higher education over a vocation, it justified differentiation based on predestination according to the students’ present class while it trained working class students for their future jobs *working for* the master class.

Le Sueur and Wharton, like Dewey in *Schools of To-Morrow* (see “essays” section) discussed opportunity and access to educational growth. In the May 1915 editorial section, Le Sueur and Wharton (1915b) wrote

Speaking of inequality of opportunity, the public school system itself is one of the most flagrant examples of oppression by deprivation. Designed to fit children for the

universities which economic conditions make it impossible for them to enter, they rob ninety per cent of the pupils in order to serve ten per cent. Having been established, supposedly, for the purpose of serving children of all tastes and inclinations, they actually meet the needs of none. Children are poured into the hoppers like waste rock into a crusher, to come out very much the same in size and appearance. The unspeakable cruelty of this process is known to any discerning person who has taken the trouble to find out what effect it has upon childish curiosity and imagination. (p. 18)

The public school system did not create opportunities for working class students; it served not “to develop individuals. . .[but] to maintain institutions” (Le Sueur & Wharton, 1915e, p. 23).

To rectify the situation, Le Sueur and Wharton (1915d) argued

Labor must capture the public schools and make them serve the interests of the people—not the interests of the privileged class. Our public schools must not be allowed to become training schools for big business. Industry must exist for the benefit of the individual—not the individual exist for the benefit of industry. (p. 22)

Because the capitalist system encouraged exploitation on the part of big business and industry and used education to control the masses, Le Sueur and Wharton called for socialist control of the schools.

The purpose of education, according to Le Sueur and Wharton (1915f), was “. . .To make life more liveable [*sic*], to make one more capable of self service, for only in intelligent service of self can the mass be well served, and only. . .[then] can there be real service of self” (p. 22). Individual expression and exploration of meaning and action was tantamount to Le Sueur and Wharton. For the working class’s benefit, the freedom to choose what to learn and how (through correspondence courses in The People’s College) was a true educational opportunity,

unencumbered by capitalist control. Le Sueur and Wharton (1915f) explained that correspondence courses offered the best way to learn from the working class standpoint while allowing students to continue to work to provide for their families.

Education in the present sense during the Progressive Era only served to keep the masses controlled and docile. Through the slave psychology taught in schools, Le Sueur and Wharton insisted that working class students, without socialist intervention, would continue serving their masters rather than learn the truth about the capitalist system. Late in 1916, Le Sueur and Wharton (1916a) explained

. . .the workers should control the matter of their own education, and only as they do it, can they escape the crippling of their own minds through the mis-information conveyed to them through an educational system controlled against their interests. There can be no industrial or economic equality, there can be no democracy of opportunity, while the minds of the workers are poisoned by the mis-education of schools controlled in the interests of an exploiting class. (p. 18)

Le Sueur and Wharton, in their roles as editors of *The People's College News*, relentlessly called for worker control of the education system and “democracy of opportunity” (Le Sueur & Wharton, 1915c, p. 19). Without a socialist check on (or takeover of) the public school system, big business and wealthy elites would control society, for “in the battle for human rights, schools are more powerful than armaments; educated, intelligently class conscious agitators [are] more effective than 42-centimeter guns” (Le Sueur & Wharton, 1915c, p. 19). During their time with *The People's College News* and The People's College, Le Sueur and Wharton continually called for change. Before the socialist revolution could come, the workers had to become class

conscious through class friendly educational institutions free from capitalist control and influence.

### **A Final Word**

The rhetoric of The People's College did not necessarily coincide with the courses taught within the Correspondence School and particularly later on the campus. The People's College vigorously protested the capitalist system, wage slavery, and wealthy control of schooling and industry. However, many of The People's College courses, specifically *Plain English*, bookkeeping, and shorthand all provided opportunities for workers within the current economic system. The Law Department purported to train working class lawyers for the struggle against capital on the industrial front, yet anecdotes of "worker lawyers" in the testimonials aside, The People's College Law Department had approximately as much success as the rest of The People's College did during its existence.

Further, the on-campus activities in The People's College's later years—the automobile shop, the commercial department, and the People's Store as advertised in the Fort Scott Tribune and Monitor and in later issues of *The People's College News*, prepared workers for jobs within the capitalist system and signified a shift away from the purpose of the college, to teach typical subjects taught in public schools and colleges from a working class stance.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps, the major contribution of The People's College was to educate socialists and fellow travelers from a working class perspective to work within the capitalist system until they could gain the strength in mind and numbers to affect serious social change. Illustrated next with John Dewey,

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<sup>8</sup> Advertisements for The People's College Automobile Department, Commercial Department, and The People's College Store appear in the August, September, and October issues of the *Fort Scott Tribune and Monitor* and in the February, March, April, and November 1918 issues of *The People's College News*. The February 1919 issue of *The People's College News* is wholly devoted to an explanation of The People's College purpose and an outline of the courses offered at the college intended to teach students automobile repair, stenography, and business-related math. The issue is remarkable in its lack of socialist rhetoric and its insistence on the use of the knowledge obtained at The People's College for better opportunities and success within the present (capitalist) economic system.

preparation for democracy based on cooperation and shared interest was easier to swallow and implement in the mainstream public sphere than education connected to the rhetoric of class revolution, no matter how incisive and accurate it may have been.

## **John Dewey**

### **Background**

Born in Burlington, Vermont in 1859, John Dewey became a leading figure in the educational reform movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Attending the University of Vermont, in Burlington, Dewey then moved to Oil City, Pennsylvania, for two years, where he wrote an article on the “Metaphysical Assumptions of Materialism” sending it to William Torrey Harris, a prominent philosopher and editor of the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* at 21 years of age. Dewey asked Harris to read the article and respond on his merits as a potential philosopher (Martin, 2002). After Dewey sent another article, Harris finally responded in the affirmative pushing Dewey to follow philosophy. At the time, Dewey had drifted back to Burlington, Vermont, complete with a perceived lack of future goals and ambition (Martin, 2002).

Dewey’s time at Johns Hopkins University proved to be his formative years as a promising academic (Martin, 2002). Dewey completed a dissertation on the psychology of Kant, aligned himself with Hegel, and attained a position at the University of Michigan in 1884, briefly taught at the University of Minnesota, and moved back to Michigan (Martin, 2002). Building his reputation at Michigan, Dewey moved to the nascent University of Chicago in 1894, beginning his experimental lab school in 1899, where he “turned his attention to the philosophy of education in a systematic way” (Chambliss, 1996, p. 146). In a disagreement with Chicago’s president, Dewey resigned from the university in 1904 (Dykhuizen, 1973; Martin, 2002). Next,

he took a dual appointment at Columbia, in the Philosophy Department, and on the faculty of Teachers College, where he taught for the rest of his academic career (Chambliss, 1996; Dykhuizen, 1973; Martin, 2002).

Already established in philosophy and education, Dewey continued to produce books and articles, including *The School and Society* (1899), *Ethics* (1908), *Democracy and Education* (1916), *The Public and its Problems* (1927), *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935), and countless others (Dykhuizen, 1973; Martin, 2002). During his time in New York City, Dewey became involved in volunteer organizations, politics, public affairs, free speech fights including academic freedom, and continued with his philosophical writings (Martin, 2002). Dewey believed that volunteer organizations would be the impetus to social and political change for good. He was a founding member of the New York Teacher's Union, the American Association of University Professors, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the American Civil Liberties Union (Martin, 2002; Westbrook, 2005).

Dewey became active and involved throughout the world. After World War I ended, Dewey made educational mission trips, first to Japan, then China (Martin, 2002). In 1924, Dewey went to Turkey, to Russia in 1928, and South Africa in 1934 (Martin, 2002). Throughout this period of his career, Dewey continued to publish and present a progressive alternative to communism for liberals (Martin, 2002; Westbrook, 2005). As demonstrated in his myriad expositions to which attention is now turned, Dewey never wavered from his belief that social change could come through organization around education.

For the purposes of this study, one must acknowledge and analyze the depth and breadth of Dewey's views on education and educational reform during the Progressive Era. Limiting my research and data collection to Dewey's lectures and writings on education, industry, and



democracy (and the intermingling between the three) between 1896 and 1917 allows for a useful comparison between Debs and The People's College. Dewey's position within the mainstream educational reform movement enabled him to disseminate his views to a wider audience than *The People's College News*, which had approximately 4,000 subscribers at its zenith (Constantine, 1990b). What follows is an explanation of his perspective from both lecture notes and published essays. Consider the position toward education and democracy of those involved in The People's College as Dewey's thoughts come to bear in the pages ahead.

### **Views on Democracy and Education**

**Lectures and Speeches.** The lectures and speeches of John Dewey, particularly his *Philosophy of Education* and *Principles of Education* lectures between 1896 and 1902 illustrate his evolving view of education and its influence on and function of democracy. Regarding the function of schooling, in his lecture on *The School as a Social Institution*, Dewey (1896a)<sup>9</sup> maintained

The school, in other words, must be considered first, not as a device by which certain individuals, who know more than others and have more moral maturity, impart their knowledge and form habits in certain other more immature persons, but as a social institution, within which a certain concentration of social influences takes place for the sake of producing certain social results. (para. 1)

The purpose of school, then, was not to educate in a top-down manner to create students and adults in a particular form, but rather, it was to develop tendencies within the students that would serve them well in the wider society. Dewey repeatedly called for schooling that prepared

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<sup>9</sup> Dewey's *Class lecture notes: volume 2* has not been published at the time of this dissertation. In consultation with the Center for Dewey Studies at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, lectures have been cited by title and paragraph number within the specific lecture as page numbers were not present in the electronic document utilized at the Center for Dewey Studies.

students for society (and thereby shaped society), but not as specific inhabitants as workers or leaders; instead, they would develop their cooperative, inquisitive, and critical thinking skills within an environment that “. . .should present all the typical phases of the highest community life so that the child should be educated into becoming a member of the society as a whole and not a member of a particular class” (Dewey, 1896a, para. 4).

One can see the beginnings of Dewey’s perspective that education’s role was to produce individual thinkers that benefit society and interact intelligently with the world around them. This was done, not through a rigid adherence to outdated or self-serving needs, but through educating the whole child morally and ethically to generate a better society. Dewey’s aim was to use education to break down class barriers to create a cooperative society; however, beyond focusing on educating children morally and ethically through authentic and cooperative tasks and inquiry, Dewey’s recommendations remained generally committed to positive change through education.

Indeed, from the same lecture, Dewey (1896a) explained, in a further section titled “Difficulties in the Organization of the School as a Social Institution”, “There is a tendency for the school to isolate itself and live a life of its own independent of existing conditions and demands. . .it perpetuates the ideas and customs of a former state” (para. 2). Dewey was cognizant of the influence schools held, and the isolation they created, and he called for changing the purpose of education. The purpose of the school, Dewey (1896b) believed was “to socialize the individual. . .[while] reflect[ing] what society is struggling to become” (para. 1). Within this context, Dewey argued that the school could pick the best advantages of society [and] “organize these resources so as to put the child upon a higher plane than its own average” (Dewey, 1896b,

para. 1). The school was a function of society through which “society. . .may formulate what it would have itself be” (Dewey, 1896b, para. 3).

In 1899, Dewey clarified his position on the function of the school. As a reflection of society, Dewey (1899a) reiterated, “Education implies the existence of social habits which constitute the standards and ideals for directing and determining the growth of the individual” (para. 1). The purpose of education, therefore, was as a social tool. Dewey (1899a) continued, “The habits, customs, existing order and functioning of social institutions fixes the ends or aims, directly or indirectly, to which the impulses of the individual are directed. They set the model for organizing the tendencies of the individual” (para. 1). School’s purpose was to educate and incorporate students within the society at large through the development of a school community to

Eliminate. . .what is simply provincial, not only in the child’s physical surroundings, but in his intellectual and moral surroundings, and extending his horizon so that he becomes a member of the whole of society, and not simply a unit in a class, much less a particular party or clique. (Dewey, 1899b, para. 5)

The social function of school was to ensure social class was not perpetuated through the public education system. Instead, students were to grow individually to contribute to the greater good of society through their schooling rather than being separated into classes based on their social status.

Notions of the retarding and reinforcing function of education regarding the stabilization of class roles and benefits of education for the student’s future place in society based on his or her current standing pervade Dewey’s later lectures. Speaking of the necessity for manual training in the schools, Dewey (1899c) remarked, “The necessity of having sympathy with labor,

of doing enough actual work with one's hands so as to know what it means, and appreciate better the lives of those that are thus engaged, perhaps need only be barely mentioned" (para. 16). However, he further reiterated that the rise of industrialization created a "life of leisure" to create culture, and that students and the wider society should understand that "there is no use in trying to erect a superstructure of culture upon a foundation of complete ignorance and lack of sympathy to what is fundamental to life itself" (Dewey, 1899c, para. 17). Without acknowledging workers, work, and the working class within the schools, students would not benefit from the understanding that their privilege emanated from the sacrifice of those working to keep society alive and running. The function of manual training in the schools was not to create apprentices or workers of the future, but to cultivate an appreciation for how society had progressed to its current state. This concept was clearly coopted by big business and its government allies in the first decades of the 20th century, serving as a talking point for Debs, The People's College, and Dewey (see previous section on The People's College, and the next section on Dewey's essays).

Addressing the further potential for stratification of social class, Dewey (1902a) discussed individuality in education. Dewey believed that individuality could "be operative in the function which contributes to social progress" and that it "is simply a question of whether only a few or whether every individual shall be given a positive opportunity to develop his activity so that he may. . .take part in this work of social development" (para. 2). Individuality and traits of individuality could be developed through education, but, once again, Dewey asked whether everyone would be afforded the opportunity to grow through education. The only way to social progress was through education of the whole populace. Asking whether all would be

afforded the opportunity to develop through education, Dewey made clear that he expected all students to be educated for the purpose of social development and positive progress.

Using schooling to adjust to the needs of society, Dewey (1902b) was critical of contemporary efforts to engineer society through education. He explained,

“Adjustment to the needs of civilization,” while conveying a true idea, yet tends to pervert the truth by setting up this civilization as something hard and fixed, outside the individual to be educated; there is overemphasis of authority and control, and underestimation of the play of individuality, of initiative. And this is just because you set up civilization as something there already, and the individual is to be fitted to perform his part in it. (para. 19)

The key to education for change and progress was the development of the individual within a social context. Where a student was allowed to develop his/her critical thinking skills, Dewey believed, successful education took place. Effective education, Dewey (1902b) contended, “[was] devoted to freeing his [the individual’s] own powers, giving him command of himself” (para. 21). Further, an effectively educated individual would be able to change society “simply because he has not been adjusted by somebody else beforehand” (para. 21). Dewey believed in the positive nature of education when training the individual for critical thought, inquiry, and ethical and moral actions.

However, education at the macro level was dictated by policymakers with different aims and filtered at the micro level through teachers to a fraction of the school-age population at the turn of the 20th century.<sup>10</sup> Dewey (1902c) cautioned

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<sup>10</sup> Dewey (1902d) expanded upon this notion of filtered and directed education. “The reconciliation [between the]...apparent opposition between the ideas of self-activity and external direction...lies in the fact that the educator supplies conditions in which the pupil responds, so that his activity is directed indirectly” (para. 9). He continued,

While then the individual must be trained with reference to a social medium, . . . [it should not] suppress his power to introduce variations and therefore transform somewhat the whole social medium. . . [the key is to] form [habits] in such a way that you leave an opening. . . [for] originality of the individual. (para. 12)

Though education should standardize students toward a social goal, Dewey explained that it should not come at the total expense of individual differences and more importantly, individuality.

Ideas of individuality, social progress, ethical and moral education, and responsibility permeated Dewey's lectures on education (and by extension, democracy) during his time at the University of Chicago. Later in the decade, Dewey addressed the NAACP Annual Conference in New York City on May 14, 1910. Discussing "a really perfect system of education," (para. 4)

Dewey (1910) again delineated between traditional and progressive education. He remarked

Our traditional education has been an education of the leisure class, and a great deal of contempt for labor and the contempt for the laboring man has been through the indirect influence in the fact that our whole educational tradition arose and was stimulated and developed by people who thought that leisure—whose meaning of leisure was relief from any useful activity, especially if that activity involved the hands in any way—that type of education was alone worthy of the name of a liberal education. (para. 10)

Dewey (1910) concluded

But the history of the race shows that all great lasting moral and social inspirations have come from the masses, from the depths. . . . I have always noticed, that these people who were always so certain as to what nature intended, are always the least willing to provide

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"The educator's problem here is simply to surround the child with those conditions or that environment which will arouse in him in due proportion the various elements in the natural organic activity" (para. 9).

that degree of freedom of action and equality of opportunity which would really give us a chance to find out the purposes that God had in mind. (para. 11)

Because the function of education traditionally was to transmit knowledge to those deemed worthy of it, and to shape and mold others into what the class in power expected, Dewey explained, traditional education was not efficient or transformative. Instead, it served to perpetuate class and race division. Dewey's hope, promoted in his speech to the NAACP was "that perhaps one of [the] things our colored friends may do for us in the South will be to develop for us, for the first time in the history of the human race, a really perfect system of education" that would "bring completely and accurately together. . .the education of head and hand" (Dewey, 1910, para. 10). Merging vocational and academic education would create a more democratic educational system, targeting all of the student's faculties for critical thinking and growth rather than one or the other.

Dewey furthered this perspective to include class-oriented analysis in a speech on Industrial Education and Democracy, given to the Southeastern Iowa school teachers association on April 3, 1914. Dewey described for the audience a dichotomy predicated on industrialization. Dewey asked, "Are we going to allow our schools to be dominated by purely economic interests, or are we going to be courageous enough to determine that even our industries must be educational in character?" (para. 2). Only through transformative education for the betterment of society would individuals be successful and society more democratic.

In 1917, Dewey made two key speeches on democracy and education. After the publication of *Democracy and Education* in 1916, Dewey embarked on a speaking tour throughout the country. In April 1917, he spoke at the University of Wisconsin, Madison and Beloit College.

On April 18, 1917, Dewey (1917a) addressed the Beloit College Round Table. He warned

Democracy is not an institution that can take care of itself. Above all, democracy is an achievement, and has to be achieved repeatedly with each social, democratic, or economic change. In order for an educational institution to be successful, it must always be ready for the consideration of new ideas. Institutions are not shops for antique ideas. (para. 7)

Dewey characterized democracy as a lifestyle that needed constant reflection to remain successful. A successful society, Dewey related, must be willing to address its undemocratic aspects, with its constituents continually agitating for more influence in dictating the direction of change. Dewey (1917a) placed the blame squarely on industrialization, explaining

The development of industrialism, causing destruction to creativeness and imagination, threatens our democracy. We have carried division and subdivision of labor so far that our originality and independence of mind are being lost. The moment a person ceases to do something new, his education through work has ceased. A slave is the man who carries out the ideas of another person. There is a large slavish element in our population due to industrialism. The problem of education is to take the economic and industrial forces, harness them, and use them positively as agents for the carrying out of constructive policies. (para. 8)

Without the ability to expand the mind through education, democracy was at risk. Workers working for large corporations with no prospect of improving their relative positions within the institution became slaves. They lost their creativity, imagination, and ability to contribute positively to society. Industrialization was neither democracy nor opportunity, it was



exploitation. To counteract the ill effects of industrialization, Dewey saw education's purpose as mediating economic and industrial forces for good.

At his Madison, Wisconsin, appearance the next night, Dewey tackled democracy and expanded on education's role in the development and preservation of democracy. Dewey (1917b) stated, "Democracy is not a fact, not something we now possess by inheritance, it is an ideal. What we need. . . is a great system of social education which will lead the world into the channels of co-operation and democracy" (para. 1). Both Wisconsin speeches, occurring during the backdrop of World War I, which Dewey endorsed as a way to save and promote democracy, explain education's role in the development, furtherance, and safeguarding of democracy as a societal goal and standard.

**Essays.** Throughout Dewey's academic career, he published hundreds of articles, essays, and full-length works on various topics. His joint position at Columbia (in philosophy) and Teacher's College (in education) allowed for crossover of his philosophical ideals and recommendations for application to the educational arena. Spanning 1895 to 1917 for the purposes of this study, Dewey's thoughts, ideas, and perspective illuminate his position on the function of education and its place within society related to class, vocation, and democracy.

Dewey (1895-1898a) explained his stance late in the 19th century with *Ethical Principles Underlying Education*. A roadmap for his later writings, *Ethical Principles* explained, "The moral responsibility of the school, and of those who conduct it, is to society" (p. EW.5.57).<sup>11</sup> Schooling in the United States was a moral action, one that provided society with a better future

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<sup>11</sup> Citations from *The collected works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*, come in the following format as requested by the Center for Dewey Studies at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. The series number "EW" for Early Works, "MW" for Middle Works, is followed by the volume number, and then followed by the page number. For instance, this citation refers to the Early Works, volume 5, page 57. This citation format continues throughout the course of this dissertation.

through an educated citizenry. And, Dewey noted, within United States society, one which he characterized as “a democratic and progressive society,” (Dewey, 1895-1898a, p. EW.5.59) students must cultivate the skills necessary for promotion and protection of democracy and responsibility to society. However, Dewey (1895-1898a) cautioned

New inventions, new machines, new methods of transportation and intercourse are making over the whole scene of action year by year. It is an absolute impossibility to educate the child for any fixed station in life. So far as education is conducted *unconsciously or consciously* on this basis, it results in fitting the future citizen for no station in life, *but makes him a drone, a hanger-on, or an actual retarding influence in the onward movement* [emphasis added]. (p. EW.5.59)

Within the context of Progressive Era education, the school was to serve a transformative function, both developing and perpetuating democracy through moral and ethical channels. One can also see the potential pitfalls of industrialization if the education system was tied directly to producing future workers for the system, drones rather than and educated citizenry cultivated and committed to positively advance United States society.

Furthering his perspective, Dewey (1895-1898b) asserted that schooling should “prepare [the student] for the future life [which] means to train him that he will have full and ready use of all his capacities. . .[and] capable of grasping the conditions under which [he] has to work” (p. EW.5.86). Education, according to Dewey was not for a specific task or role in the future, but for the development of reasoning, perspective, and critical thinking in order to “secure right habits of action and thought, with reference to the good, the true, and the beautiful” (p. EW.5.93) and positively affect society. Education is a transformative experience dedicated to social progress if enacted correctly (and for the right reasons). Dewey went so far as to call education

“the most effective instrument of social progress and reform” (p. EW.5.94). Dewey’s explanation of the underlying ethical principles of education combined with his pedagogic creed shaped his perspective on manual training in the schools and the impact of industrialization on schooling in general.

Dewey reiterated that democracy hinged on schooling and criticized the contemporary public education system as one principally developed to serve the purposes of a democratic society, yet not realizing the goal. Dewey (1903-1906b) exclaimed

When we turn to the aim and method which this magnificent institution [public education] serves, we find that our democracy is not yet conscious of the ethical principle upon which it rests—the responsibility and freedom of mind in discovery and proof—and consequently we find confusion where there should be order, darkness where there should be light. (p. MW.3.230)

Dewey discussed the undemocratic response to this issue, arguing that some reforms, particularly the attempt to fix the school system by placing power with the superintendent or school board, actually curtailed democracy within the school system, with reformers “trying to remedy the evils of democracy [abuse of power and corruption within the schools] by adopting the principle of autocracy” (p. MW.3.231).

Dewey further explained the influence of education. The difference between direct and indirect education, Dewey proposed was the purpose and the methodology of each. Direct education “shape[s] the conditions and direct[s] the influence of school work so that pupils are forever reminded that they are pupils,” while indirect education promoted learning based on “doing and inquiring for its own sake” (Dewey, 1903-1906c, p. MW.3.240). Within a top-down version of education (direct education), students are treated as though their knowledge only

comes from someone or somewhere else. Dewey advocated indirect education, the formulation of tasks and inquiry to encourage learning, which would create ownership of the content, but more importantly, promoted a democratic educational process.

Discussing the class differences inherent in Progressive Era education, Dewey (1903-1906a) delineated between true education and the function of the school system at the turn of the 20th century. “A true education,” Dewey (1903-1906a) wrote, “is a liberal education. . .designed to prepare one to share in the free life of leisure. . . .Its aim is not preparation for living, but for noble living. . . .Such an education keeps itself [far] from everything industrial, utilitarian, professional” (p. MW.3.287). However, Dewey, in an analysis of the school system, concluded “The separation in education between culture and labor, between a liberal and a professional training is the reflex of a more fundamental social difference between a working class and a leisure class” (p. MW.3.287).

The purpose of education, to Dewey’s chagrin, was a function of the class in power dictating and shaping class division and tasks within society. Dewey (1903-1906a) blamed industry and generally the corporate system for shaping education for its own self-serving purposes, explaining, “The education which should develop initiative, thoughtfulness, and executive force would not turn out recruits for our present system” (p. MW.3.288). Dewey concluded

In short, we are engaged in training a comparatively small number for an academic life of leisure and culture; we are engaged in failing to train the great number so that anything but somewhat *passive and dulled participation* in unidealized labor is possible to them; we are permitting a few to train themselves so as to *control the labor of these masses* to their own ends [emphasis added]. It is this which makes me say that the question is not

so much what the schools are to do for industry, as what our industrial system is to do with the schools. (Dewey, 1903-1906a, p. MW.3.289)

Education's purpose was not to prepare and track classes to their perceived roles within society, but rather to educate all for moral purposes. An educational system that created and perpetuated class division "maintain[ed] a double system of education, one sort for cultured leisure called liberal, the other sort for work, called professional" (Dewey, 1903-1906a, p. MW.3.290). Instead, Dewey (1903-1906a) called for a "free and large education which should give [students] a maximum of insight and appreciation" (p. MW.3.290). With an education system built and constructed for "insight and appreciation," Dewey believed that education could create and further democratic change within society.

Stemming from his earlier essay, *Democracy in Education* (Dewey, 1903-1906b) and set forth in *Schools of To-morrow* (Dewey, 1915a), John Dewey's (1916a) *Democracy and Education* was his most thoughtful expression of the relationship between education and democracy during the Progressive Era. Perhaps Dewey's most important quote in *Schools of To-morrow* centered on the education needs of *all* students. Dewey (1915a) argued

If schools are to recognize the needs of all classes of pupils, and give pupils a training that will insure their becoming successful and valuable citizens, they must give work that will not only make the pupils strong physically and morally and give them the right attitude towards the state and their neighbors, but that will as well give them enough control over their material environment to enable them to be economically independent. Preparation for the professions has always been taken care of; it is, as we have seen, the future of the worker in industry which has been neglected. (p. MW.8.400)

Without an adequate educational system focused on the needs of both affluent and working class students, education could not be democratic in nature. Dewey expanded on this view in *Democracy and Education*, published the next year, in 1916 (Dewey, 1916a).

In a letter to friend Horace M. Kallen, Dewey (1916b) wrote, “The Democracy and Education in spite of its title is the closest attempt I have made to sum up my entire philosophical position” (p. 1). In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey devoted considerable attention to the duality of the United States educational system. Within his work, Dewey clearly articulated his views of the democratic possibility of education.

Addressing the ideal function of education during the Progressive Era, Dewey (1916a) believed the purpose of education was to “. . .extract the desirable traits of forms of community life which actually exist, and employ them to criticize undesirable features and suggest improvements” (pp. MW.9.88-MW.9.89). Education’s purpose was to shape society, weeding out its undesirable features, and promoting the desirable traits integral to a smoothly running society. Within the desirable/undesirable context, though, Dewey noted that society was full of undesirable conditions.

Principally, Dewey took issue with the class division within United States society. Common values and virtues must be illuminated and taught within the schools. Dewey (1916a) explained, “All of the members of the group must have an equable opportunity to receive and to take from others. . . .Otherwise, the influences which educate some into masters, educate others into slaves” (p. MW.9.90). Without a commonality, class division would continue and education would serve to enlighten some at the expense of the many. Furthermore, education during this period, as Dewey (and Debs) routinely illustrated, often only furthered the aims of the privileged while perpetuating the separation between the leisure and laboring classes.

On the concept of state education for democracy and equality, Dewey (1916a) asked, “Is it possible for an educational system to be conducted by a national state and yet the full social ends of the educative process not be restricted, constrained, and corrupted” (p. MW.9.104)? Could public education become the great equalizer as so many believed it could? Or would it continue to reinforce roles within society? In his answer, Dewey explained that preventing exploitation was not good enough. Education’s goal was to “secure [for] all the wards of the nation equality of equipment for their future careers” (1916a, p. MW9.104). Within the “equality of equipment” lay not only skills to complete tasks, but also the critical thinking ability to reject the “authoritative control of others” (Dewey, 1916a, p. MW.9.159).

The major impediment to social change and democracy in education was class division. Class division, Dewey (1916a) noted, hampered democracy because “[the division] between rich and poor, men and women, . . . ruler and ruled. . . mean[s] absence of fluent and free intercourse . . . equivalent to the setting up of different types of life-experience, each with isolated subject matter, aim, and standard of values” (p. MW.9.343). Without freedom—of speech and educational opportunity—democracy would remain elusive. Instead, the educational system would continue to create class divisions, preparing some for college and leadership roles while others were tracked into vocational settings based on corporate industrial needs, not the wants of the working class.

In the name of progress and justice, Dewey framed his argument against industrial education much the same as Debs and The People’s College did. Manual training, Dewey (1899-1901) believed, served a twofold purpose in the elementary school. It not only “give[s] play. . . [and] expression to [the child’s] motor instinct,” manual training also would be “a way that the child shall be brought to know the larger aims and processes of living. . . . [Ways]

through which the child may be initiated into the typical problems which require human effort” (pp. MW.1.235-MW.1.236). Through manual training, children would learn how their ancestors created the world around them, and further, gain critical thinking skills toward production and the realization of goals creating functional citizens oriented toward individual success within a community and the larger society.

Moving specifically to industrial training between 1912 and 1917, just before the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, Dewey explained his position toward industrial education in the public schools. Though public training for future jobs within industry in the schools should serve as way to keep students in school that otherwise would have left, Dewey referenced the Gary System, and shifts in public education in Chicago and Cincinnati to keep students in school longer (Dewey, 1912-1914b, p. MW.7.96), he did not believe schools should serve the purpose of industry. Dewey (1912-1914b) cited industrial innovation as a reason to develop an education “whose chief purpose is to develop initiative and personal resources of intelligence” (pp. MW.7.96-MW.7.97). Instead of preparing future laborers for specific jobs and thus limiting them to one tract, Dewey proposed an approach that would develop critical thinking skills within the world of work rather than “a separate industrial education sharply [divided] from general education. . .to mark off to the interests of employers a separate class of laborers” (Dewey, 1912-1914c, p. MW.7.99). Dewey’s (1912-1914c) vision for students entering the workforce was a “general education which fits them not only to find a better paying job, but a line of occupation suited to their own capacities and one in which this is a future for growth” (p. MW.7.98). Preparation for work after school was not the issue, educating the individual to make informed choices within society after school was Dewey’s expectation.



On the topic of industrial education, Dewey wrote even more forcefully against a dual system of education. Dewey's reasoning for a well-rounded education for future laborers coalesced with Debs's. Dewey (1912-1914c) explained, "The young workman who understands his trade in its scientific relations, its historical, economic and social bearings, will take a higher view of his trade, of his powers and duties as a citizen, and as a member of society" (p. MW.7.101). Developing class-consciousness through education would create a better and more democratic society with fuller participation of all the classes. Dewey railed against employers pushing for narrow views of education for the working class, urging reformers to "be united against every proposition, in whatever form advanced, to separate training of employees from training for citizenship, training of intelligence and character from training for narrow industrial efficiency" (Dewey, 1912-1914c, p. MW.7.102). Addressing the debate between incorporating industrial education into the public schools versus a dual differentiated system, Dewey called for a strong public school system educating the whole child without doing the bidding of corporate interests.

Dewey called for a democratic shift in education, from the social perspective of education. Dewey (1912-1914a) bluntly stated, "The social perspective of education does not involve a superficial adaptation of the existing system but a radical change in foundation and aim: a revolution" (pp. MW.7.119-MW.7.120). Dewey proposed an education system that linked work to intellectual curiosity, elevating it from the depths of the lower class to a revered institution, and enabling education for both the leisure and working classes, not as just a privilege for families with the means to send their students to high school and college, but as a positive force for all (Dewey, 1912-1914a, p. MW.7.120). Later in 1915, Dewey placed the potential dual education system in democratic terms, stating, "It is for the average citizen who

retains his belief in democracy and in the duty of the public school to educate for a still better democracy to decide” (Dewey, 1915b, p. MW.8.127) whether vocational education should serve the purposes of industry at the expense of the whole child. Clearly, a dual education system set up to perpetuate class differences did not foster democracy.

Dewey did not disagree with industrial education; however, he believed that industrial education should remain within the public school system as one part of the whole educational system. Once again, he determined that equality of opportunity and the potential for individual growth defined a democratic society. In a social democracy, Dewey (1916-1917e) explained, “There is a wide and varied distribution of opportunities; . . .[a] social mobility or scope for change of position and station; . . .[a] free circulation of experiences and ideas” (p. MW.10.138). The Progressive Era educational reform potential to split the education system to perform the function of both industry and college preparation did not sit well with Dewey. He (1916-1917e) concluded, “To make it a separate system, . . .having different aims and methods from those of the established public-school system, is to invite the promotion of a narrow trade system” (p. MW.10.143). Having a separate industrial education system would not create a better society.

Dewey continued his critique of industrial education, insisting that a dual system would “emphasize those things which emphasize duties to the established order and a blind patriotism which accounts it a great privilege to defend things in which the workers themselves have little or no share” (Dewey, 1916-1917b, p. MW.10.148). A more humane and human way to prepare students for futures within industry would be to “give all pupils a genuine respect for useful work” (p. MW.10.149) and

secur[e] industrial intelligence—a knowledge of the conditions and processes of present manufacturing, transportation, and commerce—so that the individual may be able to

make his own choices and his own adjustments, and be master, so far as in him lies, of his own economic fate. (Dewey, 1916-1917b, p. MW.10.149)

Students becoming masters of their own economic fate coalesced with Dewey's view that they should have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for success and equal opportunity in a democratic society (Dewey, 1916-1917d, p. MW.10.208).

Dewey believed a democratic society rested on the efficacy of the public school system. The function of the public schools within a democratic context was not to prepare students for their future status in society based on their class associations, but rather, to develop cooperative, collaborative, and critical skills necessary for progressing society in a positive direction. The industrial education system should not prepare students for particular jobs, it should raise consciousness, revere labor, and offer opportunities for students to determine their futures through equal opportunity. Most striking is Dewey's attitude toward industrial education and the dual system proposed in the early 20th century. His perspective of the corporate influence in industrial education clearly aligned with that of Debs and the leaders of The People's College; however, he did not advocate a worker-centered, anti-capitalist curriculum or approach to public schooling.

## **Summary**

### **Democracy and Education in the Progressive Era**

Debs and The People's College praised the virtue of the worker and the college as the avenue toward liberation from the master class. Taking courses in "Plain English," law, bookkeeping, shorthand, and other functional activities gave workers the opportunity to raise their standard of living and promote higher paying jobs. While the rhetoric was revolutionary,

the function of The People's College was to help workers assimilate into the current system through instruction from a college "For the workers by the workers."

However, though W. E. Williams (1915) asserted that the People's College was an adversary of the public school system, he also promoted the idea that teachers taught through The People's College from the working class perspective, could eventually reform the public school system. Sheppard believed workers should learn law to gain concessions and fair treatment during strikes, and Debs wrote with a positivistic bent that, "[The] People's College . . . is fundamentally democratic, and marks the awakening of the masses to the necessity of . . . educating themselves, with the one supreme object of getting at the truth in all things" (Debs, 1916b, p. 570). Williams, Sheppard, and Debs all advocated revolution in education but The People's College served to create a space within the mainstream for working class education, focusing on functional skills useful to workers in their current situations. For a party bent on social revolution, The People's College had mainly mainstream results, if any, as quantifiable evidence, save from student testimonials in *The People's College News* could not be procured.

Dewey's ideas on education and democracy remained static but fluid. As a pragmatist, Dewey attempted to illustrate the positive potential of education and democracy within the mainstream. His philosophy of hope and ethical treatment sought to create change through changing perspective and ideology, which would ultimately positively affect society. Both Dewey and Debs would be considered on the political left during this period, as Westbrook (2005) explained, "Dewey. . . was such a peculiar socialist. . . [and] had much in common with Eugene Debs, the greatest—and most thoroughly American—of American socialists" (p. 98). Indeed, Dewey and Debs had distinct similarities concerning the function of education.

## CHAPTER 5

## FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The difference between Debs and Dewey, at the base, is that Debs and those involved in The People's College believed socialist education was the only way to fix the ills of society, and the state of public schools did not allow for a socialist perspective. Instead, workers were to educate themselves and infiltrate the public schools, wresting them from capitalist control. Dewey wanted to use and shape the present educational system to remedy society's ills.

While he acknowledged the moneyed interest behind education, Dewey thought more positively about the future of public education. Dewey insisted a communal approach was taken toward education and that its ethical and moral function was to democratically prepare students for productive futures within society, whatever they might have been. Although Dewey (1895-1898b) remarked that

Education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living. . . .The best and deepest moral training is precisely that which one gets through having to enter into proper relations with others in a unity of work and thought. (pp. EW.5.87-EW.5.88)

The function of public education, according to Dewey, was as a social institution that allowed students to prepare for life and grow intellectually within a communal environment based on interaction and living, rather than recitation and boredom. Further, Dewey saw the education

system as a means to creating democracy, though it had to be linked with society rather than removed from the events and actions of the past and present (Dewey, 1896a).

More importantly, though, were Debs's and Dewey's views on democracy and education. Debs believed democracy and cooperation within the working class would result in a better society and a more socially just educational system. Dewey, meanwhile, believed that the public education system's function was to act as a democracy *promoter*, where students would learn how to work cooperatively for success beyond their schooling within a civilized society.

Both Debs and Dewey wanted to restructure and reform society in an egalitarian manner. Debs wanted to work from the fringes in, training socialists to see "truth" from the working class viewpoint and urging them to action in local school board elections, a radical perspective consisting of overthrowing the power of the master class. Meanwhile, Dewey worked from the inside out through adoption of his principles by the existing public education system in an attempt to positively affect societal change, a liberal perspective inclusive of competing interests to create a positive change.

The corporate influence that Debs, The People's College, and Dewey protested persists in the present educational reform context. One hundred years separates the rhetoric, but the general idea of what to teach, to whom, and how to teach it continues. However, in recent times, the push to privatization, particularly at the expense of public education, parallels issues developed and discussed by Debs, Dewey, and leaders of The People's College. Recent debates have again exposed the for-profit motive behind educational reform (Apple, 2012; Ravitch, 2013; Schneider, 2014a). Apple (2012) explained how privatizers have misappropriated choice to fund for-profit educational reform, specifically charter schools and school vouchers, at the expense of public schools. Ravitch (2013) and Schneider (2014a) made similar claims pertaining to the profit

motive underlying charter school expansion, assaults on teacher unions and the tenure process, and the current educational reform culture led by venture capitalists with an eye on profit veiled with rhetoric based on accountability and student achievement.

Through an analysis of the intersections between Debs and Dewey and drawing of parallels between the Progressive Era and the present day, current educational practices can be informed for a better educational future. Revisiting the research questions through the evidence collected and presented in Chapter 4 leads to conclusions and implications useful when applied to the current context of educational reform. Viewing the present context within the prism of the Progressive Era, the rhetoric of educational reform in both eras bears striking similarities. Because the same questions arise regarding educational reform, reformers have continually attempted to revise a system that serves not to propel society toward a more democratic goal but to reinforce the status quo and the class divisions that exist within the United States today.

The research questions addressed throughout this dissertation consisted of three queries concerning educational reform rhetoric in the Progressive Era, Debs's and Dewey's views on education and democracy during the Progressive Era, and a final question based on how best to incorporate Debs's and Dewey's views into current educational practices. For the benefit of the reader, the research questions appear below, followed by an in-depth response to each. Sections pertaining to current educational reform events and rhetoric follow the research questions, culminating with a brief discussion and summary to end the study.

### **Research Questions Revisited**

The following research questions guided this study on the similarities between Progressive Era educational reform rhetoric and the current educational reform context.

1. In relationship to education of the populace, what intersections existed between Eugene Debs's social vision and John Dewey's philosophical perspective on education as influenced by, and as a product of, democracy and society in the Progressive Era?
  - a. What evidence exists, if any, of direct interactions between Debs and Dewey that support a dialectical relationship between their visions and philosophical perspectives?
  - b. What evidence exists, if any, in documentation independent of direct interactions between Debs and Dewey that support a dialectical relationship between their visions and philosophical perspectives?
  - c. If a dialectical relationship is found, what parameters can be deduced to explain the nature of that dialectical relationship?
2. What parallels to the Progressive Era exist in the current social, political, economic, and educational milieus in view of the social vision held by Debs and the philosophical perspectives held by Dewey?
3. In what ways might Debs's and Dewey's visions and perspectives inform educational practices in the current era?

### **Intersections Between Debs and Dewey**

Though no overt intersections were discovered during this case study, as popular figures in the Progressive Era, Debs and Dewey must have known of each other. Martin (2002) discussed Dewey's correspondence with his wife Alice about the Pullman Strike early in his career at the University of Chicago. Dewey specifically mentioned Debs in relation to the labor struggle, identifying with the action; however, no correspondence between Debs and Dewey or accounts of them meeting in person was found. Debs did not discuss Dewey in his



correspondence, but The People's College did quote Dewey and recommended both *Schools of To-morrow* and *Democracy and Education* to readers of *The People's College News*.

As shown in Chapter 4, Debs, leaders of The People's College, and Dewey all believed in the transformative potential of education. As illustrated in his several works,<sup>12</sup> Dewey wrote more generally about the potential pitfalls of an unjust educational system, while Debs and leaders of The People's College specifically addressed the perceived injustice of the Progressive Era socially, politically, and economically and the role that the educational system played in the perpetuation of capitalist exploitation.<sup>13</sup> Debs and leaders of The People's College suggested the working class take control of the educational system to serve the interest of the masses;<sup>14</sup> though Dewey did not advocate a takeover, he instead insisted on the democratic function and purpose of the public education system.<sup>15</sup>

Debs and Dewey both identified as socialists. Dewey enjoyed an academic existence where he was able to produce scholarship that shaped educational reform in the Progressive Era. Though Debs did not have the same success, in numerous instances, his views toward education aligned with Dewey's.

Consider Debs's perspective of higher education. In *The American University and the Labor Problem*, Debs explained that the American University would have to change to consider the working class perspective. Debs (1896) wrote

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<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 4, specifically Dewey, 1895-1898a, 1896a, 1903-1906b, 1910, 1912-1914c, 1915b, 1916a, 1916-1917b.

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 4, specifically Debs, 1896, 1915a, 1915c, 1915d, 1916b, 1916c, 1916d, 1917a; Le Sueur, 1914; Le Sueur & Wharton, 1914a, 1914b, 1914c, 1915a, 1916.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 4, specifically Debs, 1915a, 1915b, 1915c, 1915d, 1916b; Le Sueur & Wharton, 1914a, 1914b, 1915a, 1916.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 4, specifically Dewey, 1895-1898a, 1902a, 1902b, 1902c, 1902d, 1903-1906b, 1910, 1915b, 1916a, 1917a, 1917b.

The American university, if it would do [its] share in solving “the great labor problem,” would be required to attack the corrupting power of money wielded by corporations, trusts and syndicates, as also the American aristocracy, whether built upon coal oil or codfish, watered stocks, banks, bullion or boodle. . . .It [the American university] would be required to employ professors to lecture upon the degrading influences of starvation wages, which darken ten thousand American homes. It would be confronted with the exiling power of labor-saving machinery, which is filling the land with armies of enforced idlers which thoughtful men regard as dangerous and threatening the perpetuity of our republican institutions. It would have to array itself against a corrupt judiciary and hold it up as a target for the maledictions of liberty-loving Americans. (as cited in Tussey, 1970, pp. 58-59)

Debs’s view of capital’s influence on the American university and the threat it posed to democracy coincided with Dewey’s. Dewey (1916-1917b) characterized the objective of colleges in the second decade of the 20th century as

More and more shaped by reference to the needs and interests of the professional schools. The college tends to become more and more a preparatory professional school—and even where the tendency has not gone far it is possible, I think, to detect “the more and more” of the present situation as compared with a former one. (p. MW.10.151)

Dewey acknowledged the trend of colleges and universities (under outside influence) to prepare students for a predetermined place within society. Though Dewey did not link professional preparation to an immoral economic system as Debs (1896) had, he noted the influence of outside pressure.

The link between Debs and Dewey becomes even more evident in their assessments of the state of public education and its democratic function. Dewey (1903-1906a) first evaluated the influence of industry on public education. He wrote

If there is to be any result save blind conformity, passive reproduction, it must proceed from facing the overlordship of industry in modern life, with all that it imports. The question as respects education is how the school is to secure the good and avoid the ill of this sovereignty; how it may select and perpetuate what in it is significant and worthy, and may reject and expel what is degrading and enslaving. (Dewey, 1903-1906a, p. MW.3.286)

Debs (1917a), ten years later exclaimed

The capitalist does not become the industrial captain by the use of his own head and his own hands. Oh, no, he uses the hands of an army of others who have no heads of their own, or have so long neglected them that all they are fit for is to light the way of their hands to and from their slavish tasks. (p. 2)

Dewey (1912-1914b) warned that not accounting for industrial influence in education would create a differentiated system based on predestination along class lines and leading to a situation where students become enslaved. Debs (1917a), addressing industry, described how capitalists manipulated the working class, turning them into slaves. Dewey (1903-1906a) continued,

The education which should develop initiative, thoughtfulness and executive force would not turn out recruits for our present system. And, if we are honest, we know that it is not intended that these shall be turned out in numbers except such as may be required to take charge of running the machinery to which the masses are subordinate. (p. MW.3.289)

Dewey held the same perspective as Debs that the education system only served to perpetuate class relationships of the leisure class versus the laboring class. Debs (1916c) described free education as

The development of the mind, the training of the faculties, the cultivation of the sciences and arts, the triumph of truth, the enthronement of justice, and the freedom and happiness of the people. Precisely for this reason education has been zealously guarded by the privileged parasites who have ruled in every age and nation since society was first organized, and whose salvation as a class depends upon keeping their subjects in their mental childhood. (p. 1)

Debs's and Dewey's views congealed. Dewey flatly articulated that education served to continue the cycle of workers prepared to work for someone else. Meanwhile, Debs conveyed the same sentiment. Dewey's discussion of the "present system" directly aligned with Debs's statement that the upper class withheld education from the lower class to ensure working class obedience and capitalist class dominance.

Concerning democracy and education, Dewey (1903-1906b) asked

What does democracy mean save that the individual is to have a share in determining the conditions and the aims of his own work; and that, upon the whole, through the free and mutual harmonizing of different individuals, the work of the world is better done than when planned, arranged, and directed by a few, no matter how wise or of how good intent that few? How can we justify our belief in the democratic principle elsewhere, and then go back entirely upon it when we come to education? (p. MW.3.233)

Along the same lines, Debs (1916c) stated

The public school of today was resisted to the last by the privileged few. It is called a free school but it is not free. It is controlled by the same capitalist class which controls the government under which we live and all other social institutions. . . .There is a world of mis-education going on today in the name of education. . . . (pp. 1-2)

Both Debs and Dewey agreed that the function of education within their society was to continue class distinctions and divisions rather than meliorate social ills. This aligns with Freire's (1970/2005) banking concept of education, in which students are taught by teachers in a proscribed manner through an unequal relationship of knowledge receiver and knowledge provider.<sup>16</sup> Instead, Debs and Dewey called for a freer form of education to prepare all for a better future.

A final illustration of the similarities between Debs and Dewey comes in relation to their respective visions for education. Dewey envisioned education as a social endeavor, not just between students, but also for the benefit of society. Dewey (1915a) stated

Responsibility for the conduct of society and government rests on every member of society. Therefore, every one must receive a training that will enable him to meet this responsibility, giving him just ideas of the condition and needs of the people collectively, and developing those qualities which will insure his doing a fair share of the work of government. (p. MW.8.398)

Debs explained education in similar terms. Writing in *The People's College News*, Debs (1916c) maintained:

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<sup>16</sup> Freire (1970/2005) explained the banking concept of education in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He maintained, "Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. . . .The scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits" (p. 72). Freire concluded, "In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. . . .Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others. . .negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry" (p. 72).

The workers who are educated in their own schools and colleges learn to know the truth, the whole truth, so far as it may be known, without any reservation whatsoever; they maintain their self-respect, realize their duty to their fellows, and start out in life to serve those less fortunate than themselves instead of preying upon their ignorance and misery. (p. 2)

Dewey and Debs believed education could create positive change. Dewey believed public education system reform could include the masses,<sup>17</sup> while Debs advocated the creation of working class schools and colleges to educate from a working class viewpoint.<sup>18</sup> Though their solutions differed somewhat, Debs and Dewey shared the similar belief that education was being used as a tool to exploit the masses. Dewey (1916a) cautioned against the potential for exploitation while Debs (1915a) argued that the system under capitalist control already exploited the working class.

Though Debs and Dewey had no overt interactions, their views toward the function of education and its purpose within the capitalist system aligned. As they both came from the socialist perspective, it is not surprising that they held similar views toward public education. However, that Debs had any in-depth views toward education is surprising as previous research (Constantine, 1990a, 1990b; Freeberg, 2008; Ginger, 1949; Salvatore, 1982; Westbrook, 2005) focused mainly on Debs's labor and political career and influence. Linking Debs to Dewey underscores the perspective that similar ends of the socialist spectrum came together, albeit unknowingly, to call for change to the public education system during the Progressive Era. Though Dewey generally spoke about the pitfalls of an educational system that educated some at

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<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 4, specifically Dewey, 1903-1906b, 1912-1914a, 1915a, 1915b, 1916a.

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter 4, specifically Debs, 1914a, 1915a, 1915d, 1916b, 1916d.

the expense of the many,<sup>19</sup> Debs and leaders of The People's College specifically labeled the United States public education system as the tool of the rich to exploit, oppress, and indoctrinate the working class.<sup>20</sup> Dewey's standing and stature as an academic helped him shape educational reform, however; it is his similarity to Debs's perspectives that illustrates the truly radical nature of their views throughout the early-20th century.

### **Contemporary Parallels to the Progressive Era**

As Debs and Dewey lived more than 100 years ago and both were public figures shaped and molded by the events of their time (i.e. industrialization, big business, an expanding economy, a substantial wealth gap between rich and poor), one might be hard-pressed to draw parallels between the Progressive Era and the current social, political, economic, and educational milieu. However, by drawing parallels between the Progressive Era and today, we can apply their views specifically toward educational reform to the current context. Subsequent theorists have acknowledged the same issues of exploitation within the capitalist function of education throughout the 20th and into the 21st centuries. For now, comparing the Progressive Era to the current context allows for analysis, conclusions, and further implications for teaching and learning in the 21st century.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Progressive Era was a time of immense change and reformist spirit. Social, political, economic, and educational reformers sought to enhance society while taking into account the rise of industrialization, an influx of immigrants, and a nascent public education system that would guide and shape future generations of United States citizens (Bankston & Caldas, 2009; Bowles & Gintis, 1976/2011; Callahan, 1962; Chace, 2005; Fraser,

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<sup>19</sup> See Chapter 4, specifically Dewey, 1903-1906b, 1912-1914b, 1915b, 1916a.

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 4, specifically Debs, 1914a, 1915a, 1915d, 1916b, 1916d; Le Sueur, 1914; Le Sueur & Wharton, 1914a, 1914b, 1914c, 1915a, 1916b.

2001; Kliebard, 2004; Ravitch, 2000). Similarities between the Progressive Era and today abound.

Socially speaking, the Progressive Era and today have similar percentages of the population of high school age. In 1910, 15 to 24 year-olds made up 19.7% of the total population (United States Census Bureau [USCB], 1999, p. 869). Likewise, according to the USCB (2014), 5 to 18 year olds comprised 23.3% of the total population (Figure 1). Though the statistical categories differ due to census category revisions throughout the 20th century, both the Progressive Era and the current era have similar populations of school-age citizens.

Concerning immigration, itself a social issue present in the Progressive Era and the current context, census statistics illustrate another parallel. Though the country of origin has changed throughout the 20th and into the 21st centuries, persons of foreign birth constituted approximately 14.7% of the total population in 1910 (USCB, 1999, p. 872)<sup>21</sup> and 12.9% of the total population in 2013 (USCB, 2014, Figure 1). Total immigration statistics today parallel those of the Progressive Era.

Chace (2005) characterized the election of 1912 as a turning point in American history. He stated, “In its essence, 1912 introduced a conflict between progressive idealism...and conservative values” (Chace, 2005, p. 8). Issues present in the midst of the Progressive Era consisted of

The recent influx of new immigrants. . .The issue of woman suffrage, the safeguarding of the right of black Americans to vote, and the need to end child labor and to regulate factory hours and conditions went to the very heart of the promise of American democracy. Above all, there was the question of how to curb the excesses of big

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<sup>21</sup> To determine the percentage of total population, I divided the number of foreign born in 1910 (13,516,000) by the total population in 1910 (91,972,000) and multiplied by 100 to create a percentage (14.69%).



business, symbolized by the great trusts, which had accompanied the rise of industrial capitalism. (Chace, 2005, p. 7)

As politics mirror social and economic conditions, 1912 serves as an illustrative juxtaposition to the current political scene. The year 2012, also an election year, saw similar political issues discussed including the potential failure and subsequent bailout of big banks and big business, job growth and opportunities, and fairer treatment of the working and middle class in relation to industries within the economy that rebounded after the Great Recession of 2007 to 2009 (Casselmann & Flowers, 2014).

Economic conditions present during the Progressive Era rival those of today. A report produced for the United States Census bureau concluded that between 2000 and 2011

experiences of households varied widely depending on their net worth quintile. . . .

Median household net worth decreased by \$5,124 for households in the first (bottom) net worth quintile, \$7,056 (or 49.3 percent) for the second quintile, and \$5,072 (or 6.9 percent) for the third quintile. Median Household net worth increased by \$18,433 (or 9.8 percent) for households in the fourth quintile, and by \$61,379 (or 10.8 percent) for households in the highest (top) quintile. . . . (Vornovitsky, Gottschalck, & Smith, n.d., p. 2)

Further, according to Piketty and Saez (2003), “Wage inequality increased considerably since the 1970s. . .[and] the decline of progressive taxation observed since the early 1980s in the United States could very well spur a revival of high wealth concentration. . .during the next few decades” (p. 37). In a follow up analysis published recently, in October 2014, Saez and Zucman wrote,

Our results show that while the share of wealth of the bottom 90 percent of families did gradually increase from 15 percent in the 1920s to a peak of 36 percent in the mid-1980s, it then dramatically declined. By 2012, the bottom 90 percent collectively owns only 23 percent of total U.S. wealth, about as much as in 1940. . . . (pp. 2-3)

Though the bottom 90% of families in the United States have a higher ratio of wealth compared to their Progressive Era counterparts (23% in 2012 versus approximately 20% in 1917),<sup>22</sup> the top 0.1% of families own approximately the same amount of wealth (23%) as they did in 1913, which rivals the bottom 90% of families in the United States (Saez & Zucman, 2014, p. 2).<sup>23</sup>

From an educational reform standpoint, in the present day, Kliebard's (2004) reform categories (defined at the end of Chapter 1) have remained remarkably consistent. Intellectual traditionalists/humanists have continued to focus on content acquisition. Rather than continually promote a separate subject-centered curriculum, they have joined forces with the social efficiency reformers to create the *Common Core State Standards for College and Career Readiness* (Schneider, 2014a). Developing students for their roles in either college or career smacks of the predestination associated with social efficiency reformers of the Progressive Era. Linking new systematized standards complete with suggestions for a scripted curriculum teacher-proofs teaching and focuses on the students' future in United States society as a reaction to the perceived failing education system (whether in college or career). Disruptive reform proponents such as Eli Broad, Arne Duncan, Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, and others have

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<sup>22</sup> See Figure 2, p. 3 in Saez, E., & Zucman, G. (2014). *Exploding wealth inequality in the United States* (Washington Center for Equitable Growth Brief). Retrieved from Washington Center for Equitable Growth Website: <http://ms.techprogress.org/ms-content/uploads/sites/10/2014/10/102014-wealth-brief.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> See Figure 1, p. 2 in Saez, E., & Zucman, G. (2014). *Exploding wealth inequality in the United States* (Washington Center for Equitable Growth Brief). Retrieved from Washington Center for Equitable Growth Website: <http://ms.techprogress.org/ms-content/uploads/sites/10/2014/10/102014-wealth-brief.pdf>

called for more rigorous standards in an attempt to bring the United States in line with its global counterparts on the education scene (Altman, 2014; Schneider, 2014a).

Experientialists/developmentalists have continued to push a constructivist perspective to educational reform. However, within the current educational reform climate, while a constructivist approach is advocated, standardized high-stakes assessment has ensured that most teaching and learning takes place to justify school accountability grades rather than educating the whole child. This leads to a de-skilled child capable of answering questions on a test but not applying knowledge in authentic ways (Ravitch, 2014b).

Social meliorists have combined perspectives with the reconceptualists (essentially critical theorists and postmodernists) to take a critical view of current educational reform. With the push for standardized prescribed academic outcomes (standards), curriculum, and assessment, public education breeds passivity, which cannot create a skilled democratic citizenry capable of critical thinking within a democracy. In the past 20 to 30 years, critical theorists have expanded beyond reproduction theory to include social and cultural capital in the conversation of education's purpose while including perspectives on gender and other marginalized students within the public education system (Cannella & Lincoln, 2011). Critical theorists perceive the current educational system as a place that provides little opportunity for critical thinking and problem solving (Apple, 2012; Bowles & Gintis, 1976/2011). While critical thinking and problem-solving are pushed in schools as components of educational reform, the critical thinking and problem-solving necessary for students comes within the context of what is being taught. Simply put, rather than asking, "Why is this being taught?" students are taught skills critical for solving problems and completing tasks created for them as a tool to create "critical thinkers"

within a business development model for corporate and economic purposes (Apple, 2012; Bowles & Gintis, 1976/2011; Willis, 1981).

Because social, political, economic, and educational conditions remain similar to the Progressive Era, what Debs and Dewey wrote about the state of education and by extension, the state of society in the early-20th century, can be applied to the current educational context. Public schools, and more recently, the rise of private charter schools have still perpetuated a two-class educational system of privilege (Russom, 2012). Considering that wealth has continued to concentrate in the hands of the few (Piketty & Saez, 2003; Saez & Zucman, 2014), Debs's (1915a) quote in *The National Rip-Saw* regarding education still resonates when he explained

The whole theory of education has been and is to give the favored few "advantages" over the less fortunate many; to enable the few to rule and exploit the many and to wax fat and idleness and luxury at the price of their slavery and misery. . . .The chief purpose of education has always been to maintain class rule, to keep the many at the mercy of the few, and to clothe idleness in robes and industry in rags. (p. 20)

Dewey (1916a), in agreement explained,

It is not enough to see to it that education is not actively used as an instrument to make easier the exploitation of one class by another....The democratic ideal of education is a farcical yet tragic delusion except as the ideal more and more dominates our public system of education. (p. MW.9.104)

A social, political, economic, and educational system based on capital growth and competition, whether between and among students in the United States or on a global scale, cannot in any century, affect positive democratic and social change according to Debs (1915a) and Dewey

(1916a) in the early-20th century and applied to current educational reform rhetoric and practices.

### **Informing Current Educational Practices**

It is safe to maintain that Debs and Dewey would disapprove of the current state of educational reform. Both Debs and Dewey repeatedly called for a publicly funded and utilized education system to shape and better society. Particularly concerning the current rise of accountability measures to ensure teaching and learning takes place, Debs and Dewey would bristle at the thought of standardized tests dictating school funding, student success, and teacher retention. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1916a) commented

If a pupil learns things from books simply in connection with school lessons and for the sake of reciting what he has learned when called upon, then knowledge will have effect upon some conduct—namely upon that of reproducing statements at the demand of others. There is nothing surprising that such “knowledge” should not have much influence on the life out of school. (p. MW.9.366)

Consistent with Dewey’s perspective, Debs (1915c) explained

The reason the workers of this and every other nation on earth are not in open revolt against the system that robs them is that the beneficiaries of capitalism control every avenue of information and education from the cradle to the grave. In schools, both public and private, the child of the worker is taught to revere the institutions of capitalism. Six days in the week, through the school, the press, and the spoken word, a perfect deluge of capitalist philosophy and hypocrisy is poured upon the innocent and plastic mind of the child of the worker. (p. 3)

Dewey believed a form of education based on memorization and task completion would reproduce unequal social conditions. Debs maintained that the public education system served as a way to indoctrinate United States citizens.

Debs and Dewey would not approve of the push toward privatization or the institution of privately and corporately funded educational standards. Instead of educating students to think about, critically examine, and participate in the wider world (Dewey, 1915b), the Common Core State Standards are attempting to reform the public education system to produce graduates ready for college and career. As Debs (1915d) wrote

The smattering of so-called education they receive in the schools controlled by their masters is artfully adapted to their condition and not calculated either to arouse discontent with their lot or prompt them to question the rightful supremacy of the “upper class.”  
(para. 2)

One can also see the similarities between Debs’s (1915d) views toward John D. Rockefeller’s interest in education, which he maintained served “the purpose of controlling educational influences in a way to keep the rich and poor respectively where they are” (para. 3), and contemporary critiques of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s funding of the Common Core State Standards. Regarding Gates’s influence in the Common Core, Layton (2014) explained

Gates has said that one of the benefits of common standards would be to open the classroom to digital learning, making it easier for software developers — including Microsoft — to develop new products for the country’s 15,000 school districts.

In February, Microsoft announced that it was joining Pearson, the world’s largest educational publisher, to load Pearson’s Common Core classroom materials on Microsoft’s tablet, the Surface. That product allows Microsoft to compete for school

district spending with Apple, whose iPad is the dominant tablet in classrooms. (paras. 84-85)

In an opinion against a dual system of industrial and academic vocation, Dewey (1912-1914b) argued, “Every ground of public policy protests against any use of the public school system which takes for granted the perpetuity of the existing industrial régime, and whose inevitable effect is to perpetuate it, with. . .its antagonisms of. . .producer and consumer” (p. MW.7.95). Applying Dewey’s and Debs’s arguments to the 21st century, they would not support Bill Gates’s intrusion into public education.

Debs’s and Dewey’s vision and perspectives can inform educational practices in the current era. However, educational practices will likely be changed on the grassroots level given past realities and current pushes toward privatization by the Obama Administration with the help of wealthy elites looking to profit from privatized educational reform (Ravitch, 2013; Russom, 2012; Schneider, 2014a). Already, teachers in Chicago and Seattle have fought back against perceived inequality within funding and standardized assessment (Hagopian, 2013). Parents and teachers are coming together across the country to voice their displeasure with the new assessments aligned with the Common Core State Standards. In New York State, a rally against standardized testing drew approximately 2,500 attendees in October, 2013 (Anderson, 2013) and “between 55,000 and 65,000 students were opted out of the 2014 New York Common Core tests by their parents” (Burris & Tanis, 2014, para. 17). States and governors are taking notice. Though many still remain committed to the Common Core, in March 2014, Indiana became the first state to formally opt out of the Common Core State Standards (Nicks, 2014). To continue in the vein of Debs and Dewey, the public education system must “vigorously [promote] personal development and social equality” (Bowles & Gintis, 1976/2011, p. 265).

## Conclusions

The same issues from the Progressive Era remain unresolved. Notions of what to teach, how, and to whom have continually evolved throughout the century between the Progressive Era and today. As a response to economic and social factors, public education during the early- to mid-20th century expanded to include vocational education (Smith-Hughes Act, as cited in Hillesheim & Merrill, 1971), a behavioral approach in the 1940s (Tyler, 1949/1969), a cognitive approach based on behavioral outcomes in the 1950s (Bloom's Taxonomy, 1956), and finally became framed as a national security issue during the early years of the Cold War (Rickover, as cited in Kliebard, 2004, p. 266). Throughout the later-20th century, public education became more inclusive in the 1960s, retrenched itself in the 1970s, once again became a national crisis in the 1980s with *A Nation at Risk* (as cited in Fraser, 2001) and entered a phase of neoliberal reform with the beginning and rise of charter schools starting in the early-1990s (Marshall, Sears, Allen, Roberts, & Schubert, 2007; Pinar et al., 1995). Into the 21st century, the struggle surrounding the purpose of public education is framed as a social, political, and economic issue, as a way to improve the state of society as the great equalizer with best practices centering on standards and accountability reform in an environment conducive to privatization efforts.

Within the Progressive Era, Debs and Dewey must be located in the educational reform movement. Both Debs and Dewey viewed education as an important intellectual and transformative opportunity. Dewey cautioned against the potential for class exploitation within the public education system while Debs believed exploitation was already underway in the United States. Dewey believed the public education system could be reformed to produce a more democratic society, though he identified inequality within the public education system, particularly within the oft-discussed dual system of academic education and vocational education



(Dewey, 1902a, 1916a). Debs believed that the public education system served as a propaganda machine for the master class. He and those associated with The People's College called for the working class to take control of their education to promote socialist truth and equality of opportunity (Debs, 1915c, 1915d; Le Sueur & Wharton, 1915d).

Debs and Dewey held similar views of the function of education. Both wanted to reform the system to create positive social change. Debs's solution went mostly unheard as *The People's College News* and The People's College only lasted for four years and had approximately 4,000 subscribers and students (Constantine, 1990b). However, to discount Debs in the educational reform arena would do a disservice to the working class perspective of education. Indeed, though Dewey enjoyed a more public career in the academic and educational reform realm (Kliebard, 2004; Martin, 2002), his views, though more general than Debs's and focused on the positive aspects and potential of the public education system, generally aligned with Debs's and leaders of The People's College's assertions pertaining to the function of public education in the Progressive Era.

### **Implications**

A major benefit of historical analysis is the ability to determine how others tackled serious issues within their contemporary context with the added advantage of hindsight. Posner (2004) explained that the hidden curriculum is "not generally acknowledged by school officials but may have a deeper and more durable impact on students. . . .The messages of the hidden curriculum concern issues of gender, class and race, authority, and school knowledge" (p. 13). In relation to the current educational reform context, the hidden meaning (much like the hidden curriculum) and impetus behind the reform initiatives matters as much as the reforms themselves. Tackling the privatization movement, Schneider (2014a) explained, "This reform-

bent group is the new, traditional-education-destroying Status Quo. By revealing their self-serving histories, I hope to ruin their game, whether it be to corporately run their own schools, districts, states, education companies, or the country” (p. xiv).

Implications pertaining to 21st century educational reform can be drawn from an analysis of the current state of reform through the lens of Progressive Era reform. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, reform during the Progressive Era sought to determine what to teach, how to teach it, and to whom it should be taught. Debs, leaders of The People’s College, and Dewey cautioned against the predilections of those who sought to shape the education system to produce future subservient employees through a differentiated (dual system, vocational/academic) approach. Current educational reform rhetoric has approached the process from a “change the failing status quo” perspective. Specifically, an analysis of charter school implementation and the rise of the Common Core State Standards within the context of the current privatization climate yields similar results to the apprehensions Debs, leaders of The People’s College, and Dewey had in the Progressive Era.

### **Present Reform**

Down to the present, Debs’s view, that education reproduces power and dominance, and that workers must come together to gain democracy and freedom still holds a niche in the education field. Debs’s views particularly resonate within critical theory, though their aims have been coopted more recently (within the past 20 years) by for-profit charter schools under the auspices of choice, and private enterprise subsidized by public dollars to fix a failing system (Ravitch, 2013; Schneider, 2014a). Dewey’s view, that education can promote democracy and change society has had more mainstream success, which serves to direct and dictate educational reform and rhetoric today; however, educational reform rhetoric has not changed much at all.

This is precisely because reform has not substantially reformed the social and economic system enough to make education the great equalizer (Bowles & Gintis, 1976/2011). Nevertheless, the ideology of education is still used as a way to train and track students without regard for their wants and needs (Apple, 2012), other than those dictated by the dominant paradigm of college and career readiness and reproduced class structure of growing income inequality.

In the current educational context, events of the past 20 to 30 years have shaped the reform climate. Reformers still push for higher standards in education as a result of a continuing perceived loss of world standing in education and technological development (Patton, 2014; Ravitch, 2013). In his previous two Presidential addresses, Barack Obama has called for more funding and research in the STEM subjects, No Child Left Behind has continued to haunt educational reform, the debate centering on school funding, opportunity, and accountability has raged, all of which has given rise in the past 30 years to an overreliance on standardized testing as a way to measure teacher effectiveness and student knowledge (Ravitch, 2013).

### **A Critical Perspective**

Within the educational system, dominant culture has played a hegemonic role in defining, interpreting, and allowing access to knowledge. Because of this, inequality has pervaded the educational system, with reform reduced to rhetoric (Apple, 2012). Giving the Melbourne Graduate School of Education Dean's Lecture in 2012, Michael Apple explained his view of current educational reform in the United States.

In the current educational reform context, Apple (2012) identified four competing interests: neoliberals, neoconservatives, the home school/religious movement, and the managerial movement. Neoliberal reformers seek to lessen state sponsorship of education and public services, instead converting these issues to private institutions in an attempt to let the

market dictate educational reform. Neoliberals are proponents of school voucher systems, which punish poorly performing schools (without addressing the inherent problems associated with the poor performance) allowing students to become pawns in the push for educational privatization (as poorly performing schools can be replaced by private charter schools).

In the same spirit as neoliberals, neoconservatives also push for market dictation of educational reform. However, they propose a return to traditional education and a return to more conservative values. Issues of funding are important, but ideological debates about what to teach and the role of historical memory in constituting the version of what students are taught regarding citizenship, nationalism, and situation in the world are just as important.

Spending considerable time on the home-schooling movement, Apple (2012) explained that the removal of students from public schools (approximately 3,000,000 at the time of the talk and according to Apple, swiftly growing) hinders their social and empathic development. Particularly problematic are the organizations and associations pushing for student removal from public schools in an effort to isolate themselves from diversity, “indoctrination,” and association with the “other.” As a growing segment of educational reform, and a growing market for textbook companies, these organizations push for an even more conservative version of schooling based on ideological grounds.

Apple (2012) identified the fourth interest as the managerial movement (closely aligned with Kliebard’s [2004] social efficiency movement). Within the managerial movement, cost associated with education becomes a focal point, but, more importantly, school’s purpose is to prepare students for their roles in society. Within the managerial movement, students are shaped to predetermined roles based on society’s needs.

Relating Apple's (2012) charges to his previous (2004) concepts of hegemony and dominant ideology, the public education system has not reformed or changed for the better. Instead, as Apple (2012) argued, educational reform and rhetoric has skewed farther to the right to account for a market-based concept of achievement within a conservative ideological context to create versions of students able to meet the needs not only of society, but also of conservative movements. Using reconstituted words (taking the general meaning of a word and reusing it to fulfill an ideological agenda) frames educational reform in a generally good light but with a devastating result. Apple (2012) explained how equating "democracy" in schooling with "choice" has served the purpose of creating and implementing school voucher programs, merit pay, and funding inequities with negligible positive results. Instead, ideological forces have pushed the purpose of public (and private) education toward conservative objectives under the auspices of positive change.

Giroux (1981) argued that intellectuals like Apple combined with teachers on the front lines of education must unite to resist these changes and illuminate the inequities present in current school reform rhetoric. Additionally, McLaren (1989) added to Apple's (1979) original critique noting that the confluence of everyday activities reinforces the dominant discourse and culture that prevents actual reform from taking place. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977/1990) considered the misrepresentation of events in history through a neoconservative lens (see the Texas Board of Education History Curriculum Debate in 2010 and 2014 and Oklahoma lawmakers' recent push to ban Advanced Placement US History Courses in public high schools in February 2015) an act of symbolic violence, silencing the "other" in history to produce a "grand narrative" of diversity and inclusiveness at the expense of atrocities committed against indigenous people and minorities throughout history.

Without the input of critical theorists in the educational reform debate, perspectives of school's purpose would continue to be placed in a non-political, non-social, and non-economic context. The major value of critical theory is its analysis of social and class systems and its relation to the politics of curriculum development and educational reform. Without understanding the underlying meanings and results of continued neoliberal, neoconservative, home-schooling, and managerial (social efficiency) educational reform, accountability remains mistakenly (though not by accident) placed on schools to fix United States problems when, in reality, schools have perpetuated the problem and cannot change political, social, and/or economic issues without accounting for state domination and ideological oppression.

### **Theory Into Practice**

As numerous radical educational theorists have asserted (Apple, 2012; Bowles & Gintis, 1976/2011; Giroux, 1981; McLaren, 1989), one cannot view education, educational change, educational implementation, and the process of applying theory to practice without accounting for social, political, and economic factors. Socially speaking, the reality that inequality exists at both the K-12 and higher education levels impedes the opportunity to turn theory into practice (Bowles & Gintis, 1976/2011). Specifically, tying merit pay—a theory that some (Harris, 2011) propose to raise student achievement—to student achievement fails to consider the social notion that where the implementation takes place can (and often does) determine the educational achievement results (Jones, 2010). School districts dealing with issues of poverty often have lower achievement scores than districts that operate within a more affluent and educated tax-base (Berliner, 2013). Therefore, a major obstacle to implementing merit pay is a low socioeconomic context and the ills associated with poverty (Berliner, 2013). For a theory to be translated into a generalizable practice, social factors must be considered.

In the current age of accountability with its emphasis on standardized assessment as a measure of educational achievement and growth, politicians with specific agendas and no educational background more often than not evaluate accountability and educational attainment. Within this politicized atmosphere, reforms that seem adequate at the theory stage fail in the practice stage (García, 2014). For example, No Child Left Behind (2001/2002) attempted to raise educational standards, achievement, and attainment for students; however, the implementation of the law took a punitive nature, harming public schools (and public school teachers associated with failing schools) that failed to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) and furthering the neoliberal privatization agenda. While in theory the law was commendable, in practice (due to conservative politics and notions of education based largely on numbers and statistics) the law has failed students, teachers, and communities (Ravitch, 2011).

An economic factor that hinders theory into practice is the constriction and constraint of funding at the K-12 and, more recently, the higher education level (Tavernise, 2012). Tying funding to achievement, retention, and student support services after cutting education funding in the name of market forces dictating quality (school choice, school vouchers, the concept of “democracy in action in education” as described by Apple, 2012) prohibits theory from translating into practice (García, 2014). In theory, schools and colleges should be able to retain students and make them successful; however, schools and colleges are doing more with less in practice at the expense of public education in the name of privatized profit (Ravitch, 2014a; Schneider, 2014a).

Theory cannot be linked to practice without accounting for outside factors. Though data can be collected and best practices defined, obstacles abound in implementation. Theory and practice are only as good as the measurement of their effectiveness. In the realm of educational

reform, expectations are high and time is short, leading to a lack of achievable goals and a return to the continuous cycle of revision and reapplication, as has been the case in the last 15 years with No Child Left Behind, Race To The Top, the Common Core State Standards, and the shift toward charter school implementation and privatization (Baker, 2013a; García, 2014).

### **Charter Schools**

In theory, charter schools appear to be a positive approach to education. Harkening to the past when community schools taught students in a responsive fashion, based on their needs, charter schools have become increasingly popular. Private educational reformers prefer charter schools because they promote the ability to experiment and to create successful students in otherwise unsuccessful situations (Sirota, 2014). However, in the recent push to buoy charter schools against “failing” public schools, facts have been distorted and dollars spent, not to raise educational achievement in a reflexive way, but rather to create profit for individuals or investors under the guise of reform (Schneider, 2014a).

Charter schools, as a function of the privatization movement, signal a shift in the public consciousness about education. Education is now subjected to a process of competition as charter schools vie for public dollars. As Russom (2012) stated, “By 2010 charters grew from only a handful of schools in the early 1990s to some 4,600 enrolling 1.4 million children nationwide” (p. 127). Within this larger footprint, over the past two decades, many charter schools have not academically outpaced their public counterparts (Russom, 2012). Charter schools have, however, increased profit for their investors (Wang, 2014a, 2014b). Russom (2012) explained,

Because charter schools received state funding on the same per-pupil basis as traditional public schools, upping these ratios [increased student to teacher ratio] leads directly to



greater profits for the charter holders—often privately held corporations—at the expense of educational quality [due to high teacher and student turnover]. (p. 130)

In an educational reform era fixated on assessment data as proof of effective learning, many charter schools take on a militaristic, regimented, and discipline-oriented approach to teaching and learning (Domenech, 2012; Schneider, 2014a).

Domenech (2012) illustrated the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) charter schools method. KIPP schools “have an extended learning day that typically runs from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with a bi-weekly half-day Saturday program. . . .If school districts attempted to replicate the KIPP model, however, they would experience significant. . .taxpayer opposition” (Domenech, 2012, p. 71). Further, students are forced to behave with threats of detention, demerits, or belittling exercises including “stand[ing] outside the classroom on the black line holding my notebook out. . .or. . .they’ll have you write four pages of a sentence about KIPP—‘I must follow the rules of KIPP Academy’ or ‘I must not talk’ for four pages” (unnamed student as cited in Schneider, 2014a). Finally, regarding charter schools and student access to education, Hirji (2014) contended,

The perception that charter schools are open to all students is being called into question by increasing evidence that children who are disadvantaged by a disability, poverty, or being a member of a minority group, or who have been accused of an offense, may not have the same access to charter schools as those [that] are not. (para. 16)

Clearly, charter schools are not educating the whole child, nor are they even accepting a typical cross-section of students enrolled in their traditional public school counterparts. However, the profit motive of many charter school companies and executives compares directly to the capitalist influence on education that Debs, Dewey, and leaders of The People’s College

considered a threat to public education during the Progressive Era (see Chapter 4).

Sirota (2014) explained, “Business heavyweights are dumping millions into the nationwide campaign to promote charter schools as a replacement for public education. . . .At least some corporate titans promote charter schools to do what they do best: make money” (paras. 2, 5). Sirota (2014) linked corporate intrusion into education through charter schools with urban renewal and gentrification real estate money and tax credits, concluding, “Somehow, we are to believe that in the midst of their careers making as much money as possible in their chosen careers, every philanthrocapitalist suddenly is selflessly spending. . . .money with no desire to get any return on investment” (para. 17). The fact remains, charter schools have disrupted public education siphoning public dollars for private profit in the name of educational reform when most charter schools fare no better than their public school counterparts (Russom, 2012).

### **Common Core State Standards**

In an attempt to standardize teaching and learning purportedly for the benefit of students, state governors along with the federal government (largely financed by the Gates Foundation) developed the Common Core State Standards in 2010 (Murphy, 2014; Schneider, 2014a). Ostensibly, the Common Core State Standards attempt to provide students with the skills necessary for the 21st century, whether in college or a career. A major impetus to the development of the Common Core State Standards was the fact that state educational systems throughout the United States operate independently of one another and emphasize different state-specific standards and learning objectives (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2014). To increase accountability, the Common Core State Standards aim to develop similar student skills and knowledge, focusing on critical thinking and processing (Schneider, 2014b). However, the

assessments being designed (by testing corporations) for the Common Core State Standards still emphasize what is a quantitative evaluation of a qualitative issue. To ensure learning takes place, one must go beyond the numbers and test answers.

The Common Core State Standards have also been criticized for the preponderance of private backers and supporters from the corporate sector. Burris (2014), Ravitch (2014b), Schneider (2014a) and others have written extensively about the undue influence of corporate reformers in the standards that were developed without much teacher input. The corporate influence in lieu of teacher input makes Common Core seem like an attempt to transform the public education system into a private, for-profit education system. From their development to their implementation and institutionalization via standardized tests, the Common Core State Standards remain fraught with controversy (Ravitch, 2014b; Schneider, 2014a).

Perhaps the most cogent argument against the Common Core comes from Azar Nafisi. In a PBS NewsHour interview, Nafisi (2014) explained

Common Core. . .is a manifestation of an attitude. It is not, “You did this wrong here or there.” It is the fact that you’re saying, “Our children should go to school and later to college, not because they are passionate about it, not [because] they want some meaning or fulfillment in life. They should go to college because they want to be career ready.” . . .What’s being lost in that attitude is what is being lost in a democracy, because, in a democracy. . .both the individual and society have responsibilities. The society’s responsibility is to provide the citizens with [the] opportunity to fulfill themselves as human beings. When you take fulfillment, meaning, passion out of education. . . .Why should our children want to give back if all they [learn] at school is based on greed and making more money? Why should they even want to serve their country or be concerned

about what happens in this country when. . .all we teach them [is] this is a dog-eat-dog world and each for his own? (Nafisi, 2014, 10:00-12:00)

Nafisi's explanation of the thinking behind the Common Core does not even account for its linkage to standardized assessments meant to raise the rigor of teaching and learning. Instead of fixing education, the Common Core "will act as a vise pushing schools toward similar curricular experiences for American students. . .[through] the combination of common, prescriptive standards, national tests and a re-alignment of the SAT and GED" (Burris, 2014, para. 20). The Common Core clearly does not promote positive reform in education, instead it places the future of public education in the hands of corporate reformers with little educational experience and ties to testing and technology corporations set to profit from their implementation (Schneider, 2014a). Ravitch (2014b) concluded

All of these tests will be accompanied by test prep and interim exams and periodic exams. This is testing run amok, and the biggest beneficiary will be the testing industry, certainly not students. . .Students don't become smarter or wiser or more creative because of testing. Instead, all this testing will deduct as much as a month of instruction for testing and preparation for testing. In addition, states will spend tens of millions, hundreds of millions, or even more, to buy the technology and bandwidth necessary for the Common Core testing (Los Angeles—just one district—plans to spend a cool \$1 billion to buy the technology for the Common Core tests). The money spent for Common Core testing means there will be less money to reduce class sizes, to hire arts teachers, to repair crumbling buildings, to hire school nurses, to keep libraries open and staffed, and to meet other basic needs). States are cutting the budget for schools at the same time that the Common Core is diverting huge sums for new technology, new textbooks, new

professional development, and other requirements to prepare for the Common Core.

(paras. 12-13)

The Common Core State Standards are clearly a moneymaking opportunity for those invested in test development, preparation, and implementation. Although Dewey (1915a, 1915b, 1916a) and Debs (1915c, 1915d) cautioned against the corporate influence in education during the Progressive Era, it is alive and well in the current educational reform context. Whereas during the Progressive Era, educational reformers were attempting to structure the public educational system to serve the needs of United States society (including corporate aims), the public education system was still in its early stages. Today, corporate influence is felt in all aspects of reform, from the development of charter schools specific to corporate needs and corporately underwriting standards and assessments, to the narrow focus on college and career readiness for private sector jobs. While corporations attempted to influence the development of the public educational system during the Progressive Era, they are currently attempting a takeover of the education system through private means using public education dollars (Schneider, 2014a).

### **Discussion**

Within the past decade, the reauthorization of Lyndon Johnson's 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), passed by Congress in 2001 and signed into law by President Bush in 2002, has taken standardization and standardized assessment to a new level in a perpetual quest to improve accountability (Ravitch, 2013). However, NCLB has tied funding to school achievement on standardized assessments and punitively dealt with failing schools (Berliner, 2013). Without accounting for individual obstacles to learning within the school society (special education, poverty, accessibility to knowledgeable staff and teachers), NCLB attempted to promote an ideal of adequate yearly

progress (AYP) based upon a best-case scenario often unattainable by districts in poor areas without access to funding (Ravitch, 2014a). Further, failure to meet AYP could result in loss of funding, school restructuring, and potential privatization. Linking accountability to standardized tests that do not account for social, economic, and cultural differences does not keep districts accountable or determine whether learning has taken place. As Kozol explained, “NCLB widens the gap between the races more than any piece of educational legislation I've seen in 40 years . . . .[Its] gains aren't learning gains, they're testing gains. That's why they don't last” (as cited in Kohn, 2004, para. 13).

Within the reform movement (pushed by politicians) of the past decade, teachers have to determine how to prepare students for their futures. With high-stakes testing affecting school funding, job status, and student promotion/graduation, many teachers revert to traditional, rote learning, teaching to the standardized test for better “results” rather than encouraging an active and engaging learning environment (Ravitch, 2014a). The conundrum created by high-stakes testing has not increased accountability, rather, it has pushed educational systems to make difficult decisions regarding curriculum, often promoting more math, science, and reading remediation at the expense of history courses and electives used to (in the words of John Dewey) teach the whole child (Ravitch, 2013; Schneider, 2014a).

Alfie Kohn (2004) succinctly summarized the effect of high-stakes standardized testing in the name of accountability. He contended that the push toward standardization in an effort to compare schools to one another and determine progress zapped creativity and authenticity from the classroom, replacing it with test preparation, as schools have developed a cycle of teaching and learning that consists of teaching facts and figures necessary for standardized test achievement and copious amounts of test review before the high-stakes testing season. Further,

Kohn (2004) argued that standardized testing deskills the child (and the teacher) and does not account for the individual nature of learning and child development. Corporately and politically motivated, high-stakes standardized testing allows testing and textbook megacorporations and publishers to create and determine assessment while politicians can point to their push for accountability and *results-based* education (Schneider, 2014a).

In the results-based corporate education model pervading neoliberal educational reform today, *accountability* has become a buzzword used by charter schools and for-profit private educational enterprises often with the blessing of local, state, or federal government (Schneider, 2013). Instead of making districts and schools more accountable for learning, recent school reform/legislation and the push for accountability has come as a result of political agendas regarding the function of schools (Meyer, Tröhler, Labaree, & Hutt, 2014; Ravitch, 2013). What may be considered critical thinking and problem-solving skills within the context of the Common Core State Standards, is actually an attempt to complete a task chosen and developed by an entity to determine whether adequate learning has taken place regarding *task completion*, not critical thinking. This is an attempt to create students and workers that will complete tasks assigned to them or create an idea or product *for* someone else's purposes, not to critically question *why* they are completing the task or creating the product in the first place.

Instead of thinking, standardized assessment (in the name of accountability) promotes passivity and obedience within a specific social, political, and economic context. Are bad scores on standardized assessments a sign of accountability issues, or could they be seen as a function of repressive tactics and a withdrawal of effort, which unfortunately (and often) perpetuates the class/social status of the non-performer (Giroux, 1981; Willis, 1981)? The push for accountability to ensure learning takes place comes within an economic system that Bowles and

Gintis (1976/2011) would argue reproduces social and economic positions between classes, punishing lower classes, often in poorer schools, while perpetuating the power and legitimacy (both socially and culturally) of the privileged class.

Considering the effect society has on the function of schooling, Bruce Calvert addressed educational reform in the April 1916 edition of *The People's College News*. As Calvert (1916) explained

In our modern high-pressure existence we are cultivating the frills and fripperies at the expense of the real things of life. Educators are forever talking about “enriching” the course of study in our public schools. But while the curriculum becomes richer, scholarship grows steadily poorer. There is something here to give us pause. It applies not only to school education but to life itself as well. *The goal of life is not to possess, but to become* [emphasis added]. It is not the multiplicity of things that fill our lives or minds that makes for happiness or progress. Alas, no. Not what we have but what we rightly use makes us great, or noble, or wise or worthily successful. We have more than enough in the world for the happiness, comfort, nobility and well being of all the people on the globe, if only those who have more than they can ever use would share with those who have nothing. Will they ever voluntarily share—the plethoric ones? No they never will. They cannot under this inhuman capitalistic regime. Not until we change our social system can we ever change the natures of men and women. (p. 6)

One hundred years later, Calvert's perspective perpetually resonates. Until we change the system and educate for justice and democracy, we will forever remain tinkering with symptoms rather than treating the disease. Dewey (1916-1917a) remarked, “To concentrate the mind of the public upon the need of the open and inquiring attitude, to lead it to realize that education should



not be confined to making a choice among already formulated conflicting alternatives, . . . is. . . the achievement” (pp. MW.10.123-MW.10.124). The for-profit charter school movement combined with an attempt to create systematized standards and new tests to assess the quantitative aspect of learning means millions for investors, politicians, and testing corporations continually at the expense of the masses.

The function of education should be an attempt to teach “how to think,” not “what to think” (Le Sueur & Wharton, 1917, p. 8). Precisely because “teaching what to think adds nothing to the individual that aids him to growth, teaching how to think makes possible the fullest growth and development” (Le Sueur & Wharton, 1917, p. 8), which should be the ultimate purpose of education. Today, we still concern ourselves with benchmarks and standards within an exploitative system that rewards compliance and hard work with tangible things while punishing attempts to maintain public education through a manufactured global achievement crisis (Baker, 2013b; Hagopian, 2014a; Horton, 2014; Hutt, 2014; Ravitch, 2013). As Dewey (1915b) remarked in *Schools of To-morrow*,

The conventional type of education which trains children to docility and obedience, and the careful performance of imposed tasks, because they are imposed, regardless of where they lead, is suited to an autocratic society. These are the traits needed in a state where there is one head to plan and care for the lives and institutions of the people. But in a democracy they interfere with the successful conduct of society and government. . . . Our State is founded on freedom, but when we train the State of to-morrow, we allow it just as little freedom as possible. Children in school must be allowed freedom so that they will know what its use means when they become the controlling body, and they must be

allowed to develop active qualities of initiative, independence, and resourcefulness, before the abuses and failures of democracy will disappear. (p. MW.8.398)

Corporate reformers substitute “careful performance of imposed tasks” with “preparation for college and career readiness.” Next, they place “initiative, independence, and resourcefulness” within a standardized test preparation and developed an accountability model based upon a neoliberal educational reform culture. At the same time, reformers deskill teachers and students alike with a standardized curriculum and learning modules that purport critical thinking and instead resort to teaching to the test to achieve a satisfactory student, teacher, and school grade. Finally, they add charter schools backed by corporate donors to compete for resources with and within public schools, a recipe for educational reform failure based on private profit.

Instead of liberation and freedom, education’s goal and function is to recreate and perpetuate the uneven and unjust economic and social system present and thriving within the United States. John Dewey warned us years ago, as did Eugene Debs and leaders of The People’s College. Educational reform has always consisted of attempts to meliorate the product of our capitalist environment. Instead of viewing education as the great equalizer within our current social and economic state, we should acknowledge its misuse, misappropriation, and intent to continue a class-based hierarchy in contemporary society in the name of reform. Education, in the vision of Debs, leaders of The People’s College, Dewey, critical theorists, and anyone interested in substantial reform, can only become the great equalizer when citizens appreciate and promote its transformative ability and power through *real* truth and change, moving away from current neoliberal reform concepts of accountability based on assessment and decoupling it from profit and privatization to transcend the rhetoric of “results” to create a culture of cooperation, concern, and civility.

### **A Responsive and Reflexive Educational System**

The key to creating a responsive and reflexive education system is community support. Further, parent, teacher, and student solidarity can affect positive change if support is galvanized in a meaningful way. Understanding that education involves more than just formal schooling and that children and the future they represent are influenced and shaped by their surroundings (Bronfenbrenner's (1974) Ecological Systems Theory), for education to be transformative, it must address authentic tasks, not in the real-world, task completion sense, i.e. completing an assignment or project for someone else, but rather through an inductive and deductive approach committed to social justice and based upon mutual respect, curiosity, and advocacy. Ways to develop a responsive and reflexive educational system include: focusing on Bloom's Taxonomy emphasizing the Affective Domain, teaching critical thinking skills using critical discourse to deconstruct the educational system from within (McLaren, 1989), reducing emphasis on standardized assessments as benchmarks of learning and instead using multiple modes of authentic assessment to determine mastery and advancement—with student input, valuing teachers as facilitators of knowledge acquisition and compensating them as professionals, and empowering parents and students in the fight against privatization, standardization, and homogenization. As Shaul (1970) explained in the foreword to Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,

There is no such thing as a *neutral* educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, *or* it becomes "the practice of freedom," the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. The development of

an educational methodology that facilitates this process will inevitably lead to tension and conflict within our society. But it could also contribute to the formation of a new man and mark the beginning of a new era in Western history. (as cited in Freire, 1970/2005, p. 34)

### **The Affective Domain**

Developed by Bloom, Krathwohl, and Masia (1964), the affective domain advances and facilitates the growth of positive attitudes and beliefs such as “respecting the rights of others, participating in team problem-solving activities, [and] us[ing] an objective approach in problem solving” (University of Connecticut [UCONN], n.d.). The five-step process includes “receiving, responding, valuing, organization, and characterization by value set” (UCONN, n.d., para. 1). By focusing on the affective domain when undertaking knowledge acquisition and application, students will learn to appreciate each other’s’ perspectives, work collaboratively, self-advocate, and create ethical values with others in mind. Reforming the educational system to create students that care for one another and collaborate to solve problems while accounting for different perspectives and fostering democratic interactions will create a better future. No matter what is taught in schools, as a social institution, experiences shape students’ interactions. Within the technological advances of the 21st century, students can tackle learning together with the teacher as a facilitator. Working together and treating each other in a humane, caring, and reflective way will create conscious citizens capable of action for the greater good.

### **Critical Discourse**

Reforming the educational system to account for the affective domain can only happen if done within a critical discourse context. McLaren (1989) defined critical discourse as “focus[ing] on the interests and assumptions that generate the knowledge itself. . . .Some

[discourses] will account for and justify the appropriateness of the status quo and others will provide a context for resisting social and institutional practices” (p. 181). Teachers and students can work together to deconstruct the hidden meanings and realities behind the objectives of the educational system. Within content areas, teachers can facilitate discussions centering on themes of justice, equality, fairness, and democracy to further a deeper understanding of the material and counter the corporately driven reform practices evident and present within the current educational context. Further, the ideas generated during the interaction between teachers and students on a level plane, as collaborators rather than teachers acting as arbiters of knowledge, allows for truly transformational generative knowledge (see Freire, 1970/2005, Chapter 3) targeted at perceived problems within the system while concurrently reducing the power relationship between teacher and student to create an egalitarian alternative to the data-driven status quo. As the Black Panther Party (1972) stated

We believe in an educational system that will give to our people a knowledge of the self.

If you do not have knowledge of yourself and your position in the society and in the world, then you will have little chance to know anything else. (p. 124)

Using critical discourse allows students to discover their position within the system and can lead to positive reform from within.

### **Reducing the Emphasis on Standardized Assessments**

Standardized assessments and standards in the age of accountability only serve to categorize students and their schools in a data-driven atmosphere that places social and economic success or failure on the schools themselves while denying the deleterious effects of economic inequality on test results (Berliner, 2013). Tying funding, staff retention, and school status (potential state takeover or conversion to charter school) to standardized assessment scores only

serves to disrupt the purported goal of the educational process and places the blame on teachers and students rather than the underlying systemic conditions of wealth inequality and lack of social and economic opportunity (Piketty & Saez, 2003; Saez & Zucman, 2014). Standardized assessments do not measure the qualitative aspects of teaching and learning.

Rather than making major policy and legislative decisions based upon standardized scores derived from a few hours of testing on a single day or within a single week of the school year, authentic and holistic assessment opportunities such as portfolio assessments or a skills-based approach to grading developed with teacher and student input would be a more humane and effective avenue of assessment. However, any form of assessment within the current educational system, while potentially more humane and just, still serves to perpetuate knowledge obtained *for* corporate purposes (see Discussion section). Until the educational system becomes more aligned with inquiry and discovery beyond skill acquisition necessary for participation within the dominant corporate culture, offering multiple forms of assessment only serves to reduce the impact of standardized assessment, while continuing to serve the purposes of those with power.

The rise of the reliance on standardized assessment belies the negative neoliberal attitude toward teachers as test-prep machines responsible for student scores rather than student growth. Growth in this context is measured in a quantitative fashion using a business model of bottom-line cut scores determining the futures of schools, students, and teachers (Russom, 2012). Instead, growth should be determined by the professionals working with students on a daily basis and in an authentic way that allows students the ability to demonstrate growth within a larger context, rather than through a narrow numerical score. As S. J. Kiger (personal communication, December 18, 2014) stated,

Moving to alternative [and authentic] forms of assessment not only presents a more accurate level of student's understanding; it also builds an effective learning environment where neither teachers nor students are de-skilled. While this still does not directly address the need to question the content of the curriculum, the learning environment facilitated by this practice may provide venues for promoting deeper levels of understanding of the content and its relative value within the larger societal context. Certainly, it would help students to provide their own answers to the age-old question: *why do I have to know this?"*

A learning environment that promotes deeper levels of understanding and critical thinking through alternative and authentic assessments lays the groundwork and foundation for a critical analysis of content rather than operating within the current context of developing critical thinking skills and problem-solving methods for corporate and economic purposes. Though turning to authentic and alternative assessments presents an opportunity to change the way school works within the current climate, unless teachers, students, parents, and communities question and determine the function of education in the United States, substantive change will not result.

### **Valuing Teachers**

Until teachers are valued for their contribution to field, corporate privatization forces will continue to demonize and blame educators for the systemic inequality present in the United States in an attempt to create and generate profit (Schneider, 2014a). Within the current educational reform climate, Berliner (2013) explained the hypocrisy of reform rhetoric and policies surrounding student achievement. He wrote

Instead of facing the issues connected with poverty and housing policy, federal and state

education policies are attempting to test more frequently; raise the quality of entering teachers; evaluate teachers on their test scores and fire the ones that have students who perform poorly; use incentives for students and teachers; allow untrained adults with college degrees to enter the profession; break teachers unions, and so forth. Some of these policies may help to improve education, but it is clear that the real issues are around neighborhood, family, and school poverty rates, predominantly associated with the lack of jobs that pay enough for people to live with some dignity. (Berliner, 2013, pp. 9-10)

Treating teachers as professionals would reduce teacher turnover and increase morale. Instead of promoting for-profit charter schools, notorious for their treatment and turnover of both teachers and administrators, as the answer to educational inequity, fully funding public schools and reversing the trend toward privatization would increase the status of the teaching profession and could possibly lead to positive results, if combined with meaningful positive (rather than punitive) educational reforms (Ravitch, 2011, 2013).

### **Empowering Parents and Students**

Empowering parents and students within the current educational reform climate includes linking them with teachers, informing them of current educational practices, and advising them of their options in relation to standardized assessment. Recently, parents and students have refused to take standardized assessments to protest the usage of snapshot data to inform educational policy decisions (Burris, 2014; Burris & Tanis, 2014; Hagopian, 2013). When parents, students, and communities galvanize to support their schools and push back against damaging and disruptive educational reform, policies can be changed (Hagopian, 2014b). Because of voter backlash and vocal discontent, some states have considered dropping the Common Core State Standards, a direct result of parent and student mobilization (Murphy, 2014;



Nicks, 2014). Further, during the Chicago Teachers Strike of 2012, teachers struck to “fight school closings, to organize communities to oppose school turnarounds. . .working hand in hand in collaboration with community members. . .[and] fighting the most powerful forces in the country that have an agenda of privatization, of school closings, of increasing testing” (Noor, 2012, para. 9). When parents, students, and teachers are empowered to promote change with community support progress can be made.

### **Summary**

The school system, serving as a function of the state, regardless of whether it is public or private, cannot assuage society’s ills. Because the overarching economic system has not changed throughout the past century of educational reform, the reforms enacted and the rhetoric used have not allayed or addressed the real issue. Educational reform has concerned the symptoms, not the problem. Within a capitalist system based on competition and free-market neoliberal concepts of change, educational reform (and reformers) takes the view that education, if enacted correctly, can become the great equalizer.

However, the present push for standardization, of curriculum and assessment, maintains the false notion that we must provide and promote education that prepares students for the 21st century workplace. Instead of promoting truth and critical thinking, education has only served those with an interest—political, social, and/or economic—in the current system. Present-day reforms center solely on preparing students for college and career through more rigorous standards, ostensibly to create better citizens, when in actuality, students learn within a narrower curriculum aligned with corporate needs while providing private profits through curriculum development, implementation, and assessment.

What Eugene Debs, The People's College, and John Dewey discussed a century ago still rings true. Education in the United States promotes and legitimizes a class system based on social standing and perceived value attached to success *within* the workplace and the system. While Debs and leaders of The People's College sought to control the education system for working class needs and thus improve and promote a more democratic system of schooling and living, Dewey believed education could create a democratic way of life through reform of the education system, rather than a class takeover. In the end, both points are moot because the education system reinforces current relations within the United States. The question remains, whom should we teach what, and how? The answer cannot be socially effective and just within the current context and climate. Until we shift our perspective to educating for social, economic, and political change, we will continue to reform the system to fit capitalist needs of competition and coercion, rather than fostering collaboration and compromise for a better future.

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To teach hundreds by correspondence method--To teach according to ability--First of its kind. (1914, June 19). *Fort Scott Tribune and Monitor*, pp. 1, 5.

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